



Freedom Day: A Service to Commemorate and Celebrate

With a so-called 'Freedom Day' on the horizon when most, if not all, pandemic restrictions will be lifted, churches will have the chance to finally meet together again as normal. But how should we address all that has happened through the pandemic?

A service where we come together to commemorate all that has been lost, and those who are no longer with us, and to celebrate the good things God has also done, and give thanks for His provision, could be part of the answer.

Why should we take time to mark the past year?

As a church, we are a family – and that means that we want to care for and honour one another. Over the past year, coronavirus and the lockdown restrictions have impacted us all in dramatic and different ways. We can't wait to be able to gather together again as we used to! However, before we get too used to being 'back to normal', we feel it's essential to take some time to gather as a community to reflect on what God has done in our lives and church over the past year and share our experiences – to celebrate the good and commemorate the bad.

For some of us, there will have been grievous loss as family members and friends may have been very ill with the virus or even passed away. For others, there will have been painful loneliness and isolation, or the strain of home-schooling and shielding. And yet there will be some who have found great positives in the slowing down of life and increased time spent together as families. And throughout the pandemic, joyful life events have continued as children have been born and couples have got married.

In Romans 12:15, the Lord exhorts us to mourn with those who mourn and to rejoice with those who rejoice. It is important that as a church family we are able to be honest with one another – that we can share when things have been difficult and when the Lord has seemed absent, but also when things have gone well, and His presence has seemed very near.

We'd encourage all churches to consider setting some time aside to look back over the year or more that has passed, allowing church members to share their joys and struggles, and what God has done in their lives, commemorating and celebrating. We hope this would act as a uniting event, allowing us to lament together for what has been lost, to grieve for those who have died, and to thank God for His faithfulness through such difficult times. Our hope is that it would also be a time to commission ourselves into a new season of life and of community.

What it could look like for you?

- This could be an event for your whole congregation, or in a larger church it may be more appropriate to do it in life groups or other areas of ministry.
- It could be a special Sunday service, or another time that is set aside, such as an evening or lunchtime gathering.
- If restrictions allow, consider allowing some time for people to be together socially before and after the event – such as a ‘bring and share’ meal, which everybody can contribute towards.

Other Ideas

- Allocate some time to mark those who have passed away over the past year, from COVID or other causes, whose funerals had to be kept small.
- Allocate some time to celebrate the joyful life events that have occurred – weddings, new children, etc!
- Consider asking a few people to prepare a testimony in advance. It may be worth aiming for a variety of different experiences to try and represent all.
- Take some time to pray and ask for God’s direction for the coming months.

Suggestions for Testimonies

If the testimony is one of struggle and pain, the church will be honoured to hear it as brothers and sisters, longing to be able to share your hardship and support the individual. And if the testimony is one of joy and ease, then it is a privilege to be able to rejoice in their blessing. There is no pressure here to varnish what may have been a bruising experience, and no need to hide what may have been a rich time of rest.

Some possible questions for individuals to base testimony around:

- Did coronavirus and the lockdown have a big impact on you?
- Have there been difficult times?
- Are there things you are thankful for?
- How has your relationship with the Lord been affected?
- How do you feel about life going back to ‘normal’?
- Are there things you hope you or the church will be able to change going forward?
- Is there anything we can pray into for you?