



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?

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Annual District Church Meeting 2014
HG92: A Blueprint For A Growing Church

Ephesians 1:15-23

Home Group Study Notes

6th April 2014 - 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 (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Easter will soon be upon us. What, for you, is the most poignant aspect of Holy Week, from Palm Sunday through to Easter Sunday, and why?



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 the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Looking back over the past year, what are you most thankful about in the life of Emmanuel.

2: In vs15-16 the Apostle Paul spoke of the importance of a commitment to prayer. Rector Paul suggested that the corporate prayer life of Emmanuel might not be as effective as it could be, what could be done to ensure this is a priority in the life of our church?

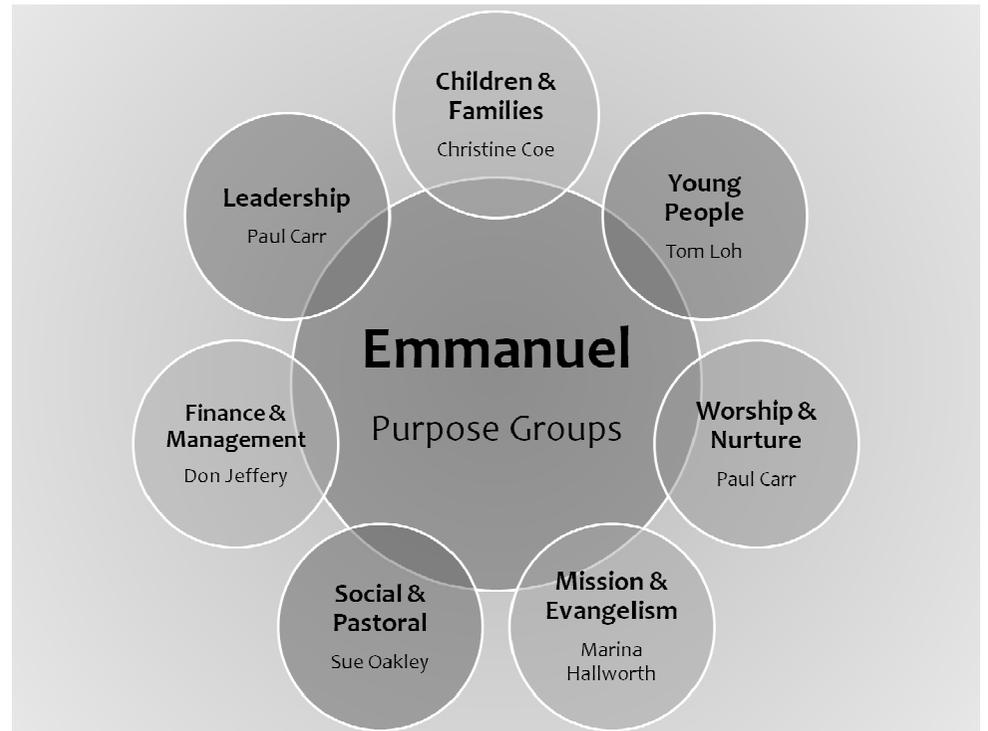
3: Growing in the knowledge of God, vs17, is an important aspect of growing in faith. How can you be better equipped to grow in knowledge and share the Gospel of Good news in an increasing secularised society?

We must move out of the place that is comfortable and convenient; and that which is traditional and safe and cosy, outside of the comfort zone, and be willing to bear disgrace with him on the Calvary road. The disgrace of a belief in the Biblical, Apostolic and Historical Formularies, Creeds and traditions of the Christian faith; the disgrace of holding to a traditional/orthodox understanding of scripture.

4) Knowing the blessing of God's riches, vs18b-23: Fourthly, it is Paul's desire that, after growing in the knowledge of God and his calling on their life, they might know God's riches. One of the great blessings of God's grace *Gods Riches At Christ's Expense* is that God deals with us on the basis of our future not our past. That's so reassuring isn't it? The stuttering Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. The cowardly Gideon became a mighty man of valour (Judges 6:12), the adulterer David became the greatest King Israel had ever known; the impetuous and inconsistent Peter was called a rock on which the church would be built (John 1:42). And so I could go on. God deals with us on the basis of our future not our past and the future, for each one of us is bright!

Conclusion: Each one of us are all called, and equipped, to serve and each of us have a strategic role to fulfil in the mission and ministry of Emmanuel - age, even Christian experience, isn't a barrier. Although it was a bit before my time, I've always been inspired by John F. Kennedy's inauguration address when he was sworn in as American president on 20th January 1961.

Remember those famous words: *Ask not what your country can do for you, ask, what you can do for your country.* I'd want to rephrase that to say: ***Ask not what your church can do for you, ask, what you can do for your church.*** There is much to do.



c) Don't be distracted: The greatest danger posed by the advance and triumph of secularism is that we will become distracted from the real task of the church, which is to grow the kingdom by making disciples through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. Our mission is not to 'Christianise' society nor to moralise and protect people from themselves and the consequences of their own choices. The way that we are to transform society is through conversion not legislation, building the radical new society of the church community which will serve as the most powerful apologetic for the gospel. Romans 1 tells us that the way God deals with sin is by handing people over to it, so that they might experience the reality of its bondage. All too often it seems that we have wanted to try to protect people from the very work that God does to prepare them for the good news of the gospel!

d) Don't be caught unprepared: The way that we can prepare ourselves and others for these challenges is by teaching and applying the Bible faithfully. God's word has everything we need is fully sufficient to equip us to meet the needs of the hour. The vast majority of the Old Testament addresses God's people when they are strangers and aliens, whether on their pilgrimage from Ur to the Promised Land, in slavery in Egypt, wandering in the wilderness or in exile in Babylon, or when the kingdom is suffering progressive collapse and apostasy. The Bible is filled with material that teaches us how to live in the context of a hostile society and culture which is why growing in the knowledge of God is so important and how are you doing this? Regular sermons may help so may Table Talk, joining a Home Group, attending an Alpha or Pilgrim Course - let us have your ideas as to how we might be able to develop and strengthen our growth in faith. Text for 2014:

“As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life.” 2 Peter 1:3

3) Knowing God's calling on our lives, vs18a: What is our calling as Christians? How would you answer that question? Remember Jesus' response to the teachers of the law in Mark 12:29-31: *Love the Lord your God with all your Heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as you love yourself.* There is no doubt each one of us is called to serve and there is plenty of opportunity for each of you to become active in church life. This is especially true if we want to sustain our future vibrancy and vision.

Next Sunday sees the beginning of Holy Week. Have you ever wonder why Jesus had to go outside the gates of Jerusalem to be crucified? In ancient times, you would never bury someone inside a Jewish city nor carry out an execution inside its walls. Criminals had to be executed outside the city gates. But there's another reason. God purposefully decided that this most important event would not take place in heaven, on a throne, in a temple or inside the holy city; it would take place 'outside the gate.' Why? Because Jesus came to earth to save those who are outside the gates, outside his mercy, outside his holiness, outside his love. Throughout the NT we see Jesus touching those who were excluded.

We've seen some great strides in recent years of this taking place haven't we through CTB: Fun in the Park; Street Pastors; Credit Union; our mission weekend ... Real love always steps outside the gate – and that is where we must go.

Jesus could be found amongst the Lepers or daring to drink wine with Tax collectors and Prostitutes. If we are his disciples then we too must go outside the gate; we too must go to the outcasts and the rejected. We too must move away from security and familiarity.

4: On what ways might you bear the disgrace Jesus bore in your daily lives at work, school, rest and play?

5: Do you, vs18a, know the calling of God on your life? What are your gifts and talents and passions? Have you explored these? What might members of Emmanuel and/or your Home Group see as your strengths?

6: Think about the ways in which you have received the blessings of God's grace, vs18b-23. How might these be used to grow God's kingdom in our community?



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



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Home Group Sermon Notes

6th April 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: An ADCM is a time to look back over the past year as well as an opportunity to look ahead, too - as the agenda on page 3 reminds us! I hope you've had a good read through all the reports and, like me, are encouraged and excited by all that has taken place in/through Emmanuel. One of the things that has always been important to me, and I know to many of you, is that we do all that we can, spiritually, administratively and financially to be a healthy church. There's no doubt, through researching for my MA research, that there are definite principles that should be in place for a church to be healthy and effective in its mission and ministry I've compiled, what you might call, a 'Top Ten' blueprint for a growing church:

1. **Leadership:** Clear, visionary and strong.
2. **Welcome:** A genuinely warm welcome
3. **Preaching:** High quality, that is engaging and relevant
4. **Informal Worship:** In dress; liturgy, contemporary music
5. **Good provision for Children and Young People**
6. **Small Groups:** For effective discipleship and pastoral care
7. **Evangelism:** And follow up courses such as Alpha
8. **Shared Ministry:** Active lay participation/involvement
9. **Improvements in Buildings:** Good facilities are essential
10. **Large staff team:** To include 'specialist ministries'

When we look through that list we should be encouraged to see that most/all of those principles are in place and, if you reflect back over my nearly six years here, you will see how these have undergirded much of our ministry - by default or design. But what might God be calling us to do in the year ahead? What new ministries might be coming our way as we respond to the needs of our community? It's always a dangerous to say just keep on doing what you are doing, but that's not a bad thing as we have many great activities happening in our church. But if we are not moving forward we fall back, organisations, especially churches, never stand still. Which is why I'm particularly encouraged by the possibilities of our new Purpose Groups and how they will shape mission and ministry in the year to come (page 7). I've always believed that we should be proactive rather than reactive in what we do as a church and our reading from Ephesians 1:15-23 reminds what it is we should be proactive about in our Christian lives, both individually and as a church family. The apostle Paul offers four suggestions which could also be seen as a blueprint for a growing church:

1) A commitment to Prayer, vs15-16: I'm very aware that you are a praying people in Home Groups; Prayer Ministry and the many other and different ways that you pray. However, I want to encourage you to recognise how strategic the corporate prayer life of a our church is,. It seems to me that corporate prayer has to be high on the list of all of our agendas if we want/expect God to move in a mighty way amongst which is why the monthly Prayer & Praise evenings are so important.

These take place on the first Monday of every month and do not clash with any other church activities. Our next one is tomorrow evening and the focus is the Children and Families Purpose Group. It would be really good to see a few more of you joining with us - especially if you're a member of the DCC/PCC or a leader in an area of church life

2) Growing in the knowledge of God, vs17: There is no doubt that the moral landscape in our nation, and church, is changing fast and this causes huge problems for us as we seek to nurture growth and reach out to a generation that no longer sees the Christian faith as valid to their lifestyle or their spirituality. Because of this, it is becoming increasingly difficult to adopt an traditional/orthodox Christian moral stand point. The issues around human sexuality is just one of several controversial issues within the church in recent years. Tom spoke about this at Table Talk recently. These issues affect our ministry and our witness and there is a whole new debate taking place with many not knowing what to say or do. The most disappointing aspect for me, is that within these discussions, even within the Christian community, to hold to a traditional/orthodox theological, historical or conscientious Christian viewpoint is to be accused of homophobia, or similarly, those who oppose the consecration of Women Bishops, for similar reasons, find themselves accused of being sexist! Or, in the case of females, misguided.

The triumph of secularism, or at least the eclipse of Christianity as the basis of public life and policy, has been inevitable for decades because of the decline of Christian belief in the nation and the reality of a plural multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. Ajmal Masroor, an east London Imam writing in Tuesday's Evening Standard about the decline of Christianity and the increase of Islam in Hackney, writes: *I believe the real reason why Christianity is doing so poorly in fast-moving, materialist, secular Britain is ... [because] People do not like wishy-washy ideas: they like a clear, consistent and coherent philosophy. For the moment, Christianity has lost its way*

Barring remarkable revival, the triumph of secularism will be with us for decades to come, so we urgently need to get used to it, and learn how to live and minister effectively despite it. So, what should be our approach?

a) Don't be surprised: Despite the fact that the UK has enjoyed a long Christian history and heritage the reality, is that most contemporary Britons are unbelievers and secularism seeks to exclude religion and religious belief from public life and culture and to confine it to the private sphere Most of those who still identify themselves as 'Christian' in the census do so only in a vague cultural sense, with no real understanding of what Christianity is, and no personal commitment to Christian values. We ought not to be at all surprised by what has happened. If anything, it is the state-sponsored Christendom which was the historical anomaly. Christians should expect to find themselves as aliens and strangers in the world. This was the situation of the early Church, and books such as 1 Peter and Revelation were written to equip Jesus' disciples to live in a hostile pagan society in which they were a tiny minority. The triumph of secularism marks a return to normality for the church, and this may well be beneficial for it.

b) Don't be distraught: It is all too easy for Christians to feel distraught and disorientated - particularly those of you of an older generation who find it very difficult to understand and accept how society has changed. The triumph of secularism seems to many to be disastrous for the nation, the church and the gospel. However, the work of the gospel has never been dependent upon an avowedly 'Christian' state, and may often be inhibited by such an idea. The gospel is thriving around the world in many countries which have no state support for the Christian faith. A case for disestablishment, perhaps? The triumph of secularism may also have the ultimate benefit of refining and purifying the church in the UK, as people are forced to choose more starkly between following Christ and being faithful to his Word, and enjoying social acceptability in the eyes of wider society.