

BIBLE STUDY 5: Strangers on earth

Way in/ setting the scene

The Early Church had a very keen sense of being strangers in the world (see 1 Peter 1:1-17 and 1 Peter 2:4-11).

Have you ever had an experience where you have felt like a stranger? How did you feel?

What do you think made you feel that way?

If you are living in a tent, the land that you may wish you had never left may still be very much in your thoughts. But Abraham was called by God to a new future - a journey requiring faith and no small amount of imagination. He learnt to live as though he is a stranger on earth, dependent on God and living into a future which is entirely open and the seemingly impossible is made possible.

Read: Hebrews 11:8-16

1. In what way are Christians "strangers on the earth"?

2. What implications does this have for how we view other "strangers" in our country?

3. What can the church learn from asylum applicants and refugees, from migrant workers and people here for a short period of time, from people living here who come from other countries or people of other ethnic backgrounds who live in Northern Ireland?

(Why not try this out as role-play or an imagined interview - the 'church member' interviews the other about his/her experiences here - positive and negative.)

4. What are the characteristics of the 'better country' that we long for?

5. How might you show heaven on earth to people who are strangers in your church or your community?

In the New Testament, the church, rather than any one nation, became "God's people". The church took on the identity of being aliens in their own land, as Israel had been.

6. What gives you your identity?

7. What do we mean by "national identity" in particular?

8. How do we view people from other nations or those who have an allegiance to a different national identity, especially those living in this country? Does it make a difference to us where they come from or why they are here?

9. What is the relationship between Christian faith and national identity? Is one more important than the other? How do they get confused?

Taking it forward

Discuss how you plan to take forward your learning from this series.