

AT HOME WITH GOD

Two ceramic mugs are shown against a background of a warm, glowing fire. The mug on the left features a colorful illustration of a landscape with a blue sky, green hills, and a red-roofed building. The mug on the right shows a scene with people, possibly a church service, with a large red cross in the background. Both mugs have text overlaid on them.

GET TO
KNOW
GOD
BETTER

RECOGNIZE
GOD AT
HOME
WITH YOU

by Breige O'Hare

Light-hearted look at life and God
Time to think, to chat, to pray, to
laugh.

At home with God is designed for use in parish – either in a small group setting or around the kitchen table in the homes of parishes. Scripture, Church teaching, psychology and faith development are drawn on to produce a down-to-earth accessible experience that is Christ-centred and relevant. Undertaken in parishes of different kinds over a number of years, it is developed with the following in mind

- The experience in the English and Welsh Church that 3-4 session activities have wider appeal than more extensive programmes.
- Thomas Groome’s emphasis on transformation not information: facilitating transforming encounters with Christ must be at the core of all our activity.
- Martin Kennedy’s observations a) that God is powerfully at work in parish homes and b) less than 5% of any parish congregation will be attracted to parish groups/activities.
- Malcolm Gladwell’s concept of ‘thin-slicing’: the capacity to distil experience, information, etc and communicate the most effective and transformative elements simply and accessibly.

At home with God works around the kitchen tables in parish homes. It can also be used by parish groups as a substitute for or complement to one/more of their regular meetings. Obviously a skilled facilitator will work differently with the materials, however, the information is such that it can be used by people already occupying roles such as prayer guides and liturgy leaders. . . .or those who have experienced it themselves and want to try it out around another kitchen table.

Consider this material as a living document, one which will grow and change with time and experience. Try it out for yourself. Try the follow up text “The Nearness of God: Rediscovering God’s love and longing” Breige O’Hare, Shanway Press 2011) to deepen the experience of the session. Grow with it and change it with the help and suggestions of the people who experience it in their own homes.

Let me know how you get on – contact me at breigeohare@athomewithgod.co.uk - and tell me what worked/did not for you.

God bless your work.

Breige O’Hare

OPENING SECTION AND INTRODUCTIONS

What would you be doing if you weren't here?
Why are you here?

Purpose of these four sessions

God is everywhere and we each have our own unique relationship with him. However, there are times when we might welcome a bit of help to recognise God's presence in our daily life, at home with us. There are times when our need is for company or perhaps simply for rest. . . or for the various reasons you mentioned when introducing yourself . . . (like-minded people, questions, searching, looking for more . . . etc)

We'll settle in to this session with a reminder of God with us, spoken to us through the words of Isaiah.



Now, thus says Y-hw-h
who created you
who formed you.
Do not be afraid
I have redeemed you
I am with you
I have called you by your name
You are mine
Should you walk through raging waters
I will be with you

When you pass through rivers
They will not sweep over you
When you walk through fire,
. . . the flames will not consume you.
For I am your saviour,
. . . Your God
. . . You are precious in my sight
And I love you . . .
Do not be afraid for I am with you.

YOU ARE MINE AND I AM YOURS

God's faithful love for his people.

In this session we settle into the group and get to know the God of the Old Testament. We see how the experience of the people of Israel was coloured by their life experience – especially that of covenant. We recognise how our own life experience, of rules and rewards, colours our image and expectations of God.

We realise also that in the midst of all our limited human perceptions, the OT presents us with an accessible God, at home with us; we find a God who wants to give his life to us, who longs for us, who belongs to us as we belong to him.

Blood is the anchoring image of the session, a symbol of lives shared, and of life-changing love-lived promises.

I AM YOURS AND YOU ARE MINE

How might we begin to connect today with this amazing commitment of a loving God, and to do so in a way that helps us realise that his commitment, his promise of his presence is directed at each one of us? For this we take a glimpse at the God of the Old Testament through the lens of our own human experience. A child's toy helps introduce our reflection. The toy is Grainne's, her first toy, bought by my mother. That bond between mother and daughter, between parent and child, a bond with which we are all familiar, from one side or the other, speaks to us of the bond between God and his people.

The brief input which follows draws on the content of *The Nearness of God*, p16, quoted in its entirety below.

How can this be? (Luke 1:34) Mary's words to the angel Gabriel, words of wonder and awe, found an echo in my own heart when I sensed the first flutter of my baby's gentle movement within my womb. I struggled to give expression to the amazement I felt at this new life, with its own personality, its own destiny, growing and moving inside me; God was creating her in me, bringing her to life in me.

Holding this tiny creature in my arms a few moments after her birth was an experience beyond my wildest imaginings. Heart pounding with excitement and delight, I gazed at her and knew with every fibre of my being that I would do anything to care for and protect her. I would give my life for this wonderful, wonderful child: she belonged to me and I belonged to her.

As we set off on the journey of this book, we do so in the hope that we might grow in awareness of the nearness of God. The experience of mother-love is a good place to start because it is in this bond of love between mother and child that we are presented with something of the love and longing of the creator God.

Such is the mother-father God, the source of life; the God who has loved us into life and who wants to be with us to share the life and love he has given us. Such is the God who whispers into the tiny ear of each baby he has created, '*I am yours and you are mine*' God wants nearness with us. His entire creation is focussed on bringing about that nearness and has been from the beginning. We are created for absolute nearness with God; we belong with him; nothing less will do.



MULTIPLE PERSONALITY GOD

Everything we've touched on so far relates to a positive experience of God. We see a God who loves and cares for us; we can trust this God; we can rest easy; we can be at

home with God. However, even a quick reading of sections of the Old Testament reveals another side of God, a God who is less comfortable to be with. Somehow the people of Israel kept the two personalities of God together and loved and trusted God. For us, the God they present is a God who at times inspires fear rather than engenders loving trust. How do you love and trust someone if you are afraid of him?

We'll try to get a better picture of the full personality of God as it is presented to us in the OT. We're going to start in what may seem to be a strange place.



Back to the **toy** again and a return to childhood. Think about what it took to be a good boy or girl . . . what were the unspoken, or spoken “rules”. As we think about this, maybe we might realise that childhood was not always a good experience and some days we don't want to remember much about it. If this is your day for not going there, then simply refer to children in general. What you say doesn't have to be personal to you. Working in small groups.

Small groups

Whole group

Feedback to large group. Answers put on small cards and placed in centre of group – on floor or on low table. Summarise.

Now think about what happened if you/ a child broke the “rules”. What were the consequences? Whole group. Again but answers on cards in centre of group.

Quite often we let our experience of significant adults influence how we perceive God, the rules we sense he has, the consequences we face of we break the rules. The detail of the impact of our childhood on our experience of God is for another night. Here, we are simply aware that our human experience colours and influences our experience of God. So it was with the people of Israel. Their experience influenced what they thought God was “at”.

Not only did their experience of human parents influence their perceptions of God but the key influence was the experience of relationship agreements prevalent at the time – agreements called covenant.

TEA BREAK



GOD HAS SET HIS HEART ON YOU BECAUSE HE LOVED YOU

Following input is kept very brief. Uses fake blood (<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Fake-Blood>) as visual aid (very effective!) and sticks closely to themes around it, themes of life: life given; life changing; life shared.

Blood – symbol in the Old Testament and New not of death but of life.

Two parts of covenant: Written and ritual

Written – rewards and consequences.

Ritual : Quartered animals . . walking between them expressed in ritual the commitment to the agreement made . . let me suffer the fate of these animals if I betray our agreement. Symbolism made visible the extent of the commitment between parties; it was a life changing commitment; a desire for the good of the partner.

Blood enters the ritual it has a profound significance. Blood ritual – between equals. Bestows or recognises kinship.



Blood ritual seen in Exodus when Moses spreads blood on altar and sprinkles it on the people. Ritual of kinship. God depicted as inviting Israel into a relationship of equality. Why?God has set his heart on you because he loved you . (Prayer card)

Take a moment in the quiet to let this settle . . . what's standing out for you? What are you discovering or remembering about the God of the Old Testament?

Reflect

Gather their comments and add to them by reinforcing different elements of OT God's personality – strong king and tender lover. People of Israel held these two elements together and they loved God, the just, tender God, the powerful, gentle God. The holding together of what they believed God to be finds expression in, for example, Isaiah

Here is the Lord Yahweh coming with power . . . he is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes.
Isaiah 40: 10-11

AN ACCESSIBLE GOD

Jesus brings us the fullest revelation of the Shepherd God. In him we would see the God who gave his people love freely, without the need for them to earn it, to score points, to rigidly and dutifully obey and elaborate system of rules. However, if we were to dismiss the OT experience of God as infantile or undeveloped, we would risk losing a key gift of relationship with God. This God with all his human foibles was accessible – they could talk with him; they were very much at home with him . . . on good days and on bad.



Listen to this psalm, read here in an unsanitised way (*read with all the anger and rage of the psalmist in exile*)

*How long Yahweh, will you forget me? For ever?
How long will you turn your face from me?
How long must I nurse rebellion in my soul,
sorrow in my heart day and night?
How long is the enemy to domineer over me?
Look down, Lord, answer me, Yahweh my God!
Give light to my eyes or I shall fall into the sleep of death
Or my foe will boast, "I have overpowered him"
And my enemy have the joy of seeing me stumble.
As for me, I trust in your faithful love, Yahweh.
Let my heart delight in your saving help,
Let me sing to Yahweh for his generosity to me,
Let me sing to the name of Yahweh the Most High!*

Psalm 13

Reflect

What strikes you about this psalm?

Remarkable honesty about the psalmist's way of relating to God. The psalm is not a transition from anger to trust but an expression of anger within a relationship of trust. The psalmist trusts that God can take his anger, that God is not going to leave him no matter what he says. How do we get ourselves back in touch with that place of honest in our own lives?

Think of the guests we entertain in the good room and then think of the people we bring into the kitchen . . . mug of tea, freer conversation. Where do we put God?

Good room conversations can seem very artificial, unnatural. Little wonder that God can seem so far away if we are relating to him in “good room” mode. Invitation is to bring him into the kitchen, messy places of life, to have real conversations about our real lives.

Psalmists had God very much in kitchen places; their conversations were honest, real. All the Psalms have that honesty about them and there’s one for every occasion; like the gifts given out on the Late Late Show “There’s one for everyone in the audience!”

What’s your life like at the minute? What joys or worries are you taking into your kitchen with you? Can you see a psalm on the page given that puts words on your experience . . . that might help get that conversation going with God in your own kitchen?



Let’s take some time to find a psalm that suits and then to use in your prayer. (*See separate sheet of psalm selections.*)

PRAYER

Slow down using the breath . . . God’s life in you

If it helps, imagine yourself in your kitchen or somewhere that you sit to have a rest/break with friends.

Let your eye rest on the psalm that says most about how your life is at present. Read it a few times . . . or repeat it to yourself in your mind/ heart. Let it take you into conversation with God. Know that you can be honest with him, that he wants to hear how you really are. That he cares about you.

Time in quiet.

Know that you can return to this place, return to this conversation whenever you want.

Glory be to the Father . . . AMEN.

What stands out from this evening?

Reflect

SESSION ONE RESOURCES

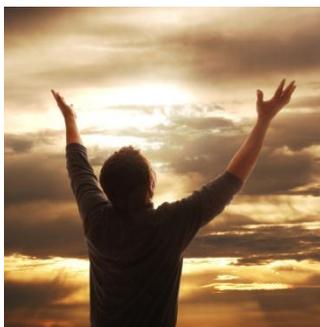


A sheet of psalms . . . “A Psalm for your place”

X4 cards for copying onto good quality card.



How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day
have sorrow in my heart? Psalm 13



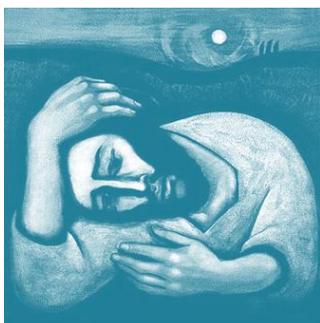
The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul. Psalm 23

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, Psalm 18



O God, You are my God. I will look for You with all my heart
and strength. My soul is thirsty for You Psalm 63

My stomach aches and burns with pain.
Sharp pangs of anguish are upon me,
like those of a woman in labor. I grow faint . . .
I am too afraid to look. Isaiah 23:3



My groaning has worn me out.
At night my bed and pillow are soaked with tears.
Psalm 6



I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart;
I will tell of all the marvellous things you have done. Psalm 9

For the LORD is good.
His unfailing love continues forever,
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.
Psalm 100

You are mine
and I am yours

Yahweh has set
his heart on you
and chose you
because he loved you
Deuteronomy 7: 7-8



You are mine
and I am yours

Yahweh has set
his heart on you
and chose you
because he loved you
Deuteronomy 7: 7-8



You are mine
and I am yours

Yahweh has set
his heart on you
and chose you
because he loved you
Deuteronomy 7: 7-8



You are mine
and I am yours

Yahweh has set
his heart on you
and chose you
because he loved you
Deuteronomy 7: 7-8

