



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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HG180 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For Open Eyes

Ephesians 1:15-23

Home Group Study Notes

10 March 2019 - Rachel Orford



**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 ability or talent (that you don't possess) do you most wish you had?



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 ...



HG180 *Prayers Of The Apostle Paul* Praying For Open Eyes

Ephesians 1:15-23

Home Group Sermon

10 March 2019 - Rachel Orford

Introduction - Spiritual Enlightenment Those of you who are old enough will probably remember Magic Eye pictures, which were a bit of a “thing” in the early 1990s. These were what appeared to be normal 2D repeated patterns, but there was a technique of looking at the patterns, un-focusing your eyes and moving the page gradually away from your face, which revealed a 3D image hidden within the pattern. A lot of people found it really easy to see the 3D pictures - and a lot of people couldn’t do it. I couldn’t do it. My brother (who of course was able to do it right away) tormented me with them - “Honestly - how can you not seeeee the lion, racing car (or whatever it was)?” he would say, and I would persevere, miserable and cross-eyed, feeling totally inadequate. Until one day - suddenly - I could do it. One moment it was a jumble of shapes and the next a crystal-clear 3D picture leaped off the page at me. And once I saw it - I couldn’t un-see it. I was beside myself with triumph and spent the next few hours looking at every one I could find. It was like my eyes had been opened to a whole new world. Of course, all I had done was practise a technique until I managed to do it, but the feeling of suddenly “getting it” was very much like a Eureka moment of suddenly understanding a previously incomprehensible problem or alien concept - when it all becomes clear and obvious.

St Paul of course had possibly the most famous Eureka moment in history. When after years of “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” he was blinded on the way to Damascus from Jerusalem. Three days later, on receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, “something like scales fell from his eyes and could see again” (Acts 9:18). Both physically and spiritually his eyes were opened, and his life changed forever. It is clear that from this point on Paul knew God intimately - he knew what God had done for him and how much he was loved and valued by him. His letters are fully of unspeakable joy and it feels almost that sometimes he cannot find words adequate for his experience of God - it is something that we need to live out for ourselves. Our eyes need to be opened to it, and in this letter to the Ephesians, he prays for this to be their experience.

Paul knew the Ephesians well. He had established the church there in AD 53 on one of his missionary journeys and then he returned about a year later when he stayed for three years. So, they had had the benefit of his preaching and teaching for some time. And his letter, although written when Paul is in prison, is one of encouragement for his friends. It wasn’t written to confront any heresy or problem within the church. He just yearns for them to know God better - he asks in v 17 for them to be given the “*Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [they] may know Him better*” and then in the next verse “*that the eyes of [their] hearts may be enlightened....*” God had sent believers the Holy Spirit, this helper and advocate through which to receive wisdom and knowledge about Him. But Paul also wanted the “*eyes of [their] hearts to be enlightened*” - in other words for them be spiritually enlightened - for the scales to fall from their eyes so that they could understand what God’s revelations meant - things about God that they didn’t understand before.

Gaining Insight Paul is excited to tell the Ephesians about three specific insights which he believes will become clear once the eyes of their hearts are opened. (From here on in, I will be using ‘the Ephesians’ and ‘us’ interchangeably, because I believe we can identify with them in several

4. How much time to you spend with God just getting to know Him? What distractions might prevent you from doing this?

5. Jesus often used parables to explain truths that his followers would find hard to understand. Which of His parables do you think help us understand the true nature of God the father?

6. Imagine if the hearts of our world leaders were enlightened in the way that Paul prays for the Ephesians. What impact do you think this would have on our world today?



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 do you understand by the term ‘enlightenment’? Is it the same as knowledge? Insight?

2. In what ways do you think that Christians could appear more ‘redeemed’? Why do you think they don’t?

3. Do you find it difficult to accept that we are God’s inheritance - the father’s gift to the son? What effect might this realisation have on our lives?

ways.) He believes they will know the true meaning about 1) their salvation 2) the value in which God holds them and 3) God’s power.

Firstly, he tells them that they will know **the hope to which he has called you**. When we hope for something it normally means that we wish for it - we hope it won’t rain tomorrow, but if it does, oh well it’s not the end of the world. But the hope Paul is expressing is biblical hope, Christian hope - a confident expectation of what God has promised. When he called us to faith, God called us to be his sons and daughters forever, so that we will have life with Him in the new heaven, fully redeemed, holy and blameless. We are saved. Paul is talking about our salvation. Unlike our earthly aspirations, if this doesn’t happen it literally is the end of our world. But we can be confident it will because Jesus himself tells us in one of the most well-known passages in scripture from John 3 16-17 “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*”

The second thing they will know is **the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**. Paul often referred to followers of Jesus as “saints”. In the very first verse of this letter he addresses it “...*To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus*” So, as followers of Jesus this means us. If you have been following this Home Group sermon series, you will have heard other speakers talk about a book by D A Carson - called “*A call to Spiritual Reformation.*” which focuses on the prayers of Paul and how they can help us in our prayer life today, When he looks specifically at this passage from Ephesians, Carson identifies us, (the saints), as God’s inheritance. He says that “*we are those whom the father has given to the son, his gift to the Messiah.*” Incredibly this means that God now sees us in Jesus. He identifies us with Him, making us co-heirs to all His glorious riches. In our earthly language - we inherit whatever Jesus inherits. This might seem very difficult to get our heads round (maybe because we are not that enlightened), but we understand what an inheritance is don’t we? It is something of innate value, something precious given by loving family members to their children and heirs. We are God’s adopted children. He didn’t need us, he wasn’t just lumbered with us by accident. He chose us. He WANTED us. We are identified with his own son. If only we can comprehend that, then what else could we possibly need to convince us of the value that God places on us? How precious we are to him.

Thirdly they will know **His incomparably great power**. This is probably an easier concept for us to grasp but it is the one which Paul really wants to hammer home. In verse 19 alone when he talks about “*[God’s] incomparably great power*” and says “*that power is like the waking of his mighty strength*” the original New Testament Greek use four different but essentially synonymous words for power. Paul wants to make it very clear that we cannot think of God’s power in small ways! And he goes on to review God’s most dramatic displays of power. The power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power that exalted him to the highest status in heaven next to the father - the highest authority over everything. Forever. And the power vested in Jesus to be head over everything for the church - the body of believers. That’s us! God gave us to Christ so that all of his sovereignty should work for our good.

Knowing God Better Now I am sure you are thinking, well yes, these are pretty awe-inspiring truths. But don’t we know all this already? If we read God’s word, we can learn all of this anyway. Surely we don’t need to be enlightened to take this all on board. We know we are saved. We know we are his children and that he values us highly. And we know how powerful he is. The Ephesians probably did too. (You will remember earlier that I identified us with the Ephesians). Paul was not writing to unbelievers, or people whose faith is weak or failing. Like us, these were people who had received the word, believed it and they knew God. But Paul obviously didn’t think that they know God that well.

In one of the most famous of Jesus’ parables in Luke 15 we hear of the prodigal son, who leaves home, squanders the money which his father has given him and finds himself destitute. Now he knows his father.

He knows he is a fair and merciful man, a man that works hard and treats his servants well. He knows that he will be taken back into his home. But he knows he can't expect his father to treat him as he would a son. Not now. Not after all he has done, how he has disrespected his inheritance and made such a mess of things. So he goes home to face the music and we can imagine him, practising his speech - I'm sorry, I messed up, I'll work as a servant, please just take me back..... But he clearly doesn't know his father that well. Because what does he do? Filled with compassion, he rushes out to greet him and lavishes on him the best that he has and welcomes him as his son who has returned home. Like the son in this story the Ephesians knew about God, they knew about their salvation, they knew about God's great mercy, but they didn't know him very well - they didn't know the full extent of what they had in Him and what He meant for their lives. They just didn't see it. Could it be perhaps that we don't either? Imagine if these truths which Paul speaks about were firmly in our enlightened hearts. What a difference that would make on so many levels.

From a personal point of view think what a sure and certain hope in our salvation would mean. We usually focus little on the future and almost never on eternity, but to be absolutely sure we knew where we were going - wouldn't we act differently? Wouldn't there be more joy in our lives. Frederick Nietzsche famously said, "I might believe in the Redeemer if his followers looked more redeemed". We know it. Most of the time we don't act like we have this sure and certain hope. Paul himself writes several letters from prison, which much have been a miserable existence, not knowing what was going to happen to him, but his words are full of thanksgiving, hope and joy. He knew he had a future to look forward to; if we ask God to help us truly know this reality then we would live our lives so differently, with the values of eternity influencing our actions. And others would see it too.

If we had real insight into the value of our inheritance, the value God holds us in, that wouldn't just do wonders for our self-esteem (although that would be nice), but our gratitude would extend to so much more than material things. The implications are breathtaking. Our communities would be changed. If we are all the adopted children of God, if we are all co-heirs with Christ, if we are in true fellowship with Him and with each other, it follows that we also inherit each other! We will be spending eternity with each other. Admittedly, in God's kingdom we will be new creations, but should this thought not inspire us to get along a bit more whilst we are waiting for this day. Do our own agendas and power struggles maybe seem a bit inconsequential?

If we had real confidence in the immeasurable power of God, wouldn't we be looking for and expecting miracles on a daily basis. Paul has already drawn our attention to how powerful He is in this passage. In Matthew 19 26 Jesus himself tells us "*with God all things are possible.*" Why then do we not expect more of him? Are our imaginations too limited? C S Lewis writes in his book *The Weight of Glory* "*if we consider.... the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*" Our eyes need to be opened so that we cannot think of God's power in small ways.

Asking God for Enlightenment So, we can know all kinds of things about Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how the father works through him. If we read enough of his word, God can certainly reveal these things to us. We are believers, we have faith and we know about God. But to really KNOW what someone is like, to understand their true nature - that needs a relationship with them. It means talking to them, spending time with them and getting to know them. This kind of relationship with God means not only immersing ourselves in His word but also spending time in prayer. This kind of insight about God is not something that comes to us without asking him about it, without praying for our eyes to be opened to it, without a real and deep relationship. It's what God wants for us. He wants us to know about what he intends for us and about the blessings he has given us.

In John 8 31-32 Jesus says "*If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" But we have to talk to God about it.

We are very good at coming to Him with our shopping list of things which we want. There is nothing wrong with that. I am not suggesting we stop asking for things. Jesus himself tell us to do so. In Mark 11:22 he says, "*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*" Many things we ask for are big things - healing, resolutions to conflict, solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems and in her talk a few weeks ago, Pauline spoke about the monumental importance of praying for others. But often these things overshadow talking to God about HIM.

D A Carson's book has a great deal of practical advice about prayer and in particular about resetting the balance of our prayer life to include more time getting to know God. He compares our relationship with God to our relationship with our earthly parents and says "*the wise father is more interested in a relationship with his son than in merely giving him things. Giving him things constitutes part of the relationship but certainly not all of it. The father and son may enjoy simply going out for walks together. Often the son will talk with his father not to obtain something, or even to find out something, but simply because he likes to be with him.*" When did we last go for a walk with God and just listen to him? Carson also encourages us to "*pray until we pray*" which I think is a great expression. It doesn't just mean persevering in prayer but moving beyond rushing our prayers as something to be done as a duty, so that we eventually come to delight in God's presence and rest in his love or 'abide' in him, as some translations of the bible put it. In Mark 4 Jesus tells several parables to the assembled crowds - "*as much as they could understand.*" But then we learn that "*when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.*" This time alone with God is I think when we will discover amazing truths - when our eyes could really be opened.

So what is stopping us praying for our eyes and those of our fellow believers to be opened? Is it that we think that enlightenment is not for us, but for holier, cleverer, more worthy people than ourselves? Is it that we are comfortable looking inwards, knowing about these great promises from God, but fearing what we might find beyond that? Are we too afraid to see beyond our limited horizons?

There is apparently an old map on display in the British Museum in London, drawn in 1525, outlining the North American coastline and the surrounding sea. In the areas of the map that represented regions beyond the then explored world the map maker had written in one place "Here be giants." In another "Here be fiery scorpions," and in another "Here be dragons." Eventually, the map came into the possession of Sir John Franklin, a British explorer in the early 1800s. Scratching out the fearful inscriptions, he replaced them with the words: "Here is God. " He knew, as we should know, that just beyond our own horizon is exactly where we will find God if we just ask him to open the eyes of our hearts.

We can go beyond knowing about these things to truly knowing them - we can understand the awe-inspiring impact of our promised salvation, we can appreciate our true value to God as co-heirs with Christ and we can realise the immense power of God. Our eyes can be opened. Paul prayed this for the Ephesians, and we can pray it for ourselves and each other.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2019

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and the blood
of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7