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**COVENANT RENEWAL 2022**

**RESOURCE PACK**

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# Introduction

## Covenant Renewal & Founders’ Day

The first Sunday in July is traditionally Founders’ Day and Covenant Renewal – a day to remember our history, commit to the future, and encourage people to consider their covenant. At the same time, we want to provide covenant renewal resources each year to promote soldiership and offer everyone (soldier or not) the chance to re-affirm their commitment to God.

This year the theme is Faithful: Looking back, moving forward. The meeting outline and sermon challenges us to look to God’s faithfulness and spiritual markers in our lives to spur us forward in our relationship with God. The service is focused on Psalm 77 and the Hebrew meaning of the word ‘future.

This pack contains a theme, introduction, children’s content and meeting lead ideas, plus renewal cards are available to you. We have also included a range of pre-recorded worship videos that could be used to facilitate worship in your gathering.

You are welcome to adapt everything in the pack to suit your local context, e.g. use what you like here, use all local content, just use the sermon, change the date you do this. You will know best!

**All resources can be found at either of the following links:**

<https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/church-community/resources/covenant-renewal-2022>

If you have any questions or need help with anything, please email missionteam@salvationarmy.org.nz

## Resources Available

The Mission Resources hub has all the resources that you should need for that day. <https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

Resources are available include:

* Digital file for printing your symbol cards / response cards
* Social media images
* Kids material pack and full resource pack
* Sermon Powerpoints
* Pre-recorded worship videos (for corps/faith communities without live music capabilities) – search in the Mission Resources Hub

## Meeting Elements

To assist with your meeting planning, here are some segment suggestions. Ideas for each section further in the pack.

| Section | Suggested Content |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Introduction | Potential script below |
| 1. Song Ideas | List of song ideas you can do live or pre-recorded worship videos. |
| 1. Children’s story / kids church lesson | All kids Covenant Renewal material can be found in the Kids Covenant Renewal pack. |
| 1. Prayer segment | Pre-written prayers that could be used during the service. |
| 1. Founders’ Day | We have included potential stories and video clips to celebrate Founders’ Day below. |
| 1. Intergenerational Ideas | Some ideas for an intergenerational service. |
| 1. Bible reading | The scripture reading for the service. |
| 1. Sermon | Full sermon outline/notes that can be adapted to locally. |
| 1. Response | Potential script below. Follow with appropriate response music (suggestions in song list or can use pre-recorded songs). |
| 1. Benediction | Benediction ideas for concluding your service. |

## Preparation

1. Read through this document – select what elements you’ll use and what you could adapt for your setting.
2. Check out the Kids pack and see how you can adapt this locally.
3. Print your response cards using the digital file from the Mission Resources Hub or find an alternative response prompt and have these ready for your service. You could use a range of things – rocks, signposts, chalkboard signs, anchors, small oars – get creative and cater your response to your congregation.
   1. We have not mass-printed cards this year as these are not always used, and we trust you know your congregation best. Take time to be intentional about what you offer to engage in the response time.
4. Promote the service.

# Meeting Content

Scripture: Psalm 77

Subject: Faithful: Looking back, moving forward

Aim: To encourage the congregation choose to respond to God’s faithfulness by moving forward

## 1. Meeting Introduction

Today is a special day in The Salvation Army calendar year – it’s our Founders’ Day and Covenant Renewal Day. Founders’ Day is a day to acknowledge and honour the Salvation Army founders, Catherine and William Booth. What great examples of living in covenant with God and going after all he has called and asked of them.

Founders’ Day is a great day for us to consider our own covenants, so today we also celebrate Covenant Renewal day. We each have the chance today to consider the various commitments we’ve made to God. For some of us, this is in the form of a covenant that we signed when we became a soldier, adherent or officer in The Salvation Army. For others, it may be a commitment you’ve made in another church to follow Christ, or when you were in a desperate situation and you cried out to God promising that you’d change the world if He saved you. And for some of you, you’re simply here today because you’re wondering what this Christian thing is all about.

Today we’re exploring what it means to look back and move forward. Being a Christian is an on-going commitment to growing in our relationship with God, of moving forward, taking steps of faith and deepening our commitment to Christ.

We’ll be looking at how looking back at spiritual makers can give us the confidence and assurance in God to move us forward. There’s a famous quote from Catherine Booth, one of the founders of The Salvation Army, ‘Whatever the particular call is, the particular sacrifice God asks you to make, the particular cross He wishes you to embrace, whatever the particular path He wants you to tread, will you rise up, and say in your heart, "Yes, Lord, I accept it; I submit” …. Oh! but you say, "I don't know what He will want next." No, none of us know that, but we know we shall be safe in His hands.”

Catherine and William Booth’s lives are an incredible testimony to how God uses ordinary people to change the world. What a great encouragement for us today as we each consider our own covenant or commitments we have made and what God is asking of us today.

No matter your situation, we pray that you will feel very welcome and that you will encounter God during this service, as we look at why and how the world needs you.

## 2. Ideas for Songs

There is pre-recorded music available for this service, or you are welcome to do your own worship time. If you are doing your own, here are some song suggestions to fit the service theme.

**Songs/Congregational**

* + God so Loved – We the Kingdom
  + Promises – Maverick City Music
  + Great Things - Phil Wickham
  + King of Kings – Hillsong Worship
  + How Great is Our God – Chris Tomlin
  + Goodness of God – Bethel
  + A Thousand Hallelujahs – Brooke Ligertwood
  + Firm Foundation – Cody Carnes
  + Yet Not I but Christ in Me - CityAlight
  + God Is For Us - CityAlight
  + Seek First – Housefires
  + Follow You Anywhere - Passion
  + There’s Nothing That I God Can’t Do - Passion
  + Who You Say I Am - Hillsong Worship
  + Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing – Hymn
  + SASB 687/SASB 960 (new ed.) I’ll Stand for Christ
  + SASB 696/SASB 980 (new ed.) Storm the Forts of Darkness (Soldiers of Our God Arise)
  + SASB 707/SASB 992 (new ed.) Who is on the Lord’s Side?

**Response / Reflection**

* + Build my Life – Pat Barrett
  + Firm Foundation – Cody Carnes
  + Let It Be Jesus - Christy Nockles
  + Send Me Lord – Matt Redman
  + Here and Now (Nau ma ra) – Souvenirs Worship
  + Christ Is Enough - Hillsong Worship
  + More Like Jesus – Passion
  + We Fall Down - Chris Tomlin
  + Breathe – Souvenirs Worship
  + I Surrender – Hillsong
  + Way Maker – Leeland
  + Great Grace – The Mclures
  + Do It Again - Elevation Worship
  + Surrender – Lincoln Brewster
  + Here I am, Wholly Available – Modern Hymn
  + SASB 474 / SASB 637 (new ed.) I Surrender All
  + SASB 313 / SASB 830 (new ed.) Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing
  + SASB chorus 163 / SASB 837 (new ed.) He’s the same today as yesterday
  + SASB C53 / SASB 312 (new ed.) Spirit of the living God
  + SASB 37 / SASB 49 (new ed.) How Great Thou Art!
  + SASB 474/ SASB 636 (new ed.) All to Jesus, I surrender
  + SASB 487/ SASB 705 (new ed.) Have thine own way Lord
  + SASB 525/ SASB 623 (new ed.) Take my life and let it be
  + SASB 568 (new ed.) All that I am

## 3. Children’s Material

The Territorial Children’s Department has produced some resources for children and families.

Please download these and use the material that best suits your context.

https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources

https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/church-community/resources/covenant-renewal-2022

## 4. Prayer Segment Ideas

As another way to engage people in your service, you may want to include an intentional time of prayer. Here are some ideas that you could adapt for your setting.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving: For Love**

(inspired by 1 John 4:18 and similar passages)

Let us give thanks for the remarkable gifts

of God’s creating and redeeming love,

the loving that casts out all fear.

For the love that frees us to ask questions and explore,

to frame doubts and investigate new possibilities,

to build theories and then cross-examine them.

*We thank you, God of adventurous love.*

For the love that enables us to marvel at our own existence,

to ponder and remember,

recognize our own needs

and affirm our own knowledge and purpose.

*We thank you, God of determined love.*

For the love that helps us to communicate with one another,

to express trust and respect,

share heartaches and visions,

to convey love and mercy.

*We thank you, God of reconciling love.*

For the love that inspires us to warmly encourage those around us,

to affirm and build up, comfort and enlighten.

*We thank you, God of nurturing love.*

For the love that liberates us to celebrate the world around us

in poetry and song,

to delight in shapes and colours, intricacies and patterns,

awesome forces and deep mysteries.

*We thank you God of visionary love.*

For the love that encourages us to express something of our faith;

for creeds and prayers, hymns and readings,

discussion groups and sermons.

*We thank you, God of creative love.*

Above all else we thank you

for the love that allows us to admit

that we have no words in which to adequately describe

the process of faith in Christ,

the awesome worship of our God,

and the holy wonder of the Spirit.

We thank you for that point where

our love becomes wordless adoration.

Through Christ Jesus,

who is the pure glory of your loving. Amen!

- Bruce Pewer, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Opening Prayer**

(inspired by Psalm 85:8-13)

Lord God,

speak your peace to your people, gathered here in Jesus’ name.

We confess that our faithfulness to you,

our obedience to your calling,

our righteousness is not steadfast and true.

In living out our praise, we too easily falter after the first page.

Were it not for the lavish gift of your Son, we would be lost.

Through him, however, we turn to you in our hearts,

knowing your steadfast love and faithfulness,

your righteousness and peace.

In him your salvation is at hand.

We thank you.

May this worship reflect your goodness,

as we respond to you with our heart, soul, and mind.

Make a path in the middle of this congregation today,

and walk among us through your Holy Spirit.

This we pray in the name of the One who is your peace, your salvation—

Jesus Christ. Amen.

- Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

Merciful God,

You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to show us a different way to live—

the way of deep humility and obedience.

You’ve called us to love one another,

and to work together with one heart and mind,

balancing our needs with the needs of those around us.

Give us courage to follow faithfully, and with integrity—

with actions that bear witness to the words we speak,

and worship that overflows into our daily tasks and relationships—

so that our lives will bring glory and honour to You,

our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.

- Christine Longhurst, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Call to Worship**

(based on Psalm 100)

Shout with joy to God, all the earth!

Remember that our God is the only God—

the One who made us,

the One who sustains us,

the One whose Spirit lives within us.

Let us enter God’s house with thanksgiving;

and come into God’s presence with praise.

For God is good,

with unfailing love that lasts forever,

and faithfulness that extends to all generations.

- found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**In Your Name**

May we honour your name

not by paying it lip service, Lord Jesus

but by trusting the vision it speaks of

and the way it calls for

May we honour it by following you

speaking into the word with our actions

and showing who we’re chosen to follow

May we love in your name

speak in your name

care in your name

that willingness to touch the outcast

feed the hungry

remember the sick

visit the imprisoned

clothe the naked

give water to the thirsty

in your name

* Roddy Hamilton, www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Call to Worship**

(based on Exodus 33:12-23, Psalm 99, Matthew 22:15-22)

The earth has its kings, but God is ruler of all.  
**Praise God above all, the giver of life!**The mountains may tremble, the oceans may roar,  
**but God's presence is more powerful  
than the earth itself.**Come into God's presence, for God is among us now.  
**O God, show us your glory; we seek your ways.**Come to the Rock, the God of life,  
for God is present now.

**Opening Prayer**

(based on Exodus 33:12-23, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22)

Loving, living God,  
be among us now.  
Show us your ways.  
Guide our steps.  
Live in us,  
that we may be people of steadfast hope  
and powerful giving.  
Help us hear your words,  
challenging us to give you  
all the things that are yours.  
Help us remember  
that all we are and all we have  
are gifts from you,  
gifts to be shared in service and love.  
Holy One among us,  
help us be a holy people  
who receive your word with joy  
and live your message with love. Amen.

—Mary Scifres, www.re-worship.blogspot.com

## 5. Ideas for Founders’ Day

Here are some ideas for creative elements to include in your service to highlight Founders’ Day. You could include one of the stories below as part of your service; you could share about it during a segment in your service/play one of the videos or you could have one of your corps members research one of the stories and share about it.

**Video about different creative Army endeavours:**

Various short stories around creative Salvation Army endeavours over the years, created by our Creative Ministries Department.

* <https://youtu.be/jlLInPi5TMg>
* This and other videos can be found in the Covenant Renewal folder here: <https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

**Making matches safe:**

The Salvation Army encouraged the change from dangerous phosphorous matches to safety matches by opening their own factory, employing people in a safe environment and for a fair wage.

* [https://glynnharrison.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/when-william-booth-took-on-the-big-manufacturers-of-safety-matches-and-won/](https://glynnharrison.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/when-william-booth-took-on-the-big-manufacturers-of-safety-matches-and-won/%20)

**Raising the age of consent:**

The Salvation was pivotal in raising the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16.

* [https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/1C9CE9592331AC2F802575CA004EF0A2](https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/1C9CE9592331AC2F802575CA004EF0A2%20)

**Opening Men’s homes:**

A story around William and Bramwell’s response to the large number of homeless men in London.

* [https://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/boothbiovol2/boothbiovol2ch7.htm](https://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/boothbiovol2/boothbiovol2ch7.htm%20)
* <https://goo.gl/KSAvqy>

**Lowering the cost of bread:**

In 1914, in Britain there was a grain shortage because many of the ships were being sunk by German U-boats. In one town, the bakers raised the price of bread so high that poor people could not afford it. Twice General Bramwell Booth asked the bakers to reduce their prices and they refused.

Booth wrote to the bakers saying that if the prices did not come down and the poor could eat, the Salvation Army would establish bakeries in the town and undercut the prices. The prices came down.

## 6. Intergenerational Ideas

Including some elements in your service that are intergenerational is a great way to increase engagement, encourage relationships across different ages and cater to all people. Here are some ideas you could adapt in your setting.

* You could do the symbol card response time option before the sermon (if your kids head out to their own space). Ask people to pick a card that reminds them of a time that God spoke to them or did something significant or when they felt close to God. You could then ask people to share with those around them about this. (If using rocks, small oars, signposts etc. you can have these out then instead).
* Include an activity or game that includes all ages – this could be about walking backwards or being blindfolded or working together in ‘boats’.
* Use music and prayer that all ages can sing and engage with.
* You could have a morning tea that fits with the theme – we have included small, boat-shaped bamboo plates that you could serve morning tea in. These are available at a range of supermarkets, party stores and craft stores.
* If all ages are staying in together the whole time, adapt the sermon to work for all ages. Include and adapt the Powerpoint for visual learners of all ages, and be creative in how you engage all ages in the response time – the symbol cards or object options should work great for this.
* Have all ages involved in the planning of the service and represented from the front – this could be through the music, prayer time, activity etc. Never underestimate how a child or teen could be involved!
* Decorate your space to make it feel more exciting – if you have access to some oars, or rowboats, or an anchor – this will help visually engage people. Or you could cut anchors or oars as a backdrop or have rock ‘altars’ on your stage to connect with the theme. Get creative!

## 7. Bible Reading: Psalm 77

You could include this scripture reading as part of the sermon time, or as a separate bible reading earlier in the service.

### Psalm 77

#### For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm.

**1**I cried out to God for help;  
    I cried out to God to hear me.  
**2**When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
    at night I stretched out untiring hands,  
    and I would not be comforted.

**3**I remembered you, God, and I groaned;  
    I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.  
**4**You kept my eyes from closing;  
    I was too troubled to speak.  
**5**I thought about the former days,  
    the years of long ago;  
**6**I remembered my songs in the night.  
    My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

**7**“Will the Lord reject forever?  
    Will he never show his favour again?  
**8**Has his unfailing love vanished forever?  
    Has his promise failed for all time?  
**9**Has God forgotten to be merciful?  
    Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

**10**Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:  
    the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.  
**11**I will remember the deeds of the Lord;  
    yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.  
**12**I will consider all your works  
    and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

**13**Your ways, God, are holy.  
    What god is as great as our God?  
**14**You are the God who performs miracles;  
    you display your power among the peoples.  
**15**With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,  
    the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

**16**The waters saw you, God,  
    the waters saw you and writhed;  
    the very depths were convulsed.  
**17**The clouds poured down water,  
    the heavens resounded with thunder;  
    your arrows flashed back and forth.  
**18**Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,  
    your lightning lit up the world;  
    the earth trembled and quaked.  
**19**Your path led through the sea,  
    your way through the mighty waters,  
    though your footprints were not seen.

**20**You led your people like a flock  
    by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

## 8. Sermon

Feel free to adapt this sermon to suit your style and setting best. There is an accompanying Powerpoint available, with the blue logo representing when to change slides.

*[We’ve added the symbol A picture containing graphical user interface

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**INTRODUCTION**

*You could share a personal or funny story, start with the scripture passage or if you’re doing an intergenerational service – you could start with a hands-on activity or game (like a question prompt, or a blindfold or walking backwards challenge)*

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For me, I probably wouldn’t have booked an overseas holiday for later in 2020.

I might have bought shares in Facebook years ago, or Google, or Tesla or an activewear company, or hand sanitizer, or face masks.

I would have told everyone to buy a house in [your suburb or area] 10 years ago!

I would have known that yes, that was an electric fence, that the glass sliding door was definitely shut when I ran toward it, or that that gravel hill was too steep to bike down.

If you’re comfortable, turn to the person next to you and ask if they could see into the future, what would they want to know about? If you’re not comfortable, this is a great time to check your phone, pretend to get something out of your bag, re-read the Bible passage or blow your nose etc.

You might wonder why we take time each year to pause and consider our covenants or our relationships with God. How does looking back help us move forward?

Our suggestion is this – looking backwards helps us see forward…

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One of the key ways that we can learn more through the Bible is by understanding language. To understand some of the deeper meanings in passages we need to understand the original language.

A great example is the word ‘future’.

Some of us may know the classic Bible verse, Jeremiah 29:11 where the prophet Jeremiah is delivering a message from God to the troubled Israelites. One of these messages is around what God has in store for them.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Now this sounds like a pretty solid promise for the Israelites. I’m sure that’s why a lot of us declare this over each other and our own lives. It’s a great promise to hold to. But let’s go on a language lesson.

The word future in this passage is a little different to our Western, hanging out in [location] in 2022 understanding of what future is. The word here is actually ‘aharit’ - the Hebrew concept of future.

The basic meaning is *after, later, behind, following, end result, after-effect, future.*

How can a word mean both past and future? To the ancient Israelite, the past was in front of them because it was something they could see. Their future “aharit” was considered behind them because they could not yet see it as it was in the distant future and unclear.

**ROWING ANALOGY**

The Hebrew concept of time is like someone rowing a boat. Let’s think about rowing eights. You know the long boats with 8 people in them, rowing backwards, with a guide at the end who can see where they’re going.

The rowers face backward on their journey – unable to see the future, but only where they’ve come from. The rowers see where they have been, but the future is toward their backs. They back into the future. It is entirely unknown to them because it is behind them!

*A picture containing graphical user interface

Description automatically generated*There’s a Māori proverb that aligns with this Hebrew understanding. ‘Titiro whakamuri, haere whakamua’ which means, ‘Look to the past, move forward to the future’. You might have heard it more commonly translated as ‘we walk into the future backwards’.

Now, walking into something backwards doesn’t seem like the most logical, safe or simple way to do something.

But we also know that our journey with God isn’t stagnant – that it requires movement, action, stepping out, a deepening… more.

**So how does looking back give us clear vision for the future? How do we trust God with what’s next? How do we take those next steps?**

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The Psalmist teaches us a few things in this passage.

**POINT 1: Reflect – reflecting helps us to see where God has been at work**

Like someone rowing a boat, we can see where we’ve been – how far we’ve come, what we’ve been through, who was there.

[PERSONAL STORY] I can remember that for my fifth birthday I had a mini mouse cake at our house in Auckland. I can remember there was a bunch of friends from our church and my kindy. I can watch the video and see my fluffy pink jumper, who sang for me, who did and didn’t want to play games. But I can’t see my 50th birthday party. I can’t see where it’ll be, who will be there, who will sing for me and whether or not I’ll be in a fluffy pink jumper again.

And that’s okay.

What is known and certain is everything that has happened in my life, and even the legacy of lives before me – my whakapapa, my family’s whakapapa, this church’s whakapapa and the long, long whakapapa of Christian faith before me.

Like someone rowing, we can see exactly where we’ve been. We’re facing backwards – the only thing certain is the path we’ve taken.

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Description automatically generated*Skip Moen’s commentary puts it this way, “*We have as a guide what we see, the course we have been following. We see the past because we are facing it. The past is in “front” of us. No wonder our history with God is so important. It is not just about where we came from. It is the visible guide for our course into the future.”*

Reflecting on our journey with God shows us where we’ve been and where God has been at work in our lives. This is why spiritual markers are so important. They act as markers of encouragement, as reminders of God at work in our lives, of God’s faithfulness and grace.

In the Old Testament, there’s a story about how Samuel is calling Israel to repent and turn back to God. They do, choosing to put their confidence in God, and the Lord intervened mightily in Israel’s behalf and gave them victory over the Philistines. After this, Samuel places a rock down and calls it Ebenezer. You might know the song C*ome, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. There’s the line that says, ‘Here I raise my Ebenezer; Hither by Thy help I've come’. It’s one of the lyrics that we probably sing mindlessly, or maybe not even knowing its context or meaning.

*A picture containing graphical user interface

Description automatically generated*Ebenezer means ‘thus far the Lord has helped us’. It’s a spiritual marker. Something to act as a reminder – thus far the Lord has helped me. Like ‘look, remember, God did this and got you through that’ ‘Hey! Don’t forget how good Jesus was when this happened.’

The Psalmist does this in our passage. He’s crying out, feeling like God isn’t listening, or answering. He’s questioning if God has abandoned him. And then he chooses to remember his ebenezers, his spiritual markers.

*‘But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most high. I will remember the works of the lord. Surely I will remember your wonder of old. I will also meditate on all your work, and talk of all your deeds’.*

It’s only when The Psalmist realises he’s backing into the future, that he shifts his focus to what he can see – everything that God has done. He is reassured by what he can see, what is known, what God has proven.

When we’re unsure where we’re going, when we’re bogged down in life, or need confidence to take that next step, we can recall moments in our own lives, in others around us, in the Bible, where God has been at work and we can trust he is the same God and keep moving. We can look to spiritual markers in our own life – our soldier’s or adherent’s covenant, a moment of feeling God’s nearness, a timely encouragement from a friend, an encounter at an Easter camp or conference.

We can feel secure knowing ‘thus far the Lord has helped me’ …so why would it be different going forward? That’s what faith is – being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. We can be certain that God will be faithful again in the things we can’t see yet, because he was faithful in the things we can now see.

In Skip Moen’s commentary, he says “*If we have the right markers in the past, we do not need to see the future direction of our rowboat. By keeping on a course that uses these markers as bearing points, we know that we are going in the right direction even if we cannot see where we are going. It is not necessary to see the course of the future because our future is merely an extension of the same line we have taken with God in the past. Those of us who know God will know that we are on the right course because God’s faithfulness marks the way we have already come and God does not change course.”*

Sometimes we need to look back, to move forward.

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Description automatically generated***POINT 2: Reassess – reassessing helps us understand that God is still at work**

If someone rowing a boat never stopped to assess markers around them, they’d end up in trouble. Whether in a race and looking at the distance from the start and the buoys on the side, or someone out for a paddle on their own - looking back at where they took off, the distance to shore, trees and other natural markers. If we don’t check in, we all eventually drift off course or stop moving forward.

And it’s the same with our faith journeys. We need to take time to reflect and reassess – to check in with God. Read his word, talk to others, pray, learn more and really take time to discern God’s will for our lives. When we don’t, we drift or we end up paddling in circles or maybe we end up not moving at all.

Markers give us clarity for what’s next. They help us see how God has been at work and how he is currently at work. This builds trust that God is stable – he is with us and will be with us. If God was faithful then, he’ll be faithful moving forward.

There’s a key moment in this Psalm where the writer moves from remembering the past, reflecting and writing in past tense, to claiming these promises and truths as present tense.

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Description automatically generated*Going from ‘I will remember, I will consider…’ to ‘Your ways, God, *are* holy. What god *is* as great as our God? You *are* the God who performs miracles; you *display* your power among the peoples.’

The Psalmist remembers the faithfulness and goodness of God of years gone by – in their own life, in stories passed down from generations before them. And then actively chooses to declare these things as current realities – as a God who is still all these things.

Our own Salvation Army songbook declares it with these words, ‘He’s the same today as yesterday, my great unchanging friend; he’s the same today as yesterday, just the same unto the end’.

The Bible tells us the same God that moved thousands of years ago, is the same today. We can hold onto that truth and help it direct us forward.

Sometimes to move forward we need to check in where we’ve been and where we’re at.

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Description automatically generated***POINT 3: Respond – responding helps us step into where God is at work next**

So how do we respond to a God that has been faithful and is still at work in our lives and world? We do something!

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Description automatically generated*Hillsong United have a line in a song that says ‘Your love’s too good to leave me here’. It’s a reminder that God is still at work – he doesn’t leave us as we are, where we are. He’s too good to leave you where you’re at. God doesn’t call us out onto the rowboat to just have us hanging out in the middle of the lake, doing circles. He calls us forth, to greater things. God is still at work in us and in our world, and he calls us to partner with him.

And we can trust him with that because of what he’s shown in our lives and the lives of others.

You may have made a covenant with God to be a soldier or adherent years ago or chose to be a Christ follower years or weeks ago, or maybe you’re still figuring it all out. God doesn’t want us to be content with that – he is a living, real God that is at work in our lives today.

Our response to God’s faithfulness should be faith.

There’s a Bible verse in Hebrews that says, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

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Description automatically generated*The Message version puts it this way, “The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It’s our handle on what we can’t see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.”

God is looking for people ready to respond to his promises, to his goodness and faithfulness with faith. And that’s not a one time, done deal. It’s a daily commitment to stepping out in faith for what’s next with God – where is he asking me to partner with him today?

The trouble we often have is, we can’t see the future. We don’t always feel confident in what’s next, where God is leading, in his plan for us and this world.

The Psalmist felt this way too. The author questions if God will show up again? I like how the Message version puts these verses, 7-10:

*‘Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good? Will he never smile again? Is his love worn threadbare? Has his salvation promise burned out? Has God forgotten his manners? Has he angrily stalked off and left us? “Just my luck,” I said. “The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him.”*

Sometimes it feels like we’re on our own, like our situations are too dire, the world is too broken, our gifts are too small, our efforts aren’t worth it, our job is done. We often end up focusing on the wrong things – what is unknown, fear of the future, on feeling inadequate, on feeling alone, we often start asking ‘where is God in this?’ ‘how do I know what’s next?’ ‘Can I really trust God with my future or what he’s asking of me?’

These are encouraging markers for us too! See how the Psalmist responds to his uncertainty and anger:

*“Once again I’ll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders; I’ll ponder all the things you’ve accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts.”*

We can push through uncertainty with what is certain – our history with God. We can trust our future to God, and cast-off anxiety, because we have a trustworthy and proven navigator! The stories woven through our life of God’s faithfulness, of God’s comfort, of God’s care and grace, of God’s provision and goodness are our spiritual markers that we can refer to as encouragers. What a tapestry of faith we have to reflect on!

And if we are new on the journey with God (or don’t feel we have much of a tapestry with God yet), then we have thousands of years recorded for us to draw on. This is the beauty of the Bible! God’s people learning to understand and respond to the voice of their navigator.

The passage goes on to refer to how God has redeemed and led others. That his footsteps may not have been known or visible to us (or the ancient Israelites) but he led his people like a flock. It refers to the Israelites passing through the waters when they were escaping Pharaoh and Egypt. All they had was trust. They trusted God, like sheep trust the voice of their shepherd.

God didn’t stop calling you to more when you took that first step of faith, when you made a significant decision with him, when you felt close to him in worship at that event or when you signed a covenant with him.

You’re still on the river – there’s still more ahead of you. God is asking each of us to continue rowing that boat. God is still leading us forth like he did for the Israelites thousands of years ago.

Our response to God’s faithfulness should be stepping out in faith.

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Description automatically generated Skip Moen’s commentary puts it this way, “So much of our lives seem to be consumed with plans for our future. We all want to “look ahead” as though we will be able to guide and protect ourselves from what may come. But God says that the real direction of our life should be to the past. The course of our life was set in the past. The victory over the future happened in the past. It is our history with God that gives us peace and confidence.”*

We don’t need to see the future – we can trust an unknown future to a known God!

**So what?**

So why bother moving forward? Maybe you’re content just hanging out in the middle of the river, eating a sandwich. Maybe you think you’ve finished your race and are keen to watch the other rowers. Maybe you think you’re on the riverbank, just watching and not invited to participate. Maybe you think you’re the coach and you don’t really row anymore, you show others how to do it.

While those thoughts and feelings are valid, God doesn’t only call a handful of us to row or move forward with him. He invites us all into active participation in his plans for us and this world.

And what’s crazy is that God doesn’t need humans to help fix a broken world. He has everything he needs to do it. God also doesn’t need to be in relationship with us. He’s God.

He *chooses* to invite us to participate in relationship with him and his redemptive and restorative work in this world. He *chooses* us. Wow. This is his plan. He *wants* us to partner with him.

And we have a choice to head out on that journey with him.

Sure, you can choose to sit in the boat on the river and tap out. But why would you? Why would you see all that God has done in your life, in the lives of others, in the testimonies of the Bible, in your church, in this world, and choose to… sit?

How could you not see all that God has done and not want to partner with him in creating these stories and moments in others’ lives? How could looking back at God’s faithfulness spur you on for what’s next? Where is God at work and how can you join him?

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Description automatically generated*Will you respond to God’s incredible faithfulness with your own faith today? Will you trust what is unknown to a known God?

## 9. Response

So what would it look like for you to look backwards and move forward?

Each year we set aside a day to consider our covenants – our commitments to God.

Maybe you become a Christian years ago and have chosen to honour God by living in certain ways or doing certain things.

Maybe your covenant with God is through soldiership or being an adherent.

Maybe you’re still trying to figure out who God is in your life and how you might live in response.

Whatever your personal covenant with God is, he calls us all to step out in faith and partner with him.

* What markers has God put in your life that you can recall and spur you on?
  + Maybe today you want to declare God’s faithfulness in your life.
* Do you feel ‘stuck’, like you’re in the boat but going nowhere. Maybe you can’t see him at work or feel you need to make change in your life.
  + Maybe today you want to cry out like the Psalmist and ask God where he is and where he wants you to be? Maybe today you want God to show where he’s been at work so you can trust him with what’s next?
* What next steps is God asking you to take? Are you ready to move forward with God? What is your response to God’s faithfulness in your life?
  + Maybe you want to set today as a new marker in your journey – the day you took a new step forward with God into the unknown

Today, we have some covenant renewal cards available. These are available for you to take as a marker on your journey – a reminder of today and your commitment, something for you to look back on as you move forward. There are a range of cards with different images – we invite you to come forward and take one with an image that will act as a marker (either of something God has done in your life or something that will remind you of what God is asking of you today). Take time to choose an image that will help you remember the step you made today – whether it’s an encouraging marker from your past or something to remind you of the next steps you’re going to take.

*[If you are using other ‘markers’ today, this is a great time to explain the different response options – I.e. rocks (like the ebenezer), signposts, anchors, roadcones.]*

If you would like to respond and make a commitment today, we invite you to come forward, and take a reminder of today. Maybe you want to make this commitment for the first time today, or you want to reaffirm this covenant again – we invite you to come forward.

If you’d like prayer, please come forward and someone would love to pray for you.

## 10. Benediction

You are welcome to use one of the benedictions below or feel free to use one of your own.

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24**

**23**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24**The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

***Sending***

*(Romans 8:38)*

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,*

*nor angels, nor rulers,*

*nor things present, nor things to come,*

*nor powers, nor height, nor depth,*

*nor anything else in all creation,*

*will be able to separate us from the love of God*

*in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 38)*

*We leave this place of prayer to return to the particular circumstances of our own lives. Let us go forth strong in our faith and our hope, for God our Father has made all things new in Jesus Christ. He sends us to witness to his love and to play a role in the new creation. May God, who knows our joy, our anger and our pain, guide us always, and may we be courageous, stay faithful and live a life worthy of the Christian faith.*

*Lord, stay with us.*

*via www.re-worship.blogspot.com*