

How to have a life of significance

Introduction

There is a truth that begins to dawn on us, as we get older, and that truth is that our bodies since birth have been in a slow process of deterioration. Yet there is another truth that we often don't fully appreciate that our behaviour patterns can also deteriorate over time. So that instead of improving, our problems and those habits that we find less than helpful, become increasingly more serious. We often find ourselves on a gradual slide, and there seems no way to avoid this. When we begin to think like this we can also find ourselves wearing out, giving up and giving in. However God offers us the promise of the hope of significance, through the promise of change. The Apostle Paul wrote 'It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then and do not let yourselves be burdened yet again by a yoke of slavery' [Galatians Ch 5 v1].

In this study we shall have a look at what God promises can be achieved, and how each of us can have a life of significance, and what we never thought possible with God's help falls within our reach.

Study 1 God's love

Introduction

Long ago I discovered a truth that always impresses me, which is the more I grow in my Christian faith, the greater my wonder that God could love someone like me. I am painfully aware of what goes on in the dark recesses of my life, but I am also aware of the fact that the Bible points out to me that God knows me and loves me. The Bible makes it clear that God knows everything about me, and yet chooses to still love me. What is true for me is also true for you.

The Big picture

1. If you can, tell of a time when you experienced God's love in a deep and personal way.

The Biblical picture

Read Isaiah 43 v4, John 15 v9, Ephesians 3 v14-19

2. After reading the above finish the statement

When God thinks about me, He feels.....

3. What does it mean to be 'rooted and established in love' in the following areas

Knowing God's love for you

Expressing your love to God

Living out God's love in your relationships

4. What do you learn about God's love from each of the following images?

a. A hen [Matt. 23 v37]

b. a good shepherd [John 10 v11-14]

c. a compassionate father [Psalm 103 v13]

d. a nursing mother [Isa. 49 v15]

5. Why do you think that God uses such creativity in expressing His love for you?

6. There is some truth in the statements 'talk is cheap' and 'actions speak louder than words'

If you can describe the kind of love it would take for you to give your life for another person.

7. How would you feel if you offered an incredible act of sacrifice for someone and they still questioned your love?

Being in the picture

8. How can you express your thankfulness for how God has proved His love for you?

9. How to you is God's ongoing provision a constant reminder of His love?

10. What are some of the ways God provides for the needs of his people?

11. How have you experienced the provision of God's resources in your life?

Study 2 God's Presence

Introduction

The truth is that God's love is so great that he can't stand to love us from a distance. In His love he has arranged to be with us all the time. God doesn't compartmentalise His love for us. He goes with us everywhere we go, it's a twenty-four hour a day, 365 days a year relationship. God's companionship through the Holy Spirit offers us companionship, conviction and courage. We grow more and responsive to His presence as we grow in faith.

The Big picture

1. If you can, describe a time when you saw someone go through a radical transformation from one situation to another.

The Biblical picture

Read Matthew Ch 27 v35-54

2. What are the different ways Jesus suffered as he was being crucified?

3. The curtain in the Temple being torn in two was a sign that the way to God was open. How is Jesus' death on the cross the doorway to eternal life?

4. If you can offer an illustration of how you have experienced the companionship of God through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the following areas

In your home life

In your professional life

In church worship

In a friendship

In a time of struggle or suffering.

5. Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit came it would be like having Jesus walk with us every moment of our day. If you knew Jesus was going to appear physically and would walk with you through the coming week, what would change in your week?

6. Although not physically, Jesus will be with you this week through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Why doesn't this reality have the same impact?

7. How would you respond to someone making the following comments.

a. 'I never feel conviction or guilt. God has forgiven me for all my sins, so I'm not going to live with some guilt trip. In Christ's grace I never have to feel bad again. Praise the Lord'

b. 'I'm just rotten. I feel conviction every moment. I know Jesus died for my sins, but I still feel dirty all the time. I guess you could say I am paralysed by guilt'

Being in the picture

8. Describe if you can a time when you were going about your life, minding your own business, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit cut through and opened your eyes to an area of your life that needed to change. How did you respond?

9. How have you experienced God giving you courage in a difficult situation?

10. If there are any, what situations are you currently facing in which you need to be filled with the courage that comes through the presence of God?

11. In what ways can your group members pray for you and support you as you face this area of need?

Study 3 God's power

Introduction

There is an old song with the line, which goes 'takes these chains from my heart and set me free'. The truth is that in life so many of us live with chains that bind us, and we just can't break free. A line from a Queen song goes 'I want to break free'. We just don't seem to have the power to break free. But God has an endless surplus of power that He wants to make available to us. He does both take away all of our struggles, but he does offer us power so we can resist and begin working with Him at bringing change and significance into our lives, and breaking the chains that bind us. God enters into a partnership with us as we learn to walk in freedom.

The Big picture

1. Consider the following

- I would like to lose five or more pounds in weight
- I would like to get a better grip on managing my time better
- I would like to worry less
- I would like to be more disciplined in my spending habits
- I would like to find more time to read the Bible and pray
- I would like to develop a healthier thought life
- I would like to have better control over my moods
- I would like to stop or reduce my drinking

Which area of change jumps off the page and strikes you?
If nothing does, then what would if it was there?

The Biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 1 v15-23

2. The Apostle Paul asks God to grant specific things to those who are followers of Christ. What does he ask God to give us?
3. Why are these things needed in the life of a person who follows Christ?
4. One of the things Paul asks God to give is power. To what is this power compared?

5. How do you respond to the idea of this kind of power residing inside of you?

6. Psalm 19 v1 says 'The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands'. How do you experience God's power through the created world?

7. Can you identify one place in creation where you personally sense God's presence and power?

8. Why is this place so meaningful to you?

9. Can you identify one Bible story about a miracle that reminds you of the great power of God?

10. If you can tell of a way that you have seen God work in a miraculous way in your life, or in the life of someone you know?

Being in the picture

11. If you can describe a time in your life when you felt powerless, but the power of God filled you and carried you through?

12. How would you respond to a person who is feeling powerless to overcome an area of sin in their life?

13. If you can, identify one area in your life in which you need to feel and experience a breakthrough of God's power?

14. How can the members of your group pray and support you in this area?

Study 4 God's Plan

Introduction

There are two major errors to avoid. One is that change in our life is just down to God. The idea 'let go and let God' leaves you and me with no responsibility. The other idea is that change is all down to me. Such people think God says to them 'I saved you now clean up your act, and get moving'. Both approaches are wrong. The balanced and Biblical position is that change is a co-operative venture. Both God and ourselves play an essential part in the process. God provides us with his Holy Spirit, who gives us the desire and the power to change. He gives us Christian brothers and sisters who can help in the change process. We bring ourselves, our human wills, our perseverance, our effort. It's not an equal partnership, but it is a co-operative venture.

The Big picture

1. How have you experienced God's transforming power in the following areas?

Learning to love a child

Growing to love a spouse

Being faithful to do your work in a Christ-honouring way

Caring for the physical body God has given you

Deepening your commitment to grow through Bible study and prayer.

2. How have you had to work and use your own abilities to grow in any of the above areas?

The Biblical picture

Read Haggai Ch 1 v2 - Ch 2 v9

3. God called his people to rebuild the temple so they could re-establish worship. Consider how much of the project was

a. God's part?

b. The people's part?

4. How do you see God and His people working in co-operation to accomplish the goal of building the temple?

5. How does this example carry over to how we co-operate with God in bringing about change in our lives?

Being in the picture

6. In the co-operation with God we need to build a 'motivational package'. This is a list of the factors that might motivate a change in a specific area of our life

Take a few minutes to think through the following statements to help you develop and motivational package for one area of your life.

a. If I experience change in this area, the positive results will be

b. If I don't see change, some of the negative results will be

c. How can developing a motivational package help in the process of seeking personal change in your life?

7. We all need a 'workable plan', to help us through a process of change. So why is a workable plan needed in addition to a motivational package?

8. What are some of the items that could be part of a workable plan for you to seek change for the area you have already identified?

9. The key to making a motivational package and a workable plan work is a closer walk with Christ. What can you do to deepen your spiritual life and walk more closely with Christ?

10. The three elements in this process of change are

- a. motivational package
- b. workable plan
- c. commitment to reading Scripture and prayer

Study 5 God's purpose

Introduction

Change is possible for human beings, simply because we are dynamic and static. Therefore each of us has the same offer from God to respond to His help. The way this happens is on the whole through a process. As we look at areas of our life, and seek to live as God calls us to live, then we begin the process of being changed more and more into the image of Jesus. This process often is a gradual one, and takes place in the everyday trenches of life.

Some believe that God's purpose is to give them everything they want, health, wealth and happiness

Some believe that God's purpose is to bring hardship into their life, the harder it is, the more terrifying it is, then the closer you are to fulfilling God's purposes.

Some believe that God's purpose is to take all the joy, fun and thrill out of life, God is a cosmic killjoy, better get used to this if you are going to follow him.

God's ultimate purpose is nothing like this.

The Big picture

1. The Introduction offered some views of belief on God's purposes. What is wrong with the above views of God's purposes for His children?
2. If a seeker after Jesus Christ asked you, 'If I become a follower of Christ, what would God have planned for me?' what would you say?

The Biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 8 v28-39, Ephesians Ch 2 v4-10

3. In Romans 8 v29 we read we are to be 'conformed to the likeness of his Son'. What does a person who is conformed to the likeness of his Son look like?
4. Take what you learn from the two Biblical passages and write a purpose statement; God's purpose for me is.....
5. What do you learn about God's purpose for your life from these two passages?

6. If you can, think of some of the 'noises and distraction' that get in the way of you hearing the whisper of God's voice?

7. What can you do to start tuning out some of this noise and static?

8. Can you think and identify some of the ways that God speaks to His people through the ages?

Being in the picture

9. The scripture says 'encourage one another and build each other up' 1 Thessalonians 5 v11. Can you think of a person in your life that has consistently spoken words of encouragement to you?

10. How has this person's words reflected the presence of Christ in their heart?

11. How can you use your words in the coming week to show someone that Jesus Christ is in your life?

Study 6 God's Promises

Introduction

We have looked at five great truths so far. First is that God loves us passionately. Second truth is that God doesn't love from a distance, He gives us His presence through the Holy Spirit. Third truth is that God is not powerless to produce change in a life. The fourth great truth is that God's power and love has a plan. The fifth truth is God has a purpose for us to become more like his Son Jesus.

In this session we will focus on the fact that God offers a meaningful and abundant life on this earth, and secondly the hope of an eternal home in heaven. These are just two promises which God offers, among many and they provide an anchor for the present and a hope for the future.

The Big picture

1. If you can and are able, identify one promise God made in His Word that gives you a sense of freedom?
2. How does it feel to know God always keeps His promises?

The Biblical picture

Read John Ch 10v 7-10 and John Ch 14v 1-6

3. In John 10 we read of a contrast between a thief and a shepherd. Who is the thief and who is the shepherd?
4. What are goals of each?
5. Jesus said 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full'. What does Jesus mean by a 'full' life?
6. How would you describe the promise Jesus gives in John 14?
7. According to this passage, how can we know if this promise is for us?
8. Psalm 23v6 says 'surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' How have you experienced God's goodness and mercy during a difficult time in your life?

9. Respond to one or more of the following
- a. 'When I am having a hard time and struggles, I don't feel any of God's goodness and mercy'
 - b. 'I have been a follower of Christ for a number of years now, and I still don't feel like I am experiencing the Christian life to the full'
 - c. 'I would like to experience an abundant life in Christ, but to tell the truth, I don't feel worthy to receive His good gifts in my life.'

Being in the picture

10. What is one area of your life in which you long to experience a fuller sense of God's purpose and direction?

11. How can your group members pray for you as you seek to experience fullness of life in this area?

12. How does the hope of heaven impact you at times like these
- a. When you are facing long days and weeks of struggle and sadness
 - b. When you are walking through the death of a loved one who knew Christ as saviour
 - c. When you grow weary of resisting a recurring sin in your life
 - d. When you are tired of serving in an area of ministry where God has called you