



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 5/6
HG138 A Song For Fearful Thursdays

Psalm 34:1-22

Home Group Study Notes

12 March 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

We are now in the season of Lent. What, if anything, might you be giving up for Lent this year? Is giving up 'something' a helpful discipline during Lent?



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 5/6
HG138 A Song For Fearful Thursdays

Psalm 34:1-22

Home Group Sermon Notes

12 March 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: We continue our series on *Songs for the Workplace* - a Christian perspective of work. We began thinking about how we were created by God to work. On *Miserable Mondays* we thought about the importance of starting everyday with prayer. On *Tempting Tuesdays* we thought about not allowing envy to consume us by delighting in the Lord. On *Workaholic Wednesdays* we were reminded not to allow ourselves to be consumed by worldly measures of success. Today we're looking at *Fearful Thursdays*. The fear of others is a big factor in most people's lives - especially in the workplace. We fear rejection from our boss and colleagues, and symptoms include susceptibility to peer pressure, over-busyness (because we can't say "no"), "needing" affirmation, telling white lies to cover up our shortcomings, and other people's responses to us making us angry, anxious and depressed. In Psalm 34 David wants us to know the reality of what he experienced of being rescued from fear and he does that by laying down two challenges: 1) Taste and See (1-10); 2) Listen and Learn (11-22).

1) Taste and See, vs1-10: David begins by praising the Lord in vs1-3: *"I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together."* Notice how totally centred on the Lord these verses are. In fact, David mentions the Lord in 16 out of 22 verses. And notice how joyful he is: *I will extol (praise enthusiastically) the Lord, I will praise him, I will boast in him, I will glorify him.* David believes God has done something wonderful and he wants us to join in: *"Let us exalt his name together,"* he says. But why? Vs4 tells us: *"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears."* David prayed at a time of great need and God answered. *He delivered me from all my fears.* What possible danger could David have been in that would bring about such an outburst of praise to God?

In many of the Psalms we're not really clear on the historical background in which the Psalm was written, but some have titles and take us back to stories in the OT. And this is one of them. Notice the title of the Psalm: *"When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away and he left."* It's worth reading 1 Samuel 21 to read the full story behind this Psalm. Remember how David had risen to great fame as the young shepherd boy who killed Goliath. As a result, he became a very famous general in King Saul's army and something of a celebrity in Israel. There was even a song which would have gone straight to No: 1 if they'd had pop charts in those days: *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands!"* Not quite Robbie Williams, but catchy all the same!

But gradually, because of David's fame and success, King Saul became so angry and jealous and paranoid that he tried to kill David and so David was forced to flee the country. At first he went to the Temple and was given some food and a sword which happened to be Goliath's sword that David had captured when he'd killed him. And then David ran for his life.

4. Read Psalm 34:11-22.

a) What does the fear of the Lord mean in practise?

b) How will we behave if we fear people more than we fear God?

5. David says, in vs17, that the Lord delivers his *people* 'from all their troubles.' Yet bad things do happen to Christians at work. How can we reconcile this promise with the reality of life in the workplace?

6. How have you seen God protecting you at work?

Have you seen God using bad experiences at work to make you more like Jesus?



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. When are you worried about what other people think of you? When are you afraid of other people's disapproval?

What symptoms does this fear of other people produce in you?

2. Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15. What fears does David have? Can you think of any other fears you might have in that situation?

3. Read Psalm 34:1-10.

a) What does David say about fear in these verses?

b) What does David say about God in these verses?

And where did he run to? He actually ran to the court of Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. The very last place you'd run to if you'd just killed *tens of thousands* of his army. It just goes to show how desperate David was. He couldn't stay in Israel because he was facing certain death so he went to his arch enemy. David must have been on his knees and at his very lowest ebb to walk right into the court of the man whose army he's decimated carrying the sword of their greatest ever hero! What madness! Can you imagine anything as stupidly suicidal as that! 1 Samuel 21 tells us David was very afraid! Psalm 56 gives us another take on this story, it was written at the same time. David hadn't been rescued when he wrote these words: "*All day long my enemies twist my words. They are always plotting to harm me. They conspire, they lurk, they are eager to take my life.*" If that doesn't sound like office politics, what does?

David was expecting to die at the hands of the Philistines! So what does he do? He decides to play at being insane. 1 Samuel 21:13: "*While David was in their hands, he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.*" He'd made himself to look an utter fool by dropping his dignity and self-worth. And what does Abimelech, the King of the Philistines, do? He says: "I've got enough mad men in my court! Get rid of him." So they let David go! They had pity on him instead of killing him!

Does David respond in the way that Baldrick from *Blackadder* would? "How very clever of me for thinking up this cunning plan!" Not at all. Rather, he says, Psalm 34:4: "*I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.*" It was God who rescued him. It was God who delivered him. And that is what David rejoices in! He was staring death in the face and God saved him. And what is even more staggering in Psalm 56, written when he doesn't know the outcome, David can say: "*In God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" He was totally confident that God would be there for him and rescue him and that is precisely what God did. Psalm 34:6: "*This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.*"

David is quite simply overjoyed that God should choose to rescue him and it's because of that he gives us this challenge in vs8: "*Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*" David isn't just talking about a small taste of a little morsel that you sometimes get when a new product is being sampled at a supermarket. He's talking about taking a big mouthful and really chewing it over, a bit like the way Clint Eastwood chews tobacco in his spaghetti westerns! David wants as many people as possible to experience the saving hand of God as he did. Not just to know it in their heads, but to know that rescue for themselves. And for those of us experiencing uncertainty in the workplace that's a great encouragement. We might sometimes feel as if God is distant, but the truth of this Psalm is that he is not. He will uphold you. He will stand by you. He will keep you. Taste and see, says David. Relish and savour. See if God will not keep you in days of darkness.

Should we expect God to save us from similar perilous situations in the workplace and life generally? Will he always step in to stop bad things happening and going wrong? Well, there's no promise in the Bible that God will protect believers from misfortune. But what David did know was God's power in troubled times. See how he puts it in vs9-10: "*Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*"

Sometimes Christians are fearful of admitting they are Christians in the workplace. Fear of sharing, praying, wearing a cross ... There's no doubt that many of you will find that deeply challenging. But we should not be fearful of being men and women of honesty and integrity. Nor should we be fearful of being hard workers, good timekeepers, taking responsibility, not talking about others and keeping our word.

How will Christians behave if they fear other people more than they fear God? Might they be more interested in pleasing them than in pleasing God. As a result, they will do whatever we need to do to receive their approval, love, protection or blessing, promotion - even if it means displeasing God. You become a slave to that person's attitude towards you.

But David is asking us to show our fear of God, rather than fear of men, in everyday life. He's effectively asking us, "How different is your life from your non Christian work colleagues and friends? You say you fear God, but where's the evidence?" Remember Pauline's questions a few weeks ago: "Would your work colleagues notice a difference in you if they saw you on a Sunday morning? Would those who worship with you on a Sunday notice a difference if they saw you on a Monday morning?"

2) Listen and Learn, vs11-22: But David doesn't just tell us about his experience and challenge us to taste and see. He also has things to teach us from his experience. It's as if David is asking us to sit down with him and learn from him. So what does he want us to learn? Two things. He wants us to:

a) Have a greater devotion to God's ways. We see this in vs11: "*Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.*" One of the key things that David has learnt in his near death experience is to fear the Lord. But what does it mean to fear the Lord? It's certainly not to be afraid of him. To fear God in the Bible means to hold him in honour, to respect his glorious character. To revere him. To realise God is Lord of all. In fact, when God is the one we truly fear and honour, then everything else is put in its proper perspective. But David wants us to see that fearing the Lord is not just an attitude of the mind. It's a change of life. So what does fearing God mean in practice?

Vs12: "*Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*" David is saying that a life lived in the fear of God means a godly use of our tongues. It means a rejection of all that is evil. It means a deliberate pursuit of all that is good. It's another way of saying that if you have genuinely been rescued by God, if you have known the delight of forgiveness and a new life, then you need to walk in God's ways, you need to be devoted to pursuing holiness, God's standards of living.

I'm sure many of you have come across the plaque in people's homes which reads: *Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.* It may be a well used phrase, but a reality, none-the-less, through the presence of the Holy Spirit. We should live with that in mind.

Living out godly relationships in the workplace is difficult. Loving our families is one thing, but loving our colleagues, superiors and employees is much harder. This is because the relationships are not based upon love, but upon money and power. We work to earn, not to be charitable. Paul reminds us (Colossians, 3:22-4:1) that regardless of the work status of others, boss or employee, we are to work as if working for the Lord Jesus himself even if they are far from being like him.

As Christians we do not serve Jesus in order to gain reward alone, we do it out of devotion and gratitude to the kindness of our Master who rescued us. Your master is not your boss, your colleagues, or peer pressure, or family, or cultural expectation - it's the Lord. You fear him and him alone, and it shows in your everyday life. David is reminding us that regardless of what is happening around us, whose company we are keeping, however aggrieved we feel, whatever our circumstances, we should have the praises of God bubbling away somewhere below the surface and a genuine desire to live God's way is a good sign that we have been rescued.

Not that we are perfect, not that we don't have some serious ups and downs and find ourselves wrestling with sin. But that our hearts are devoted to him and it's seen in real life. You will bite your tongue when you're tempted to snap back. You will turn the other cheek. You will genuinely desire to grow more like Jesus. David also wants us to:

b) Have A greater understanding of God's perspective. We see this in vs15-16: "*The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.*" The righteous are saved, and the evil doers perish. The righteous are not the self righteous, but those who have received God's gracious offer of rescue. The evil doers are those who have not accepted God's rescue. For David, being in the camp of the righteous, is a wonderful place to be, because God will guard and keep his people. God will vindicate his people. There will be an end to their suffering and pain. David ends in vs21-22: "*Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*"

That's the perspective we are to have, especially when we are going through the mill, when life is hard and we feel like David did, then we can claim the wonderful promise of vs18: "*The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*" What a fantastic promise to take into this coming week. In the midst of the trial God will not abandon us. And if you are feeling broken hearted and crushed in spirit, as I guess a number of us will be this morning, then take this truth to heart - not just on Thursday but every day. God is close to you, even if you don't feel it. And he will save you and bring you through.

Conclusion Eric Liddell is famous for having won the 400 metres gold medal at the Paris Olympics in 1924, and he became more famous through the film Chariots of Fire. But what is much more interesting about Liddell's life was his absolute commitment to the Lord Jesus. He was in fact a very normal guy, yes a great athlete, but in every other way, a normal person like you and me. Same struggles, same fears, same problems. But he took God seriously and his fear of the Lord revealed itself in practical everyday life - such as refusing to run an Olympic final on a Sunday. We know the story that he entered another race and, against all the odds, won! For Liddell it was very simple: You claim to follow Jesus, then give him everything.

This is what one man said of Liddell at his funeral: "What was the secret of his consecrated life and far reaching influence? Absolute surrender to God's will, as revealed in Jesus Christ. His was a God-controlled life and he followed his master and Lord with devotion that never flagged and with an intensity of purpose that made men see both the reality and power of true religion."

I don't know about you, but I would love for someone to say that at my funeral. That my life was one of absolute surrender to the will of God. And that is what David meant by fear of the Lord. An attitude of submission to God in all his holiness and majesty and to experience his presence every moment of every day ...

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