

Practising The Presence of God —Worship at Home

Dear Friends of Currie Kirk. Please get in touch with the Kirk Office (451 5141) if you need anything.

We have friends willing to listen, shop, walk a dog, fix a garden.

Website: <https://www.curriekirk.org/> or <https://www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/>

Call to Worship

The beginning of wisdom is to revere God
The wise delight to meditate on God's will and way
They are like a tree, planted by streams of living water, that yields fruit;
whose leaf does not wither
Come Holy Spirit and find us in our wilderness
Lead us into the wonder of your wisdom and love

Opening Prayer (adapted from the Iona Prayer Book)

Father God
This is the day that you have made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it
You are always present to us, enfolding us in your love
You are the author of creation's beauty and power,
Of the farthest reaches of time and space
You wait in silence for us until we are open to you
Tune us to hear your voice and to seek to do your will

Lord Jesus Christ
Enable each one of us to place our trust in you,
And to live in the present moment
We often forget that You long for peace and healing in our minds and hearts
Your hands are always and everywhere
The source of our journey into wholeness
And that inner gift of springtime which is your gift to our souls

Spirit of God
You hover over the chaos of our lives
You are always doing a new thing
In the love of friends you build a new house
Uniting us as one
You sing the song of the universe
And your song can pierce even our darkest days
And you Fill us with your breath of life
Keep us faithful that your goodness may shine in us and through us
for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen

The Scripture Readings are
taken from:

**Genesis 28: 10-19—page 30
(NIV)**

**Matthew 6: 5-13—page 970
(NIV)**



It is with great sadness that
we have to intimate the death
of:

Angus Maison
18 Blinkbonny Road

Please pray for the family

Meditation

A writer named John K Lagemann told of a time when he had to face a difficult decision; whether or not to accept a job that would entail moving his family to another city and changing his whole style of living. He began overthinking and stressing, unable to do anything (what my husband calls paralysis of analysis!) Anyway, he decided to pray for guidance and in order to give his brain a rest he went to get a haircut . . . something we are all missing presently! But as he was sitting in the Barber's chair, having silenced his overactive mind, he got clarity. He knew the right thing to do. He turned down the job. As soon as he came to the decision he felt a deep sense of peace within himself. Years later he wrote that he never regretted the decision nor doubted the clarity that had come by quieting his mind and leaving it to God.

I liked the story because sometimes when we pray there is a temptation to give God a grocery list of requests, issues and troubles and whilst we might be good at talking, it is sometimes only when we are quiet enough to shut down our minds that God might actually speak to us, guide and refresh us.

I know that in Lockdown, many of us have endured moments where anxiety or overthinking are normal human reactions to so much uncertainty and unrest, not only in our own lives but, in our nation and world. And yet in this time when routines have been upturned and normal social meetings and gatherings cancelled, there has been a different sense of time. I know that for busy working parents trying to home-school, this has proved to be a challenging experience, and for others, the lack of contact has made you fed up.

For those working from home or for those shielding at home, for those feeling stuck or trapped at home, there has been more time to be still. I recently bumped into our beloved organist Michael at the Crematorium and he said that in Lockdown he has enjoyed being able to spend more time "Being rather than Doing." That is a good way of putting it. I know some friends who began meditating during Lockdown in order to quiet their overactive, anxious minds. One friend noted, "Meditating enables me to make good use of periods of time which I had previously largely wasted."

Sometimes in those moments when we are quiet, when we stop doing and concentrate on being present in the moment, we can grow more able to know our own souls, minds and our true selves—more aware of Presence of God too.

It was at a place named Bethel, that Jacob discovered himself. (I know some of you are back to golf . . . but if any of you are missing all the live action of music, theatre or sport, then read the book of Genesis. Jacob's story is full of action and drama!). Jacob betrayed his twin brother Esau in order to get his father's inheritance. This was no financial inheritance, it was the blessing of God, the covenant promise that he coveted. Esau was the son who cared about physical, earthly things, and he gave his inheritance away for soup . . . indeed Jacob swindled his brother—but Jacob had always had a spiritual mind and he wanted to be blessed. So, having cheated his slightly older twin, Esau was so angry that Jacob had to flee.

In the story we heard, Jacob was wandering in the wilderness in search of his new home. Jacob was lost and lonely and really, he had no idea where the road he had chosen might take him. He was in the barren country side when exhausted, he lay down to sleep. Knowing all the wrong he had done, he was aware that there was a higher righteousness to which he was accountable. He might have felt God-forsaken. But in his moment of quiet sleep, his mind meditated upon a vision, "of a ladder set upon the earth and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God were ascending it and descending it."

I have mentioned that one of my favourite Lockdown reads has been Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in the World*. In her chapter, "Practising the presence of God", she mentions Jacob. These are her words:

"It was one of those dreams he could not have made up. It is one of those dreams that is so much more real than what passes for trying to figure out, 'what really happened?'. Even if Jacob could never again find the exact place where the heavenly ladder touched the earth, even if he could never find a single angel footprint in the sand, his life was changed for good. Having woken up to God, he would never be able to sleep again, at least to the presence of God in his life . . . the Divine presence that had promised to be with him . . . Looking for something to mark the spot, he spotted the obvious choice; his stone pillow. He set it into place, poured oil on it and gave the place a name: Bethel, House of God."

Many of us are missing worship in Currie Kirk. When we are there on a Sunday, we feel we are in a sacred place. We pray there, our children have been blessed there, we sing and share the fellowship and friendship there. It is always and ever so good to hear prayers for one another and our world shared aloud together.

But Lockdown has been a kind reminder that as Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, "God can drop a ladder absolutely anywhere, with no regard for religious congregations or buildings." She reminds us to practice being present to God in the living-room, the garden, on the riverbank, the balcony, the mountaintop or even just looking at a flower or the birds in a tree.

The truth of the matter is that there is no special technique or skill required. There is no need for eloquent language or profound theological contemplation. Everyone can meditate or pray simply by directing our attention to God, to the spiritual truths of a scripture or to the present state of our present being or soul—as in a silent, private conversation with God who knows us more than we know our own selves. So we can be natural, without doing a grocery list and without any stilted language or awkward fear.

Listen to the wise words of Marcus Aurelius written as far back as the second Century. He is considered one of Rome's 'good' emperors, a moral man. He said, *"Nowhere does a man retire with more quiet or freedom than into his own soul. It is one of the few temples left where the doors are always open and admission is always free."*

Being present to God, can happen anywhere when we are open, even at times, as Jacob knew when life seems burdened by uncertainty. Wherever we are, in all circumstances we can draw close to God both in our being and in our doing.

I will share the old joke written on a wall by a graffiti artist a long time ago. Here goes:

The Mathematician Descartes once said, "To do is to be"

The Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre once said, "To be is to do"

Frank Sinatra sang the song,

"Do, be, do, be, do"—Frank Sinatra.

So in Lockdown, can I encourage us all to practice the presence of God in the every day. Jesus gives us access to the very real power of God—a spiritual strength and energy, always available to us. Just as an iceberg looks small above the sea-line, but maybe so much greater below sea-level—they say, such are the untapped gifts of the human spirit to grow and use our minds to meditate and pray.

Here is a lovely meditation by Helen Crouch given to me by Shirley Bowman

Quiet now

Close the mind's door on the busyness of the day
And for this brief moment clear the way for God

Quiet now

No need for words. Listen and be still
God's voice will direct you, His spirit fill your soul

Quiet now

Breathe in new strength, new courage
Learn his Plan for you and then in peace, return to duty.

I came across the true story: father of four children who had dinner with his wife and kids one evening. After dinner everyone went their own way as usual. Each had a corner of the house to themselves. The two boys were playing video games. The girls were watching a film, his wife was checking emails. He had to get to sleep because he would leave the next morning at 6am, before anyone in the house was awake for a four day work trip. But a thought lingered in his mind. If he just went to bed, would they notice? It was what he usually did before work, just flop into bed. But somehow this night he yearned for something different. He wanted to say, "I love you" to his family . . . But he didn't know how—it wasn't their thing to talk. He didn't want to embarrass himself and he didn't know if his emotion would be dismissed. So he stood at the foot of the stairs and pondered what to do. If he took a step one way and just went to bed, life was still ok, life was fine but he would feel a little emptiness, a void. To go the other way was a bit scary.

He made a decision. He went to the kitchen and baked a batch of brownies, his kids' favourite! Soon the smell of chocolate was wafting through the house and one by one everyone was in the kitchen wanting a brownie. But he said, "Before we all tuck in, Let's say a prayer to thank God for one another and to ask God to keep us close to one another while we are apart until we are back together."

When he got home from work four days later, it was very late at night but he saw that there was a freshly baked batch of brownies on the kitchen counter and one by one his wife and the kids all came down in their pyjamas and they said to him, "We made the brownies, now it is time to say a prayer."

Somehow the simple step he took to open himself and his family up to God's presence began to shape his life and his family's life.

We are all capable of growing closer to God because God desires our deepest needs and God even prays for us within ourselves if we meditate and pray and sometimes stop all our doing and enjoy the quiet of being. Please consider Lockdown to be a gift, not just a sentence or a burden. Let it give you time to practice the presence of God.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, in Your good time you appeared to Jacob in a dream
And life was transformed
In Your good time, You appeared on earth as Jesus
And the life of the world was transformed
You stir and call in the most unlikely places of life
You beckon us in the corners of our inner being
Help us not to miss Your presence today and every day

In long summer evenings when light lingers
And sunsets have time to deepen from light pink to deep red
We give You thanks and praise

We also remember and hold before You
People where the fading of the light brings not only darkness
But sadness or discomfort—May they know Your light

We pray for those who have to eat alone
We also remember those who are hungry and have little food
Those who fear for livelihoods in lockdown

We lift before you our prayers for our loved ones and families here
And far away—or who feel too far away right now.

We remember and hold before you all those caring for a loved one at home
And for those front-line workers helping and serving and saving life
Give them Your strength and love

And especially we pray for those who have lost loved ones
Who are deprived of the ability to mourn with friends or family
Comfort them in grief and lift them to the light of Your peace.
Ever creating, ever loving, ever encouraging God
Use our gifts, talents and skills
So that our lives and our compassion may tell out Your praise and where possible
Aid those whom we have remembered before You today.

AMEN

