

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

2024 VISION

CONNECT RESOURCE

VISION MONTH 2024

Dates: Sunday 4th February to Sunday 25th February 2024

Purpose of this campaign: To share the vision of our church for 2024 and activate our people to prepare their hearts, environment and thinking for the year ahead.

Key text for this campaign: Isaiah 40:3-5

4 weeks (unless more) worth of supporting points to the overarching point of this campaign.

Week 1: Prepare the Way for the Lord (6PM ANOINTING SERVICE OXF)

Week 2: Prepare Your Heart

Week 3: Prepare Your Environment

Week 4: Prepare Your Thinking

Logistics:

25-minute message

5-minute salvation response

4th February: [6pm Anointing Service Oxford Falls](#) Extended Ministry time at the 6pm service will be an anointing service for all locations.

Week 1: Ps Alex pre-recorded preach

Weekly subtitle: Prepare the way for the Lord.

Date: Sunday 4th February 2024

Main Point: To cast the vision for our church for 2024.

Anchor Scripture: Isaiah 40:3-5

Prepare the way for the Lord

In 2022 we had the sense that God was calling us to be a 'Church in Motion' - a commitment to steps. A commitment to helping people take steps to follow Jesus.

In 2023 we have had the sense that God has called us to be a "Church Purposed for others" - you grow the most when you help someone else grow. Consumer church to an on-mission church.

In 2024, we have felt God point us to a prophetic picture in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:3-5

"A voice cries:^[b]

*"In the wilderness **prepare the way** of the LORD; make straight in the **desert** a highway for our God.*

*⁴Every **valley shall be lifted up,**
and **every mountain and hill be made low;**
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.*

*⁵And the **glory** of the LORD shall be revealed,
and **all flesh shall see it together,**
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

In Isaiah 40 and onwards, Isaiah is prophesying the future restoration and redemption that would come to the people of God and to the world. The context he speaks into is one where the kingdom of Israel and Judah have fallen - where the people of God have fallen to the superpowers of Assyria and Babylon. They have gone into exile because they have turned away from the Lord. Prior to chapter 40, Isaiah has been prophesying and speaking of judgement, from verse 40 he is now prophesying comfort, comfort to the people of God. It is at this point that Isaiah prophesies of the future King, who will rule all Kings. He speaks of Jesus!

Supporting points to Key point (3-5 points max):

Verse 3: *"In the Wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*

This prophetic picture from Isaiah speaks of John the Baptist, who would **PREPARE THE WAY** for Jesus.

We see the reference to this prophecy in the Gospel of Mark:

Mark 1:1-4

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b] ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"^[c] —*

³ “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark is referencing both Isaiah and Malachi, which we see in Malachi 3:1.

Malachi 3:1

*I will send my messenger, who will **prepare the way** before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.*

John the Baptist had great impact but was also declaring an unpopular message. This message was a message of repentance and consecration.

Our sense is that this year ahead; God is continuing to call us to a place of CONSECRATION. Calling us to SET OURSELVES APART and allow God to REFINE US, in preparation for all He wants to do in Sydney.

The wilderness, or the desert is a dry place, there is no water, a place where there is no life, a place where there is no order or cultivation.

Making a way in the desert means disturbing the current norm. Making a way in the desert means cultivating what has been uncultivated. Making a way in the desert means a level of agitation, means working on what is not currently prepared and preparing it. It means bringing things into alignment and into synergy. Dealing with the mountains that need lowering (blockages) and the valleys (weak things) that need raising, the uneven and rocky ground being made smooth.

As we have been praying and seeking God, we have the sense that 2024 is an important year of *preparation*. 2022 and 2023 have been foundational years of establishing who we are as a Church (a church who moves and a church that is purposed for others) and we sense 2024 is a foundational year of preparation.

Like John the Baptist, we get the sense that 2024 is a year we adopt the posture of PREPARING THE WAY for God to move in our city. For God to bring streams of LIVING WATER into lives that are destitute, dry and cut off.

We see a great return of prodigals and a great harvest of new believers.

So, the statement we sense over the year 2024 is:

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Our preparation is not for what we can do or what we are going to do but for what God will do. We do the preparing, God does the moving - we don't create the river, we prepare for it.

*⁵ And the **glory** of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

Preparing our hearts, preparing our lives, preparing our environments, preparing everything we do for the Glory of God to be revealed. For all flesh in Sydney to see the glory of the Lord revealed! For the eyes of their understanding to be opened.

- For spiritual blindness to be broken off people.
- For people to encounter the manifest presence and power of Jesus.
- For people to say surely the Lord is in this place!

- For people to say, come and see what the Lord has done! Not look at what they have done but come and see what the Lord has done!

Later in Isaiah 43 it says,

Isaiah 43:18-19: *“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it. I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”*

We sense the tide rising and when the tide rises, people will find themselves swept off their feet, caught up with the tide.

You can't hold onto old things and to what you've known. As the tide rises we will have to let go of what we have been comfortable with and go with the tide. Our sense is that we need to come into 2025 with a new wine skin that is ready for new wine.

In 2024 we are preparing for what the Lord is going to do.

So what does this look like practically for us as a team?

- **PREPARE IN THE SPIRIT** (PRAYER)
- **PREPARE PEOPLE** (DEVELOPING PEOPLE)
- **LOWER MOUNTAINS** (REMOVE BLOCKAGES)
- **RAISE VALLEYS** (CONTINUE STRENGTHENING)

CONNECT QUESTIONS

Sunday 4th February 2024

Prepare the way for the Lord.

Pray for the Set-Up Cards

GATHER: (ensure that these questions center around community)

- Consider the times God asked His church to wait (eg. the disciples, the early church). They needed to leave a lot of ideas and habits behind to make way for a new relationship with God. What can we take from their example?
- Is there anything that has been left behind through COVID, or over the last few years that needs to be cultivated once again?

GROW: (ensure that these questions prompt discussion on personal growth and maturity)

- What areas of your life need work this year to be removed, raised up, so that God has space to grow something new?
- Consider what it means when we pray “Your kingdom come”? How can we remind ourselves daily to be mentally and emotionally ready when God moves?

GO: (ensure that these questions prompt discussion on going and spreading the good news)

- Jesus’ priorities were always people-centered. Who are you going to pray for, believe for and offer opportunities to meet Jesus this year? You can just pick one - ask the Holy Spirit and see who comes to mind.
- Are there people in your world who need to come back to God? How can you prepare them a welcome?

Connect Group Resources:

“Flowering Desert” (deserts are full of seeds! Just look at what happens when the rain finally comes - much like God’s spirit when He goes to wide open spaces):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgV8SVu1dOg&ab_channel=CGTN

Week 2

Weekly subtitle: Prepare your heart

Date: Sunday 11th February 2023

Main Point: A prepared heart is a heart of repentance and consecration.

Anchor Scripture: Mark 1:1-4

Mark 1:1-4

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,^[a] the Son of God,^[b] ² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"^[c] —*

³ *"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,*

*'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"^[d]*

⁴ *And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*

Supporting points to Key point (3-5 points max):

Preparing the way for the Lord begins with **repentance** and **consecration**.

1. Repentance

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."

What things in our lives do you need to repent of?

- Idols
- Sin
- Self-sufficiency
- Pride
- Jealousy

Proverbs 4:23 NKJV

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

- How is the state of your heart?
- Do you need to forgive?
- Do you need to let go of disappointment?
- Is there bitterness in you?
- Is there judgment in our heart?
- Is there fear in your heart?

1 John 1:9

^a If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confessing our sin is an act of repentance, which prepares the way for the Lord in our hearts."

2. Consecration

Joshua 3:5

⁶ Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.”

Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

Holman Bible dictionary:

CONSECRATION is when a persons or things are separated to or belonging to God. They are holy or sacred. They are set apart for the service of God. The Hebrew qadesh and Greek hagiozo are translated by several different English words: holy, consecrate, hallow, sanctify, dedicate.

Old Testament: God is said to be qadesh or ‘holy’. When persons or things were ‘consecrated’, they were separated to or belonged to God. “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2 NASB). “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6 NASB). When people were ‘consecrated’, they were set apart to live according to God’s demands and in His service.

In the Old Testament the ordination of persons to the service of God is indicated by the phrase ‘to fill the hand’. This phrase is usually translated ‘consecrate’ or ‘ordain’.

Numbers 6:1–21 sets forth the vow of the Nazirite. Nazir from which Nazirite is derived, means ‘to separate’ and is translated ‘consecrate’ in Numbers 6:7, 9, 12.

New Testament: This ethical understanding of God’s holiness is found throughout the New Testament. In Matthew 23:16–24 Jesus criticized the scribes and Pharisees based on their neglect of justice, mercy, and faith. He said it is “the altar that sanctifies the gift” (Matthew 23:19 HCSB). The cause to which persons give themselves determines the nature of the sacrifice. When the cause is God’s, the gift is consecrated. Jesus’ mission was to sanctify persons. Paul said that Christians are called to be ‘saints’, and their sanctification comes through Christ.

1 Peter 2:9–12 (ESV):

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Romans 12:1

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”

Consecration is when we set our lives a part for God. When we devote ourselves to God as belonging to Him, as a living sacrifice to Him, as clay in His hands for His purposes. When we surrender our lives to the call and purposes of God. We give God our yes, we let go of the things that have taken our attention and affection and give ourselves fully to God.

3. Throw off and run

Hebrews 12:1-2

“12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off

everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Let us throw off

- everything that hinders
- The sin that so easily entangles

So that we can run with perseverance the race marked out for us!

Week 3:

Weekly subtitle: Prepare your environment

Date: Sunday 18th February 2024

Main Point: The Glory of God revealed requires a life that has been DE-CLUTTERED.

Anchor Scripture: Isaiah 40:4

*“Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.”*

Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

The environment needs to shift from being cluttered, overly complex and convoluted to being clear, simple and straight.

- How is the environment of your life?
- Is your life highly distracted?
- What needs to be removed?
- What needs to be strengthened?
- What needs to be put in order?
- What muddies the way for God in and through your life?

Isaiah 40:3–5 (TOTC Is): The creation of a road that is straight, unmistakable, level and smooth pictures a journey made without difficulty and therefore with certainty of arrival.

Supporting points to Key point (3-5 points max):

Luke 10:38-42

“38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Few things are needed. Intimacy with God is the primary pursuit! To know God deeply, closely, in a dynamic relationship is the goal. Martha’s error in this story was not the doing, what she was doing was a good thing, preparing meals for her guests. Her error was that she didn’t recognize the time: it was not time to be doing but rather time to worship and be with Jesus. Jesus was not going to be there forever, and the limited time he had with them should be spent in intimacy and adoration. Don’t let the “things” distract you from spending time with God.”

What is blocking, what is distracting, what is competing and tearing you away from God?

Matthew 21:12-13

“12 And Jesus entered the temple^b and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

In Christ, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit!

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

I wonder, what is your temple full of? What has cluttered your mind, body, soul? Where does prayer fit in your life? Where does God fit in your life?

How have you designed your home, your calendar, your weekly schedule to allow a clear path for the Glory of God to be revealed in your life?

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS

18th February 2024

Prepare your environment

GATHER: (ensure that these questions center around community)

- What are the things that distract you from pursuing God? These things can be different at different stages of your life so share any that you've experienced on your journey.
- Being together as a church is vitally important for God showing up in your life, so how can you help each other to "not neglect meeting together"?

GROW: (ensure that these questions prompt discussion on personal growth and maturity)

- If you are a temple of the Holy Spirit, what does the interior décor look like at the moment? What needs to be removed? What needs to be strengthened? What needs to be put in order?
- How difficult is it for God to talk to you? Are there perhaps non-spiritual areas of your life that need simplifying so that you can grow with God?

GO: (ensure that these questions prompt discussion on going and spreading the good news)

- How have you designed your home, your calendar, your weekly schedule to allow you a clear path for showing others God's love when an opportunity suddenly arises?
- Is there one small change you could make to prioritize praying for revival and the salvation of others?

Week 4

Weekly subtitle: Prepare your thinking (Extended Response time)

Date: Sunday 25th February 2024

Main Point: We need to embrace a new paradigm; a new way of thinking and seeing in preparation for what God wants to do.

Anchor Scripture: Isaiah 43:18-19

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it. I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

Historical Context, Commentary + supporting references:

Three chapters on from Isaiah 40 we read Isaiah’s exhortation to forget the former things. To embrace the new thing God is doing, the glorious and miraculous thing God is doing.

Supporting points to Key point (3-5 points max):

Peter had the vision on the roof — change of thinking from an old paradigm to a new paradigm.

Acts 10:9-16

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.”

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Peter had to let go of what he had known as right, to embrace the new paradigm and leading of the Holy Spirit.

What he knew to be right, was right, but it had now become an old way of doing things because God had done a new thing through Jesus.

Can we embrace the new way God is working and moving? Can we lean into what God is doing and saying now?

Right after Peter’s vision, two men arrived at Simon’s house on behalf of Cornelius requesting Peter to come to them. They were requesting Peter to come and speak to them, and Peter having had the dream **“came no objection.” Verse 29 of Acts 10**. God orchestrated the opportunity; Peter’s change of mind was what caused him to embrace the opportunity.

There is new opportunity and new calling in front of us — an old paradigm, and an old mindset will miss new opportunities.

We must allow the Holy Spirit to renew and change our thinking! Our job isn’t to create new opportunities, our job is to change our thinking and embrace the new opportunities for God’s glory to be revealed that He will put before us.

Romans 12:2

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Extended Ministry Time: At the end of the service, we will be opening the altar for people to respond to the vision that we have presented over the last four weeks. A call to repentance and consecration, to shift any biases, blindness like Peter and to see the vision that God is calling us to.