

April 3, 2020

Dear City Reformed,

We are all living through a memorable event. Sometimes I stop and smile when I think about the way this story will be told by our children to their grandchildren. Perhaps they'll say, "Stop complaining about your situation, when I was a kid we were quarantined for weeks at a time. And we almost ran out of toilet paper." What we don't know, is how the story will end. It may get a whole lot harder and more painful as we progress. At the moment, though it seems that the initial shock is subsiding and people are settling into a new normal. That makes this a good time to talk about an important matter. *How are you using this time to draw close to God?*

We recently published a [paper that addressed the many ways in which people worship](#). We are meant to draw near to God as we worship alone, in our families, and as an entire congregation. Because we cannot meet together on Sundays, we focused that paper on exploring the way we worship through livestreaming. For the next week, I would like to expand that concern and ask people to consider how they are drawing near to God on their own and in their household units. This could include your roommates, but if you are living alone you can reach out to friends or family in other places to create a "virtual household unit." We have to make the best of a hard situation.

If you are like me, then you know this is an area in which you can improve. The most common thing people say about their own devotional life is this - "it could be better." While I recognize that some of you are busier than ever, for many people the stay at home order has brought added free time. With that comes the challenge of boredom, but also the opportunity to invest in our relationship with God. I believe that the practice of personal and family worship (often called "devotions") is an essential part of healthy Christian spirituality. Sometimes in recent church history it has been overemphasized, but I suspect that the pendulum has swung the other direction. I suspect that for many of us, this has become a particularly weak point in our Christian practice.

This Sunday is Palm Sunday on the Church calendar and will initiate what has been historically called Easter Week or Holy Week. While, the actual time is not objectively more holy than any other week, it can be a healthy practice to rehearse the final week in the life of Jesus before his death. This final week of Jesus carries great importance in the Gospel narratives of the New Testament and should be of special concern for Christians. I believe that this is a great opportunity to refresh and revive our practices of personal and household devotion.

In order to help encourage you in that direction, we will be offering an [Easter Week devotional \(CLICK HERE\)](#) that you can use for your personal time or your household time. It follows the Gospel of Luke narrative of Easter Week, but also includes other Bible readings, a short meditation to guide your prayers and a suggested hymn to sing. In addition, Joseph is posting several videos to [his YouTube channel](#) that will give practical guidance on the matter of personal and family worship. I would like to encourage you to join with others in our congregation to set aside time this coming week. Some parts you can read on your own, some you can read with your family, and some you can read with a friend via the phone or computer. Feel free to discuss this with others and also to meditate on Scripture alone. As we continue to social distance, let us (together) draw near to God.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Ball". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Matt