

God is Love



Knowing God Through Uncertainty



SAINT BRIGID
— PARISH —

Connection to Christ (C2C)

Fall 2020

GOD IS LOVE

Knowing God through Uncertainty

Whether you are joining for the first time or you have been in a Connection to Christ small group for a while, welcome! We find ourselves in the midst of many challenges today. COVID-19 has affected us in a variety of ways, causing fear, anxiety, depression, loss, and uncertainty about the future. Recent events have made us acutely aware of the profound effect racism still has on our culture. As the upcoming elections approach, disunity, anger, and lack of charity abound. We might wonder where God is in the midst of all of this and what we can possibly do to make a difference.

Through our Fall Series, God is Love: Knowing God through Uncertainty, we will look at many of today's challenges and explore how God—who is Love—helps us experience hope and peace, enables us to walk in faith and trust, and equips us to “be” love to others. We hope and pray that this Fall Series helps you grow in your Connection to Christ, now in this time of uncertainty and always.

Gather:

Father in Heaven, throughout history you have filled your people with your Holy Spirit, equipping them to face challenges and uncertainties of their times. As we face the anxieties of our times, help us lay them at your feet. Pour out upon us your Spirit, that we may become witnesses of your Divine Love. Remind us, Father, that we are “in the world but not of the world.” We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. What challenges, changes, losses, and blessings have you experienced during the pandemic?
2. For you personally, where is God or faith in all of this?

Watch:

Julie Colman welcomes us and Deacon Chris Hulburt talks about God's love.



Discuss:

1. Why do you think people sometimes struggle with the statement, “God is love”?
2. Is it easy or difficult for you to accept that you are a beloved child of God?
3. What do you think it means that we are made in the image of God?



Mark 1:9-11

9 It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. **10** On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. **11** And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Explore:

1. Why do you think Jesus underwent baptism by John?
2. Why do you think the Holy Spirit was manifest in bodily form?
3. What is the purpose of the crowd hearing a physical voice proclaiming Jesus to be God's beloved son? Why is the voice "well pleased" with Jesus?
4. What would your life look like if you truly believed that you are the beloved child with whom God is well pleased? How might your relationships change? How might your view of the world differ? How might your view of yourself be different?
5. This occurs in the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. What does this tell us about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our mission? How have you experienced the Holy Spirit?

You are My
beloved Son
[Daughter]:
with You I am
well pleased.

Mark 1:11

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Mark 1:11.
- Find an image of God that speaks to you: maybe it's on a prayer card or is a piece of art. Looking for ideas? Click [here](#).

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for being love. Help us to understand, accept, and embrace our identity as your beloved children, today and always. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about God is Love:

- John 3:16
- Romans 8:31-39
- Genesis 1:26-27
- 1 John 4:7-19
- Isaiah 43:1-2, 4

Songs:

- "[Belovedness](#)" by Sarah Kroger
- "[How He Loves Us](#)" by David Crowder

Reflection Exercise:

"[Sense-Making](#)" by [Becky Eldredge](#) and [Stephanie Clouatre Davis](#)

Video:

"[Reminder: God Loves You](#)" by Fr. Mike Schmitz (6:31 min)

Book:

[Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World](#) by Henri J. M. Nouwen

BE LOVED

Recognizing God's Presence Within and Around Us

One of the fundamental truths of God is that God loves each of us beyond comprehension and that nothing we do, or do not do, can earn or take away that love. This type of unconditional love may seem unimaginable to us if our past experiences made us feel we needed to behave in an acceptable manner, achieve lofty goals, or look a certain way in order to be loved. It may be difficult for some of us to be vulnerable enough to fully accept being loved, by God or anyone else, just as we are.

God's deepest desire is to be in relationship with us. In the intimacy of this relationship, we learn to open our hearts to receive the love of God and others. In today's session, we explore how God speaks to us through the Bible—His Living Word—and through the times we set aside for prayer. God calls each of us, by name, into deeper union with Him. Are you ready to accept His invitation?

Gather:

Heavenly Father, You formed us as your precious sons and daughters. You call each of us by name as You invite us into an intimate relationship with You. Open our hearts to receive Your love and allow us to recognize Your presence within and around us yesterday, today, and always. We pray through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

1. From last week, share your image of God and explain why you chose it.
2. What do others do for you to make you feel loved?

Watch:

Cathy Winter shares how God beckoned her into a deeper relationship, softened her heart, and healed the wounds of her past.



Discuss:

1. When has a song or Scripture spoken to you directly?
2. Have you ever had a 'midnight call' experience? If so, how did God call you and how did you respond?
3. Why do you think God wants a relationship that "isn't all pre-worded for us?"
4. When Cathy offered the simple prayer, "Change me," God began to work in her life in powerful ways. What simple prayer do you need to offer to God today?



Isaiah 43:1-4

1 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. **2** When you pass through waters, I will be with you; through rivers, you shall not be swept away. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, nor will flames consume you. **3** For I, the Lord, am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior. I give Egypt as ransom for you, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. **4** Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you.

Explore:

1. Prior to this passage, the prophet listed out the ways Israel had been disobedient. How does this color your understanding of the passage above?
2. What does this tell us about God's love? Has He chosen us, or have we earned it?
3. During the time of the prophet Isaiah, Israel was in a bad place politically, socially, and in the spiritual lives of everyday people. God affirms His love for them even as they continued to suffer. How have you seen this in your own life?
4. Which word or phrase stands out to you and why? What might God be telling you? Is it easy or difficult for you to accept God's Word? Why do you think that is?

*Do not fear,
for I have
redeemed you;
I have called
you by name;
you are mine.*

Isaiah 43:1

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Isaiah 43:1.
- Spend 1% of your day (about 15 minutes) in God's presence. Try it once this week or every day.

Prayer:

Father, we are precious in Your eyes and You desire a deep and abiding relationship with each of us. May Your Living Word draw us into a more profound acceptance of Your love and Your invitation to intimacy. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages recognizing God's love and presence:

- Psalm 46:11
- Psalm 18
- Ezekiel 36
- Ezekiel 47
- John 4:4-40

Songs:

- "[Dancing on the Waves](#)" by Bethel Music feat. We the Kingdom
- "[Lord I Need You](#)" Sung by Lauren Swain

Art:

"[Isaiah 43:1-3](#)" by Chris Powers

Prayer:

- "[A Meditation of Psalm 43:1-4](#)" Based on the Practice of Lectio Divina
- 1% challenge "[30-Day Kick Start Scriptures](#)" by Evangelical Catholic

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Encountering God, Even in Times of Isolation

Perhaps one of the greatest hardships of the pandemic has been the feelings of loneliness and isolation it has caused. Whether we are living alone or in a home filled with people, social-distancing protocols have altered our lives in dramatic ways. Special family celebrations have been cancelled or postponed. Many of us have been forced to leave our workplaces and school communities in order to work and learn online from the safety of our homes. Some of our favorite leisure activities, such as attending picnics, concerts, or sporting events, have come to a halt. Even if we are able to gather with people outside our “safety-bubble,” masks and six-foot distancing guidelines can make things feel awkward.

In spite of this loss of community, we are not alone! In today's session, we explore the fundamental truth that God is always with us. There is a sacred space within each of us—an Inner Chapel—where God resides. Once we discover this sanctuary within our hearts and open ourselves to the personal relationship God longs to have with us, we are able to find peace, comfort, and fellowship regardless of our circumstances.

Gather:

Heavenly Father, We thank you for gathering us together today. Help us to recognize your constant presence—around us, among us, and within us—now and always. We pray through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how lonely have you felt since COVID-19 placed so many restrictions on our lives?
2. How are you connecting with family and friends at this time?

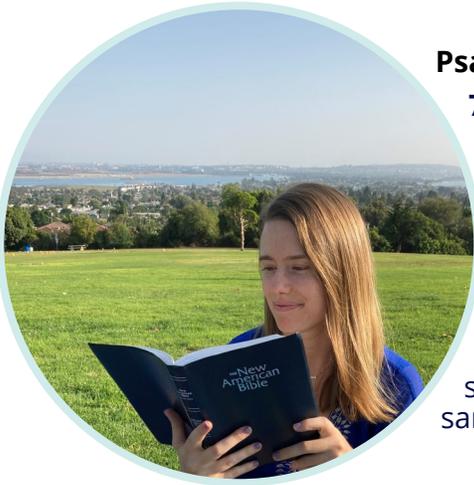
Watch:

Hear Julie Misleh and Betty Matteson share how their faith helps them cope in times of isolation.



Discuss:

1. Which of your favorite activities or events have been restricted?
2. Which effects of social-distancing have been the most difficult for you personally?
3. Have you noticed any difference in the way you view the Bible since the pandemic started? Explain.
4. What are some surprising benefits that have come from having more time alone?



Psalm 139:7-12; 17-18

7 Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee? **8** If I ascend to the heavens, you are there; if I lie down in Sheol, there you are. **9** If I take the wings of dawn and dwell beyond the sea, **10** Even there your hand guides me, your right hand holds me fast. **11** If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light"— **12** Darkness is not dark for you, and night shines as the day. Darkness and light are but one.

17 How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them! **18** Were I to count them, they would outnumber the sands; when I complete them, still you are with me.

Explore:

1. Have you been able to sense God's presence during times of loneliness? If so, what were the circumstances and how did God's presence make a difference?
2. The psalmist says, "Your hand guides me, your right hand holds me fast." Have you had an experience in life where you felt God's hand guide you?
3. Has there been a time in your life when you tried to "hide" from God? How did you experience God's light shine in that darkness?
4. "How precious to me are your designs, O God...when I complete them, still you are with me." In what ways does it give you hope to know God is always with you, even during hard times?

*Where can I go
from your Spirit?
From your
presence, where
shall I flee?*

Psalm 139:7

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Psalm 139:7.
- This week, reach out to someone who might be feeling lonely or isolated.

Prayer:

Lord, you promise to be with us and within us always. May we learn to treasure your presence more and more each day and be attentive to all the ways you call us to be your presence to others. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about seeking calm:

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 62:5-8
- Isaiah 55:6-13
- Proverbs 3:1-12
- John 10:11-18

Songs:

- "[There Was Jesus](#)" by Zach Williams and Dolly Parton
- "[We are not Alone](#)" by social distance Virtual Choir
- "[I Am Not Alone](#)" by Kari Jobe
- "[All the People Say Amen](#)" by Matt Maher

Book:

[Inner Chapel](#) by [Becky Eldredge](#)

Article:

["When I Feel the Ground Disappearing"](#) by Gretchen Crowder

COMFORT

Coping with Loss through Prayer

We have all experienced loss at some point in our lives. It is part of the human experience. However, as we navigate our way through life in a world plagued by pandemic, it seems our normal routines have been disrupted by an onslaught of losses. How have your health, income, family relationships, and social life been impacted? Perhaps you were forced to cancel a long-awaited vacation or alter or postpone your dream wedding. You may even have lost a loved one to COVID-19. So many compounded losses—whether seemingly minor or life-changing—can leave us feeling exhausted, angry, sad, or depressed.

What do we do with all these feelings? It is important to identify what is bothering us and give ourselves permission to grieve. We can take all these thoughts and feelings to God in prayer. Like a faithful friend, God wants to be with us in our sorrows, trusted with our burdens, and bring comfort to our grieving hearts.

Gather:

Loving and gracious Father, in recent months, we have experienced many losses, big and small. Help us to name those losses and the grief and emotions they have caused. Turn our hearts to You, O Lord, so we may bring You our burdens, rest in Your presence, and accept Your comfort and healing. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. Who is a comforter in your life right now?
2. Who are you comforting?

Watch:

Mary Pat Warner and Darren and Allyssa Blair share about finding comfort in times of loss.



Discuss:

1. What types of losses have you experienced recently?
2. What is bothering you lately? What is making you cranky, angry, impatient, or depressed?
3. Have you brought your losses or what has been bothering you to God in prayer? Share about those experiences.

Matthew 7:7-11



7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. **9** Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake? **11** If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Explore:

1. Do you feel that God answers your prayers? How do you recognize His reply? What is your response when He says no?
2. Share about a time when your prayer, or the prayer of others, brought you comfort.
3. "Prayer doesn't change God, prayer changes us. It's not about convincing Him of our will, but surrendering to His will." How does this fit with the Scripture reading? Have you had an experience of this you can share?

*Ask and it will be
given to you; seek
and you will
find; knock and
the door will be
opened to you.*

Matthew 7:7

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Matthew 7:7
- Reach out to someone who might need comfort this week.
- How can you knock, seek, and ask God?

Prayer:

Loving God, help me surrender my will to You, this day and every day, in complete and loving trust. Free me from anxiety over the past and fear of the future. Accept my gratitude this day for the gift of life You have given so generously to me. Guide me in my struggles so that I may bear witness to the living hope found in You. Bless me, O Lord, and each of us, for in You we have nothing to fear and everything to anticipate with joy. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about finding comfort:

- Isaiah 49:8-16
- Mark 10:46-52
- Luke 18:1-8
- Acts 1:4-8, 12-14, 21-22, 24-26; 2:1-4
- Ephesians 6:10-18

Song:

- "[Lay it All Down](#)" United Pursuit feat. Will Reagan
- "[Comforter](#)" by Amanda Lindsey Cook

Prayer:

["Prayer of Transformation"](#)

Book:

[When Bad Things Happen to Good People](#) by Harold S. Kushner

Parish Ministry:

[Seasons of Hope](#) Bereavement Group

TRUST

Responding to Loss with Faithful Surrender

From a young age, we were taught the importance of making plans. From ordinary every day things to major life decisions—we set our course and we like to be in control. But what happens when our plans are suddenly interrupted and we no longer feel in control? How do we respond when somebody or something “rocks the boat” in our lives?

Having the right attitude can make all the difference. We can respond with anger and despair or we can surrender our circumstances to Jesus in faithful trust. If we take our eyes off of the storm, focusing instead on the One who can calm it, we just might be surprised by the outcome!

Gather:

Litany of Trust

From the belief that I have to earn your love, **R.—Deliver me, Jesus.**

From anxiety about the future, **R.**
From the fear that trusting you will leave me more destitute, **R.**

From resentment or excessive preoccupation with the past, **R.**

From the fear of being asked to give more than I have, **R.**

From the belief that my life has no meaning or worth, **R.**

That your love goes deeper than my sins and failings, and transforms me, **R.—Jesus, I trust in you.**

That not knowing what tomorrow brings is an invitation to lean on you, **R.**

That you are with me in my suffering, **R.**

That your plan is better than anything else, **R. Amen.**

1. In what area of your life do you need to trust God more?

Watch:

Katie Cavallo and Gretchen and Grace Esparza share their experiences of trusting God when our plans get disrupted.



Discuss:

1. How has your faith shifted or evolved in recent months?
2. In the last 6 months, has your house felt more like a jail or a monastery? Explain.
3. Name a time when your plans got changed but the outcome turned out better than you could have imagined.
4. God can bring good out of seemingly hopeless or devastating circumstances. What evidence have you seen of this in your life?



Mark 4:35-41

35 On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, "Let us cross to the other side." **36** Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. **37** A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. **38** Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" **39** He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. **40** Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" **41** They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

Explore:

1. Why do you think Jesus was sleeping during the storm?
2. What happened in this story that helped the disciples put their faith in Jesus?
3. During the recent "storms" of your life, do you feel that Jesus is beside you in your boat? If not, what could help you increase your faith and trust in Him?
4. While this pandemic has created a "storm" for everyone, our storms may be different and we are not necessarily all in the same boat. How might this awareness help you relate to others during this time?

Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?

Mark 4:40

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Mark 4:40.
- Spend some time each day praying the Litany of Trust and then resting in God's presence.

Prayer:

"Jesus, I trust in you!" You may know this prayer from the image of the Divine Mercy. Repeat this phrase several times slowly. As you are praying these words, think of ways you may have lacked faith and trust this week, but more importantly, how you can put your faith and trust in the Lord in the days ahead. Amen.



Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about trust:

- Jeremiah 17:7-8
- 1Peter 5:5-11
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
- John 12:24
- Revelations 21:1-8

Songs:

- "[Show Me](#)" sung by Katie Cavallo
- "[Taste and See](#)" sung by Katie Cavallo

Books:

- [What the Mystics Know](#) by Richard Rohr
- [Falling Upward](#) by Richard Rohr

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Embracing our Diversity as Children of God

One of the beautiful things about God's creation is the diversity of people throughout the world. He has endowed us all with unique gifts, abilities, and practices that somehow reflect His image and likeness and yet those differences can become a cause for disunity, separation, and even hatred.

During these past months, we have seen acts of violence against people of color, and subsequent protests, both peaceful and violent, ongoing unrest, and a call for change to something greater.

In these days, we are being called to self-reflection, dialogue with one another, and reclaiming the belief that starting with our own action of loving God and loving our neighbor, is the path forward. While it can be a challenge to see God in the midst of the suffering and discord, we know He is at work, and we can begin by asking Him to help us embrace and live our true identity as beloved children of God.

Gather:

Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism finds no home within me. Keep watch over my heart Lord, and remove from me any barriers to your grace, that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters. Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give services of justice and peace. Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory. And finally, remind us Lord, that you said, "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Amen.
*see worship aid in "Go Deeper"

1. When and how have you acted as a peacemaker?"

Luke 10:25-37

25 There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" **27** He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." **28** He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." **29** But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him,

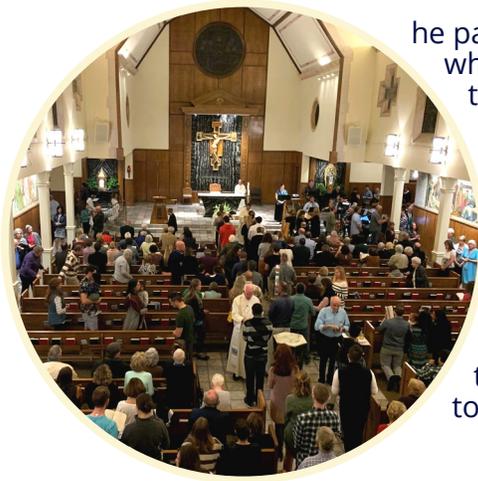
Watch:

Paulina Gonzales shares how her faith integrates into dialoguing about racial justice and the call to love our neighbor



Discuss:

1. Have you felt called to do something that you didn't want to do? What was it and how did you know it was the right thing to do?
2. In the video, Paulina mentions we are all called to different ways to put our faith in action. In what ways have you put your faith in action over these past months?
3. In addressing all forms of social injustice, and in particular racism, we are invited to prayer, education, and action. Which of these seems easiest for you? Which is the most difficult?



he passed by on the opposite side. **32** Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. **33** But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. **34** He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. **35** The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' **36** Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" **37** He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Explore:

1. What does it mean to you to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, all your being, all your strength, and all your mind? Which of these seems the most challenging to you?
2. Have you ever been "moved to compassion" to help another? What did you do and how did it make you feel?
3. To embrace the command of Jesus to "go and do likewise," how can you treat others—close friends and relatives as well as strangers—with mercy?

You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

Luke 10:27

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Luke 10:27.
- Pray for the openness to recognize all you meet as your neighbor and treat them with the dignity of a child of God.

Prayer:

God of Heaven and Earth, you created the one human family and endowed each person with great dignity. Aid us, we pray, in overcoming the sin of racism. Grant us your grace in eliminating this blight from our hearts, our communities, our social and civil institutions. Fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbor so that we may work with you in healing our land from racial injustice. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. *see worship aid in "Go Deeper"

Love Your Neighbor (session 5)

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about loving your neighbor:

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-25
- Exodus 20:1-17
- Matthew 22:36-40
- Romans 12:9-21
- Ephesians 4:32-5:8

Videos, Prayers, Articles, Books, etc.:

- Presentation: "[Courageous Conversations](#)" by Deacon Chris
- Video: "[Justice](#)" from the Bible project
- Video: "[Leaning into What we Fear](#)" by Jeremy Courtney
- Resources: from the [USCCB](#) Ad Hoc Committee on Racism
- "Prayer Service for Racial Healing" [recording](#) and [*worship aid](#)
- Video Homily: Deacon Chris on "[Love Your Neighbor](#)"
- Video: "[Purl](#)" by Pixar Sparkshorts
- Prayer: "[Combat Racism through Peace of Christ](#)"
- Article: "[A Conversation about Race with Damon Clarke Owens](#)" by Deacon Steven D. Greydanus

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HOPE

Facing Fear with Courage

When COVID-19 first emerged, none of us could fathom how far reaching its effects would be, how long it would last, or how significantly it would impact our own day-to-day lives. We have experienced numerous losses, big and small. Many of our plans have been cancelled or postponed and we may feel anxiety about an unknown future. How do we maintain hope in the midst of all of this?

The answer lies in our Connection to Christ. We may not know what the future will bring, but He does, and He wants to bring good out of all of our experiences—all our frustrations, all our trials, and all our disappointments. As we draw closer to Him, and trust in His promises, He casts out all of our fears and fills us with courage and hope.

Gather:

Heavenly Father, these past several months have brought many losses, cancelled plans, and uncertainties. Our hope is in You. Help us to rest in the assurance that You lead us safely through all things, and even when we feel we can bear no more, You carry us in Your arms. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. What are some of the things that have caused you discouragement since COVID-19 upended our "normal" lives?
2. What person, experience, or piece of news has recently brought you hope?

Watch:

Patrick McCay shares how his Connection to Christ helps him remain hopeful in the midst of life's trials and uncertainties.



Discuss:

1. In the video, Patrick talks about "The Lentiest Lent he ever Lented." Reflecting on all the things you have lost and gained over the last few months, was there anything you were forced to let go of that probably wasn't good for you anyway? Did you gain any unexpected benefits during this time?
2. God often teaches us through our experiences. What have the last few months taught you? Is your trust in God stronger? Has your hope diminished or grown?
3. How have you been able to bring hope to others in the last few months?



Jeremiah 29:11-13

11 For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the Lord—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. **12** When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. **13** When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart.

Explore:

1. This prophecy occurs when Israel is exiled to Babylon, and Babylon is as strong as ever. Reflecting on Israel's suffering and loss, how can we believe in a future of hope?
2. Before He makes this promise, God asks the Israelites to be faithful to him while in exile. In what ways can we be more faithful (individually or as a community) as we wait in hope for our restoration?
3. When have you experienced God turning a seemingly bad circumstance into good?
4. What does it mean to seek God with all your heart? What are some concrete ways you can do this?

For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the Lord—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Jeremiah 29:11.
- Be hope to someone this week. Share ideas of what this might look like.

Prayer:

Padre Pio said, "Pray, hope, and don't worry." With that in mind, take turns praying for each other's petitions.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about finding hope:

- John 3:16
- Romans 8:18-30 with [reflection \(Day 15\)](#)
- Job 11:17-19
- Romans 15:7-13
- 1 Peter 1:3-9

Songs:

- "[All My Hope](#)" by Crowder
- "[Be Not Afraid](#)" by Catholic Artists at Home presented by Salt + Light Media

Prayers, Quotes, Articles:

- "[Hope During the Pandemic](#)" courtesy of Patrick McCay
- "[Be at Peace](#)" by St. Francis de Sales
- "[Anchor into Hope](#)" by [Becky Eldredge](#)

Books:

- [Conquering Coronavirus](#) by Teresa Tomeo
- [Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus](#) by Stephen Bullivant

PEACE

Seeking Calm Amidst Anger and Disunity

The vast effects of COVID-19—isolation from family and friends, loss of freedom, economic hardship and unemployment, closed or socially-distanced schools and churches, conflicting opinions and division, and more—have most likely caused all of us to lose our peace on one occasion or another. We might be experiencing anger, fear, anxiety, or a variety of emotions as we navigate through this time. How can we find and maintain peace in the midst all this turmoil and uncertainty? We find our answer in Christ and our relationship with Him. In today's session, we examine the things that rob us of our peace, take an emotional inventory, and discover how the peace of Christ can be our calm amidst the storm.

Gather:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Prayer of Saint Francis

1. On a scale of 1-10, how much are you experiencing peace right now?
2. What are the things that take your peace away?

Watch:

Joe LaRussa shares about finding peace during difficult and uncertain times.



Discuss:

1. What is the predominant emotion you have been experiencing since the pandemic began?
2. Which of the current “hot topic” issues (i.e. mask vs. no mask, varied reactions to racial injustice, upcoming elections) are causing division among the people you care about?
3. How can we practice non-judgmental attitudes around these issues?
4. How do you find the peace of Christ amidst all of this turmoil and uncertainty?



John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

John 16:33

I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.

Philippians 4:7

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

Explore:

1. Which of these Bible verses speaks to you most today? Explain.
2. In what areas of your life are you seeking peace from the world instead of the peace of God? How can you seek that peace from your relationship with Christ instead?
3. When you consider that Jesus commanded us to bring peace to the world, in what areas, places, or relationships do you feel most challenged?
4. Can you recall a time when you experienced peace in a way that "surpassed all understanding?" What were the circumstances?

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Philippians 4:7.
- Make peace with someone where your relationship is fractured.

Prayer:

Based on today's discussion, pray one-by-one for each other to experience Christ's peace. Pray together for any other intentions you would like to add.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about seeking calm:

- John 14:16-31
- Philippians 4:4-9,13
- John 16:25-33
- Galatians 5:13-26
- Ephesians 2:14-22

Songs:

- "[Peace](#)" by Bethel Music featuring We The Kingdom
- "[There is Peace in Christ](#)" by Youth 2018
- "[Peace Be Still](#)" by Hope Darst

Article:

"[Catholic Teaching and Political Life](#)" by USCCB

Handout:

"[Wheel of Emotions](#)" by [Becky Eldredge](#) and [Stephanie Clouatre Davis](#)

FREEDOM

Practicing Detachment to Break Unhealthy Habits

We are confronted with daily struggles and hardships, whether we are in the midst of a pandemic or not. Our human nature tends to avoid discomfort and seek happiness and satisfaction, so when faced with challenging times, we sometimes turn to quick fixes for a pick-me-up. These can be seemingly minor and harmless, or extreme and dangerous. Regardless of how mild or severe we judge them to be, we always need to gauge how much we let our behaviors or attachments control our lives. This week we explore what experiencing real freedom means and how we can seek to direct our actions toward loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving ourselves.

Gather:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

1. What has been your “go-to binge” during these past months?
2. In what areas of your life have you been seeking control?

Watch:

Scott Weeman and Katie Cavallo share about finding freedom by giving up control.



Discuss:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “freedom?” Have you ever thought of freedom in the way that Scott describes it, as being the ability to choose good?
2. What attachments might be limiting your freedom?
3. How are you being called to let go of some unhealthy habits, attachments, compulsive behaviors, or addictions?
4. What actions can you take to let go of control and hand it over to God?

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

1 For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. **13** For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. **14** For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor



as yourself." **15** But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. **16** I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. **18** But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **19** Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, **21** occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control.

Against such there is no law. **24** Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.

Explore:

1. For what does God want us to use our freedom (verse 14)?
2. What benefit comes from living in the Spirit (verses 22 and 23)?
3. What fruit are you feeling most right now? Which fruit could you use more of?
4. In our opening prayer, we prayed, "Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will." How easy or difficult is it for you to pray those words?

*For freedom Christ
set us free; so
stand firm and do
not submit again to
the yoke of
slavery.*

Galatians 5:1

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize Galatians 5:1.
- What action can you take this week to start letting go of one of your attachments? Find an accountability partner and resolve to do it!

Prayer:

Serenity Prayer (short form)

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about freedom:

- 1 Peter 2:16
- Romans 6:12-23
- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
- Psalm 1:1-3
- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Song:

- "[Where the Spirit of the Lord Is](#)" by Life.Choice Worship
- "[Holy Water](#)" by We The Kingdom
- "[Suscipe](#)" sung by Lauren Swain

Book:

[Let Go of Anger and Stress! Be Transformed by the Fruits of the Spirit](#) by Gary Zimak

Prayers:

- "[Litany of Humility](#)"
- "[Suscipe](#)"
- "[Serenity Prayer](#)" (long form)
- "[Morning Offering](#)"

BE LOVE

Becoming Men and Women for Others

We have grown deeper in our connections with each other and our connection to Christ as we have gathered for prayer, reflection, and sharing over the past nine weeks. What are we to do next? Jesus always formed His disciples to be sent on mission. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” He said. Those same words Jesus spoke to the disciples are meant for us, too! How will we know where to go or what to do? The good news is that we are not expected to do it alone. The Holy Spirit lives and moves and breathes in us. The Holy Spirit will guide us to the particular mission and purpose for which we are uniquely called, and the Holy Spirit will equip us to carry it out. Now, let us go out and be men and women for others as we seek to encounter, love, and serve Jesus, one another, and the world—today, tomorrow, and always!

Gather:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for gathering us today and for allowing us to journey together through these difficult times. Open our hearts and minds to receive all that you have for us and to be attentive to the unique ways that you are calling and equipping us to serve you. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

1. In a word or a phrase, describe what you have gained or how you have grown during our time together over the last nine weeks?

Watch:

Deacon Chris Hulburt, and our other guides along our journey, share what it is like to live as beloved children of God, made by love, for love, to go and be love.



Discuss:

1. Over this series, was there a particular topic that really stuck with you? Explain.
2. What do Pope Francis' words, “We are all called to be missionary disciples.” mean to you?
3. Have you ever experienced the freedom of allowing yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than attempting to plan and control everything yourself? If so, how did you feel and what were the results?
4. How has the Holy Spirit enabled you to “be love” in recent months?



John 20:19-22

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. **21** [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Explore:

1. Before Jesus' Passion, Peter denied Him three times. Also, Peter, and most of Jesus' disciples, fled in fear. In light of that, why do you think Jesus' initial post-resurrection greeting was, "Peace be with you"?
2. We have been "locked-in" like the disciples for a while now. How do you think they felt? How did they feel having Jesus come crashing into their locked-in world? How has Jesus come into your locked-in world; what impact has it had on you and others?
3. As we have discussed the difficulties of the last few months, where do you think the Father is sending you now?
4. What will it take for you to get where God is sending you?

Peace be with
you. As the
Father has
sent me, so I
send you.

John 20:21

Weekly Challenge:

Do one or more of the following:

- Reflect on and memorize John 20:21.
- The Spirit chose you for a specific purpose, that only you can do. What might it be? Ask God to clarify it and give you the courage to act on it.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank You for the gift of community, and the love that we have shared as we have journeyed together over the last nine weeks. Embolden us to go out and be love for others as we carry out the particular mission You have for each and every one of us. Amen.

Go Deeper:

Additional Bible passages about living love:

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- Luke 10:25-28
- Matthew 25:34-40
- Romans 15:1-6
- Micah 6:8

Songs:

- "[Out of Hiding](#)" by Steffany Gretzinger
- "[Who You Say I Am](#)" by Hillsong

Books:

- [I Heard God Laugh](#) by Matthew Kelly (sneak peek: St. B's will be giving out this book at Christmas!)
- [Rejoice and be Glad \(Gaudete et Exsultate\)](#) by Pope Francis

Prayer:

"[Lord, Here I Am](#)" from [I Heard God Laugh](#) by Matthew Kelly