

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.

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?



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:

Leaders: It may be worth giving copies of this to the group.

*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.*



Leaders: The following reflections and conversations could be quite lengthy. Please adapt as necessary.

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?

Leaders: This could be the basis of a helpful meditation. Begin by a re-reading the extract from the Covenant. Then have a period of silence, allowing the Holy Spirit time to engage with people. This can lead to an intensely personal reflection, which there is no particular need to share with the group. However, this can be quite painful for people. and so should be accompanied by an offer of prayer and counselling.

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?

