

GOING for GOLD



**Easter Study Group Material:
Penarth & District Churches Together**

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Going for Gold

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Introduction

The church of Jesus Christ is the family of God. In this loving community there is a true commitment to Jesus Christ and to each other. Jesus was inclusive in his welcoming attitudes to everyone and small groups facilitate opportunities in which everyone should feel at home in our local fellowship. (See Acts 2:44-46 and Acts 4:34) Therefore all of our Easter Groups should be welcoming to each other and should be creative in finding ways of allowing every member to share their concerns and to experience the care of a loving community.

We seek to emphase the importance of the four “W’s” of which welcome or fellowship is but one aspect of our life together

Welcome: where the group exercises love to one another and where there is real caring and sharing.

Worship: where the group seek to encounter God through prayer, praise and silence.

Word: where the group seeks to understand and apply God’s word in their everyday lives.

Witness: where the whole group looks outward in practical ways.

Every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ should devote themselves to such a group and to such principles as outlined here. These studies have been organised to help us develop these four areas together.

THIS YEAR’S THEME—Going for Gold



Since the Olympics is this year being held in London the Church leaders in Penarth thought that this would provide an inspiring theme for our Penarth and District Cytûn Small groups this year being held between Easter and Pentecost. The leaders providing material for the groups this year are Steve Mayo (Salvation Army), Sue Fender (Elfed Avenue), Simon Jennings (Cosmeston), Peter

Cox (All Saints), Steve Brind (Immanuel), Roger Grafton (Tabernacle) and John James.

If the apostle Paul was alive today, he would probably subscribe to Sky Television and read all the sports pages of the newspapers, following with interest the progress of various teams and athletes. Why? Because his letters, from which all of our studies are drawn, regularly have athletic references, revealing his interest in sports.

Of course the Greeks and the Romans, who dominated world affairs in the days when the New Testament was written, were keenly interested in athletic contests, not only for their physical well being, but also for the honour of their towns and countries. It was a patriotic thing to be a good athlete and to bring glory to your country.

“Going for gold” reminds us that as Christians we have a goal to go for—and it is gold! We are going to discover, or be reminded of God’s great purpose for our lives as Christians. The greatest thing God could ever do for any of us is to make us like his son the Lord Jesus Christ. God wants you and me to be like the Lord Jesus! Think about that; the Lord’s highest purpose is not to make us ministers, missionaries, doctors or teachers but to make us like Jesus. Everything else is secondary to this overall purpose.

This is not an easy transformation and it will only be accomplished by God’s grace, an abundance of it but he needs our willingness to cooperate with his purpose. It calls for preparation, concentration, dedication and the right motivation. These are the first four themes that we will explore in this series. Then we will go on to look at our role as representatives of the Kingdom of God and the sure Celebration that is guaranteed as we learn how to live in the Victory that Christ provides.

I trust that you enjoy the exercise as we journey together.
John James (Editor)

Session 1: Preparation

WELCOME & ICEBREAKER

The Question Web

You need to have a spool of string or wool for this game. The group are to stand or sit in a circle. Hold on to the end of the string and throw the ball/spool to one of the people to catch. They then choose a question from 1-20 to answer. A list of 20 sample questions is given below. Adapt for your group. Holding the string they then throw it to another member of the group. Eventually this creates a web as well as learning some interesting things about each other! At the end of the game you could comment that we all played a part in creating this unique web and if one person was gone it would look different. In the same way it's important that we all take part to make the group what it is, unique and special.

QUESTIONS

1. If you had a time machine that would work only once, what point in the future or in history would you visit?
2. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
3. If your house was burning down, what three objects would you try and save?
4. If you could talk to any one person now living, who would it be and why?
5. If you HAD to give up one of your senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting) which would it be and why?
6. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
7. Do you have a pet? If not, what sort of pet would you like?
8. Name a gift you will never forget?
9. Name one thing you really like about yourself.
10. What's your favourite thing to do in the summer?
11. Who's your favourite character from the soaps, and why?
12. Does your name have a special meaning and/or were you named after someone special?
13. What is the hardest thing you have ever done?
14. If you are at a friend's or relative's house for dinner and you find a dead insect in your salad, what would you do?
15. What was the best thing that happened to you this past week?
16. If you had this week over again what would you do differently?

17. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about God?
18. What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?
19. If you could ask Christ to change one problem in the world today, what would you like him to change?
20. What book, film or video have you seen/read recently you would recommend? Why?

WORSHIP

If you have access to the internet you can sing along or listen to this beautiful hymn, it can also be found in most contemporary hymn books. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

Come, bow before him now,
with reverence and fear.

In him no sin is found,
we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;

he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned.

How awesome is the sight,
our radiant King of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;

he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace.

No work too hard for him,
in faith receive from him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place

David J. Evans

Bible Reading: Psalm 46:10a - *'Be still, and know that I am God...'* [NIV]

Now consider in a few moments of silence...

Q: What brings you here today?

Q: What are you expecting from God today?

Prayer led by the leader or an open time.

WORD

Read the Text: Philippians 3:12-4:1 [NIV]

Discuss together:

1. How physically fit are you?
2. If you lived in ancient times and participated in sports, would you prefer chariot racing or spear throwing? Why?
3. How much time do you spend watching or participating in sports?

Explore the Text:

4. What was Paul's testimony? (3:12-14)
5. In what ways did Paul's spiritual life resemble the discipline of a runner? (3:12-14)
6. What was Paul's view of the past? (3:13)
7. What was Paul's goal? (3:14)
8. How did Paul call the Philippians to share his view? (3:15)
9. What did Paul hope for the believers who disagreed with him? (3:15)
10. What was Paul's plea to the Philippians? (3:16)
11. How did Paul want believers to imitate him? (3:17)
12. How did Paul describe God's enemies? (3:18-19)
13. Where did the Philippian Christians have their citizenship? (3:20)
14. Whom did the Philippian believers eagerly await? (3:20)
15. What characterizes citizens of heaven? (3:21)

Amplify the Text:

16. What kind of race are you running for Christ?
17. What prize do you seek?
18. What kind of opposition do you face in your struggle to live as a Christian?
19. How can you imitate Paul's life and example?
20. How can Christ help you stay on track and reach the goal?

WITNESS**Apply the Text:**

21. What spiritual workout or training this week will help you run your Christian marathon?
22. In what way can you renew your commitment to press on toward the goal of being like Christ?

Closing Prayer

Session 2: Concentration

Hebrews 12 1-3

WELCOME

Display:

A pair of training shoes, tracksuit and pedometer if possible. If not available try to display some pictures of a runner, either for a track event or long-distance, cross country.



Here is a picture of an athlete crossing the winning line in a race with his arms extended as in a crucifix position.

Ice-breaker:

Ask the group about their own athletic achievements, or other achievements, honouring those who have none as much as those who have had. Discuss what it feels like to win something or to

succeed in something, especially if it was unexpected.

WORSHIP

(Take time for silence between each section for the group to bring their own thoughts before God either in the silence of their hearts or spoken before the whole group.)

Guided meditation: either in silence or accompanied by some quiet music of the Leader's choice.

Looking back:

Spend some time in quiet, thanking God for the achievements we have accomplished, acknowledging that all our strengths, our gifts and our talents come from God.

Looking forward:

To the goals we have made for ourselves; the achievements we still want to attain and ask God to show us a way forward.

Looking at today:

Thank God for what you HAVE accomplished or WILL accomplish this day and thank him for the knowledge you have in His presence with you.

Prayer:

Creating, redeeming and sustaining God,
we thank you for the gifts you have bestowed upon us,
for the ability to achieve even the simplest of tasks in the richness
of all you have given to us.

Grant us perseverance to look always to you, knowing that though
there may be hostility towards us, in you we will find the strength to
endure all things.

As we gather in your name, so may we know your presence with
us, perfecter of our faith.

To him who endured all for our sakes be glory and honour now and
forever.

Amen.

WORD

Read the text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Look at the text through the eyes of an athlete. Someone who trains hard has single-mindedness to what they do, someone who has an overwhelming desire to succeed in the race.

The letter of Hebrews has an unknown authorship and although it is often attributed to Paul, we can not be certain that he wrote it. We do know that it was written before the destruction of the Temple in AD70 as there is no mention of it in the letter. We can also be certain that the author knew the recipients well.

The theme of the letter is that there can be no turning back to the old ways of the Jewish System. In Christ all is made new and they should persevere in the Spirit and commit themselves to Christ who, through his death and resurrection has opened the way into the heavenly sanctuary of God's presence.

Perseverance

and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us

How hard is it to persevere with our faith?

Does it always seem like an uphill struggle?

Where can we turn to lighten our load and lay aside every weight that clings to us so closely?

Endurance and Hostility

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

How much are we prepared to endure for the sake of the Gospel?

How much training do we do to be 'good Christians'?

If we are to win the race, what do we need to do to show the world that although we are small in number and do not have a loud voice that makes people listen we still have a message to take out and a lifestyle to live even if it means we swim against the tide?

Athletes and Christians are called to set themselves apart from the ordinary everyday if they are to succeed. An athlete trains for many hours often alone, sometimes in the company of others.

How do we work as Christians, coming together often just once a week to learn with others?

Is it a hostile world for Christians? Recent debates have suggested that Christians in the UK are now marginalised within society.

If we are to win the race, what do we need to do to show the world that although we are small in number and do not have a loud voice that makes people listen we still have a message to take out and a lifestyle to live even if it means we swim against the tide?

WITNESS

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Are we credible witnesses to the Gospel? How does an athlete witness her/his achievement?

Who are the people who witnessed to us? What is it to be a successful athlete?

How did they help us in our faith journeys? Who works alongside athletes?

How can we celebrate our faith in ways that touch those around us and witness God's great love for us to those who have not yet heard?

We are encouraged to '*look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*' through prayer, through study, in all we do and say. Let us celebrate together Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith in a time of prayer before we close.

Session 3: Dedication

2 Timothy 2:1-13

WELCOME & ICEBREAKER

[If you have access to the internet and can play a You Tube clip, the following link will enable you to access a clip of Derek Redmond's 1992 race in the Barcelona Olympics which could be used as part of the welcome session.]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZIXWp6vFdE&featurefwfwp&NR=1>



Derek Redmond of Great Britain is in agony as he is helped to the finish line by his father, Jim, after tearing his hamstring muscle in the semi-finals of the men's 400 meter run at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Redmond collapsed about half way through the race with the injury, but got up, determined to

finish despite the pain. His father came out of the stands and onto the track to help his son. Redmond initially tried to push him away, not realizing who he was, but then heard a familiar voice. "Derek, it's me" his father said.

Redmond told his father "I've got to finish this race". His father said "If you're gonna finish the race, we'll finish it together". With his father's help, Redmond made it to the finish line.

This weeks study looks at Paul's encouragement to Timothy in what were difficult times for both of them. Paul's exhortation to his young ward is to maintain his dedication to God in whom he has believed and to persevere in his mission and calling.

Sharing Together

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." **Winston Churchill**

Life is full of challenges that require from us the character of

perseverance and dedication.

Share with the group a challenge that you have had to face or are facing and your experiences both good and bad in trying to meet it. Alternatively, share some achievement that you have experienced and explain what helped you in your success.

WORSHIP

If you find it helpful to have a focus for worship you could place a table in the centre of the room and have a cross or candle on it to provide a focus for prayer and reflection. Leader to prepare readers before hand.

(Worship developed from Northumbria Community Evening Office)

Leader (L) All (A)

L: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

A: My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

L: Out of the depths I have cried to You.

A: O Lord, hear my voice.

L: With my whole heart I want to praise You.

A: O Lord, hear my voice.

L: If you, Lord, should mark iniquities:

A: Who could stand? who could stand?

A: I will wait for the Lord. My soul waits, and in His word do I hope.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 30

Music: Listen to or sing together a song or hymn e.g.:

- Give Thanks With a Grateful Heart
- As the Deer
- Here I am Waiting (Eagles Wings)
- Only By Grace

Prayers

Spend some time in quiet reflection thanking God for his presence and provision in your times of challenge.

If you are comfortable as a group pray for the challenges that you face in your lives, families, churches and community. Finally pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you look at the scriptures together.

WORD

Read the Text - 2 Tim 2: 1-13

Organise someone from the group to read the passage through out loud. Spend a few minutes re-reading it again individually before moving on.

Scripture Context

Paul is writing to his great 'son' Timothy from his prison in Rome around AD 65-67. It is the time of the Emperor Nero and Christians are suffering great persecution across the Empire. Paul is anticipating his execution and so is aware of the urgency of his own need to see and encourage Timothy. Time is running out.

Paul has also experienced the disappointment of some of his group giving up on the mission and the impact of false teaching and apostasy. So he is determined to lovingly exhort and challenge Timothy to remain true to his experience and understanding of the scriptures and the gospel of Jesus and to keep focused on the mission of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.

Our Context

Whilst our physical lives may not be at stake as Christians in Penarth we nonetheless face significant spiritual threats within society that are looking to kill off faith and belief in God.

Evangelical atheism and secular humanism are the current forces that seek to snuff out the voice of Christian influence arguing that it is void of relevance. Post-modern subjectivity also constantly threatens the belief and trust in objective and absolute truth.

In our comparative wealthy, celebrity obsessed and consumer driven society people are constantly being invited to live lives of ever increasing comfort and to indulge whatever desires we have. After all...if we're not hurting anyone what harm is it going to do.

We face the same sorts of challenges and compromise today that Paul and Timothy did...what should we do?

The Text

Vs 1 ...be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (cf Eph 3:14-21, 6:10)

Paul wants to encourage Timothy to tap in to a source of strength that he knows will sustain him in the face of difficulty. It's the same source of strength that he himself has continued to rely on through long missionary journeys where he has been beaten, imprisoned, rejected, shipwrecked and deserted.

1. How much does Paul's instruction match Jesus teaching on the Great Commandment in Matt 22:37
2. What helps your relationship with God grow stronger?
3. What weakens it?

Vs 2 ...And the things you have heard me sayentrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (Matt 28:18-20)

Paul goes on to then remind Timothy of the Great Commission as the outworking of his love and faith in God. Paul underlines the process that he used to Timothy and charges him to reproduce the same in others.

1. How effective do you think the Church is at making disciples?
2. Do you think of yourself as someone called to disciple others? Why?
3. Do you think this should still be a priority for the Church in today's culture? Why?

Vs 3-7.. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.....

Having refreshed Timothy's call to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission he then encourages him to count the COST and enjoy the COMPENSATION of his labour for the Gospel.

William Barclay notes "One thing remains in all three pictures. The soldier is upheld by the thought of final victory. The athlete is upheld by the vision of the crown. The husbandman is upheld by the hope of the harvest. Each submits to the discipline and the toil for the sake of the glory which shall be. It is so with the Christian. The Christian struggle is not without a goal; it is always going somewhere. The Christian can be certain that after the effort of the Christian life, there comes the joy of heaven; and the greater the struggle, the greater the JOY."

1. Why do you think that people give up on being involved in Church?
2. How does Paul's encouragement affect your view on what God is calling you to do?
3. Who can you pass this encouragement on to?

Vs 8-13 ...Remember Jesus Christ....(cf Phil 2: 5-10, Heb 12:2-3, Phil 3:12-21)

Having charged Timothy again to the cost of his calling Paul, and almost as if he were stood next to him, then exhorts him to raise his sight to look on Jesus. He reminds him of the bigger picture – God's mission and our participation in it and the fact that nothing can prevent the ultimate purposes of God in the fullness of time.

1. Paul was clear and confident enough about the gospel that he proclaimed to lose 'all things' – To what extent do we share his confidence?
2. How well do you think we communicate the gospel of Jesus in 2012? How might we improve?
3. What motivation can we gain from knowing that we are 'in Christ'?

WITNESS

Paul's encouragement is a timely motivation to a Church that finds itself increasingly being pushed to the margins. It serves as both an invitation and challenge to be determined to persevere through the difficulties and obstacles we face to our challenge to Mission.

However, we are encouraged to realize that while we might feel constrained with resources as individuals and as churches God's word can never be constrained. This word makes its home in our hearts and works its way out into the relationships and situations that we find ourselves in daily. It cannot be snuffed out...the light has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it.

Today

Spend time reflecting on God's love for you and the gift of life he has given you.

Pray for each other asking for God's grace to strengthen and deepen our relationship with Him.

This Week

Reflect once again on the 'great commandment' and the 'great commission' and carry out a health check to see how you are responding to them in your own lives. Ask God to identify areas of weakness that need to be strengthened.

Identify the people that God might be asking you to disciple or to be discipled by. Pray and reflect on ways that you can encourage them in their walk with God.

If you don't have anyone that comes to mind, ask God for the opportunity to journey with someone.

Pray for the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus with someone in word, deed and the power of the Holy Spirit. Have confidence and be determined.

N.B. Next Week

Will you please bring something with you, that is really precious to you and be ready to explain briefly about it during the session?

Session 4. Motivation

WELCOME & ICEBREAKER

1. Each member shares the object that they have brought and for one minute explains why it represents them.
2. The group splits into pairs and for five minutes they try to explain to each other why they follow Jesus or take part in the life of their Church.
3. Then they share with a different partner what their goals are in their lives.

WORSHIP

Listen to or sing together the Graham Kendrick song: 'All I once held dear' [there is a lovely version by Rob Mark easily accessible on Youtube with the lyrics and it is in most song books and hymnals published since Noah died out in 1990!]

WORD

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:15

INTRODUCTION: What a great thing motivation is. It gets you moving when nothing else can. We all need motivation to help us achieve what otherwise seem impossible. But to stay motivated you need goals. You don't have to take life the way it comes to you. By converting your dreams into goals, and your goals into plans, you can design your life to come to you the way you want it. You can live your life on purpose, instead of by chance. The Apostle Paul had goals that kept him motivated; his goal is clearly stated in verses 9 and 10 ***"So we make it our goal to please him..."***.

What we believe and how we behave must always go together. Duty and doctrine belong together, because what God has done for us must motivate us to do something for God. In this passage of Scripture Paul's theme is *"motivation for ministry"*. The Apostle Paul sets before us a three-fold motivation here, that when in place will ensure both faithfulness and fruitfulness.

1. THE MOTIVATION OF HOPE. Look up 2 Cor 4:16 – 5:9

This passage is full of confident assurance *“We know...we are confident...”*

How can we say “We know”? (5:1)

What gives believers such confidence? (5:6)

Hope gives the right perspective for ministry 4:16 *“We don’t lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”*

What do you understand as the reasons for Paul saying “we don’t lose heart?”

Hope gives the right objective for the ministry see 5:1-9

What was his objective? **v.8).**

Now Look at **v.9 – “We make it our goal to please Him.”**

What a great personal motto that would be for us all!

As we review this passage let hope be reawakened by the fact that every believer in Jesus Christ can share this same assurance and can find courage for the conflict.

2. THE MOTIVATION OF FEAR. Look up 2 Cor 5:10-11

It is interesting to note that the term *judgement seat* comes from the Greek word *bema* which was the platform in Greek towns where orations were made or decisions handed down by rulers (Compare Matthew 27:19, Acts 12:21 and Acts 18:12). It was also the place where the awards were given out to the winners of the annual Olympic games.

Plainly what Paul has in view here is the believer’s life and service, as seen in the light of the judgement seat of Christ.

The Judgement Seat of Christ will be a place of revelation. The word *appear* (v9) means be revealed. We may hide things from people here but there will be no hiding there.

What do you understand by this ?

Compare 1 Corinthians 3:13 and 1 Corinthians 4:5 and discuss what you think will be revealed?

The Judgement Seat of Christ will be a place of reckoning.

Here we will receive what is coming to us!

Compare Romans 14:10-12, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 4:1-6 and discuss what you think we might receive.

The motivation of hope and the motivation of fear are two of the ways in which the Apostle Paul kept going but we must now look at his third motivation.

3. THE MOTIVATION OF LOVE

2 Corinthians 5:14 *“For Christ’s love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died.”*

This surely is the greatest of all motivations. It seems that the pen of the Apostle Paul had caught fire. So often he uses long-reasoned statements, but here in the middle of such an argument, he seems to erupt into a flaming passion. ***“For Christ’s love compels us.”***

This love is the love seen in his sacrificial death. When he died on the cross Christ proved his love for the world (John 3:16), the church (Ephesians 5:25) and individual sinners (Galatians 2:20).

When you consider the reasons why Christ dies, you cannot but love him.

- He died that we might die – see 2 Corinthians 5:14
- He died that we might live – see 2 Corinthians 5:15
- He died that we might live through him – see 1 John 4:9
- He died that we might live with him – see 1 Thes. 5:10
- He died that we might share in the new creation – see 1 Corinthians 5:16-17

WITNESS

Discuss which is the greatest motivation for you in life—each share. What are you as group motivated to do this week and why?

Session 5 - Representation

WELCOME & ICEBREAKER

The game “Drop/Catch”

Using a soft ball throw to each member in turn with the instruction “drop” or “catch”. They are however to do the reverse of what they have been asked to do. It is harder than you might think!”

WORSHIP - Read or sing

I lift my hands
to the coming King,
to the great I AM,
to You I sing,
for You're the One
who reigns within my heart.

*And I will serve no foreign god,
or any other treasure;
You are my hearts desire,
Spirit without measure.
Unto Your name,
I will bring my sacrifice.*

Open Prayers – share a time of prayer using the Acrostic **ACTS**

- **Adoration**
- **Confession**
- **Thanksgiving**
- **Supplication**

WORD

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:2

INTRODUCTION: What a great thing it must be to represent your Country at the Olympics; most of us can only dream of such a privilege. Yet when it comes to the Kingdom of God we are all called to represent the King of kings as we engage in the race of life.

Consider the privilege, power and responsibilities of the ambassadors life and remember this phrase of Paul's, ***"We are Christ's ambassadors"*** which we are going to examine together.

1. AN AMBASSADOR REPRESENTS HIS OWN COUNTRY IN AN ALIEN LAND

If an ambassador's country is a monarchy they are the personal representative of the Monarch and it is expected that he will be given the honours and distinctions which belong not to him as a person but to the one in whose place he stands.

The embassy (the place where the ambassador lives and works) is counted as being a little bit of homeland in a foreign land.

Now says Paul, ***"We are Christ's ambassadors"***. We are personal representatives of the King of kings!

Sometimes ambassadors are the bearer of good news. For instance when foreign aid is to be delivered the Ambassador must be the first to break the news.

- **How do you rate yourself (on a scale of 1-10; 1 being bad and 10 being good) as a representative of King Jesus?**
- **How do you rate your church as a colony of heaven...does his rules and customs and laws prevail?**

2. AN AMBASSADOR HAS PERSONAL RECOURSE TO THE MONARCH

How on earth could an ambassador represent the monarch if he didn't know the monarch's mind? Consequently it is the established practise to guarantee to every ambassador uninterrupted communication with those he represents.

The Christian ambassador is guaranteed no less. When Jesus Christ makes us ambassadors he promises us that indispensable privilege. He says, *"You are going to represent me in an alien world... You may always know my mind... Nothing need come between us... only your neglect or indifference... When you pray I'll*

hear; when you listen I'll speak".

The secret of successful ambassadorial service is good communications. How true that is of the Christian. No man or woman can hope to be a dependable ambassador for Christ unless they maintain prime allegiance. The alien world affects us all; its atmosphere penetrates us; its pressures bear in on us in ten thousand ways. How easily we become conformed to this world. (See Romans 12:1-3)

- **Discuss what are the best ways, in your experience of maintaining contact with our Lord?**

3. AN AMBASSADOR MUST PERSONALLY RECOGNISE HE HAS A SPECIAL MISSION

Study carefully v20, *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God".*

What a task; to reconcile the alien world to Christ. How do ambassadors cope with that mission? One of the primary ways is to study the mind of the nationals!

- **Discuss how you understand the special mission we have as Christian ambassadors? Each share.**
- **What ways do you exercise the Ministry of reconciliation?**

4. EVERY AMBASSADOR IS ONE DAY RELIEVED OF HIS POST

You can only imagine the relief that there must be, when an Ambassador is called home after being posted in a particular difficult situation.

Some day the Christian ambassador will be called home but until then there is no retirement! God doesn't intend that we dwell forever in an alien land. Some day that call will come to you and me. It is as the Monarch wills. When it comes, may it find us fulfilling our duties as ambassadors of Christ: busy in the tasks he has given; filling the moments either in communication with him or communicating for him.

WITNESS

- Pray for all national ambassadors especially for those serving in countries where there is civil unrest or where there are unjust and oppressive governments.
- Discuss how, as a group you could seek to encourage them.
- Discuss how we can use the Olympic games as a means of evangelism.

Session 6: Celebration

WELCOME & ICEBREAKER

What would you say is your greatest achievement in life? What would you say was your proudest moment, or perhaps most rewarding? How was your achievement acknowledged by others? Did you receive a prize, an award or was there a special ceremony? Share your memories of this with the group.



WORSHIP

1. Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in endless praise.
2. Take my hands & let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.
3. Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.
4. Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.
5. Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.
6. Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Either sing together the words of "Take my life and let it be" by Frances Ridley Havergal, or if your group is not one that is suited to singing, ask a few people to recite one verse each. Then reflect on the meaning of each verse as we think about laying every achievement and prize at the Lord's feet.

THE WORD

The reading for this week's study starts in Troas. Troas was a place



of major significance in the Apostle Paul's day. It was a major sea port in North West Asia Minor and the embarkation port to cross over to Macedonia for the land route to Rome. Mentioned six times in the bible it is the place where Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia

standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". Acts 16.9 tells us of the first time that Paul preached the gospel in Europe. Acts 16 is also the place in the book of Acts where Luke starts writing about 'we' instead of 'he' when describing Paul's journeys, so it is likely that Luke joined Paul at Troas. Troas is also known as the place where Eutychus fell down from the third storey as the apostle Paul preached on and on until midnight (Acts 20:6 - 10).

Reaching further back into history, Troas was named after the city of Troy, which was only 11 miles away, and was thought of as being one of the most notable cities in the Empire. Emperor Augustus made it a Roman colony meaning that people born there were Roman citizens, and it served as a strategic point on the east west communication route.

The site of Troas is abandoned today, with only a few monumental walls intact. However, a stadium and a gymnasium are key amongst the building which can still be identified. It seems that sport was a key part of the life of the people of Troas, just as it was in the lives of the people of Corinth who hosted the Isthmian Games. The Isthmian Games were held both the year before and the year after the Olympic Games (the second and fourth years of an Olympiad), while the Pythian Games were held in the third year of the Olympiad cycle at the city of Delphi.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

- Paul says in verse 12 that when he arrived at Troas to preach the Gospel, "The Lord had opened a door for me". What do you think

this means? There was not Christian church in Troas at that time, so what form and where do you think the preaching might have taken place?

- Have you ever been aware of the Lord 'opening a door' for you to share your faith? Do you think that sharing your faith is an important part of your calling as a Christian? Why, or why not?
- Verse 14 says, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ". A triumph in Roman times was a victory parade in which a victorious general would lead his soldiers (and any prisoners he had captured) through the streets in a festive procession whilst people cheered and applauded and incense and spices were burned in their honour. Paul relates this image to the victory of Christ as he leads his followers in a victory procession. It is an openly militaristic and triumphant image. How do you feel about martial images and triumphalism in relation to the Christian faith?
- The Greek word which is translated as 'triumph' in our English versions of the Bible is 'thriambeuo'. It is a compound word made up of two other words which means to join in with a noisy clamour or wailing. The word was used elsewhere in Greek writing to describe the loud, noisy songs sung in honour of the god Bacchus. How do you feel about Christianity 'borrowing' words, ideas and practices from other religions and beliefs?
- Many people say that they value the peace and quiet of church services, and yet almost all the images we have of worship in the Bible are loud, clamorous and passionate! From David urging us to 'shout aloud' in the Psalms with loud cymbals and

θριαμβεο

Verb. To triumph, to celebrate a triumph, cause one to triumph. From *θρέομαι* (*threomai*) to wail; to clamour, that is, (by implication) to frighten or to trouble and a derivative of a word meaning a noisy iambus, sung in honour of the god Bacchus; to make an acclamatory procession

stringed instruments through to the 'loud voices' of the worshippers in heaven in the Book of Revelation, vibrant worship seems to be the norm. Should we be more passionate in our worship or more reserved?

- In verses 15 and 16 of this reading Pauls talks about 2 groups of people: the saved and the perishing. To one group he says the knowledge of God is like a sweet fragrance and to the other group the smell of death. Many Christians today are uncomfortable with the idea of there being some people who are 'saved' and others who are 'perishing'. Last year the author Rob Bell caused a major stir and argument by suggesting to evangelical Christians that God's love might be more universal than some would want to say it was, and that there are not such clear-cut divisions between those who are saved and the lost. What is your view on this issue?
- From verse 17 it seems that there were some preachers who were bringing the Gospel and the church into disrepute by 'peddling the word of God for profit'. Many clergy make their living from their ministry, and most churches would pay a 'preaching fee' to a visiting preacher. What do you think Paul would say about this? What would he make of the preachers and evangelists of Christian TV today urging viewers to sow a financial 'seed' into their ministry? Do we talk enough about money, stipends, giving and financial matters in our churches?

WITNESS

Share with the group helpful ways you have found of sharing your faith with others and unhelpful ways in which people have tried to share their faith with you. Read again the passage from 2 Corinthians 2:12-17 and ask together in prayer that your experience would be that the Lord would open doors for you in your life.

Appendix

A NOTE FOR THOSE FACILITATING THE GROUP

One of the most important roles of the small group facilitator is to ensure that the group members have received the study material in plenty of time to prepare adequately for the meeting. If members have not read the material before hand allow time for everyone to do so. Then summarise the subject briefly.

1. What kind of group Bible study is BEST?

The best discussion follows when the members each prepare privately and then discuss their findings together. What we want to avoid is doing people's thinking for them when they could be doing it for themselves. Few mountaineers enjoy being carried to the top of a mountain, but most appreciate a guide.

2. What a group Bible study should NOT be

a) It is not a lecture.

It is quite unnecessary for the group Leader to give a lecture, especially if the members have prepared beforehand.

b) It is not a long conversation.

Another way of leading degenerates into merely having a long dialogue. The leader asks one member a question, and comments on the reply. The member then tries to justify himself or herself. Avoid the long conversation: it is only appropriate when no more than two people are present.

c) It is not a series of conversations.

If the leader directs questions to specific individuals, not only may they be embarrassed if they fail to have relevant answers, but the whole group will become more and more leader-dependent and will increasingly become a teacher conducting a series of conversations.

The study therefore should be a GROUP DISCUSSION.

3. Group discussions

In practice the Leader asks a question while looking around the group to show that anyone is welcome to answer. Somebody does.

The leader then asks: "What did others find?" or "What facts did someone else discover?" and look around the group for anyone else who wants to catch his or her eye but doesn't like to speak without doing so.

Then another member contributes and so on. To begin with, the members will give their replies looking at the leader, but soon, if the leader persists patiently with suitable guiding questions, the members reply to the group instead of the leader: the discussion has begun.

Instead of remaining Leader-centred, it must become group-centred.

Although the leader is no longer the focus of the group, he or she needs to guide the group to see that the Bible is their focus and the Holy Spirit their teacher.

This is the kind of purposeful group Bible discussion which is most profitable: each member contributing to the group, everyone, including the leader, learning from each other; the Bible and the Lord are at the centre, and the leader quietly acting as facilitator.

