

PAPER CHURCH

Where Faith and Life intersect: Family & Relationships 1 John 4: 16-21

Sunday 10 May 2020

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

Mother's Day

Video produced by *Family Today*

Click here to watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHvjTLOtq0U>

Every time a child is born
So is a Mother.
Mother.
An eternal bond is formed.
As you grow, your mother is there.
There to tuck you in, to cheer you up.
There to teach.
There to send you off, and to listen, when you call.
There to encourage you as you explore, create, and dance the night away.
There to encourage, to build faith.
There by your side, when others have left you.
There in good times and hard times.
There in the details of daily life.
Life doesn't come with a manual, it comes with a Mother.

This Mother's Day thank the women who have loved, mentored, and mothered you.

Message

Kaye Reid

Hi from our home during this time of isolation.

This is our main living area where we do most of our living. It has been part of how we do family life together that we don't spend much time in our bedrooms, which are small, but spend most of our time in these larger spaces and all in together. These spaces are nearly always a work in progress, with washing to be folded, jigsaws or Lego underway, piles of books, laptops and phones everywhere, and moving things off the table so we can eat dinner together.



During isolation we are needing to spend nearly all of our time in our households. We get to spend more time together and be more focused on whoever is in our immediate household, and with our own family and nearby neighbours, and less on wider connections and further distances, and running around from one thing to another. We are less dispersed and more focused in our neighbourhood, in our street, in our home.

If family and relationships are going well and safe and healthy this is great.

If our immediate relationships are unhealthy or there are tensions or it's toxic then our world being smaller and very focused can intensify these issues. It becomes like a pressure-cooker environment. This has raised significant concerns for people who may be isolated in households where they are at risk of family violence, there are reports of increased rates of divorce, and increased use of pornography, and additional pressure for people struggling with addiction.

And even if our households and relationships are inherently healthy some of the ways of letting off steam are missing – by going to and being at work, going to the gym, having debriefing conversations, and enjoying drinks with friends. So, what has been working may be feeling a bit out of balance.

We need to bring our best selves to our households right now, to our families, our neighbours, our online colleagues, and virtual classmates. How do we think we are going at that?

The intersection of our life and faith has something of foundational significance to say here. We can be our best self and we can participate and enjoy and be enriched in the best possible relationships.

Jeremiah 6:16 says

Thus says the Lord:

*Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*

People who follow Jesus and are committed to his life-giving teachings – the good way - and are living in this love of God, being transformed by the Holy Spirit, are able to have positive, fruitful, peaceful, flourishing relationships. I think of my Gramps as an example of this for me. My Dad's dad was a gentle, funny, kind man, who always had a twinkle in his eye, and had time and interest for us all. One of the things that is most memorable for me now as an adult is how tender he was towards my Nana. Always, without fail. I never heard or saw a raised voice, or a cutting comment, just tenderness and honouring of each other.

In scripture in the book of 1 John, chapter 4, the writer talks about God's love and ours. And the message is clear and simple. "Let us love one another, for love comes from God" (v 7). And not just in an abstract way, but God showed this love through Jesus, and loved us first. Not as a response to us loving God. So, let us love one another. You might like to pause now and read all of chapter 4, or at least from verses 7-21 and just sit with it. Let it steep into you ...

Bible Reading: 1 John 4:16-21 (NIV)

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

God is love and God's love is transforming. And we can be transformed and bring our best self to our relationships.

We need to be taking responsibility for our mindset, approach, attitude, character and behaviours in relationships. Because we are called to be growing up into Christ, to be setting aside our childish ways. This doesn't mean that we aren't impacted by our family of origin and the scripts from our life that we have brought with us but that we can continue to be transformed in the light of God's love for us.

If we are not sure what this looks like we look to Jesus. Jesus is a model of healthy relationships and emotional maturity. If there was a scale, Jesus would be at the 100 end. We don't see Jesus taking on other people's anxiety. We do see Jesus being able to have hard conversations and still being able to stay connected and in relationship with people. We see Jesus being full of grace and truth and love.

Are we living the vision of this scripture of receiving and reflecting God's love?

We are fortunate to now have a small caravan from some dear friends of ours which we are able to take to places like Warburton or Apollo Bay and particularly down to the Peninsula; to Rosebud and McCrae. It's so good, it's like having a tiny house on wheels, with a compact version of the essentials – bed and a fridge. And an awning; one of the best inventions in life. We can be outside most of the time, especially being near a river or the sea, no soggy food in an esky, no drippy wet hunched over tent, and I am as happy as can be. You spend a lot of time just being around – eating, reading, walking, observing the small part of the world that you are in. You live in pretty close proximity in a caravan park. It's quite different from our very private, separated, suburban homes. You hear a lot and see a lot. It's a window into what is happening within the very private spaces of our individual and separate homes.

Similar but not as extreme as living or visiting slums. I think of Klong Toey in Bangkok where some people from here lived for a time as part of UNOH. I remember hearing stories of what it is like to live in such close proximity. You hear everything. You hear the violence and you wonder what to do.



(Photo source: UNOH)

That proximity forces an honesty that our separated private homes can hide.

We need to be really honest with ourselves because we are not always able to live our lives from these places of God's love. Our brokenness breaks through. Sometimes in our relationships we speak with contempt, or disgust; without respect. We don't listen, particularly not deeply, and ignore or reject the bids that we make towards each other. Sometimes in our relationships there is lying, secrets, unfaithfulness, betrayal. Sometimes there is unmanaged anger, moodiness, aggression or withdrawal. Sometimes in the relationships we are in people are walking on eggshells and trying to avoid setting off us or someone else. Sometimes there are negative put downs and patterns, harsh words, bumps or threats, intimidation, and behaviours that control or limits the time, interests, relationships and finances of others.

We need to be honest. We need to repent. We need to draw a line in the sand and say these are not ok. We need to change. We need to seek help if appropriate.

It is not ok and there are better ways. There are new ways of doing things. God's love is an invitation to change the ways you function. To reset. To reset, beyond the past of what has been and not overwhelmed by the future. Just reset and focus on the new possibilities of right now. Your relationships are impacted by you and need your best and most transformed self.

The good news is that God is always doing a new thing in us. Our hope and trust is in a God who loves us and calls us to love others. Good and healthy relationships are absolutely possible. They are created and made possible by God's love for us. We need to accept God's love for us and live it into our relationships.

In our relationships we can be honouring, interested, curious, gracious, truth seeking, uplifting, reliable, trusted and constant. We can be our best self in our relationships. Seeking the flourishing of others. And a really simple way of doing this is to be *for*, not against, in your relationships. Be *for* the person you are married to, or the children you are parenting, or the people you are sharing a household with, or the people you are working with or studying with. In everything you do let it be clear that you are *for* them.

I didn't put everything away from our living area before recording today, because our households and our relationships are a work in progress. We are working on them as we go along. Hopefully creating something new and beautiful. But it's also not necessarily a bad thing to live with some of the self-consciousness that comes with doing life in public in places like the caravan park. If that helps us to pay attention to what we sound like, to what is really going on in our relationships, to wonder self-consciously "what do we sound like to others"? If this helps us to be honest and reflective with ourselves. If it helps us to strive to express God's love in the most beautiful and honouring ways, of showing people that we are *for* them.

Let us bring these things to God in prayer. Would you pray with me, perhaps checking that you are in a comfortable position, and focusing your spirit with God's spirit:

God of love, I sit in this space conscious of your love for me.

Thank you for loving me just the way I am - but thank you that you love me too much to allow me to stay this way. Convict me of my attitudes that need some level of heart change. Make me more like Jesus, I pray.

I bring before you the parts of my life that are characterised by a lack of real shalom. Make me long for wholeness and harmony in all my relationships and empower me to act on this longing, I pray.

Give me a contrite spirit that I might hear what it is you want to say to me, today. Give me grace to overlook minor offenses (as you do mine), and courage to confront those things that go beyond this. Help me to truthfully identify those areas of my life that I am currently blind to. And only after examining myself, I pray that you would give me wisdom and clarity about those things that you call me to confront in others.

Please make me gentle. May my strength be under control, may I bring a calm and peaceful presence into heated places, and may I possess such tact and gracious courtesy that it could only come from you!

I choose gentleness ... nothing is won by force. If I raise my voice may it only be in praise. If I clench my fist, may it only be in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself.

Would you help me to be a 'responder' before I am a 'reactor' please? May I truly recognise that all those I am in relationship with are equally made in your image and may I afford them all the value and worth that this demands.

I have sinned against you and against others. Forgive me I pray. As you drench me in your forgiveness, I pray that this might spill over into my relationships, that I might truly forgive those who have hurt me as you have forgiven me. Heal me in every way, I pray.

I am in awe that you have chosen to love and forgive me, and that when you look at me, you don't see my wrongdoing at all. This is amazing grace. And now, Lord, empower me to do the same.

I need your help with this. I want to be reflecting your love and grace and truth in my relationships. Draw close to me and comfort me, I pray,

As you have made peace with me, I pray that I will be able to share that peace in my own sphere of influence. And I pray that I can and will make a difference.

Thank you for all people in our world who have recognised that peace-making is a high and holy calling for all who choose to follow Jesus. Establish this calling within me too, I pray, and send me out to truly live and share the gospel of peace.

Amen.

(Adapted from prayers of Melissa Lipsett, Bible Society, in a daily series on Family Peacemaking)

Actions you can take:

What do you recognise? What do you need to change? What do you want to embrace?

You may wish to pause now to consider or commit to some of these actions ...

Would you like someone to pray or chat with you?

There is power in prayer and in the experience of being prayed with. You are encouraged to take this opportunity, even if this isn't something you have experienced before. Or you may be feeling particularly lonely or disconnected today and would love to speak with someone. Please call or email the office, on 9870 8169 or office@ringwoodchurch.org.au, and someone will call you back between 10am and 11am this Sunday 10 May (if it is not already past this time).

Reflection and prayer in preparation for Communion

Brooke Prentis, CEO of Common Grace, adapted from The Justice Conference podcast "When all you can do is pray", 8 April 2020.

"There are now less planes in the sky, less cars on the road, you can listen more deeply to the winds rustling through the trees, to the land beneath your bare feet, to your breathing; the breath that Creator physically put in your lungs. So what about breathing? Martin Luther once said "to be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."

We struggled to breathe through the bushfires, COVID-19 attacks the lungs and people struggle to breathe, people who have asthma have always struggled to breathe, people with anxiety struggle for breath, people facing injustice struggle for breath, a new baby is born and takes their first breath. And besides COVID-19, the cycle of life and death continues and people passing away from things other than COVID-19 also take their last breath.

During this period of COVID-19 has been Eastertime. We reflected at Easter on Jesus' life death and resurrection. I think of Jesus' breath. Through Jesus' life here on earth he breathed just as we do, he prayed just as we should, he took action just as we must. Every breath counted. As Jesus hung on the cross we are reminded of Jesus' breathing in scripture. Luke 23:46 says "Jesus called out with a loud voice "Father into your hands I commit my spirit". When he said this, he breathed his last." This was Jesus' last breath in his earthly life.

But Jesus' breathing does not end here. In John 20:21-22 Jesus in his resurrected life appears to his disciples and says, "Peace be with you, as the father has sent me, I am sending you", and with that he breathed on them and said receive the holy spirit." The disciples received Jesus breath individually and collectively.

You see for me breathing is not just an individual activity it is a rhythm. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. For me prayer is also a rhythm. Breathing for me is also a community activity. At this moment in the world's history it feels like collectively we are holding our breath. My prayer is that we learn to breathe together, but that breathing is in a new rhythm. A communal rhythm of love, of compassion, of generosity. Our individual breaths in rhythm with each other as brothers and sisters where no one is left behind and is in rhythm with Creator, Jesus and Holy Spirit."

With the breath we have been given we can shape the world with prayer.
Let us pray the Lord's Prayer, knowing that we pray this from near and far but still together.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rnqwd.com/communion or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service. Or you can join us at 11am via Facebook Live. You don't need a Facebook account or camera/microphone, just enter facebook.com/RingwoodChurchOfChrist in your web browser to watch communion.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion ...

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

I Could Sing of Your Love Forever

Over the mountains and the sea
Your river runs with love for me
And I will open up my heart
And let the Healer set me free

I'm happy to be in the truth
And I will daily lift my hands
For I will always sing
Of when Your love came down yeah

I could sing of Your love forever
I could sing of Your love forever

Oh I feel like dancing
It's foolishness I know
But when the world has seen the light
They will dance with joy like we're dancing now

Martin Smith
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Blessing

UK Blessing, based on The Blessing by Elevation Music

Click here to watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtl3mNj5U> or search UK Blessing.

Let us conclude our worship by sharing the “UK Blessing” as a blessing across our households ... and a blessing over our church, our community, country and world.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace. May His favour be upon you and a thousand generations and your family and your children and their children. May His presence go before you, and behind you and beside you, all around you and within you. May you know: He is with you. In the morning, in the evening, in your coming and your going, in your weeping and rejoicing. He is for you!
Amen!

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

Thank you!