

CELEBRATING,
WORKING,
PRAYING

Christ Church
Homegroups
Summer 2007

Jesus said, *'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.'* (John 10:10)

Life to the full must involve celebration – especially celebrating the fact that Jesus who died for us rose again and is alive today.

Life to the full must involve work – Jesus calls each of his people to serve him, and unless we are doing that, our lives will not be fulfilled.

And life to the full involves prayer – God invites us to a personal relationship with him, but what relationship can grow without conversation?

HOMEGROUP PROGRAMME for this term

w/b Mon 30 th April	Study 1 – Sonrise
w/b Mon 7 th May	Study 2 – The most important thing
w/b Mon 14 th May	Study 3 – He ascended into heaven
w/b Mon 21 st May	Study 4 – The great mission
w/b Mon 28 th May	Study 5 – Pentecost
Wednesday 6 th June	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 13 th June	Study 6 – Approaching God
w/b Mon 20 th June	Study 7 – Getting our priorities right
w/b Mon 27 th June	Study 8 – Asking God
Wednesday 4 th July	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 11 th July	Study 9 – Forgiveness
w/b Mon 18 th July	Study 10 – Temptation

1. Sonrise

WELCOME

What is the biggest surprise you have ever had?

WORSHIP

Colossians 1:15-20 is a wonderful picture of how great the Lord Jesus is. Read it together as an act of praise, then continue to praise God for the things this passage tells you about Jesus.

WORD

From the earliest days of the church, Easter has always been the greatest Christian festival. The early Christians, who were all Jews, would have been used to meeting for worship on Saturday (the Sabbath), but very soon they started meeting on Sunday, because that was the day that Jesus rose. And it seems that long before Christians started making anything big of the celebration of Christmas, the annual celebration of Jesus' resurrection was the high point of the year.

But for the disciples, it must have been very different. The first Easter was a time of confusion – following hot on the heels of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and then his arrest and crucifixion. Even though Jesus had told them that he would rise again, that was something that they just didn't understand, and they certainly didn't expect to see Jesus alive again. In fact, the

reports of the empty tomb just added to their confusion. But gradually it did dawn on them – the impossible had happened.

Read John 20:1-18

John identifies three witnesses to the empty tomb: Mary Magdalene, Peter and ‘the other disciple’ (who was most likely John himself.)

- *What important details do we learn from each one?*

It has been said that the reason the stone was rolled away was not so that Jesus could come out, but so that the disciples could see in, and know that the tomb was empty.

- *Why is it so important to prove that the tomb was empty?*
- *Why do you think that Mary didn't immediately recognise Jesus (v.10-15)?*
- *After she does recognise him, what impresses you most about their encounter?*

Read John 20:19-31

When Jesus appears to his disciples,

- he shows them his hands and his side,
- he greets them with his peace
- he blesses them with the Holy Spirit.

- *Why do you think that each of these is significant? Which seems most important to you?*

- *Finally Jesus appears to Thomas. How does Jesus meeting with Thomas help us to deal with the doubts that we and other people might have about the Christian message?*

- *How does Thomas' exclamation 'My Lord and my God' (v.28) make a good climax to John's gospel?*

- *Is believing that Jesus rose from the dead as important as believing that he died on the cross for our sins?*

WORK

Mary Magdalene wanted to hold on to Jesus, but Jesus sent her on a mission to tell others that he was alive. Similarly today while we might want to stay holding on to Jesus, our mission is to go and tell others about him.

This is something that all of us should be involved in. A recent study found that despite big differences in the way in which people come to faith, one of the things that linked most of the people interviewed was the importance of other people. “The research showed that you didn’t have to be a minister, an elder or a theology graduate to play this role. Everyone – ‘our son ... my sister ... my gran ... my ex-girlfriend ... this family I teach ... my wife’s colleague’ – did their part.

Who is the risen Jesus sending you to? Pray together for opportunities this week to say something to them about Jesus.

2. The most important thing

WELCOME

What is the most important item in your house? Why?

WORSHIP

When Thomas finally met the risen Jesus, his response was to say ‘My Lord and my God.’ Jesus is Lord and God of the whole universe, but he is also ‘my Lord and my God’ personally. Praise him that that is true for you, and for what it means to you to know Jesus.

WORD

Many of us find it easier to forgive than to forget. We may be ready to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, but we have a hard time trusting that person again. Peter had failed Jesus miserably. He promised to give up his life if necessary to protect Jesus but then a few hours later denied even knowing him. The question that must have been on Peter’s heart was, would Jesus ever trust him again?’ It is a question that many Christians face at some time, when they know that they have let the Lord down.

Read John 21:1-14

- *What do you think is the significance of Peter's decision to return to fishing?*
- *What do you think Jesus was trying to show the disciples by allowing them to catch such a large number of fish? (see Luke 5:4-11)*

When Peter hears that 'it is the Lord', he jumps into the water and begins swimming ahead of the boat.

- *What does that tell you about Peter and his relationship with Jesus?*
- *How would you have responded if you had denied Jesus just a few days earlier?*
- *Could Peter have ever been the same if Jesus had not returned from death and met with him?*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20

- *What, according to Paul, are the essential elements of the gospel (v.3-5)?*

- *Why is each important?*

- *If there is no resurrection, what are the consequences for us?*

- *Could the Christian faith still exist if Jesus body was found still in its tomb?*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:21-34.

- *How should belief or disbelief in the resurrection affect a person's lifestyle?*
- *How can your lifestyle affect your witness to a world which is hooked on 'eating and drinking'?*

WORK

Have someone in the group read John 21:15-19 slowly. As they do, allow what Jesus says to Peter to also be said to you.

‘Do you truly love me?’

‘Take care of my sheep.’

‘You must follow me.’

The three things have to link together. Unless we love the Lord, we won’t follow him. Unless we are following him, we won’t be able to serve him, or grow to love him more. And if we are following him, he has work for us to do.

3. He ascended into heaven

WELCOME

What do you think is your greatest achievement? What makes it so special to you?

WORSHIP

Hebrews 4:16 tells us that through Jesus we can approach God with confidence, and that we can ‘receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.’

Praise God for any times when you have been aware of his help in difficult situations.

WORD

Thursday 17th May is Ascension Day. I guess it would be fair to say that of all the great Christian festival, the ascension is the most neglected. We celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas (though sometimes it is a struggle to remember what Christmas is really about!), we celebrate Jesus death and resurrection at Easter, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but the Ascension is all too easily forgotten.

That is sad, because it is the Ascension that brings the earthly ministry of Jesus to an end. Jesus is no longer teaching and healing in Galilee and Judea, he no longer appears to his

disciples as he did after the resurrection. But the story of Jesus is not ended – before he ascended he commissioned his disciples to proclaim him to the world.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

When Jesus rose from death, although his appearance had changed, one thing was still the same – he still bore the scars of his crucifixion. They were a sign that Jesus didn't somehow stop being human when he rose and ascended.

➤ *Think of some of the experiences that Jesus had of temptation, of rejection, of abandonment. How does knowing that Jesus has experienced these things help you to pray?*

➤ *Jesus 'was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.' Why might Jesus' victory over temptation encourage us to come to him for help?*

Read Hebrews 7:23-28

Admittedly Hebrews isn't the easiest book in the New Testament – largely because of its Jewish background, with all its reference to priests and sacrifices.

➤ *What do you think it means when it says that Jesus is 'able to save completely those who come to God through him'?*

The writer tells us that although Jesus work of salvation is finished, he still lives to intercede for us. It is a reminder for us that though we are saved, we are still sinful. We still need help if we are to persevere; we need help to grow in grace.

➤ *How might knowing that, no matter how at times we do fail, Jesus is interceding for us – that he is at work for us – help us to persevere as Christians?*

Read Luke 24:36-53

➤ *Before he ascended, Jesus left his disciples with a great mission. What did this mission involve (v.47-48)?*

➤ *Why is the forgiveness of sins so important?*

➤ *Why did the disciples have to wait in Jerusalem? Why could they not be effective witnesses straight away?*

We no longer have to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit – since Pentecost he is given to each person who repents and is forgiven. But the mission is still the same – we have been empowered to be witnesses.

WORK

Jesus sent his disciples ‘to all nations’, and still his people travel to different parts of the world to share the good news. If you know anyone who is serving God overseas, tell the rest of the group about them, so that you can all pray for them.

We’ve seen several people leave Christ Church in the last couple of years to serve God elsewhere.
Tim & Norma Robinson – training in Durham, and soon to move back to Nantwich
David & Mags Eames – also training in Durham
Howard & Betty Turner – in the Falklands.

It would be good to pray for them, and perhaps to send them a card from your group, telling them that we are praying for them.

4. The great mission

WELCOME

What do you get most enthusiastic about?

WORSHIP

At its most basic evangelism is sharing with others what God has done for you. Spend some time thinking about what God has done for you, and then praise him for it.

WORD

Every now and again I end up in conversation with a football fan! Some people are so enthusiastic about the team they support, and will happily tell anyone they meet just how great their team is. They don’t seem to worry whether I’m interested, they just assume that I’ll want to know. Even if it isn’t one of the top teams – that doesn’t matter. In fact, even if it is a team that I would be embarrassed to admit to supporting – still the real fan tells everyone just how great his or her team is.

Last year I spent some time at college, and got to know a minister from Tanzania. From what he told me, that is just how many Tanzanian Christians are about their faith. But strangely,

in this country, even Christians are often happier enthusing about the team they support than talking about Jesus.

Read Colossians 4:2-6

- *What is the connection between evangelism and prayer?*
- *Why is it so important to tell others about Jesus?*
- *Why might it be important that all our conversation is 'full of grace'?*

Read Acts 2:42-47

- *The church just after Pentecost was growing rapidly. What does Luke tell us that the Christians were devoting themselves to?*

In v.47, Luke tells us that 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

- *Why might the things that the disciples were doing have resulted in others turning to Jesus?*

Read Acts 8:26-40

- *How did Philip get the opportunity to share the gospel with the Ethiopian?*

It seems that in the early church it was the lifestyle of the Christian community that prompted others to want to find out about Jesus, but that also the Christians were ready to take any opportunity to share their faith.

In *1 Peter 3:10*, Peter writes: *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

- *What reasons might your friends and family have for asking you that question?*
- *How would you answer them?*

Tell the others in the group something about what it means to you to be a Christian (if you can't tell other Christians, it will be very difficult to tell non-Christian friends!)

WORK

We aren't all called to be evangelists, but we are all called to be witnesses – to 'put in a good word for Jesus.'

Pray for opportunities to do that this week. There may be specific people you would like the opportunity to say something to – pray for them.

5. Pentecost

WELCOME

Who has been the biggest influence on your life? Is there someone you consciously try to imitate?

WORSHIP

Imagine what it would be like to have to live in isolation from other Christians. Praise God for making you part of his church, and for the Christian family he has given you. Pray for Christians who have to go long periods without fellowship with other Christians.

WORD

What would it have been like to be with Jesus – to talk with the One who created the galaxies, to hear him teach as no one has ever taught before or since, to witness him feeding the crowd, or healing the sufferer, to see his quiet power over life and death. What questions would we ask him? How amazing just to be with him!

It is easy to envy those who had these privileges. But for the disciples, that joy was about to end. As their last evening with Jesus progressed, it became clearer and clearer that they would not have Jesus with them much longer.

Saying goodbye to a dear friend is always hard. But as this goodbye approached, Jesus stunned them by telling them that his departure was good news! And now, 2000 years later, we experience something the disciples never knew during Jesus' time on earth.

Read John 15:18-16:4

Just before this, Jesus had been talking about love, but now he turns to hate. Jesus seems sure that Christians who love him will always face opposition from 'the world.'

- *Why does this opposition happen?*

- *Have you ever experienced the world's hatred as a Christian?*

Jesus says that if he hadn't done among people what no-one else did they would not be guilty of sin (15:24)

- *What did Jesus mean? How do these words apply to our society today?*

Read John 16:5-15

Jesus then turns again from the world's hatred to the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says that it is for the disciples' good that he should leave and that the Counsellor should come.

- *Why is the Spirit's presence better for the disciples than Jesus' presence?*

The word *Counsellor* (15:26) means 'one who is called alongside to help.'

- *In what ways does this passage describe the help that the Holy Spirit gives?*

- *Have you experience of the Holy Spirit helping you in these ways?*

- *What does Jesus say the Spirit's ministry will be towards the world (v.8-11)?*

- *What does this tell us about our part in bringing people to faith in Christ?*

- *What is the Spirit's responsibility in bring people to faith in Christ?*

Jesus tells his disciples that *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.* (v.13)

- *How does the Spirit guide us in God's truth and bring glory to Jesus today?*

6. Approaching God

WORK

Most Christians in democratic societies face very little persecution for their faith. Christians in other parts of the world, however, often have to endure imprisonment, poverty, slavery and even death for their commitment to Jesus. Two organisations which support persecuted Christians are The Barnabas Fund (www.barnabasfund.org) and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (www.csw.org.uk) Check them out for information. Pray for your brothers and sisters facing persecution.

WELCOME

What is the most difficult journey you have ever taken?

WORSHIP

Psalm 15 gives us a description of the person who can come into God's presence. As you read it, you might well realise that you fall short of that ideal. And yet through Jesus, we are able to come before God, despite our failings. Praise God for making this possible.

WORD

The great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote: *'Of all the activities in which the Christian engages, and which are part of the Christian life, there is surely none which causes so much perplexity, and raises so many problems, as the activity which we call prayer.'* Lloyd-Jones wasn't the first person to have realised that – Jesus' disciples once saw him praying, and responded 'Lord, teach us to pray.' (Luke 11:1) As Jews they would have been praying all their lives, yet in Jesus they saw prayer that was different, prayer that they longed for.

The Lord's Prayer was given by Jesus as a model of what genuine Christian prayer should be like.

Read Matthew 6:7-15

- *Jesus warns against praying like the pagans do. But in what ways might we be guilty of mindless, meaningless prayers?*
- *If, as Jesus says, God already knows what we need, why should Christians pray?*

Read Psalm 97

- *What picture of God does this give you?*
- *What different ways does it use to describe God's greatness?*
- *How do you respond to this picture – with love, fear, awe etc?*
- *Do you find it easy or hard to believe that when you pray God is actually listening to you? Why?*

Read Luke 15:11-32

- *Do you find it easy to relate to God as Father?*
- *Although this parable isn't about prayer, how does it help us to be more confident in coming to God in prayer?*
- *What warning is there in the second half of the parable (v.25-32)?*

Christian prayer has to start with a realisation of who it is that we are talking to. In fact, the issues that we might want to pray about should always be secondary to the relationship we have with God through prayer.

Having focussed on the God we pray to, the first request in the Lord's Prayer deals not with our needs or wants, but with God.

- *To hallow means 'to make holy, to honour as holy.' So what do you think it means to pray 'hallowed be your name'?*
- *In what ways might our actions result in God's name being hallowed, or in God's name being dishonoured?*

WORK

We've thought today about what it means to call God our Father. Yet for some people calling God 'Father' is made hard by having had bad experiences of their earthly fathers.

Maybe one of the greatest responsibilities that Christian parents have is to treat their children in the same way that God our Father treats us. And that is a big challenge. Pray for those in your group who are parents – especially any who are finding it tough. Pray for all those at Christ Church who are parents, that their lives will help their children to understand God's love. Think of any practical ways in which you can help.

7. Getting our priorities right

WELCOME

What is your favourite part of the day?

WORSHIP

We live in a world where things seem constantly to be changing. It is good to know that the Lord our God never changes, and that what we read of him in the Bible is still true today. Praise God for revealing himself in his word; for his love, faithfulness, mercy, justice etc.

WORD

Read Matthew 6:9-13

*Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven*

Many years ago I remember a speaker saying that the fact that sin has I in the middle (S I N) tells us a lot about what sin is. Right back in Genesis 3, the original sin was that Adam and Eve put what they wanted before what God had said. And that is how the majority of people live today, and if we are honest, if we don't watch ourselves, we can end up doing the same.

That means that it is all too easily to pray ‘my will be done’, to give God a list of things that we want him to do for us. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed ‘Yet not as I will, but as you will.’ (Matt.26:39) If we know and trust the Lord, we will be able to trust that his way is best.

Read Matthew 14:24-43

- *How do these parables help us to understand God’s Kingdom?*
- *What differences will there be when the kingdom has fully come?*
- *Is this something you look forward to? Or worry about?*
- *What would it mean to pray ‘your kingdom come’ in our own lives?*
- *In our church?*
- *In our community?*

In heaven, God’s will is carried out perfectly. But how can that be brought about on earth. To help us answer that

Read Psalm 1

- *What contrasts are there in this psalm?*
- *In a world where we are surrounded by pressures to ‘do your own thing’, how can we learn what God’s will is?*
- *The psalmist describes the person who delights in God’s law (v.2). What is your response to Scripture?*
- *How does meditation – listening to God speak to us through Scripture – prepare us for prayer?*
- *Psalm 1 begins by saying that the person who is in line with God’s will is blessed. Does that help you to pray more enthusiastically?*

WORK

To pray ‘your will be done’ in our own lives involves turning our backs on any activities, habits, attitudes that are sinful. It means accepting that what God wants is best.

Are there areas of your life where you find it hard to say ‘your will be done’?

8. Asking God

WELCOME

If you had a short break, would you rather go to a city, the countryside, the mountains, or the beach? Why?

WORSHIP

‘Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.’ (James 1:17)
Thank God for all the good things he has given you.

WORD

Read Matthew 6:9-13

Give us today our daily bread

When most people use the word ‘pray’, what they think of is asking God for things. In fact I suspect that for a lot of people, the only time that they do ‘pray’ is when they have a problem and need God to get them out of it!

The Bible does tell us to ask God for things. But – it isn’t always as straightforward as we might like it to be. Think of the classic situation where on a summer’s day where a group of schoolchildren are praying for good weather for their sports-day, while a local farmer is praying for rain for his parched crops. The film *Bruce Almighty* gives a wonderful picture of what it would be like if God did say ‘yes’ to every prayer, when

thousands of people all win the lottery! (If you don't know the film, see if someone in the group can explain it.)

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for their daily bread. In a society where most people only had enough money to see them through the next day, that was a serious prayer – a prayer for survival. Knowing that might help us as we start to think about the things that God wants us to ask him for.

Read Psalm 103

- *What different things does this psalm see as having come from God?*

- *In what ways does God 'satisfy our desires with good things?' What sort of good things has he given to you?*

- *In what ways does this psalm describe God's love for us?*

- *Jesus told his disciples to pray 'give us today our daily bread.' Do you find it easy to think of God as the provider of our food etc.?*

Read Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus says that 'God will give good gifts to those that ask him?'

Which do you think this means (tick as many as you like!)?

- That God will give me whatever I want.
- That God will give me anything I think would be good.
- That God will give me what I need.
- That I can trust God to care for me.
- That God will answer my prayers
- That God won't give me the opposite of what I want!
- That God knows what is best for me.
- Any other ideas?

Someone said of this part of the Lord's Prayer: 'This prayer is for our needs, not our greeds.'

- *When we come to God in prayer, how can we guard against being greedy?*

And finally:

Read Proverbs 30:8-9

- *Why might both wealth and poverty be seen as dangerous?*

9 Forgiveness

WORK

It is right to pray for our daily needs, but it is also good to pray for the needs of others. We live in a world where still there are many who lack adequate food and water, where children die from easily treatable diseases.

We should pray for such people, but we should also be asking God what we can do to be the answer to our prayers – how does he want us to be responding to the needs in his world. You might like to look at material from organisations like TEAR Fund (www.tearfund.org) for ideas.

WELCOME

Describe a time when you made a real fool of yourself (I'm assuming that we all have at some time!)

WORSHIP

Despite the fact that it was written hundreds of years before Jesus, Isaiah 53 is maybe the most powerful picture in the Bible of Jesus' death and what it means. Let someone read it slowly, and then thank God for his great forgiveness.

WORD

Read Matthew 6:9-15

*Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

The more familiar words of the Lord's Prayer (and the version of the prayer recorded in Luke 11) talk about forgiving sins, rather than forgiving debts. But the overall thought is the same – an essential element of our relationship with God has to be asking him for forgiveness.

At virtually every service we hold at Christ Church, there will be a confession.

- *Do you think that it is important for that to be part of our services?*

- *What things (if any!) are in your thoughts as we use the words?*

Read Psalm 51

- *What different words for sin does this prayer use?*
- *What might this tell us about the nature of sin?*
- *If I have been a sinner from birth (v.5), sin must be something more than doing wrong things.*
- *What else is involved?*
- *Verse 10 in the central verse of the psalm. What does David ask God to do for him?*
- *In what way does this go beyond just asking for forgiveness?*
- *What is 'a broken and contrite heart' (v.17)? Have you ever experienced this?*

Psalm 51 reminds us of the depth and significance of sin. But there are 2 sides to forgiveness.

Read Matthew 18:21-35

(yes, I know we look at this passage last term – but it is an important subject!)

- *Why do you think it is so important for us to forgive those who sin against us?*
- *What does it mean to forgive?*
- *Forgiving those who have sinned against us is often very difficult. How does this parable help us?*

WORK

Are there any situations where you are practically struggling to forgive someone – or situation where you might think you have forgiven them, but you find it hard to trust them? What could you do to help each other in such situations?

10. Temptation

WELCOME

If you weren't at home-group, what would you most like to be doing at the moment?

WORSHIP

The last thing that Jesus told his disciples in Matthew's gospel is 'and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' Think back over situations you have been in where you been aware of God's presence with you, or where as you look back now you can see that God was at work.

WORD

Read Matthew 6:9-13

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

I think that temptation has to be one of the most universal of human experiences. And it has been since the start of history. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And it was very good. Adam & Eve, the first man and woman, lived in Eden, the garden paradise. They were at peace with themselves, at peace with each other, and at peace with God.

And then onto the scene comes the devil, in the guise of a serpent. He sidles up to Eve and says, 'Did God really say 'you

must not eat from any tree in the garden'?' God hadn't actually said that at all – he had said they could eat from any tree except one. But having used that to get Eve into conversation, the serpent said, 'Why not eat from that ONE tree then?' And Eve looked at the fruit and thought – Yes, it does look good! And Eve took the fruit.

And ever since then the same thing has been going on. A hundred or so years ago Oscar Wilde said, 'I can resist anything – except temptation.' And actually we are all the same. Constantly we are tempted to do what we want rather than what God wants. And constantly – in many little ways, just like Adam & Eve, we do it.

Read Psalm 23

- *In this very well known psalm, God is like a shepherd. In what ways does the shepherd care for his sheep?*
- *How does the setting of v.4 contrast with that of v.1-3?*
- *Do you think that the shepherd leads his sheep into the valley of the shadow of death?*
- *'I will fear no evil' is a bold statement. How can the writer make such a statement?*
- *Are there particular temptations which you fear? How might this psalm help?*

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

- *This passage talks about God providing us with armour. But why do we need it?*
- *What armour has God provided us with?*

- *How might each of these items help us in the battle against the Evil One?*

WORK

We've come to the end of this series of home-group studies. But that doesn't mean that your group can't continue to meet over the summer. You might like to meet informally – maybe organise an evening which you could invite friends to.

Hebrews 10:25 says 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.'

CHRIST CHURCH,
MORETON

We want to be a **W**elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him.

an **E**vangelising Church

*Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear
the Good News of Jesus*

a **L**oving Church

*Because Jesus commanded his followers
to love one another*

a **L**earning Church

*Because we are in the business of making disciples,
and disciples must always be learners*

