

Practising the presence of God in your neighbourhood

God calls us into relationship with himself and with others. Our spirituality is one that is “for the sake of the world”. However, often as Christians our spirituality fleshes out as inward oriented and withdrawing from the world. Our study for these next two weeks will help us to practice the “spirituality of Jesus”. This is a spirituality which is lived for the sake of others so that those who live right next door to us in our neighbourhoods might know his love and live in the story of the kingdom of God. How do we discern and practice the presence of God in our local contexts?

Written by Rev Dr Karina Kreminski, lecturer in Missional Studies at Morling College. She is also an ordained minister and hopefully a church planter in the inner city of Sydney one day. She considers herself to be a foodie, cultural exegete and a fabulous aunt.



**BIBLE
SOCIETY**
Live light

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: (NRSV)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.	John 1:14	The Message version of the beginning of this verse reads, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.” God chooses to constrain himself to a particular time, place and culture and then lives among us. Not only does he live with us, but he “dwells” with us. This means he decided to live his day-to-day life among us. What impact does God's presence make to your view on how you live in your neighbourhood?	Jesus, thank you for becoming human and dwelling with us. Help me to understand how this impacts the way that I need to live my life in my local community. Amen.
2	He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”	Matthew 22:37-40	Often as Christians we focus on the first part of this commandment but we neglect the second part. Why do we place a high importance on loving God but then do not see that loving our neighbour must be a natural and necessary flow on from it? Do you find it harder to love those you see than the God that you can't see?	God, please help me to love my neighbour. Help me to love them as you loved us: sacrificially, radically and boldly. Amen.
3	And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.	Mark 1:33-35	After Jesus engaged in the busy activity of serving his community, he then needed to spend time with his Father. After he did this, he was given fresh hope, vision and enthusiasm for continued mission. As Jesus built his relationship with his Father, this inspired him to be outwards oriented rather than turn inwards. Do you follow this pattern of Jesus in your daily life?	God, please help me in my quiet times spent with you. Help me to know that it's not simply about me and my relationship with you, but that you call me to turn outwards and share the love that you have revealed to me. Amen.

Practising the presence of God in your neighbourhood (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
4	<p>He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come Give us each day our daily bread And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”</p>	Luke 11:2-4	<p>To pray that God’s kingdom would come on earth is to pray that God would radically turn upside down our usual cultural systems and values. To pray that God give us our daily bread means that we trust that God is our ultimate provider. To pray that God forgive us our sins is to show humility and to forgive others shows the connection between our life in God and our relationships. All of this is deeply counter cultural!</p> <p>What difference would it make if you prayed daily “God, your Kingdom come here in my neighbourhood”?</p>	<p>Lord, please help me to not only be able to pray this prayer but to live it as well in my neighbourhood. Help me to discern where you are at work and then join with you on your mission. Amen.</p>
5	<p>After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.</p>	Luke 10:1-2	<p>Jesus sends people into the community on a mission that is a kind of precursor to the broader mission, which we are all part of. We usually interpret these verses to apply to overseas mission fields but your neighbourhood is as much as a mission field as far off Mongolia.</p> <p>How can you see your neighbourhood as a mission field, and yourself as a missionary to your community?</p>	<p>God, please help me to see my neighbourhood as a mission field and that you have commissioned me to serve here for your kingdom purposes. Open my eyes to see your work and to see myself as a labourer in your field. Amen.</p>
6	<p>And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”</p>	Matthew 9:10-13	<p>If we are going to be missionaries in our neighbourhoods we need to remember two things: Firstly we need to get used to truly loving those who are different to us: the marginalised, homeless, mentally ill, poor and generally disenfranchised in our community. Secondly, we need to better practice hospitality as a spiritual discipline. What might happen if we put those two things together and showed radical hospitality to the marginalised in our neighbourhoods?</p> <p>What would it look like for you to show hospitality to the disenfranchised in your community?</p>	<p>God, our culture tells me to fear what is different to me, but you tell me to accept and welcome without judgement and with grace. But God, I am fearful. Help me to take one step forward today in showing love to those who I struggle with because of their gender, social status, religion or appearance. Amen.</p>

Practising the presence of God in your neighbourhood (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
7	Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."	John 20:21-23	<p>We are on God's mission, and we are to see ourselves as sent into our neighbourhoods for the purpose of embodying the gospel of grace and growing God's kingdom. This defines us as God's people. So, instead of an inward-oriented community, in essence we are outward oriented and exist for the sake of the world.</p> <p>What would change if you saw yourself as sent from God into your neighbourhood?</p>	Lord, please help me to move on from seeing myself simply as a privileged child of God. I want to see my identity as a privileged child of God with the delightful responsibility of joining you on your mission in my neighbourhood. Amen.
8	Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.	Acts 2:43-47	<p>Often in Christianity, spirituality is expressed in a very individualistic fashion however, here we see true spiritual community being practiced by the early church. As the church reflects the relational nature of the Trinity, they become a witness to the community and they grow in number. The church practices the spiritual disciplines of hospitality, prayer and sharing resources and they gain a positive reputation in the broader community.</p> <p>Have you ever thought of the practise of community as a spiritual discipline? How can the church do better at building true community?</p>	God, please help me to reflect your nature which is relational. Show me how to put this into practise in my local church so that the broader community will see and want to join us. Amen.

Practising the presence of God in your neighbourhood (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
9	Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.	Romans 8:26-27	<p>The Holy Spirit helps us to connect with the heart of God for our world. As we pray, God gives us his heart full of grief and joy over the world he created. The Spirit is our intercessor and he sometimes gives us prayers, sighs and groans for God's creation. As we pray we realise that our mission is God's mission and we are helpless without his presence and power.</p> <p>Try sitting in a local park or café today or this weekend. Listen and watch. What do you hear and see that is in the heart of God? Pray for what the Spirit nudges you to pray for.</p>	Thank you Holy Spirit that you help me to connect with the heart of God for my local community. Show me what to pray for today. Amen.
10	Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.	2 Corinthians 12:8-10	<p>Grace can function as a form of power that we rely on for strength. It is not however, an impersonal power, rather it is the very presence of Jesus dwelling in us. Sometimes when we pray about our local community and ask for God's heart for the people there, we can feel overwhelmed with all there is to do. Our encouragement is that when we are weak, God can fill us with his strength to be the people he has created us to be.</p> <p>How have you experienced strength in weakness as you engaged with God's mission in your local community?</p>	God, thank you for your very power and presence in my life. This grace helps me to be the person you want me to be and engage with your mission in this world. Thank you and please be my strength today. Amen.
11	Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,	Philippians 2:4-5	<p>As the people of God we are to be shaped by the cross of Christ. Our lives are to be marked by giving up our own interests and serving others sacrificially. As we do this we imitate our Lord who made himself nothing for the sake of serving the world.</p> <p>What does it look like for you to become a cross-shaped follower of Jesus?</p>	Lord Jesus, often my relationship with you is mostly about my self-improvement. Help me today to focus on the needs of others and in that way to imitate you. Amen.

Practising the presence of God in your neighbourhood (continued)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
12	So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.	Colossians 3:1-3	<p>We are privileged children of God seated in heaven with Jesus. Yet we are not to be escapist as we live our lives. Instead we can focus on the values of the kingdom of God rather than the values of this world. We set our minds on the kingdom and discern its presence before our very eyes in our local neighbourhood.</p> <p>Where do you discern the kingdom of God breaking through in your neighbourhood?</p>	God, please help me fix my eyes on your activity in my local community. As I discern this, help me to take action and work with you to grow the kingdom here. Amen.
13	For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.	1 Thessalonians 1:9-10	<p>A group of Christians living out Christ's love in their community life can have a profoundly positive effect on the world around them. As we love each other with Jesus-shaped love, the broader community sees a glimpse of the love of Jesus for them.</p> <p>How could your church family live out Christ's love amongst the community around them?</p>	Lord, please help me to be an active part of my local church community witnessing to your love, so that others want to join in and live the story of the kingdom with us. Amen.
14	Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.	1 John 3:18	<p>For us who believe in Jesus, love is a doing word. God loved us by taking action and coming into our world to save us. In the same way, if we say we love people then we must take action and show that love through what we do.</p> <p>How might you show God's love to people in your local neighbourhood today?</p>	God, please help me to love as you have loved me. Forgive me when I have loved only in words and not by stepping out of my comfort zone to take action. Give me courage to do that today. Amen.