

HOME GROUPS

Well done! Any of you who are reading this and Especially well done Anyone who has made it to a HG tonight. Have a good look round and see if you can work out who is missing, maybe even give them a quick call right now and say We're here having tea and a chat come on over. Bless those who are blessing other groups and bless those who are having a break (try and remember that they are still part of your group – so remember them in prayer and keep up with how things are in their lives.

Welcome: Maybe by now you've already covered the basics – how's this week been for you? That sort of thing. So now ask: What's your favourite aroma? What smells have a special significance for you?

Worship: try Psalm 126. (i) have one person read it, play a piece of music. (ii) read it as a round. (iii) do something completely different like using Chess pieces! Or listening to a fav piece of music. I know you weren't asked to do worship this evening but why not show up with an idea anyway, if there are two or three ideas that's great, you can do next week!

Word:

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1.23-ch2v17.
2. Can anyone remember anything James said?
3. What was the one word sermon? Ah c'mon someone should know the answer to this one!
4. Vs23 God as witness to my thoughts! Some might find this intimidating, how might it impact your life?
5. How can leaders not "lord it over" but work with you for your joy? What's the difference between these two approaches?
6. Should Christians, Christian leaders, show emotion the way that Paul does?
7. Does my interpretation of this – that Paul is hurting and has contributed to the hurt of others (perhaps unwittingly) help you in your faith? How?
8. 2Cor2.5 If this is about someone being slanderous to Paul, how does that hurt the whole Church?
9. Why is it hard to forgive? What's the most profound experience of forgiveness that you've come across?
10. How do you restore someone to the Church family?
11. We are not unaware of Satan's schemes. What other schemes are we aware of? (see also Screwtape letters!)
12. What's this Triumphal Procession? James didn't mention that at all in the sermon. (see also Colossians 2.15)
13. Why are we a bad odour to those who have determined not to follow Christ?
14. Why are we a good fragrance to others?
15. Who is equal to this task? (2 Cor 3.5)
16. Have a think about your (spiritual) aroma? How can you give off the right whiff? (you might like to start by thinking about how other things gain a flavour / smell from other things)

Works: Pray for those who didn't make it this evening, pray for those who are with other groups, pray about people who could be invited to this group. IF your group is really big, pray about whether you might go be a blessing to another group.

Be clear with each other about where you're meeting next week or two. Proactively offer to lead the worship or the word. And of course someone needs to be the one to say Can we start now / pray now etc.

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THE TALK:

What's your favourite smell? **Fresh cut grass**? A warm cup of coffee? Whenever I smell Pear soap I am instantly transported back in time to lovely memories of my Mum. Smells are really powerful. They seem to go under the radar, under our strong masks and pull something up from somewhere deep inside of us. The one word sermon this week is **Aroma**. And it's about how the Aroma of Christ that is on us, the kind of memories good or bad and of faith or revulsion that it stirs up in other people. The idea of the one word sermon is not to show you how cleverly **pithy** I can be Nor simply so that you can **remember** at least one thing from this talk – the idea is that you will be able to chew over that one word as you stand in the Check out queue and your mind starts to wander, you might turn it to this word Aroma.

Previously we've had the word **Comfort** and we looked at the importance of receiving comfort of God and of comforting others and how that was about drawing alongside other people. And then we had the word **Deposit** – I gave the scenario where you are the washing machine and God is the customer and the Holy Spirit is given to you as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. All very encouraging stuff. Part of the sermon on Deposit was about Paul trying to say **Sorry** that he'd let the Church down, trying to encourage them to **put their faith** in Jesus because its Jesus who makes us **stand firm**. Role models can be wonderful but I'm not the one who makes you stand firm, it is Jesus who is faithful and reliable.

So now we come to what happens next. And the key word is **Aroma**, the fragrance of Christ because that's what we are.

We smell of God and Church and the Bible and the Holy Spirit and Forgiveness – we smell of all these things to larger and lesser degrees and **other people react** to that smell, not always positively.

Some of Paul's letters are written with direct intent to **teach theology** - Romans would be the very best example of this. Others are written in order to deal with theological **heresy** – **Colossians** is worried about the worship of Angels (Col 2.18) Galatians is concerned about some Christians who seem to want to go back to the old Law. Some of **John's** letters talk about dealing with people who are into a sort of **magic Knowledge**. All of them are saying What you want is to **stick to the bible**, stick to **Jesus** and his death on the **cross**, stick to the **Holy Spirit**, and you'll be fine.

This letter of 2 Corinthians isn't quite like that. Its more of a **story letter** but we're not entirely sure of the story that's going on, we're having to do a little bit of guessing.

Paul visited the Corinthians because there were **issues** that needed sorting out but something **went wrong** with that meeting. People got upset, Paul got hurt. So he left them and instead wrote a letter. We don't have this letter but it is sometimes called the **Severe or Painful Letter** in which, we guess, Paul spelled out the problems and the solutions.

And now he's writing this letter that we call 2 Corinthians. So Now he explains **why he let them down** with his promise of a double visit that he couldn't pull off – and the reason is **Not to make it worse**.

Sometimes a little **bit of space** needs to be given, either to cool down or to let someone get on with sorting themselves out a bit rather than being constantly in their face and on their case.

I didn't come back, I'm hurting, you're hurting, it seemed as if my return so soon was just going to make **matters worse**. I didn't want to come over all heavy handed that's not my intention at all. Not lording it over you, full of swaggering arrogance.

So Paul stays away, he writes a letter **that's got tears dripping** down on to it. I have written letters that have had hot tears drip down in my writing – they're not easy letters to write, they can't be easy to read either! Certainly they are emotionally draining.

The one word sermon is **Aroma**, and I'm wondering what the Aroma of Paul is in his leadership. He says I didn't return because I **didn't want to lord it over you** and I think that is how it would have seemed.

Paul's Leadership style here is of wanting to serve, to **work with you** – not telling you what to do, to work with you and the aim here is joy, **your joy**.

If we can **learn to serve each other with the other's joy in mind**, we can't go very far wrong. If our aim is to see each other stand firm in our faith in Christ, to know that joy, then that's good.

The aim of the Severe Letter is not to make the problem worse – but to convey the **depth of Paul's real love** for these people. He really does care for them.

There's someone here who needs **forgiving**. We are not **privy** to the story behind it – perhaps it is the shockingly immoral man that Paul wrote about in 1 Cor 5 – we live in a society today that might not be shocked by the son who takes his **father's wife as his lover** – but even ancient Corinth with its loose morals, even the non-Christians found that pretty shocking.

Maybe that is who Paul was trying to **discipline**. Another possibility is that it was the bad visit when everything went wrong, maybe there was someone who was **straightforwardly rude** and slanderous to Paul. Maybe the congregation refused to stop him. But it would seem that they have after the event had a go at this man, perhaps quite **harshly** – but not in the sense of excommunicating him, he still seems to have been in the church fellowship.

And now Paul says Its time to stop, its **time to forgive** and to **comfort** one another.

After Princess **Diana** died there was this national grief that gripped us all and it took **Elton John** of all people to say Come one everyone, chin up and back to work. The Church tried saying something like that but it wasn't received well at all.

Paul says The man's been punished enough, time to forgive.

The **Aroma of Paul's Leadership** is not to Lord it over but to Work with others and to work for their joy. The Aroma of Paul's discipline is not to enjoy others being put down but to see them **restored**. **Forgive!** Comfort!

There are two reasons for this – the first is that Paul sees the **Church as one Body**. When one part of it is hurt, we all hurt. You shoot yourself in the foot and the rest of the body screams too! We all hurt when there's issues that are not being dealt with or when there's a harsh spirit of shunning going on.

The other reason is **Satan** loves these moments. The **Accuser** knows how to get in and make havoc. He loves it when we're cross with each other, and the unity is broken and the peace is shattered and we're judging each other. Marvellous stuff.

And – as CS Lewis puts it – **our father below** – loves it when we don't, when we do nothing, even though someone is causing disruption – either by their rudeness or slander or something like that. The Devil loves it when we're laissez faire about that and he loves it when we're heavy handed. The trick is to find the right balance – we **care enough** to ask you to **stop** being rude, we care enough to ask you to **stay** and not go. That's not an easy balance to hold.

So Paul goes to Ephesus, there's trouble in Ephesus and he has to leave and go **north to Troas** and we read how he's really looking to catch up with **Titus**. And the reason for that is that Titus was the last person he knows to have visited Corinth. Paul wants to hear about how things are going in Corinth. How did they receive that last letter?

It's amazing: Paul preaches the gospel and **God opens a door** for Paul so that means that lots of people are responding to him – yet still Paul has **no peace**. He wants to know how things are in Corinth. And so Paul stops doing this good work and goes off to Greece – in search of Titus, in search of news.

It's surprising I think that Paul is more concerned about the **Pastoral welfare** of the Church in Corinth than he is in making **new converts**, in starting up a new church.

I think that this speaks volumes – when people think you're only friendly with them in the **hope of catching their soul**, or of getting them into church, then the priority of evangelism overrides care of others – I think people see that. But I also think they pick up when they see the real and **genuine care** that we have for each other.

Sorry I'm not going to tell you about Jesus, I'm going to go and make sure that these people are okay – that should be a sure sign that you really care.

The one word sermon is **Aroma**. The challenge is for us to think and pray through what kind of Aroma **we give off**. Some of us feel terribly **inadequate** in our Christian life – a terrible hypocrite – often we judge ourselves more harshly than non-Christians would. So the idea that we give off a Christian Aroma – oh please Jesus **may it be an acceptable** one, a good one, a pleasing one!

Look at Paul – he's **done stuff that has not worked** out how he hoped it would – as a result he's hurt, others are hurt. One man, perhaps rude slanderer, is being shunned by the church. It all seems to go horribly wrong. That might encourage some of you!

Look at **Paul's aroma** – his use of power is **not to dictate** and lord it over but to **work with**, and the aim is your **joy**. He calls the people to come together and to **forgive and comfort** each other.

Interesting how he seeks **Peace** and that means putting Pastoral care above Evangelism - and I think that that's quite a **powerful evangelistic** thing to do! But that's not the point, the point is that Paul really cares.

From Paul, I'm picking up **wafts of Service**, of Joy, of Forgiveness, of Comfort, of Peace. – that's not such a bad smell. Amen.