



**CREATING
'CHURCH'
AT HOME**

**For people living with
anxiety or depression**

Patrick Coghlan

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About the author

Patrick is Minister at Worstead Baptist Church in Meeting Hill (North Norfolk). He is a trustee and chaplain of Aylsham and district Care Trust (ACT), and manager of 4C's Aylsham Counselling Centre. ACT is a Christian community care charity, which is part of the St Michael's Care Complex in Aylsham, and the organisation does a lot of work with older people.

In his work as a minister, chaplain and counsellor, Patrick has had considerable experience of working with people of most age groups, in the context of providing ministry and care – many of whom have been quite vulnerable – including those living with varying types and degrees of dementia.

Patrick is married to June and they have two grown-up children – Rachel and Jonathan. For his leisure Patrick enjoys quality family time, walking the two family dogs and riding his red motorcycle.

Patrick has been an enthusiastic author for many years, having had his first book published in 2001. He has written a variety of Christian resources for different age groups, and some family novels.

Introduction

After being involved in a church fellowship – experiencing the spiritual input, support, encouragement, love and friendships it offers – a huge void must be left in people’s lives when that is no longer possible, as a result of difficult or changing circumstances. I have written *Creating ‘church’ at home* with that in mind. My intention was to produce some ideas and material to enable an act of worship to take place in the home – even for those with no ministerial or leadership experience – and for it to be done in such a way that it would be deep and meaningful.

Creating ‘church’ at home is focused towards those who are housebound because of anxiety or depression and as a result are no longer able to get out to church activities or Bible studies. *Creating ‘church’ at home* can be used as a personal resource or may be enjoyed with one or two carers, friends, neighbours or family members. It is a user-friendly, off-the-page, Bible-based resource that has the flexibility of being adapted to different situations. More about that in the following chapters.

The approach taken by *Creating ‘church’ at home* is to build up an understanding of the individual who is housebound, – which may be yourself – as that will form the basis of the approach to the act of worship. This includes the style of the time of spiritual preparation leading into the act of worship and the way the room is set up for the occasion (in a way that is familiar, comfortable and meaningful).

There are three different contexts in which to use *Creating ‘church’ at home* (by using the different options in the worship sessions). These are described in detail in the following three chapters.

Housebound

Housebound with a friend

Carer for someone who is housebound

N.B. Using the short messages from the author (see 'How to use this book'), pick out which of these three chapters best describes your situation. Turn to the appropriate page: you only need to read that one chapter before beginning your preparations for the 25 ministry sessions that follow.

How to use this book

Using the short messages from the author (below), pick out which of the following best describes your situation. You only need to read that one chapter before beginning your preparations for the 25 ministry sessions that follow.

- You have become housebound as a result of anxiety or depression and, because you are not feeling ready to mix with others, are no longer able to regularly participate in the activities of your local church. If this describes your situation, and you want to enjoy a fulfilling act of worship at home, then chapter 1 is for you.
- You have become housebound as a result of anxiety or depression and, because you are not feeling ready to mix with others, are no longer able to regularly participate in the activities of your local church. However, you have a trusted friend, neighbour or family member who is happy to come in and join with you for a time of worship at home. If this describes your situation, then chapter 2 is for you.
- You are caring for someone (or are a good friend, neighbour or family member of someone) who has become housebound as a result of anxiety or depression. They are no longer able to regularly participate in the activities of their local church, and you want to organise worship sessions for them at home. If this describes your situation, chapter 3 is for you.

Housebound

You have become housebound as a result of anxiety or depression and, because you are not feeling ready to mix with others, are no longer able to regularly participate in the activities of your local church. If this describes your situation, and you want to enjoy a fulfilling act of worship at home, then this chapter is for you.

Getting to know you

As well as coming to terms with many other consequences of becoming housebound, if your faith and involvement in church activities has been a large part of your life (maybe for many years), you are probably struggling at times to find sufficient spiritual nourishment. But perhaps more than that, you could be finding it difficult to fully enter into worshipping God on your own. Maybe you dream that ‘church’ could be brought into your home.

We know that the Church is the people and not the building or its furnishings; however, it could be helpful to you to reproduce some of those elements that have been a part of your worship over the years – in your own home: those things that are familiar, comforting and helpful to your worship; things that will assist in making your worship personal; and things that will help you to connect with God and have a truly fulfilling worship experience.

The intention of *Creating ‘church’ at home* is to help you to replicate at least something of the church experience that you have been used to and have treasured – in order to help you to achieve a satisfying spiritual life.

Consider carefully your church background and preferences. Think about the following questions. The conclusions you arrive at will form the basis of how you could set the scene for your personal worship sessions (using the resources provided in *Creating 'church' at home*).

- What denomination have you been used to?
- Do you like a formal or an informal approach to worship?
- Is your preference for a modern or a more traditional style?
- How was the building in which you used to worship laid out?
- What are your favourite hymns, and what is your preferred style of church music?
- What is your preferred version of the Bible?
- Did you have a particular role in the church: for example, musician, choir member or worship leader, lay reader or local preacher, Sunday school teacher, flower arranger, etc.?

Setting the scene

Spend some time yourself – or ask a friend, neighbour or family member to help – collecting together some resources which will help to replicate something of the style and feeling of the place and situation where you have been used to worshipping in the past.

- Take your Bible readings from the version of the Bible that you prefer.
- If you have been used to having symbols like a cross, some candles or a banner to focus on at the front, get a small, free-standing cross, some candles (battery ones are

probably safer in the home), a banner, etc. to re-create the feel of what you have been used to.

- You might like to brighten up the room with some flowers or a flowering plant, placed somewhere prominent.
- You may already have some CDs of the kind of church music that you like and feel comfortable with: have one playing quietly in the background to lead into your worship session.
- If you were a church musician and you have an instrument at home, you might like to provide the music yourself.
- If you were in the choir, a worship leader or an enthusiastic singer, you might like to join in and sing with the CD.
- If you were involved in a teaching ministry, I am sure you can add your mark to the sessions in some way.
- This is your time and setting: do with it exactly as you would like.

Guide to using the material

- Set out the room – including the music playing quietly in the background.
- **Be still and quiet:** Spend some time being still and quiet in God's presence, listening to the background music which is playing, in preparation for using the resources provided for your act of personal worship. Focus on the theme during this time.
- **Passage to read:** The Bible references for a psalm or part of a psalm to read. Read it out loud if you prefer.
- Select **(Option 1) Resting in his presence:** Listening to, and receiving restoration, guidance and healing from

God. This is linked with or in some way leads into the main theme of the session.

- **Story to tell (in the author's words):** Read this familiar Bible story (out loud if you prefer), which is told in the author's own words (Bible references are given). The author endeavours to bring out a spiritual message at the end of the retelling of the story, as indicated by the subheading.
- **Prayer of response and the Lord's Prayer:** Draw the session to a positive close. (The bracketed words are either allowing for additional material or, in most cases, for use in a shared worship session.)
- **Be still and quiet:** If you would like to, spend some further time in God's presence in an attitude of worship as you listen to the CD again (or sing or play some more music yourself).

Housebound with a friend

You have become housebound as a result of anxiety or depression and, because you are not feeling ready to mix with others, are no longer able to regularly participate in the activities of your local church. However, you have a trusted friend, neighbour or family member who is happy to come in and join with you for a time of worship at home. If this describes your situation, then this chapter is for you.

Getting to know you both

As well as coming to terms with many other consequences of becoming housebound, if your faith and involvement in church activities has been a large part of your life (maybe for many years), you are probably struggling at times to find sufficient spiritual nourishment. But perhaps more than that, you could be finding it difficult to fully enter into worshipping God on your own. Maybe you dream that ‘church’ could be brought into your home. Now you have a friend, neighbour or family member who is happy to come and share with you to make that something of a reality.

We know that the Church is the people and not the building or its furnishings; however, it could be helpful to you to reproduce some of those elements that have been a part of your worship (and that of your friend, neighbour or family member) over the years – in your own home: those things that are familiar, comforting and helpful to your worship; things that will assist in making your worship personal; and

Lent

Be still and quiet: Being prepared – Making a response to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Passage to read: Psalm 15.

(Option 1)

Resting in his presence: Pray the following short prayer and then spend a few minutes allowing Jesus to fill you with his love, comfort, peace and strength.

Lord Jesus, please help me to feel held by you, in a close relationship, during this difficult time in my life.

Amen.

(Option 2)

Coffee time: Chat over a hot drink about what kind of lifestyle might evidence a true commitment to following Jesus. At this time you might be struggling to feel close to Jesus: if you can, spend some time talking about how you are feeling right now.

(Option 3)

Make a plan (begin with the prayer – Lord, reveal your plan. Amen): Talk about where you might like to go for an outing when you are feeling better – it needs to be a realistic aim. What preparations would you need to make on the day?

Story to tell (in the author's words):

(Based on Matthew 25:1-13)

Jesus told this parable as a way of explaining what the kingdom of heaven would be like.

Ten young ladies had been invited to a wedding: five were wise and five were not so wise. They arrived for the celebrations – dressed up for the occasion – only to discover that the bridegroom still hadn't arrived. It was getting quite late – and dark – so it was a good job the ladies had brought their oil lamps with them.

There was a lot of laughter and chatter while they were sitting waiting, and the time passed quite quickly. Indeed, it got very late, and the groom had still not arrived. At that point, some of the lamps began to flicker – a sure sign that the oil was running low. Fortunately, the five wise ladies had brought some spare oil. They hurriedly topped up their lamps, and carried on chatting. However, the five not-so-wise ladies had not come prepared.

'Can you spare us some of your oil?' they pleaded to the wiser members of the party.

'No, we can't; because then we will run short. You should have thought about this when you got ready to come!'

After a few minutes' thought, the not-so-wise ladies jumped up. 'We're just popping out to see if we can buy some more oil. Wait for us if the groom arrives while we're away.'

And the bridegroom did arrive in their absence; but there wasn't time to wait.

‘Come on in, ladies, and join the celebrations,’ the groom invited.

The five wise ladies who were there – prepared, ready and waiting – hurried in, before the door was firmly shut and locked behind them. The wedding banquet was laid out: it looked amazing – so much lovely food and drink. Time to party!

When the not-so-wise ladies arrived back, having bought some more oil, they banged on the door. ‘Open up and let us in! Sorry we’re late!’

But they were not allowed in, because they had not been prepared and ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. What a tragic end to the story!

What it means to be spiritually prepared

Jesus is talking about his return (his second coming); he is pleading with us to be spiritually prepared for that time by making a positive response to his death and resurrection – entering into a personal relationship with him. The wedding feast represents the ultimate fulfilment of the kingdom. All the young ladies represent those who profess to be followers of Jesus. Those who come prepared with spare oil represent those whose commitment of faith is evidenced by an appropriate lifestyle. Those who come unprepared represent those whose profession of faith has no real evidence in their lifestyle. The message is that only those who are truly prepared will enter into God’s eternal kingdom.

In times of sickness (mental or physical) we can find ourselves becoming more aware of our mortality, and as a result thinking more about what happens after death, and whether or not we are prepared for that time. This story becomes particularly relevant if that is where you are in your life’s journey.

Prayer (renewing, affirming and strengthening our relationship and daily walk with Jesus):

Lord Jesus,

as I (we) think about being prepared for Easter and the significance of the events to me (us) today, I (we) also think about being prepared for your second coming.

Fill me (us) with a sense of urgency to be ready for your return.

During this period of Lent, help me (us) to look seriously at my (our) relationship with you, and to think about how your death, resurrection and ascension are relevant to me (us) today.

Let this be a time of Bible study, prayer and listening to your answers.

Help me (us) to walk closer to you day by day, and to evidence my (our) faith by living out an appropriate lifestyle – living according to your teaching and example.

I (We) pray for those who are not prepared for your return.

Amen.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer.

Mothering Sunday

Be still and quiet: The parenthood of God – being part of God’s family.

Passage to read: Psalm 68:4-6.

(Option 1)

Resting in his presence: Whatever your personal experience of a parent’s love has been – good or bad – God is the perfect parent. Pray the following short prayer and then spend a few minutes allowing God to reveal something of his parenthood to you.

Loving heavenly Father, please help me to experience your perfect parenthood in my life. In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

(Option 2)

Coffee time: Chat over a hot drink about parents and being a parent. What feelings do you associate with each?

(Option 3)

Make a plan (begin with the prayer – Lord, reveal your plan. Amen): Maybe since you have been feeling anxious or depressed you have struggled to keep in contact with family members – including those from the church family. Perhaps the plan could include setting times and dates to make some phone calls, send some emails, etc. to renew those contacts.

Story to tell (in the author's words):

(Based on Luke 15:11-32)

You probably know this story – it must be one of the most well known of Jesus' parables – but don't worry if you're not familiar with it.

It all started on a family farm in the countryside. A father and his two sons worked together growing crops and caring for livestock. The elder of the two sons was totally dedicated to his father and the farm, but the younger son was unsettled: he believed he was missing out on something. And so, one day he asked his father if they could have a chat.

The loving father smiled at his son. 'What is it?'

The younger son didn't believe in beating about the bush. 'I want my money now. I want my share of what the farm is worth so that I can go out and be free – live my life!'

His father could have refused, but he knew that his son would only become more restless and rebellious. 'Come and see me tomorrow, and I will give you the value of your inheritance.'

The next day, bags packed and a wallet stuffed full of money, the young man waved goodbye to his old life, and began his journey. He believed that this was true freedom and the route to unending joy. With so much money he could travel, party, have as many girlfriends as he liked and be thoroughly extravagant. Indeed, the women flocked to him, and he was surrounded by friends – he'd never been so popular before. But what he didn't realise was how

quickly the money was going. Before very long he was broke. And he got caught up in a severe famine.

‘Lend some money to your old friend, just to tide me over,’ he asked his so-called best mate.

‘You’ve got to be joking. You’re no friend of mine!’

A day or two later the young runaway managed to get a job on a pig farm. It was hard work, and the pay was rubbish. He felt so hungry as he thought about how well fed he had always been at home. And he missed his dad so much – and even his older brother (though they hadn’t always seen eye to eye).

‘I can’t go home, not after letting Dad down so badly,’ he told himself for several weeks – until eventually he became so desperate that he decided he would return.

It was a long way. But what the lad didn’t realise was that every day since he had left home, his father had walked out to the open plains to see if he could see his lost son returning in the distance. So while the young man was rehearsing what he would say to his dad, he was spotted in the distance. Despite the heat of the day, the boy’s father ran for all he was worth to meet his returning son.

‘Accept me back as one of your servants, if you will . . . please,’ the boy mumbled.

‘Come here and give your old dad a big hug, and stop all that nonsense about being a servant,’ his father said as he flung his arms around his son.

There was a big party that evening, and although the lad’s older brother was a bit put out – to say the least – his father explained that he loved them both equally.

Belonging to God's family

What an amazing father! So loving, generous, welcoming, forgiving and faithful. The younger son doesn't really deserve his father's kindness. And the older son is a little self-centred about his brother's return – although maybe understandably so.

This is a story about God's amazing love for each one of us. The younger son is like us when we turn our backs on God, tempted to satisfy our self-centred desires. The older son is like us when maybe we are a little self-righteous and judgemental. But the thing that really stands out is the amazing forgiveness that the father offers – the same forgiveness that God offers to us today!

God longs for us to be part of his heavenly family, and to experience his parenthood forever. In sickness (physical and mental), often family takes on a far greater significance than ever before. How significant is God's family in your life?

Prayer (giving thanks for mums, asking a blessing on parents and families, and giving thanks for and asking to be included in God's heavenly family):

Heavenly Father,

thank you that whatever I (we) do, you never stop loving me (us).

Thank you that even if I (we) have turned my (our) back(s) on you to go my (our) own way, you receive me (us) back with a warm welcome and forgiveness.

Help me (us) to be willing to be part of your family.

Thank you for earthly parents – especially mums!

Be with me as a (all of us who are) parent(s), grandparent(s) or great-grandparent(s) and help me (us) in the role(s) that I (we) play.

Fill me (us) with your love to share – and give me (us) wisdom.
Thank you for my family (our families) which is (are) so
important to me (us).

I (We) pray for a blessing upon all families.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer.

Maundy Thursday

Be still and quiet: ‘God willing’ – accepting and doing God’s will.

Passage to read: Psalm 40:1-8.

(Option 1)

Resting in his presence: Spend some time meditating on the thought that God is in control and he can bring something good even from the most difficult situation (Romans 8:28).

(Option 2)

Coffee time: Chat over a hot drink about those times when it is difficult to do God’s will – and why? How does that make you feel?

(Option 3)

Make a plan (begin with the prayer – Lord, reveal your plan. Amen): Decide on a ‘to do’ list for the day ahead, and talk about what it means to say, ‘God willing’.

Story to tell (in the author’s words):

(Based on Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus and his disciples were walking towards Gethsemane. There wasn’t a great deal of conversation on the way after the things that had been said by Jesus earlier in the day about his death. The mood was sombre on their arrival.

Jesus turned to his disciples. 'Sit down on the grass and wait for me while I go and pray.' He was experiencing deep emotions as he took Peter, James and John further on with him. 'Keep alert while I go and pray.'

Jesus pleaded with the Father that he might be set free from the suffering and painful death that lay before him. He finished his prayer with the words, 'But it's not what I want; it is your will that should be done.'

Returning to his disciples, Jesus was disappointed that they had fallen asleep. Once again he asked them to remain alert, and this time also to join him in praying, commenting, 'I know that you have good intentions, but the body is weak.'

Jesus went away again to pray. This time he prayed that if a painful death on the cross were the only way, then so be it – finishing with the words, 'It is your will that should be done.'

On his return to the disciples Jesus found them sleeping again, so he left them, returning to pray for a third time. Once again Jesus finished his prayer with, 'It is your will that should be done.'

As Jesus walked back to where his disciples were sleeping, he had his answer from the Father: he knew exactly what he should do. 'Wake up. It's time. My betrayer is approaching.'

God's will be done

It is easy for us to fall into the trap of believing that, as Jesus approaches a terrible death on the cross, he is quite at ease about it. But that is not the case: the humanity of Jesus means

that he feels the pain and the emotions that we feel – but his priority is always to do the Father’s will.

There are life experiences that we struggle with. We shouldn’t feel guilty if we battle with our feelings linked to those events. But we should always strive to accept the Father’s will in all situations.

As we get older, and time seems to go so much faster, we might reach the point of becoming more aware of the value of each day – a gift from God. And so the saying ‘God willing’ begins to have far greater significance to us. However, if we are feeling stressed or our mood is low, as a result of anxiety or depression, it can be quite difficult to begin the day with a positive attitude; but it can be a tremendous comfort to know that God has his hand on us and is in control.

Prayer (for the strength to live according to God’s will):

Loving heavenly Father,
thank you for the gift of time. Help me (us) to value it even when it seems difficult to do so, and grant me (us) the enablement to fit into the day those things that are important.

Thank you that your will is perfect.

Be with me (us) during those difficult and testing circumstances that I (we) will meet during my (our) life’s journey: strengthen and uphold me (us).

But help me (us) to always accept and live according to your will.

I (We) pray that your will be done on earth.

In Jesus’ name.

Amen.

Finish with the Lord’s Prayer.

Help me (us) to recognise that I am (we are all) guilty of sin,
as I (we) approach you in repentance and faith.

Forgive me (us) for those times that I (we) have 'got it wrong'.

Let others hear and respond to the message that the price for
sin has been paid!

In your name.

Amen.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer.

Easter Sunday

Be still and quiet: Life after death – heaven.

Passage to read: Psalm 23.

(Option 1)

Resting in his presence: Heaven is about being in the Triune God's (God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit) presence forever – but without anything bad or negative to spoil it. Pray the following short prayer and then spend some quality time with God.

Loving God, please help me to spend some time resting in your presence today. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

(Option 2)

Coffee time: Chat over a hot drink about the springtime, and the new shoots springing up from what appear to be lifeless plants. This concept is used to represent Easter Sunday as a day of celebration in the Christian Church – Jesus coming to life again. But maybe you are not really feeling like celebrating today. Talk about how you are feeling right now.

(Option 3)

Make a plan (begin with the prayer – Lord, reveal your plan. Amen): Spring is here! Plan one or two achievable gardening jobs to perform over the next few days. Think particularly about clearing up the flower beds to allow the spring flowers the space to shoot and grow once more.

Story to tell (in the author's words):

(Based on Luke 24:13-35)

Their hearts were very heavy as Cleopas and his friend were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. The journey was about seven miles – but it seemed further! They were speaking about the traumatic events of the past few days, when suddenly a stranger joined them and began to walk with them.

The stranger enquired, 'What are you talking about?'

The two travellers came to a halt, turning to him in surprise. One of them questioned, 'Haven't you heard about the things that have happened?'

'What things?'

The traveller explained, 'Jesus of Nazareth has been crucified. We had hoped that he was the Messiah – what a disappointment! But then some of the women went to the tomb this morning and had a vision of angels who told them that Jesus was alive. Some of the others went to the tomb later in the day, and they confirmed what the women had said. Now we don't know what to think or believe.'

The stranger looked saddened. 'But the prophets said that the Messiah would suffer.' He went on to explain the meaning of the Scriptures concerning the Messiah as the others listened carefully.

When they arrived at Emmaus, the stranger acted as if he were going to continue on his journey. The others urged, 'It's late! Will you not stay with us tonight?'

The stranger smiled warmly. 'I appreciate that, thank you.'

During dinner, the stranger picked up a fresh loaf of bread, gave thanks to God and broke it, handing it round to everyone at the table. It was one of those moments of realisation, but at that instant in time the stranger disappeared.

‘Why didn’t we recognise that it was Jesus?’ one of the travellers questioned in complete disbelief. ‘It was so obvious!’

‘There was something so special about the way he explained the Scriptures: we should have known,’ the other added.

But, of course, they had been prevented from recognising Jesus until the moment he broke the bread, in the way he had done so many times before.

The two men couldn’t contain their excitement. ‘We have to go back to Jerusalem, right now, and tell the others that Jesus really has risen from the dead.’

A home in heaven

So what is the message of Easter Sunday? It’s quite simple really: Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today. Death is not the end when we have a personal relationship with him. There is life after death, which the daffodils – associated with the springtime and Easter – have come to symbolise! And there is a heaven!

The older we get, perhaps the more significant the hope of heaven becomes – especially in times of bereavement, when we become more aware of our own mortality and seek some kind of comfort for that person who has passed away. (I appreciate, of course, that it is not just older people who meet with bereavement.)

Prayer (giving thanks for, and finding hope in the promise of eternal life):

Loving heavenly Father,

thank you that Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today.

Thank you that he has conquered death.

Thank you that through my (our) relationship with Jesus,

I am (we are) assured of life after death – in heaven.

Help me (us) to hold on to that hope.

I (We) pray that others might think seriously about their eternal future.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer.

Ascension

Be still and quiet: Jesus will return – completing the plan and a new beginning.

Passage to read: Psalm 27.

(Option 1)

Resting in his presence: A friend of mine who is a farmer spoke once about the promise of a fresh start when a field has been freshly ploughed. Close your eyes and visualise a field that is being ploughed. The birds follow the tractor and plough expectantly. Half the field is a mixture of stubble and weeds, the other half is fresh dark soil. Think about new beginnings.

(Option 2)

Coffee time: Chat over a hot drink about how you would feel if Jesus were to return unexpectedly tomorrow.

(Option 3)

Make a plan (begin with the prayer – Lord, reveal your plan. Amen): Plan some small jobs to do around the house: for example, washing up, tidying the breakfast things, putting clean washing in the drawers, cleaning shoes. When the job is finished, feel the satisfaction associated with starting and finishing a job – big or small.