

In The Neighbourhood Discussion Questions

March 2019 (03 March - 06 April)

This month, at the start of *Lent*, we are inviting you to look around your local neighbourhood, to get to know it better, to weave it into your prayers, lifting it before God. Lent is a time of reflection and preparation for Easter beginning on Ash Wednesday (6 March) and it's often characterised as a time of personal contemplation, when we are asked to consider our individual relationship with God, but this year we are encouraging you to look around - to still contemplate that relationship but in the context of the neighbourhoods where we live.

In February, we explored friendship and considered the various social connections we have that often transcend the local - but for this theme we want to turn to focus specifically on *proximity*, to consider your *local* community (perhaps a mile or two around where you live). Despite our increasingly isolated and atomised lifestyles in contemporary Scottish society and much of the world, all human life is sustained by community, we cannot live alone. We rely on our neighbours in both direct and indirect ways.

So this month we want to get out and about in the neighbourhood. We will get to know our neighbours better, consider what it is to be a good neighbour, look for where we see God in our neighbourhood and perhaps touch on urban development, land reform, sociology, psychology, architecture, art and beauty.

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [In The Neighbourhood Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part 1: Holiness = Transformation		
<p>During our Lenten journey we will be looking around our local communities to see where God is calling us to be in our neighbourhoods. But we begin by settling down and orientating ourselves before God.</p> <p>6 March is <i>Ash Wednesday</i> on the Christian calendar, traditionally a time of repentance when we humble ourselves before God at the start of <i>Lent</i> (the time of reflection that culminates in the celebration of Easter).</p> <p>The words of Psalm 51: 1-17 are a powerful, heartfelt cry. If your group is happy to do so, read the verses out loud in turn, each saying one at a time. Do this slowly leaving a short gap between each verse, giving the words space to sink in.</p> <p>Afterwards ask one another:</p> <p>What words stuck out for you? What words (if any) comforted you? What words (if any) challenged you? What words (if any) inspired you?</p>	<p>Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2</p> <p>Encountering God's glory changes us.</p> <p>God's holiness, the wonderful, sacred, set apart, hard-to-even-imagine incredible power and other-worldliness, transforms us and emboldens us. It makes us people who can transform our surroundings.</p> <p>When we look around our community, what are our bold hopes for our neighbourhood?</p> <p>How we can reflect God's glory where we live?</p>	<p>Read Isaiah 58: 1-12</p> <p>Encountering holiness humbles us, transforms us...and calls us to action!</p> <p>What are practical things we could start doing in our neighbourhood so that we can be 'restorers of streets to live in'?</p> <p>Actual concrete things we could start doing, from tomorrow...?</p>

Part 2: Radical Love		
<p>This week we think about the consequences of the radical love advocated throughout the Bible for our local neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Read Leviticus 19: 33-34</p> <p>Verse 34 must have been a radical statement when it was first made. It's a radical statement now. Has there ever been a time and place in history where this statement was not deeply radical?</p> <p>What would a society look like that acted this instruction out on an everyday basis?</p>	<p>Read Jeremiah 7: 1-7</p> <p>Our sense of belonging and security in our neighbourhood is bound up in how we treat others, especially the most vulnerable.</p> <p>How do people deal with one another in your community? Especially the most vulnerable?</p> <p>Are they treated justly?</p>	<p>Read Deuteronomy 26: 1-11</p> <p>What could this sharing of first fruits look like in your local neighbourhood?</p> <p>How would you organise it?</p>

Part 3: With Fresh Eyes...		
<p>Read Psalm 27</p> <p>Using verses 8 and 13 as our trigger we look around our neighbourhood for God's face...</p> <p>Where do you see God smiling in your neighbourhood?</p> <p>Where does God sigh?</p> <p>Where does God weep?</p> <p>Where does God laugh?</p>	<p>Read 1 Corinthians 10: 23-33</p> <p>This reading describes a thoughtful way of engaging with the world, seeking the good of all while participating in local life.</p> <p>How involved are you in your community?</p> <p>What goes on in your neighbourhood - where do people meet, socialise, celebrate?</p> <p>How can we see these spaces and activities through God's eyes?</p>	<p>Read Jeremiah 29: 4-7</p> <p>Are you invested in where you live? Not financially, but emotionally and spiritually?</p> <p>What are the biggest needs you see around you?</p> <p>How can you seek the welfare of the village/town/city/place you live in?</p>

Part 4: Fractured and Fraying		
<p>Read: Psalm 63: 1-8</p> <p>This poem expresses a profound longing for God. It's a deeply human desire for love, comfort and assurance.</p> <p>Most of us have found ourselves, longing for some kind of connection or affirmation that will validate us. We often struggle to find the words to describe it. Sometimes we find ourselves turning to God in our restlessness, sometimes not. These feelings of isolation and loneliness can be amplified by fractured and fraying infrastructure - when there is nowhere safe for us to go to spend time with others.</p> <p>Where do you see thirst and need in your community? Both a thirst for the divine and for basic necessities? Where do you see people looking for assurance, for comfort, for protection?</p> <p>Where are there fractured or fraying spaces such as dry fountains, broken swings, condemned leisure centres or shuttered libraries?</p>	<p>Read Isaiah 55: 1-9</p> <p>This reading begins with an open invitation to participate without cost. The language is compelling, especially if you are used to a society where everything comes with a price tag.</p> <p>This generous hospitality opens up a space where people can listen and makes a strong contrast from many of the public spaces in our towns and cities where there's nowhere you can even sit down 'without money and without price'.</p> <p>How does economics shape your neighbourhood? Are there places people can go for shelter, or a feeling of community, or even a wee rest without having to pay for it?</p>	<p>Read John 4: 4-26</p> <p>Our resources - utilities like water - can be used to drive people apart or draw people together.</p> <p>The custom of the day frowned on Jesus and the Samaritan woman associating with one another - but Jesus saw their shared need as an opportunity to break down a barrier rather than build one up.</p> <p>What are the resources that we use in our neighbourhood? How could our shared need for these things offer us a way of interacting with and blessing others rather than setting us apart?</p> <p>Some suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Water</i> • <i>Friendship</i> • <i>Heating</i> • <i>Broadband</i>

Part 5: 'Settling In' and 'Not Settling'		
<p>Read: Psalm 32</p> <p>The psalmist writes movingly of God being a hiding place, addressing a deep human need to feel safe and protected when we are scared and restless.</p> <p>If you don't have a safe physical place to be it can hard to find the mental space to reflect.</p> <p>Where do you go when you're feeling unsettled?</p> <p>Are there peaceful places in your neighbourhood where those feeling unsettled can 'hide away' from it all? It might be spaces in nature, or perhaps in public buildings, like a big library?</p> <p>Are there any churches in your neighbourhood that offer space for those who are feeling unsettled to hide in God?</p>	<p>Read Genesis 11: 1-9</p> <p>Sometimes we suffer from apathy, lacking focus and drive but at other times we get carried away with a relentless determination on one track. Suddenly completing a big project, such as the tower in the reading, becomes an end in itself and we forget that God might be calling us elsewhere to do other things.</p> <p>At these times perhaps we need a little bit of 'creative unsettling', (like when the languages diversify in the reading) to break up our complacent assumptions and help us to expand our horizons and enrich our lives.</p> <p>Where could you use some creative unsettling in your neighbourhood? Maybe in local government, businesses, or churches or charities? Where might God be calling us away from one big obsession and towards something new, possibly somewhere new?</p>	<p>Read Matthew 5: 13-16</p> <p>Salt and light can both settle and unsettle and make compelling metaphors for engaging with the world.</p> <p>What is salt like? What is it used for?</p> <p>Brainstorm the properties and uses of salt and then see how they might offer us ways of blessing our neighbourhood.</p> <p>What is light like? What is it used for?</p> <p>Brainstorm the properties and uses of light and then see how they too might offer us ways of blessing our neighbourhood, and working for the good of God's Kingdom.</p>