



Technology has given us some incredible things. You can now Facetime with Grandma and send mail electronically that will get to its destination in a matter of milliseconds rather than days. But no matter what devices we employ, or commodity we consume, some things you just can't phone in. Bodies sharing life together is what presence truly means. And it's why He came.

These questions are intended to deepen your experience of the message. Use them for your personal or family study time, or with an open Bible as you share the good news with your neighbor.

Group Introduction: "Describe your favorite experience with someone you love." After sharing, ask how many of those stories took place in person. Why do you think that is?

Helpful Resource:

J. B. Phillips, "The Visited Planet."
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53212406e4b09d85eb0bcdb9/t/5675d89d05f8e2dd006ef90c/1450563741944/The+Visited+Planet.pdf>

THE TROUBLE WITH BEING "WITH."

Reflect on what it means to be "present." Do you find technology enhances or takes away from being fully present? Mukesh Gupta says we are hard wired (for survival) to live in the past and the future. Do you find it hard to be fully present? Discuss the challenge.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE.

Read **Matthew 18:20 & Matthew 26:29**. Think of a moment when you would most want a real, live person with you (maybe at the hospital, for example). Why is presence and physical touch so powerful? Follow up: Why do you think God wanted churches to "assemble" and to share life and food together? How does this speak to the power of presence?

PLAN A: FULLY PRESENT.

Read **Genesis 2:1-3:8**. What do you notice about God and humans are described? Circle key words that speak of real presence and shared experiences. God's Plan A was to live together, walk together, and be "with" his people. Discuss the significance of that.

PLAN B: PRESENT IN PART.

Read **Genesis 3:8**. Sin leads to hiding from the "presence" of the Lord. Why is that significant? Follow up: Read **1 Chron 22:17-19; Zephaniah 3:14-15**. God was present with his people through mediators (ark of the covenant; priests; prophets; etc.). How does this speak well of God, but also speak to our longing for more?

RETURN TO PLAN A: THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

Read **Zephaniah 3:14-17**. The word translated "in your midst" is *qereb*. While a general word for "among, with, or within", it points to the womb of Rebecca in **Gen 25:22**. Read this Zephaniah passage slowly, then compare the stories in **Luke 1** and **Matthew 1** with the language used here. Do you see God restoring Plan A?

IMMANUEL: GOD WITH US.

Read through the genealogy of **Matthew 1** and when you get to a person with a hard story, say "God is with you." Then look at each person in the room, let them tell their story, then say "God is with you." Believe it!