

# A new year, a new heart, a new spirit

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning and Happy New Year! What a joy it is to see so many people gathered here together.

And isn't it a joy, isn't it a privilege to come together as the family of God at the start of this brand new year, to commit ourselves to God, to one another, for our service to him through the days ahead.

Now, we have a new verse for this year as a fellowship, and it is Romans 15, 13. If you haven't already got the card, there are some at the back and at the side here, and I encourage you to take one with you.

For it says, What a way to start 2023, focusing on that joy, on that hope that we have as we trust in God, not just today, on the 1st of January, but each day in the year ahead.

And we're going to open our time of fellowship today by singing of that joy. Now, many people think of joy to the world as a Christmas carol, but actually it wasn't written as a Christmas carol at all.

[ 1 : 32 ] It's a reflection on Psalm 98. And yes, it looks at when the king came at Christmas, and we've just focused and celebrated on that.

But more than that, our joy and our hope comes as we wait for that second coming of the king, that certainty we have.

And I think as we start 2023, that should be the joy. Joy to the world, the Lord has come, the Lord will come again.

Shall we start our worship together on this new day by singing, Joy to the World. Please stand to sing. Joy to the World. Joy to the World.

Joy to the World. Joy to the World. The Lord is come.

[ 2 : 34 ] Let earth receive a gift. Let every heart prepare Him room.

And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the World. The Saviour brings. Let them their songs and glory.

While fields and floods, What fields and plain. Repeat the sounding joy. Repeat the sounding joy.

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy. He rules the world with truth and grace.

[ 3 : 32 ] And makes the nations prove. The glories of His righteousness.

And wonders of His love. And wonders of His love. And wonders, wonders of His love.

Fabulous. Please do take a seat. So I wonder, Has anyone made a New Year's resolution? That might be a no then.

Everybody's avoiding eye contact. Looking down. Nobody? Me neither. I haven't. Suddenly, I'm here on the 1st of January. And I haven't made a resolution at all.

But you know, there's this saying. That if you keep doing what you've always done. You'll keep getting the results you've always had. And I wonder, Is that what we want for the year ahead?

[ 4 : 36 ] Is that our goal, our aspiration for 2023? To keep doing the same thing? Or, maybe, Do we want to do something different?

Do we want to change something? Well, today in our service, We're actually looking at Ezekiel 36. And there is that fabulous verse in it. Verse 26 that says, I will give you a new heart.

And put a new spirit in you. And do you know, That renewal doesn't come from a date in the calendar. Not because it's the 1st of January.

But because God can do amazing things in our life. He can transform us. So I wonder, How would you like to be transformed this year?

What amazing work are you asking God to do in you? To do in your heart? What goals might you want to set?

[ 5 : 43 ] Do you know something amazing? Transformed hearts transform people. Transformed people transform places.

Our vision as a whole church says, We, as a body, a body of Christ, Want to see High Wycombe transformed by God Through his loving, Serving, And worshipping church.

I wonder, What part are you going to play in that this year? What do you want to see? What is God placing on your heart today?

For the days, for the months ahead. What steps could you take? Well, in the next couple of days, I suspect most of you will be taking down your Christmas decorations.

We get to that point where everything looks a little bit bare, doesn't it? Well, today, as you came in, You will have been given a heart that either looks like this one, Or looks like this one.

[ 6 : 57 ] And on the back, there's two different verses. So one of them has Deuteronomy 6.5 on it that says, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, With all your soul, And with all your strength.

And the other one has Ezekiel 36.26 on, Which is the promise, I will give you a new heart And put a new spirit within you.

Now, hopefully, you were also given a pen as you came in. And the challenge, the encouragement, So we're just going to give you a couple of minutes now.

What would you like to happen in your life this year? What is your prayer? What is your hope? What is your aspiration? How would you like to be transformed in 2023?

I'm going to give you a moment to do that. You can talk amongst yourselves, Or just write something very personal for you on it. But as the decorations come down, Maybe it's something you could hang by the front door, By the coat peg as you pop your coat on to go out, Or as you come back home, Maybe in your Bible, Maybe by your school bag as you're getting ready to go to school each day, Or your briefcase as you get ready to go to work.

[ 8 : 16 ] How would you like to be transformed at the start of this new year? Just going to give you a minute to think about that. And it's the chance for that new year's resolution you didn't get round to doing.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

And write down, How would you like God to work through you? Thank you. As we just finish that, I'm going to say a prayer of commitment, That those requests that would work within us, And that we will see amazing things, More than we ask or imagine, That God will work through us individually, And together in a fellowship, In new and exciting ways.

Shall we pray together? Thank you, Lord, For your transforming power. We pray that you would continue to work in us, So that we do not become like the world.

We pray that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, That we may learn to understand your will for our lives, Which is good and pleasing and perfect.

[ 10 : 12 ] We pray that we pray that we would love you, And serve you in all we say, In all we think, And in all we do.

Amen. And I really look forward to hearing, About how that works out in your life, In the coming days and weeks. Now we're going to sing, Based on one of those Bible verses, On the Deuteronomy verse, So I'm going to invite Beth to come up, And Becca, We're going to sing, Love the Lord your God, With all your heart, With all your strength, With all your soul, But there are actions, And the girls are just going to remind us, Of how those actions go, Then we're really going to brave it, And we're going to sing it in parts.

It's going to go brilliantly. Thank you. Yeah, So I'm just going to run through the actions with you, If you want to do them as I say them, From where you are. So first of all, There are two people in this song.

There's us, And every time you say I, You point to yourself. And there's the Lord your God. So for Lord, You make like L's with your hand, And then you go God. Nice and simple.

Next, There are four ways that we respond to God. The first one is loving him. So every time you say the word love, You go like this over your heart. The next one is by praising him.

[ 11 : 35 ] So we're going to go praise, Like this. Then there's serving him. So you go like this upwards, Like you're offering something up to God. And then the last one is trusting him.

So you do this, Like a nice firm foundation on your hand. Trust. So we have love, Praise, Serve, And trust. And finally, There are four ways, There are four parts of us that we do this with.

The first one is your heart. So for heart, We do this. It's different from love. Make like a fist over your heart. Next is your soul. So something coming within you, Coming out. Next is your mind.

So you point to your brain. And finally, Your strength. And you show us all how strong you are.

That's a very quick run through. Becca and I will be doing this from the front.

Last thing to make this trickier. In the bridge, There are separate parts. So I'm going to divide you guys. Down the middle here, All the way up the balcony. So this half, You're with me.

[12:35] We're going first. This half, You're with Becca and Paul. And you're singing the part in brackets. Hopefully it will be very obvious. Let's give that a go. Love the Lord your God With all your heart With all your soul With all your might And with all your strength Love the Lord your God

With all your soul, with all your light And with all your strength I will serve the Lord with all my heart  
With all my soul, with all my mind And with all my strength I will serve the Lord with all my heart  
With all my soul, with all my mind And with all my strength With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my strength.

I will serve the Lord with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my strength. Us first.

I will love you. I will praise you. I will serve you. I will trust you.

I will trust you. With all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my strength.

[15:03] I will love you, Lord, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my strength.

Brilliant. Thank you. Please do sit down. I wonder, do we do that? Do we serve the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our soul and with all our mind?

Or sometimes do we just hold that little bit back, not giving of our whole self? Well, at the start of this new year, it's worth reflecting on how we do that and how much we give of ourselves.

Now, I've got an illustration here, and I wonder if anyone's feeling brave to come up. Don't have to. I have two very handy volunteers in reserve, fully prepped.

Excellent. Come on then, girls. Now, there are jelly tots and these rather fabulous scales. They go not to eat. So, as we were thinking of how we serve God and how we commit to it, I wonder whether we allow other things to get in the way.

[16:36] So, these jelly tots, we're going to weigh out here, thinking of our sin, thinking of the things we get wrong, that bog us down, that actually take our whole focus, our attention, take us away from God, and we are weighed down by that.

But we've already learned of that transforming of the minds, and we're going to hear more from Mike as he unpicks Ezekiel 36, of how God met with his people, and he turned their hearts of stone. Those people who rebelled and allowed the sin and what they wanted to do and focus on to detract from him. And God met with them in the way that he meets with us.

So, on the other side, the trick is to see... Hmm, not quite there. Not quite there. Ooh, movement.

How is that? Ooh. Are you weighing? Are you balancing? The idea is, I also want us to think about the incredible work that God does in each and every one of our lives.

[18:00] Each and every one of us who come to him. Each and every one of us who prays that prayer of renewal. Who comes to God in repentance and says, Sorry for the times that we are so focused on our own way.

But, you know, we need to have a mind that looks at both halves. Do you know, if we just think of all those things and allow everything that went before last year, or that we didn't get right, or that could have gone better, then we miss God's amazing and renewing work in our lives, because we are so focused on what we didn't get right.

But also, if we only ever think about the incredible works God does, but forget of where we came from, then we miss some of our rebellion and our hearts, those hearts of stone that don't do what he wants.

And today, I want you to think of those scales, that balance, to have in our minds that renewing work that God can do, that transforming work that he has and does and will continue to do in each and every one of us, so that he can turn our hearts of stone to hearts of love, hearts of servitude to him.

And that is our prayer for 2023. And Mike will look more at that as we look at Ezekiel 36 this morning. Do you know, we serve a God not just of second chances, of third chances, fourth chances, fifth chances.

[ 19 : 46 ] What a privilege it is to come to him, particularly at the start of the new year, and set our hearts and minds on him to be transformed.

When we turn back to him, just as the Israelites did, he will replace our hard hearts and he will make us new.

So shall we just pray together? Lord God, thank you that you are love and that you love us with a depth of love that passes our understanding.

Jesus showed us by his life and tells us in his own words that God will never turn from anyone who comes to him. However, we know our lives are far from perfect.

We are sorry we're not the best that we can be or the best that you long for us to be. We want to say this morning, we're sorry.

[ 20 : 49 ] We're sorry for the wrong things that we have said or done or the things that we have left unsaid or undone. Thank you for the promise that you will give us a new heart and place a new spirit within us.

Help us to be renewed and to serve you with a new commitment and a new enthusiasm. Amen. Now our next song has a commitment in its very final verse and we're in January so I thought, in the bleak midwinter.

It's quite mild out there, it's not particularly bleak, it doesn't feel midwinterish, but we are the first of January. But I particularly picked it for that final verse, which I think is so moving.

It says, what can I give him? Poor as I am. Over Christmas we looked that the shepherds brought a lamb.

The wise men brought their gifts. What do we have? On the 1st of January 2023, we have our hearts.

[ 22 : 05 ] What can I give him? Give my heart. And the children are going to leave to go to their groups during the singing of this song. So please stand and sing In the Bleak Midwinter.

Thank you. Thank you. In the pigment winter, frosty wind made mow.

Earth stood hot as iron, water like a stone.

Snow has fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow.

In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

[ 23 : 16 ] Our God cannot hold him, nor earth's a stain.

Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.

In the bleak midwinter, a stable place suffice.

The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there.

[ 24 : 27 ] Cherubim and seraphim formed the end.

But his mother mourning in her maiden bliss. Worship the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, for as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part.

[ 25 : 43 ] Yet what I can, I give him. Give my heart.

Amen. We come to our time of intercessions.

And I just want to start off with the verse of Scripture when Jesus himself said, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Whether we realize it or not, he was with us through 2022.

And he will be with us through 2023. Whatever 2023 may hold. Let's pray.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on each one of us now as we bring our intercessions to you. 2022, Lord, has been a bad year for so many.

[ 26 : 59 ] But despite the floods, the droughts, the war in Ukraine, COVID, cost of living crisis, strikes, a desperate NHS, we thank you that you are still on the throne.

Monarchs, prime ministers, presidents may come and go. But we thank you that despite it all, you are still the same yesterday, today and forever.

And whatever ill may come our way, we know you have promised you will never leave us or forsake us. Despite the difficulties we all may have faced this past year, we thank you.

You have remained faithful and blessed us in so many ways. We particularly give thanks again that you became man in the person of Jesus and his willingness to suffer more than any of us to save and redeem us.

Lord, as we face 2023, despite the problems we as individuals in the country seem to be facing, we can go forward with confidence, knowing our times are in your hands.

[ 28 : 18 ] And as a people, we feel very much like Isaiah when he said he was living amongst and part of a nation with problems. We too feel like we are in and part of a world and a country with numerous problems, including turning our backs on you.

Lord, looking at the global situation, we pray again for the people of Ukraine.

Whatever problems we may have, Lord, seems so insignificant compared to theirs. You are the God who can do anything, really anything.

And Lord, we pray you will act quickly and bring peace to that country. We ask you to work in the heart and mind of President Putin and bring the hostilities to an end.

Lord, if anyone can do it, you can. And Lord, we bring that prayer to you from the very depths of our hearts. Lord, as we look at our globe, we are told of global warming.

[ 29 : 23 ] We pray for governments and people will find and implement solutions to stop us heading to what would appear to be a global catastrophe.

Help us to be willing to be part of the solution. Lord, our NHS is in crisis. We thank you for it and those within it who serve us with so much commitment.

And we pray for those who are feeling so hard done by. We pray, Lord, there will be solutions and resolutions to the many problems the NHS seems to have.

For those, Lord, in our country who feel they have no option but to strike for better paying conditions, we pray for speedy resolutions to the issues.

For those facing or already in poverty, we pray they may somehow receive help. We pray you will give us the wisdom as to how to deal with our own increased costs and how or what to do with those around us who are struggling.

[ 30 : 31 ] Maybe, Lord, we need to be part of the solution. For our government, Lord, we thank you for people willing to serve us as MPs.

We pray you will give our Prime Minister and Cabinet wisdom as to how to bring resolution to the conflicts, problems and cost of living crisis that we face.

Particularly, Lord, as we see the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. More and more people becoming those who are struggling to make ends meet. Lord, we pray that you will help the nation to realise that we need to find solutions for the growing numbers of people who have not.

For government ministers, Lord, trade union leaders, we ask you to give to all understanding of all the issues, not just their own problems. We pray you'll give to all of them a willingness to compromise for the good of all and the wisdom to find solutions to the issues they seek to solve.

And Lord, as a fellowship, we pray you'll give us wisdom as we move into 2023. Guide us as to how we can best help those in need. How we can reach more people with the message of hope and salvation you have entrusted us with.

[ 31 : 58 ] Open more and more doors for us to witness for you. And as we meet on the 22nd of January, Lord, to discuss the way forward regarding the Living Stones project, we ask you will give us a spirit of unity.

May your will be made plain to us. Do we proceed? And if so, how do we proceed? And what part each one of us should play in that decision? And Lord, we recognise that your word is prophesied of tumultuous times as the end draws near.

And that ultimately all these things will be destroyed. With all the issues this country and world face, Lord, part of us says, Come, Lord Jesus, your second coming we await.

Your new heaven and earth we urgently need. On the other hand, while we have loved ones and friends who still do not know you, we plead they will open their hearts to you.

Lord, save our people. Save our country. Save our world. We desperately need your intervention. We thank you too, Lord, that this troubled world is not our final home.

[ 33 : 13 ] Despite all the issues, Lord, we thank you that you are still the King of Kings, who loves each one of us beyond measure. Again, we remind ourselves you'll be with us until the end of time, regardless of what we may have to go through.

We look forward to your coming. But until then, Lord, we will praise you and enthrone you as our King. With all our being, we cry, Hallelujah! Praise you, Lord, and thank you for all that you have done and all that you will be doing.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on each and every one of us as we plead with you now these are our prayers. Amen, Amen, and Amen.

Together, let's sing that song, Spirit of the living God. Fall afresh on me. If you feel you want to sit and sing it through, you want to stand, whatever you feel best is for you, but let's sing it through prayerfully, carefully, and Lord, may his Spirit fall on each one of us.

Amen. Amen. Fan■■■ 2 prayerfully, fully to help you God's Holy Spirit, Fraseratz, bleh, fill me afresh on me.

[ 34 : 53 ] Spirit of the living God, all are fresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

[ 36 : 07 ] Break me, melt me, mold me, fill me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Okay, I am going to be reading a very fun reading from Ezekiel 36, 16 to 38.

If you want to read along, then you can flick to it in the Bibles in your pew. Again, the word of the Lord came to me.

Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight.

[ 37 : 21 ] So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. I dispersed them among the nations and they were scattered through the countries.

I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations, they profaned my holy name. For it was said of them, these are the Lord's people, and yet they have had to leave his land.

I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore, say to the Israelites, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

I will show you the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations. The name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

[ 38 : 40 ] For I will take you out of the nations. I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors.

You will be my people and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the corn and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you.

I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds.

[ 39 : 46 ] And you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the sovereign Lord.

Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel. This is what the sovereign Lord says. On the day I cleanse you from all your sins.

I will resettle your towns and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it.

They will say, This is the land that was laid waste. This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden. The cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.

Then the nations around you that remain will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken and I will do it.

[ 40 : 53 ] This is what the sovereign Lord says. Once again, I will yield to Israel's plea and do this for them. I will make their people as numerous as sheep, as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals.

So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord. Thank you, Beth.

Good morning. Happy New Year to you. An amazing passage. Let me just pray first, please. Father God, thank you for your word.

It's a challenge as we read it, Lord. As we look into your eyes and we consider how we may have treated you, Lord. We humbly come before you this morning and ask for those new hearts that you want to give.

As we celebrate a new heart. As we celebrate a new year. We want a new heart. And we want fresh direction, Lord. We want to be made clean. So we come to you and we want to listen to your word and speak to us today, Lord.

[ 42 : 11 ] We pray for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. The passage that originally I was going to bring, thinking of new year, thinking of a new heart, thinking of a new direction for this year.

I was looking at this passage in Ezekiel and I just read from verse 16, I think, to 22 or something like that.

And I thought, what a lovely passage. God's going to give us a new heart. Not one of stone, one of flesh. But then I thought, well, I'll tell you what, I ought to perhaps read that in context.

And decided to read the whole of Ezekiel. Not easy. Not the loveliest book to read. In fact, quite frightening in some of the areas.

Thinking of coming to this passage, I felt that we really need to know the bit beforehand. And so a little bit about Ezekiel.

[ 43 : 19 ] On our first slide we have a few points there. Ezekiel, a little bit like Jeremiah really, didn't have an easy time of it. God spoke to him and he shared what God spoke to him.

The nice thing about this journal, I think it's more as a journal than a book written sort of later, because the dates that Ezekiel writes in, you can see when God said something at a particular time. And it was always before it actually happened. So the proof that Ezekiel was given the job of being a prophet was that the things that he shared that God said to him came to be.

So they could look back on the date that God said this to Ezekiel and then see later it happened. Now Ezekiel was already in Babylon.

He had been taken in the first wave about five years ago. He was in Jerusalem until he was about 25 and he was then taken to Babylon.

[ 44 : 27 ] And he starts opening of this passage when he was 30 that God spoke to him. God spoke to him. He thought he was going to be a priest. He was the son of a priest.

So he would be planning that one day he would be a priest in Jerusalem. Suddenly he's in exile and he's away from Jerusalem.

And God says, I'm choosing you as a prophet. How many times have you thought this is what God wants me to do? And then he comes and says, you might think that's what I want you to do.

But actually this is what I want you to do. And it's quite different. So he was a priest, but he was also a prophet. And as you read through the book, you'll see that he was also given the job of being a watchman.

And he was told that I want you to be like a watchman. The watchman that stands on the tower and looks out. And when he sees the enemy coming, he warns the people.

[ 45 : 26 ] If he sees the enemy coming and he doesn't warn them and they're destroyed, then it'll be on you as well as on them. But if you warn them and they don't listen to you, then you're free of that.

You've done the job. So warn the people that the enemy is coming. Now they think the enemy is the Babylonians.

But actually the enemy that is coming is God. God is coming to fulfil his promise.

He's put it off for so many years, so many times. He's said, if you disobey, you'll be cursed. And so often you can see in history when Moses stood up for the people and said, think of your name.

If you were to destroy them, what are the people around going to say? They're going to say you couldn't look after your own. And he relented. And he relented so many times. But this time, he says, he's not going to relent.

[ 46 : 31 ] So what did God actually see when he looked at the people? There's some quite horrible passages in Ezekiel, if you read them.

And he's blunt, quite blunt with his language. God says, don't pray for the people. I'm not going to listen. This doesn't sound like the God that we read about in the New Testament, does it?

I'm not going to listen to them. I have seen what they're doing. And I'm going to give you a little vision of what they're doing. Have a look at this, what they're doing in the temple. Now, the temple was facing east-west, west-east.

And he saw, Ezekiel saw a picture of what God saw in the temple, that they were worshipping idols in the temple. They were actually in the temple worshipping idols.

And what they were doing, they were bowing to the idols in the east. So where were their backsides facing? Their backsides were facing towards God in the west.

[ 47 : 33 ] What an insult. What an insult. And they weren't listening. They were, they'd taken God for granted. He's our God. He will look after us.

And almost, it doesn't matter what we do, and sometimes we can give that impression to people. They'll become a Christian. Your sins are washed away, you'll be clean. And you are assured of eternal life.

Nothing to say what we must do. Nothing to say how we should honour God. What they were doing, they were idolising others, and they were shedding blood in that they were sacrificing even their children to these other gods.

In the temple. Shedding blood in the temple. God says, I'm just going to have no mercy. I'm going to drive them all out. What was God's biggest concern?

The biggest concern God has is the honour of his name. Have you ever had anybody say to you, if that's what a Christian is, I don't want to be one.

[ 48 : 46 ] If that's what a Christian is, I don't want to be one. We hold up God's name. And we're not always what we should be.

And people see us perhaps at our lowest time and our most difficult time, and they wonder where the God is that we profess. Where is he in your life? Is he looking after you?

Look what you're going through. God is so concerned about the honour of his name. And he sent them out, and most of them would never come back to Jerusalem.

God was going to do it. He was going to show his wrath and exile the people. They're going to be driven away from their land. They're going to be driven away from the temple.

And they're going to be driven away from the idols. Although some of them will still meet up with them where they're going. I suppose not only were they going to be away from their temple, they thought that that's where God resided.

[ 49 : 54 ] So he wasn't going to be with them in Babylon because he's in Jerusalem. But God said, I'm not even going to be in Jerusalem. I'm going to... And Ezekiel sees a picture of God leaving his temple.

God leaving the place where the people expected God to be. away from their land, away from the temple, away from their idols, away from their family.

And some of them were going to be killed. He says that some will die by the sword, some will die by the famine, some will die by the fire, and some will be taken into captivity.

These are the few that God was saving. But he says that one day he will restore his people.

And it isn't because they've changed. The problem was that they wouldn't repent. I wonder how that hits with us when God says, have you taken me for granted?

[ 51 : 11 ] Do you just expect me always to be there for you? And you don't have to honour my name. I've been challenged about that in all sorts of areas where I don't honour God's name.

I listen to things that probably I shouldn't be listening to. I watch things that probably I shouldn't be watching. I say things that I probably shouldn't be saying. And I don't say things when I get the opportunity to say them.

But God says for his own namesake, it's not because they've repented. He is going to do something that the nations will be shocked by. They've been saying, like they said to Jesus on the cross, you saved others but you couldn't save yourself.

They're saying these are your people and look at them, they're in exile. They can't rely on you. So God's name was being taken in vain.

And he says, I'm going to do something, I'm going to restore them. And people may well wonder, why are you restoring that rabble? And when Jesus was on the cross, maybe people were saying, would you really want to die for those people?

[ 52 : 32 ] Look at Michael. Look at his heart. Would you really want to die for him? And God says, yes, I want to restore. I want to restore.

At the moment you've got a heart that is hard, it won't listen, it won't change, it won't absorb, it won't see what's happening around and accept it.

I'm going to need to give you a heart of flesh. And not like the flesh, they use the word, we're living in the flesh. It's not that sort of worldly heart I'm going to give you.

It's a heart that's soft and pliable and I can say something to you and you're going to feel it the way I feel it. I'm going to give you a new spirit, not the spirit that you've got in your own heart that says, I can do it my way.

I know how to do this. I've done it for so long I don't need God anymore. I can do it. I'm going to give you a new spirit and it's going to be my spirit that's going to direct your life and I want you to listen because you've still got that old spirit there.

[ 53 : 44 ] You've still got that old life there. There's a battle going on. And I'm going to give you a new life. It must have felt a little bit like being thrown out of the Garden of Eden, mustn't it?

We don't picture a God of wrath but he says that I'm not going to have my name profaned.

I'm not going to stand for the sin. I'm going to pour out my wrath on sin and he did that on Calvary. Where we should have been on the cross, it was Christ who took the wrath of God for us.

I wonder if God is saying today, are you honouring my name as a nation? When you look around what's happening in our country or in the world, do you see God's name being honoured?

I understand there are more people in Ukraine asking for Bibles than there's ever been. It's when these things happen that people are pulled up and we're pulled up.

[ 55 : 04 ] Are we honouring God? Are we putting him first? Or is he saying in your church, in High Wycombe, is the church honouring God in High Wycombe?

As a body, are we putting God first? Have we as a church got a new heart? Or has it got into a routine?

Has it got into an acceptance that God will always be with us? Or perhaps it's more personal, God is saying, look into your own life.

Look what I've done for you. Because what these people are going to see eventually when they are brought back into their own land, they're going to see a God who's been so merciful, so graceful, so loving, that they're going to look at their own lives and they're going to be ashamed.

And they're going to be, they're then going to respond with a repentance. And that's what brought us to the cross, wasn't it? When somebody told us that actually we were sinners and we fall short of God's glory and there's no place for us in eternity because of our sin.

[ 56 : 26 ] And Jesus said, I know, but I'm going to take that off him. I'm going to take that off you and I'm going to deal with it and I'm going to give you a clean heart. I'm going to wash you clean, give you a fresh start.

What a lovely day for a fresh start. But every day is a fresh start. If you miss January the 1st, January the 2nd's there for a fresh start. God wants his name to be honoured and it's for us as his people to honour his name.

When we're in situations on our front line, know what God has done for you but also know that he's done it for the person. We're very good at judging where other people stand with God because God says, that's not your business.

You just tell them about me and I'll sort it out with them. So let's tell people. Psalm 51 verse 10 says, this is David's prayer, Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me. Sometimes we're concerned and rightly concerned that people need to be saved but we need to start looking at our own hearts and our own spirits and what direction God is taking us.

[ 57 : 56 ] Are you prepared to be moved this year by God somewhere where you didn't expect to go? A job that he wants you to do and it might be quite different to what you're already doing?

Is he calling you to be a watchman and you see something coming on your friends that they don't see and you can give them a warning?

Let's pray that we might do that. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for that promise that you didn't wait till we repented before you did something.

You sent Jesus while we were still your enemies. You sent Jesus to us while we were still far from you, while we were still full of sin, while we gave you no regard.

You sent Jesus to save us. And we thank you, Lord, that there was a watchman that warned us. We thank you for the response that you've given us as we gave our lives to you.

[ 59 : 05 ] Hear our prayer, Father. Change our hearts. Give us your spirit. May we live that new life that you've planned for us so that your name might be honoured.

And we ask it through Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing our final song which is At the Name of Jesus.

At the Name of Jesus.

Every knee shall bow Every tongue confess Him In the glory now Tis the Father's pleasure We should call Him God God from everlasting He's the Lord Mighty and mysterious In the highest height God from everlasting Buried the heart of light In the Father's birth With the Spirit's birth All in love eternal

Rest and perfect rest Humbled for a season To receive her name From the lips of sinners Unto whom He came Faithfully He bore it Soughtless to the last Horted back victorious When from death He passed For it of triumph With His human light Through all ranks of creatures To the central height

[ 62 : 05 ] To the throne of God's head To the Father's breast Filled it with the glory Of that perfect rest In your hearts and throne Him Then let Him subdue All that is not holy All that is not true Crown Him as your captain In temptation's arm Let His will unfold you In its light and power Brothers, this Lord Jesus Shall return again

With His Father's glory Is the angels' train For a wreath of empire Beats upon His crown And our hearts confess Him King of glory now At the name of Jesus Every knee will bow And every tongue will confess Him King of kings and Lord of lords Can I just encourage you to seat please Just a couple of notices Before we finish First of all to say There is no evening service This afternoon But there is one next week So Sunday the 8th of January Do come in the evening And in the morning Next Sunday We have a very special service

Of prayer As we seek to commit ourselves As a whole fellowship And seek how we can serve God In new and exciting ways Through 2023 So if you could come next Sunday For that time of dedication And affirmation of us all That would be great Now just before our final blessing I'm going to invite Pete Montagu To come forward Because he's going to share One of the exciting things That lay ahead of us this year A warm welcome Thank you Pete On Thursday If you come to the hub Between 1.30 and 3.30pm You will receive a warm welcome You'll be able to chat Read and play games You'll do some work With free wifi available This is an activity

We are starting this week To provide a welcoming Warm safe space In conjunction with A national initiative Which has started All over the country During the cold winter months When cost for heating and lighting Is at a premium So please do pray for the event And come along with your friends Family, neighbours Work colleagues As the opportunity arrives I became aware this week Of some employees On their work at home day Have gone to warm spaces And together Worked in a community centre Or library We're designed to be A community together So rather than stay at home In the cold on your own Come down Have a cup of coffee And have a chat Perfect Thank you So as we go As we go on this Very first day Of the new year Can I encourage you To take your hearts With you There are

Spare if you want To take another one Pray through it How are you going To be transformed This year To find new ways To love and serve God Think through our vision To see High Wycombe Transformed by God Through his loving Serving And worshipping church How are we Going to do that Through him Okay A final prayer of blessing Shall we pray together Father At the start Of this new year We pray that you Would remove Our hearts of stone And give us A heart of flesh Help us to surrender Our lives Completely to you And be willing To obey you In every way Give us hearts That long For the things That please you And a desire

[ 67 : 14 ] To be continually In your presence May we become A people After your own heart Thank you Lord For the blood That cleanses us From all sin And gives us A new heart And new everlasting Life in you May we be light In this world Of sin And darkness And may we lead Others to you Holy Spirit We invite you To continue Changing us And renewing us Into the image Of Christ Send a revival In us today And may as the God of hope Fill us with joy And hope And peace As we trust in you Today And always Amen Amen Amen Amen