



For
now

– *being the church
in unusual times*

For now – engaging with God in worship

Just now: Worshipping weakly?

The impact of necessary restrictions on gathering to curb the spread of Covid-19, have left us with a sense that instead of weekly worship we find ourselves worshipping weakly. The worshipping life of the church has been interrupted by lockdowns and circuit breakers and its normal rhythms have been disrupted by the need for shorter services and online offerings. Nevertheless, worshipping God is both a desire and duty central to who we are as the people of God.

Watch a short introduction to this session by [clicking here](#)

Read: Psalm 84. [Click here](#) for the passage.

Talk about: *Gathering before God*

Writing in the 16th Century, John Calvin one of the father figures of Presbyterianism, described the background to this psalm as follows: 'The psalmist complains that nothing proved to him a source of greater distress than his being prevented from coming to the tabernacle, and his being banished from the assembly of the saints, where God was called upon. And yet he shows, that nothing can withstand the longing desires of the godly; and that, surmounting all obstacles, they will be constantly engaged in seeking God, and, so to speak, will make a way for themselves where there is none.' We can relate to this feeling of frustration and desire.

- 1.** The psalmist expresses his strong desire to be with others worshipping God in verses 1 and 2. As gatherings for worship have been disrupted by lockdown and the restrictions necessary to maintain social distancing, how has this increased your appreciation and awareness of the part that weekly worship plays in your walk with God?
- 2.** Pictures of 'dwelling', 'house' and 'home' abound in the early verses of the psalm. In what practical ways can we try to make digital and social distanced worship engaging and accessible to all of our church family? In particular, how can we make them a comfortable environment in which families with young children can feel included and catered for like the sparrow with her young (v3)?
- 3.** Verse 6 pictures journeying through particularly difficult seasons of life like being in a dark and fearful valley. Nevertheless, strength can be found in refocusing our gaze on God (vv5&7). What moments in worship, however disrupted, have reminded you of God's presence with you during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic?

4. It can be tempting to simply skip participating in weekly worship, whether in-person or digital, at present because doing so is either difficult to negotiate or less than all it usually is in impact. How do verses 10-12 challenge and encourage us to struggle to overcome that temptation?

Consider: *Things we can all do to continue to engage in worship as a congregation*

There are simple things we can all do to continue to engage well in worship each week, whether digitally or in-person while having to navigate ongoing restrictions.

- **Follow** – even if you cannot gather to worship in-person or access digital worship, find out what happened on Sunday as your congregation gathered. What Bible passage was read? What was the theme of the sermon? What songs were sung? What topics were the subject of prayer? Read, reflect and respond to what God was saying to your church family as it met and you will feel less disconnected from its worshipping life.
- **Attend** – if circumstances allow you to attend in-person worship, make the effort to do so while carefully observing guidance to maintain your safety and the health of others. Find a balanced approach to danger, desire and duty.
- **Include** – go out of your way to be understanding of the challenges others face in engaging in worship which is not as it usually is, especially families with young children.
- **Connect** – where digital worship is available and your only option to gather with your church family, commit to doing so at the normal service time to maintain the routine of weekly engaging with God on his day.
- **Participate** – worshipping while socially distanced, singing while masked and staying engaged while online do not come naturally and call for patience and perseverance, but don't complain. Instead commit to being a focused and enthusiastic participant in praise, prayer and listening and responding to preaching.
- **Pray** – these are challenging times for those who lead worship and make it available online. Pray for your minister, those who lead praise and those who stream or upload services.

Try: *Tips for extending a conversation about worship*

- **Construct** – build a network of one or two people who you can speak with after worship to talk about what God was saying to you as an individual and a church family. Use telephone, text or other digital mediums to do so. Remember to include someone whose circumstances mean they can't attend church so that they can also feel engaged.
- **Prepare** – worship will be more meaningful and have a greater impact on our hearts and lives if we prepare carefully to listen to God and are open to what he is saying. So, don't rush into the building or online at the last moment. Instead ensure some time to get organised and be still before God.
- **Reflect** – as you participate in worship, do so asking yourself "what is God saying to me in my current circumstances" and "what is God saying to us as a congregation in our current circumstances?"
- **Challenge** – listen for a particular area in which God is challenging you about something specific. Make this a topic of conversation in your follow up conversation with others.



- **Encouragement** – listen for something particular in which God is encouraging you as you live through these difficult days. Make this a topic of conversation in your follow up conversation with others.
- **Pray** – pray with others about your conversation together around worship and the particular needs of your church family at this time.

Pray: About what God is leading your congregation to do for now to effectively engage with God in worship.

Follow up?

The Psalms are a particularly rich resource to stimulate praise and prayer to God, giving us words and pictures which we often struggle to find and form for ourselves in worship. Visit psalterproject.com/sing to find faithful translations in contemporary musical form of psalms ranging over many topics and themes. Use these if you cannot attend worship, or share them in your follow on conversations with others.

