



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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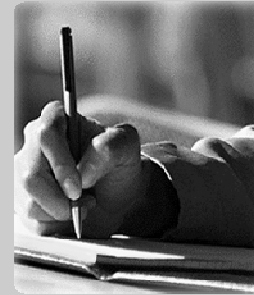


A Season Of Celebration
HG141 Joy In Community

Philippians 1:1-11

Home Group Study Notes

14 May 2017 - Revd Canon Peter Ashton



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

As we welcome back former Team Rector, Revd Canon Peter Ashton, to Emmanuel, what memories do you have of Peter's ministry amongst us? If you weren't Emmanuel during that time, what have you picked up from others?



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 ...



A Season Of Celebration
HG141 Joy In Community

Philippians 1:1-11

Home Group Sermon Notes

14 May 2017 - Revd Canon Peter Ashton

This is the first in the planned series of sermons based in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. Today we are looking at the first eleven verses of the first chapter.

After the usual greetings, Paul writes about his prayer and thanksgiving for the Christians at Philippi. He speaks of his great affection for them and tells them his prayer for them is always joyful, because of their partnership with him in the Gospel since the first day he arrived in their city. He looks back to that time as the moment when God began a good work in them. He looks forward with confidence to God carrying that good work to its completion. So in these verses Paul is *looking back* to when this Church in Philippi was formed and he is *looking forward* to what it will mean for them to go on with God in the future.

First, let's go back to how things began in Philippi. Paul and his companions reached Philippi in the early 50s of the first century. On a sabbath day they went to a place for prayer by the river. They talked about Jesus to the group of women they found there. A woman named Lydia, responded and was baptized, along with her household. She invited Paul and Silas to her house to stay. Others soon followed Lydia's step of faith.

But Paul and Silas ran into trouble. They were badly beaten and put in the town jail by the magistrates. The owners of a slave girl had lost money because Paul had delivered her from a clairvoyant spirit. In Jail Paul and Silas sang hymns. There was an earthquake that opened the prison and released their chains. The jailor decided to take his own life for fear of the consequences of losing all his prisoners. But the prisoners had not left.

4. Philippi was a Roman colony, in which a number of Roman veterans were settled. It was a strategic city at the midpoint of an important road, the Egnation Way, that ran from the west coast to the east coast of what is now Greece. It had a range of religious cults represented in its population. Its wealth came from nearby gold mines. What sort of dangers and possibilities might the Christians in Philippi have faced in these circumstances? What dangers and possibilities are there for a Church, such as Emmanuel, in this twenty first century society?

5. Paul prays that the overflowing gift of God's love will bring the Philippian Christians to spiritual maturity. What does he say are the effects of such overflowing love? (verses 9 and 10)

6. What is the most important thing you have gained from reading and discussing this passage?



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 read through the sermon notes as you do so and read Acts 16:11-40. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What do these verses reveal of Paul's faith and character? You could make a list of the main points that you find and talk about which three or four you think were the most important for his church founding ministry.

2. The New Testament suggests Paul visited Philippi only twice more after his first visit. Even so he speaks of the Philippians fellowship with him continuing 'from the first day until now', including times when he was in prison. (verses 4 and 7). How do you think that fellowship might have been kept up?

3. Do any members of the group maintain links of any sort with Christian communities or individuals in other places? Are these links intended to provide support of any kind?

The jailor was converted, and along with his family, was baptized. He washed Paul and Silas' wounds, then took them into his house and fed them. The next day they were released.

It was in these turbulent and miraculous events that God began his good work in the small group of believers that became the first Church in Europe. You can read the story in Acts, chapter 16. That is how things began, we will see what Paul says in his looking forward, in a moment.

A twenty fifth anniversary is a another time for looking back and looking forward. As I was thinking about coming here I wondered if there could be any similarities between the Philippian story and the story here. I have to say there were no earthquakes, arrests, beatings or imprisonments in Billericay when the church was built! Not even the process of getting planning permission came anywhere near that! As well, in Philippi, a brand new community of Christians came into being. Whereas in Bille-ricay it was a migration. The people of St. Mary's, walked down the High Street, led by Bishop Derek, took possession of this building and became the people of Emmanuel.

But I think there is a similarity. For Emmanuel that similarity is reflected in the Church's name. I think it was only after the name had been chosen that I began to see how apt it was. Emmanuel means 'God is with us'. God was certainly present in Philippi and we were assured he was with us in Billericay.

This seemed particularly true in the 1980s, in the way new members were added to St. Mary's congregation, nearly doubling its size and leading us to ask the question, 'What do we do now?' We prayed and thought and discussed and eventually came up with six options for creating more space for the church. We took these six options to an away day conference. We prayed. Small groups were formed. Their task was to decide which of the six options was the best way forward. Then when we looked at what had happened during the day we found all the options had been rejected by almost every group! However, quite independently, almost every group had come up with the same new option. That was to clear the Archer Hall site and build a totally new church and hall. We concluded that was where God was pointing.

I remember the next few years as a period of daring faith and effort on the part of many. Many prayed and shared and worked and gave to bring this church into being. It was a time of extraordinary shared experiences, of setbacks and joys, of crises and answers to prayer. One Saturday morning stands out.

The first phase of the building project was about to begin. We were in the Archer Hall to collect together the furniture and equipment that we wanted to keep, before the building was demolished. But we were faced with a crisis. We had just been told that we had lost about a quarter of our funding for the project. Some of us gathered in a close circle in the centre of the hall, furniture and bits and pieces stacked all around us, and prayed. Wonderfully, with further generous gifts and loans from the congregation, the yawning financial gap was bridged. We gave thanks to God.

With faith and persistence, the hall was added in Elwin's time. Surely God met us in this whole story. Without his grace I do not believe it would have been possible to bring this building into being. This whole episode from church growth, to church building, to church opening, to hall building, was a 'God with us' experience.

Having looked back to the beginning in Philippi and the beginning for Emmanuel, it is the moment to turn around and with Paul, look forwards. His focus is on spiritual maturity. We can make his prayer for the Philippians, a prayer for ourselves. He asks that the Philippians' love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that they may be able to discern what is best and be pure and blameless until the Day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness that come through Jesus Christ (verses 9 – 11)'.

His prayer is that we might become genuinely Christ-like. The power behind this is overflowing love. It is God's gift. It is always love in action. Such love leads to the completion of God's good work in Christian lives. Such love provides the answer to disunity. It gives the ability to meet hostility and remove its sting, though that may be at some cost. It makes sacrifice possible. It makes us credible witnesses to the one who loved us totally and gave himself for us. Such love in action is to be the heartbeat of every Christian and every Church.

On Palm Sunday this year St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral in Alexandria, Egypt, was the target of a suicide bomber. He was prevented from getting inside amongst the worshippers and detonated his bomb outside. Naseem Faheem, the guard at the entrance was killed. Samira, his widow, speaking after the event in a television interview, said "I'm not angry at the one who did this." On television she asked God to forgive him and spoke of her family's forgiveness for him.

The host of the television programme, Amr Adeeb, was astonished at hearing this and said later, "The Copts of Egypt are made of steel. If it were my father, I could never say this. These people have so much forgiveness. But this is their faith, their religious conviction. These people are made from a different substance."

Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:)

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