

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Bible Themes 6: Temple.



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session is one of several on great themes that run through the Bible. In the book 'The Drama of Scripture' the authors write this: "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." By looking at its themes we can begin to get a sense of how to "enter" the Bible.

### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What does it mean to you that you, individually, are God's temple?



### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Throughout the Bible the Temple shows us a lot about God's presence and His continuing plan for a recreated world. Whenever God calls His people to worship this is always linked to the reality that God wants them to experience His presence.

There are four ways in which a Temple is given - three physical and one spiritual. In each the aim is the same - so that God can create a way in which He can dwell with humans. Most profoundly, the Temple is a place in which heaven (God's presence and space) and earth (human presence and space) can overlap.



Moses has a profound encounter with God when he meets Him at the burning bush (Exodus 3). But after the Exodus, when the people return to the same Mount Sinai, not just a bush but the whole mountain is on fire (Exodus 19).

Now God wants to be present to His **whole** people. So after this escape from Egypt God seeks to find a way in which the holiness of His presence can be with His covenant people once again. “Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29: 45-46)

How might this happen? After giving Moses the law, nearly a third of the book of Exodus is taken up with detailed instructions for a Temple. At this stage it is a moveable Tabernacle, a Tent of Meeting. God also sets up a priesthood, so that the Israelites may have a place of being put right with God and coming to Him in worship. The fact that there are so many details recorded shows significant this is.

The Temple contained altars for sacrifices and places for ceremonial washing. Its twelve loaves of bread symbolised both the tribes of Israel and the completeness of God’s provision, the Ark (containing the Ten Commandments) symbolised God’s presence and the lampstand His protection.

Exodus finishes with God’s coming to the Tabernacle. His occasional presence is now His permanent presence with His people – the full restoration of His presence within creation as He originally intended. This is why the Temple is not often referred to as ‘Temple’ in the Old Testament. Rather it is “the House of the Lord” or “the place which the Lord will choose to make his name dwell” (Deuteronomy 12:11) or a “temple for my Name”. (1 Kings 5:5). It is important to know that the Israelites did not believe God was restricted to the Temple. Their sense of God’s presence was highlighted by the Temple, but not dependent on it.

This connection between the Temple, worship and God’s presence are repeated themes in the book of Psalms. “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.” (Psalm 84:1-4)

The Temples are also signs and symbols of how God is working. The Temple is a sign of the recreation of the world. The tabernacle in the wilderness was like an ordered creation in the middle of chaos, with people centred around God and priests worshipping regularly in exactly the same way that all of creation was made to worship God. Enns writes it is a “piece of holy ground amid a world that has lost its way”.

As the Bible story continues God reveals how His people are to become God’s temple. The physical Temples become replaced by a “living” one. Now the promise that God’s presence might fill all creation can be realized.

Understanding this story of God’s presence and Temple helps us to grasp the wonder of the gift God’s Holy Spirit for disciples. This is a fulfilment of Christ’s promise, “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:23) In the Old Testament people come to meet with God at the temple. In the New Testament God comes to people and we become His temple.

As individuals each disciple can now become a Temple, in which God dwells: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19) As such, he calls us to treat our bodies with dignity and holiness.

As a Christian community we have become God's temple. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 3: 16-17). This calls us to a unity through which the presence of God can be displayed to the world.

Discuss: How can we, together, be God's Temple?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Hebrews 9: 1-14 which describes how the tabernacle points to Jesus.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of what helps you to connect with God's presence.



## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!  
My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the Lord;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.  
Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,  
Lord Almighty, my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.  
Amen.  
Psalm 84





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