

. Our worship is empty unless through it God focuses and transforms our wavering hearts.

Aim: To explore how true worship of God is fuelled by love and how worship also inspires a deeper love for God and others.

Optional. Think back to Sunday: did you notice anything that was said, seen or sung in the service that would be helpful in conditioning your heart, making you more likely to respond well to situations on your frontline?

Introduction/ice breaker

Imagine you have just moved to a new area and you have been looking online to find local churches. You come across a church called St. Perfecto, and they have a very impressive and up-to-date website. That Sunday you turn up and the building is both beautiful and functional and includes some very comfortable seating. A team of children's workers provide a fun time for the young ones while the adults listen to a doctrinally sound sermon, delivered by the impeccably dressed senior leader. At the end of the service, you enjoy an unusually high quality cup of tea/coffee before you leave. The experience seemed to tick so many boxes... except for one thing: you're left with a vague sense that a genuine love for God and people had somehow been lost along the way.

- If you were invited to preach at St. Perfecto what sorts of things would you want to say to them?

Read Revelation 2:1-7

The church in Ephesus made a great start despite severe challenges. We know from Acts chapters 19 and 20 that Paul spent a long time teaching there (2-3 years) and specifically warned the elders of the church about the dangers of false teachers (20:28-31). In this church's early years, we see not only a hunger for knowledge, but also a heart of love (Acts 20:36-38 and Ephesians 1:15-16). However, by the time John's letter to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 is read to them near the end of the first century, some things have changed.

- In what areas has the Ephesian church excelled? What have they failed to hold on to?
- How do you think it's possible that they could be doing so much good stuff but not notice such an important change had taken place?
- Time and again God calls his people back to their love relationship with him. What will be their punishment if they fail to repent? Why do you think it's so severe? What will be their reward if they do repent?
- Why do you think Jesus was so exercised by this loss of their first love?
- In what ways do you think our worship together can strengthen our love for God and focus our wavering hearts? How does encountering Christ's love in gathered worship impact our capacity to love others in our day-to-day lives? Is there anything you can do to help this process happen more?

Prayer

- Repent of ways in which you are failing to love God and the people he has made, whether inside or outside of church.
- Ask God to help us grow in worship together on Sundays in ways that will help you worship him more lovingly wherever you are, Monday to Saturday.