

Discussion questions Lent 2018

Heaven Touching Earth Part 1 (Feb 11 - March 03)

Discovering spirituality in the everyday, the fantastic in the ordinary...

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Heaven Touching Earth Resource Pack 1 PDF](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through them all 3 questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part 1: Dust need not be grey - discovering God's promises through times of pain		
<p>CrossReach's Grey Cakes initiative (taking inspiration from a concept first developed by Emma Thomas, founder of The Depressed Cake Shop) offers an engaging way of thinking about Mental health. It encourages people to bake cakes (for fundraising/awareness raising events) with bright rainbow layers inside but covered on the outside in grey icing.</p> <p>"(They) symbolise the world of someone who is affected by mental health problems, where the fog of anxiety and depression can feel overwhelming, colouring their experience of life."</p> <p>Every year 1 in 4 adults in Scotland will experience a mental health problem. Why do we talk about (and handle) mental and physical health so differently?</p>	<p>Read Psalm 15.</p> <p>The prerequisites in this Psalm for abiding or 'being at home' with God - do not relate to how we treat God - but how we treat one another.</p> <p>How we are with other people - is important to how we are with God.</p> <p>Are the communities we are a part of (family/work/college) places where heaven touches earth in the interaction between us? If not, why not?</p>	<p>Read Matthew 9: 10-13. Tax collectors at this time were unpopular, despised and feared.</p> <p>They tended to be avoided but where others saw a minefield of guilt, suspicion and animosity, Jesus saw an opportunity for friendship, connection, and celebration.</p> <p>Who are the tax collectors in our society - the people that we see as too 'other' to include, to reach out to?</p> <p>Really challenge yourself to think of the people that you struggle to relate to or empathise with.</p>

Part 2: Blessings and trials

Read Matthew 7: 7-12.

We see here a connection between expectation and blessing, an encouragement to ask directly. We are shown a model of a child asking for things from a parent.

Are we bold and imaginative enough in our asking? How do we balance expectation and disappointment? Hope and frustration?

Read Leviticus 19: 18.

“Love your neighbour as yourself”, the ‘Golden rule’ is a difficult commandment, but one we often remind ourselves of.

But what about that first part, about not seeking revenge or bearing a grudge?

Sometimes loving someone - doing the right thing, can be the easy part, but changing how we feel in our heart, letting go of the grudges and resentments can be a lot harder.

How do we let go of grudges?

Read Isaiah 55: 10-11.

Think about the simile of God’s Word being like rain that falls - fulfils its purpose - and returns to heaven. We see the circularity of blessing, that having blessed, blesses the blesser!

Where could we use blessing? Where could we use the rain? In our lives, our communities, our society, our world?

Part 3: A new rhythm for living - a response of faith

Read Luke 6: 27-38.

In this reading Jesus calls us to love our enemies. It is interesting to note the distinction - that we are asked to *love our enemies*, rather than being instructed *not to have enemies* in the first place. It doesn't say in the reading, 'Love everyone and don't have any enemies.'

It's not a call for tolerance, it is much more radical, it is a call to love even the things and people we can't tolerate.

Why is this? Why is it assumed that we will have enemies? Does a Christian's challenge to the status quo naturally create resistance and enemies? How do we handle the concepts of 'love' and 'enemy' together?

'Loving our enemies is different to not having enemies' - Discuss.

Read Jeremiah 17: 7-8.

Life can be fraught and difficult, bad things happen to good people through no fault of their own.

Trust in God leads to blessing but this can be difficult to get our heads around through times of suffering.

In verse 8 when it says that the tree 'never fails to bear fruit' - what are these fruit?

Read Luke 15: 11-32.

This parable is a universal story of rejection, return, and reconciliation but it is full of specific cultural details that would have resonated with its original audience. It's no accident that the younger son is left to look after the pigs - so removed is he from his kosher upbringing. Or in verse 20 when the father runs - this is a big deal as it was not the 'done thing' for a patriarch at this time to run about making big emotional displays.

As a group, retell the story in a contemporary setting.

Be inventive with the casting - mix up the genders and ages and family dynamics, imagine famous people in the roles.

"Barack Obama had two daughters..."

Think about what details would resonate in your culture. What's the equivalent of a fatted calf today? Use your imagination to re-familiarise yourself with this age old story.