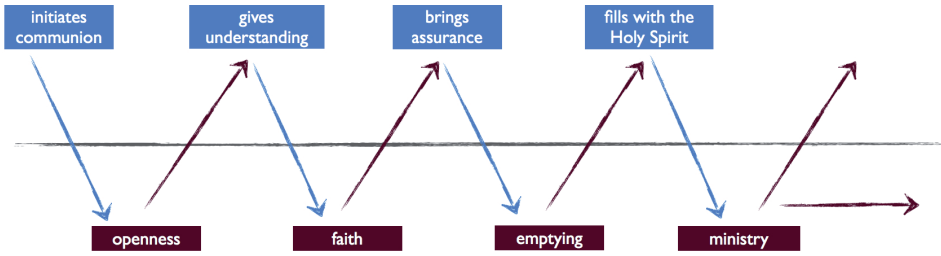


# UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU



## connect to reflect

### UNDERSTANDING COMMUNION: 1

God initiates, we open  
God initiates all communion and longs for us to be open to him



### the challenge to believe

1. The sanctuary teaches that God's primary concern is to re-establish a relationship with us—for us to continually live in his presence. How does this influence your view of God?
2. How does it feel to think that there is no part of you that naturally longs for God, and that there are parts of your life that are still closed to him? What can you do about this?



### deepening dependence

Spend some time in prayer to acknowledge your own spiritual bankruptcy. In what areas does the Holy Spirit need you to become open to him?



### steps for re-connecting our hearts to God

1. Ask the Holy Spirit what he wants you to learn from this lesson. What do you sense the Holy Spirit teaching you?
2. This week, what practical steps do you need to take to apply what the Holy Spirit is teaching you?
3. What evidence will you see that indicates that you are successfully applying what the Holy Spirit is teaching you?



### passing it on

- INTERCESSION** Who can you pray for, that they grasp God's longing for communion with them, and that they open their hearts and minds to him?
- WORDS** With whom can you share God's desire for communion with them, and the concept of openness?
- CHARACTER** How can openness become characterised in your own life?



## Opening to God's words

God's greatest longing is to be re-united in relationship with us. But there is a problem. The sin within us has broken any natural desire we have for God—unless he initiates the process of bringing us back together with him.

As soon as sin entered the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hid out of fear. So it was God who took the initiative, calling, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Writing to the Romans, Paul quotes a number of Old Testament passages that highlights our naturally deep rooted antagonism towards a God-ward direction.

*Read Romans 3:10-18. What does Paul say we are inevitably prone to think and do without God?*

At the beginning of the New Testament, Matthew quotes the prophet Isaiah to explain that the coming Saviour would be called "Emmanuel—which means 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23). The Bible wants to make it clear that we are not left alone on Earth. God himself—at his own initiative—has come to be with us. As John has famously written, "for God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son..." (John 3:16, italics added).

This idea of God's desire for a relationship with broken people can be seen long before in building of the Israelite sanctuary. God said to Moses, "let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Because of the prominence of sacrifices in the Old Testament, we may think the main reason for the sanctuary was to deal with sin—but that is not correct. The primary purpose was for God gain constant communion with his people. God's desire to restore human beings into his personal presence (without sin getting in the way) was what mattered most.

Now imagine it is the time for the morning offerings at the tabernacle. As an Israelite, you call your family together and stand at the entrance of your tent facing the sanctuary where the offerings will be made. They are made by the priests on behalf of the whole of Israel and symbolise the consecration of your family and the rest of Israel to God.

But wait. You don't have to go to the front of your tent. You can ignore everything and keep eating your breakfast. So here is the question: what is difference between the person who recognises their need to consecrate themselves to God, and the one who doesn't care?

In the Bible, the person who ignores God is considered to have a "hard heart".

*What do the following Bible verses teach about the meaning of a hard heart? Exodus 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19; 9:12; Hebrews 3:15; 4:7; Mark 6:52; 8:17; 10:5.*

*The opposite of a hard heart is a soft "heart of flesh". What does the Bible teach about the characteristics of a heart of flesh in Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26?*

A person with a hard heart is closed to God, while the one with a heart of flesh is open to the impressions of the Holy Spirit. God may be speaking, but unless someone is actually open to listening, God's voice will not be heard or understood.

Our hearts will begin to be re-formed as we learn to be open. Openness enables us to hear God speak so we can choose to dedicate our lives to him. The more we can learn to be open towards God, the deeper our communion with him can grow.

We can be closed to God's voice in many ways—not only because of sin. From the list below, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you may be closed to God—even though you may be a Christian of many years. Is there anything that you need to add to the list?

Sin	Emotional	Physical	Mental
bitterness	hurt	illness	inflexible
unforgiveness	exhaustion	stress	cynical
resentment	other: _____	feeling driven	condemnatory
pride		agitation	legalistic
other: _____		other: _____	judgemental
			other: