

Jesus knows what it's like to be alone

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Prior to this virus season, when was a time you felt really alone?

What circumstances led to that feeling?

In what ways did you cope?

As you think back on that time now, what do you recall proved to be most, or least, helpful to you?

The whole world seems to be centered on the coronavirus, and that is certainly true for us in Europe. All of our ministry events have been cancelled in Serbia and Slovakia, as well as here in Austria. Right now, we are in a holding pattern, circling like a plane and wondering when we might be able to land and continue on with our normal lives. We are in a lockdown here, as many are, urged to stay at home and restricted in many of our normal activities. Even the simple act of getting groceries raises the level of anxiety.

It is all too easy to worry when we see daily reports of new confirmed cases of coronavirus, and the death toll rising in many places. Someone has pointed out that it takes the same amount of energy to worry as to pray! The one leads to panic, the other to peace. Paul says that "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Having a sound mind means controlling our thoughts, taking every thought captive that is not in line with God's thoughts. When I find my thoughts spiraling down in the direction of "worst case scenarios," it is time to run to the word of God and let his word and his Spirit change my thinking. A thought-provoking definition of anxiety is "imagining the future without Christ." When I engage in the "what ifs," I am often leaving Christ out of the picture. Yet he promised he would never leave me or forsake me. We don't face this uncertain future alone; he is right there with us.

What do you think about the statement, "it takes the same amount of energy to worry as to pray?"

How have you found that to be true or not true in your experience?

What are some of your "what if's" these days?

What might be a practical way to bring Christ into the picture of one of your "what if's?"

My ladies' Bible study is nearing the end of the gospel of Matthew. As we focused on the ordeal of Jesus' trials before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod, the agonizing events of the crucifixion, and the deep sorrow surrounding the burial of Jesus, our hearts were touched at the magnitude of what Christ

experienced for us. We recoil at those unbearable moments on the cross when Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” All others had forsaken him in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the end, he was alone in the garden, alone in the courtyard, alone on the cross. Finally, and most devastating of all, separated from his beloved Father as he bore the sins of the world, becoming sin for us.

Surely, he knows how we feel now, the fears we wrestle with, the sense of isolation from those we love. As they met for the final time together, Jesus sought to prepare his disciples for the crucifixion, comforting them in advance with the promise of the Holy Spirit, and saying, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”

The disciples faced upheaval and uncertainty, the prospect of persecution and death. Like them, we face uncertain days. But we are never alone; we never face the future without Christ. He is right there beside us, comforting us, strengthening us, pouring out his grace, being our sufficiency, carrying our burdens, leading us on to a morning resplendent with light.

Consider Jesus praying alone in the garden, during his various trials, on the cross. What feelings might he have felt?

What temptations might have come upon him?

What do you notice about his responses?

What might it have felt like for him to know that he was, for a time, separated even from God?

How might Jesus’ aloneness impact you during this season of coronavirus?

What do you sense he wants you to hear, see, learn, respond to, whenever you feel alone?

How might he use you to encourage someone else who is feeling alone at this time?

