



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?



HG72: Transforming Presence (5/6)
Transforming Hope

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Home Group Study Notes

8th July 2012 - Andy Smith



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 (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Go around the room and get people to finish the sentence: "I know I am blessed because ...". Let people know that they can't take the easy way out and say because they are alive today. They must come up with something more original!



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: Why do you suppose it was so hard for Adam & Eve to remain in covenant with God?

2: If our identity is found in our relationship with the Father, what does that mean for our lives?

3: If obedience is simply living in a way that is true to our identity, what would you expect to see in the life of an obedient person?

When Jesus celebrated Passover with his friends, he took the bread and the cup and used them in a special and unique way: *“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”* (Luke 22:19-20)

The most important celebration of Israel’s covenant with God was gathered by Jesus into the New Covenant in him. It was a covenant that would be established in his death and sealed with his blood. The blood of the Passover was smeared on the doors of the Israelites, meaning they could go into freedom, having been rescued from death. The blood of Jesus means that we are released from the prospect of spiritual death because he died in our place. And now we walk free because of his sacrifice.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57)

Jesus Is The Answer! How wide, how vast, how deep is his love? Ephesians 3:19 says his *“love surpasses knowledge.”* It’s more than we can comprehend. Jesus **is** our majestic, sufficient, all powerful, wonderful, spectacular saviour. Jesus is the answer: he’s our healer, he’s the deliverer and he’s the counsellor. If Jesus isn’t enough, if he’s not our hope, then we are doomed! We’re finished and we should lock up the church and never come back. He’s all we have, he is the gospel! He is the message and he is the **hope**. He is enough...he’s more than we’ll ever need in this life and the next. He has made a way: Let’s think of Jesus; Let’s worship Jesus; Let’s speak of Jesus; **Let’s tell the world that Jesus is the hope of the world.**

**Living God,
Draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
To live your love with generosity and joy, imagination and courage;
For the sake of your world and in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits (*It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda*).

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
 “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel
 and with the people of Judah...
 “...This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
 after that time,” declares the LORD.
 “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.
 I will be their God, and they will be my people.
 No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another,
 ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me,
 from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.
 “For I will forgive their wickedness
 and will remember their sins no more.”
 (Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34)

Jesus Is The New Covenant: “This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17). As the voice of the Father boomed out, the message was clear: the Son of God is among you! And the Son of God was able to do something no one else could – reconnect us to the Father.

But this required a covenant where both parties would agree to give up their old lives – in death – and become one in a new life. Jesus – both human and divine – represented both parties in himself. But the covenant still required a death.

Jesus understood this and had already begun the task by being baptised. As he went down into the waters and re-emerged, he committed himself to going the full distance on our behalf. He said it was to “fulfil all righteousness” – literally, to create a “right relationship” based upon a covenant agreement. In his baptism, Jesus promised to take the path of death on our behalf and offered to raise us to new life as we live in him in covenant unity.

In submitting to baptism, Jesus was offering to represent us in covenant exchange. He was prepared to embrace our sin and the full penalty of death. He walked the path of death, fully identifying with us. He would shed his blood and give up his life so that we could live.

Previously, in Old Testament covenant, the “death” of the covenant partners was represented by the blood of animals. Now there was a perfect representative who was both God and man. When Jesus died, the covenant would no longer be symbolised in the death of an animal but would be fully realised in the death of the Son. John highlights this truth: “Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

4: Jesus took on both parts of the New Covenant as God and as a man – a bit like a judge sentencing you and then taking the punishment in your place. When you think of God’s grace in this way, what does it inspire you to do?

5: Is Jesus the hope of the world? Is he the answer to everything?

6: Is there anything you need to offer up to God so he can meet a need in your life?

Spend some time in praise and worship. Pray that each person in the group will have a fresh, new understanding of what Jesus has done for us all. Give thanks that our debt is paid and that nothing can now separate us from His great love. Hallelujah!



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



HG72: Transforming Presence (5/6) *Transforming Hope*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Home Group Sermon Notes

8th July 2012 - Andy Smith

Covenant is the way the Bible describes and defines relationship: first our relationship with God and then our relationship with everyone else.

In the beginning, when we lived in perfect union with God, the only thing necessary was to maintain the “oneness” that God had already created. Sadly, as easy and simple as that task may have sounded, the first people found it impossible to keep. The story of Adam and Eve tells us that humans became alienated from God. However, as the Bible unfolds, the story also tells that time and again God took a gracious initiative towards the people he created. As we read on through Genesis, it becomes clear that we could never make our own way back to God, so he built a bridge to us. Beginning with Abraham and Sarah, God reconnects with humankind.

This reconnected relationship is ratified and reconfirmed in the lives of Moses and David. By the time we reach the New Testament, we see a deepening in our understanding as Jesus reveals his relationship with the Father. As we follow the story of Jesus, we see him invite his followers into a depth of covenant relationship not seen before. He invited them to experience the same depth of relationship that he enjoyed with the Father.

Understanding covenant is vital to understanding the character of God. There are three essential elements of covenant:

1. The Fatherhood of God: He is our creator, and we live our lives under his loving and generous gaze.

2. Identity: This flows from our relationship with God. Our identity and therefore our sense of security and confidence come from outside ourselves as God tells us that we are his children.

3. Obedience: Although this can sound rather heavy, it is simply acting in a way that is consistent with our identity.

From the beginning, God created us in his likeness. He wanted to tie our identity to his. When creation was pristine and unspoiled by the stain of sin, God put people in prime position, the crown of his creation. We were the pinnacle, the high point of all that he had made. And, unlike all of his other creatures, God made us in his image.

The word translated as “image” also means “imprint”. When God created us, he pressed the imprint of his presence upon us. It is as if God had left his handprint in the clay from which we were made. The imprint was always intended to be filled by the hand that made it. His presence was always meant to fill human existence and experience. When Adam and Eve asserted their independence and pulled away from the hand of God, his spirit no longer filled that imprint. They began to feel empty, uncovered and vulnerable.

Covenant is the fundamental concept that lies at the heart of this truth. Covenant is all about relationship: the word means, “To become one.” God’s desire was that we should live in union with him. God’s desire was that, when anyone looked at us, they would see him!

Luckily for us, this has always been God’s desire for us. So he hatched a plan, one that would recover all the ground that was lost, remake the relationships that were broken and destroy the enemy that stood opposed to us all.

How would God do it? Not by the use of his overwhelming superiority or creative majesty, not by force or might, but by the use of one human being – another “Adam.” God would give humanity a chance to reclaim what they had lost. But it would require one who would live in perfect dependence on God: one who would live in a covenant relationship with his Father.

The passage from Jeremiah points to this eventuality. A day where: “*no longer shall they teach one another ... for they shall all know me ...*” (Jeremiah 31:34). Covenant is the central thrust of Jeremiah. The context of Jeremiah’s calling was unique as he was sent with God’s words upon his lips, commissioned with a special task: “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.*” (Jeremiah 1:5)

This intimate relationship with God, initiated by the Lord while Jeremiah was in his mother’s womb, was the basis of his calling. From this initial revelation of relationship, Jeremiah continually called God’s people back to their covenant. When Jeremiah foresaw the future, his vision was of a new covenant written in people’s hearts: