

Trek Discussion 5

'The Fire'

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Relationships are the most important thing, so start with warmth and hospitality. Have a cuppa! You could do it your own way or use some of the following questions to get people talking...

- *What's one of the best surprises you have had?*
- *What sort of reactions do you get when people find out you went to church?*

'THE FIRE' IN THE LETTER OF FIRST PETER

The short letter of First Peter uses the word 'suffering' 21 times. It was written to Christians who faced what he called 'the fiery trial'. This letter may have been written between 63 and 66AD around the time of the Fire of Rome. The emperor Nero blamed Christians and violence broke out.

Tacitus (alive at the time) later wrote: *"Therefore, to stop the rumour [that he had set Rome on fire], he [Emperor Nero] falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most fearful tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their strangeness... a vast multitude [of Christians] were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city, as of "hating the human race." ... they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and mauled to death by dogs, nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights... - Tacitus ~112AD.*

In his letter Peter uses the image of 'fire' to describe a part of the Christian experience. "The Fire" is being treated in the way Christ was treated to the end. Throughout history Christians (and others) have been persecuted for faith: slandered, tortured, killed. Imagine the 'fiery trial' faced by Christians in Rome, Aceh Indonesia, Iran or Syria. Following Christ's path means 'the fire' too.

- *How do you react to all this?*
- *Have you experienced trouble for calling yourself Christian?*

Read, reflect on, and discuss the opening of First Peter...

1 Peter 1:1-8

From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

To God's chosen ones, exiles scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

May God give you more and more grace and peace.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.

In this you rejoice greatly, even though now for a little while you must endure many trials. These have come to prove the genuineness of your faith. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will result in praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.

EXILES AND FOREIGNERS?

In this letter to suffering Christians the writer calls them some beautiful things:

Chosen (1 Peter 1:1)

Newborn Babies (1 Peter 2:1)

Living Stones (1 Peter 2:4)

Priesthood (1 Peter 2:5)

Holy Nation (1 Peter 1:9)

Beloved (used twice in 1 Peter 2:11 & 4:12)

- Which of these images do you love most for yourself and for the church?

Of all the things Peter calls these suffering Christians, the strangest are “exile” and “foreigner”.

1 Peter 1:1 “To God's chosen ones who are exiles...”

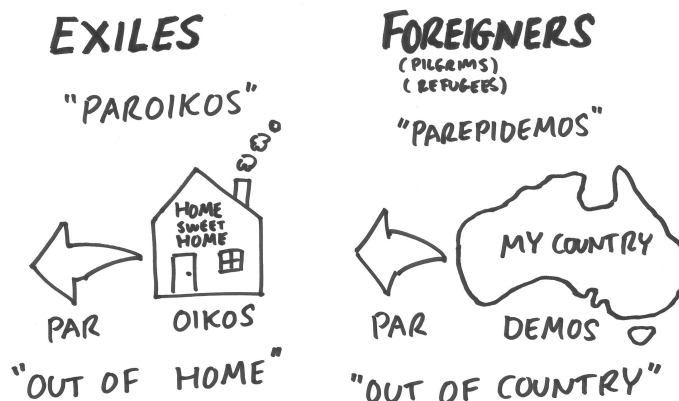
1 Peter 2:1 “I urge you as foreigners and exiles...”

PAROIKOS/EXILES:

out of home, travelling but not yet arrived.

PAREPIDEMOS/FOREIGNERS:

out of your country, like a pilgrim, refugee, foreigner.



Discuss:

- *How could it have helped to call those who were suffering for their faith 'EXILES' or 'FOREIGNERS'?*
- *What greater realities are being pointed to by calling Christians these things?*
- *How would we live differently if we always remembered that we are not citizens of this world, but instead already citizens of heaven?*

HOW TO RESPOND TO 'THE FIERY TRIAL'

1 Peter 4:1-6.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to the One who is ready to judge the living and the dead...

1 Peter 4:12-16.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Read God's word above. Reflect and discuss:

- *What will others be 'surprised at' in Christian lives?*
- *How do you respond to people's surprise at the choices you make? (See 1 Peter 3:15 too!)*

First Peter gives repeated and strong advice about how to respond to the fire:

1. Be surprising – don't conform to the world's ways or join in! (1 Peter 1:14, 2:11, 3:5, 4:4, 4:13)
2. Don't be surprised. (1 Peter 4:12)
3. Don't be ashamed. (1 Peter 4:16)
4. Remember Christ's sufferings - rejoice to share them (1 Peter 2:1, 2:24-25, 3:18, 4:1, 4:12-13)
5. Don't attack, insult, or hurt them back, but respect and bless! (1 Peter 1:14, 2:1, 2:23, 3:9, 3:15)
6. Love each other (1 Peter 1:22, 3:15, 4:8)
7. Praise God no matter what. (1 Peter 1:7, 4:16)
8. Entrust your soul to God. (1 Peter 4:19)

- *Which of these eight pieces of advice is your favourite today?*
 - Which do you need to be reminded of today?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray in whatever way suits your group best! You may use these words as your closing...

Isaiah 43:1-3

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

1 Peter 5:10-11

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.