



Worship at Home—Sunday 1 August 2021

Call to Worship

In this moment let us acknowledge the loving care and compassion
God has for each of us,
Let us listen to words of encouragement, and call, in scripture
For even on difficult or depressing days,
God's desires for our faithful response to the message of Jesus.
Come let us worship God. Let us Pray

Opening Prayer

O God You know each of us well, and you love us deeply
You are able to sustain us in an enormous variety of ways.
We are humbled by Your profound concern
and involvement in our every-day concerns
and your keen interest in our welfare.

Loving father, you give us so many gifts in our daily lives to enrich us;

And opportunities for love and companionship, and so we come to this time of worship
anticipating a deeper appreciation of your presence
and wider perspective of Your grace and power.

We know Your mercy for the penitent, loving God.
Let us experience it once again
as we place the record of our past week before You.

We recall our lack of respect and care for others
We acknowledged our neglect of our particular talents and gifts.

We have lived as if the world and its wonders were under our control,
and needed no reference to You.

So often, we have failed to measure up to the standard expected of Your disciples,
and our example has not influenced the world for good.
We have lived as if this earth and our own life upon it was the limit of our horizons

In a moment of silence, we now confess our individual failings to you.

Help us God to live as mature human beings made in Your likeness.

We are so grateful that you are faithful and just and will forgive our sin,
Prod us awake to the opportunities and invitations You lay before us.

Give us your spiritual strength in times of ease and difficulty
so that we may trust You rather than our own wisdom and wit.

Grant us
willing spirits and a sense of purpose to know how each one of us listening and praying may learn to know
how to play our individual part in Your plan for this world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We ask this in Jesus' name and we ask you to hear us as we pray the prayer of Jesus Christ

Our Father, who art in heaven.
Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
For thine is the glory, the power and the kingdom, for ever and ever. Amen

The Scriptures

1 Corinthians 9: 23-25

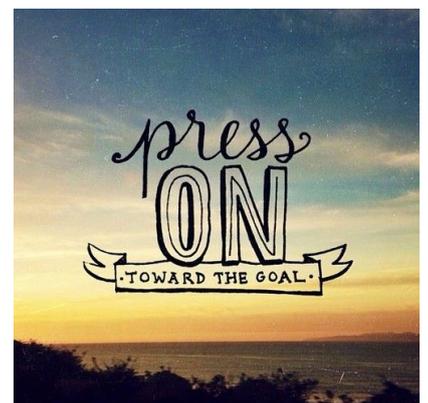
I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

The Need for Self-Discipline

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Philippians 3: 12-14

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.



Sermon

I wonder how many of you have been captivated by the Olympics in Tokyo. You might enjoy watching sport or not, but whether or not you are a sports fanatic (like my whole family), it is difficult to avoid excitement about the Olympics; the fact that these international games are finally taking place a year late, despite the problems of Covid. It is uplifting to get to see athletes from Britain and all over the world compete . . . to see and observe the accomplishments and achievements and general excitement of the whole international event.



Whether in the pool, on the track, on a court, or now newly on skateboards . . . there are certainly some amazing personal stories of individuals who have been working, striving, training, competing, dreaming, hoping, maybe even of a medal. Dreams have been realised for some. For others hopes have been dashed. We watch, in awe of the abilities of divers, swimmers, runners and teams—and reflect further that so often the slight difference between a gold, silver or bronze medal might be nothing more than a few hundredths of a second, or a tiny fraction of a point. On our TV, or computer screens we are able to witness some astonishing stories of triumph and disaster.

In St Paul's letters to the churches in Philippi and in Corinth it seems clear that Saint Paul, was an enthusiastic supporter of athletic sports. Paul would have been passionately interested in the local Isthmian games which were second only to the Olympic Games of those times.

Paul must have admired the athletes, because he draws a clear parallel between life as an athlete and life as a Christian. Apparently, Paul himself was not athletic. Tradition has it that he was a small, possibly crippled fellow. But he was a fan of following Jesus, and not a mere bystander kind of fan. He was an active, involved fan, a great Christian proponent of the meaning of life. In other words, he did not just appreciate and watch the unfolding of the Christian Faith. Paul wants to teach us all how to live it as if he were a life coach himself pushing us towards the best that the life of faith can mean—encouraging us to go for the prize. He wants us to dream of living as if we were running a race, a race of life aiming for high standards and fabulous rewards. The parallels are clear, although, he explains, a runner may win a medal, a garland or a wreath—things are perishable, but we, by living our faith fully and following Jesus are aiming not for a medal but for gifts that are imperishable because they are eternal.



Paul writes, *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ"*. He also says to us, *"Run in such a way as to get the prize."*

Paul's analogy is helpful, especially as we watch the Olympics. Paul knows that following Jesus gives us goals and purpose and high standards to aim for. As we watch the games in Tokyo, no medals are ever earned without a lot of effort. How challenging, exciting, perhaps frightening to be selected to represent your country in your chosen sport. The Olympic athletes speak of years of hard training, early morning work-outs, afternoon work-outs and training in between, and great sacrifice on the parts of families, friends and coaches. The regime takes over what they eat, when they sleep, how they organise their day—it is a life commitment, an all-in investment of self and time.

That is why it has been so exciting to see some unexpected medal winners. You may have seen the euphoria of the 18 year-old swimmer Ahmed Hafnaoui from Tunisia when he won the 400 meter free style. No one had ever heard of him before. He only just made it to the final and so they put him in lane 8. And the 17 year old girl, Lydia Jakobi from Alaska who won the gold. There only is one 50 metre pool in Alaska and it is 120 miles from her school. Athletes not only train, they must dream big and aim high if they want to win. Paul encourages us to think of our faith this way, and to give it our everything, remembering that all we have comes from God.

Paul's comparison of running the race to the Christian life also recognises that the life of faith is hard. Since Covid, not one of us can ever deny that life at times can be a struggle, a challenge. As we watch the Olympics, we see that the races are not simply a matter of physical strength or speed. When the day of the race or the competition arrives, we wonder, how will he/she cope under so much pressure?

Pressure from within, pressure all around to perform at their best. The competitions at Olympic level become far more than a test of physical skill. The pressure can be hard as we have seen—Osaka, the talented tennis player from Japan withdrew from the French Open last year due to her mental health in coping with the press. America's best gymnast Simone Biles said she had to withdraw from some events in Tokyo because she was not performing her best for the team.

Competitions involve a lot of psychology—the phenomenal resilience of the human spirit and positivity in the heart and mind of each competitor, the morale and spirit of a team make every difference. Yet, no one can perform at their best all the time. There are false starts, injuries and not least now Covid to contend with.

This is doubly the case for some athletes on the refugee team. Several refugee athletes have come through situations and been up against odds we can only imagine—not simply odds to compete but odds to survive ethnic or religious persecution, violence, war—and living without a nation state to call home. Young people from Syria, South Sudan, Congo and Afghanistan feel so grateful just for the chance to take part.

It has also been fascinating to hear stories of how many athletes trained during the Covid months when fitness centres and swimming pools were closed and the lengths they went to keep fit in the most outrageous of places and ways.

The image Paul uses is helpful—just as an athlete trains and gets stronger, fitter and faster—Paul encourages Christ's followers to keep going, to dream big, to aim high, to live our faith fully and fulfillingly! This is the life into which God is calling us—AND, Paul reminds us that the rewards are well worth it—the sense of life full of joy, hope and purpose.

Paul wrote . . . *Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward*

This verse speaks powerfully: **Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead.** Athletes have good days and bad days, good performances and bad, good races and bad, good interviews and bad press conferences. If they spent all their time looking back on the mistakes or bad days, how could they begin to push forward? Saint Paul himself was shipwrecked, persecuted, often in jail, and often writing these letters during tough times of adversity and he writes, *“forgetting what is behind, I strain towards what is ahead to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward”*

When we look behind at this dreadful Covid experience, it is hard to forget, and even harder to know how we might push forward. What will life be like after Covid—even as restrictions ease, we sense things will be different. It was tough for all of us, young, old, employed, unemployed, healthy and unhealthy and all in between. Yet Paul reminds us to forget what is past and look forward.

Even when I first came here there were days when I could see Dad was fed up of being in pain and of being dependent, because he is so independent. BUT, I am happy to report that he has come through two major surgeries and the progress is immense. I said to Dad, it has been like our own little Olympics, small steps, getting him up and walking again with a boot and soon hopefully swimming and driving. We just have had to look forward.

I was fascinated by an interview with Michael Phelps, a local superstar who won so many gold medals in previous Olympics breaking swimming record after swimming record. Phelps recently revealed that after his swimming career ended he became deeply depressed. The cause of his personal crisis was that he felt he had had no youth. His only memory of his teenage years was the black line at the bottom of the pool. He swam two hours before school and then again after, then the gymnasium and the weights. Every weekend involved travel to races while his friends were dating and partying and growing up—whilst for himself, all he felt was pressure in a pool. Now Michael Phelps is a great ambassador helping other young athletes keep on top of the performance pressure and public anxiety and telling them specifically that “It’s ok not to be ok” some days. Phelps looks back but looking back does not hold him back. He is looking onwards and upwards and my prayer is that once we get out of this Covid we, the Church in Currie, can meet and pray and worship and laugh and maybe cry—we can push onwards and upwards together.



Life has its setbacks, its ups and downs. But we can prayerfully ask that we will be given the strength to aim for the goal, to strive onwards and to know that the key to our strength within this life of faith is that we need not depend solely on our own physical OR psychological strength but on the immense source of support and energy that comes from God, ever willing to be with us offering us meaning, purpose, a way forward into a positive future. Amen

Prayers for Others

Great and Loving God

We know we are tenants of your good earth,
entrusted through Your grace and love with its abundance and harvests.

Strengthen our resolve to be worthy of Your covenant with us,
and make us more willing to hear, to obey,
so that we may bear the fruit of Your kingdom of love.

We thank you for your promises through Jesus Christ,
we are grateful for how His life and example has illuminated and inspired our lives
and pushed out the limited horizons of our thinking
and challenged our systems of values
and called us to look onward and upward towards You.

Sustain those with special talents—

We ask you to bless the athletes and coaches and staff at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.
Keep them safe—we thank you that You as the source of all our special talents and gifts.

Bless all our local athletes, footballers, rugby players, swimmers and runners too

We pray for the young people who have lost out on education,
Opportunities, developmental experiences due to Covid

Bless them and guard them as we find our way back to a new normal

We pray that this day you may refresh the weary and the war-torn,
the oppressed and the suffering
with the sense of Your unlimited and unexpected mercies.

Motivate the hearts of compassionate men and women
to the cries of the hungry and the plight of the undernourished.

Fill the leaders of our nation, and all nations,
with a healthy respect for the dignity of human life,
the worth of the individual
and the need to consider the everyday issues
as well as the wider issues in politics and society.

Give patience and strength to those who labour to alter the ideas of society
and challenge the patterns of the growing gap between rich and poor.

Direct and embolden those who campaign against problems of insufficient shelter
and food and all abuses of power and causes of injustice.

Bless and encourage your Church

Help us to look forward faithfully and positively

As we emerge from Covid
Grant us a renewed passion for the Gospel and the building of God's kingdom

And help us, each one, to pause to honour your presence in the gift of each new day

For it is in you that we live and breathe and have all our being and your love broader, wider, higher,
longer and deeper than we may know- yet for your love, we thank you.

Amen.

Blessing

Let us reflect God's love
Wherever we may be
May the love God is
Be in us
And shine from us.

Amen

Kirk Contacts

Minister: Rev Dr Easter Smart—Tel: 449 4719 email: esmart@churchofscotland.org.uk

Family worker: Heather Merriman email: Familyworker_JVP@outlook.com

Pastoral Coordinator: Gordon Clephane—449 2313

Nina at the Kirk Office—451 5141

[email currie_kirk@btconnect.com](mailto:email.currie_kirk@btconnect.com)> if you need anything.

Website: [//www.curriekirk.org/](http://www.curriekirk.org/) or [//www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/](https://www.facebook.com/CurrieKirk/)

All sermons from Currie Kirk can be found on the Kirk's website and on YouTube—search Currie Kirk



Charlotte Dujardin and Gio what an amazing performance

... and in the Pool

