

Pressure points in people's lives

Caring for physical needs

Introduction

The challenge of caring for people with physical needs whether that be baking a cake, helping with home plumbing, doing the grocery shopping, helping clean up after the flood, or helping in the removal, is all in how the task is done. Part of the joy of receiving practical physical help is the gracious way in which it is offered and given. When it is offered in the right way, the person who receives it doesn't feel guilt, doesn't feel they have to pay the person back, they just feel loved, and feely given to.

People who want to care for others in physical need are usually those who are 'full of compassion'. This is a quality we see in Jesus. The refrain 'he was full of compassion' is something repeats itself through the gospel [see Matthew Ch 14.] The dictionary defines compassion as 'to sorrow for the sufferings or troubles of another or others, with the urge to help, deep sympathy.' Others have defined compassion as 'using words and actions to make another person feel better'. Compassion involves sensitivity to another's needs.

Compassion is different from pity, simply because it is motivated by a positive and genuine desire to comfort someone. Pity on the other hand involves an attitude of contempt or 'looking down' on a person and rarely results in action. Learning to care for others through action is what this study guide will be looking at, by establishing a principle that when we care for others we are doing what God wants us to do. If we want to learn to grow in our compassionate ability to care for others in physical needs, then these studies will help you.

Study 1

God cares for physical needs

Introduction

In our affluent society what were once considered to be luxuries are now viewed as necessities or needs. Sometimes we feel that if we do not have the income to match our expectations then we are in need. The antidote to this in our western society is to look and see what needs are from God's perspective. As we look I hope that we shall see that God cares for our physical needs.

The Big picture

How are you affected by society's definition of need?

The Biblical picture

Read Matthew Ch 6 vs. 25-34

2. What are the specific physical needs mentioned in this passage?
3. What does Jesus say about these needs? [vs. 25-32]
4. How would you define need?
5. Four times in these verses Jesus says don't worry. Why?
6. What do you think it means to seek God's kingdom and righteousness first?
7. Some of us are not only anxious about present needs but worry about the future as well. In what ways might your worry about tomorrow be relieved as a result of what you see in this passage?

Being in the picture

8. What are your basic physical needs?
9. When have you been anxious about whether or not these needs would be met?
10. Do you have the ability to satisfy these needs for yourself? Why or why not?
11. How does knowing about God's care for your physical need equip you to help others who are in need?
12. How can you help someone else not worry about tomorrow?

Study 2

Caring for the whole person

Introduction

The reality is that when we are physically ill our emotional life and spiritual life can take a tumble, and may need some extra care and attention. When our emotions are out of kilter then our body and relationship with God can be likewise out of kilter. It's at moments like this we realise that we are an integrated whole. Body, soul and spirit. When we are troubled in part we are troubled in whole. Take a man who is troubled with backache, and he becomes more and more irritable with his wife, after some angry words with her he begins to feel a little guilty, that night he is determined that he will sort things out, he gets down on his knees to pray, he finally slips his disc! We become irritable when our bodies ache.

The big picture

1. When you're feeling low, what is your relationship with God like?

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 32

2. As you look through this Psalm what are all the phrases that describe or relate to spiritual needs?
3. What about physical needs the Psalm relates to?
4. What are the emotional needs?
5. How does David describe the happy person? [vs. 1-2]
6. What do you think it means to have deceit in one's spirit? [v2]
7. What was David like before he confessed his sins? [vs. 3-4]
8. What steps towards healing and forgiveness does the Psalmist advocate and demonstrate? [vs. 5-6]
9. What were the physical and emotional as well as spiritual benefits of God's forgiveness to the Psalmist [vs. 1-2 5-10]?
10. What hope do verses 8-10 give for dealing with temptation in the future?

Being in the picture

11. What problems can you predict if a person tried to achieve this kind of whole person healing, but refused to confess and turn from their sin?
12. In the final verse of this Psalm David advocates rejoicing and singing. What effect does rejoicing and singing have on the whole person, body, emotion and spirit?
13. When have you experienced a lift in your whole being because of music that praised God?
14. As a result of this study, how do you think you can more effectively care for those in physical need?

Study 3

Praying for healing

Introduction

Many pray for people to endure suffering, but fewer pray for people to be healed. Yet the Bible is full of encouragements for us to pray for people's healing. Both the Old and New Testaments encourage us to pray for healing. At times we have prayed for people to be healed and they have been. At other times we have prayed and the person has continued to suffer. What makes the difference? Is it that God's glory is demonstrated differently in different situations? That His purpose and will is different in each case? Is that healing is only complete in heaven? I can't answer. What I do know is that it is God who heals, not man. There is no technique involved. We pray with love and simplicity. The motivation of Jesus was His compassion for people. If we love people we will always treat them with respect and dignity. If we believe that it is God who heals we will pray with simplicity, because it is not our prayer, our faith, the faith of the person we are praying for, but the power of God which brings healing. God calls us to pray for one another, and not to pray is disobedience. This study might provide some answers.

The big picture

1. In what kinds of situations are you most apt to pray?

The biblical picture

Read James Ch 5 vs 13-20

2. What different uses of prayer do you see in these verses?
3. In verses 14-16, James discusses physical and spiritual healing. What are the steps to be taken in this process?
4. Why do think it is important that the sick person initiates the healing process?
5. How does Elijah illustrate the effectiveness of prayer?
6. Notice the different types of prayers that are mentioned in verses 13-20. How might each of these be part of a healing process?
7. What seems to be the purpose of a community of believers who pray in this way?
8. This passage suggests not only individual prayer and confession but praying for each other. What is the emotional, spiritual and physical value of confessing sin and praying together?

Being in the picture

9. Would you call elders of your church for anointing, prayer and confession? Why or why not?
10. What do you think should be our attitude toward God as we pray for the sick?
11. What steps can you take to make praying for and with those in need more a part of your life?
12. Remember a time when you prayed for someone in need. What did you feel when you prayed?
13. What happened or didn't happen?
14. Which do you find it easier to pray for spiritual, emotional or physical needs? Why?

Study 4 **Why suffering?**

Introduction

This is a big question, simply because we are constantly confronted by suffering. Someone when they were thinking about this question answered it like this. I would like to go back to the Garden of Eden, and try it over again with a different script. It would be great to go back Adam and Eve a second chance. What relief it could bring to many people. By giving this couple the opportunity to play their parts just a little bit differently would have such a dramatic outcome. But we cannot go back. This is a scene, which cannot be re-running. We are a fallen humanity, living in a fallen world, terribly broken by our distorted motivations of our actions, attitudes, belief and behaviour deeply rooted in our alienation from God, what we call sin. There is no clearer demonstration of this brokenness than the physical suffering that we see pressing in all around us.

The big picture

1. What happens when you see someone physically in pain or distressed? [What do you feel? How do you react?]

The biblical picture

Read Genesis Ch 3 v s.1-21.

2. Compare what God said would happen if the man and woman 'ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' with what the serpent predicted would happen.
3. In what ways did both predictions come true?

4. What was wrong with the serpent's prediction and attitude towards God?
5. Under Satan's influence and using her own reason Eve, chose to eat the fruit that God told her not to eat. Adam willingly stood by watching it happen, then ate some fruit himself. How is this similar to the way that choices are made in our society today?
6. Adam and Eve's relationship with God was broken because of their disobedience. The first result of their guilt was that they were embarrassed because they were naked before each other and before God. What does this indicate about the way sin changed their self- concepts?
7. What changes did God make in Adam and Eve's lifestyle as a result of their sin? [Verses 14-21]
8. What do you think is the significance of God making 'garments of skin' for Adam and Eve?

Being in the picture

9. How does self- concept affect physical well being?
10. What other forms of suffering result from the fall?
11. What environmental changes resulting from the fall; continue to contribute to human suffering?
12. How can you make 'garments of skin' for those who are suffering physically?
13. How does an increased understanding of the effects of the fall help you to handle your own suffering as well as that of others?

Study 5

Demonstrating real care

Introduction

I came across a story about a young boy who was sick with leukaemia who lived in one of the Northern State of America. One night he took a turn for the worse and was rushed to hospital. A terrible ice storm hit the city. Timothy's mother, a single parent, could not get her car started. So she called her local Pastor for help. He couldn't get his car started either. So the Pastor called another man, who could get his car started, and who made his way to Timothy's home, collect his mother, and took her to the hospital. The roads by this time were sheets of ice, they slide off the road several times, had couple of minor accidents as they did, but they finally reached the hospital. In a relaxed moment after the trip, this sturdy man appreciated the mother's words of gratitude, but it was the young boy's words, which touched his heart. Timothy had asked 'Sir, are you Jesus?'

The big picture

1. When have you been in physical need and have been cared for by someone else?

The biblical picture

Read Mark Ch 2 v 1-12

2. What evidence is there that the friends really cared about this man?

3. Of what value to the man was the faith of the friends?

4. Though we assume that the four friends brought the man to Jesus because of his physical need, what need did Jesus see as more crucial?

5. Why do you think the forgiveness of sin was a priority to Jesus?

6. How did Jesus's approach to the man's needs suggest that the paralytic's body was connected to what is going on in his relationship with God?

7. The teachers of the law questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sin and accused him of blasphemy when he did it. How did Jesus demonstrate his authority to forgive sins?

Being in the picture

8. Sometimes we need to hang on to someone else's faith. When have you needed another person to believe God for you?

9. What actions and attitudes might you need if you are trying to believe God for someone else?

10. Why is it important to be 'amazed' ourselves because of Christ's authority over both sin and physical illness?

11. What risks do we take when we bring a friend to Jesus?

12. As you think about caring for friends in need by bringing them to Jesus, what difference does it make to you that Christ's perception of need, as well as his ability to meet those needs is so great?

Study 6

Helping a person find wholeness of life

Introduction

One of the ways we realise that we are maturing is when we stop just thinking about ourselves and start to think about others. It is when we realise that there are other people around us who are in pain, and we are not the only one who is suffering. It is when we stop focussing on our own pain and see the pain in others, that we realise that we have taken the first step of being used by God in meeting the needs of others

Over three thousand years ago, Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army was sick. In this setting a take-charge person learned about need from a servant girl, and he met a God who cared.

The big picture

1. When you are in physical need what kinds of response or activities from people communicate to you that someone cares?

The biblical picture

Read 2 Kings Ch 5 vs. 1-15

2. Describe Naaman and the servant girl?

3. As you consider perceiving and meeting needs, what is the significance of the vast difference in the social status of Naaman and that of the servant girl?

4. What are the ways that people reached out to Naaman throughout this passage?

5. Why was Naaman angry at Elisha? [vs. 10-13]

6. What was Naaman's response when he was cured? [vs. 15]

7. When you see God healing Naaman's life, or to the life of someone else, how does your response compare to Naaman's?

Being in the picture

8. How do you respond to the possibility of being used by God to meet the needs of people in social, professional or economic groups different from your own?

9. When have you been upset because of the way God chose to work when you or someone else was in need?

10. It was a servant who encouraged Naaman to do what the prophet had told him to do, though such action seemed to Naaman to be menial and beneath him. What right and simple things might people need encouragement to do, in order to get well?

11. In what ways can you give to God, as you desire to express your gratitude to him?

12. We have considered the benefits to Naaman of the help people gave to him. What benefits do you think came to those who helped?

13. What benefits do you receive from seeing others helped?

Study 7

Demonstrating compassionate love

Introduction

There are times when we embrace the lives of others simply because of the connections they have with those we have a deep and loyal love for. Because of the love and loyalty we have to a friend or their family, those other family members will have a special place in our care.

The story in the Old Testament of David and Jonathan is a good example of this. It is because of David's deep brotherly love for Jonathan that he gave special care to his son Mephibosheth.

The big picture

1. When have you cared for someone that you did not know very well? Why?

The biblical picture

Read

1 Samuel Ch 18 vs. 1-4, Ch 19 vs. 1-7 and Ch 20 vs.1-4

2. How would you describe the love and loyalty of David and Jonathan one to another?

Read 2 Samuel Ch 9 vs. 1-3

3. In verses 1-6 what did David have to do to find Mephibosheth?
4. How did David show kindness towards him? [verses 7-10]
5. How would you define kindness?
6. How was Mephibosheth affected by David's kindness?
7. What risks did David take when he showed kindness to Mephibosheth?

Being in the picture

8. Describe a time when someone was kind to you?
9. Think of someone you know who is in physical need. What might you need to do to show kindness to that person?
10. Why should your love for and loyalty to God motivate you to show kindness to that person?
11. What results would you like to see in a person to whom you show kindness?
12. What kinds of risks do you take when you care for people that you do not know well?

Study 8

Showing care when you least feel like it

Introduction

In Matthew Ch 14 Jesus performs a miracle at a time when he was in great personal need. The feeding of a large crowd comes after the word that Jesus's cousin John has been killed. He needed a bit of space for himself not only to adjust to John's death but also to reflect that his own end lay in a violent death. But this time of quiet reflection proved impossible because of his compassionate care for the crowd, which followed him. At a time when Jesus would have much rather been alone with his own grief, he continued to care for the crowd.

The big picture

1. Under what kinds of circumstances is it difficult for you to meet the physical needs of others?
2. When is it easier?

The biblical picture

Read Matthew Ch 14 vs. 13-21.

3. Jesus had just received word that John had been killed [Ch 14 vs. 1-12] How did he respond?
4. Compare Christ's response to the crowd with that of the disciples [vs. 14-19]
5. When do you respond to needy crowds more like Jesus, and when do you respond more like his disciples? Explain.

Being in the picture

6. What does it mean to you to have compassion on someone?
7. When have you experienced someone's compassion towards you?
8. What was it like?
9. Identify a person that you know who has a need. What 'loaves and fishes' [resources] do you have that could meet those needs?
10. When Jesus multiplied the disciples' loaves and fishes, not only was the crowd satisfied, but also the disciples ended up with more than when they began. How have you experienced God's blessing in your own life as a result of helping someone else?
11. When you helped someone in need, what were the effects of your help on that person?
12. How can helping to meet someone's physical needs help you to know Christ better?
13. How have you experienced this? Explain.