



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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Who Cares When ... HG150 Times Are Hard?

John 14:25-31 & 16:33

Home Group Study Notes

10 September 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr



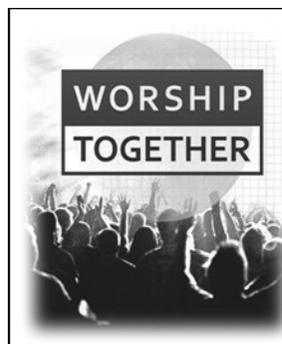
**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

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

Share one experience and/or event (whether on holiday; at home; or in a newspaper, magazine, book or on TV) which has had an impact on your Christian life over the summer.



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 ...



Who Cares When ...
HG150 Times Are Hard?

John 14:25-31 & 16:33

Home Group Sermon

10 September 2017 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction We begin a new Home Group series this morning entitled '*Who Cares When ...*' and, over the next three months we'll be looking at some of the issues that cause us the most pain and trouble in life, such as Stress/ Depression; Loneliness; Debt; Bereavement and Family Crisis. And most importantly, looking at how God's Word speaks into those struggles and challenges.

If I was looking to make one of the greatest understatements of the day, I would simply say, "Life is hard," and would expect to hear at least a few rousing 'Amen's.' And guess what? Jesus not only knew life would be, He told us it would be. In John 16:33 Jesus told his disciples: "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" Jesus says: "Yes, you are going to have troubles in this world. You are going to struggle with such things as loss and grief, family crisis, loneliness. But in Me, you can have peace. Not instead of trouble, but in the midst of trouble."

There is one thing that is guaranteed, and another that is optional. Jesus says, "You will have trouble." No question about it. It's guaranteed. But He also offered an option. "You may have peace." Jesus makes a connection between trouble, and peace.

1. There Must Be Trouble Ahead There's not a day goes by when the troubles in the world don't have an impact on us one way or the other: Brexit, Race riots in USA, terrorism, ill health, bereavement - these can so easily lead to despondency can't they? When I ask people on Alpha what question they'd ask God if they could only ask one question the number one response is always: "Why is there suffering in the world?" Interestingly, the Christian writer Lee Strobel, undertaking research on this same question, observed that people who are married were much more likely to want to know why there's so much suffering than those who were single! You draw your own conclusions!

Life ought to come with a list of potential side effects. There should be a tag on every newborn baby saying life can be full of fun and adventure and excitement and joy, but there are side effects. There's illness; abuse; broken relationships; betrayal; sorrow; loss; injuries; disappointment; heart-ache; crime and death. Actually, life did come with a warning. Jesus said there would be trouble in this life. But why? Why these side effects? Why is there suffering and evil and pain? That "why" question goes back thousands of years. It was asked in the Old Testament by Job and the writers of the Psalms, and it was especially relevant during the 20th century, where we witnessed two World Wars, the Holocaust, devastating famines in Africa, the killing fields of Cambodia, the emergence of AIDS, the genocide in Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, the attacks of 9/11 and the disasters of hurricanes and tsunamis. Why all of this if there's a loving and powerful God? Why do bad things happen to good people?

4. When does 'living in anticipation of God fulfilling His promises on earth' and 'living in anticipation of Heaven' help to bring peace into your life?

5. Have you ever used words from John 14 to bring reassurance to those who have faith, and those who don't? Share an example, or two, with your Home Group.

6. With what is going on in your life, how can the Holy Spirit help to bring peace to you this week? Pray for one another that God would make this a reality for each one of you.



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. What events (s) taking place around our world today causes you the most stress, distress or anxiety?

2. If you could ask God one question, what would it be and why?

3. Lamentations 3:22-23 says: *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* What mercies are new to you every morning?

We remember, too, of course, that the very people Jesus was speaking to would learn the troubles of life the hard way. Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew was crucified in a spread-eagled position. James was beheaded. John was banished to the nearby island of Patmos. Bartholomew met his death by being skinned alive and then beheaded. Thomas was speared to death near Madras. On top of that, there were other unnamed followers of Christ that suffered brutal fates, and lives of trouble (Hebrews 11:36 and the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:22-28).

2. Peace? Peace? There Is No Peace When Jesus uses the term world he isn't referring to planet Earth, but to the people who are ruled by unbelief. Those who are blind to the things of God and want nothing to do with the Christian faith. So what type of peace can the world offer us? Not much. In this world peace seems to be elusive. How does the world define peace? Peace is typically defined by the absence of something. World-peace is the absence of war, inner-peace is the absence of conflict. Jeremiah 6:14: *"Peace, peace, ' they say, when there is no peace."*

Did you know that since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than 8% of the time. In over 3,600 years of recorded history, there have been only 286 years of peace. Even though during this time an excess of 8,000 peace treaties were made - and broken. During this same period of time there have been 14,500 wars in which 3.60 billion people have been killed. History shows us that the world has not known peace.

The world can only offer us a peace that is devoid of the presence of God. It is a peace that does not have God as its source nor as its inspiration - instead it must look elsewhere. Apart from God the world defines peace based upon two factors: *Control and circumstances*. When a situation gets out of hand the world says, "Maintain control. Alter your circumstances." You must take control of the situation and make it turn out your way. You are the only one who can alter your future and destiny - you must maintain control. For the world peace is found by how much control you have over individual circumstances.

According to the world there is no God to grant us peace - so peace must be a product of human effort and human control. Is it any wonder that so many people suffer from anxiety and depression? When the world says the answer to peace is found in your ability to maintain control and alter your circumstances, you have one person to rely upon - yourself. My life and my circumstances are really in my own hands, and I become anxious, or I believe that no one's in control, that my life and my circumstances aren't in anybody's hands, and I despair. What anxiety and despair have in common is a lack of trust, a lack of trust in the sovereign hand and the loving purposes of God. However, all is not lost because Jesus promises peace to his followers.

3. Jesus Gives Us Peace In our reading from John, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His betrayal, rejection, trial and death. He is attempting to comfort them as He prepares to return to His Father and complete His work on earth. For three and a half years they have walked with Him. They have watched Him heal the sick, they have seen Him bring comfort to the afflicted and laughter to the face of children. Not a day has past where Jesus hasn't been with them. Their sole thought and attention has been Him since the day they were called. And now they are faced with continuing His ministry without Him.

This was a crisis point where they could be overcome by emotions of uncertainty, confusion, anxiety, depression, or frustration. In fact, those emotions, if allowed to blossom unchecked, could threaten to undermine all that Jesus has attempted to teach them and show them, and could turn them into a group of individuals whose primary concern was for their own future and self-interest and not the spreading of the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The peace that Jesus offers is altogether different than the peace offered by the world.

It doesn't depend on external circumstances or maintaining control but on Jesus and the eternal certainties of which this world knows nothing. And it is in the midst of this setting that Jesus says John 14:27: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Jesus faced every difficult earthly situation imaginable. He lost his closest partner, John the Baptist, early in his ministry, who was beheaded by a wicked woman and an easily seduced ruler. He felt the rejection of his own family who didn't understand his mission. He suffered persecution from angry religious leaders and unwelcoming peasants. He knew hunger, he experienced thirst, he went days without sleep and had no place to lay his head. Ultimately he was betrayed by a close friend, beaten, forsaken, and murdered.

Yet Jesus' life was characterized by peace. The Hebrew word for peace is *Shalom* and means wholeness and completeness and comes from God alone. It's a peace that goes beyond what the human heart and mind can understand. It is this *Shalom* that Jesus offers. Real peace of mind:

- Is knowing that no matter what happens, God will always be with me.
- Means that no matter what happens in my life, God gives me the strength to cope.
- Is living by God's Word, which enables me to avoid the needless pain and hang-ups that mess up my life when I do things my way.
- Is having a relationship with Jesus and becoming friends with God.
- Is knowing that no matter what I do, God will never stop loving me.

The Holy Spirit is the bringer of peace. The peace that existed between Jesus and God is now available to us. It is the Holy Spirit's purpose and joy to keep us on track with that knowledge and for us to experience peace and security because of it. We are forever looking for the Spirit of God to display his power and to perform extravagantly but his real ministry to us is about bringing the presence of Jesus to us. How do we experience, live out, demonstrate and convey peace in the midst of a restless, troubled world?

Live in anticipation of God fulfilling His promises on earth. God's Word is filled with promises that you and I can turn to help us get through life and through the grind of day-to-day living. And the best way to find them is just get in the Word on a daily basis. You'll be surprised what you will find. And one of the greatest things you'll discover is that God has some promises that you can cling to over and over throughout the years. Lamentations 3:22-23: *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* Nahum 1:7 on your prayer diary ...

I'm grateful for that promise, because I've made mistakes in life. When I think of just some of the choices I've made over the years, I'm amazed that God didn't just shake His head and say, "That's it. I'll never get his attention to be able to use him as I want." But God's faithfulness is always in play, and I thank God for that. If you have been walking with Jesus for any length of time, you have discovered some of those wonderful promises that He fulfils here on earth while we wait for His return. So we ...

Live in anticipation of Heaven. Are you looking forward to the time you will see the Saviour face to face, to that time when there will be no more suffering and death, no more war and no more pain, only perfect bliss in the presence of God Himself? Philippians 3:20-21 says: *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to the time that I don't have to mess with my melanomas or my frozen shoulders or ill health anymore! And you know something else, I'll bet there's no such thing as high blood pressure or cholesterol in heaven. Anticipating heaven helps me gain peace in unsettling times.

Conclusion As we journey through this series together, I don't want to minimize pain and suffering, and yet, as Christians, we are called to take a long-term perspective to this life. Remember that testimony of Paul's sufferings? He writes, "For our light and momentary troubles" — wait a second: light and momentary troubles? Five different times his back was shredded when he was flogged 39 lashes with a whip; three times he was beaten to a bloody pulp by rods. But he says, *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."* (2 Corinthians 4:17). Look at Romans 8:18: *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

One anonymous Christian, who lived a life full of pain, said: *"In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth, a life full of the most atrocious tortures on the planet, will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel."*

God promises a time when there will be no more crying, no more tears, no more pain and suffering, when we will be reunited with God in perfect harmony, forever. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."* But let me ask you this morning. Which solution are you seeking to all that is being thrown at you? Are you riding the rollercoaster of the world's view of peace? Are you looking to gain control? Are you wavering back and forth between anxiety and depression? Or are you accepting the gift of Jesus' peace, and applying it to your life?

For those who have chosen to walk with Jesus, there should be something different about our handling of trouble. Not only something different, but something transferable. It's one thing to be able to empathize with those we come in contact with. Even non-Christians can do that. Empathy is not an emotion reserved for the godly. But it is a whole different story to be able to model and offer something that can transform their lives and experience the peace that Jesus speaks of. Something that we can pass on to those around us and that is the peace of God. So that when their troubles of life overwhelm them, and they scream out, "Who cares!" We can lovingly respond, "We do." "Jesus does."

The result of accepting Jesus' gift of peace is confidence that God is in control. Life is difficult and hard times do come, but you do not have to live in fear you can live with the confidence that comes from knowing the peace of Jesus. It is a gift. It cannot be earned — it must be accepted.

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