

Seeing God clearly study

Introduction

The 19th Century Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno wrote that to believe in God is to long for his existence and, further, it is to act as if he existed, it is to live by the longing and to make it the inner spring of our actions. Well I believe that we can go much further than that. To believe in God is to know that he exists and to act in obedience to him because he exists. C.S. Lewis put it, that in Christianity God is not a static being, but a dynamic, pulsating, active being. As such it is good to celebrate his existence and activity. Human beings love to celebrate. Sporting events, rock concerts, opera, ballet, all have spectators standing and applauding. We need to do this for God, to celebrate his goodness, character and glory, this should be something, which we need to encourage each other into doing.

As we walk through life there are many things to celebrate and cheer, and one of those things should be the person of God, which is what this study is all about.

Session 1

God is a relational God - applaud it

God is deeply relational. The powerful, holy, righteous, sovereign, majestic God is also a being who longs to experience and intimate relationship with his people. God is irrepressibly communal, he longs for relationships.

A wide view to take

1. Imagine you are the host of a dinner party, and you may invite any two people to join you for the whole evening of food and conversation. They can be from any part of the world, any walk of life. So, of all the people on planet earth today, whom would you invite?
2. What is one question you would ask someone at your table and why?

A Biblical view to take

Read Psalm 23

3. What does this psalm teach about the relational nature of God?

4. Share if you can a personal example of how you have experienced God as one who does one of these things

Provides for you v1

Gives you peace and rest v2

Guides you in the right ways v3

Walks with you in hard times v4

Frees you from fear v4

Disciplines and directs you v4

Lifts you up v5

Blesses you v5

Lavishes you with love v6

Invites you to dwell with Him v6

5. What do you see are some of the results of seeing God as a divine boss whose primary concern is that we understand and follow his ways?

6. How does this understanding of God impact your life today?

7. How does the daily outworking of the Christian faith change when we see it is a relationship instead of rules for living by?

8. What are some of the things that get in the way of walking hand in hand with God?

9. How can we overcome these distractions and disruptions?

A personal view to consider

10. What specific things have you discovered that you can share with other group members that help you walk closer with God?

11. How does your relationship with God deepen as you learn to see him as a loving, caring and tender-hearted God?

12. If you can, tell about how you have experienced God drawing near to you, to care for you, provide for you, protect you like a loving Father?

Session 2

God is a guide - applaud it

We all have moments of decision, at times like this where do we look for insight and help in the choices we have to make? Each of us responds uniquely when faced with such crossroad moments in life. Some most naturally take the path of the least resistance, simply because of their personalities and temperaments. Other do the opposite, they make reflexive responses, they take the more risky and challenging path. Others gather advice from friends and family, they base a decision on a culmination of advice and insights from others, only then do they take a course of action. The bible offers a simple message from God, which is that God, wants to lead and guide. God is ever eager to offer us direction along the way of life.

A wide view to take

1. What is one important decision that you are facing in your life right now, and how are you looking to God to guide you?

A biblical view to take

Read 2 Timothy ch 3 vs 14-17 also Psalm 119 v 1-16 and Hebrews Ch 4 v 12-13.

2. How does God use the Bible to give direction and guidance in our lives?

3. If you can tell about a time you faced a crossroads and God used the Bible to give you clear and helpful guidance.

The Bible is a spiritual GPS that helps us keep our bearings, and become good decision makers. God's word is crystal clear on so many topics, we don't need anything further, God has already given us an answer. With that in mind

5. What for you is a 'no-brainer' example?

6. Because the Bible answers so many of the directional questions of life how have you tried to find the advice the Bible holds?

7. How can you help others members of your group to grow more in finding the directional help form the Bible?

8. Another way God guides is through His Holy Spirit. Through spiritual promptings, nudges, through visions, through dreams, through audible words. We just need to believe that God wants to guide, to be still and make space for such guidance, be aware of the Holy Spirit's promptings. With this in mind.

Can you recall a time you felt nudged, prompted by the Holy Spirit and you responded. What was the result?

Or have you had a time when you felt nudged but you resisted, what was the result?

9. The bible speaks about the wise counsel of others Proverbs ch 11 v14 Ch 15 v22 are two examples.

Can you tell of a time when a person has spoken wisdom from God into your life?

10. How might your group become a source of godly and wise counsel for each other?

A personal view to consider

11. We all have experienced times when God has closed the door in our life. Such moments can be frustrating, but later we look back and can see things differently. Can you tell of one such incident?

12. Can you tell of how God has opened a door that has led you to follow him more closely recently?

Session 3

God is a refuge - applaud it

Introduction

The ancient Middle Eastern culture was quite dangerous and brutal. Judicial systems were few and far between so people kept law and order by an aggressive form of tribal retaliation and retribution. It was into this brutal culture that God spoke and revealed core elements of His character. God is a refuge who cares about people in their times of need. This becomes clear in Joshua Ch 20 v 2-3 'Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge as I instructed you through Moses, so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood'. Six cities spread across the land were designated by God as places of refuge for those being chased by a blood avenger. If after a fair trial a person was found to be guilty of murder, the blood avenger was free to avenge the death. But if the person could prove that death was accidental, he or she was protected. These cities of refuge reflected the nature and heart of God. The heart of God aches for people who are running fast and wearing down. God is a place of refuge, safety and rest.

Wide view

1. Most of us have never had to run literally for our lives because a blood avenger was after us. But we have had experiences of being chased by a bully, or being oppressed by a hard-hearted boss. Describe a time when you felt chased, under attack, or oppressed, and would have loved a place to find rest.

Biblical view

Read Psalm 18 v1-2 Psalm 27 v 1-6 Psalm 91 v 1-16

2. The writers of these psalms use a number of word pictures to illustrate this beautiful truth of God as refuge. What images are used in the above Psalms and how do they help you understand what it means to say, 'god is my refuge'?

3. According to psalm 91, how can our attitude and outlook change when we live with a deep awareness that God is our refuge?

4. How have you experienced God as a refuge, and how did this strengthen you for the next part of your journey?

5. What are you facing in your life today that causes you to say, 'God, I need you to be my refuge?

6. How might you as a group extend the protecting care of God to each other during these storms of life?

7. Psalm 62 v8 speaks about pouring out our heart to God. What does it mean to pour out our heart to God?

8. Can you offer an example of how a person might pray when they are really pouring out their heart to God?

Our view

9. Spend some time in silence as a group, calling out to God in the quiet of your heart. Tell him where you feel oppressed, weary, fearful, worried, disappointed, and lonely. Ask him to be your refuge.

Then briefly discuss why you think God wants us to call out to him when we need a refuge.

Study 4

God is committed to us - applaud it

Introduction.

Someone has written that 'Commitments create small islands of security for us in our oceans of insecurity. They give us the human basis for trusting each other, for counting on each other. Commitment is the visible fibre that binds a collection of individuals together into a caring community' There is a great truth in that statement. We only have to look at our world to see the results of a commitment free society. We are more often than not trading in our ability to make and keep commitments for a quick-fix illusion of an uncommitted life. The consequences and costs are being felt all around us.

Wide view

1. Name some signs and indicators that show a decreasing concern for commitment within our culture
2. What are some of the consequences we are facing, or might face if we continue on this course?

Biblical view

Read Romans Ch 8 v 31-39 and Psalm 18 v 1-6

3. As you read these passages, note a few of the signs that show God is committed to His children?

4. In a world where commitment is becoming a rare commodity, how can God's tenacious commitment to us become an example of how we are to live in relationship with Him and each other?

5. Read the following passages

1 John 1 v9 John 14 v1-3 Deuteronomy Ch 31 v8 Psalm 91 v 1-4

Have a chat about one of the Biblical promises that means a lot to you [it can be one of the passages above, or another promise] how have you seen God keep this promise in your life?

6. God is always looking for his people to be commitment makers and keepers. So that when a person is growing in faith and experiencing the commitment making and keeping heart of God, what do you think are some of the promises he/ she might make

To God

To other believers

Their church family

To their community and to the world.

7. What one serious and enduring commitment have you have made in your relationship with God, and how has this impacted your life and faith?

8. What is one significant and lasting commitment you have made to another person, and how has this impacted your relationship with them?

9. What is one commitment you made to God that you find difficult to keep?

10. We live in a world where keeping commitments has fallen on hard times. Yet there are people who keep their commitments and live out the promises they make. What attitudes and behaviours help a person remember their commitments and keep them?

Our view

11. Name one of the great commitment makers and keepers from the Bible [Hebrews Ch 11 may help you], or someone from your own life who inspires you. What have you learned from their example?

12. Consider over this coming week writing down half- dozen fundamental commitments around which you want to orientate your life. As you reflect and write them down remember that these are all commitments to God first and foremost.

Study 5

God is generous - applaud it

Introduction

Babies, when they have something in their hands, they have a tight squeeze and grip. We learn this early in life, and often carry this through life. For some people the last time their grip relaxes is when they draw their last breath. This can be the first time they really open their hands. What a contrast between our hands and God's hands. Throughout the history of the Bible God has opened his hands, in provision and care, and forgiveness and hope. The hands of Jesus remained open even on the cross, to reveal a generous love. Today God's hands are still open, inviting people to Himself. The open hands of God are merely the outward manifestation of an inner reality; God is infinitely and shockingly generous.

Worldview

1. How have you seen the human tendency to hold on to things, live greedy lives, ignore those in need?
2. How have you experienced the open handed generous love of God?

Biblical view

Read Luke Ch 19 v1-10

3. Describe the transformation that happened in the heart and life of Zacchaeus when he met Jesus Christ?
4. Describe how your heart has changed over the years as you have come to understand the amazing grace and love of God revealed in Jesus?
5. When the followers of Jesus allow their hearts to beat with the generous heart of Christ, everything changes. Talk about what might change in some of the following areas, from tight fisted hard-hearted to open handed and soft-hearted
 - How we share our financial resources
 - How we offer words of blessing and encouragement
 - How we treat people who are different from us
 - How we use our time
 - How we see the poor and marginalized

6. How we think about finances directly impacts how we live our life. We are driven by a mind-set, which is either shaped by closed fist living or open handed living. What are some of the implications of thinking the following thoughts?

All I have is mine. I worked for it and I deserve it

Everything I have is a gift from God. He has been good and generous to me

Poor people are poor because they are lazy and unmotivated. Helping them will only reinforce negative behaviour

Bigger, better, newer is the only way to go when it comes to the stuff of this world

God provides for me so that I can help and serve others

7. How has your understanding of wealth, material goods, and generosity changed the longer you have been a follower of Jesus?

8. List some of the ways Christians can impact the world and be a witness to the presence of Jesus by living with open-handed generosity in the following areas.

In our families

In our neighbourhood

In our workplace

In our community/ Town

In our nation/ the world

Our view

9. Over this coming week reflect on the following Biblical passages

Eph ch 1 v7-8

Psalm 145 v 15-17

Lamentations Ch 3 v22-24

See how you begin to be challenged and encouraged. Maybe just ask yourself are you living on the treadmill of seeking more and more stuff, never being thankful or satisfied? How can you stop this kind of insanity?

Maybe reflect back at the beginning of the next group meeting your thoughts

Study 6

God is righteous - applaud it

Introduction

There is something inside each of us that is exhilarating when things are done right, whether it's a round of golf, game of squash, a walk accomplished, a task finished. It can be creating a beautiful piece of art, or a family holiday which has been planned well and ends well. There is a deep soul satisfaction of life when things go right.

Worldview

1. Tell about a time when things just seemed to click and something you were part of went right. Why do you remember this moment, and how did it make you feel?

Biblical view

Read the following passages.

Psalm 11 v4 Psalm 111v2-3 Psalm 119 v 137-138

Romans 1 v17 2 Timothy Ch4 v8 1 Peter 3 v12.

2. What do these passages teach you about the nature and character of God?

3. What do we mean when we say that God is righteous?

4. A follower of Jesus Christ is called to be shaped and moulded into the image of the true and living God. What do the above passages teach us [directly or indirectly] about God's call for his children to grow in righteousness?

5. God loves his children to dream so think about what would be some of the new and revolutionary things that might begin to happen in the following places if God's righteousness was embraced and lived out

In our neighbourhoods

In our Town

In our nation

6. If you can name two or three of God's transcendent standards that many people ignore today?

7. What are some of the consequences we face because we ignore these God ordained standards?

8. What practical steps can we take to reclaim God's standards in a world that often resists the idea of absolute truth?

9. We all know the feeling of being tied or tethered to the systems of this world. What can we do to cut these ties and be set free? Can Romans Ch 6 v 17-18 help?

10. What are some of the daily acts of righteousness that each of us can and should engage in? [Look at 1 Timothy ch 6 v 11 also 1 Timothy 4 v 7-8]

Our view

11. What is one act of righteousness that you know God wants you to embrace, but you find it difficult?