



ENTER God's presence

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.
 – Psalm 139:7-10

Lord God, even in our deepest times of loneliness you are with us. As we meet together right now, you are with us. By your Holy Spirit, open our ears to hear your word and prepare our hearts to receive it, so that we might know again the truth of your presence with us at all times and in all circumstances. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. **Share your highs and lows with each other?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **Have you ever been surrounded by people but still felt alone? What caused you to feel this way?**
4. **In your opinion, has technology generally helped or hindered people in their loneliness?**

On your own. Three small words that contain a range of emotions. Fear. Excitement. Dread. Anticipation. Loneliness. Freedom. On your own. Three small words that cover a range of transitions. From dependence to independence, from needing your parents to drive you everywhere to driving on your own, from living at home to living on your own, from being in a relationship/marriage to being on your own. From having someone do things for you to making it on your own. From a house full of kids to being just on your own. From being connected and having a purpose to feeling like you are on your own. From sharing a lifetime together to being on your own again. Life is full of 'on your own' moments that can either halt you in your tracks or launch you into new adventures. So how do you thrive when you're on your own. We'll explore and discover that today.

Week beginning:
Sunday 13th September 2020

Worship series:

New Terrain



VERSE for the week

**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
 I have summoned you by name; you are mine.**

Isaiah 43:1



REMEMBER this week

**You are never alone,
 when you are on your own.
 For in God's presence,
 you have an abiding home.**



LISTEN attentively

Read Isaiah 43:1-7

5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?
6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?
7. What are some of the 'waters' or 'fires' that you are facing in your life right now? In the midst of those challenges, how aware are you of God's presence with you?

One of the crazy things about loneliness is how it can hit us even when we are surrounded by people. Some of the times we can feel most alone are when we are in the midst of hundreds of people but somehow still feel invisible. We think that no one really understands us, that no one cares enough to sit and talk with us. Ironically, a quick Google search will turn up numerous studies from various sources suggesting that in many cases, the emergence and rise of social media, rather than helping us feel less lonely and more connected, has had the opposite effect and those who spend large amounts of time connecting online often experience larger levels of loneliness in their day to day lives. Loneliness is a pandemic which has been with us longer than Covid-19 but which has only intensified with the social distancing and movement restrictions that Covid-19 has brought with it. If we look at how the world is trying to address the Covid-19 pandemic, mostly by racing to find a vaccine, we might ask ourselves, 'Is there a vaccine for loneliness? God says there is.

8. **Loneliness is more than just the absence of others, it involves a lack of connection with others. What are some of the ways God describes his relationship with his people in this passage? What are some other images from Scripture you can think of that help us understand the nature of God's relationship/connection to us?**

God makes it clear throughout Scripture, that he is always with those who place their trust and hope in him. Even when we might stray like a lost sheep God does not simply let us wander off, he relentlessly pursues us until we are back in the flock. We are his treasured possession, he will not let us go. This truth, this reality, is the vaccine to loneliness. Yet it is often the case that we lose sight of this reality. Losing sight of God and his presence in your life does not mean he is no longer there but failing to recognise it puts us at risk of relapsing into loneliness. The key is to allow your relationship with God to become the primary relationship in your life because it is the only relationship that is guaranteed to be consistent and to last for eternity. When we fall into the trap of allowing our relationships with our friends, our parents, our children, or our partners become the relationships that define us and give our lives meaning, then we will always experience times of loneliness because these relationships shift and change over time. Friends change and move away, parents and partners grow old and pass away, children grow up and move away from home (maybe). On top of all this change, we also know from our own experience that no human relationship is completely free from conflict and the risk of breaking down. Our ability to connect with each other and have connection and relationship is a gift from God and being connected to friends and family can be an incredible support and help in our lives, but God gave us the ability to connect and relate first and foremost so we can connect and relate to him.

9. What have been some of the most significant relationships in your life?
10. Have you experienced relationships that have helped you prioritise your relationship with Jesus? Have you experienced some that have distracted you from it? Share some of your experiences.



GROW deeper

Now look at 2 Timothy 4:1-8

People come into and out of our lives in seasons. Sometimes the arrival or departure of some people in our lives causes grief, other times it can bring joy, sometimes it might be a mixture of both. In his letter to Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of seeing to his task of proclaiming the good news of Jesus in all seasons. The proclamation of the Gospel is the reminder which keeps the reality of our relationship with God, through Jesus Christ a central focus for our life. Unfortunately when we are lonely, we can sometimes find ourselves withdrawing from the very thing that will help us regain a sense of

connection with others, the Word of God. We can be drawn to other voices and places that offer a more immediate sense of connection, but fail to connect us with the reality of our relationship with Jesus.

11. What are some of the places or voices that you, or perhaps the world at large, tends to go to to find connection and validation instead of Jesus?

This is part of the joy of real Christian community. When we tend to the task of proclaiming the gospel, we not only find ourselves drawn deeper into relationship with Jesus, but we call out to those who have perhaps listened to other voices and found themselves abandoned or disappointed in the reality that those other voices provided. We can help to lead them to the truth that they are never truly alone because the creator of the universe wants a relationship with them. As we go about attending to the task of proclaiming the gospel, we find ourselves drawn closer with other Christians as we experience the joy of having a united purpose, a common goal and a God who is with us wherever we go.

12. People can form connections in so many ways. We connect over shared beliefs, common interests or hobbies, mutual friends, sense of humor, work or employment. God made us for connection with himself and with each other. How does the idea of having a common goal or purpose connect you more closely with other Christians?



LIVE purposefully

Making meaningful connections with others has been increasingly difficult in the Covid-19 environment. Yet there are still opportunities for us to make connections with others. Remember that in every season, even a season of global pandemic, our task as Jesus' disciples is to proclaim the good news of his death and resurrection.

13. What are the names of your immediate neighbours? What do you know about them? Find a fun and creative way to make a new connection with your neighbours this week.

14. When was the last time you received a hand written letter from a friend in the mail? There is something about receiving a hand written letter that says more than just the words written on the page. It says someone took the time to think about you and that you matter to them. Write an actual letter and send it in the post to someone who you think might be lonely at the moment.



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his promise to never leave or forsake you.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you trust that even as you walk through the floods or the fires that life can bring, you are never alone. God is there with you.
- Pray for those whose are experiencing loneliness at the moment, particularly as a result of the Covid-19 situation. Pray that the love and presence of God might break through into their lives.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], Christ is always with you. Amen.