



WHAT YOUR GROUP WILL NEED

- A quiet spot
- Something to watch a video clip on from YouTube on
- A Bible
- A pen and some paper

LEADER NOTES

This session has been adapted from the *Isolated Church: Isolation* reflection so you can use it with your group online. Feel free to pick and choose parts of it, if you are short on time.



Make sure you send round the video link (click here) to your group before you meet or have it ready in your video chat to watch at the right time.

Tip: There are a few prayers and quotes included in these notes. As you'll most likely be using this session on a video chat service, text or message certain people in the group with the prayers or quotes at the start or throughout the session and ask them to read them out at the right time - it'll help break up your meeting and involve others too!

i INTRO

Start the session with a word association game: Ask the group, 'What's the first thing that comes into your head when I say...' Go round the group (via whatever video chat service you're using) - no one is allowed to repeat an answer, and no 'erms', 'uuhhs' or pauses. Have a few rounds and finish with the word "isolation".

Ask:

- How are you coping with the lockdown?
- What is good? What is bad?
- How are your relationships at home holding up?

Isolation will conjure up a mix of emotions – it can feel really hard. But let the group know, that as we look at persecuted Christians around the world for whom isolation is not a new thing, they can show us that this is an opportunity for us to get closer to each other and closer to God.

👐 PRAY

Encourage the group to be still and pause. Ask them to slow down their breathing and focus on God. Ask Him to speak to you all whilst you go through this session!

You might want to ask one of your group to read out this prayer:

Father God. You are good. You are unchanging. Please speak to us as we read these stories. Help us put aside distractions and focus on You. Teach us something new. Let us know You are with us. Amen.

📺 STORY: PASTOR HUANG LEI - CHINA

Explain: The church in China has faced a lot of pressure in the last year: there have been thousands of Church closures, restrictions on the sale of Bibles, crosses taken down from church buildings and pastors are being watched by the police, but the virus has helped the persecuted church come together in a new way. Pastor Huang Lei leads a church in Wuhan, China – the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak. The coronavirus crisis makes it impossible for his church to have their usual gatherings – but Pastor Huang and his congregation have used the crisis to focus in on God – and it's changing them:

*"Crises forces change. Let's use this virus crisis to become more like Jesus and grow closer to God. **It's time to be church rather than do church.**"*

"Of course, now we have more free time; everybody is staying at home, so that's given us the chance to do this. But we usually have the group meeting weekly and now we're doing this daily – sometimes even more, so we are very grateful for that."

Ask

- What are we doing with all the free time we have?

"The epidemic didn't cut down our meetings. It's the opposite... After this, many church members will be more willing to communicate with other sisters and brothers in Christ, to encourage each other and share with each other."

Continued...

Explain: Huang Lei's story about his church is amazing, it challenges us to flip isolation around. To use this time to draw closer to God and others. To stop just doing church, to be the church. But what if you can't get hold of anyone, what then?

VIDEO: WANG MING-DAO

If you haven't already - send round the link to the video for people to watch (click here). In the video Naomi reflects on Wang Ming-Dao's story. He was sentenced to 22 and a half years in Chinese prison because of his faith, a lot of it in solitary confinement. Yet he managed to lead 96 people to Christ.

- Having heard about Wang Ming-Dao, can you think of any opportunities where you might be able to share about Jesus despite being isolated?
- Are there any ways you want to start using your time differently?

BIBLE: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-22

Have someone read out this passage the explain: Wang Ming-Dao's story teaches us to lean into God and to love those around us. It's a bit like this section of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul is giving instructions to a church which is facing opposition as it lives out and preaches the Gospel.

- What are some of the key instructions from these verses? (encourage those who are struggling, help those more vulnerable etc)
- What would it look like for us to live out some of these instructions?
- Make a list together - how can you be more encouraging, thankful and forgiving over the next few weeks?

BIBLE: EPHESIANS 4:1

Explain: Paul wrote loads of letters to churches that he had planted. Some of these were written from prison - he was arrested several times because of his passionate faith in Jesus. In his letter to the church in Ephesus he says (ask someone to look up and read out the following passage):

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received"

Ephesians 4:1

Paul is urging us to not waste our time, but to keep pressing into God's promises for us.

Ask the group the following:

- Since being in isolation have you wanted to spend more or less time engaging with God?
- What helps or encourages you to spend time praying, reading the Bible, worshipping?
- As a group, think of ways you can encourage each other to lean into and grow with God during this time of isolation.

ACTIVITY

Here are a few activities you could ask your group to do as part of the session or afterwards

1. Send a message locally:

Isolation probably isn't something we would ever choose. It's hard being trapped in our homes, and it's likely that we'll all know someone who is feeling the impact of isolation more. It might be an elderly neighbour or relative, or it might be someone who is more 'at risk' from COVID19 who has completely locked themselves away. Take some time to write them a quick note or letter. Let them know you are thinking of and praying for them. Why not include an encouraging Bible verse (try Numbers 6: 24-26 or 1 Thessalonians 1:2). Take it to their door or a post-box on your daily exercise (wash your hands before and after, and don't touch your face 😷!)

- How did writing the note make you feel?
- How do you think your note will make the person you sent it to feel?

2. Send a message globally:

Could you reach out to those who are feeling isolated longer term? Christians facing persecuted can feel detached and alone all the time. Receiving a message of hope from a Christian on the other side of the world can help transform their situation, reminding them they are not forgotten - and it's so simple for us to do...

Here are two links with tips on what and how to write messages, they are both asking for emailed content, so you don't even have to leave your comfy chair.

 **Abishek is a volunteer 'first responder'** and local partner of Open Doors in India. That means he goes to help Christians when they've been attacked - he's often the first person to show up offering help. As a result, he often is on his own, responding to situations as they arise and supporting Christians in difficult circumstances.

[Write to Abishek as he serves God's church in India \(click here\)...](#)

 **Christian Children in India** are experiencing more and more pressure to convert to Hinduism or stop following Jesus. The Hindu government has said that to be Indian, is to be Hindu and a member of the party says he aims for all Christians in India to be gone by next year.

[Write to encourage brave faith in the Christian children of India, who are often the victims of bullying and violence \(click here\)...](#)

PRAY

As you close the session ask the group for any prayer requests. If they don't want to share, that's fine, just encourage them to bring their worries and unknowns before God. Have a few minutes silence, then finish by reading out this prayer.

Father God, we thank You for our brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. We thank You for Pastor Huang's church in Wuhan, where it would be so easy to hide in isolation, but the church is growing as a strong community. We thank You for Wang Ming-Dao being able to lead 96 people to You whilst isolated in prison. Help me learn from him that a relationship with You is the greatest relationship we could ever know. Help me to see opportunities to reach out to people that are struggling with loneliness and isolation during the lockdown. Help me lean into You more and more and live out my love for You. Amen