

Finding fulfilment in living today

Introduction

We often live with those around us who say 'well that's good enough' but for ourselves we know we could have done better. We have replaced excellence at times with good enough. We need to find a way of thinking about how we can live our life in not just a good enough way, so that our present moulds our future, deepens our faith, and impacts our life today. This will mean investigating every aspect of our life, and seeing ourselves through the lens of God eyes. It is also about dreaming of a future which is shaped by God's hands, and not just our own.

Of course the example that is always set before us is Jesus. He is the one who lived the most excellent life in human history. His life shows radical obedience, sacrificial love, moral purity, relational intimacy, Jesus loved with excellence. We see this in the way that his life led him to the cross for the sake of mankind. Jesus offers a blueprint as to how to live our lives not just good enough, but with an excellence, which we often seek for ourselves. We shall be looking in this study a finding fulfilment in the following areas of life, spiritual, moral, relational, financial, directional, and eternal.

We live in a world where 'mediocrity' is embraced, and 'good enough' is praised, we need to be looking for a standard, which says that 'excellence' not perfection, is what God is seeking from his people.

Study 1

Finding fulfilment in our spiritual life

Introduction

The Old Testament prophet Malachi, asked the people 'How should a human being respond to the excellence they see in the nature and activities of God? What kind of response should a human make to what they see? In a sense he is saying' OK so what does an fulfilled spiritual life look like?' He uses an Old Testament illustration from the sacrificial system, and says that a blemished, or a blind sacrifice is not good enough; it has to be the best. In fact he suggests that anything less than this means that we have not recognised what true worship actually is.

The big picture

1. What are some of the ways that we can be tempted to give second best, or even leftovers, when it comes to how we follow God?

In our offerings

In our singing

In our attentiveness in worship services

In our time

In our surrender of heart

In our service to others

The biblical picture

Read Malachi Ch 1 vs 6-14

2. what do you learn about the heart and character of God in this passage?

3. How does God's character connect to the kind of worship and offers we bring Him?

4. What do you learn about the attitudes and motives of God's people in the days of Malachi?

5. How do you see these attitudes alive in the Church today?

6. How do you see these attitudes at work in your own heart?

7. What has God done to show His commitment to you? [Linger on this question, deep into your memory, your story, think about how God has revealed and proven his commitment to you?

8. All of us can be tempted to place conditions and limits on our commitment to God. 'God I will do anything except....' What are some of those limits you can be tempted to place on your devotion to God?

9. If you feel able tell about a time you were amazed and overwhelmed by the sheer depth and reality of God's love for you. How did you respond to this growing awareness?

Being in the picture

10. Think deeply about God's love for you. Then be creative and identify some substantial ways you can respond back to God. What are some ways we can express our love and praise to God?

11. What is one expression of loving action that might stretch you and grow you as a follower of Jesus? What is standing in the way of you expressing your love in this way?

12. When God has our best commitment and when our hearts are devoted to Him in love, everything else seems to follow. With that in mind what are some of the unique skills, gifts, abilities God has given you?

How are you using one of these for God's glory in

Your home?

The church fellowship?

Your community?

13. What is one gift or ability you have still not offered back to God, and are using for his purposes in this world?

14. What step can you take to offer this to God, and begin a process of discovering how He can use it for His glory?

Study 2

Finding fulfilment in our moral life

Introduction

We live in world where moral compromise is evident. Many things, which we have seen as morally questionable years ago, are now standard operating procedures. But God calls his people to purity of life, no matter how others are living around us.

Too often we do not realise just how treacherous the slippery slope of moral wrong behaviour is for us. This study reveals to us that morally wrong behaviour always ends badly, unless we seek and ask for God intervention.

The big picture

1. If you can tell of a time when you or someone you know tried to do the right thing for God but things seemed to go wrong. Or tell about a time you watched someone cross all kinds of moral boundaries and seemed to get away with it. [Be careful not use unnecessary names]

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 73

2. In Psalm 73 vs 1-16 the psalmist has a very specific view of life. How would you describe his outlook on each of the following

His own life and condition

The lives of the wicked and their condition

God's activity in the world

3. In Psalm 73 vs 17-28 everything changes. When the Psalmist enters the sanctuary of God, the whole world looks different. How would you describe his outlook on each of the following in this portion of the Psalm

The lives of the wicked and their condition

God activity in the world

4 As sinful people we are all tempted to live with moral compromise. In his grace God gives us warning signs, if you can name some of these warning signs, use the Psalm to help you.

5 Why does God give us these warnings?

6. God does not want his people to walk in the slippery slopes of moral compromise. If you can tell of a time when you followed God's warning and left the morally slippery ground on which you were walking. How did this change your relationship with God and others?

7. If you are willing to be vulnerable, what is an area of your life right now where you are still walking on slippery stones of moral compromise?

8. The psalmist sees things differently as he comes to worship vs 17. Here he gains strength in the struggle, and finds support from God. How does God's help and intimacy help you to live a morally fulfilled life?

Being in the picture

We're all tempted to live with moral compromise, slippery stones are everywhere. We need therefore to be aware of the following

1. Areas in which we have slipped in the past
2. Areas in which we are sure we will never fall

This coming week take some time to

A. Reflect on one or two areas where you have struggled in the past, and pray for strength to resist the temptation in these areas

B. Identify one or two areas where you are confident you would never struggle with. Ask God to humble your heart, and allow you to keep your guard up. When we say 'I would never do that', we can easily drop our guard and become a target.

Study 3

Finding fulfilment in our relational life

Introduction

There is a balance which the author Carl George wrote about in the early 1990's when he wrote 'the church of the future my need to return to a structure similar to the church in Acts, large enough to attract a crowd, but small enough to have a personal touch'.

If we are going to have a life of fulfilment in our relational life then we need to realise that there is a certain work that God can do for us in a large gathering, and another kind of work he can do in us through the Holy Spirit when we are in smaller groupings. We need to recognise that both are important to our fulfilment of relationships

The big picture

1. Most of us have seen examples of people who go to church, follow the routine, and go home with no real connection with other people. If we are honest many of us have had seasons in our life when we have functioned in this way. What do we miss out on when we only settle for this kind of Church experience?

2. In the same way, most of us have had times when we have deeply engaged with other Christians and taken the risks of being authentic. What do we gain when we seek this kind of connection with other followers of Jesus?

The biblical picture

Read Acts Ch. 2 vs 42-47 1 John Ch 4 vs 11-12, James Ch 5 vs 13-16

3. What were some of the practices that marked the life of the first-century church, and how do you see these alive or missing in the church today?
4. What were some of the attitudes that marked the life of the first century church, and how do you see these alive or missing in the church today?
5. How have you found small groups/ cells settings to be a natural place for expressing and receiving love and affirmation?
6. What can you do as a small group/ cell to create more space for expressing love and affirmation to each other?
7. A small group/ cell is a great place to speak openly and honestly about what we are learning from sermons, Scripture, books, CD's TV etc. How can the deep thoughts and insights of others help shape and deepen our personal application of what we are listening, watching?
8. How has participation in a small group/ cell raised the bar for accountability in your life?
9. What steps can you take as a group/ cell to increase the level of accountability both when you are together and between meetings?
10. If you are facing major decisions or a crossroads moment in your life, how can your group/ cell members pray, support, and bring wisdom to you?
11. The Scriptures speak of confessing your sins one to another [James Ch 5 vs 16]. What do you consider to be the potential risks and dangers of confessing your struggles in your cell/ small group?
12. What are the benefits and values of being a group/ cell where each can humbly confess areas of struggle, sin, brokenness?

Being in the picture

13. Look again at Acts Ch. 2 vs. 42-47. Identify what the early believers did and the characteristics, which marked their community

Consider doing this in the following grid.

Verse	lesson	prayer
42	devoted to teaching	Lord, help me be a student of the Word

14. Can you identify in each of your group/ cell members a word of affirmation as to where you see God working in their life. Share this within the group/cell

Study 4

Finding fulfilment in our financial life

Introduction

In both the Old and New Testament there is plenty of teaching on how God wants us to use and review the resources he has given us. We do at least need to dig into this teaching in order to gain the best from it. I once had a complete set of hubcaps stolen from my car while it was parked in a multi-storey car park in London. As I came back and saw what had happened I felt violated and angry, someone had taken what was mine. I thought who has been so brazenly self-centred and uncaring as to invade my life like this. [I know a little over the top, but you get the idea of what I was feeling, and anyway, they were nice hubcaps]. So as you work through this study allow it to become an opportunity for God to have a chat with you, so that you get find the fulfilment in your financial affairs.

The big picture

1. If you have been robbed or had something stolen from you, how were you impacted. How did it make you feel?

The biblical picture

Read Malachi Ch 3 vs 6-12 and Proverbs Ch 3 vs 9-10

2. How does God feel about the behaviour of His people in the light of what you read in Malachi Ch 3 vs 6-12?

3. What is God calling His people to do in these passages?
4. What does God say will happen in His people follow His call to live with generosity?
5. Jesus spoke about ' where your treasure is there will your heart be also [Matthew Ch. 6 vs 21] Why do you think in Malachi God calls for a tithe[10%] to go back to Him?
6. How does a person pattern of giving reflect the condition of his/ her heart?
7. What specific growth steps will help us expand our hearts so that giving a tithe and offering [gifts above the first 10%] is a natural response of love?
8. If a person has a heart for God, and wants to give the tithe, and even offerings, but never does a serious' gut check' [a gut check is about having the courage to examine our character to ensure we are taking the practical steps needed to honour God with our finances], what might happen?
9. How might a serious personal evaluation of our financial lives bring our heart and actions into sync and deepen our faith?

Being in the picture

10. take a few minutes to do the following
 - A. An initial gut check-, think through your income over the last few months, then think about what you have given to God. How does it measure up?
 - B. Reflect your heart- over the past few months have you given joyfully and generously? How is your giving reflected in your heart?
 - C. Prayer- take a moment to either praise God for the strength to continue if you are living in joyful obedience to God. Or, pray for your heart to love God more, and your life to reflect this in the way you give.
11. What happened to your heart in that time of reflection?

12. What is God saying to you about how you view Him, and how this impacts the way you handle finances?

13 What helps you maintain a faithful heart and generous hands even in hard times

Study 5

Finding fulfilment in the direction our life is going

Introduction

We don't have to wander through life with no direction. We also do not have to figure out everything on our own. God is ready to give us direction if we ask for it with faith and follow His leading. God offers us direction in numerous ways. He has all kinds of wisdom and insight to offer us, just waiting to be used, we just need to avail ourselves of it. Nothing would please God more than to steer us in a constructive direction. God is in the business of coming alongside of us at critical intersections in our life to help us make the right call.

The big picture

1. If you can tell of a time when you had to make a decision and failed to ask God for wisdom or direction. How did things turn out?

2. If you can tell of a time when you slowed down and looked at God for His direction. What means did God use to guide you?

The biblical picture

Read James Ch 1 vs 5-8 Psalm 119 vs 105 Romans Ch 8 vs 14 Proverbs Ch 11 vs 14 Colossians Ch 4 vs 3

3. According to these passages, what are some of the ways that God gives direction to His children?

4, How have you experienced one of these direction-giving encounters with God?

5. Why do you think that God is concerned that we live with confident, rock solid faith in Him and not place part of our faith in the 'wisdom' of the world?
6. Through being a follower of Jesus, what has strengthened and fortified your faith in God's ability to guide you?
7. God offers to guide us through the Scriptures. He says his word is a lamp to our feet. Describe a time when the simple, clear teaching of the Bible gave you a direction that you needed to press forward and follow God's will for your life?
8. how can daily study of God's written Word prepare you for most situations you will face in life?
9. What are some practical ways we can develop a pattern of daily Bible study to help us gain heavenly wisdom and direction in our life?
10. God will guide through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we need more specific direction, then the general direction the Scriptures offer. The promptings of the Holy Spirit will always agree with the teaching of the Scriptures, but with an added personalised guidance.
If you can tell of a time you felt God's prompting and heard the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit guiding you. How did you respond the Spirit's prompting, and how did this impact your decision?
11. Proverbs Ch 11 vs14 says 'Many advisors make victory sure.' God used other people to help us. Who has God placed in your life with a deep faith and real wisdom, and how might they act as sounding board for directional excellence?
12. How might your cell/ small group become a community of wisdom-givers that God could use to guide you?

Being in the picture

13. If you can tell of a time God clearly closed a door and gave you life direction instead?

14. Tell if you can you sensed God had opened a door for you, and you walked through it?

Study 6

Finding fulfilment in the eternity of life.

Introduction

No matter how good this life is for someone, it is the snap of a finger compared to eternity. God is looking for us to find satisfaction and fulfilment in this area of our life. Jesus asked a question 'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul' [Mark 8:36] God is looking to help us seek fulfilment in this life, but he also longs for us to find his excellent fulfilment in eternity. There is a frailty in our existence, our life can be like wild flowers that spring up, adorn the landscape, but before you know it, they and we are gone.

American Christian Lewis Smedes wrote 'Grace is the gift of feeling sure that our future, even our dying, is going to turn out more splendidly than we are daring.' Heaven is a gift of grace, but it must be received, and when it is, we need to trust God's hold on us, more than our hold on God.

The big picture

1. Tell of a time when you were struck by the frailty and brevity of life. How did this moment of insight impact the way you view eternity?

The biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 2 vs 8-9 and Titus Ch 3 vs 4-7

2. In this life, almost everything had to be earned. Even Christian can fall into the mind-set that we to work for God's favour or blessing. How do the above passages correct this view?

3. read John Ch 14vs 6 Acts Ch 4 vs 11-12 Romans Ch 10 vs. 9-10 John Ch 1. vs 12-13.

How does a sinful person find cleansing from sin and assurance that heaven will be their home?

4. Describe the first time it sank into your soul that salvation is not based on your good works or personal merits, but on the amazing grace of a loving God?

5. forgiveness and heaven are undeserved gifts given from the hands of a loving God. How does this truth impact the following areas of your life

a. How you worship God

b. How you share the love of God with others?

c. How you respond when you stumble and fall?

d. How you view people who are living neck-deep in sin and rebellion?

e. Other aspects of your life and faith?

6. What is one practical step that you can take in response to your awareness of the above truth?

7. The message of God's love and grace is truly amazing. The hope of heaven is glorious. What are some of the ways we can communicate this good news to fiends and family members who have not yet embraced Jesus?

Being in the picture

Read 1 Corinthians 15: 50-57 Revelation 7: 15-17 Revelation 21: 18-22:5

8. When you think about heaven, what excites you most about going there when this life ends?

9. How does this hope of heaven inspire you to live for Jesus in a fulfilled way today?