



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 sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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Songs For The Workplace 1/6
HG134: A Song For Your Journey To Work

Psalm 8:1-9

Home Group Study Notes

8 January 2017 - 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

At the start of a New Year, many people resolve to live life differently in the year to come. What 'spiritual resolutions' are you planning to introduce in your life for the year ahead? Share your hopes with your Home Group!



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 ...



Songs For The Workplace 1/6
HG134: A Song For Your Journey To Work

Psalm 8:1-9

Home Group Sermon Notes

8 January 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr

1. "Hi Ho, Hi Ho, It's Off To Work We Go!"

'How do (or did) you usually feel on your journey to work in the morning?' This is the first question in your Home Group sermon notes this week. I guess some of you went back to work this week, after the Christmas break with an all too familiar sense of dread. Perhaps those usual Monday blues intensify with overcrowded trains and tubes, congested roads and ill-mannered drivers as you make your way to work. On reaching work, you're confronted with a pile of letters on your desks and a huge inbox waiting to be cleared - all marked urgent! There is the usual high expectations of your boss to contend with as well as opportunistic colleagues, demanding clients, office politics, temptations and long working hours - and that's just me!

In Snow White, the seven dwarfs go off to the mine each morning happily singing: "Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go!" However, their joyful enthusiasm is often far removed from our own experience of work. For many Christians there is a gap between church on Sunday and work on Monday. If you've looked at your Home Group diary you'll know that our new series is entitled 'Songs for the Workplace' looking at six Psalms which will help you to take God to work - or maybe discover that He is already present! These studies will focus on Psalms that relate to our everyday working lives. They address the frustration we often feel: the temptations to compromise; the busyness and stresses of the workplace. They will also help to celebrate the good days when everything is going well.

For many people, a sensible work life balance remains an impossible dream - especially for the workaholics amongst us. So you might be wondering: 'How could I possibly sing happy songs like the dwarfs when I don't enjoy my work like they do?' This series will give us some helpful pointers in that direction. It may also help you address the frustrations and stress of the workplace and help you to understand something of God's purpose and perspective of work. As we recognise that God himself is a worker and he has designed us not to be idle but to glorify him through our work.

These six Spirit-inspired Psalms will enable us to seek guidance from his Word and truly praise God and enable us to sing happy work songs, not as dwarfs, but as cherished children of God saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

2. The Creator God, vs1-5

Psalm 8 begins and ends, vs1&9: "*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*" The two words for *Lord* (O Lord, our Lord) are not the same in Hebrew. The first one is a translation of the name *Yahweh* - not a generic name for God, but the personal name of Israel's God based on the statement in Exodus 3:14: "*I am who I am.*" *O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.*" There is no place in all the earth where God is not *Yahweh*. Everything depends absolutely on him. He is above all things everywhere. He sustains all things everywhere. He is the ground and goal of all things everywhere.

4: Read Psalm 8:5-9. What is the position God has given to us in His world?

5: God gives us the responsibility to care for His creation as (Genesis 1:26-28).

a) What significance does this give to your work?

b) How would you rate humanity's performance as stewards of God's world?

6: Use Psalm 111 to praise God the worker for the work he has done. Pray that, even when work is frustrating, oppressive or futile, you may have a sense of working for God and His glory.



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



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: How do (or did) you usually feel on your journey to work in the morning?

2: Read Psalm 8:1-3. This teaches us that God is a worker.

- a) How do you see the majesty of God's name in what he has made?
- b) How should we respond to God's work?
- c) How can this change our attitude to work?

3: Read Psalm 8:3-4. What is the point of the comparison between God and humanity that the writer makes?

He is greater and wiser and more beautiful and wonderful than everything everywhere. *"O Yahweh, our Lord (our Master, our King, our Ruler), how majestic is your name in all the earth."* However, between verses 2 and 8, David wants us to see a very peculiar mark of his majesty and the peculiar mark of His majesty is seen in the way God relates human beings.

In verses 3-4, David describes God as the majestic Creator/Worker who created the universe and made the stars with his fingers. *"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place ... We, like the Psalmist, sang earlier: 'I sing for joy at the work of your hands ...'"*

The late President Franklin D. Roosevelt used to have a ritual with the famous naturalist, William Beebe. After an evening's chat, the two men would go outside and look into the sky. Gazing at the stars, they would find the lower left hand corner of the great square of Pegasus. And one of them would recite these words, as part of their ritual: 'That is a spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It is 750, 000 light - years away. It consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our own sun.' They would then pause, and Roosevelt would finally say, 'Now I think we feel small enough. Let's go to bed! '

If only more of our world leaders would practice something like that, what a different world we would have! Well, that is what this great leader who wrote this psalm, King David, is doing. And as he stands beneath the star studded night sky, he feels dwarfed by it all. *What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"* The contrast between God and man is immense and yet ...

3. God Chooses Humans To Be Co-Workers With Him, vs6-8

God chose us to be co-workers with him. We see this in verses 6-8: *"You have made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas."*

John Stott writes: *God has humbled himself and honoured us by making himself dependent on our co-operation.* And what a responsibility we have been given. But what exactly, is meant by the term 'work.' A person can be involved in work without ever receiving payment for what they do i.e. voluntary work of some kind, or indeed a housewife (or househusband!), who is also a mother/father, cleaner, cook, baby sitter, taxi service etc., without ever being paid for what he/she does. But does it mean they, and those who are retired or unemployed are worthless? Of course not.

But work is an essential part of our identity as people isn't it? It's one of the first questions we ask someone when we meet them, isn't it? What do you do for a living? We don't ask if they are a Christian or the names of their children - we ask about their employment and many of us make instant judgments about people based on their occupation! It's true isn't it. When I was a Prison Officer and people found out my occupation they used to run a mile and when they find out that I'm a vicar, they run even further.

Work is as much a source of identity and dignity for us today just as it was for Jesus, who followed in his Father's family firm as a carpenter - presumably until the age of 30 when he began his ministry. Jesus' job of work created an identity for himself, and was recognized by others - he was known as the carpenter's son (in fact, Jesus often used parables relating to work to explain the Kingdom of God, i.e. the 'Parable of the Talents' in Matthew 25:14-30, the 'Parable of the Sower' in Mark 4:1-20, amongst others).

Work can also be seen to be an expression of our personality and work plays a major role in shaping people's attitudes. A person's occupation defines who they are and how they fit in society. The jobs people choose may compliment the talents/gifts they have.

The beginnings of human work, as we know it, originated when God ordained Adam and Eve to 'subdue and rule over' his creation (Genesis 1:28-30). It could be argued, however, that this mandate had more to do with stewardship than ownership and was to be a collaboration between them and God. We are all called, in a sense, to be co-workers with God as we use our God given skills in a creative way. The human race, therefore, was created in God's image, not to be lazy and idle, but to be hardworking and industrious. I believe God instigated work as a human activity at the beginning of time not, as many commentators suggest, as a result of the fall, as we read in Genesis 3:17-19. Work is a way of using the talents God has given us for the benefit of others, and is therefore a way of becoming part of the community.

One of the most popular TV programmes of the 1990's is the sitcom 'Friends', and is still going strong. For those of you who don't know, it centres upon a small group of Generation X-ers who share two apartments (they are Americans) across the hall from one another. And through thick and thin, good times and bad, these friends laugh with one another and support one another. And it is their relationship to one another which gives meaning to their lives. The central message of the series is captured in the theme song 'I'll be there for you.' They promise to be 'there' for one another. Why? Well, because to cite the last line in the song, 'you're there for me too.'

Now that reflects a deep God given intuition, namely, that it is in *relationship* where we find significance. That is what the Psalmist is getting at. But it is not just in any old relationships, it is being rightly related to God first and foremost as co-workers together and our relationship to the world he created and, of course, to each other.

4. The Christian's Attitude To Work!

Three men were working on a building site. The first man was asked: what is it that you are doing? He replied, earning some money to pay my bills. The second man was asked: what is it that you are doing? He replied: building a wall, what does it look like? The third man was asked the same question: what is it that you are doing? He replied: building a cathedral.

What is your perception of your work? Money, a mundane task or building the kingdom of God? Whatever your work, paid or unpaid, do you really see it as a service for God? Jesus considered his ministry to be 'work.' We see an example of this in Jesus' prayer in John 17:4: *I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.* The apostle Paul also echoes these sentiments when he wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

Colossians 3:23: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.* Pleasing our employers is not the definitive meaning, or purpose, of work, rather, it is working as for the Lord. (This theme is echoed many times in the NT, 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 6:7). Christians should be distinctively different in their attitudes and aptitudes. They should be honest and conscientious. Paul condemned idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:6) and urged Christians to be useful (Ephesians 4:28). He criticised the Thessalonians who had stopped working because of the hope of Jesus' return (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

The old saying: actions speak louder than words is so true. We are to live holy lives. We are to live in a way that shows us to be different. We are to live in a way the Bible says we should. We are to be men and women of honesty and integrity. We are to be hard workers, good timekeepers and people who keep their word.

It's about our manner of conversation and language we use. It's about what we are seen to read and listen to. It's about the love of Jesus, the fruits of the Spirit and our servant heart, demonstrating to others something of our faith (Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 4:1; John 13:34-35; Hebrews 10:24; Matthew 5:13-16; James 2:26; Galatians 5:22-26).

Conclusion.

In closing ... work isn't a bad thing – no matter what we might think to the contrary. I don't believe work was ever meant to be a punishment, however, the result of the fall (Genesis 3:17-19) does add strain, sweat, weariness and disappointment to a working day! The endless battle to make a living from hostile soil, the dreary monotony of an industrial production line and all the injustice of sweated labour are all, in some way, the result of our disobedience to God. Work was initiated by God to make us wholesome and productive beings. However, because we have taken our eyes off the Lord, we have made it into something it wasn't meant to be. There is a clear need for the world at large to repent, reintroduce, and implement, Biblical principles of fair distribution of employment, equal wages, and the serving of the community rather than oneself.

However, you know as well as I do, that there is a huge chasm between the ideal and the actual, due to a lack of good stewardship and an unfair distribution of resources. It has to do with being a self-centred society, who, because of the worship of success and personal affluence, have allowed God's ideal to die a death. This is where we as Christians can have such a great influence by setting the example, and agenda, for others to follow. In real terms, however, that may not always be possible, especially in a society where the problems associated with work are the results of our broken relationship with God in the first place.

E.F.Schumacher, in his well-known book: *Small is Beautiful*, suggests that work has a threefold purpose: First to provide necessary and useful goods and services. Second, to enable every one of us to use and thereby perfect our gifts like good stewards. Third, to do so in service to, and in co-operation with others. Work, essentially, is using the gifts and talents God has given us, in co-operation with Him, for the benefit of others.

Work should give us the opportunity to develop our skills, patience, courage and the give us the joy of achievement. It is something in which we should be able to gain personal satisfaction. Throughout creation we see God repeatedly suggesting that his creation was good or, in the case of humankind, very good (Genesis 1:31). In Ecclesiastes 3:13 the preacher suggests: *That every man may ... find satisfaction in all his toil - this is the gift of God.* Work instils a sense of pride and gives a person self-worth knowing they are involved in something that is of value to society. Every aspect of work, whether manual or office-based, whether waged or voluntary, however humble or menial, needs to be seen by Christians as co-operation with God.

And finally ... Most of us are in jobs largely devoid of glamour, status or prestige. Seldom will our daily decisions make much difference on the world scene. Yet each one of us can know the habitual practice of the presence of God in the workplace. And, as you remember Psalm 8 on your journey to work, may that experience is the most important of all.

Emmanuel Text for 2017

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14