

**YOU WILL NEED**

- Some time - about 20 mins.
- A quiet spot
- Something to watch a video clip on from YouTube on
- A Bible
- A pen and some paper

**SHORT ON TIME? NOT A BIG READER?**

Just read the Pastor Huang Lei and Video sections, then pray the final prayer. That should take just 7 minutes.

### How are you getting on. Are you stuck home with family? Getting fed up of just seeing friends through a screen? Exhausted all the decent shows on Netflix?

Isolation is forcing us to live life in a completely new way. We hope you're coping O.K. and have found ways to connect with others and maintain friendships. It's likely your church, youth group and community probably look very different and several weeks in, you might be thinking that connecting online is starting to feel a bit frustrating. But as we look at persecuted Christians around the world for whom isolation is not a new thing, they show us that this time of enforced distancing can actually be an opportunity for us to get closer to each other, and closer to God.

So, for the next 20 minutes or so (see the note on the left if you're not a big reader), take some time to focus in on God, a source of comfort, hope and friendship in these times of enforced isolation and social distancing.

**PRAY**

Just pause. Sit. Slow down your breathing. Focus on God. Ask him to speak to you whilst you go through this devotional. And know that we, and others around the UK, are praying this with you!

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

**ACTIVITY**

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?

The next few stories are about how people have coped with isolation by doing what you've just done. It seems simple, but if we want to beat isolation and loneliness we just need to reach out and connect with people and lean into God.

**STORY: PASTOR HUANG LEI - CHINA**

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."*

Continued...

*"The epidemic didn't cut down our meetings. It's the opposite... I think, 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."*

- How are you connecting with friends and your church at this time?
- Are you able to talk about how you are feeling and how the lock-down has affected you?
- Could you find someone to pray with via WhatsApp or FaceTime over the next few days?

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

Check out the video by Naomi as she reflects on Wang Ming-Dao's story ([click here](#)). 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?

#### BIBLE: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-22

Read this passage and think about Wang Ming-Dao's story. Both teach us to lean into God and to love those around us. The Bible passage was written by a guy called Paul. It's part of a letter he wrote to a church that was facing opposition as it lived out - and taught about - the Gospel.

- Take some time to re-read the passage and list out all the instructions. Next to each one, see if you can add an action. For example: How can you encourage someone who is feeling disheartened (v14)? How can you make sure you forgive and don't pay back wrongs - even if your little brother eats your secret stash of treats (v15)? Despite the lock-down, what can you be thankful for (v18)?

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 "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.

- How are your days in the lock-down looking? Could you give just another 10 minutes each day to simply pray and listen to God?
- Could you spend 10 minutes sending encouraging texts or messages to different people each day?
- Could you commit to reading a gospel or book of the Bible over the next week?

In this time when we feel isolated, let's keep chasing what God has for us. Let's reach out to people and lean into Him.



Abishek praying with a Christian family that have faced persecution because of their faith

#### ACTIVITY

You've already written a note to encourage someone you know during this crisis, but what about reaching 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

*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 lock-down. Help me lean into You more and more and live out my love for You. Amen*