

In The Neighbourhood, 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.

We will ask:

- How does encountering holiness change us and our community?
- What are the consequences of practicing radical love in our neighbourhood?
- How can we open our eyes and spot the shoots of the Kingdom?
- In what ways can we pray creatively into fractured infrastructure and frayed relationships?
- What does it mean to 'settle in'? And what does it mean 'not to settle'?

Each week of the theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
03 March	Holiness = Transformation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exodus 34: 29-35 2. Psalm 99 3. 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 4. Psalm 51: 1-17 5. 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 6. Luke 9:28-36 7. Isaiah 58: 1-12 	<p>We begin Lent by considering our proximity to God's holiness - God's wonderful, sacred, set apart, hard-to-even-imagine incredible power and other-worldliness. When we encounter holiness we cannot remain unchanged. It transforms people and often in unexpected ways.</p> <p>Are we hospitable to holiness in our neighbourhood? Do we make room for the holy, the unusual, the strange countercultural call of grace in our community? Holiness invites us to face up to our failings and delight in our gifts, to find strength in brokenness...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You could tell from the look on his face...Moses' radiance unsettles his community. Where do we see shining faces in our neighbourhood? 2. Systems of holiness lead to justice. But systems of justice don't always lead to holiness... 3. Glory transforms. What are our bold hopes for our community? 4. A sacrifice of a broken spirit. Personal words as a route to public action. 5. Glorious dishonourables, true imposters, sorrowful rejoicers...A contradictory community inspired by holiness - to inspire and be inspired by our neighbourhood. 6. Holy dwellings. Peter's response to holiness is a natural one, to want to hold it and pin it in place in a building, but holiness is on the move... 7. A call to action! A genuine encounter with holiness often leads directly to action, such as this manifesto: 'You shall be the restorer of streets to live in!'

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10 March	Radical Love	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deuteronomy 26:1-11 2. Leviticus 19: 34 3. Jeremiah 7: 1-7 4. Psalm 91: 1-2 5. Romans 10: 8-13 6. Luke 4: 1-13 7. Luke 10: 25-36 	<p>This week we think about the consequences of the radical love advocated throughout the Bible for our local neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Religion is sometimes thought of as a private experience, about personal devotion - but the Bible is strongly concerned with how we treat one another, how we live together. Our faith is not something held separate from our neighbourhood - in fact it has consequences for our neighbourhood...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sharing first. What could this sharing of first fruits look like in your local neighbourhood? 2. A radical statement in our society today. 3. Amend your ways. Our sense of belonging and security is bound up in how we treat others, especially the most vulnerable. How do people deal with one another in your community? Especially the most vulnerable? Justly? 4. Sheltering in God renews us with confidence to act out our radical love in our community. 5. Radical perception. "...there is no distinction between Jew and Greek..." 6. Overcoming the temptations of hubris, the desire to be thought of as a great leader for its own sake... Radical love comes from a less fretful, arrogant place. This Lent we consider where we get the inner strength to serve, not dominate, our neighbourhood. 7. It's not a halfhearted love... We are called to love our neighbours, not with a halfhearted one-strike-and-you're-out kind of love, but as we love ourselves sharing our first fruits, treating them equally, coming to their aid, trusting that we dwell in God together.
17 March	With Fresh Eyes...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psalm 27: 4-9 2. Philippians 3:17-4:1 3. Luke 13: 31-35 4. Jeremiah 29: 4-7 5. 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 6. Ephesians 1: 15-23 7. Psalm 119: 15-20 	<p>This week we invite you to look around your community with fresh eyes. Literally go out and look around. Where do you see God's face?</p> <p>As empowered citizens of heaven, how can we help nourish the shoots of the kingdom on our doorstep?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seeking God's face. Where do you see God smiling in your neighbourhood? Where does God sigh? Where does God weep? Where does God laugh? 2. We are empowered citizens of heaven, able to see how humiliation can be transformed. Where do we see shame, indignity, and oppression in our neighbourhood? What can we do about it? 3. Meeting resistance... when shoots of the Kingdom - God's new reality - burst forth there are others keen to trample them down. 4. Seeking the peace of the city. How can you seek the welfare of the neighbourhood you live in? Look around and see where the needs are. 5. Participating in local life. What goes on in your neighbourhood - where do people meet, socialise, celebrate? 6. Seeing with the eyes of your heart... 7. Praying for open eyes to behold wondrous things.

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24 March	Fractured and Fraying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Isaiah 55: 1-9 2. Psalm 63: 1-8 3. I Corinthians 10:1-13 4. Isaiah 6: 1-8 5. John 4: 1-26 6. Proverbs 18: 4 7. Psalm 36: 7-9 	<p>Fractured infrastructure can lead to fraying relationships. What does it do to a place when basic needs aren't being met and old promises are left to wither?</p> <p>This week, while we think about our neighbourhood we look around our built environment - what condition is it in? Is it loved? Cared for? What resources do we have, and what are we lacking? How does economics, architecture and town planning affect our daily lives? How can we pray creatively into these spaces and effect change?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economics + space. In this extract the offer of free food and free drink creates an environment where people can listen. This generous hospitality is a contrast from many of the public spaces in our towns and cities where everything comes with a price and there's nowhere you can even sit down 'without money and without price'. How does economics shape how you behave in your local neighbourhood? 2. Where do you see thirst and need in your community? Both a thirst for the divine and for basic necessities like water. Where are there dry fountains, broken swings, condemned leisure centres, shuttered libraries? 3. Where are the idols? What do people turn to in your local community as a stopgap against isolation, loneliness and despair? Some areas struggle to access basic resources while many seemingly affluent communities are deprived of meaningful places of connection where people can feel valued. This can lead to people searching for solace in harmful ways. How can we help one another to stand firm? 4. What does it mean to have 'unclean' lips'? 5. 'Give me a drink.' Our resources - such as utilities like water - can be used to drive people apart or draw people together... 6. Fountains of Wisdom. Wisdom, like fresh water - requires movement and circulation. Do we allow wisdom to stagnate in our community or do we keep it fresh and moving? Where are the local wise fountains? 7. An abundant feast, a river of delights, a fountain of life! How can we mirror God's generosity in our neighbourhoods?

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
31 March	'Settling In' and 'Not Settling'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joshua 5: 10-12 2. Psalm 32: 7 3. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 4. Luke 15: 1-7 5. Jonah 3:10 - 4:11 6. Genesis 11: 1-9 7. Matthew 5: 13-16 	<p>Any settlement, from a small hamlet to a giant metropolis, is the consequence of a series of decisions stretching back into history. Some of these decisions are impulsive, others carefully planned and both lead to intended and unintentional results. These decisions have been shaped by the unique combinations of geography, geology, history, culture, art and language as a community shifts and adapts (or struggles to) to ever-changing circumstances.</p> <p>The Bible, emerging over a number of years, and spanning many cultures and locations, contains a fascinating commentary on what it means to live with one another. We are called at times to settle in and at other times we are deliberately unsettled...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wandering versus settling. Mana versus crops of the land. 2. Do we have hiding places in our neighbourhood? 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. Are there places in our neighbourhood where those feeling unsettled can 'hide away'? 3. Let's not settle for less. Just as we can become new creations, our neighbourhoods can be made new. 4. Welcoming sinners and settling down to eat. 5. Siting in the outskirts. Many of us have felt like Jonah, unsettled, restless and angry, going out to sit on the fringes to despair at how things are going. 6. Hubris and humility. Sometimes our settlements suffer from apathy, lacking focus and drive but at other times we get carried away with a relentless determination on one track where completing a big project becomes an end in itself that is no longer about serving the good of the people. At these times we need a little creative unsettling to break up our complacent assumptions and expand our horizons and enrich our lives. 7. A city on a hill. Let's strive for excellent loving, neighbourhoods where people can feel settled and cared for, following Jesus' example. Let's be a light for others to see and let's look to the light others carry, to learn from them.