

How to cultivate a life of character

Introduction

It was the 20th Century writer C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity*, who reflects on the truth that when a person begins to explore Christianity it is a little like inviting God to rebuild your house. You invite him in and initially you can begin to understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains and the guttering sorted out, stopping the leaks, which you always intended to get round to but presently he starts to knock walls down, in a way that hurts dramatically. You ask what on earth is he doing? Then it dawns on you, he is re-designing the house. You thought you were going to be made into a lovely little cottage, but he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in Himself.

So there is a war going on inside the person who invites God into their life. One of the challenges God puts before us is that we are to start to treat others with humility, and consider them better than ourselves. Our human tendency is not to treat others as better than ourselves, but to put ourselves first. However God calls us to have our whole perspective on life transformed by His supernatural presence. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who begins this change in our life. We just need to be open to the challenges he presents us with. When we learn to co-operate with the Holy Spirit we discover that the challenges God offers us are possible and do-able for us.

This study will help us in our willingness to allow this spirit of co-operation to flourish between ourselves and the third person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit. He is the one who will help us unlock the door to the kind of life God calls His followers to enjoy. God calls us to a practical, personal pivotal change

Session 1

Love

Introduction

It takes an enormous amount of courage to enter into the lifestyle God calls the Christian believer to. The Christ follower enters into a new life, a supernatural life empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. When this happens we can love others and put their needs and interests before our own because we have hearts that are filled with the love of God.

The Big picture

1. How would you have defined love at the following times in your life?

When you were a child

When you were a teenager

When you were a young adult.

2. How has your understanding of love changed over the years?

The Biblical picture

Read Philippians Ch 2 vs. 1-11

3. What does this passage teach about what love looks like?

4. What has Jesus done to model perfect love for us?

5. How can we follow Jesus example of love?

6. If you can tell your group about a time what you had a chance to treat someone else as better than yourself, but failed to do so

7. If you can tell your group about a time when you received God's supernatural ability and were able to love another person by treating them as better than yourself

8. How have you experienced the transforming power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your life since becoming a follower of Christ?

9. If you can describe a time when you did not fully cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work or prompting. What were the consequences?

Being in the picture

10. Choose one area below and list a practical way you can show love by putting the needs of others ahead of your own needs

Your home

Your workplace

Your neighbourhood

Your cell/ small group

Your church

Your community/ Town

11. Can you think of how your cell/ group members can support you to keep you accountable as you seek to express love in this area?

12. If you can describe the recurring situation in your life where putting others first is difficult

13 What is the one thing you can do to begin to change in this area of your life?

14. Take time this week to think of one person you need to love by putting that person's interests and needs before your own. Decide how you will express love to them

To whom will you express love?

What will you do to put that person first?

When will you do it?

Session 2

Joy

Introduction

All of us hunger for joy. Yet so many people seem to live a joyless existence. We look for answers in different places, but when God speaks, He tells us where we can discover true joy. Part of the answer of finding joy is not just entering into a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ but also joining with others in a loving community, who also share the desire to follow Christ. This adds to the purpose in our life, and offers us a bigger reason for living; we have discovered the value of community.

The big picture

1. What brings you joy and happiness?

2. What takes away your joy and happiness?

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 15 vs. 9-11

3. Jesus talks about our joy being 'complete' .How was your joy incomplete before Jesus entered your life?

4. Jesus said, 'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you'. What is unique about the joy Jesus brings us?

5. What has God done to bring you joy over the past year?

6. Armchair experts are people who offer free advice for anything which ails us. They usually mean well, but their advice seems hollow and it rarely brings joy to a joyless heart. With that in mind, how do you feel when an armchair expert offers advice to you?

7. How did it go when you followed the armchair experts advice?

8. Many have studied the absence of joy in human life; here are the brief summaries of 3 broad opinions

William Glasser, a psychiatrist, for him joy and happiness are found when we have significant love relationships in our lives

Viktor Frankl, a neurologist, for him joy comes when we have meaning in life and a purpose for living

Bruno Bettelheim, a psychologist, for him joy comes when we live with hope, something to look forward to.

How do some of these experts capture the meaning of joy?

9. How do these definitions fall short of the full meaning of joy?

Being in the picture

10. How has your relationship with God brought you significant love relationships?

11. If you can write down the names of four people God has brought into your life who express/ expressed a deep Christ like love for you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

12. Tell your cell/ group members how one of these people has brought joy to your life.

13 How has your relationship with Christ given you meaning in life?

14. How does your walk with Christ provide hope both now and for your eternity?

15. How does this hope increase your joy?

Session 3

Peace

Introduction

If you went to a war torn part of the world and asked for a definition of peace, you might get the answers that peace is about laying down arms. Peace means the end of conflict. We all have a sense that peace is about the absence of conflict and hostility. However, this may not be the whole picture of peace. There is a peace, which heals relationships, brings us into intimate friendship, and give us into a new beginning in our relationships. This is a deep peace which all hunger for.

The big picture

1. What does peace look like when it is fleshed out. Chose one area below and describe what it would mean to have peace there

In a family

In a neighbourhood

In a church

In a nation

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 14 vs. 25-27 Romans Ch 5 vs. 1-2

2. How does God's peace differ from the peace we find in this world?

3. How have you experienced turmoil, conflict, and lack of peace in this world?

4. How have you experienced the peace that comes from a vital relationship with Christ?

5. In Romans Ch 5 vs. 1-2, we are told that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. How did you view God before you met Christ?

6. What changes did a relationship with Christ bring?

There are many people in our Country today who if you asked them if they were peaceable they would say yes. They are not in conflict with anyone, let alone God. They have a kind of agreement with God, God is doing his thing, they are doing there's, and as long as it stays this way they are at peace. I call this P1. P2 is when we choose to do whatever it takes to make a healthy relationship with God

7. What does a person look like when they only exist on P1 level with God?

8. How does their life change when they move to P2 peace?

9. If someone asked you. 'How can I move to P2 with God?' How would you reply?

10. If you can describe when you first experienced P2 with God?

P2 relationship with God brings with it a comprehensive sense of peace which connects with the whole of life. The 'if only' mentality of if only I had more money, a better body shape, more friends, however P2 reconciles us to ourselves and our circumstances, so that God's peace is manifest in our life.

Being in the picture

11. Can you think of any more 'if only' areas in life?

12. Read Psalm 139 vs. 1-6 and 13-14. Take some silent prayer to confess to God any 'if only' areas you still carry.

13. If you can think of anyone you are not at peace with on P1 level?

14. What is it going to take to have P1 peace with that person?

16. How can your group/ cell help support you in your peace- making effort?

Session 4

Patience

Introduction

If you want to develop strong relationships, a good marriage, or be successful in your chosen career, it is going to take patience. If you want to develop a strong relationship with God, it will take along with other things patience. The reality is that God loves us so much that He can't stand the damage that we inflict on ourselves and others simply because we lack patience. God wants to encourage us, so He offers us the Holy Spirit to help us, who is looking to work overtime in our life to produce patience. The Greek word for patience literally means 'slow anger' God is seeking to help us develop patience so that we don't become quickly angry with ourselves, with others, and with God. Patience helps us maintain our emotional equilibrium in life.

The big picture

1. What is one of the pet peeves that push your impatience button?

The Biblical picture

Read Psalm 103vs. 8-12.

2. What do you learn about the character of God in this Psalm?
 1. How do you feel when you read these words?
 2. How do you see the patience of God in this passage?
 3. When was a time you have experienced this kind of divine patience in your life?

Being in the picture

6. Take some time to work through the following
 - a. Tell a story of how you were hurt by someone's impatience
 - b. How could patience in that situation have spared you from pain and hurt?
 - c. Describe a time you have hurt someone else because of your impatience
 - d. How could you have behaved differently and spared someone else from needless hurt?

7. If you can reflect on how God showed you patience before you decided to follow Jesus Christ?
8. How could this impact the way you respond to 'non-believers' who may annoy you with their 'decidedly unspiritual' lifestyles?
9. In what areas of your character has God shown His patience to you since you have been a follower of Christ?
10. How does focusing on God's patience help you grow in patience with others?
11. What is one situation in your life in which you are struggling with impatience?
12. How can your cell/ group help and support you as you seek to yield to the help of the Holy Spirit, to be patient in that situation?

Session 5

Sensitivity

Introduction

Life is full of hard knocks, and we are not always aware of the ballast that others carry in their lives unless they tell us. The more we are exposed to the ills of a culture, the stronger ones inner urge to self-protection becomes. The reality is that we are all tempted to have a 'do unto others before they do it unto you' philosophy of life. Someone put this very succinctly when he said 'My philosophy in life is to keep the enemy on the run, and the enemy is everybody apart from myself'.

In the middle of a hard-hearted world we are called to live with sensitivity. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take insensitive, hardened, toughened, calloused, people and transform them into sensitive, kind, courteous, gentle people.

The big picture

1. There is an outlook on life, which goes, 'Life is tough, and it's going to get tougher, so you had better toughen up if you are going to survive.' Can you think of similar messages that you have heard in your life?

The biblical picture

Read 2 Samuel Ch 10 vs. 1-5

2 How does David show a tender and sensitive heart in this story

- a. Towards the king of the Ammonites
- b. Towards his won men who were humiliated

3. In David's day and in our day, some people would say, 'Tender-hearted and sensitivity is a sign of weakness'. How do you respond to this statement?

4. How as Jesus an example of tender- heartedness when He lived on earth?

Being in the picture

4. Can you think of situations God has placed you in that have softened your heart to the hurts and needs of others?

7. Describe if you can a situation where someone reached out to you and participated in your pain or time of struggle. How did you feel?

8. How did you experience the love of God through that person?

9. Tell about a time God moved your heart so much that you had to actively participate in someone else's pain.

10. What happened in your heart that moved you into action?

11. When King David heard about the public humiliation of his friends he responded in a variety of ways. The Holy Spirit helped David empathise with his people.

Can you recall a time when the Holy Spirit gave you just the right words or insight to help another person through a difficult situation.

12. How did you know that the words you used the insight you had came from God, and not from yourself?

13. In what situation at present do you feel/ sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to help someone, but you find yourself resisting?

13. What is it going to take for you to soften your heart and respond to the leading of the Spirit?

14. How can your cell/ group encourage you and support you as you follow the Holy Spirit's leading in this area of your life?

Session 6 **Faithfulness**

Introduction

In any group of people there are those who have been chronically unfaithful, some will have been fairly unfaithful, and some will have been very faithful. Yet no matter where we are on the faithful scale God remains consistently faithful to us. He also takes it upon himself to transform us into faithful people, in our words and our deeds. God has commissioned His Holy Spirit to deal with faithlessness in our life, and plan in our life the tree of faithfulness. We live in an easy come easy go world, today the friendly handshake to seal a deal, has been replaced by the multiple copies of a signed deal. Today we tend to distrust everyone. Today we need to cultivate a life, which breeds faithfulness.

The big picture

1. Describe in some detail someone you know who has modelled faithfulness to you?
2. What were some of the characteristics that marked this person's life?

The Biblical picture

Read Proverbs Ch 20 vs. 6-7 Revelation Ch 2 vs. 8-11

3. Both passages call followers of Christ to be faithful. Take a moment of reflection and then write down the four things that you believe are signs of a faithful follower of Christ

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

4. Read out one of more items from your list, and explain why you feel these are critical elements for what it means to be faithful as a follower of Christ?

5. In Revelation 2vs 20 we are called to be faithful ' even to the point of death'. How do you react when you read this?

6. How can we live out this level of faithfulness even when our lives are not in physical danger?

Being in the picture

7. There is a song we sing called 'Great is they faithfulness' How has God shown his faithfulness to you in one of the following areas

- a. This week
- b. This year
- c. Over your life as a follower of Christ.

8. What hymn or worship song helps you remember God's faithfulness, and what is it about this song that helps you focus on God's faithfulness in your life?

9. How can a lack of faithfulness have a negative impact in one of the following areas.

- a. Your friendships
- b. Your family
- c. Your faith
- d. Your vocation

10. How can a deep commitment to faithfulness have a positive impact in one of these same areas?

11. In what relationship or situation do you need to commit yourself to live with a deeper level of faithfulness?

12. What practical things need to happen for you to develop faithfulness in this situation or relationship?

13. How can your cell/ group members encourage you, pray for you, and spur you on in this area of your life?