



christ church
moreton

NO OTHER
GODS.

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME GROUPS
SUMMER 2013

CHRIST CHURCH VISION 2017

1. To **DEEPEN** our commitment to Christ and to one another
2. To **INCREASE** our relevance to the people of Moreton
3. To **RESPOND** with compassion to the needs in our community
4. To **DEVELOP** our evangelism within our community and among our friends

Great is the Lord and most
worthy of praise; his greatness
no one can fathom.

One generation will commend
your works to another; they
will tell of your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:3-4

Welcome to our new Christchurch Home Group series –

NO OTHER GODS.

As we start our new studies, it might be good to remember why Home-groups are so important, and why it is that we need to meet together in small groups as well as in church. Here are three things which I hope will be happening in your Home-group this term:

1. Understanding the ways in which the world around us draws us away from the worship of the one true God. For that to happen we need to understand the world we live in, and how as Christians we should respond to it. So we will read the Bible, and try together to understand what God says in it. This booklet contains some material to help us to do that, but what is also important is to be able to ask our own questions and together look for God's answers in his word.
2. That isn't just something theoretical! If we want to bring together our own world and God's word, we need to be honest with each other about things we find difficult. We live in a world that in various ways puts pressure on us – we need each other for support both spiritually and practically.
3. So we need to pray for each other, especially over those areas where we are aware of our weaknesses. This is an extension of what happens with our Prayer Ministry team on Sundays – and just like then it means that we should never talk outside the group about problems that a

particular member has shared. And our prayer shouldn't just be for ourselves, but for Christchurch generally, as we seek to live lives which honour our great God, and which pass on the news of his greatness to the next generation.

The programme for this term looks like this:

Wednesday 10 th April	The Power House – Church Prayer Meeting at 7.45 pm
w/b Monday 15 th April	Home Group 1: A world of false gods
w/b Monday 22 nd April	Home Group 2: Mammon
Wednesday 1 st May	The Power House – Church Prayer Meeting at 7.45 pm
w/b Monday 6 th May	Home Group 3: Aphrodite
w/b Monday 13 th My	Home Group 4: Bacchus
w/b Monday 20 th May	Home Group 5: Mars
w/b Monday 27 th May	Free Week
Wednesday 5 th June	The Power House – Church Prayer Meeting at 7.45 pm
w/b Monday 10 th June	Home Group 6: The unknown god
w/b Monday 17 th June	Home Group 7: Myself
w/b Monday 24 th June	Home Group 8: True worship
Wednesday 3 rd July	The Power House – Church Prayer Meeting at 7.45 pm

1. NO OTHER GODS – A WORLD OF FALSE GODS.

WELCOME

If you could spend the rest of your life doing exactly what you wanted, what would you do?

WORSHIP

Isaiah 40 gives us one of the most wonderful pictures of the Lord in the whole of scripture. Read Isaiah 40:12-31, as an act of praise to God.

WORD

There is an often-repeated story about what happens to a frog in hot water. Apparently (and I hasten to add I've never actually tried this!) if you drop a frog into boiling water, it will immediately leap out. But if you put a frog into cold water, and then gradually increase the temperature, it is possible to boil it alive without it ever reacting and jumping out.

Fascinating – but so what?

Whoever we are, society has an influence on the way we think and act. As Christians we live in a society that at times will influence us in ways that are not God's ways. Our problem comes with the things which subtly influence us, and which we can find ourselves going along with quite innocently. Just like the frog, we can end up being cooked!

Our theme verse this year reminds us that "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." Yet all too easily we allow ourselves to be drawn away from the greatness of our God to lesser things which try to take his place in our lives. Over the next few weeks we will be exploring some of these, so that we can help one another to live a life of faithfulness to our great God.

- *In what ways are you aware of being influenced by the world around?*

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-9

'The last days' (verse 1) refers to the whole of the time between Jesus' ascension and his second coming.

- *Do you think what Paul says here is a fair description of our own society?*
- *In what ways might we be influenced to be like that ourselves?*
- *When Paul says we should 'have nothing to do with them', do you think he means we should cut off all contact with non-Christians?*

Now read 1 Timothy 3:10-17

- *What is Paul's antidote to the influence which society exerts on us?*
- *What steps can we take to allow God to influence our attitudes? How can we help one another in this?*
- *What do you think has the greater influence on the attitudes you have – the Bible, or secular media?*
- *Have there been times when you have read something in the Bible, or heard something in a sermon, which has challenged something you were doing or some attitude which you held?*

Did you change as a result?

How easy was it to change?

In a book published in the early 90's, Tom Wright suggested that society today is dominated by the same gods that dominated the world of the first Christians¹. Of course, people today don't admit that they worship gods, and maybe we don't think of being influenced by just the same things as the first Christians. But in practice things are not that much different from how they were 2000 years ago. So over the rest of this series we are going to look at some of these 'gods' and see how we can stand against the influence which they have over our lives.

¹ Tom Wright New Tasks for a Renewed Church (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992)

WORK

Our theme verse for 2013 not only reminds us of the greatness of the Lord, but also challenges us to pass on the truth about him to the next generation. This doesn't necessarily just mean the younger generation, but the next Christian generation – those who don't yet acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

As we have done before in our Home-groups, please pray about what you could do towards the end of this term as a group to introduce your friends to Jesus. Maybe by putting on a social event – a barbecue or afternoon tea? Or, inviting friends to special services which we will be holding as part of our 150th anniversary? There are endless possibilities – and one of them will be right for you.

2. MAMMON – THE GOD OF WEALTH.

***Mammon** – not actually the name of a god, but derived from the Hebrew for 'putting your trust in wealth'. So in Jesus' time it was shorthand for worshipping wealth.*

WELCOME

If you were given a large amount of money, what would be the first thing you would buy yourself?

WORSHIP

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, then spend some time praising God for how great he is and for all he has given you.

WORD

Up until around 50 years ago, the buildings that dominated the skylines of most towns and cities were churches and cathedrals. Today it is more likely to be financial institutions.

What does this tell you about what society today treats as important?

Read Matthew 6:19-24

In v.24 the word translated 'money' is 'Mammon' – the god of material wealth, rather than money itself.

- *Why is it impossible to serve God and Mammon?*

John Wesley warned the early Methodists that their industry and thrift would inevitably bring them wealth, social standing, the envy of their neighbours, and a host of new temptations.

- *What temptations are you aware of wealth bringing?*

In Matthew 6:19-20 Jesus draws a distinction between storing up treasures on earth and treasure in heaven.

- *What sort of things do you think he meant by 'treasures in heaven'?*
- *How does this function as the opposite of what society does when it stores up treasures on earth?*
- *Why should we be concerned about treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth?*
- *In what ways does the society we live in condition us to seek material wealth?*

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10

- *What does Paul call 'the root of all evil'?*
- *Does this mean that Christians should not have money?*

Mammon isn't only a problem for those who do have wealth. It can be just as much of a problem for those who don't have much at all.

- *How can we help each other to be contented in a society which suffers from rampant discontent?*

When the culture around is pointing towards moneymaking as the major goal in life, the church can sometimes unintentionally get on the same bandwagon.

- *In what ways might a church end up worshipping Mammon instead of opposing it?*
- *What about Christchurch? How do we shape up?*

WORK

Society expects us to bow down and worship Mammon. Take some time to realistically talk about the pressures which our society puts on us in this area, and what active steps we can take to resist that pressure.

Most importantly, pray for one another, that we may be people who accept and use the wealth (or lack of it) that God gives us wisely.

3. APHRODITE – THE GODDESS OF LOVE.

***Aphrodite** – Of all the goddesses of ancient mythology, none were more widely worshipped than the goddess of love. The Greeks called her Aphrodite. The Romans worshipped her as Venus.*

WELCOME

Tell everyone about something that made you laugh or smile in the past week.

WORSHIP

In a world where the word 'love' is often used so casually, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. It has been pointed out that you could replace the word 'love' with the word 'Jesus', and that would give a picture of his perfect love for us. Spend some time thanking him for his love.

WORD

The goddess Aphrodite has made a big comeback in the last generation or so. In the ancient world she was openly

worshipped, but it is only recently that eroticism has become a dominant force in our society.

- *What signs of the worship of sex can you see in our community?*
- *How aware are you of being influenced by them?*
-

Read Ephesians 5:1-16

'But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality ...' (v.3)

- *Presumably there were plenty of other things that these Christians needed to avoid. So why do you think Paul singles out this as the vital issue?*
- *What sort of things does society class as 'sexual immorality' today?*
- *Are there other things that the Bible would include under that heading which our society is happy to accept?*

At the more sordid end of 'Aphrodite worship' come the tens of thousands of Internet sites dedicated to sex. But our society has also seen a huge change in the portrayal of sex in mainstream cinema and T.V.

Job 31:1 says 'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.'

- *Are there things which we should avoid looking at?*
- *How should we decide what we should or should not read or watch on television, video etc.*

It is important to remember that sex isn't of itself bad.

Genesis 2:18-25 seems to make it clear that our sexuality is part of being human. But the Bible also lays down boundaries within which that can be expressed.

And the Song of Songs is well worth a look at sometime.

According to 'The Bible Speaks Today' commentary on the book, 'The Songs powerful and unabashed affirmation of love, loyalty and earthy sexuality is urgently relevant today, when commercialised eroticism is in, and permanence in relationships is out'

But Aphrodite has taken that, and turned it into something which has hurt millions, and has left others enslaved to lust.

Maybe one of the clearest ways in which the dominance of sex in our society can be seen is the way that some people (particularly the 'gay' lobby) define themselves by their sexuality.

At the same time there is a definite pressure to believe that if you are not in a sexual relationship of some sort, you are in some way incomplete.

- How aware are you of these pressures?
- What can the church do to resist these trends?

WORK

Sex has become so dominant in our society that it is hard for any of us to avoid its influence. We need to take care that we are not drawn into accepting things that the Bible says are unacceptable. But we also have a big responsibility for the younger generation. Are there things that we could be doing as a church to protect our children / young people from the sexual immorality which is all around?

4. BACCHUS – THE GOD OF SELF-INDULGENCE.

Bacchus – originally the Roman god of wine, later this expanded to include all of pleasure and civilisation. The Romans celebrated the *Bacchanalia*, or festival of Bacchus, every third year. It became so immoral, however, that in 186 BC the Romans Senate forbade it!

WELCOME

What have you most enjoyed doing in the past 7 days?

WORSHIP

‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.’ (Genesis 1:31)

Praise God for the wonder of the world, and for the things about creation that you most enjoy. You might like to use the words of the hymn ‘For the beauty of the earth’, or the song ‘Our God is great’.

WORD

The American sociologist Neil Postman wrote a book a few years ago called ‘Amusing ourselves to death’.

- *How good a description of our society do you think this is?*

My parents grew up in an era when it was generally accepted that Christians didn't drink or smoke, didn't go to the theatre or cinema, and would certainly never set foot inside a pub or dance hall. My children are growing up in an era when it seems to be generally accepted that Christians can do all these things.

- *Which view do you think is right?*
- *How important is it to you to enjoy yourself?*

Read Matthew 6:25-34

- *What are the sort of things that the people around us are running after at the moment (v.32)?*
- *How do you understand 'the kingdom of God'? As something purely spiritual, or as something concerning the whole of life?*
- *What do you think it means to 'seek first the kingdom of God' (v.33)?*

- *Which of the following are your main leisure activities?*

- a) Cinema / Theatre etc.
- b) D.I.Y. / Gardening
- c) Eating / drinking
- d) Reading
- e) Music
- f) Sport
- g) Spending time with people
- h) Study
- i) Television

- *How important are they to you?*

- *Do you ever think about how God wants you to be spending your time? (Not just about how much of your time you should be spending on church activities, but about all of it.)*
- *Is church-going a leisure activity for you (well, O.K., you are bound to say it isn't, but do stop and think. Everybody else in society thinks it is, and that you only go to church because you 'enjoy' it. How do we avoid being caught up with that view?)*

Read Colossians 3:1-17

Paul tells us to 'set our minds on things above, not on earthly things'

- *Do you think he means that we should have no interest in life here and now?*

In verse 17 we are told 'whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

- *How can this be applied to our leisure activities?*

Read Philippians 3:12 – 4:1

Again Paul talks of getting our priorities right – our citizenship is in heaven (v.20). This doesn't mean that we should become completely other-worldly – the heaven to which we look forwards is a thoroughly physical flesh and blood reality – think of Jesus resurrection body. He was no ghost! We are going to be like him. At my first church there was a woman confined to a wheelchair, who was looking forwards eagerly to being able to dance in heaven! I think she had it exactly right.

But – we need to avoid being too wrapped up in our life here.

- *How could our enjoyment of the leisure activities we looked at above become 'gods' (v.19)?*

- *Do you think that at the moment any of your leisure activities are either inappropriate, or that they are good, but too important to you?*

WORK

Pray for each other, for wisdom in using wisely all the wonderful opportunities for enjoyment and pleasure that God gives us.

Pray as well for others you know who are so busy enjoying themselves that they have no time for God, and no realisation of their need of him.

(How are the plans for your outreach event coming along? Please let Graham know what you are planning, so that as a church we can be praying for you.)

5. MARS – THE GOD OF WAR.

Mars – the Roman god of war. On the international level it is not hard to see that war is still with us – in Afghanistan and Syria fighting continues, in North Korea the tension is rising. In the Middle East Israel and Palestine continue to fight for the land that both consider to be theirs. Yes – the god of war is still very much in business.

WELCOME

What things make you feel irritated?

WORSHIP

Read Romans 5:1-11. In a world where we are so often surrounded by (and caught up in) broken relationships, we can still have peace with God. Praise him for that peace, and for the death of Jesus which made it possible.

WORD

On the international scene, the god of war is still in business. But – just in case that all seems rather remote from us, let's remember that war isn't just about what happens on the international stage. In our own society we see violence,

breakdown in communities, breakdown in families. We are a world at war.

- *Where are you most aware of a lack of peace?*
- *What do you think causes breakdown in relationships – both internationally, and also in our own communities?*

Read James 4:1-12

It looks as though the church which James was writing to had just the same problems as the society around.

- *Why is it that quarrels break out among Christians?*
- *Is there any difference between this and the reasons why fights or wars occur in the world around?*

This passage says a lot about making good, healthy relationships. It does this by pointing out all the things that were going wrong in the Christian communities at that time.

I think there are 3 key ones (plus a fourth one in the next chapter)

- 4:1
- 4:11
- 4:12

5:4

- *How can each of these things cause 'wars'?*

Read Ephesians 4:17-32

In v.26-27, Paul targets anger as one of the issues in the Christian life.

- *Is anger always wrong?*
- *Why might anger give the devil a foothold?*

When we think of war, I guess we usually think of military weapons. But in v.31, Paul highlights other things which work as offensive weapons.

- *Do you recognise any of these from your own life?*
- *What sort of situations might tempt you to slip into bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander and malice?*

- *How do kindness and compassion help to diffuse the things that cause fights?*

Read Matthew 5:1-12

- *What does it mean to be a peacemaker?*
- *In what situations do you find it hardest to do this?*

WORK

'Blessed are the peacemakers.'

Think of a situation you are involved with where there is a lack of peace. (It might be work, family, neighbourhood, church, maybe even your own group!)

What practically can you do to be a peacemaker?

Talk about practical steps you might take, and then pray for one another in those situations.

. 6. THE UNKNOWN GOD

Not so much the name of a god as an idea about God. This is the idea that there is a supreme being – but that we can't know him (or her). All the different world religions are different approaches to him, but none of them is perfect.

WELCOME

What is your favourite piece of music / song?

WORSHIP

The book of Revelation can be rather confusing, but it does show us something of the majesty of God. Read Revelation 5:9-14.

Then bring your praise to God, joining with the whole of creation.

WORD

In previous generations people in this area probably knew very little about religions other than Christianity, but now things have changed. We live in a multi-faith society, probably most of us at some time meet and mix with those of other faiths. And even if we don't know anyone

personally, as a country we are more aware than ever of the tensions that can arise when different faiths live together.

One result of this is that there has been a growth of the idea that 'all roads lead to God.' Similarly, I increasingly find that when I talk to people about Jesus, the response I get is along the lines of 'well, if Christianity works for you, that's fine. But I have chosen some other path.'

- *How do you respond to the idea that all roads lead to God, and that it is up to us to choose which path we take?*

Read Colossians 1:15-23

- *How does this passage challenge the idea that 'Jesus is just one way to God'?*

Colossae was a thoroughly cosmopolitan place – it was a 1st century multi-faith community, with many different religions and everyone had some god or gods they worshipped. And yet in verse 21 Paul explains that before they knew Jesus, these Christians were 'alienated from God.' He then goes on to explain how this situation was resolved.

- *On what basis have you been put right with God?*

- *How does understanding God's actions help to explain why Jesus is the only way to God?*

Paul tells us that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God.' And in John 14:9 Jesus tells Philip 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'

- *How does Jesus help us in relating to an invisible God?*

Over the past few years it has become fairly common to find most of the world's problems – from capitalist exploitation to ecological disasters – blamed on Christianity. It also seems widely believed that over the past centuries religion has caused nothing but war and hatred, and that what is needed now is for people to concentrate on what unites them rather than on what divides them. The world's religions should stop competing and join together.

- *How do you respond to this suggestion?*
- *Do you think it is right for a Christian to seek to convert a member of another faith?*

It is not only those of other faiths who reject the idea that Jesus is the only way to God. It seems to me that the majority of people in this area still consider themselves to be 'basically Christian' because they believe in God.

- *Do Christians have the right to tell such people that they are wrong?*

Read Acts 17:16-34

- *How did Paul react to the worship that was being offered to all sorts of gods in Athens?*
- *How does our response to what goes on in our area compare with this?*
- *How can we learn to value what is good in other religion traditions without compromising the gospel?*

WORD

Think of someone you know who does not yet know Jesus, but who would still consider themselves to be a Christian. Pray for opportunities to share with them just how important Jesus really is. Maybe this will tie in with the plans your group are making for some event later this term.

. 7. MYSELF!

Myself – not a god at all! Or is it?

WELCOME

What are your favourite clothes?

WORSHIP

Read Romans 12:3-5, then praise God for the gifts and abilities he has given the other members of your group, and for the way in which you have been blessed by others.

WORD

I remember that in the last few months of 1999 there were a lot of candidates being put forward for 'song of the 20th century.' My vote would have gone to 'My Way' – not because I like it, but because it seems to sum up the era we live in. It's not that people are necessarily more greedy than before, but that the emphasis on 'self-fulfilment', on 'getting the most out of life', on 'living your dreams, etc. encourages people to put themselves first.

- *Do you think that people are basically selfish?*

- *In what areas do you find selfishness a temptation?*
- *What is the difference between living life to the full and being selfish?*

Read Genesis 3:1-13

- *Why did Eve take the fruit?*
- *What was wrong with wanting those things?*
- *Are there ways in which the desire to have something good for ourselves can be a source of temptation to go against what God has said?*

Eve wanted to gain wisdom, but without the context of obedience to God.

- *How can we make sure that our desire for wisdom, our education and that of our children, is done in the context of 'the fear of the Lord'? (Job 28:28)*

Read Mark 10:35-45

Surely James and John were just wanting the best for themselves. Is there anything wrong with that?

- *How was the response of the ten really just playing the same game?*
- *What was Jesus' response? What would it mean to be slave of all?*
- *In what ways might the attitude of James and John show up in churches today?*
- *Is it happening at Christ Church?*

In Romans 13:8 Paul wrote 'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.' The emphasis is entirely on what we owe to others (especially other Christians). Yet so often I hear Christians talk about how others have failed to do things for them.

- *In a society where there is such a huge emphasis on 'my rights', how can we put into practice what Paul wrote?*

Read Philippians 2:1-11

We are not supposed to forget about our own concerns, but we do need to keep them in context.

- *What would it mean in practice to 'look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.'*

WORK

Selfishness can easily creep into the church in terms of people coming to church for what they can get out of it. Talk practically about what you could do this Sunday to give something to others.

The greatest thing we can ever do for others is to tell them about Jesus, but often that is something which we feel uncomfortable doing. Continue praying for those you want to invite to your end of term event, especially for opportunities to invite them, and the right way to do it.

8. TRUE WORSHIP WORSHIPPING THE LORD.

Jesus said, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:29-30)

WELCOME

Imagine it's your birthday! What present would you most like to receive?

WORSHIP

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. Use psalm 145 to help you praise God for his greatness.

WORD

We've spent this term looking at the way in which our society, without realising it, is still dominated by the same 'gods' as were around in New Testament times. Hopefully you have been honest enough to realise the points at which you have been influenced by these false gods.

- *Of all the things we have looked at, what is the biggest issue for you personally?*

I think that one of the problems that the church faces today is that these ideas have made their way into our worship. At the end of this series, can you think of any ways in which our view of God, of what he has done for us, and of how we should respond to him, has been influenced by the culture around rather than by the Bible?

Read Psalm 95

- *What sort of an image do the first 2 verses give of the worship which should be given to God?*

True worship must spring from a realisation of who God is. As we meet, especially at our services on Sundays, one of the most important parts of our worship should be the reminders of who God really is.

- *What picture of God is given in verse 3-5?*
- *How does thinking about God's greatness push us into worship?*

God is both 'our Father' and also the creator and ruler of the universe.

- *In our worship do we have a right balance between love for our Father and awe at his greatness?*
- *What response does the writer of this psalm expect to come from his reminder of who God is and what he has done?*

Romans 12:1 says 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.' Worship isn't something restricted to Sundays – it should occupy all our time and involve all that we do.

- *What might it mean to 'bow down in worship' in the way that we do our work, handle our relationships, enjoy our leisure?*

So far we have seen that true worship will involve joy and thanksgiving, humility and awe. But verses 8-11 introduce another element which is at the heart of true worship – listening to God and obeying him (Meribah & Massah are referred to in Exodus 17)

- *How do these verses underline the importance of the Bible in worship?*

True worship involves our minds, our feelings, and our actions – 'Worship is an attitude of our hearts towards God. It is stimulated by what we know about God. It results in what we do with our hands.'

The society which we live in is dominated by false gods. And what the people around us need is not just to hear about the true God, but to see the difference that he makes to our lives.

As his people, we need to do all we can to make sure that our attitudes, our actions, our worship, are all inspired by the truth, and not by the idols of our society.

WORK

This is our last Home-group till the autumn. But the temptations to follow false gods will be just as real in the coming months. What can you do as a group to continue supporting one another? Will you meet during the summer? Will you commit to praying for one another?

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

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

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him.

an **E**vanglising 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.*