

Helping people through pressure points in life

Spiritual Needs

Introduction

Whether we recognise it or not everyone has spiritual needs. The helper and the one being helped, the Christian and the non-Christian. Seldom is there an obvious set of symptoms of spiritual need. The truth is that if we want to help people meet spiritual needs we must develop a sensitive ear and a willingness to respond to the tiny clues which people offer.

We are all integrated beings created to live in harmony with God, ourselves and other people. The truth is that to maintain harmonious relationships, we must first establish right relationships. The position of this study takes the view that if a person wishes to have a harmonious with themselves and rich meaningful relationships with others, then they also need to look at having a right relationship with God. God is the key to physical, emotional, social and spiritual integration.

However today we live in a culture in which the material, what we see, touch, feel smell, is all-important, so we often ignore the spiritual. We need when we are seeking to help a person through the pressure points of life to connect with the spiritual as well as the emotional. The need to be loved is an emotional as well as a spiritual need. We are integrated. We need to be loved by God, whether we recognise this or not, as much as we need to be loved by each other. The physical is involved as well, the body can deteriorate if we are not loved. It may well be challenging to do, but it is possible to gather information from a person, and determine ways to help someone in spiritual need.

This guide will help you be a person helper to others who are in spiritual need. It is only an introduction, and if you feel that you would like to take things further, then have a chat with someone in leadership.

It is also hoped that as we seek to help people through spiritual pressure points in their life, that our own walk with God will be strengthened.

Study 1

What are spiritual needs?

Introduction

Rick Warren in his best selling book Purpose Driven life writes about the Russian Novelist Andrei Bitov, who grew up under an atheistic regime. Bitov recalls, 'On my twenty-seventh year, while riding the metro in Leningrad [now St Petersburg] I was overcome with a despair so great that life seemed to stop at once, pre-empting the future entirely, let alone meaning. Suddenly, all by itself, a phrase appeared: Without God life does not make sense. Repeating it in astonishment, I rode the phrase up like a moving staircase, got out of the metro and walked into God's light.'

The Big picture

1. When are you most likely to be aware of your spiritual needs?

The Biblical picture

Read Psalm 38

2. What clues to David's spiritual needs do you find in this Psalm?
3. What physical symptoms did David exhibit?
4. What emotional responses accompanied his illness?
5. How did the Psalmist perceive his friends and family [v 11-22]?
6. How did the Psalmist perceive his enemies?
7. How did the psalmist respond to his own needs [v 15-18, 21-22]?

Being in the picture

8. Describe a time when your sin or distance from God has created a comparable situation to the Psalmist for you?
9. What helped you at that time?
10. If you had been a friend of David's, what might you have done to meet his physical, emotional and spiritual needs [be specific]?
11. What is involved in 'waiting' for the Lord for yourself or for another in deep pain?
12. What role does confession play in your relationship with God and for your well-being?
13. What are your spiritual needs right now?
14. How could they be met?

Study 2

Recognising spiritual needs

Introduction

The 18th Century Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle put it 'the man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder.' 19th century American writer Henry David Thoreau put it that people live their lives in 'quiet desperation.' People also live their lives in aimless distraction. Such people have been described as being like gyroscopes. Spinning around at a frantic pace but never going anywhere.

Jean was a difficult client, and to be frank many carers did not enjoy the home visit simply because of her unreasonable demands. One day after making her comfortable, she said to one carer 'don't go, please don't leave me'. To which the carer responded 'Jean I have to leave you, but if you like when I'm off duty, and if you want to, I will call and tell you about someone who will never leave you.'

The Big Picture

1. Think about a time that you recognised a spiritual need in someone. How did you know it was a spiritual need?

The Biblical picture

Read Matthew Ch 9. vs. 1-8

2. What do you think the paralytic and his friends were expecting from Jesus?
3. Why do you think Jesus offered the paralytic forgiveness?
4. What role did the man's friends play in this process?
5. What do you think accounts for the difference in the response of the teachers of the Law and the response of the crowd to Jesus?

Read Matthew Ch 9 v 1-13

6. How was Christ's call of Matthew similar to his healing of the paralytic?
7. Compare the Pharisee's response here in Matthew Ch 9v 1-13 with that of the teachers of the Law in Matthew Ch 9 v 1-8. What do you feel was the basic concern of both?
8. How did Christ's response to the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees demonstrate his recognition of their spiritual needs?
9. Who are the people mentioned in verse 12?
10. How did Jesus show mercy?

Being in the picture

11. How does your faith in Jesus affect what you do for those who are in spiritual need?
12. What have you learned from this passage that will help you recognise and respond to the spiritual needs of others?

Study 3

The need for a relationship with God

Introduction

Sometimes to help people with their spiritual needs we need to ask the questions behind the presenting question people put to us. Or even the question behind the non- question. For people preoccupied with life and living, and the pressures of the moment, few will have energy or time to ask the traditional deep questions, or as the writer C.S. Lewis called them the 1st order questions of life. Why am I here?, What's my purpose? We sometimes have to pick up the clues that people drop, and ask 'What is it that you are afraid of?' Sometimes a person's natural apprehension about an issue can trigger an awareness of a more central need.

The Big picture

1. Under what kinds of circumstances do you feel best about your relationship with God?

The Biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 5 vs. 1-11

2. According to this passage what do you see as the benefits of a relationship with God?
3. What does it mean for you that we have 'gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand'? [Verse 2]?
4. How does this work of God's grace continue in your life today?
5. In verses 2-5 what is the connection between rejoicing' in the hope of the glory of God, and rejoicing' in our sufferings'?
6. What difference does it make for you to understand that in a relationship with God that he loved us even before we turned to him [v.8]?
7. How does what you see that God made possible for us through Christ's death and Christ's life affect you today [v 9-10]?

Being in the picture

8. In what ways do you see faith, hope and love as ingredients in your relationship with God [vs. 1-8]?
9. What is it like for you to be at 'peace' with someone after hostility and conflict?
10. In summary what do you have to offer from this passage to someone who has the spiritual need of a right relationship with God?

Study 4

The need for meaning and purpose

Introduction

Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* makes the point that most people struggle with three basic issues in life. The first is identity, 'Who am I? The second is importance 'Do I matter? The third is impact' 'What is my place in life?' The 20th century Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl puts it 'Our search meaning and purpose is a primary force in life. The power of this force is felt in the person who is void of meaning and purpose. The symptoms run the gamut from 'eat, drink and be merry' to the deep desire to end it all now.'

The big picture

1. When, if ever, has life seemed meaningless to you?

The Biblical picture

Read 1 Peter 1 vs. 1-16 and verses 22-25.

2. How does Peter address the recipients of his letter [vs. 1-2]?
3. How does this greeting address the subject of their meaning and purpose in life?
4. Consider a time when you have known someone who has lost a sense of purpose in his, or her life. What did you observe about this person?
5. Look at verses 3-9 more carefully. What do these verses say about
 - a. meaning and purpose of new life [salvation]?
 - b. suffering?
 - c. faith?
6. How do verses 10-12 emphasize the importance of our meaning and purpose in life?
7. According to verses 13-16 what is involved in holy living?
8. How can an awareness of our meaning and purpose in life affect our ability and desire to live a holy life?

Read 1 Peter 1 vs. 22-25.

9. In verse 22 Peter states that the readers have purified themselves by obeying the truth. One of the results of this obedience is sincere love for their brethren. Why then does he exhort them to 'love one another deeply from the heart'?
10. How is the endurance of our meaning and purpose in life further communicated in verses 23-25?

Being in the picture

11. How have these passages thus far spoke to your personal need for meaning in life?
12. Think about how you spend your waking hours, how is the real purpose of your life demonstrated in your behaviour?
13. What areas do you need to work on?
14. When caring for others who lack meaning and purpose in life, what do you/we have to offer them from this passage?

Study 5

The need to be loved and to belong

Introduction.

In order for infants to thrive they need 3C's -to be carried, caressed and cuddled, without this kind of touch they will die. For a child being loved is not a luxury it is a necessity.

This need does not cease to exist when a child become an adult, in fact this need may intensify, depending on how adequately this need has been met throughout life. The loss or absence of human relationships as a primary source of love can contribute to issues later in life. How we are loved, directly affects how we love others, receive God's love, and how we respond to God. However God does not expect us to fuel our emotions and manufacture love for him. Instead, he treats us the same way a responsible human father treats his own baby. God loves first.

The big picture

1. Think about someone who loves you. How is this love communicated to you?
2. How does this make you feel?

The biblical picture

Read 1 John 4: 7-21

3. Find as many phrases as you can in this text that would complete this sentence. ' We love because.....'
4. What are the qualities of God's love?
5. How is God's love demonstrated?
6. How are you affected when you experience God's love?
7. When do you have difficulty accepting God's love?
8. When do you have difficulty accepting the love of others?

Being in the picture

9. How does living in God's love affect our view of the future[vs.16-18]?

Why?

10. How do you respond to the thought in verse 18; 'there is no fear in love'?

11. When have you seen a person's relationship with God begin in fear, but grow to trust and eventually to love?

12. Why might a person's relationship with God begin partly with fear?

13. What information do you find in verses 19-21 that shows how important it is for God that we love one another?

14. When you love you become vulnerable. What enables you to risk having your love rejected?

15. How is your sense of belonging affected when someone loves you?

16. Bring to mind someone who needs to experience God's love. How might you express God's love to that person? [Be specific]

Study 6

The need for assurance

Introduction

There is a story about a youngster who was spending the summer at his Grandmother's farm while there he was shooting tin cans with a catapult, he kept missing. As he was returning to his Grandma's kitchen he spied her pet duck. On impulse he took aim, the stone hit the duck and killed it. The boy panicked and hid the duck in a woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. After lunch the Grandmother asked the boy's sister to help with the dishes. Sally responded, 'Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen, didn't you Johnny?' and she whispered 'Remember the duck'. So Johnny did the dishes. For the next several weeks Johnny was at the sink often. Weary of the chore he decided that punishment was better than more dishes. He confessed to his Grandmother about killing the duck. She replied. 'I know Johnny; I was standing at the kitchen window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you.' He'd been pardoned, but he thought he was guilty. Why? Because he had listened to the words of his accuser
Romans Chapter 8 is written for the Johnny's in this life

The big picture

When have you like Johnny felt the need for assurance in your life?

The biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 8 vs. 18-30

2. How do you respond to what is stated in verse 18?
3. We do not always feel assured as followers of Christ. How do verses 19-25 help explain this?
4. In our culture of instant gratification and comfort, waiting for anything is not very acceptable. What do you think is involved in waiting patiently for our redemption?
5. How can an eager expectation of what is to come help us cope with our present problems and sufferings?
6. What other help is offered to us during our painful wait [vs. 26-30]?
7. What is God's purpose for us [vs.29-30]?

Being in the picture

8. Read Romans 8:31-39. What is your emotional response to this message? Explain.
9. How do you think you would view your relationship with God in times of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or the sword?
10. Based on the truths in this passage what should our response be to difficulties?
11. When have you been comforted and strengthened in a time of trouble because you knew God loved you and was in control?
12. What are ways that you can care for someone who needs assurance concerning his or her relationship with God?

Study 7

The need to persevere

Introduction

The former heavyweight-boxing champion Jack Dempsey put it, 'A champion is one who gets up when he can't'. In order for athletes to get their best performance, they have to persevere through gruelling training. Without this there is no improvement. Perseverance is a determined, resolute hope, it is an active decisive attitude of mind.

Perseverance is not easy, today we live in quick fix culture, outside of sports, perseverance is almost unknown.

The big picture

1. When do you most feel like giving up in your Christian life?

The Biblical picture

Read James Ch 1 vs. 12-18.

2. As you look through this passage what connections do you see between perseverance and spiritual growth?
3. Why does it seem strange that we should 'consider it pure joy' whenever we 'face trials of many kinds'?
4. How do you think perseverance and maturity are developed in us when we endure trials [vs. 3-4]?
5. What different experiences have increased your ability to persevere?
6. How might trials expose our need for God's wisdom [verse 5]?
7. When have you been able to persevere because God provided the wisdom you needed?
8. Under pressure. How does Christian perseverance contrast with the person on verses 6-8?
9. In the context of trials and perseverance, why does James contrast rich and poor Christians [vs. 9-11]?
10. How are temptations different from trials [vs. 2-16]?

Being in the picture

11. Reliance on God tends to increase perseverance. In what ways do you tend to rely on your possessions instead of God?
12. What role does God play when we face trials and when we face temptations?
13. How is God the ultimate example of goodness and perseverance?
14. How can you encourage someone who is suffering to grow spiritually through perseverance?

Study 8

Caring for those who doubt

Introduction

It's easy not to talk about doubt, and so it is easy to suppress it. However doubt is not scepticism, the decision to doubt everything deliberately. Neither is doubt unbelief, the decision not to have faith in God. Unbelief is an act of the will, rather than a difficulty in understanding. Doubt often means asking questions or voicing uncertainties from the standpoint of faith. A medical doctor once put it that life was a permanent battle against all sorts of diseases, with good health being little more than an ability to keep diseases at bay. For some people the life of faith often seems like that, a permanent battle against doubt. Maybe therefore we should think of doubt as a symptom of our human frailty, or our reluctance to trust God. We need to think about how we embrace the doubter, take them seriously, and care deeply for them. So that in this environment the doubter is freed to change and to grow.

The Big picture

1. How do you usually feel about yourself when you experience doubts about God?

The Biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 7 v 18-30 and Matthew Ch 11 vs. 11-14.

2. We are told that John sent his questions to Jesus from prison, and that he was soon beheaded as the popularity of Jesus spread. How might John have felt as he sat on his jail cell?
3. What types of circumstances usually cause you to doubt who Jesus is or your relationship with him?
4. How did John the Baptist deal with his doubts about Jesus [vs. 18-19]?
5. How did Jesus respond to John's doubts [vs. 22-23]?
6. Describe Christ's esteem for John in spite of John's doubts about Jesus [vs.24-29]?
7. How were all the people affected by the ministry of John the Baptist [vs.29]?
8. How were the Pharisees affected? [V 30]

Being in the picture

9. How do you usually deal with doubts?
10. John experienced doubts. The Pharisees rebelled. What would you say is the difference between doubt and rebellion?
11. What could you do, or not do, that might encourage your doubts or those of others to lead to rebellion?
12. How could you deal with doubt in a way that allows it to deepen your faith, or the faith of others?

Study 9

Caring for those in spiritual warfare

Introduction

In a warfare of bullets careful aim, and heavy armoury and air cover wins battles. In a war of words, eloquent speech and sharp pens overcome the opposition. However if the fight is outside of the realm of sight and sound and touch, we need to reflect on how the battle is won for those who find themselves on the front line. The 16th century Church leader John Calvin put it ' we must wage irreconcilable war with him who conspires man's ruin.' It was the 20th century Church leader James Stewart who wrote ' we have lost the Apostle Paul fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, and Luther flinging his ink-pot at the devil'. The truth is that the drama of the cross of Christ is not complete if we avoid the invisible confrontation with cosmic powers.

The Big picture

1. How do you respond to the idea that there are spiritual forces in the universe working against God's will?

The Biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 6 v 10-20

2. Why according to Paul does a believer need the whole armour of God?
3. From Paul's' description what can we know about the enemy?
4. Four times in verses 11-14 Paul urges his readers to stand firm in the battle against the devil's stratagems. What kinds of spiritual instability are we Christians susceptible to?
5. Think about each piece of armour Paul calls for. What physical function does each perform?
6. How does it's spiritual counterpart perform a similar function?
7. How can God's armour equip you to face the opposition described in verses 11,12?
8. Which piece do you need most to fight your personal spiritual battles? Explain.
9. In verses 10-12. Paul identifies our ally and enemies in warfare. In verses 13-17 he considers our preparation and tactics. In verses 18-20 how is the battle fought? Explain your answer.

Being in the picture

10. What kind of spiritual opposition do you face?

11. What main obstacles do you face in effectively fighting your spiritual battles with prayer?

12. How might you overcome them?

13. In our materialistic society, how can you become more sensitive to spiritual opposition and warfare?

14. Paul concludes by asking the Ephesians to pray for him. Prayer is spiritual warfare. It is also caring for each other in spiritual battles. If you do not have people who are committed to pray for you regularly, whom could you ask?

Who could you pray for regularly?

Who could be your prayer partner?

What group might you pray with?