



**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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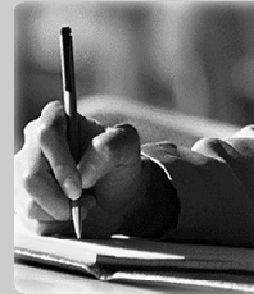


*Annual District Church Meeting*  
**HG140 God Of The Past, Present And Future**

Psalm 145:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

2 April 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 for your discussions.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?



**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 ...



Annual District Church Meeting  
HG140 **God Of The Past, Present And Future**

Psalm 145:1-21

Home Group Sermon Notes

2 April 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction** At DCC a few weeks ago I shared my heart and my concerns about where we are as a church and especially what the future holds for us and I was encouraged to expand on those concerns this morning. Whilst my talk will be recorded, it will be password protected to listen to / download and the password is ....

**1) God of the Past vs 1-7:** This Psalm has some tremendous words of praise for who God is; for what He's done; and for what He gives. Vs1-3 explains how God is worthy of our praise, whatever the circumstances in which we may find ourselves. And because the God of the Bible is the God of history (it is 'His story' after all) David looks back, vs4-7, on the many blessings he'd received and, as a consequence, he couldn't help but praise Him for who He is and for what He had done. I've no doubt David recalled the times God delivered him from wild animals as he tended his father's flocks; or perhaps he remembered how he'd slain Goliath against all the odds; how God had raised him up from being a humble shepherd boy to sit on the throne in Jerusalem or, as we looked at a few weeks ago, how God delivered him from the court of King Abimelech.

I'm sure there are times when we look back at the works of God in our own lives and we praise him for what he has done. There's no doubt that we all have much to be thankful for as we look back over the past twenty five years:

- We remember the many answers to prayer.
- We remember those special times when the Holy Spirit has touched our lives.
- We remember His presence with us through dark/difficult days
- We remember that walk up the High Street from Saint Marys to Emmanuel, that is pictured on the front page of the ADCM docs.
- We count our blessings and 'name them one by one!'

I believe that hindsight is one of the greatest attributes we have as Christians. I say this because if we are feeling a bit low or out of sorts, looking back breathes new life into our weary spirits! I believe that we should deliberately plant markers along the way in our journey of faith so that we can look back at them for encouragement in difficult times.

But as well as remembering and celebrating the past, we also, as painful as that might be, have to learn to let go of the past, too.

**4.** Paul spoke about how Jesus 'Lived in the present.' What might you/we be able to do to 'Live in the present' instead of harking back to the 'good old days' of the past?' Suggest some practical steps that could be taken.

**5.** In Psalm 145:13-21, David looks to the future. Paul suggested that the future of Emmanuel belongs to church members. What is your response to that statement?

**6.** Thinking about the story of the church on the South Coast, what would it take for Emmanuel to become the best church *for* the town of Billericay?

What would you be able to do to play a part in enabling that to become a reality?



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. Psalm 145 begins with David looking back at the God of his past, vs1-7. As you look back over the 25 years Emmanuel has been in existence, what is your most special memory? (You don't have to have been at Emmanuel for 25 years to have a special memory!).

2. Spend some time looking back at the past twelve months and share with each other those things which have been a real encouragement to you and those things which have caused sadness in the wider life of Emmanuel.

3. In Psalm 145:8-12, David writes about the present.

a) What is a cause for great joy at Emmanuel in 2017?

b) What is a cause for great concern at Emmanuel in 2017?

I've lost count of the number of times people have said to me: "You know Paul, when we were at Saint Mary's things were great ... it was this ... it was that ... it was ..." but that was twenty five years ago. Don't get me wrong, I love St Mary's and really value its place in the town. However, it seems to me, whilst we have a responsibility to honour the past we need to stop harking back to the 'Good old days' and begin by living in the present, and this is what David was saying in vs2: *Every day I will praise you.*

**2) God of the Present vs 8-12:** David recognised that God made a difference to his present situation and we see this in vs8-9, and these verses are written in a present tense, that is, they describe something of the attributes of God for today: *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he had made.*

We exist as a church because we believe the Love of God touches hearts and changes lives. One of the reasons I'm in ministry is because God turned my life upside down and changed my life for the better and I never tire of wanting people, young and old alike, to find Jesus for themselves. And each one of you are part of this church family because you've experienced the touch of God on your lives, otherwise you wouldn't be here would you? Admittedly, that first love can often grow cold and we need to rekindle that first love in our journey of faith.

Living in the present means that we recognise the many opportunities around us for mission and make every effort to make them work - for the future's sake. Living in the present means we recognise that 'putting ourselves out' is part and parcel of service and discipleship, rather than being a consumer of church and enjoying the worship and the preaching. Of course, there's nothing wrong with those things, but it's only a part of what we are called to be.

Living in the present means that we also have be realistic and honest about our situation - we are getting older, we have fewer families and hardly any young people. We struggle to find people willing to serve in almost every area of church life and, looking around, what will our church family look like when we are due to celebrate fifty years of our church building? Will our legacy may be a fantastic church building, with no congregation, that is a monument to God? It happens all the time and if it does it's because we're not living in the present as we should.

Jesus lived in the present. He preached good news to the poor; he proclaimed freedom for the prisoners; and recovery of sight for the blind. He preached the forgiveness of sins and extended God's healing touch to all (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus lived in the present and was to be found amongst the multitudes; the untouchables; the rich; the poor; the sinners; the alienated; the forgotten; and the abused. He was moved with compassion when he saw the mess peoples live were in and saw them wandering around like lost sheep without a shepherd. In His eyes, the meanest and vilest of people were precious. Imagine what would happen if we lived believing/receiving, all that Jesus has done and can do for us?

- Imagine the impact we could make on our community if we really lived as Jesus lived?
- Imagine the impact we could make on our community if we really loved as Jesus loved?
- Imagine what impact we could have on our community if we really served as Jesus served?
- Imagine what impact we could have on our community if we were willing to prefer the needs of others rather than living for ourselves?

Imagine what the future could hold if we did all of this? And that leads to my third point ...

**3) God of the Future vs 13-21:** David knew of the eternal existence of God vs13: *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures through all generations.* As we look back through the centuries we see many civilisations and world powers that have risen only to fall into oblivion. They've long lost their impact and, at best, are legendary forgotten kingdoms and Empires. I mentioned the Egyptians earlier, but the list is endless: Aztecs; Inca's; Babylonians; Persians; Greeks; Romans; British Empire; USSR; Apartheid; Communism; and many others beside. All these kingdoms of the earth have come and gone - but God's kingdom has stood the test of time and will, undoubtedly, stand forever. Our God has not withdrawn Himself, forsaken us, forgotten us, left us or changed with the seasons - He's alive and well and present in our world today. He wants to make a difference to our lives.

What about YOUR future? As I said at DCC the other week, this is your church. It belongs to you. Clergy come and go. The responsibility for the future of this church is yours - and the Lord's too, of course. But it has to be a partnership.

A few years ago I heard a story at Mulberry House about a church on the South Coast who had a vision to build a new church on a very large housing estate but, before they started to design the building they asked the community what was missing/needed. The answers they received included: Library; Sports Centre; Cafe; Restaurant; Pre-school; Youth Club etc. So the church designed a new building incorporating all of these suggestions and, as you may imagine, the church is an active and vibrant centre of the community. The pastor is often asked about what it must feel like to be the pastor of the most dynamic church building in town – you'd be surprised how often that is asked of me, especially when Diocesan events are held here. The pastor's response was very telling; he said that he isn't interested in pastoring the best church *in* the town, but the best church *for* the town.

There's no doubt that I, and we, have been greatly blessed here and yet, my concern, even if it isn't yours, is about the future when our 'Season of Celebration' from May to July to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of this amazing church building and church family is over. What will be your legacy in 25 years time?

Psalm 145 reminds us that we have a God who is *gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.* A God who is faithful and true to his promises and a God who gives us a hope built on the past, a hope rooted in the present and, most importantly, a hope in anticipation of the future. I don't know what our future will hold but what I do know is that our future, whatever shape that will take, will involve each and everyone one of you playing your part in creating a church which is best *for* our town, for our families and for nurturing the faith of the next generation.

### **This is an extract from my Mothering Sunday talk**

The church's preference for 'Mothering Sunday' rather than 'Mother's Day' allows for the possibility that mothering may be, and frequently is, more than simply a biological relationship. The Oxford Dictionary defines Mother Church as: *"The Church, considered as a mother in its functions of nourishing and protecting the believer."* To understand the church as mother is to restyle our whole idea of family, because the church consists of a wonderful variety of people who hold in common their worship of God the Father, through his only Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

At its best, the church as mother offers the hope that nurture, compassion and loving acceptance are not the exclusive domain of one gender or one age group or one culture. At its best, the model of the church as mother ensures that no one is excluded from the task of making disciples, because we're all called to use our gifts to enable the flourishing of those who are our future.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians: *'Some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.'* At its very best, the Church will serve as an example of nurturing and loving service to society. Mothering, in a loving, caring, nurturing sense is something all Christians should be doing, as we encourage new disciples. But how effective are we as the church nurturing and equipping others? Are we undertaking this task to the best of our ability? What about the next generation? What can we do strengthen them in their journey of faith?

The church times have some interesting articles focussing on the above theme:

*'Start at the very beginning'* and *'Where help can be found.'* There is also one about the challenges around Youth Work entitled *'Growing up not growing away.'*

All of these will be available to download on a PDF from the website.

### **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**