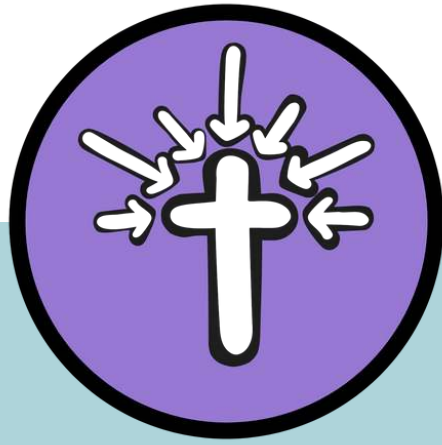


NETWORK CHURCH SHEFFIELD



**MULTIPLYING HEALTHY DISCIPLES
TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES**

COMMUNITY BIBLE STUDY

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SESSION 1: HEALTHY DISCIPLES

READ:

Our vision for this year is to multiply healthy disciples and to transform communities.

These Bible studies are designed to help us achieve this.

They are based on two premises (ideas). The first is that wherever there are healthy disciples, communities will be transformed. After all, the Lord has told us that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world!

The second is that healthy disciples will naturally multiply. The parable of the sower and the seed makes this very clear.

So, the key to success is for us to become healthier disciples. As we do, we will multiply and we will see communities transformed.

This is what makes Christianity different from much of the world around us: people generally look for better methods, but God always looks for better people*.

*The author first came across the phrase 'Men seek better methods, but God seeks better men' in the writings of Samuel Chadwick, an early C20 Principal at Cliff College, a Methodist lay training college.



SESSION 1: HEALTHY DISCIPLES

There's one other premise we need to take note of before we begin: Individual Christianity is almost unknown in the New Testament.

Everything we do, we do together as part of the body of Christ. This includes Bible study. It's good to read the Bible every day and this may mean reading it by ourselves, but we should bring what we have learnt to our brothers and sisters and share it with them. It may well be a great blessing to them just when they need it. They may also help us to see where we haven't got things quite right – none of us have a monopoly on the truth! We need one another's insights if we are going to become healthy disciples.



STARTING POINT:

If you aim at nothing, you'll probably hit it!

How do we know what we are aiming for?

What does a healthy disciple look like?

It's a curious fact that after the Book of Acts, the term 'disciple' doesn't appear in the New Testament. However, the *qualities* of a disciple are to be found on almost every page. This is a central theme of the New Testament; the most important way for followers of Jesus to identify themselves is by their character and behaviour.

Discussion: *So, each member of the group should make a list of ten qualities they would expect to see in a healthy disciple.*

Now compare your list with others in your group.



What are the main similarities and differences? Why do you think this is? Finally, as a group, try to agree on one list of the five most important qualities of a healthy disciple. Even if you can't, keep your list safe, we will come back to it later.

Challenge:

If you're feeling really brave, you can even try to agree on a top three or rank the qualities in order of importance!

For the next session:

If you had to recommend one book from the Bible that helped people to become healthy disciples,

- which book would you choose?
- why would you choose it?
- if you had to choose one verse or (short) passage to sum up the message of the book, what would it be?



SESSION 2: THE VALUE OF LETTERS

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

If you had to recommend one book from the Bible that helped people to become healthy disciples,

- which book would you choose?
- why would you choose it?
- if you had to choose one verse or (short) passage to sum up the message of the book, what would it be?



***‘SPEND A POUND ON THE HOLE,
AND A PENNY ON THE PLANT’***

READ

This old gardening saying also holds fast for Bible study. To help us multiply into healthy disciples, we are going to spend our time looking at one particular New Testament book: 1 Peter, but, of course, the previous exercise shows quite clearly that it's not the only place we can look for guidance. In fact, it is essential that we don't confine all our understanding to one book or theme; we need 'the full counsel of God' if we are going to multiply healthy disciples.

Nevertheless, detailed study of individual books is very important and for this series we are going to concentrate on 1 Peter. However, before we do, we need to do some background study. We need to spend a pound on the hole!

WHY LETTERS?

There are at least five letter writers in the New Testament.

Discussion: Can you remember them all and why might there be six?

Have you ever considered why God chose letters and not some other form of document as a way of communicating His truth to His children?



READ:

Letters, particularly between private individuals, were far from common in the first century. They were a very costly and time consuming way of communicating and most were official documents. Letters the length of those included in the New Testament were almost unheard of elsewhere.

Letters were normally written on scrolls (often by a scribe rather than the actual author, who would dictate the letter) and were always delivered by hand to their intended recipient(s). This why the writer's name comes first, so that when the scroll was unrolled the reader(s) could see whose message they were reading.

After the writer's name would come the name and title of the person to whom the letter was sent, accompanied by a list of their titles, honours and achievements.

This presented an interesting dilemma for the New Testament letter writers: the vast majority of first century Christians came from very humble backgrounds and so did not have titles or occupy official positions (many of them were slaves). So, the writers had to choose how to address them.

This produced some of the most wonderful descriptions of God's people in the entire New Testament.

Discussion: Look at Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 2 Peter 1:1, and Jude 1:1.

What do each of these ways of addressing God's people teach us about who we are?

Finally, look at 1 Peter 1:1 and 2.

What can we learn from Peter's greeting about who we are as Christians?

What challenges are there in it?

For the next session:

Many of the New Testament letters were written because the writers were unable to visit the recipients in person. Paul, in particular, often expressed extreme frustration at being prevented from doing so. Letters, then, were often seen as a (poor) 'second best' for actually re-visiting churches, particularly those where the writers had close relationships with church members. Yet, out of this, the New Testament letter writers have unknowingly blessed countless Christians throughout the ages with their teaching and instruction.

We will not know the true value of any of our decisions and actions until we stand before our Father in heaven, but can you already think of any examples where you have felt frustrated at not being able to do the thing you intended to do, but in the long run it resulted in greater blessing and glory to God?



SESSION 3: PETER AND PAUL

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Many of the New Testament letters were written because the writers were unable to visit the recipients in person. Paul, in particular, often expressed extreme frustration at being prevented from doing so. Letters, then, were often seen as a (poor) 'second best' for actually re-visiting churches, particularly those where the writers had close relationships with church members. Yet, out of this, the New Testament letter writers have unknowingly blessed countless Christians throughout the ages with their teaching and instruction.

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PAUL'S ROLE IN PETER'S LETTERS!

Discussion: Look together at Acts 16:7.

Can you see any connection between this and Peter's letters? (1 Peter 1:1 will help.)

READ:

Paul had already established himself as the leading Christian missionary outside of 'Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria'. His own experiences, training and calling (Acts Ch 9 v15) made him the perfect candidate to take the Gospel into regions identified at the start of Peter's letter (modern day Turkey). Paul was driven by an irresistible desire to take the Good News to new places and so it must have been intensely frustrating for him when the Holy Spirit refused to allow him to enter Bithynia. However, as a result of Paul's obedience, not only did the Gospel cross over into Europe, but the way was also left clear for Peter to minister in these areas, and as a result we have inherited these two wonderful letters.

The Methodist Church's annual covenant service includes the following statement:

*Christ has many services to be done:
some are easy, others are difficult;
some bring honour, others bring reproach;
some are suitable to our natural inclinations and
material interests,
others are contrary to both;
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves;
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying
ourselves.*

*Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in
Christ, who strengthens us.*



It also includes the prayer,

*Let me be employed for You, let me be laid
aside for You.*



Discussion: *What experiences do we have of denying 'natural inclinations and material interests' in the service of Christ? Are you aware of times when you have needed to submit to the Lord's 'laying you aside'. Think about yourself as an individual, your family, your community and your place in the Church.*

Some of these experiences might involve changes to our day to day routines, such as rising earlier to pray, periods of fasting, or financial giving beyond our means. Some may appear to be of greater significance, such as giving up long held dreams and desires that were very dear to us, or changing where we live, which church/group we attend or changing our occupation.

Groups of believers and Churches are also be called to obedience in these things. What examples of this have you been part of?



Reflecting on the things we were called to sacrifice in the Lord's service has been described as returning to our own private burial gardens. The Lord will sometimes allow us to walk quietly amongst the headstones, acknowledging the things we have given up. What is written on the headstones in your graveyard?

For the next session:

Peter probably wrote his first letter in the years 60- 63 AD. By then he was probably living in Rome. Paul had also been living in Rome, but he may well have left again, at least for a short time, to preach the Gospel in Spain. Either way, Paul was soon to be executed as part of the emperor Nero's sustained persecution of Christians. So, Paul probably never learnt about the short term impact of his obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading. He certainly never knew about the impact of Peter's letters on subsequent generations, including our own!

Nevertheless, one day he will! How do we discipline ourselves and help one another to take a heavenly perspective on the sacrifices we make for the Gospel here on earth?



SESSION 4: NOTHING IS WASTED

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Peter probably wrote his first letter in the years 60- 63 AD. By then he was probably living in Rome. Paul had also been living in Rome, but he may well have left again, at least for a short time, to preach the Gospel in Spain. Either way, Paul was soon to be executed as part of the emperor Nero's sustained persecution of Christians. So, Paul probably never learnt about the short term impact of his obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading. He certainly never knew about the impact of Peter's letters on subsequent generations, including our own!

Nevertheless, one day he will! How do we discipline ourselves and help one another to take a heavenly perspective on the sacrifices we make for the Gospel here on earth?



READ

The Writer

We know more about Peter than any of the other disciples. We can read about his experiences following the Lord in the Gospels. We can also read about his leadership of the first Christians in the early chapters of the Acts.

Discussion: It can be very inspiring to trace Peter's teaching in his letters back to his own experiences. For example, can you see a connection between 1 Peter 4:8 and John 18:15-27 and 21: 15-19. Btw, did you notice the two charcoal fires? How often the Lord uses our physical experiences to draw us to the truth!

However, we mustn't get carried away: whilst some of these connections seem obvious, we cannot say for certain that any of Peter's experiences led directly to particular teachings in his letters. Nevertheless, just like Peter, it is undoubtedly the case that the Lord will use our experiences and the lessons we learn from them to help us serve and guide others in the future.

Discussion: Can you think of any examples of this in your own life or the life of your community or church?

READ:

So, Peter is drawing on his own experiences in order to encourage, train and equip his readers. One of his main concerns is that they are not being led astray by false teachers.

These would follow the apostles on their journeys and then seek to 'correct' what the apostles had taught the believers. The apostles' task was made even harder by other letters that were circulating. Some of these were forgeries, sent in the apostles' names but also containing false teaching. Of course, forgeries were very hard to detect. This is why Peter reassures his readers in 1 Peter 5:12 that his letter is genuine. He even makes sure they can recognise the handwriting!

Discussion: These false teachers must have been exceedingly annoying for the apostles and caused them many a sleepless night. Read Romans 8: 28 -31. How can we see these spiritual principles working here?



READ:

So, Peter is concerned that his readers continue to follow the true faith, but he is also concerned about the trials they are now facing and are about to face. He is determined to equip and prepare them for the approaching storm.

By the time Peter was writing, the Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome had probably begun. After the Great Fire of AD 64, it was to become far worse and led to both Paul and Peter's martyrdom. Elsewhere in the Roman Empire, there were no actual laws against Christianity, but persecution was still widespread.

Much of this came from other religious groups, especially orthodox Jews, or those whose personal interests were harmed by the spread of Christianity. Sometimes, this would lead to direct action against Christians, at others, accusers would take their case to the Roman authorities and demand 'justice'. This is, of course, what happened to the Lord Himself. So, being a Christian was already hard and becoming much harder. As most Christians came from the lower orders of society, they could expect little protection from the state. Knowing all this, Peter sets out to teach his readers how to 'stand firm in the faith', and keeping this in mind will help us to better understand the letter, which in turn will help us to become healthier disciples.

New Testament letters, like most ancient documents, were intended to be read out loud (e.g. Acts 8:30). The arrival of a letter from an apostle would create great excitement in a local congregation. Its members would gather together and then the letter would be read out loud in one reading. Thereafter, the details of the letter would be discussed. Letters would also be copied and shared with other congregations and would be written with this in mind.

Discussion: Now read the entire letter out loud together. Taking turns might help. As you read, try to focus on Peter's determination to ensure that his readers keep the true faith in spite of false teaching and increased hardship and persecution.

Having read the letter, which themes stand out as the most important?



For the next session:

Before the next study, take time to read the entire letter again. Read it in one sitting. It will take between ten and fifteen minutes. As you read it, keep in mind Peter's reasons for writing the letter and the situation in which his readers found themselves.

What are the similarities and differences between the readers' experience and ours? If Peter were to write a letter to us, which aspects of our context might he focus on? Which specific instructions in his letter appear most relevant to us?



SESSION 5: HEAVENLY HOPE

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

What are the similarities and differences between Peter's readers' experience and ours? If Peter were to write a letter to us, which aspects of our context might he focus on? Which specific instructions in his letter appear most relevant to us?



The two themes of our 2024/5 vision, multiplying healthy disciples, and transforming communities can both be found throughout Peter's letter. So, let's begin to study it in more detail.

READ

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul instructs his readers to 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly with all wisdom.' For this to happen, both our thinking and our actions should reflect the truth of God's word.

To help his readers achieve this, Peter often (but not always) uses the word 'therefore', which, as has often been said, is there for a reason!

Peter is teaching these early Christians that to become healthy disciples they must not only learn the great truths of their faith but they must also let these truths transform their daily attitudes and actions. Hence, whenever Peter lays down a great spiritual principle, he goes on to explain how this should affect the behaviour of his readers.

Discussion: Look through the letter together. How many 'therefore's can you find? Can you identify the spiritual truth that comes before each one and the subsequent effect it should have on our behaviour? Are there any other sections of the letter where a 'therefore' could easily be included?

READ:

THEREFORE, from Peter's letter it is clear that Christian behaviour must be driven by spiritual truths, whilst learning new spiritual truths should always affect our attitudes and actions. We need both parts if we are going to grow into healthy disciples.

Above all, when discussing the great truths of our faith, Peter's letter encourages his readers to remain hopeful. However, he also reminds them that this hope is a 'heavenly hope'. He is clear that things are hard and may become harder, but our hope is fixed in heaven and cannot be shaken. That is why he refers several times to the day when Jesus Christ will be revealed. This is where our daily attention and focus should also be.

This is the standard view of the New Testament. It was written by men who were 'ready to go but willing to stay'. This is a very different mindset from the one found in many western churches, where the emphasis of our teaching is on the benefits in this life of following Christ.

Discussion: How many times does Peter refer to 'hope' in his letter? How does heavenly hope help us to obey Peter's instructions in Ch3 v13-15?

This presents us with a great challenge. Every day we are told that we should focus on ourselves and our immediate individual happiness and fulfilment. Peter is writing from exactly the *opposite* point of view.

Peter's instructions to fix our hope in heaven seem to contradict our natural inclinations. Even though most of the New Testament writers and their readers came from very humble backgrounds and consequently lived lives much more difficult than our own, they were still aware of the constant need to deny our earthly inclinations, which they often referred to as 'the flesh'. Peter and the other apostles knew this was a great challenge. That's why they wrote about it!

We cannot 'will' ourselves to become more heavenly minded, we will only wear ourselves out in the attempt. However, we can choose to allow the Holy Spirit to transform until we too have the mind of Christ. This is one of the great challenges that faces us in Peter's letter.

For the next session

Jules Mazarin was the first minister of the seventeenth century French king, Louis XIV. In serving the king, he also amassed a huge personal fortune. He lived in a great palace on the banks of the River Seine, across from the Louvre, where the king lived.



Mazarin filled his palace with every imaginable luxury and the most beautiful artworks money could buy. (BTW, Mazarin, as well a politician, had also trained to be a priest!)

On his death bed, surrounded by all his wealth and possessions, he is reputed to have said, “Aah, that I must leave all this.”

What is our ‘all this’? Where might we be guilty of storing up treasure on earth? In contrast, what heavenly treasures are we storing up for ourselves?

We have already said that following Christ is something we can only do together. How can we encourage one another to live in heavenly hope?



SESSION 6: THE WAY OF THE CROSS

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Jules Mazarin was the first minister of the seventeenth century French king, Louis XIV. In serving the king, he also amassed a huge personal fortune. He lived in a great palace on the banks of the River Seine , across from the Louvre, where the king lived. Mazarin filled his palace with every imaginable luxury and the most beautiful artworks money could buy. (BTW, Mazarin, as well a politician, had also trained to be a priest!)

On his death bed, surrounded by all his wealth and possessions, he is reputed to have said, “Aah, that I must leave all this.”

What is our ‘all this’? Where might we be guilty of storing up treasure on earth? In contrast, what heavenly treasures are we storing up for ourselves?

We have already said that following Christ is something we can only do together. How can we encourage one another to live in heavenly hope?



READ

Every generation sees the world through a particular lens. It is important to remember that

when we come to read the Bible, our minds have already been programmed to understand it in a particular way. This *can* be of great benefit. For example, in our age we tend to focus on the teachings which emphasise God's love for us. This is because every day we are reminded of the importance of our own happiness and well-being. Hence, it is quite natural for us to concentrate on the everlasting, unbreakable power of God's love and everything He has done for us because of it. This is a very important teaching and one that our society desperately needs to hear.

HOWEVER, if we are going to multiply healthy disciples, we need to hear the *full* counsel of God and sometimes our view of the world gets in the way of this.

Peter's letter is a good example of this. We tend to emphasise the comforting aspects of the letter, such as 'love covers a multitude of sins' or 'Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.' These are great teachings and of course should guide us in our relationships with Him and one another.

HOWEVER, if we only concentrate on these, we will miss the deeper message of Peter's teaching, which is far *less* comfortable.

READ

As well as emphasising our heavenly citizenship, Peter also reminds his readers that because our home is in heaven with the Lord, this makes us 'strangers and aliens' in this world. Therefore, we should look, speak and act differently from those around us. Other people may not like this, perhaps it will make them reflect on their own lifestyle, so we need to remember that others may be looking for any opportunity to criticise, accuse or condemn us. Consequently, Peter tells us that we should live lives that are blameless before God **and** other people.

Peter's first letter was written to help his readers respond to these challenges in their daily lives.

Discussion: Where are we (as individuals, communities and a church) most open to criticism from non-believers? How do we ensure that we are living 'blamelessly' in the eyes of the world. How should we respond when following the Lord makes us less acceptable to others?



READ

There are many helpful ways of studying the lifestyle that Peter is advocating, but one is to concentrate on five 'S's:

Salvation and *sanctification*, which lead to *submission*, *service* and *sacrifice* (which lead back to salvation and sanctification!)

Again, these five 'S's may all prove to be very challenging but this is the way Christ commands us to follow. This is how we become 'healthy disciples'.

READ

In Session Four, we looked at how Peter's own experiences may have informed his teaching,

Read together Matthew 16: 24 -28

It is hard for us to understand just how challenging or even offensive this would sound to Jesus' contemporaries.

A cross only meant cursing and death: a terrible end. Yet the Lord tells His disciples to pick theirs up and follow Him. This could only mean one thing.

From the time of a person's decision to follow the

Lord, their ambition should be to lose their life, to 'deny' ('refuse', 'reject') their own interests and desires and follow Him.

Crosses are heavy, painful and burdensome and always have the same meaning. HOWEVER, they do not fall out of the sky. Each of us has to 'pick up' their own particular cross and carry it. The same word for 'pick up' is used in John's Gospel, when John the Baptist describes Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away (picks up) the sin of the world'. Christian suffering is always chosen, never accidental.

Nevertheless, not only did Peter hear the Lord's words, he also saw the immense sacrifice He undertook to put His words into practice.

Discussion: There seems to be an endless reserve of suffering on the world. Terrible things happen every day to innocent people. What is the difference between this and what the Lord is teaching us here? What examples from other Christians (past or present) inspire you to pick your cross and follow the lord?



On occasion, the Lord requires us to make huge, life changing decisions in order to follow Him to the cross, at others our 'denying' can come in the smallest details of everyday life.

Discussion: Do you have any experiences of picking up your 'cross' which might be appropriate to share with one another.

Now take a minute to think further about these things. Be open to the Lord challenging you about your attitudes and way of thinking.

Discuss with one another how these challenges affect you. Are there any particular crosses the Lord is waiting for you to pick up now?

HOWEVER, before we decide to pick up a new cross, we should always seek advice from the people we trust.

Finally, in the light of the Lord's command to follow the way of the cross, how does our understanding of 1 Peter change?

For the next session

Read Peter's letter again. What examples are there of Peter encouraging his readers to 'deny themselves and pick their cross'?

SESSION 7: THE WAY OF THE CROSS PT2

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

What examples are there of Peter encouraging his readers to 'deny themselves and pick their cross'?

What were the five 'S's from the last session?



READ

The first two 'S's, *salvation* and *sanctification* are truths for us to believe and should transform our ways of thinking.

The last three, *submission*, *service* and *sacrifice* are characteristics of followers of Jesus and should be visible in our daily lives.

As we continue to make these five 'S's the basis of our healthy discipleship, we should not be surprised that a sixth, *suffering*, becomes part of our Christian experience.

Salvation

Peter goes into some detail to explain the great depths of God's salvation. He wants his readers to hold fast to it and to celebrate it, and to take their hope from it. He even tells them that angels long to look into it!

Peter talks about salvation in the past, the present and the future.

It has been said that God:

- has saved us from the punishment of sin
- is saving us from the power of sin
- will save us from the presence of sin

Discussion: Look at the following passages.

What can we learn from them about our past, present and future salvation?

Ch 1 v5

Ch 1v18-20

Ch 2 v2

Ch2 v10

Ch2 v24,5

Ch3 v18



A VERY IMPORTANT POINT. We live in a society that stresses the importance of the individual. In the western church, we often think about salvation in the same way. HOWEVER, look again at Ch 2 v5-12. Peter is teaching about how God is saving us now. But look carefully: he is not focussing on individuals. Rather, he is addressing entire congregations of believers.

Discussion: How can we experience the power of God's salvation as a church, rather than just as individuals?

READ

Sanctification

Our sanctification is closely related to our salvation. Sanctification means to set apart and prepare something for a special purpose.

In the Old Testament, anything used for worshipping God in His temple had to be sanctified by cleansing and sprinkling with the blood of a sacrificed animal. Peter refers to this at the very start of his letter.

Once an item has been sanctified it becomes acceptable to God and is set apart. It cannot be used for any other purpose. It has become *holy*.

All Peter's teaching about attitudes and behaviour begins with this. We have been set apart as God's special instruments to bring 'praise, glory and honour' to His Son. THEREFORE every aspect of our lives should reflect this. We should be holy in all we do because God is holy.

To be holy means there are things we must do, which non-Christians do not have to do and there are things which non-Christians might do, which we cannot.

Discussion: Peter's letter is full of examples of this, but for now, look together at Ch4 v1-11. How does Peter instruct his readers to fulfil both of these expectations?

FOR THE NEXT SESSION:

Peter also talks about 'setting apart' from the opposite perspective. In Ch3 v15, we are told that we must 'set apart Christ as Lord'. This could be the key to the whole letter and how to grow and multiply healthy disciples:

Imagine everything in your life had to be put in one of two columns. 'Setting apart' here

means putting the Lord in a column on His own. We can call this Column One.

Everything else in our lives goes in Column Two. But notice, we are to set apart Christ as *Lord*. This means everything in Column Two is there for His use and pleasure. However, we must never allow *anything* in Column Two to become so important to us that we would ever consider moving it into Column One. To set apart Christ as LORD means never allowing anything to interfere or challenge His will or command. Everything has to be given over to His pleasure.

What are the things that we as a church, a community and as individuals find most difficult to keep out of column one? How does this relate to our 'Aah that I must leave all this' list from Session 5?



SESSION 8: TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

In Ch3 v15 of Peter's letter, we are told that we must 'set apart Christ as Lord'.

Imagine everything in your life had to be put in one of two columns. 'Setting apart' here means putting the Lord in a column on His own. We can call this Column One.

Everything else in our lives goes in Column Two. But notice, we are to set apart Christ *as Lord*. This means everything in Column Two is there for His use and pleasure. However, we must never allow *anything* in Column Two to become so important to us that we would ever consider moving it into Column One. To set apart Christ as LORD means never allowing anything to interfere or challenge His will or command. Everything has to be given over to His pleasure.

What are the things that we as a church, a community and as individuals find most difficult to keep out of column one? How does this relate to our 'Aah that I must leave all this' list from Session 5?



READ

As he discusses salvation and sanctification, Peter explains to his readers how these two great truths must be revealed in their daily lives.

Again and again, Peter reminds these early disciples of the hope and joy that come from the assurance that we have been chosen by God for salvation and sanctification. He goes on to remind them that this heavenly hope and joy cannot be disturbed by earthly hardships and trials.

Peter also instructs his readers that, as a royal priesthood and a holy nation, they should live lives that are blameless before God, one another, and non-believers, even those who would accuse and condemn them.

If we are to live such lives as Peter instructs us, this will involve the three remaining 'S's: submission, service and sacrifice.

Submission

READ

None of these calls to discipleship fits comfortably into our society's values. Perhaps submission is the one we find hardest to accept. However, as we study Peter's teaching in more detail, it begins to

make sense.

The word Peter uses could be heard in everyday conversation but its origins came from military usage. In Matthew 8: 5-10 a Roman centurion explains how it worked in practice. Submission, then, involves the recognition of the superior authority of others to exercise their will at the expense of our own.

The way of the cross was and is the way of submission, even submission to those who had no authority to demand it. The Lord Himself submitted to the indignities of crucifixion for the sake of the Gospel. This is the way Peter now calls us to follow.

Peter instructs his readers to focus on their own attitudes and behaviour, *regardless* of the treatment they receive from those to whom they are submitting. The emphasis here is on us adopting an attitude of submission, it is not on the worthiness of those to whom we are called to submit. How we need the Holy Spirit if we are to truly follow the Lord!

In Ch 2 v13-25 and Ch 3 v1-7, Peter instructs the believers to submit in three different areas of their lives, in Ch5 v5 he adds a fourth.

Discussion: What challenges does each of these present us with? How can we help one another to overcome them?

How does Peter use the Lord's example to encourage his readers?

Having said this, it is worth pointing out that Peter himself was unwilling to submit to human authority when instructed to disobey the Lord's commands. Acts Ch 4 v1-20 is a good example of this.

Discussion: If we accept that wherever possible we should submit to those in authority, how do we know when NOT to submit?

Nevertheless, Peter's instructions around submission are quite clear. Put at its simplest, he expects us to follow the Lord's example: wherever and whenever possible, we should submit to those around us. In choosing the way set before us, we will reveal to others the love, joy and hope with which the Lord has filled our hearts.

These are not easy teachings. However, Peter is clear that if we are to grow into our salvation, submission must be a key characteristic of our lives.

FOR THE NEXT SESSION:

Throughout his letter, Peter honours and lifts up the name of the Lord above all things that were, that are and that are to come. Yet he continues to point out the Lord's example of submission, service and sacrifice.

What is the difference between our heavenly status and value on one hand and the earthly roles we are called to fulfil on the other?

How does our fulfilment of our earthly roles affect our heavenly standing?



SESSION 9: TO THIS YOU WERE CALLED PT 2

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Throughout his letter, Peter honours and lifts up the name of the Lord above all things that were, that are and that are to come. Yet he continues to point out the Lord's example of submission, service and sacrifice.

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READ

Having settled the issue of *submission*, service and sacrifice become much easier to understand (even if they remain difficult to fulfil!)

Service

Read Philippians Ch2 v 5-11.

Discussion: How does Peter encourage and instruct his readers to adopt this same Christ-like attitude?

It certainly helps when we keep in mind that our heavenly status is not defined by our earthly roles. Peter makes it clear that whilst 'praise, glory and honour' belong to the Lord, no other human being has ever come close to the act of service Jesus carried out on our behalf when He chose the cross. In fact, it is only when we have the assurance of our standing before God that, like Him, we can be truly free to serve others.

Someone once said that the way we view a place is defined by the path by which we chose to travel there. If this is true of heaven, then we should always be ready and willing to adopt the role of servants in order to one day hear the words of the Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Once again in Ch 4 v7-11, Peter makes it clear that the inspiration for adopting the attitude and role of a servant in every part of our lives should spring from the praise and glory of Jesus at the final coming of the Kingdom of God. *Whatever* we have in our lives should be used to help and serve

those around us. We should strive only to be channels, never destinations, of God's blessing!

In Ch 5 v1-4 Peter makes it especially clear that this should be the attitude of leaders to those in their charge.

Peter is also very clear that he is not just talking about theological niceties, he is expecting this *mind of Christ* to be expressed in the most practical details of daily life.

Discussion: *With this in mind, how should we define a 'good' day?*

And finally ..., "It's alright being a servant until someone treats you like one!"

- *Why do we find it so difficult to maintain the attitude of a servant in our daily lives?*
- *How can we encourage one another in this?*

READ

Sacrifice

In Ch 2 v5 Peter tells his readers that they are called to be a 'holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'.

To sacrifice something means to give it over forever to another person, being or cause. In the Old Testament, a sacrifice would often take the form of an animal, such as a lamb, goat or bull. It would often be sacrificed as a recompense for some shortcoming or misdemeanour. The shedding of the animal's blood would mark the forgiveness of these.

Sacrifices *always* came with a cost – often a very high one.

In the temple worship described in the Old Testament, the sacrifice would be made by a specially chosen group known as the priesthood. Once a sacrifice had been made, it could never be reclaimed. Often it was completely destroyed.

Peter makes it clear that the Lord's sacrifice on the cross fulfilled every requirement of the Old Covenant sacrificial system. However, he also makes it clear that as a new 'royal priesthood' his readers are to offer up to God their own 'spiritual sacrifices'.

These no longer involve the sacrifice of animals, but are made up of the surrender of ourselves to the Lord in thanksgiving for what He has done for us. In this sense, 'submission' and 'service' are both forms of sacrifice.

In fact, it is possible to read Peter's instructions after Ch 2 v5 as a series of examples of the kind of 'spiritual sacrifices' the Lord expects of us.

Discussion: Look at the remainder of the letter together. Which sacrifices might involve the greatest cost for us as a Church, a fellowship and as individuals? Where might the Lord be asking us to make greater sacrifices? How can we encourage one another in these things?

READ

Suffering.

So, Peter encourages his readers to celebrate their salvation and sanctification through submission, service and sacrifice. However, he never forgets that all this must occur in the midst of increasing suffering. In fact, he warns them that to adopt these attitudes might even add to their suffering.

Towards the end of his letter, he gives a clear indication of who lies behind the trials his brothers and sisters are facing. Perhaps Ch 5 v8 is another example of Peter drawing on his own experiences to help and guide others. Luke Ch 22 v31 and 61 could well be relevant here.

Nevertheless, Peter's letter is full of joy and hope. He encourages his fellow believers to hold fast and to never forget the wonderful future that awaits them. Above all, he reminds them over and over to love one another. The whole letter is based on the understanding that his readers can only grow into healthy disciples as part of a loving community of believers. Even the most challenging trials can be overcome if 'stand firm in the faith together'.

The suffering we must endure if we are to follow Christ will last only for a 'little while', whilst the glory we will share with Christ and one another will last forever.

Discussion: How can we encourage one another to 'stand firm in the faith' in the face of Satan's attempts to stop us?

TO FINISH

Can you remember your list of qualities that define a 'healthy disciple'?

Have these changed at all during your time studying Peter's first letter?

What are the encouragements and lessons we can take from his letter as we seek continue to grow into healthy disciples?



Back to the beginning.

Our vision statement for this year is to *multiply healthy disciples* and *transform communities*.

These Bible studies have been based on a single premise, namely that if we become healthier disciples, we will inevitably multiply and as a consequence we will transform communities.

So, these studies are only a starting point but hopefully they will point us in the right direction as we continue on our way, filled with the living hope and inexpressible and glorious joy of knowing Christ, who has gone into heaven before us and is seated at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.



And remember ...

We have only scratched the very surface of the wonderful truths to be found in the letter. There is far more to learn than we have uncovered so far. Nevertheless, by God's grace we can take what we have learnt here and build on it together.

May the Lord bless and keep us as we strive together to become healthy disciples. May we multiply and prosper and, as we do, may we see our communities transformed to the eternal glory of our God and Saviour. Amen.

