

AT HOME WITH GOD

Two white ceramic mugs are shown against a background of a warm, glowing fire. The mug on the left features a colorful illustration of a person in a blue coat walking through a green field. The mug on the right shows a scene with several people, possibly a family, in a domestic setting. Both mugs have text overlaid on them in a white, handwritten-style font.

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 stays with you from last week?

We'll settle in to this session once again 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.

The statue is a symbol of God reaching for us, a reminder that our relationship with God is his initiative, the result of his searching for us. Never is God's restless and relentless search more apparent than in the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God reaches down in love to his precious humanity. In Jesus we see the fullest expression of God's love and longing.

In this session we reflect on and spend time conscious of the nearness of God in the person of Christ. We realise that in Jesus, we find reassurance that we can be at home with God, that God is utterly trustworthy, his love faithful and never-ending.

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH

Jesus as the Nearness of God

This session straddles that area of mystery between the God we meet in the Old Testament and the fullness of God revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We take Jesus' encounter with Bartimaeus to help us see the God of the covenant and to recognise his faithful love, freely given.

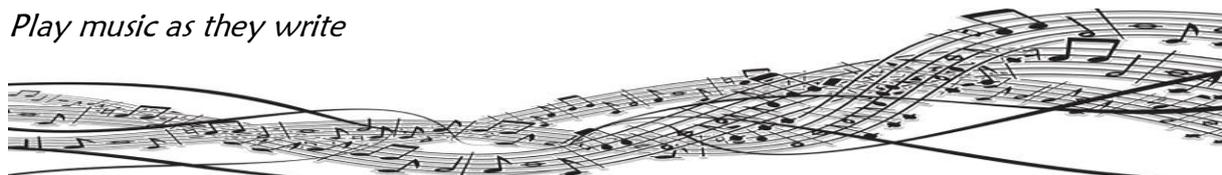
The symbol of blood carries through in this session also: life given, love shared: the God who would die rather than betray his love for his people.

The session also emphasises the free gift of prayer – the invitation to bask and to be transformed in God's loving gaze.

POSTCARD TO GOD

We're going to begin reflection in what might seem to be a strange way. Consider how you write a postcard – a few lines about what life is like on holiday. Try to write a postcard to God, only not from holiday but from your life as it is now. The postcard is for your eyes only. No one else will see what you have written and you can take it home with you. Keep it brief but honest . . . "Wish you were here??" Is that on it too?
Play music as they write

Reflect



Response: . . . while we can't put words or feelings into God's mouth or mind, we can compare what we're going to do next with what happens when we prepare to make a phone call; we quite often anticipate a response. Sometimes the response is accurate, sometimes it's not – often coloured by our mood, or our experiences of others. Think or write God's postcard to you.

How would you describe the God on the other side of your prayer?

Whole
Group

What was it like to do that exercise?

Take your awareness of who is on the other side of your prayer into this next section as we reflect on the encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus, the blind beggar.

Tell the story in own words first. A few things to highlight:

- ❖ Son of David – connection with covenant, blood, gift of life.
- ❖ Bart is blind, an outcast. Authorities system of points to earn God's love is thrown on its head.
- ❖ Question: what do you want me to do for you? Jesus question is addressed also to you. . . here you encounter the God who is on the other side of your postcard and find a God who cares about you enough to ask you and to await your response.

Input

Remember that as we read, the Risen Jesus is present with us, doing now what he was doing then . . . offering, asking, healing, drawing us closer to him.

We cannot conjure up and experience of Christ when we read this text but we can position ourselves to be more aware of his presence with us We can do this in one way using the imagination . . . entering into the scene of scripture as if we were participants, perhaps in the crowd or as Bartimaues. We might also simply spectate upon it, as we would watch a film. Or we can simply listen; God is with us whatever way we pray.

As I read the scripture, I will pause for a few minutes after Jesus' question "What do you want me to do for you?" to give you time to make your own response. Resist the urge to pray for someone else during this time. Tell him what life is like for you. Tell him what you want - not necessarily a prayer of petition but perhaps sharing a few of your dreams and desires with him – however trivial they may seem . . . I would love an afternoon off . . . a big ice cream on a summer's day . . . a quiet five minutes to myself . . .

Relax by paying attention to your breathing.

Trust that God is present

Rest in his presence.

They reached Jericho; and as he left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus - that is, the son of Timaeus - a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.'

Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man over. 'Courage,' they said, 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'Rabbuni, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And at once his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Mark 10: 46-52



TEA BREAK

Whole
Group

What words describe the Jesus you meet in this gospel?

It is the same Jesus reaching out to you, seeing you, healing you. What is this reminding you or revealing to you about the God who is at home with you?

Supplementary question if needed. . . . Where else in the gospels do you see this generous gift Jesus makes of himself, his healing, his concern for the “outcasts”? Where do you see Jesus at home with people whom others have rejected as unworthy sinners? (cf parable of tenants)



It is the same Jesus who refuses to retract God’s offer of love to his people – even those deemed unacceptable, The same Jesus who under threat of death refused to compromise God’s position. Blood – life given and shared; covenant – let me die rather than betray my promise to you. Love not earned but freely given. A God who has chosen us because he loves us . . . a God who whispers to each one of us “I am yours and you are mine”

Love as strong as death . . . (Song of Songs 8:11) . . .unrelenting, overpowering, unstoppable.

Can you imagine what it's like to open your eyes to be faced with that intensity of love, staring deeply into the very core of your being. That's what Bartimaeus saw when he first opened his eyes; Jesus gazing with an eternity of love for him.

Bartimaeus resting in the gaze of God, his heavy cloak removed, standing as a beggar; loved.

Resting in God's gaze; known and loved; spiritual directors, past and present, know all too well the kind of self-acceptance that the experience of the nearness of God engenders and its healing and transformative effect. Teresa's soul friend, John of the Cross, reminds us that in God's gaze healing happens; the struggle to fix ourselves by ourselves ceases; something within us settles. At peace, open to the gentle gaze of love, we are freer to be ourselves, freer to respond in love to that source of all love. We have a word for that healing, stemming from the Latin *salve* to heal: we call it salvation: freed to love; healed that we might live a life of love with God.

*You looked with love
on me
and deep within your
eyes
imprinted grace;
This mercy set me free,
Held in your love's
embrace,
To lift my eyes, adoring,
to your face
Spiritual Canticle
Stanza 32
John of the Cross*

*God does not
simply look
at the beautiful;
his look makes
a person
beautiful.*
Iain Matthew

Did Bartimaeus experience himself as known and accepted to his very core? Did he feel Jesus' gaze healing him? Did he experience himself a better man because of being gazed upon with such love? We will never know: we can hope - and with some confidence - that he did. What we *do* know is that Bartimaeus followed Jesus immediately. Something in Bartimaeus had changed and his response was visible: he wanted to be with Jesus. Life would never be the same again.

The Nearness of God pp62 63

PRAYER RESTING IN THE GAZE OF GOD: SUNBATHING

Can perhaps use another image of St John of the Cross to help us concretise the gaze . . . that of sunbathing. Sunbathing in God's love . . . being made beautiful because of being in his presence.

SUGGESTION TWO In the gaze of God.

Quieten down for prayer by using your awareness for your breathing, as before.

This prayer is simple: know that you are sitting in God's presence.

Become aware of the God who is looking at you, who sees and accepts all that you are.

As you sit there, aware that God is looking at you, you may become acutely conscious of your weaknesses. Know that God sees and accepts everything about you, your weaknesses and inadequacies; your beauty and your goodness.

Ask for help to be able to recognise and accept the entire person God see before him.

Trust that in his gaze, even if you do not feel it, he is making you more beautiful.

The Nearness of God p74



You looked with love on me and,
deep within,
your eye imprinted grace;
this mercy set me free,
held in your love's embrace,
to lift my eyes,
adoring,
to your face
*St John of the Cross
Spiritual Canticle stanza 32*

God does not simply look at the
beautiful; his look makes a person
beautiful *Iain Matthew Impact of God*

SESSION TWO RESOURCES



The following can be printed off on good quality card, back to back. Can be put on fridge, into a book, etc. Many of the people coming to the sessions started to bring their own bible – the first copy they'd ever bought! Slipping the cards inside their bibles reinforced the sense of God's Word as words of love.



Lord you examine me
and you know me . . .
You created
my inmost self . . .
A wonder am I
and all your works
are wonders . . .
You knew me
through and through,



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You created
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to your face St John of the Cross
Spiritual Canticle v32*



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