

## A Pandemic Survival Kit Sermon Series

### by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 139: 1-14, 23-24 NRSV

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

#### **BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What jumped out at you about the Scripture passage?
2. What do you enjoy about being alone? What's hard about being alone?
3. What do you think of this quote by Richard Rohr: It is easier to belong to a group than it is to belong to God.
4. What's the difference between being alone and being lonely?
5. Social distancing protects you and others from the coronavirus, yet at the same time chronic loneliness is as bad for you as smoking, high blood pressure, or diabetes. How do we balance the two?
6. God doesn't practice social distancing in our relationship with him. As Augustine says, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves." Even when we feel alone, we're never really alone. God is with us. God already knows us intimately, but God wants us to know him on a deeper level through this challenging time. Is this hard to believe for you right now that God longs for our companionship?

7. We can view this extra alone time that we have as either a pit to fall into or a portal to go through. What are some ways that you can deepen your relationship with God through solitude?
8. How does knowing God better help us know ourselves better?
9. Solitude has a way of bringing things to the surface in our lives that we didn't know were there. What have you learned about yourself during this season of shelter?

Let's conclude this discussion on How to Be Alone with this poem/prayer by Leonard Cohen:

*Blessed are you  
who has given each man a shield of loneliness  
so that he cannot forget you.*

*You are the truth of loneliness,  
and only your name addresses it.*

*Strengthen my loneliness  
that I may be healed in your name,  
which is beyond all consolations  
that are uttered on this earth.*

*Only in your name  
can I stand in the rush of time,  
only when this loneliness is yours  
can I lift my sins toward your mercy.*