

A lit candle in a blue ceramic holder. The candle is lit, casting a warm glow. The holder is a light blue color and has a circular opening in the center where the candle sits. The background is dark, making the candle and holder stand out.

SOCIALLY DISTANT

poems, prayers and postures for the isolated

Tim Watson

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INTRODUCTION

Socially Distant is a collection of poems, prayers and postures written and gathered together in the midst of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. I am writing this introduction on the 24th of March 2020 and am acutely aware that the challenges faced by our families and communities may well be intensified in the days to come and that by next week the world might feel very different once again. I offer you this collection of words as an encouragement in the hope that at least some of the words might resonant and encourage you. What follows in the remainder of this introduction is just a quick note about the different sections:

The Poems are there to spark ideas within you, to open up opportunities of exploration, if they are of help - fantastic, if they are not, lay them down.

The Prayers are collected into three sections. The first is daily prayers (morning and evening prayer for our socially distant times). There is also a

section of personal prayers - prayers for yourself and any worries you may have. There is also a section of prayers for others. You may notice that counter intuitively the prayers have been written (deliberately) in the first person singular to give voice and ownership to our isolation. I say counter intuitively for as a liturgist I prefer to write prayers and liturgies for communal experiences - 'We pray', rather than, 'I pray'. If you prefer, or if you are gathered with family in isolation please do adapt the prayers to be 'we' prayers!

The Postures make up the last section of the book. These are physical actions that might enable you to step outside of the hum-drum of your socially distant present and be attentive to the unspoken things that arise when our attention, or indeed our physical movements are articulated with much more intentionality. There are twelve postures and they are intended to aid reflection on different aspects of life in isolation. Put together the Postures make a micro-pilgrimage around your home. I encourage you to

find quiet when exploring these postures, and to dedicate up to five minutes to each of the postures. Some of the postures may encourage you to undertake physical actions that may make you feel foolish - delight in your foolishness before God!

I hope this book is of use to you. If it is, I would love to hear from you. As I type, I can hear seagulls outside my window, the sun is streaming in and one of my daughters is practicing the recorder in the room above me.

Even in the midst of the pandemic, there is beauty to be found.

Blessings.

POEMS

A SOCIALLY DISTANT NIGHT LIKE THIS

I see you in the street
Almost a world away
While our eyes may meet
Our hands will not
For you have your isolation
And I have mine
Barely a road width apart
Orbiting different homes
Flung out by different forces
The neighbourhood torn apart
Our job is to tether it together
And raise a glass from afar

SIMPLE COMMUNION (A LONGING)

To touch a long unheld hand

To be skin on skin

This simple communion

To redress the years of neglect

To harbour such intimate hopes

And see through the eyes of God

Is to witness to the incarnation

Is to experience the fallible and fallen

And be returned uncorrupted

A ROAD YOUR OWN

Your face, marked with tears
Hides the inner strength you bear

Painting a picture

Of what's not there

Instead, eyes turned toward

The oncoming train

Of grief, you take your

Own weight

And walk a road of your own

Down a familiar path to others

But a way your very own

Yours and yours alone

Travail and tears await you

On the walk

The walk towards home

GRIEF

Right now I want
To wake you
Tell you everything's okay
That it will
One day all make sense
But these words
And that interruption
Would only
Could only
Be for my benefit
And so I remain silent
Aware of your every breath

EVERY DAY

Every day

New news batters

And bruises

Posts post truths

Causes clueless Confusions

All nonsense

No sense found

Up feels down

And here we stand

CALLED DEEPER

You call us deeper

Call us nearer

Holding out your hand

Beckoning us on

And we know your invitation

We see what could lie before

And yet back we look

Over weary shoulders, back

To the places we have been

To faces known

People seen

Weary and wary

Unprepared for what

Might lie ahead

Afraid to leave the past

FOUND

glances back and forth
check and check and
check again
there is a truth
to be found
whether in shadows
books or
in the ground
taste and see
look and know
hear and be heard

DAILY PRAYERS

MORNING PRAYER FOR THOSE SOCIALLY DISTANCING OR IN ISOLATION

Opening Prayer

Creator God,

I hold before you the day that lies ahead:

The hours that stretch out before me

I hold before you my heart

Help me to find space for you and the things that uplift

I hold before you my mind

Help me to find both stimulation and rest when they are needed

I hold before you my body

Help me to stay healthy and find a balance of activity in the hours ahead

In the midst of it all, you Lord are present

Amen

Stepping Into Silence

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that you are near

silence is kept

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that you care

silence is kept

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that I can trust in you

silence is kept

Reading

scripture or poetry is read

Prayers for Others

Wonderful God,

I hold before you all those who I would have seen today

Neighbours

Colleagues

Friends

Make yourself known to them

Help me to serve them from a distance

Help me to hope for them from a distance

Help me to love them from a distance

Amen

Closing Prayer

Wonderful God,

You know my every breath

And the beat of my heart

You know my delights

And you know me

Draw near to me this day

Amen

EVENING PRAYER FOR THOSE SOCIALLY DISTANCING OR IN ISOLATION

Opening Prayer

Creator God,

I hold before you the day now past:

The good parts, the boring parts and the times that hurt

I hold before you the thoughts that trouble me:

Thoughts of worry, loneliness and fear

I hold before you the lacks I have experienced:

Lack of companionship, lack of hope, lack of energy

I hold before you the pain I've suffered:

Physical pain, emotional pain, spiritual pain

In the midst of it all, you Lord are present

Amen

Stepping Into Silence

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that you are near

silence is kept

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that you care

silence is kept

In the silence I wait on you Lord, knowing that I can trust in you

silence is kept

Reading

scripture or poetry is read

Prayers for Others

Faithful God,

I pray for:

Those who I love but cannot see

The friends I need but cannot see

The family who need me but who cannot see me

The community I belong to who cannot see me

Those who I love but cannot hear

The friends I need but cannot hear
The family who need me but who cannot hear me
The community I belong to who cannot hear me

Those who I love but cannot hold
The friends I need but cannot hold
The family who need me but who cannot hold me
The community I belong to who cannot hold me

To be seen

To be heard

To be held

These are my lacks Lord

These are my gaps

These are my scarcities Lord

These are my absences

Closing Prayer

Creator God,

I hold before you those who I cannot see

Those who I cannot hear

Those who I cannot hold

Draw near to them

See them

Hear them

Hold them

Let them know something of your presence Lord

And draw near to me

See me

Hear me

Hold me

Let me know something of your presence Lord

Amen.

PERSONAL PRAYERS

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO ARE WORRIED

Loving Lord

I am full of worries

For my family and for myself

For my neighbourhood, town and nation

I am worried for the world

In the midst of trouble

You whispered on the wind to Elijah

Help me to hear your voice afresh

That you might ease my troubled mind

And bring me to a place of rest

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THE SELF

Holy God

I hold myself before you

Bearing my aches and hurts

My fears and temptations

My worries and the wanderings of my mind

Hold me in these uncertain times

Keep me in the days that lie ahead

It is you I need Lord

And it is you I seek

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SLEEP

Merciful God

I am still awake

Still captured by consciousness

Wearied by the worries of the world

Bring me peace Lord

Bring me to sleep

In the midst of a violent storm your son Jesus

Slept on a boat tossed about by the waves

The sleep of one who knows who is in control

Help me Lord to know that confidence and peace

Help me to hold firmly to you

That my eyes might close

And my heart be at rest

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Gentle Healer

You are the bringer of peace

And the healer of hurts

Make yourself known to me

I am struggling in body, mind and spirit

The stresses of this time are taking their toll

And I am waylaid by turmoil

Fear, anxiety, depression, stress

Cloak me in their shadow

And I feel distant from your light

Shine brightly into my heart and life Lord

Walk with me as I take baby steps towards recovery

Stay with me when I cannot go on

Shelter me when the attacks come

Guard my heart from the traps and snares that lay before me

Strengthen me for the journey

And set before me a way forward

That as fellow pilgrims on the way towards Emmaus

We might share and grow together

Accompany me towards the feast

Where with bread, wine and fellowship you will be revealed once more

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WITH DISTANT RELATIVES

Creator God,
Author of eternity
To you galaxies are millimetres
And years are but grains of sand
You hold before you all times and all places
Yet to me these deep concepts
Are beyond my understanding
I feel the distance of relatives and friends
I feel the ache of my concern for them
And I can do nothing about it
They are removed from me
Held at a distance
Socially separated by
Miles and metres and hours and minutes
Give me peace of mind Lord

For the welfare of those I cannot visit

Make yourself known to me

And make yourself known to them

That they might know your peace

And find support and comfort in their local communities

I pray for my peace and theirs

Speak into the void Lord God

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THE VULNERABLE

Faithful God

I am full of worry

And I feel vulnerable

There is so much talk about vulnerable groups

And I count myself among them

Keep me safe Lord

Strengthen my spirit

Uphold me in the times of trial

Empower me for the days ahead

May my vulnerability be a gift

To you Lord

And to those I encounter from afar

That my vulnerability might witness to your power

Amen

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WITH LOVED ONES WHO ARE ILL

Gentle Healer

I hold before you those who are struggling with their health

Those affected by the virus

And those who are affected by the other illnesses found in this world

Gentle healer draw near to those who suffer

(Especially to..... at this time)

Bring your healing and your peace

Set the suffering free from the tyranny of their illnesses

That they might be restored to health

Help them to find peace and rest in the coming days

And fully recover their strength

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WITH LOVED ONES WHO ARE SERIOUSLY ILL

Gentle Healer

I hold before you those who are seriously ill at this time

(I especially hold before you my beloved.....)

Bring your healing Lord

Break through the chains of disease

Sweep away all pain and infection

Set the suffering free from the tyranny of their illnesses

That they might once again delight in life

Give wisdom and strength to those who care for the seriously ill

Give them insight and peace

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO GRIEVE

Eternal God,

I pray for those who are grieving at this time:

Those who are grieving for lost loved ones

Those who are grieving for lost opportunities

Those grieving for lost jobs

Those who are grieving for a loss of normality

I hold these hurts before you

In the knowledge that you are the God of hope, love and light

Pour down your light on those who walk in the darkness of these days

That they might know comfort and peace

Amen

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO MOURN THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

Eternal God,

You are the keeper of eternity and the redeemer of all things

Strengthen your people at this time in the midst of their hurts

Walk with those who are lost in the shadow of death

And make yourself known to those who mourn the death of a loved one

You know all the hurts of this life

Strengthen and envelop those whose lives have been torn apart by death

As a mother tenderly gathers her children

Draw into your presence those who mourn

(I pray especially for the family of..... that they might know your grace)

Walk with your people Lord,

Hold them in the midst of their fear and sadness

Amen

A PRAYER FOR SHOP WORKERS

Loving Lord

I give thanks for those who work in the shops

Serving customers, cleaning stores, stacking shelves

Thank you for the shop workers who face daily abuse

And stress and the threat of illness

Give them patience, help them rest, keep them safe

Thank you for these key workers who model to me a turning of the tables

A different perspective on what it means to be integral

To the smooth running of society

When this is all over

Let me not forget their significance or take them for granted again

Amen

A PRAYER FOR DELIVERY DRIVERS

Holy Lord

I hold before you the drivers still at work

The ones who deliver across the land

Travelling from depot to shop

Depot to homes

Depot to hospital

And again and again and again

I give you thanks for the great service they provide

Keeping people fed, keeping people healthy

We thank you for the risks they take travelling across the land

Preserve them and their families

For they help to hold the fabric of our society together

Amen

A PRAYER FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Holy Lord

I hold before you schools and the great work they do

I thank you for the care and attention shown by schools across the nation

I thank you for the staff, teachers, learning support assistants, bursars, cleaners, head teachers, family support workers, site managers, cooks, lunchtime supervisors, business managers, IT technicians, librarians and all who support children at schools across the nation and indeed the world

I pray in particular for those schools and staff still working at this time, to support the most vulnerable and provide care for the children of key workers

Keep them and their families safe, Lord

Give them energy

Give them rest
Give them patience
And give them hope
Amen

A PRAYER FOR THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

Merciful God

I give thanks for all those at work in the medical profession

Those who staff hospitals

And GP surgeries

And dentists

And hospices

I give you thanks for the skills and gifts you've given

For the amazing surgeons, midwives, nurses, doctors, porters, pharmacists,
cleaning staff, anaesthetists and all those who work tirelessly to safeguard
people and keep them well

I pray for those who feel the stretch at this time

Those working long shifts

Those with little food at home
Those with concerns about their families
Those who have come out of retirement
Those still in training

May these hospitals and dentists and GP surgeries and hospices be signs of
your Kingdom

Witnesses to something greater

Chapels to eternity

Reflections of your glory

Give to those who work in the medical profession encouragement
Help them to know something of the sacramentality of their work
That they might encounter something of the divine in their work

I pray for the safety of these workers

Whose work takes them into dangerous situations
Where discomfort, tiredness and anxiety are in free-flow

These Lord, are angels in our midst
And I praise you for their courage, their bravery and their energy

And Lord
I thank you for the NHS
Preserve and strengthen our health service Lord
Keep it safe from those who would seek to harm it
Amen

A PRAYER FOR RESEARCHERS

God of Wonder

To me Lord

The universe is a mystery

And the realms of science

At times, beyond my understanding

I give you thanks for the insight and wisdom of researchers

For the experience of those at work in this field

Guide them Lord

Give them encouragement when they are discouraged

Give them the creativity to innovate when times are tough

Encourage and enable those working on a vaccine for Covid-19

That their work would be fruitful

And a much needed vaccine found

Amen

A COLLECT FOR KEY WORKERS

Creator God

Thank you for the delivery drivers, shelf-stackers, nurses, teachers, funeral directors, electricians, cleaners, doctors, nursery workers, plumbers, fire-fighters, social workers, anaesthetists, police officers, carers, IT technicians, factory workers, coast guards, refuse collectors, train drivers, dentists, farmers, charity workers, midwives, postal workers, Border Force officers, check-out staff, surgeons, pharmacists, learning support assistants, gas engineers, drainage workers, prison officers, ministers, taxi drivers, journalists, probation officers, bus drivers, benefits assistants and all the other key workers

Thank you for the tireless work they do

To keep people safe, healthy and fed

Thank you for their gifts of patience, care, and expertise

Thank you for these key workers who model a turning of the tables

A different perspective on what it means to be integral to our communities

And to the smooth running of society

When this is all over

Let me not forget their significance

Or take them for granted again

Amen

A PRAYER FOR KINGDOM ATTENTIVENESS

Lord of creation

I thank you for the abundance that surrounds me

Lift my eyes up from my worries

To delight in all that you have made

Help me to see through the fog of fear and worry

To once again notice and experience delight

To hear the singing of birds, the call of foxes, the snuffling of badgers

To smell afresh flowers, food cooking and candles

To see the bright streaks of colour that are flying birds

To see the smile of a friend across the street, even from a distance

To see, hear and experience art, music and poetry

Help me to be attentive

To the gifts before me

But also

Help me to be attentive

To the signs of your kingdom
Help me to notice what might easily be missed
To witness your work in the world
To witness your Kingdom
Inspire me to creative action
To innovate
That I might witness to your work in the world
That I might witness to your Kingdom
Amen

A PRAYER FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

God of justice and of joy

I hold before you my neighbourhood

The people who live in the dwellings around me

I pray for my neighbours

Those I like and those I struggle to like

Keep them safe and strengthen them for the days ahead

Reveal to me ways to serve my neighbourhood in the midst of this crisis

Help engender community spirit among my neighbours

That through this difficulty we might all help to co-create

A resilient neighbourhood

Empowered by love of neighbour and of stranger

Amen

POSTURES

(1) THE WINDOW

Go to a window and look out at the streets / field / forest / water outside

Stretch out your arms wide and hold them there for a time

See all that lies before you remembering that God is present in all the
places you can see

Thank God for your neighbourhood and your neighbours and pray for their
needs

Hold before God, all that you see and whisper to the Almighty, 'your
Kingdom come'

(2) THE SKY

Go out into your garden (if you don't have a garden go to a window with a view of the sky)

Look up at the sky (don't stare at the sun) and hold your hands aloft for a time

As you look up, be attentive to what you see - if birds are in flight - watch them

Focus on the colour of the sky, taking deep breaths imagine becoming enveloped into the sky

Imagine what is above the sky, the vast infinity of space

Acknowledge God's presence across the cosmos

Allow your mind to journey into deep space and deep time

Recognise that God is the instigator of eternity and all things

Hold within you this knowledge

Bring your focus back down from the cosmos to the sky to the street / field
/ forest / water before you and hold deeply to the truth that the God of
eternity knows you intimately

(3) UNDER THE KITCHEN SINK

Go into your kitchen and open the cupboard under your sink

Sit or kneel down in front of the open cupboard

Look at the scene before you

Focus on the pipes, hot and cold water, waste water

Follow the curves of the pipes and imagine where they go, allow your mind to wander, where has the water coming in travelled from? And where does the waste water travel to?

Give thanks for all those involved in the provision of clean water and the processing of waste water

Focus your attention again under your sink

Take in the scene you see before you, look attentively - what do you notice that you haven't seen before?

What patterns or textures can you see?

(4) YOUR BED

Go to your bedroom and sit on your bed

Lie down upon your bed and pay attention to your breathing

Allow your breathing to become slow and deliberate

Breathe in deeply and breathe out deeply

If you feel the urge to close your eyes - do so

Allow yourself to drift off into sleep if the urge takes you

Do not resist - rest

If you don't feel like sleeping, spend some time giving thanks to God for this
place of rest

As you lie in this place your body knows so well, think about your form and
the way your body connects to the bed, your heels on the mattress, your
neck resting on the edge of the pillow, your shoulders released from stress
and tension, at ease against the soft sheets

Give thanks to God for this space and time

(5) THE DINING TABLE

Go to your dining room table / kitchen table, the place where you eat

Sit down in your usual seat before an empty placemat and place your hands on the table either side of the placemat, palms facing upwards

Think about what this place means to you

Remember some of your favourite times at this table, the food you've eaten, the conversations you've had, the drinks you have shared

Give thanks to God for those you have shared the table with

Hold before God those you would like to share the table with once the pandemic is over

Think of your favourite meal, imagine all the food journeys and processes that take place to enable your food to be before you, thank God for those involved with those processes

(6) PHOTOGRAPHS

Go and find a photograph you love

Pick up the photograph and hold it with both hands (if the photograph is on your phone take hold of your phone with both hands and find the picture)

Take a look at the picture, what is it you love about this picture?

What does this picture mean to you and why is it so significant?

If you were there when the photograph was taken think about how you felt at the time

Take time to look closely at the photograph, is there anything you notice now that you haven't noticed before? If so, what have you noticed?

(7) THE TELEVISION

Go to the room where your television is

Sit down where you usually do to watch television and take hold of the remote (wipe it down first)

Look towards the television while holding the remote, imagine turning on the television and flicking through the channels

Think about what you normally watch, news, sports, box sets, ask yourself why you watch what you watch

What is it you enjoy about your favourite films and programmes?

What might you gain from them as you think about your situation now?

Stare at the turned off television screen, imagine the flood of sound and images pouring out of the television, what strikes you about all the information that comes from your television?

Thank God for the technology that provides information and entertainment

(8) THE FRONT DOOR

Go to your front door

Stand in front of your door, as if you are about to open it, reach out your hand towards the door handle or lock, but don't touch it

Pause for a moment and think about the significance of this place

This threshold might be a liminal space, taking you from the inside to the outside, or from your property to a communal entrance hall

Think about your feelings towards what is on this side of the door compared to what is on the other side of the door, how do you feel?

What did you think the first time you crossed the threshold of this home?

Think about the last few people to come in and out of the door, pray for
them

Think about any significant moments that have taken place at the door, are
there any memories that stand out?

Thank God for your home, for the safety of this place

Pray for all that lies beyond the door

(9) A TOILET ROLL

Go to your bathroom

Pick up and hold a toilet roll in both hands

Reflect for a moment on the comedy of this situation

Take a moment to think about the significance of this toilet roll given the news of the last few weeks

Think about the process of getting hold of this toilet roll

Reflect on the processes involved in the production of the toilet roll

Recollect the news footage - or scenes you witnessed firsthand - relating to the scramble to get toilet roll, what does this tell you about what is happening at the moment?

Think about the difference between the scarcity mentality of hoarding and the abundance mentality of buying just enough, what are your thoughts about this given the present situation? How do those thoughts compare to your thoughts before the pandemic?

Take a moment to thank God for the commodities you have in your possession

Pray for those who do not have enough

(10) A BOOK OR FILM

Go to where you store books, DVD's or vinyl, etc

Take in your hands a favourite book, movie or album. Turn to a favourite page, or hold the movie or music disc in your hands

Take a moment to reflect on why you chose this object

Pay attention to the physicality and form of the object, pay attention to its weight, its finish, its smell

Think about the non-physical significance of this object, what emotional attachment do you have to what it signifies?

What memories does this object bring to mind?

(11) THE FOOD CUPBOARD

Go to a food cupboard in your kitchen

Open the cupboard door, place one hand on a cupboard shelf and keep your other hand on the cupboard door (wipe them down first)

Look at the contents of your kitchen cupboard, do you think you have enough food? Are you worried about getting access to more food?

Spend some time reflecting on your feelings about the process of getting more food, does it make you anxious?

Who do you know who might be struggling to access food at this time? How might you support them?

(12) A SHOWER OR BATH

Turn on the shower or begin to run a bath

***Hold your hands under the running water
(making sure not to burn yourself)***

As the water cascades down on to your hand, imagine being able to see a single drop of water journey down from the tap onto your hand and into the bath water, or down from the shower head, into your hand and down the drain, imagine time passing slowly as the drop falls

Step into the shower or bath, let your body relax against the contact of warm water

Imagine your stresses and worries running off you into the bath water or
down the drain

Think of what water means to you...

Water to wash and clean...

Water to drink...

Water to swim and exercise in...

Water to bathe in and relax...

Water to watch at waterfalls and beaches...

Give thanks for life-giving water

Think about what Jesus had to say about water?

Reflect on the story of the woman at the well in John's Gospel, what might
that reading be telling you today?

