

Love for the Future: Being at Home on the Earth

Exploration Group

Session 4 – Choices and Changes

The theme of this session is **repentance** and **faith**.

PREPARATION

Make a list of things you would like to be different in your own life for the sake of other people or the earth.

THEME: REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Words accumulate baggage as time goes on. A word which at one time seems very appropriate to convey an idea can come after a while to suggest something quite different. Then it's hard to know what to do. Do you trade in the old word and use a new one, or do you carry on with the old one hoping that it will carry on doing the job for a bit longer?



'Repentance' is one such word. When it was first used in English translations of the Bible it meant 'to change', or more particularly, to change one's mind and therefore do something else. By the twentieth century it had come to suggest feeling bad about oneself. By the twenty first century it has come to hardly be used at all, except in religious services, so perhaps it can be reused again soon.

But whether or not it can, it is an important idea. And the old message that we need to repent is more important than ever. Our whole consumer culture is wrecking the planet. As more and more people consume more and more stuff and put more and more pollutants into the water and the soil and greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the life systems of the earth are put under increasing stress. Already things are beginning to collapse. A big extinction of species is beginning and the climate is changing.

We need to change our ways. We need to 'repent'. We need to develop a different way of living with the earth.

If you are following this course or reading this page you probably don't need to be persuaded of that. You've probably read books or articles about the problems, and have heard talks or lectures on how we need to be living instead. (If you haven't, have a quick look at the websites of Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, WWF, Climate Coalition, Forum for the Future, or Green Christian, to give you a flavour of what is being said, or read Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si*.)

One problem is that we can't get off the boat. We are being carried along. We are part of a global society and most of us have little influence over what happens.

And when we come to try to do things differently we get stuck. We want to seriously reduce our carbon footprint but we still have to travel to work and heat our houses. We want to stop deforestation in the tropics but find it hard to avoid food containing palm oil. We want to reduce the amount of rubbish we send to the tip but still end up with plastic wrappers and containers which will take decades to disintegrate and then leave a toxic residue.

And here we turn to our second misunderstood word. 'Faith'. To many people it has come to mean either a religion, as in the Christian, Muslim or Buddhist faith, etc, or things a religious person is supposed to believe. A devoted Christian might feel they have little faith because they don't believe Jesus literally ascended into heaven, or that he will come again on the clouds, or that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born.

In the Bible faith is trust. Jesus commends people who have faith in him but nowhere does he ask them what they believe. In fact, in Greek, faith is not something you have but something you do. Faith in God is trust in God.

Obviously your faith is going to be affected by what you believe. If you believe that God can intervene in what is going on in the world you might trust God to stop people making a mess of things. But if you look at what's happened in the past and conclude that God doesn't interact with the world that way, your trust in God will take a different form.

Faith is important in the face of our inability to do things very differently because we can trust that, however God engages with the world, it is still God's world, God's universe; this is God's project and God is still active within it. And we can trust that we are not written off by God even though we can't get everything right.

An ancient prayer is *Kyrie eleison*. 'Lord have mercy'. We can say that, and get on with life, free of the burden of failure to get on and do what we can for the earth.

READING

David Osborne, *Love for the Future: a journey* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2013) chapters 7 and 8

Rowan Williams and Joan Chittister OSB, *For all that has been, thanks* (London: Canterbury Press, 2010)

Kathy Galloway, *Sharing the Blessing: Overcoming poverty and working for justice* (London: SPCK & Christian Aid, 2008)

Catherine von Ruhland, *Living with the Planet: Making a Difference in a Time of Climate Change* (Oxford: Lion, 2008)

GROUP SESSION

1. Review Earlier Sessions

(i) Does anyone have any thoughts, questions or reflections they would like to share with the group with regard to the themes of the last session: compassion and justice?

(ii) Who has been able to take time, in whatever small way, for contemplation and engagement since the first session? How have you found it?

(iii) Who has been able to take time, in whatever small way, for practising mindfulness since the second session? How have you found it?

(iv) Each person in the group talk briefly about any action you have taken for justice following the last session; what results you have had; and how you feel about it.

2. Introduction to theme: Choices and Changes

(i) Who was able to do the preparation exercise? How did they find it?

(ii) If all the group members have read chapters 7 and 8 of the book *Love for the Future*, or the introduction above, move straight to (iii) If not, read through the introduction now.

(iii) Discuss any or all of the following:

- Are you clear what the word 'repentance' meant when it was first used in English Bibles?
- In what ways, if any, is this different from how it seems to be used now?
- How many different ways can the group think of in which the word 'faith' is used now? Write a sentence with each of these on the paper.
- Now draw a line through any of those which are different from the way the word 'faith' is used in the Bible (as described in *Love for the Future*).
- Can members of the group think of any episodes in the gospels, or elsewhere in the Bible, which back up the suggestion that faith is fundamentally trust in someone rather than belief about them? (You don't need to be able to quote the chapter and verse.)
- Can members of the group think of any episodes in the gospels, or elsewhere in the Bible, which contradict the suggestion that faith is fundamentally trust in someone rather than belief about them? (Again, you don't need to be able to quote chapter and verse.)

3. Activity

(i) As far as each person wishes, share in the group the list they made in preparation for the session: of things they would like to be different in their own life for the sake of other people or the earth.

(ii) Each person choose one thing that they think they can actually change. Discuss with the group what might help. Then decide what you need to do first to help bring about the change.

4. Preparation for next session

For session 5: Find a piece of music, a poem, a picture, a story or something else which has been a help for you in a dark time in your life. If you can, bring it to the next session.

Discuss any questions or uncertainties about these exercises and how the music can be played in session 5.

5. Close with a Bible reading

Have a period of silence for people to be still. Each person first listen to any sounds in the room, and then focus on your breathing as you would in practising mindfulness.

After a short period of silence one person reads Mark 2.1 -12

REFLECTION AFTER THE SESSION

In the session you may have chosen one aspect of your life which you want to change. If you find this difficult to do, think where the problems lie: with another person, with your work or home situation, with society as a whole, or within yourself.

Be still, possibly using a contemplation exercise or a time of mindful awareness. Then read again the prayer that you read at the end of session 3:

God, you know our needs, our fears and our hopes; you love us, suffer with us, rejoice with us and lift us to new life. We pray for ourselves, our church, our communities, those distant from us and your whole creation. Work in us what is good, make through us what is just, and draw us into your ways, towards your kingdom. Amen.

Take a first step towards change that you decided on in the group session.

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