



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?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD
P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** EmmanuelChurchBillericay
Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry



HG182 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For Ministry (ADCM)

Romans 15:14-33

Home Group Study Notes

7 April 2019 - Revd Paul A. Carr



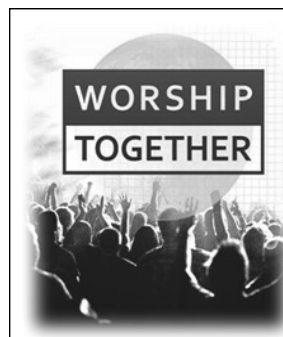
**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

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

An ADCM is a time of looking back and looking forward. What have you valued the most during these past 12 months? What would you most like to see happen in the next 12 months?



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 ...



HG182 Prayers Of The Apostle Paul Praying For Ministry (ADCM)

Romans 15:14-33

Home Group Sermon

7 April 2019 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

An ADCM is a time to look back over the past year as well as an opportunity to look forwards. I hope you've had a good read through all the reports and, like me, are encouraged and excited by all that has taken place in/through Emmanuel. We'll look closer at those tomorrow evening. However, we can never rest on our past successes and there are still many challenges facing us in the present but what an exciting future we have when God is our partner! It is against that hopeful background that we read Romans 15:14-33. And as we think about what the year ahead might hold for us as individuals and as a church, I have a few thoughts for us to focus on from this passage:

1. Maintain An Evangelistic Focus

In vs15-22 Paul talks about his missionary strategy. He feels he has been called to reach the Gentile peoples of the world. He has traveled extensively in an effort to add new believers to the faith and to establish churches in communities where there were none. Paul hasn't tried to go places where others had not gone. There are a couple of points about Paul's approach that are worth thinking about:

Paul shared by word and deed. He proclaimed the power of God but also revealed the power of God through what Paul calls "signs and wonders". Signs showed the validity of Paul's authority and wonders underscored the power of the gospel. A good witness augments his/her witness with evidence of God's fruit and power in their lives. They don't just talk about grace, they reveal God's grace and mercy by the way they handle others.

Paul looked for unreached People (20-22). Do you spend most of your time, sharing the gospel with those who have already heard the message? How many non-Christian friends do you have? I say that because God has placed in your path a host of people who have not heard the gospel message. They are people at work, those in your hobby groups, neighbours, family members, friends of your children, people you spend time with at the pub, football match etc. These people are YOUR mission field. You are their missionary. Our job is to share the truth of the gospel with our own mission field. When was the last time you told someone about Jesus (I don't mean the entire gospel story ... when was the last time you told anyone anything about Jesus?) I make time in my diary to meet up with non-Christian friends on a regular basis. Evangelism is the job of everyone. God will use you if you let Him. Let us continue to have an evangelistic focus in all we seek to do as a church community.

2. Be Willing To Adjust Your Plans

I love the section in vs23-29. Paul teaches us that we need to be flexible. Paul told the Romans that he had planned to come and visit them but he also shares that his missionary strategy included Spain. It seems apparent that Paul had a goal that was from the Lord. But Paul says he has been hindered from coming to Rome for two primary reasons. Firstly, Paul has been busy reaching out to people who have never heard the message. The Romans had already believed. The needs of the new believers delayed Paul.

4. Have you found praying to be agony? When was the last time you agonised in prayer? When was the last time you wrestled in prayer? When was the last time you shed tears in prayer?

5. Share a recent answer to prayer and how this has advanced the ministry of the Gospel.

6. What, out of all that we have studied through this series, really sticks in your mind? What has challenged your faith the most? What has strengthened your faith the most? What has inspired you the most?



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. Share with your group how, or why, you find it difficult to share your faith with others. Name one person you want to come to the Lord and pray for them by name.

2. Share an example where you've been set on a course or plan of action in your Christian life, thinking God was in the midst, but where he has intervened and you've had to adjust your plans to follow his leading?

3. Think through particular hurdles Christian leaders face in their ministry (pastoral and missional) and pray for them as you do so - include the 'so that' approach mentioned in the study.

Secondly, Paul is delayed by a mission of mercy. Paul is probably writing this letter to the Romans from Corinth. If that is the case, he is already half way to Rome. However, he is turning and going back to Jerusalem first – that's about a 2000 mile detour. His mission is to bring an offering from the Gentile churches to the hurting believers in Jerusalem. Paul had a mission to lend aid and to build a bridge between the Gentiles and the Jews.

If you remember the story, Paul did get to Rome, but he didn't go quite the way he expected. Paul planned to "stop off" in Rome on his way to Spain. Instead, Paul came to Rome as a prisoner. He barely survived a shipwreck. He was confined under house arrest for a couple of years. The book of Acts ends before we find out what happened to Paul. Did Paul get to Spain? We don't know. It's said he was re-arrested in Rome and probably executed by Nero.

If we are going to be faithful in our Christian service, we need to be flexible in our mission and ministry. Planning ahead but being ready for the unexpected. Of course, there's nothing wrong with making plans. It's always good to have a plan of action and set goals. But we must always be aware that circumstances can change for a number of reasons so plans must be flexible enough to be adjusted at short notice (not something the church at large does well); sometimes the Devil sets up obstacles and we have to address those along the way; sometimes God has a better idea.

When our plans change we are to trust the Lord who sees the big picture. Our job is to remain faithful. Paul didn't plan for things to happen as they did. However, if the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) were written while Paul was in a Roman Prison, we should be grateful that Paul had the time to write. What comfort these words have brought to so many! Because Paul went to Rome in chains all the expenses were paid by Rome. Because of the Shipwreck during the journey, the gospel came to the island of Malta. Co-incidences or God-incidences?

3. Pray For Ministry

In Romans 15:30-33 we come to Paul's prayer for his ministry. In fact, it's more of a prayer request. This is Paul, the great apostle, asking the Roman Christians (whom he had never met) to pray for him. If we study his words, we see instruction (how to pray) and encouragement (why we should pray). *I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen* (Romans 15:30-33).

Two things strike me as I consider his words. *First, notice how personal he is.* Six times in verses 30-32 he uses the words "I, me, my."

Second, notice how honest he is. He speaks openly about the "unbelievers" in Judea. They followed Paul wherever he went, harassing him, accusing him, doing all they could to stir up the Gentiles against him. Often their tactics were successful. No doubt Paul had come to a crisis moment and felt that his ability to minister was in jeopardy. Rather than pretend he was doing fine, he bares his soul and begs for help from his friends. *What would you do if I sang out of tune ...*

I have two points I want to make from Paul's prayer for his ministry:

a. Prayer Involves Agony. When Paul says, "strive together with me," he uses a Greek word from which we get the English word "agony." "Join me in my agony." What a thought - prayer is agony. But you might say: "I thought prayer was supposed to be fun." Who told you that? The Bible doesn't call prayer "fun." *Prayer isn't fun; it's hard work.* And true prayer is agony of the soul. Prayer is wrestling with God, it is spiritual warfare against principalities and powers and the forces of evil all around us. *When was the last time you agonised in prayer? When was the last time you wrestled in prayer? When was the last time you shed tears in prayer?*

You'll discover what agony in prayer means when you have a sick child in the middle of the night with a rising fever and you can't get the doctor on the phone. You'll learn about agony in prayer when you're having difficulties in your marriage. You'll know how to agonise in prayer when the threat of redundancy has hovered over you. You'll have agonised in prayer when a loved one is unwell or when the Lord takes them home. I agonised in prayer on Monday morning when I anointed Brian with oil and committed him into the Lord's care. As I'm sure many of you did when you heard the news. We've all agonised in prayer at some point in our Christian lives. For me it usually involves tears and waving my fist at God asking why.

I'm sure each of us have experienced our own 'dark night of the soul.' Sometimes it's hindsight and memories of the Lord's hand on our lives which keeps us going. Have I had dark days in my life and ministry? Of course, I have. More than you might expect.

Everyone struggles sometime, and some people struggle more than we think. If we were to speak with one of our spiritual heroes, we might be surprised by what we find. Even the most notable Christians have times of doubt, fear, frustration, anger, uncertainty and discouragement. But that's not all we would find, and we wouldn't find those things all the time. We would also find faith, determination, commitment, love, zeal, compassion, and a whole host of other virtues. Mother Teresa's letters, and Paul's prayer request, remind us that our heroes often don't have an easy time of it. True prayer (and all other parts of the Christian life) will often be a great struggle to us.

b. Prayer Advances Ministry. Paul asked for deliverance from his foes. Then he prayed that his ministry to the poor saints in Jerusalem might be acceptable. Then he prayed that one day he might come to Rome, meet the saints face to face, and be refreshed by his fellowship with them. Paul understood that the church advances on its knees.

Most of us have seen those signs that say, "Prayer Changes Things." I have heard people say: "Prayer changes things, and the thing it changes most is us." In one sense, that's true. Prayer humbles us, stretches us, shapes us, encourages us, challenges us, deepens us, and leads on the journey of spiritual growth. But there is more to this story than this.

Look closely at what Paul says: If you pray for me: I will be delivered from spiritual opposition; I will be welcomed by the saints in Jerusalem; I will be able to visit you in Rome. That's very specific. Paul asks for prayer because he knows that God is sovereign over his enemies, that if people pray, his enemies may be restrained, and the opposition removed.

Prayer quite literally influences the human will of other people in ways that we can't see and could never bring about on our own. Prayer causes things to happen that would not otherwise happen. Paul truly believes that their prayers will open the door for him to come to Rome. We can be anywhere in the world and yet in the realm of the spirit through prayer, we can be joined with brothers and sisters thousands of miles away. By prayer I can influence the world. I can touch the Philippines; The Netherlands, Uganda, and even some remote island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Without leaving my home, my prayers go up to God and then descend in the form of answers from heaven to saints around the world.

Some people talk about answered prayer as if it were nothing but a "coincidence." Remember that quote from Archbishop Temple I used at the beginning of this series: *When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.*

4. Pray So That ...!

I read in a commentary not to pass over the little phrase "so that" in verse 32. It explains the importance of that phrase: "When you pray, always try to include the phrase 'so that.'" For example: 'Lord we pray for Vivienne, so that she may know your peace and comfort at this time.' 'Lord we pray for Pauline Randall, so that the mission of the Indoor Market will go from strength to strength.' You get the idea. It's interesting how many times Paul prayed "so that" in his prayers:

- *So that you may overflow with hope* (Romans 15:13).
- *So that you may know him better* (Ephesians 1:17).
- *So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith* (Ephesians 3:17).
- *So that you may be able to discern what is best* (Philippians 1:10).
- *So that you may have great endurance and patience* (Colossians 1:11).
- *So that you will be blameless and holy* (1 Thessalonians 3:13).
- *So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you* (2 Thessalonians 1:12).

And we find it again in vs32: ... *so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.*

Many times, our prayers are good but aimless. We ask God to "bless" someone or to "strengthen" someone, but we have no particular end in view. When you add "so that" to your petitions, it forces you to ask yourself, "What do I really want God to do in this person's life?" And if you don't have a reason for praying a particular prayer, perhaps it's not worth praying in the first place. The "so that" principle is a tonic for a boring prayer life.

Conclusion

So, as we come to the end of our 'Prayers Of The Apostle Paul' series I've really enjoyed both preparing for, and listening to, all the sermons in this series. I hope you have too. So, thank you to: Pauline, James, and Rachel for your ministry to us and to all Home Group leaders who have led these studies.

The power of the church lies not in money, buildings, preachers, people activities or anything else for that matter. *Our only true power is the power of prayer.* When we pray, God moves from heaven. When we pray, things happen that would not otherwise happen. By prayer all things are possible. If we want to see the church move forward and the kingdom of darkness vanquished, we must pray and pray and pray. We have no other secret. If prayer won't do it, there is no Plan B.

Time and time again we've been reminded that prayer is such an important part of our Christian lives – both individually and collectively and been reminded ourselves that prayer should always be the starting point in everything we undertake as Christians - even if we start from a position of agony. As I mentioned earlier, even if we do, that may not necessarily be a bad thing.

If ever there is a time when we need new confidence, and renewed commitment, in our personal and corporate prayer life, it is now. I hope this series has enabled you to hear God speak to you and help you to find strength and direction which will improve your prayer life. You really must make an effort to attend 'Come Let Us Adore Him' this evening and every first Sunday.

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