

Living the life God always intended you to have

Introduction

When John Owen the great Puritan writer set out to write on the Holy Spirit he wrote that this task was 'to great and difficult for me to undertake, and beyond my ability to manage to the glory of God, and for the good of men, for who is sufficient for these things.' So what hope for me, writing a short study on the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

H.G. Wells in his book 'The History of Mr Polly' describes one of the characters as 'not so much a human being as a civil war.' Which is what starts to happen when we begin to live the life God always intended us to live. The Apostle Paul tells us to live 'not from selfish ambition or vain conceit but rather in humility, to consider others better than yourselves' Philippians 2:3. This happens when Christ invades our life by the Holy Spirit, and we start to live with the supernatural power which God provides for us. As God by His Spirit begins to work in our life we begin to change towards other people. We begin to learn how to treat other people with love and dignity. We begin to cultivate what the Bible describes as the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

In the following studies we are going to learn how to live like this. We are going to look at keys which will unlock our life to the reality of how God wants his followers to live in his world today, so that all our relationships can be transformed. The good news is that we are willing to enter the warfare of building our character around God's way, then we will succeed in developing the kind of character and life that God always intended us to have.

Study 1

Having love for others

Introduction

There is a big crisis in Christendom with regards to character. There are many who attend Church, call themselves Christian, but who don't have the kind of character that puts them squarely in the camp of Christ followers. The truth is that when those who live without God come into contact with people whose lives are radiant with divine beauty, the truth of the good news about Jesus is not only credible but also attractive.

The Big picture

1. How would you have defined love at the following stages of your life?
 - a. When you were a child
 - b. when you were a teenager
 - c. when you were a young adult.
2. How has your understanding of love changed over the years?

The Biblical picture

Read Philippians Ch 2:1-11.

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 of a time you had a chance to treat someone else as better than yourself but failed to do so?
7. If you can recall a time you received God's enabling to be able to love another person by treating them as better than yourself?
8. How have you experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in your life since becoming a follower of Jesus?

9. Describe a time when you did not fully co-operate with the Holy Spirit's prompting. What were the consequences for you?

Being in the picture

10. Chose one area listed below, and list in a practical way how you can show love by putting the needs of others ahead of your own needs

Your home

Your workplace

Your neighbourhood

Your cell group

Your church

Your community/ town.

11. What can your cell group members do to support you and keep you accountable as you seek to express love in this area?

12. Describe if you can a recurring situation in your life where putting others first is difficult?

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

Study 2

Having joy for others

Introduction.

There are very few people who would not appreciate a joy filled life. Yet so many people search for it but can't find such joy. They live a joyless existence. People will often gravitate to a group where they see real joy in evidence. The truth is that most of us prefer to be around people who are joy bringers, rather than people who are always down. The same is true of church life. We all have a natural hunger for those things which lift us up and bring us joy.

The big picture

1. What brings you joy and happiness?
2. What takes away your joy and happiness?

The biblical picture

Read John 15:9-11.

3. Jesus talks about our joy being complete in him. If you can recall how was your joy incomplete outside of Jesus?
4. Jesus said ' I have told you this so my joy may be in you.' What for you is unique for you about the joy Jesus brings us?
5. What has God done to bring you a sense of joy over the past year?
6. Consider the following statement.
 - a. joy and happiness are found when we have significant love and relationships in our lives.
 - b. joy comes when we have meaning in life and a purpose for living
 - c. joy comes when we live with hope, and we have something to look forward to.

How do these statements capture something of the meaning of joy?

7. How do the above definitions fall short of the meaning of joy?

Being in the picture

8. How has your relationship with God brought you significant joy over the years?
9. How has your relationship with Christ given you meaning in life?
10. How does your walk with Christ provide hope both now and for your eternity?
11. How does this hope increase your joy?

Study 3

Having peace towards others

Introduction.

For many people the idea of peace is all about the end of hostilities. It is an absence of conflict or hostility, but that is only part of what peace is. While it is true that peace is the absence of conflict peace is also about healing relationships, restoring intimate friendship, it's about a new beginning, and new relationships. From God's perspective he is not happy until each of us experiences both aspects of peace. Peace is not just the end of war like behaviour, it is also reconciled loving healing relationships. God is in the business of building both aspects of peace into our life.

The big picture

1. What does peace look like when it is fleshed out? Chose one area from 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. 14vs. 25-27 and Romans5:1-2

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

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

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

5. In Romans 5:1-2 we are told we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. How did you view God before you appreciated Jesus Christ?

6. What changes did a relationship with Jesus bring?

7. What does a person's life look like when they have only an absence of conflict, fighting with God?
8. How does a person's life change when they find a deeper peace with God?
9. If someone was to ask you how can I find a deeper peace with God? How would you reply?
10. Describe with others if you can, when you first experienced a deeper peace with God?

Being in the picture

This deeper peace with God is not just about relationships with God or others it is also about peace within inside ourselves. It is about finding a well-being inside ourselves. It is not about looking down on ourselves, but appreciating how God has wired us up. It is about reaching a place of reassurance , acceptance as to who we are. God's peace and presence can help us become thankful for who we are and where God has placed us in this life.

11. What are some of the 'if only areas' in your life, which you find it difficult to accept?
12. Take time to appreciate about how God has made each of you. Communicate something of value to each other
13. With whom are you currently not at peace with?
14. What is it going to take to have peace with that person?
15. Where do you need help in your peace- making efforts?

Study 4

Patience towards others

Introduction

Most of the challenges in life require the development of patience. If we want to develop as God may well be asking us to do, then we will need the supernatural patience which God provides for us. What we cannot do for ourselves God will help us with, so that we are able to reach our goal of growing patient in our heart and life. It will not be easy for many of us, as we tend to be impatient people at times.

The big picture

1. What is one of your pet peeves which always pushes your impatience button?

The biblical picture

Read Psalm 103:8-12

2. What do you learn about the character of God in this Psalm?

3. How do you feel when you read these words?

4. How do you see the patience of God in this passage?

5. When was a time when you have experienced this kind of divine patience in your life?

6. Answer the following questions.

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 hurt someone else because of your impatience

d. How could you have behaved differently and spared someone else from needless hurt?

7. How do you think God showed you his patience before you were a follower of Christ?

8. How could this impact the way you respond to those around you who annoy you with their decidedly anti-christian lifestyles?

Being in the picture

9. In what area 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 your patience with others?
11. What is one situation in your life in which you are struggling with impatience?
12. How can the members of your cell/ group support you as you seek to yield to the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit by being patient in this situation?

Study 5

Showing sensitivity towards others

Introduction

In the middle of a hard hearted world the Bible calls us to live with sensitivity. The trouble is that we are all tempted to have a 'do unto others before they do it unto us' philosophy of life. So when we begin to think about the qualities of gentleness, goodness and kindness, we realise that God is determined to work on our insensitive, hardened, toughened callous lives, and to transform us into sensitive, courteous, gentle people. For some of us this will require a longer period of re-construction than others, but we had better get used to it, for these qualities are in God's construction box for his people.

The big picture

1. We are often told ' that life is tough, and it's only going to get tougher, so you had better toughen up if you are going to survive' What are some similar messages that you heard as you were growing up?

The biblical picture

Read 2 Samuel 10:1-5

2. How does David show a tender and sensitive heart in this story
 - a. towards the king of the Ammonites?
 - b. towards his own men who were humiliated?

3. In David's day and ours some would say ' that tender-heartedness and sensitivity is a sign of weaknesses' How do you respond to this statement?

4. How would you say that Jesus was an example of tender-heartedness when he lived on this earth?

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

6. If you can describe a time someone reached out to you and participated in your pain and struggle. How did you feel?

7. How did you experience the love of God through this person?

8. If you can recall a time when God moved your heart so much that you had to actively participate in someone else's pain?

9. What happened in you that moved you into action?

Being in the picture

10. If you can recall a time the Holy Spirit gave you just the right words or insights to help another person through a challenging situation

11. How did you know these words and insights came from God, and not from yourself?

12. In what situations do you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to help someone, but you have found yourself resisting?

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

14. How can your cell/ group members encourage and support you in following the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Study 6

Showing faithfulness to others

Introduction

For some of us we have been chronically unfaithful, for some of us fairly unfaithful, for others they have been very faithful. Yet no matter where we are on the faithfulness scale God has commissioned His Holy Spirit to root our unfaithfulness from our lives and replace it with faithfulness. Today we live in an easy come easy go age. We dispose of razors, rules, relationships, responsibilities, we tend to distrust everyone. Whatever happened to a handshake sealing a deal. One of the vital things we need to regain again in or society is the characteristic of integrity, trust, faithfulness.

The big picture

1. describe in detail one of the following people who have modelled faithfulness to you;

- a. a family member
- b. a teacher
- c. a church leader
- d. a friend

What were some of the characteristics that marked this person's life?

The biblical picture

Read Proverbs 20:6-7 and Revelation 2:8-11

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

- a
- b
- c
- d

Read one or more items to your cell, and explain why you feel these are essential elements of what it means to be a follower of Christ today.

3. In Revelation 2:10, we are called to be faithful even to the point of death, how do you react when you read these words?
4. How can we live out this level of faithfulness even when our lives are not in physical danger?
5. If you were to sing the hymn 'Great is thy faithfulness' what would you be thinking about? How has God shown his faithfulness to you at the following times
 - a. before you knew who Jesus was
 - b. this week
 - c. this year
 - d. over your life as a follower of Christ
6. 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?

Being in the picture

7. How can a lack of faithfulness have a negative impact on the following areas:
 - a. your friendships
 - b. your family
 - c. your faith
 - d. your vocation.
8. How can a deep commitment to faithfulness have a positive impact in one of these same areas?
9. In what relationship or situation do you need to commit yourself to live with a deeper level of faithfulness?
10. What practical things need to happen for you to develop faithfulness in this situation or relationship?
11. How can you cell members encourage you, pray for you, and spur you on in this area of your life?