



Ballyloughan



Next Step Groups and Flexi-Groups

A FEW BRAVE MEN (THE PROPHETS)

WORD

Please read this before going to your group on Wednesday night!

Again for this week's 'Word' section, rather than concentrating on one particular passage, we're going to take the opportunity to review the previous weeks readings and discuss what we've learned so it's fairly important that you're up to date by Wednesday!

Last week's readings looked at five of the prophets...

- Isaiah: the heavyweight of the prophets, lived during the reign of several kings. His messages had a clear emphasis on warning and judgement, hope and salvation. God would send a Saviour to save his people, and, despite being spoken 800 years before the birth of Jesus, we discover many prophecies fulfilled in his life.
- Jeremiah: a young man was given a frightening message. Yet God took him beyond his human ability, providing the confidence to declare God's warning plus his desire to forgive and restore his people.
- Daniel was one of those exiled in Babylon, where he prospered and rose to a position of prominence. In such a position however, he was totally committed to living for God no matter what the consequences.
- Jonah was the reluctant prophet, the one who tried to run from God. In so doing he discovers that God cannot be hidden from, but he rescues and offers a second chance to those who repent. Although Jonah delights in God's grace for himself, when it is shown to the Ninevites, he is far from happy.
- Malachi was a prophet during the time when the people had returned to Jerusalem from being in exile (see Sunday morning's sermon!). Malachi challenges the people in relation to their half-heartedness in following God.

DISCUSS: Has there been anything that you have written on the 'review' pages or that you've found particularly helpful? Has there been anything that you've been unsure about?

Way in... Get the group to name as many of the prophets mentioned in the Bible as they can! Explore together what role the prophets in the Bible fulfilled.

Going deeper

1. Some people think that certain people are called to 'full time Christian work' whilst others do 'ordinary jobs'. Explore whether a case for this can be made from what the Bible teaches. If everyone is called to be full time Christian workers in whatever line of work (or other 'frontline') God has placed us, what are the implications for how we do our jobs and at the same time fulfil our calling? (see Daniel 6 and also Colossians 3:22-25)

2. Daniel was trapped by a deceitful plan hatched by work colleagues, other administrators whom he had surpassed in authority. Describe ways people today might suffer personal attacks or persecution if they hold to their Christian faith without compromise: e.g. in a home where others aren't Christians, in the workplace, at school, in a community setting etc. What steps can we take to stand strong and be a witness in such times of pressure?

3. Many Christians are keen to affirm God's grace which reaches to ourselves and also to 'sinners' generally out there in the world. But what about when God's grace reaches to those we feel undeserving of forgiveness, or to people within our church whom we see failing? Discuss the lessons which Jonah learned and how they relate to us today.

4. God called Jeremiah to a task – how did Jeremiah respond at first and what did God do (see Jeremiah 1: 4-10). Do you think that sometimes today God calls people to do something for Him, but they shy away due to feelings of inadequacy? Has this ever happened to you? Do you think that it's the strong and confident or the weak and frightened that God uses? Why? (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

5. *"I have loved you" says the Lord. "But you ask, "How have you loved us?"* [Malachi 1:2]. From your recollection of reading Malachi last week, as well as what you heard on Sunday, what effect did the people's lack of appreciation of God's love for them have on the rest of their lives? What relevance do you think this has for us today?

WORSHIP

Take some time to read Isaiah 53:1-8 as a group. Read it slowly and thoughtfully, perhaps you might want to invite each member of the group to read a verse in turn. As you read, when you hear the words 'our' and 'us' think of your group. E.g. *"he was crushed for our [us, in this groups] iniquities..."* You may wish to listen to (or even sing!) an appropriate song afterwards and have a time of responsive prayer.

WITNESS

The Church has left the Building begins in May. Have a chat about the various opportunities that exist to get involved in CHLTB and consider ways in which members of your group might want to take part. Encourage each other!

PS – the next and last official 'Next Step Group' night will be Friday 28th April (due to break during Easter week).