



Joshua Eckstein

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until day-break.

Genesis 32:24

It has been said that if you cannot stand your own company when alone, you should not impose it on other people! Perhaps this is unfair? Some of us (especially the extroverts) only really get to know ourselves in company with others. However, isolation does have a way of confronting us with some of the things that we try to avoid. We say that our “demons” haunt us in a sleepless night, but sometimes it is God who haunts us in our solitude.

Jacob, fleeing from one set of problems, in the family of his in-laws, is returning to another set of problems back in his own family in Canaan. He is not really alone, he has a large family of his own, with many maids and servants. Despite this, as home gets closer so does the reality of the family conflict that he has avoided for so long, and so does the weight of the burden that he alone carries. In the solitude of a sleepless night he finds himself wrestling with a man who will not disclose his name. Given his fears, we might conclude this man represented Jacob’s demons, but Jacob comes to a very different conclusion. “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (verse 30). Judging by Jacob’s experience, seeing God may sometimes be a real struggle, but it is nonetheless a blessing. In the light of the following day, Jacob is reconciled with his brother.

We may not want solitude, but sometimes life forces it upon us. It is easy to focus on the loss of companionship and loss of opportunities that isolation brings. Sometimes, however, what we really fear are the reminders of the things that companionship and activity usually help us to avoid. Scary though these things may be, God may well be in our midst, waiting to bless us.

A “Have a Go” habit: Praying in solitude

- Make a list of all the good things – and people – that you miss when you are on your own. Give thanks to God for all the opportunities that life has afforded to enjoy these things, and for all the people through whom he has blessed you.
- Digging up our deepest fears may not be a good idea when we are on our own and have no one to turn to. However, if they come your way, avoiding them may also not be a good idea. Simple prayers can become a means of finding God as we wrestle with these fears. For example, the Lord’s Prayer or the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner), can be said over and over again. Lighting a candle can also be a helpful prayer, asking God to bless us as we struggle in the dark. If the struggle is hard, then do reach out to others for help (using the internet or telephone if you are in strict isolation).



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The *#FaithAndMentalHealth* reflections were written by Rev Prof Chris Cook. Ruth Rice developed the "Have a go" habits.

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