

Adapting to Change

Hebrews 10:24–25 (NIV)

²⁴ *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,*
²⁵ *not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Well here we are in Lockdown 3.0! It has been really difficult not to be able to meet together as we would like, or even at all, for collective worship hasn't it? I know as a church leader I have really missed it. It has been a struggle for all of us. We know how 'vital' to our spiritual life that gathering is.



As our Archbishop famously put it recently, surely with these verses from Hebrews in mind, "*Worship is the work of God... and gives the strength to love and serve*"

But some time ago I was given what I felt a hugely helpful analogy, one that helped me lift my eyes from the disappointments and frustrations,

and think again about the hidden opportunity they may be for growth in our discipleship. Allow me to share it with you in the hope that it might also encourage you.

Apparently when a chess player is just starting out, you can tell they're not very good because they over-use the Queen, the most powerful piece on the board, in order to try and control the game. It darts all over the place, but leaves other pieces under-used and strategy underdeveloped. Apparently the way to train a chess player to be grow in maturity is to take away the Queen, and force them to play with just the remaining pieces. As they do so, they learn how to use all the other pieces with greater skill, seeing how they work together and complement each other. Once the apprentice has done this for a time, and you give them back the Queen, they are a vastly more mature and improved player, better equipped with all of the tools in the toolbox.

We love our gathered times of worship together, and there is nothing wrong with recognising how powerful and how missed they are, but perhaps this season can help us to get that much better at using the other pieces in our discipleship chess-set, strengthening God's church for its future mission 'beyond the present'? At our church, we share in disappointments and there has been loss, but there has also been some encouraging signs of deeper and broader discipleship taking place in the 'church scattered', rather than 'gathered'. In prayer, in community engagement, in pastoral care, digital creativity, in supporting our church key workers and in online services and evangelism... perhaps after all, God is using this time to mature his church?

I'm still frustrated at times, I miss the Queen (!), I'm still trying to learn how to disciple God's church in these strange times, but that illustration has helped me and I hope it might help you too. And let us continue, even as 'church scattered' - which after-all is what we are called to for the majority of the week anyway - to spur one another on to love and good deeds, encouraging one another and bearing with one another when we forget to 'unmute'!