



A Field Manual for Virtual Worship

As Pastor Donny noted in his recent email to the congregation, the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church has decided to move Sunday morning worship to a virtual format. While the specific details of that plan are still solidifying, we thought it might be helpful to send out this field manual for virtual worship. Hopefully it will equip you to worship our great God in this unusual time and in an unusual way.

Preparing for worship

The best way to prepare for virtual worship in your home is to be worshipping in your home already. For all of us, this means spending time in private worship by

- reading our Bibles,
- praying to God,
- and even making a joyful noise to the Lord.

For families, we should also be spending time worshipping together each day in some way, shape, or form. Jason Helopoulos has written a good primer on family worship called *A Neglected Grace: Family Worship in the Christian Home*. He offers a basic structure for worship:

- Read God's Word
- Sing a familiar hymn
- Memorize Scripture or catechism
- Pray

It may seem silly to start a field manual in this way, but the best kind of spontaneity is prepared. As we find ourselves adapting either now or in the future, we are better off when we have a solid foundation that can be applied in new ways. Beyond this practiced spontaneity, there are a few other things we should consider as we prepare for worship.

Where will you worship?

At home, of course, right? But where? At your dining room table? On your patio? In your living room? Find a place that is comfortable, but not too comfortable (lest you fall asleep). If you have a family, find a place that accommodates the needs of everyone (see the next few questions for more).

How will you worship?

As you live-stream the service, you have a few options available to you. For example, you can stream via smartphone, tablet, computer, or smart TV. What do you have available to you? What will work best for your situation? My family usually streams content through Chromecast in our living room. If you have some way to stream to your TV, try it out before Sunday to see if it will work for you.

With what will you worship?

My family has a Trinity hymnal at home, but maybe you don't have one. We'll include the lyrics in an adapted order of worship to help you, *but you need to prepare for worship by looking over the liturgy beforehand*. Get familiar with the hymns we'll sing; read through the Scripture passages; prepare your heart to worship God before the call to worship.

What will your children do?

For those of you with kids, especially younger ones, how will you prepare them for something entirely new? Do you need to give them paper and pen to help them focus? Maybe you need to make sure quiet toys are available for the littlest ones so that both Dad *and* Mom can give as much attention to worship as possible. Oh, and see below about showing grace. That will be important.

Worshipping virtually

So, you're prepared for worship. You know where, how, and with what you'll worship. Your kids are set up for the service in whatever way they need to be. You tune into the live stream and the call to worship is announced. Now what?

Embrace the awkward.

We know this is unusual, and it may feel awkward to sing along at home. But rather than shrinking from the awkward, embrace it. Acknowledge that this is different, but don't let that stop you from worshipping God.

Take it seriously.

Even as you embrace the awkward, don't dismiss virtual worship as something that is not serious. Whether we are gathered together corporately or dispersed throughout the region, we worship the Lord God Almighty. Even if you are worshipping alone in your home, you are not alone. You are joining the whole heavenly host in the eternal worship of our sovereign Lord. If you have children, don't let them think that virtual worship is a time to play around. Let's take our worship of God seriously.

Remember to show grace.

But again, even as we are serious, let's not be overbearing. The unusual circumstances might make it difficult for some to worship comfortably. Show grace to your kids if they are having a hard time worshipping. Give the littlest ones a bit more freedom given the circumstances. Show yourself some grace if you're a bit distracted.

Connecting worship to the week

Given the importance of fellowship in the life of the church, virtual worship is less than ideal. The longer we refrain from coming together, the more important it will be that we love another by means of whatever contact we can make. Use your favorite social networking platform to connect with brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the week. Give a widow or single person a call to talk about the sermon. Bear one another's burdens in virtual prayer groups. Use your sanctified creativity to love one another throughout the week in lieu of our ability to connect in person.