



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?



HG54: The Lord's Prayer (1/8) *Preliminaries: Praying In The Right Way*

Matthew 6:5-13

Home Group Study Notes

11th September 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 which might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Share one experience/event (whether on holiday; at home; or in a newspaper, magazine or on TV) which has had an impact on your Christian life since your Home Group last met.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

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





Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, 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 some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: Paul made the point that prayer is like a conversation (by phone or email, if not face-to-face). What are the good points and the weak points about such a comparison?

2: Read through Section 2: Why Pray? And discuss some of the reasons for praying suggested here.

3: Have you never admired someone else's prayers? Why was this?

You don't have to pray out loud - in fact, if you're praying on the tube it might be a help not to pray out loud! But you can pray in your heart. But I think it's a help, certainly I find it a help, to have set times to pray. I always think that whatever you start the day with, whatever those thoughts are, the mind tends to grind on them all the way through the day! And to start the day praying, is a wonderful way to start.

Alone: Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father (Matt 6:6)

With others: Jesus said, Matthew 18:19: "... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." In other words, he says there's a special power when we get together and pray together.

There's a story from the Second World War of some Londoners huddled in an air raid shelter during a bombing raid. The exploding bombs were deafening, terrifying and dangerously close. Someone suggested that it would be a good idea to pray, but none of the adults was willing to take the lead, not really knowing how to express their needs and fears in the form of a prayer. A young boy came to their rescue by eagerly volunteering. Silence fell in the air raid shelter as everyone bowed their heads and waited for their 'priest of the moment' to take the lead. Drawing himself up to full height he prayed the only prayer he knew: '*For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.*'

Think about how you pray: Imagine you were told that tomorrow you were going to meet some incredibly important person such as the Queen, the Prime Minister or the President of the USA for a discussion. Wouldn't you spend much of the next 24 hours thinking about what you were going to say? You'd probably write down some thoughts on what you wanted to speak about, rewrite them several times to get the words just right and then memorise them so that when you had the opportunity to speak, you could say the right thing. The irony is that all too often we come to prayer with God, the King of heaven, without any thought at all. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that we lie awake all night wondering what to say in our prayers. That would be to deny the fact that God is our loving heavenly Father. But if we were to think a bit more carefully about who it is we are talking to in prayer, our prayer life would be transformed.

7: Conclusion. Prayer is part of our relationship with God and we should continually seek to develop this part of our Christian life. And so, be honest in your prayer. Pray regularly and with others and remember that God answers prayer according to His plans and purposes, not according to our (sometimes) selfish motives. Having God as our heavenly Father is a tremendous privilege, as Pauline will be speaking about next Sunday, and a responsibility. And, as we look closely at The Lord's Prayer in the coming weeks, my hope is that our understanding of prayer will be enlightened and that we will begin to understand, more fully, what our priorities in prayer should be. Martin Luther said: *Pray as if everything depends on God, then work as if everything depends on you.*

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen.*

Our Father in Heaven: Privilege: Praying To Our Father (HG55)

We are praying to the God who created the heavens and the earth and holds all things in the palm of his hand. The one who loved the world so much he sent his son Jesus to be our Saviour. What a privilege to be able to talk to him!

Hallowed be Your name: Praise: Honouring God's Name (HG56)

So often the name of Jesus is a swear word and we are praying that the name of Jesus' would again be honoured in our society.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done: Purpose: The Meaning Of Life (HG57)

That's a prayer that God's purpose would be made known in our own lives, in the lives of our families; community, nation and in His world. I love to go through the day that's coming up and just ask God's help in all the different things that I'm involved in.

Our daily bread: Provision: What God Wants To Give Us (HG58)

God is interested in the things that you're concerned about, just like any parent would be concerned about the things that their children were concerned about and he wants to provide for all our needs, physical and spiritual.

Forgive us our sins: Pardon: Forgiveness And Forgiving (HG59)

There's this kind of virtuous circle in the teaching of Jesus that the more we understand that we are forgiven, the more that we want to forgive. If we really experience God's pardon, we will want to forgive others, however hard it may be - and sometimes *it is* hard.

Lead us not into temptation, deliver us from evil:: Protection: Battling Against Evil (HG60)

God doesn't tempt us, but he is in control of how much we're exposed to temptation. And all of us have weak areas, whether it's fear, or selfish ambition, greed, pride, lust, gossiping, cynicism etc. And if we know our weakness, we can pray for protection against it, as well as taking practical steps to avoid unnecessary temptation and pray for deliverance from the one who can cause so much damage in our lives.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours: Perspective: Living Life God's Way (HG61)

This is a phrase that we want to be sung by the best choir and orchestra imaginable, at a volume to rattle the church roof and windows. By praying these words we are proclaiming that at the very heart of the universe lies God's rule, God's splendour and God's majesty. Can you imagine how the devil hates this phrase - all the kingdom and all the power and all the glory belong to God and to God alone? We want to live life God's way.

Amen: is a Hebrew word that basically means 'so be it'.

Saying Amen is a decisive act of agreement with what has been prayed. It is not to be done lightly. Next time you say a prayer, don't just say 'Amen'. Pause and ask yourself: Am I really serious about what I have said? Am I prepared to commit myself to what I have prayed? Am I prepared to live in a way that is consistent with my prayer? Am I prepared for God to answer my prayers? If you are, and only if you are, then go ahead and say 'Amen'.

6: When Should We Pray?

Always: The New Testament encourages us to pray always (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Paul says, Ephesians 6:18: "*Pray in the Spirit, on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests ... and always keep praying for the saints.*" You don't have to be in a church building to pray. You can pray as you walk down the street, you can pray on your bike, you can pray on the tube.

4: Is 'The Lord's Prayer' a helpful guide for your praying? In the Church of England, The Lord's Prayer is said every week - did Jesus mean this prayer to be a formula or a framework (Matthew 6:9)?

5: Do you prefer written or 'off-the-cuff' spontaneous prayers in church? What are the positive and negatives of both?

6: An Old Testament example. Read 1 Samuel 1:1-18. What drives Hannah to prayer? What do we learn about how Hannah prayed? What initial response does her prayer provoke? Why is Eli's reaction tragic? What does this passage suggest about the reaction that heartfelt and genuine prayer may receive from others?



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



HG54: The Lord's Prayer (1/8) *Preliminaries: Praying In The Right Way*

Matthew 6:5-13

Home Group Sermon Notes

11th September 2011 - Revd Paul A. Carr

1: What is Prayer? It's amazing how many Christians have great concerns with regards to prayer: what it is and how we should engage with it. But prayer is simply talking to God in the way you would have a conversation with a friend or a family member. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we listen and sometimes we just enjoy being in that person's company. And so it is with prayer. It's not some mystical enlightenment that only a chosen few are able to attain. Prayer should be a natural part of each Christian's discipleship and is, probably, the most important activity of our lives. Prayer involves Father, Son and Holy Spirit (the Trinity): we pray *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Spirit.

2: Why Pray? How many times have you heard someone say: "If God knows all our needs; why should we waste time troubling him? Can prayer make any difference? Does God really hear me?" At one level, praying is just something that Christians do and to ask why we do it is to ask an unanswerable question. At another level, prayer is a natural communication between our heavenly Father and us. It is - or it should be - as spontaneous as a new baby gurgling to its father or mother. You don't ask why a baby is making chuckling noises as they lie in their mother's arms; they just do it. There is something that is spontaneous and natural about prayer for a child of God. Our lives without prayer are like lungs without air. However, prayer does not always come naturally; there are often times when you have to make a choice whether to pray. Sometimes, prayer can be hard work. Sometimes you have other things on your mind; sometimes you feel a million miles away from God. It is at times like these that you have to remind yourself of the reasons for praying.

Prayer develops our relationship with God: It's a well known fact that relationships break down because of a lack of communication. But with good communication, the relationship grows and flourishes. And it's this relationship with God that we find the very meaning and purpose of our lives.

Prayer allows us to be involved in God's actions in the world: God doesn't need our prayers; he is perfectly capable of acting on his own initiative. But for some reason he chooses to involve us. In prayer God chooses to involve us. We can pray about any situation/person/circumstance ... D.L.Moody: *The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoes.*

Prayer allows us to enjoy fellowship with God by communicating with him: Prayer is the communication that keeps a Christian's relationship with God fresh, healthy and real. Prayer should never be considered as a one-way phone call like a message left on an answering machine. Prayer allows us to: hear God; speak back; and it is vital that we listen. The important thing is that prayer is a dialogue and through it we grow spiritually.

Jesus prayed: Jesus doesn't start here by saying, 'If you pray' but he says 'when you pray.' He assumes that we will pray. In a way it's very natural for human beings to pray. We were created for this relationship.

Rewards of prayer: Jesus said that when we pray God will reward us (5:6). Sometimes people say: 'Isn't that inappropriate to be looking for a reward?' Well, of course there are inappropriate rewards, but there are also appropriate rewards. If somebody's working hard for their exams, passing them, getting a qualification, is an appropriate reward. If two people are in love, marriage is a kind of fulfilment and reward for love.

3: Does God Always Answer Prayer? Does, or should, God answer all of our prayers? It's a good question isn't it? I wonder, what would be your response: Yes, no, always, sometimes, never! Sometimes I think it's just as well that God doesn't! What would our lives be like if all of our prayers were answered! Sometimes God says yes; sometimes he says wait; and sometimes he says no - but these are all answers to prayer, aren't they? Only, no and wait are the answers we don't want to hear! In all my prayers, whether I get answers I want or not, I can count on this one fact: God can make use of whatever happens in my life. As the apostle Paul wrote: "*Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6-7).

4. Causes of Ineffective Prayer. But sometimes, no matter how insistent you may be in prayer, prayers just don't seem to be answered. It's like they are rebounding from the ceiling. The Bible tells us that could be due to a number of reasons, for example:

Unconfessed sin: *and this causes a barrier between us and God.* Don't misunderstand me: of course, Jesus is the friend of sinners. All of us have things that are wrong in our life, and if that stopped us praying, none of us would be able to pray. But Jesus died for us so that we could be totally forgiven. However, if we choose to reject that and wander off, like the Prodigal Son, away from the Father's house, then we're no longer in that relationship. Or if we plan to set out on a course of rebellion against God. Isaiah 59:2: "*But your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*"

Disobedience: If we are living in a way that isn't pleasing to him that is contrary to His word and our morals and values are in contradiction to his will for our lives. 1 John 3:21-22: "*... if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*"

Unforgiveness: If we have unforgiveness in our heart towards another person, that can often be a barrier in our own prayer life, simply because we have sin in our own hearts. Romans 3:23: *For all have sinned ...*

Wrong motives: James 4:3 says: "*You don't have, because you don't ask God. And when you ask you don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives—that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*" In other words, if we're praying, 'Oh Lord, I want to win the Lottery!' there's no guarantee that that prayer will be answered!

5. The Model of the Lord's Prayer. A few years ago, when we were in Texas, we visited the Kennedy Space Centre in Houston – a quite remarkable place! On the 'tour' of the site a NASA official was explaining to us the complexities of sending human beings to Mars. Someone asked about how the crew would return to Earth. 'That involves a highly complex plan,' the representative said, 'and it begins with the words "Our Father, who art in heaven".'

But what do they mean? How often do we even think about what they mean? Hopefully this Home Group series will answer all of those questions, and much more besides.