



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## HG42: A New Year Thought For 2011 *A Time For Everything*

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-17**

**Home Group Study Notes**

9<sup>th</sup> January 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources that might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

A New Year is a time when people resolve to live life differently in the year to come. In addition to the resolutions you are making, what 'spiritual resolutions' (if any?) are you planning to introduce in the next twelve months? Share your hopes with your home group! How might you be able to ensure they last longer than a few weeks?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study Ecclesiastes 3:1-17, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

1) Do you ever feel as though 'time is slipping away' and that you've not achieved half of what you aspire to do in your Christian life? If so, what 'disciplines' could you bring into your Christian life in order to be more effective?

**Time is in God's hands:** If, as Paul suggests, every birth is by divine appointment (Psalm 139:16), spend some time thinking through and thanking God for some of the advantages (and disadvantages, perhaps) of your being born in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Invest in the future:** Are Christians more prone to procrastination? Discuss why this may, or may not, be true. Prayerfully consider an area of church life where you could make a significant investment of time, for a period of twelve months, in order to nurture and develop the faith of others.

It doesn't make sense to know that you're going to die and not prepare for it by making the right decisions, both in accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour but, also, in making the right decisions in His service. And, if God is sovereign, then it must follow that we were born to fulfil an eternal purpose.

In the film *About Schmidt*, Jack Nicholson's starred as a dysfunctional retired widow, struggling to cope with some of the difficulties associated with families. The final line in the film is one of great regret, when Schmidt reflects: *I was weak, I never made a difference*. Is that how you will reflect back on your Christian life? You were weak, you never made a difference. But if we are created for God's purpose then each and every one of us should be making a difference in the world in which we live.

The problem, of course, is that God's plan for our life isn't always *our* plan for our life. If we were able to make our own choices we would have no unpleasantness at all would we? But that would ruin us. God knows that people who are protected from everything almost invariably end up being impossible to live with and become selfish, cruel, vicious, shallow, and unprincipled. God sends these things in order that we might be taught the lessons of life in the university of life! God is sovereign and in control and has a time and a purpose for everything (Romans 8:28). This isn't fatalism, nor does it rob us of freedom or responsibility. It is the wise providence of a loving Father who promises to make everything work for good. Because ...

**Eternity is in our hearts:** Man was created in the image of God, and therefore, we are different from the rest of creation. Vs11 tells us that God has: *set eternity in the hearts of men*. In other words, it won't be until we enter eternity that we'll begin to comprehend God's plan for us and for His world: Life, death, time, and eternity are the 'ingredients' that make up our brief experience in this world, and it is in eternity, vs15, that: *God will call the past to account*. At the end of time, God call into account what we have done with our time, our knowledge of Jesus. And, if that is so, then each of us must make the most of the time we have here on earth and make it count.

It's often been said that life on earth is a preparation for eternity and what we do on earth matters eternally. When our time is up, we can't change anything about the way we have lived our lives. It's a sobering thought but true. One of my favourite films is 'Gladiator' starring Russell Crowe. It's not everyone's cup of tea, but I find it to be quite inspirational – perhaps it's a 'man thing!' In fact, I have a Gladiator movie poster on the back of my study door, which includes a sentence from the film written across the top: "*What we do in life echoes in Eternity.*" A very Christian premise if ever there was one.

**Conclusion:** Solomon writes, with great insight, that God is working out His eternal purposes in and through the deeds of men, even the deeds of the wicked. Yes, God will judge when history has run its course, but God is judging now, vs16-27. In the experiences of life, God is testing man. He is revealing what man is really like. We live by promises and not by explanations. We live by faith and faith learns to live with the inconsistencies and absurdities of this world. It seems to me that Solomon is teaching us that we must experience life, but we can either endure it or enjoy it. I know which one I prefer! Solomon calls us to accept life, enjoy it a day at a time, and be satisfied, not with ourselves, but with what God brings our way.

And time is one of those things we say we don't have enough of, or use as wisely as we could. How many times have you said, or heard someone say: "If I only had the time ..." It's an excuse, or reason, that many people use, both in business, family, socially and in church, for not doing all they would want to do. But, if **TIME** is in God's hands, let each one of us use it wisely and, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ...*" **Colossians 3:23**

**Invest in the future:** Each one of us are experts at putting things off until tomorrow, aren't we. It's called procrastination. It's said that as we grow older we procrastinate even more as the impetuous days of our youth are long forgotten. But what if tomorrow never comes? Are we putting off for tomorrow what we should be doing today? Can we resolve to be in 2011, not tomorrow people, but today people?

I'm determined not to make the same mistakes in 2011 as I did in 2010 and 2009 and ... one of my resolutions is to make more time for and with my family and also, that our church family here Emmanuel will continue to invest in the future the next generation of worshippers here and, whilst we seen some growth here in recent times, how we'd love to see that continue apace this year. Perhaps it's also about each one of us investing in others. Offering support and encouragement for those who are struggling with life and starting out on their spiritual journey.

It's worth noting here that Solomon is not saying: 'Don't worry-be happy!' He is promoting faith in God, not 'faith in faith.' Faith is only as good as the object of faith, and the greatest object of faith is our Lord. Life can never be meaningless and monotonous when God has made us a part of His eternal plan. We are children of our heavenly father being prepared for an eternal home (John 14:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4). The right attitude for us is the fear of the Lord, vs14, which is not the cringing of a slave before a cruel master, but the submission of an obedient child to a loving parent.

The year 1611 is not as memorable a year as, say, 1066 (Battle of Hastings) 1662 (BCP) but 1611 is a hugely significant anniversary for us all. It will be 400 years since the publication of the Authorized Version of the Bible, sponsored by King James I – known as the KJV (King James Version). And 2011 has been designated as the Year of the Bible as a means of encouraging people to start reading the Bible again. It's my prayer that each of us will make a point of investing in God's future for us by reading and carefully examining God's word in the year to come because, in doing this, we will find the fullness of hope in your lives that will help us to:

**Make the right decision:** Making the right decision is not always easy. Some of my most disappointing moments in life have turned out to be great opportunities and that is the most wonderful part of being a Christian. I've not forgotten the line of a song by a Christian singer called Phil Keaggy in the 1970's who sang: "Disappointment becomes His-appointment" – one letter makes a huge difference.

How many of you wish you could turn back the clock and live life differently? I do ... especially when it comes to taking risks as a Christian and as a minister. The American pastor John Wimber used to say that he spells faith: RISK. You may recall that I quoted this in my very first sermon here. But I'm not sure I've taken enough risks in my life to justify my faith. I wonder, what risks will you/we take this year as we seek to make the right decisions?

**There is a time to die, vs2a.** During an interview before his death in 2001, former Beatle George Harrison was interviewed by *Rolling Stone* magazine and spoke about the important issues in his life and about his regrets etc, and said: "*Everything else can wait but the search for God cannot wait.*" It seems to me that he was absolutely right. In the light of eternity, the time span between when we take our first breath to the moment we take our last is very short.

I'm 48yrs of age and I often wonder where my life has gone. James 4:14: *What is your life? You are a mist (vapour) that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.* Is so very true. Have you ever considered the fact that we're going to spend more of our life on that side of death than we're going to spend on this side? It seems to me that only a fool would go through life totally unprepared for something he/she knows is inevitable.

**Make the right decision:** Paul quoted George Harrison, when he said: "*Everything else can wait but the search for God cannot wait.*" Are you still searching for God's plans and purposes for your life? Are you still hungry to see God's potential for you fulfilled? Are you making the right decisions in your Christian discipleship?

**Eternity is in our hearts:** Solomon suggests in 3:15 that: "*God will call the past to account.*" Does this statement cause you to reflect on your Christian discipleship and service? What might you need to change, or continue to do, so that you can give a confident account of your life at the end of time?

6) Colossians 3:23 is our church text for 2011: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ...* share with your Home Group how this might 'work' for you, and each other, in your daily lives – especially in the light of this study.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG42: A New Year Thought For 2011 A Time For Everything

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-17**

**Home Group Sermon Notes**

9<sup>th</sup> January 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Whenever a new year arrives, we often have a bit of a reminisce at what the previous year was like don't we? We think about the decisions we made and the things we wish we hadn't done. I wonder what's been going through your mind in recent days! A New Year is also a time when people resolve to live life differently in the year to come.

I read some research recently this week that suggested that less than 10% of resolutions make it through to the end of January and only 1% through to December. Isn't that amazing? What resolutions will you be keeping this year? What 'spiritual resolutions' (if any?) are you planning to introduce in the next twelve months? If you only manage to keep one, can I encourage you to remember our Church Text for 2011: "**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ...**" **Colossians 3:23**

The onset of a New Year is also a season of hope but, unlike what we might call 'Christmas' hope: *I hope I get an iPad/iPod/iTouch; I hope I get the new PSP; I hope I get FIFA 2011 ...* this kind of hope is usually less trivial, such as: *I hope I get to keep my job this year; I hope I beat my cancer this year; I hope this year will have more happiness than sadness ...*

Hope. A word that word can lift our spirits when we're feeling down. It gives us something to cling to when we lose our jobs, our health, and when we lose someone we love and it is a spark inside our soul that tells us that even if today is a struggle, tomorrow things will be better. The Bible talks a lot of about hope and it is always inextricably linked to Jesus because, in Jesus, we have the hope of God's guidance, provision and care every day of our lives as well as the hope of eternal life. Hope, it seems to me, is one of the most significant. In Ecclesiastes 3 (after the negative overtones of the opening chapters), Solomon wakes up to the fact that life does indeed have meaning, hope and purpose, and so he begins to write about where, and how, that can be found in our lives.

We don't have to be a philosopher or a scientist to know that 'times and seasons' are a regular part of everyday life vs1: *There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.* If it wasn't for the dependability of God ordained 'natural laws' both science and life itself would be chaotic, if not impossible. Not only are there times and seasons in this world, there is also an over-ruling providence in our lives. And these opening verses of chapter 3 are not merely a description of what happens in life but, rather, a description of what God sends and so, this morning I want to think about a 'time for everything' by using the word **TIME** as an acronym.

**Time is in God's hands:** *Picture by Salvador Dali – The Persistence of Memory.* Art is always subjective/personal, but this picture speaks to me of how time simply melts away before our eyes! This picture can be viewed at the Website of the Museum of Modern Art at: [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=79018](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79018)

*There is a time to be born ... vs2a:* I was born on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1962 in my parent's bedroom at 73, Warwick Terrace, in a mining village called Silksworth in Sunderland. The moment that I stuck my head out into the world, I became a part of recorded history. Paul Anthony Carr was born. The event was so important that it involved a legal transaction at the Registrar's Office where they gave my parents a certificate to mark the occasion. But do you realise that every birth is by divine appointment? Did you know that the moment we came into this world, it wasn't just recorded at the Registrar's Office, it was also recorded in Heaven? That's what we read in Psalm 139:16: *All the days ordained for me were written in Your book.*

And if that's true, then I'm glad that God ordained that my birth would take place in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> C instead of in the 1500's. I'm glad that I don't have to spend most of my day hunting for food with a bow and arrow just so Paula and the children can eat. Thank God, literally, for grocery stores and supermarkets. I'm also glad I wasn't born in the 1800's with the oppressive working conditions as the Industrial Revolution took hold in our country. I'm glad I'm one of the baby boomer generation with all the advantages, and disadvantages, that brings with it.

Charles Simeon was born on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1759. Winston Churchill was born on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1874. Adolph Hitler was born 20<sup>th</sup> April 1889. John F. Kennedy was born 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917. Gene Roddenberry, creator of *Star Trek*, was born 19<sup>th</sup> August 1921. Cliff Richard was born on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1940. David Cameron was born 9<sup>th</sup> October 1966. And so I could go on. As we look through this list of notable/infamous people, we realise that when they were born, they weren't presidents or prime ministers; musicians or mass murderers; great preachers or legendary screen-writers. They were just new born babies entering into a new world. Today, during the next 24 hours, almost a half a million children will be born into this world. About 1,800 of those will be born in the UK alone. That's means 650,000 people born in this country this year. And each one by divine appointment. Amazing.

Vs2-8 reminds us, there *is* a time to live. I'm not going to go through these phrases individually, each one is as deep and profound as the next (a talk for another time, perhaps) however, you may want to spend some time thinking through them on your own and/or in your home groups. But there is:

*A time to be born a time to die, vs2a*  
*A time to plant a time to uproot, vs2b*  
*A time to kill and a time to heal, vs3a*  
*A time to tear down and a time to build, vs3b*  
*A time to weep a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, vs4*  
*A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, vs5a*  
*A time to embrace and a time to refrain, vs5b*  
*A time to search and a time to give up, vs6a*  
*A time to keep and a time to throw away, vs6b*  
*A time to tear and a time to mend, vs7a*  
*A time to be silent and a time to speak, vs7b*  
*A time to love and a time to hate, vs8a*  
*A time for war and a time for peace, vs8b*

The Circle of Life that the Disney film 'The Lion King' so beautifully portrays, continues – as indeed it must. All of these are part of God's wonderful plan for your life and it tells us how God is accomplishing His divine purposes in us and through us, even though we may not always understand what is going on. But one thing is clear: if we co-operate with God's timing, life will not be meaningless. Everything will be, vs11: *beautiful in His time*, even in, and through, the most difficult experiences of life. Secondly: