



Envisioning the Church:

Who am I?

Bible studies and activities to help
us think about our identity



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Who am I?

Introduction

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”

A lot of the challenges we face in our communities are associated with how people see themselves. Low self-esteem or low self-worth are often associated with addictive and destructive behaviours.

A lack of confidence in oneself can lead to isolation and loneliness.

How to use the material

We would recommend that church members embarking on the 'Stories on the Street' journey, spend some time beforehand engaging with the Bible studies and activities in this section on Identity. You could possibly have a retreat or an away day focusing on identity before starting the six modules in 'Stories on the Street'.

We have chosen Bible studies that bring out aspects of our identity as children of God. There are also activities, either introductory or reflective worship activities that will help the learning go deeper.

You could do all these Bible studies or just choose one or two along with some of the activities. Please feel free to mix and match according to what you feel would work best for your group or your church.



Introductory Activity: What do I value most?

This is a get-to-know-you game, during which you will have an opportunity to discuss with others the values and characteristics that make up your identity and how you prioritise them in your life.

The activity works best in even numbers, as pairing is required. To begin, divide your group in half and create two concentric circles (one inner circle and one outer circle). The people in the outer circle should face inside, and the people in the inner circle should face outside. Each inner circle person will pair up with an outer circle person sitting down.



Materials

Every participant needs 5 or 10 pieces of paper and a pen, depending on the time available.

Method

Hand out paper and pens to each participant. Ask the participants to think about their values and what makes up their identity. Instruct them to write one value on each piece of paper. They should have written down 5/10 values/characteristics in total. Some examples of categories that can be useful for identifying values/characteristics:

- Race (e.g. Hispanic, Asian, Black, Caucasian, etc.)
- Religion (e.g. Muslim, Christian, Athiest, etc.)
- Occupation (e.g. Engineer, Artist, Student, Teacher, Doctor, unemployed, etc.)
- Family (e.g. sister, brother, mother, father, daughter, son, etc.)
- Traits (e.g. athletic, musical, artistic, analytical, creative, funny, etc.)
- Activities (e.g. sports, cooking, comic books, making movies, etc.)
- Health (e.g. healthy, immobile, mobile, depressed, diabetic, etc.)
- Socio-economic (e.g. wealthy, middle-class, financially struggling, etc.)

Once everyone has written down their values and characteristics, have the participants share with their first partner why they chose the words they did. After sharing for a minute or so, ask all participants to rip up one of their values/characteristics – the one that is least important to them. This part of the activity gives participants an opportunity to reflect on how they prioritise the things that make up their identity. Ripping up the value or characteristic should help the participant imagine living without that part of their identity. After the participants rip up one piece of paper, the outer circle will rotate one partner to the right. Everyone should have a new partner now. Have the new pairs discuss why they ripped up the particular piece of paper.

Optional quicker activity:

Have each person create a list of 5/10 values/ characteristics, and then order them from most important to least important.

Ask each person to share these parts of their identity in pairs or threes to start with and explain why these things are so important to them.

After 5 to 10 minutes of sharing, ask for some feedback to the big group from anyone who wants to share any insights having done this exercise.

"Your identity is not about who you are in appearance, or power, or abilities, or status, it's simply about God setting His love on you and making you a part of His family."

Glenn C. Stewart

MY IDENTITY IS
BEING A MUM,
PLAYING FOOTBALL, TEACHER,
CHRISTIAN, PORTUGUESE ... WHAT'S YOURS?



Made in the image of God

Bible passage

Genesis 1: 26-31

Purpose

To explore our identity as made in the image of God and how we feel about ourselves and our relationship to God



Method

Read the passage aloud to the group.

Discussion

What things shape and influence who you are and your outlook on life?

Questions

- What does it mean to be made in the image of God? (verse 26, 27)
- What implications does this have for how we feel about our identity in regard to who we are and who we belong to?
- What difference does this make to how we behave and feel about our purpose in life?
- How does this influence how we feel about people who are different from us either because of their belief, race, gender etc?
- How would your community engagement change if you related to people as persons made in God's image and if you prioritised building community?

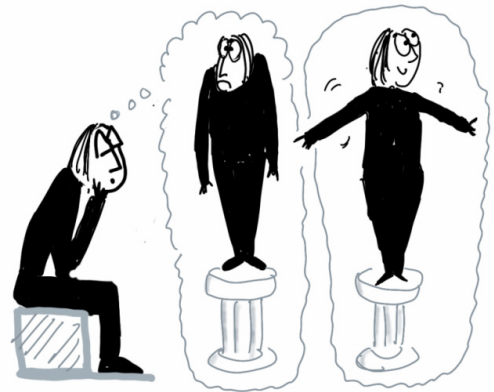
Fearfully and wonderfully made

Introductory activity:

The Statue of Meditation (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139)

'Mind games: meeting God through experience and feeling'

By Simon Hall, Scripture Union



Method

Get everyone to make themselves comfortable and explain what you're about to do. If you expect feedback afterwards, people need to know in advance. Say something like this:

'Imagine you are in a large room. In the middle is a statue covered in a large cloth, ready to be unveiled. You go to look at the statue and discover that your name is on its base: it's a statue of you. How does that make you feel? *(pause for few minutes)* The cloth is now being taken off. Take a good look at your statue. What do you notice? What do you like? What do you not like? *(pause)* Now imagine that you are your statue. How does that feel? *(pause)* Now you notice that Jesus has come into the room. What does he look like? How does he look at you? *(pause)* Now Jesus comes right up to you. You speak to him. What do you say? What does he say back? Carry on the conversation for as long as it takes. *(pause)* Jesus then goes away and you are outside the statue again. Look at it again. Do you feel any different about the statue now? *(pause)* Say good-bye to your statue and return to where you are sitting here and now.'

Give time for people to talk: this fantasy touches on issues of self-image and self-worth and can therefore bring out significant issues, so be sensitive.

Fearfully and wonderfully made

Bible passage

Psalm 139: 1-18, 23-24

Purpose

To explore our relationship with God our creator

Method

Read the passage aloud or show the film of Psalm 139

After the film, ask the questions:

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- How do you feel?

Ask your group/s to read the passage for themselves and answer the following questions

- Which verse/s speak to you?
- What do we learn from these words about God and about ourselves?

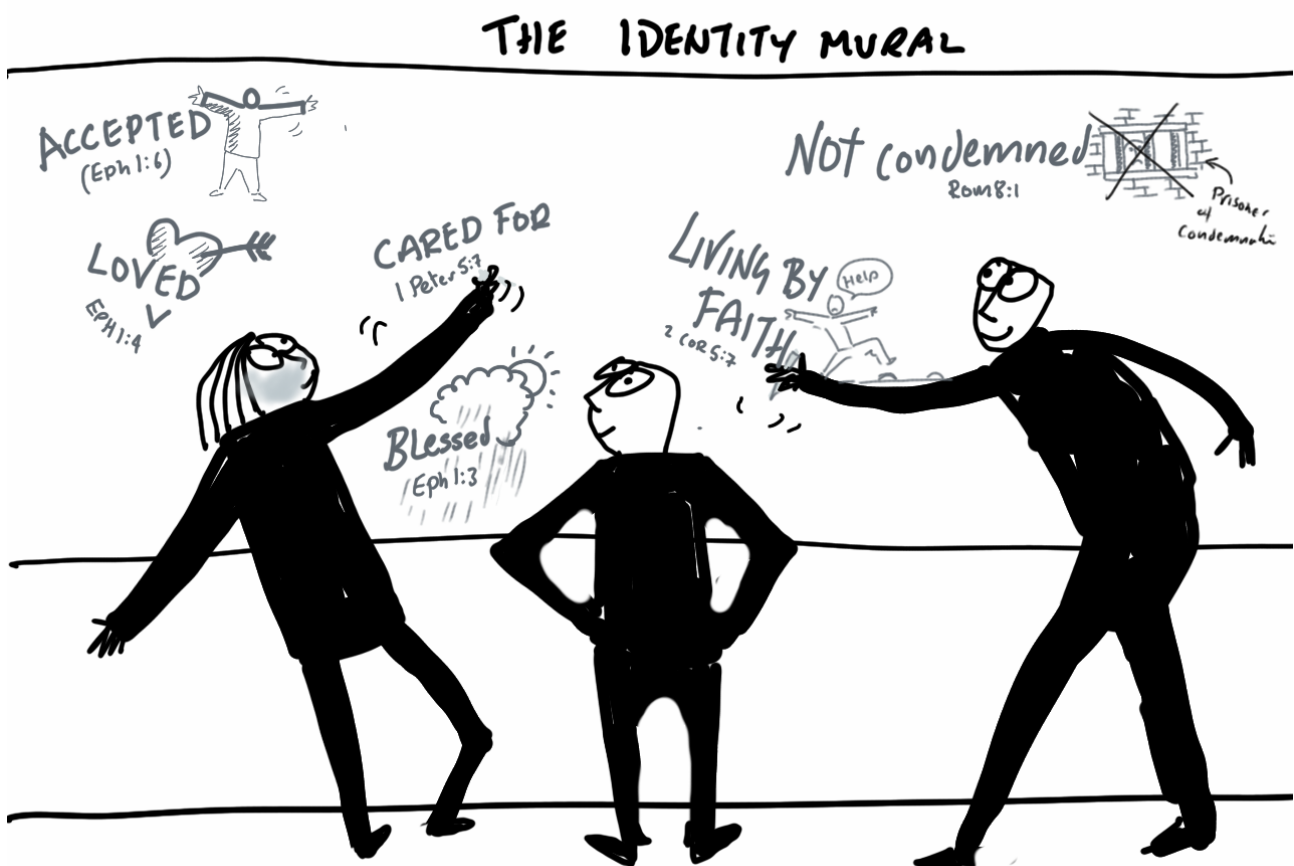
Facilitator notes

- God knows everything about us
- God knows our hearts, actions, words, destiny
- God is with us all the time



Identity Mural

This is a good activity to do after the Genesis or Psalm 139 Bible studies. All ages can benefit but we have found it to be especially suitable for young people.



Method

Take a piece of lining paper with the following Bible references (only the references) scattered across the mural. Make sure everyone has a pen and a Bible and then ask your group to discover what the Bible says about our identity as Christians. They can write words down next to the verses of what they think they mean to them/buzz words from the verses.

These are the verses to write on the lining paper in a random fashion. The words in italics are examples of what people may write next to the verse.

- *Accepted*, Ephesians 1: 6
- *Loved*, Ephesians 1: 4
- *Adopted*, Ephesians 1: 5, 6
- *Forgiven*, Ephesians 1: 7
- *A child of God*, Romans 8: 16
- *A friend of Jesus*, John 15: 14
- *Saved by grace*, Ephesians 2: 8
- *Chosen*, John 15: 16
- *Complete*, Colossians 2: 10
- *Redeemed*, Galatians 3: 13
- *Rescued*, Colossians 1: 13
- *Cared for*, 1 Peter 5: 7
- *Blessed*, Ephesians 1: 3
- *Healed*, 1 Peter 2: 24
- *Eternal*, 1 John 5: 11, 12
- *A new person*, 2 Corinthians 5: 17
- *A masterpiece*, Ephesians 2: 10
- *An heir*, Romans 8: 17
- *A temple*, 1 Peter 2: 5
- *An example*, Ephesians 5: 1
- *Declared not guilty*, Romans 3:24
- *Not condemned*, Romans 8: 1
- *Made right with God*, 2 Corinthians 5: 21
- *Led by the Spirit*, Romans 8:14
- *Living by faith*, 2 Corinthians 5: 7
- *Being transformed*, Romans 12:1, 2
- *Not afraid*, 2 Timothy 1: 7
- *Strong in the Lord*, Ephesians 6:10
- *Victorious*, Romans 8: 37
- *An overcomer*, 1 John 4: 4
- *A co-worker with God*, 1 Corinthians 3: 9
- *A workman*, Philippians 2: 13
- *One in Christ with other believers*, Galatians 3: 28

Encourage discussion while the mural is being created. Also artistic members of the group could illustrate some of the words being written down. Ask how certain things they discover make them feel about themselves and God. Play some music in the background if possible.

Once the mural is complete remind the group that due to their relationship with God, every one of these statements is true for them. Ask each group member for one thing they are taking away, having looked at these verses. The more we are confident in our identity, the more God's fruit will show in our lives.

Loved unconditionally

Bible passage

Luke 15: 11-32 (The prodigal son)

Purpose

To show the unconditional love and grace of God

Method

Read the passage from the Bible

Or

Show the film of the prodigal son

After the reading or the film, you could ask three people to read or perform the sketch on the following page, based on the story of the prodigal son.

Following this, ask for some reflection or insights from the film or from the sketch and then ask the following questions:

Questions

- What characteristics of God do we see in this parable?
- The son left to go to a far country: Have you ever experienced the "far country"? What was it like and how did you escape it?
- Why do you think the younger son tried to work himself out of his dilemma instead of returning to his father?
- How do we respond to personal crises? What are the barriers preventing us from reaching out to God?
- Compare/contrast the younger son's attitude the day he left for the far country and the day he came to his senses.
- How does shame undermine a sense of who we are?
- Make a list of the actions taken by the father in verse 20. If you believe the father in the story might represent God the Father, explain how each action listed is like our Heavenly Father.



Sketch: The Prodigal Son

Scene:

Three servants are clearing up after the party the night before.

Characters:

Servants 1, 2 and 3

1. Thanks for showing up.
2. Don't speak so loudly please.
1. A bit the worse for wear are we?
2. Yes – you could say that – where do we keep the paracetamol?
3. There you go. (hands him a paracetamol)
2. Cheers – great party though! The best we've had here, that's for sure!
1. Yep – we don't usually get invited to the master's dos – he was inviting everyone! I've never seen him so happy!
3. Yes, bless him – he was so happy to have the young master home again.
1. I don't know why, after the way he's been treated! That good for nothing was basically saying he couldn't wait for the old man to die before he inherited his share of the estate – must have broken the old man's heart.
3. It nearly did! He never gave up hope though did he? I don't know how many times I saw him out there on the balcony over the last 12 months, looking down the road, in all weathers too. I had to coax him in several times – thought he was going to catch his death of cold.
2. Yeah, so many times I just wanted to say to him, "you're wasting your time – he's never coming back". But I was wrong.
3. I know! Unbelievable! I was on my way back from town. I'd picked up the dry cleaning and few other bits and was just getting to the door when the old man came racing out - nearly knocked me over and started charging down the drive! I have never seen him move that fast!

2. I was putting in some fencing in the lower field, and I just looked up at the house and saw him running; and then I saw why – the young master was limping up the drive.
3. What a state he was in! I thought I'd better follow the old man, in case he had a heart attack or something. And then I saw this pathetic figure dragging himself up the road. He was only half dressed, painfully thin, and as I got closer - the smell! Phaw! It was pretty strong.
2. The master didn't seem to mind though.
3. No way - he threw his arms round him didn't he? The young master was mumbling something into his shoulder - couldn't catch most of it. Thought I heard him say something about being unworthy.
1. That's an understatement!
2. Don't think the master was listening though - he was shouting at us all to get the best clothes and kill the fattened calf and have a banquet, that evening! Three hours to organise a massive party – it just about killed us!
3. His brother wasn't too pleased though was he? Didn't even go to the party!
1. Well I don't blame him! He had been working hard all day in the fields – the party had started before he even finished work!
2. He asked me what was going on – so I told him! Boy if looks could kill.
3. There's no love lost between those two.
1. Yeah but can you blame him? - he's been slaving away for his dad – always worked hard that one.
2. You've always had a soft spot for him. Can't think why - he never smiles. Miserable soul.
1. Well – I don't think he ever got over losing his mother.
2. Rubbish! He's just miserable, always was as a child. Anyway, what's he worried about? He's still got his inheritance . The young master has wasted his – the whole lots gone!
1. Yes, on women and gambling I heard! I don't know why the old man is giving him the VIP treatment - he should be teaching him a lesson.

3. That doesn't seem to be his way – he just loves that boy.
1. More than his brother it would seem – which is ridiculous, after all the pain he's caused
3. No, I don't think so – he loves them both the same I'm sure. The master pleaded with him for ages to come into the party. But he refused which really upset the old man.
2. Yeah - He's not speaking to the master at the moment.
1. Well its early days - I expect he'll come round.
3. Maybe, anyway - look at all this mess! We need to get it all cleared up before tonight – the master's entertaining again.
2. Oh no! Really? Who is it this time?
3. A Samaritan would you believe! It's been in the papers! Apparently he took care of a Jewish man who had been beaten up on the road. The master wants to show him some hospitality because of the way he has helped one of our own. So – back to work everyone!

You are not alone

Introductory activity: River of Life

Brief Description

'River of life' is a visual narrative method that helps people to think about what and who has shaped their lives and who they are. A group can use it to understand and reflect on the past and imagine the future; and it can be used to build a shared view compiled of different and perhaps differing perspectives.

River of Life focuses on drawing rather than text, which makes it accessible to everyone, regardless of educational background. When used in a group, it is an active method, good for engaging people. So this tool can be used here in the Identity section for personal reflection, but can also be used by church groups as an alternative to the timeline activity in the Vision module of 'Stories on the Street'.

Individual reflection

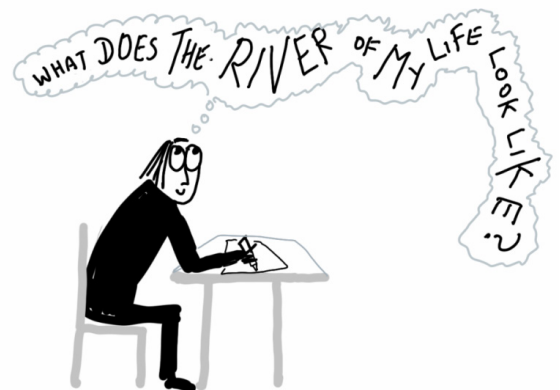
Introduce the method if participants are not yet familiar with it. You could draw an example river to help people visualise what it might look like. Explain that all rivers have different elements to them. There are tributaries that join the river which can reflect the things or the people who have influenced their lives.

The different parts of the river can represent different stages of our lives. For example, rapids can represent challenges and difficult periods, and still water can represent the calmer stages of life or a period of uncertainty or stagnation. The broad river where it flows could represent good and fruitful phases of our lives.

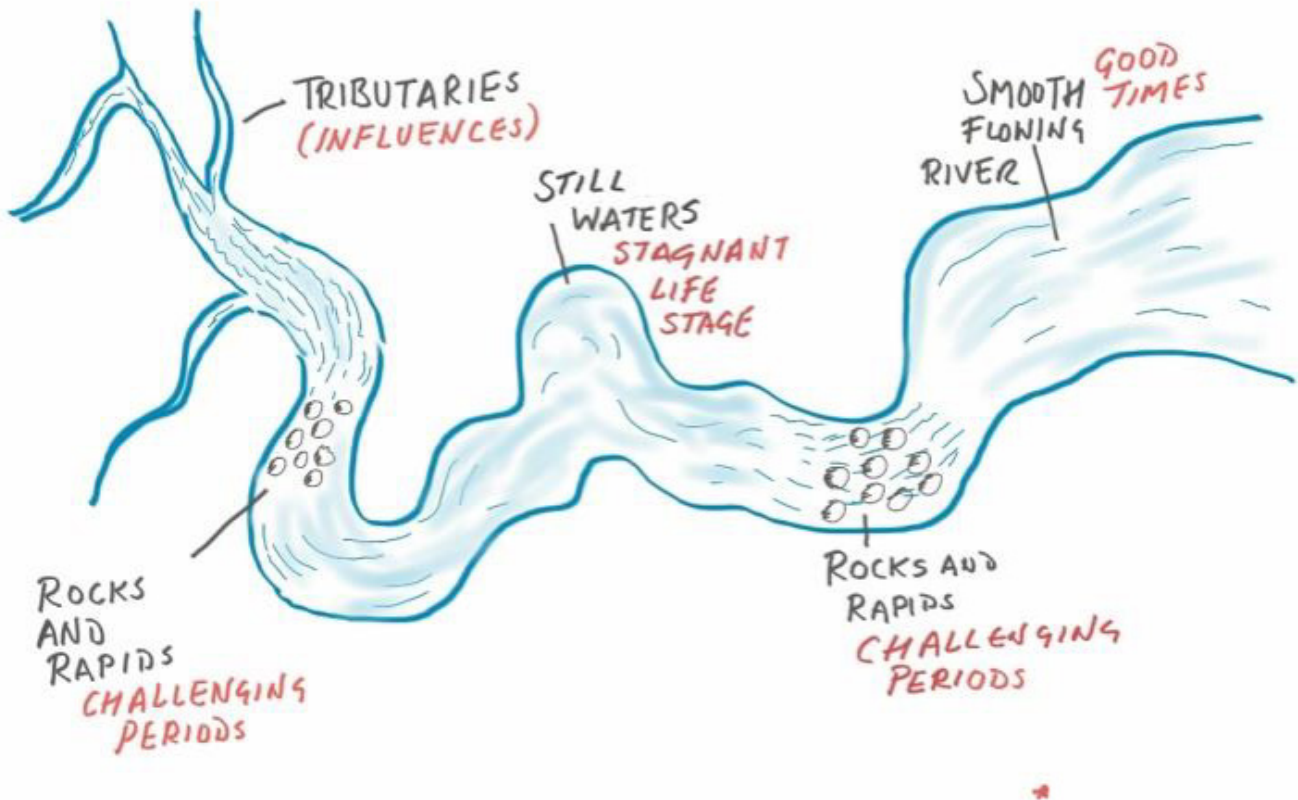
Invite the participants to draw their own rivers and mark on the different stages of their lives represented by the different elements of the river described above.

In pairs, individuals share their respective rivers and discuss the implications of changes they have gone through at different stages of their lives.

There should then be a plenary session where either individuals share their rivers, or if the group is too big, opt for a general discussion on insights about how change happens.



River of Life Example



Tips and Lessons Learned

- Be mindful that when people share back their images there may be certain parts of their story which may be particularly emotional so be prepared to support them through their presentation if necessary.
- Some people are not confident in drawing so it may be appropriate to give them a template drawn by a confident artist that they can use to fill in the details of their journey.
- If you want to add an extra element to this approach you can encourage participants to produce a collage.
- Alternative you can make a physical river, using blue material, tissue paper, sand, stones, wood etc.

As a church group

The river of life can be used as a group exercise to describe the journey of the church over a number of years (similar to the Timeline) or maybe the life of a church and community project.

You are not alone

Bible passage

Luke 24: 13-35 (The road to Emmaus)

Purpose

To reflect on how God's presence with us on our journey of life has shaped our identity

Method

This reflection is written slightly differently to the others. Read the following introduction and then the whole passage and then we will concentrate on some key verses. Refer back to your river of life as you think about the answers to the questions.

Introduction

Ever since we have become Christians we have been on a journey which has been shaped by challenges and opportunities and encounters with others. The road to Emmaus is a wonderful story of two disciples reflecting on their experience of knowing Jesus and encountering him at a time of confusion and uncertainty. When Jesus broke bread in front of them, he revealed himself and it became a transformational opportunity for the two disciples. In this section we want to encourage you to reflect on your own journey, using key verses from this story.

Read Luke 24: 13-35

Walking together

Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

Vs 13

Reflection

Spend some time reflecting on your own spiritual journey with the Lord.

- When did the relationship start?
- What have been the high and low points?



Talking together

“As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognising them... And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in the scriptures concerning himself.”

Vs 15 and 27



Reflection

- Thinking about your spiritual journey and reflecting on your river of life, have there been times when you have been unaware of the presence of God?
- What or who has kept you going in these times?
- Make a list of the people who have shared your journey with you.
- How have they influenced you?
- Take some time to thank God for them.
- Have there been scriptures that have been particularly significant for you at these times? Write these down as an encouragement for the challenges ahead.

Eating together

“When he was at table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him.”

Vs 30- 31



Look back again at the times when you were unaware of God's presence. Who or what helped you to recognise that he was with you all the time?

Can you think of a time or times when God has brought good out of the challenging situations in your life?

What have you learned from this/these experiences?

Acting together

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem

Vs 32-33



Reflection

- When you think of your calling to the work you are doing now, what are the steps that led to that?
- Have you felt your heart "burning within you" at Jesus' call?
- What aspects of our broken and suffering world cause you most pain and give you a burning passion to address them?

"God, Who is everywhere, never leaves us. Yet He seems sometimes to be present, sometimes to be absent. If we do not know Him well, we do not realise that He may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present."

Thomas Merton, No Man Is an Island