

How to cultivate Intimacy with God

Introduction

Today people will spend time and money to look good. The preoccupation of looking good covers areas of surgery, cosmetic, skin care, health foods, vitamins diet exercise books, aerobics, and barbells. Today we invest a great deal to look physically good and desirable in the eyes of others. The idea that if we look better, then we feel better, is something that many people have bought into. The idea being that if the outside package looks better, then maybe I won't hurt as much inside, and therefore we can see ourselves as worthwhile.

Yet amid all the glamour of pumping iron, dieting, jogging, exercising, being toned, tucked and siliconed, the words of God can almost be lost. The Old Testament prophet Samuel wrote, 'The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart' [1 Sam. 16v7]

This doesn't mean that we neglect our bodies, but it does remind us that our bodies are not of ultimate importance. It is our heart and our relationship with God, which matters most.

This study, Intimacy with God, is concerned about the interior, about our mind, emotions, spirit, personality, it's about the core of our being. God is concerned with this level of intimacy, so that our relationship with him while on earth is deep and fulfilling.

Session 1 A new Heart

Introduction

There is absolutely no limit to what God can do with soft-hearted men and women. He can pour His love into their hearts because he knows it will be received and not spurned. He can give direction and guidance because He knows that it will be followed. He can send blessing because He knows it will lead to deep worship. He can give ideas and creative bursts of inspiration because He knows they will be appreciated and used for His glory.

The biggest challenge to a soft heart is an iron heart. If we are grow in our intimacy with God we need to keep maintaining a soft heart towards God.

The Big picture

1. If you were a spiritual doctor doing a test for hard- heartedness, what are some of the symptoms you would look for in your examination?

The Biblical picture

Read Ezekiel Ch 11 v17-21: Ch 36 vs. 24-28

2. According to Ezekiel, idolatry was a sign of hard-heartedness. What did idolatry look like in Ezekiel's day?

3. What does Idolatry look like today?

4. In these passages Ezekiel tells of some specific changes that are going to happen in the lives of God's people as their hearts soften. What are some of these changes?

5. In what ways are these same changes needed in our lives today if we are going to experience transformed hearts?

Hearts get hard when we habitually say no to God. Two things happen as a result of this. First, the hardness drives us further way from God, and dulls our sensitivity and openness to spiritual things. Secondly, there develops a lack of sensitivity to others, and selfishness sets in.

6. Describe if you can, a time in your life when you experienced hard-heartedness towards God. How did this impact your faith and relationship with Him?

7. What impact did this have on
a close friend
a colleague at work
your spouse
a family member.

The good news is that God has a cure for hard-heartedness, but it does require a heart transplant. This is painful but does make a great deal of difference.

8. If you have acknowledged your heart disease and received a new heart through a relationship with Jesus Christ, how has this decision changed your heart?

The Apostle Paul is a good description of a changed heart. Before he had an encounter with Jesus Christ he was an intimidator of Christians. However his response to God was not only name changing from Saul to Paul, but also heart changing. He referred to himself as a bond slave, and clay in God's hands. He not only allowed God to move into his life, but also reside in his life.

This is the core of developing intimacy with God.

Being in the picture ourselves

9. How have you seen God soften your heart to others since you became a Christian?

10. What are the attitudes in your life where soft-heart seems to be a continual challenge?

11. Who is one person you need to soften your heart towards?

Remember that a responsive hearts is always one that says yes to the Holy Spirit

Session 2 A New Mind

Introduction

The promise of the Bible is that anyone who is in Jesus Christ has become a new creation. This is the process of a transformation which lasts a lifetime. The Bible talks about the transforming of the mind. God is looking for his people to have a mind, which is razor sharp, discerning and quick to respond to His will. However too often we can be dull minded, allowing the razors edge of our mind to become a ragged edge. We need to think of how we can allow God to transform our minds daily, so that we are always living with the razor's edge when it comes to our thinking.

The Big picture

1. Take a moment and sign your name in the space below. Then print your name as clearly as you can below your signature.

Now sign your name and print it with the other hand. Try to do this as clearly as you can.

The Biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 12 v1-3

2. What are some of the patterns of this world that you see people's minds conforming to?
3. In what ways do you see God's good and pleasing and perfect will in conflict with the thinking of this world?

The description of girding up your loins in 1 Peter 1 v13 is all about getting your mind ready for a fight.

4. What are some of the things you have discovered that sharpen your thinking and help you see things from God's point of view?

5. What is one mental battle you are fighting now?

6. What are you doing to help you see things from God's vantage point and not as the world sees things?

To have a ragged edge to our mind is to start to lose the vitality, joy excitement of the Christian faith. This happens when we go from reasoning with a razor edge to thinking with a ragged edge.

7. Describe if you can what your life was like during a time when you were thinking with the ragged edge instead of the razor's edge?

8. How have you the impact of the ragged edge thinking in the following areas.

Your view of yourself

Your perspective on your marriage [if you are married]

How you look at those who do not know the love of Jesus

How you view your children [if you have them]

How you use your free time

We do at times need to sharpen the edge of our mind. I would suggest three ways of doing this.

Firstly saturate your mind with God's truth. Secondly submit yourself to the Holy Spirit. Thirdly build significant relationships with other followers of Christ.

Being in the picture ourselves

9. What are you doing on a daily or weekly basis to fill your mind with God's truth?

10. If you feel a need to deepen your commitment in an area of your spiritual life, how can your cell / group members support you?

11. Tell your group members about a person who is having a positive impact on your life by helping to sharpen you in your thinking?

12. What is it this person's life and faith that inspires and challenges you?

Session 3 New Ears

Introduction

Jesus seemed to use the expression He who has ears, let him hear Matt. 13 v9 a few times. He did so with the understanding that there is a lot more to hearing than simply receiving or intercepting a series of sound waves. True hearing involves not only receiving the sounds but processing the contents of the message, giving it serious consideration, and deciding what course of action should be taken in response to what was heard. In other words whoever has ears to hear, let them really hear.

The Big picture

1. Recount a story from your life when someone heard the words you spoke but did not really 'hear' you
2. What kept this person from really hearing you?

The Biblical picture

Read 2 Timothy 4 v 1-5

3. The Apostle Paul speaks about people turning away from hearing the truth and turning their ears towards those who are saying what they want to hear. What are some of the false unhealthy messages people in our generation are turning their ears to hear?
4. This passage says that many people will plug their ears when it comes to sound doctrine. When Paul talks about sound doctrine he means the core truth of the Christian faith. What central truths of the Christian faith do people need to hear today?

Being in the picture ourselves

God speaks to us today through the Bible, through the Holy Spirit through others in a prophetic way, through circumstances. We need to hear God speak to us through the Bible so that our outlook on life does not become stagnant and depressing, but rather current, vital and fresh.

5. Describe a time when God spoke to your heart and life through the Bible to you?

6. What is your level of commitment for studying *God's Word* to your life?
7. If you want to deepen your commitment in this area of your life, how can others in your cell/ group help you?
8. Describe a time when *God* spoke to you clearly through a sermon, cell meeting, Bible study, or some other form of teaching.
9. If we are going to hear *God* speak to us when his *Word* is taught, we need to learn how to prepare our hearts. What are some of the practical things we can do to remove obstacles and prepare our hearts to hear *God* speak?
10. Tell of a time when you sensed *God* speaking to you through the voice of the Holy Spirit?
11. What was he saying and how did you respond?
12. Recount a time *God* spoke to you through a fellow follower of *Christ*.
- 13 How did you respond to the message from *God*?

Session 4

A new voice

Introduction

We can all have the tendency to suffer from foot in mouth disease. Sometimes some of us have spoken words that we wish we could take back. In developing our intimacy with God we need to allow God to come and tame our tongue. We all have been hurt by harsh words from others. We know from personal experience that words have the power to devastate. On the other hand we have all experienced the joy and affirmation of hearing someone speak words of encouragement to us. God's desire is for us to use words to worship Him and encourage each other. His desire is for us to learn how to identify hurtful patterns of speech so that we can get them out of our thinking, living and our mouths. God wants us to use the awesome power of our voices for good.

The Big picture

1. Describe a time someone spoke words that had a powerfully positive impact on you
2. Tell about a time you spoke words that had a powerfully positive or negative impact on someone else.

The Biblical picture

Read James Ch 3 v 3-12

3. James paints a series of pictures that portray the human tongue and its power to build or destroy. What are these images and what is James trying to communicate through them?
4. In verses 6-8 James has some tough things to say about our words and their impact. If you agree with this harsh assessment, explain why. If you think that James is overstating his case, explain why.

Being in the picture ourselves

Physical murder is punishable by prison, but verbal murder is legal. We have all been victims of such an attack, and we have been perpetrators, they happen everywhere.

5. There is an old statement, 'sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me'. As an adult looking back on your life experience, how do you respond to this saying?

6. We have all been guilty of striking out at others with our words. Sometimes our attacks are accidental, or simply a reflex response to our own pain. At other times the damage is intentional. If you have a person in your life who you have hurt with your words, what do you need to do to make things right with this person?

7. How can your cell/ group support you in this commitment?

We can also know the euphoria of having someone use their words to build us up and affirm us.

8. Tell your cell/ group about a person in your life who has consistently used their words to encourage and build you up. How has this person impacted your life?

9. Who is one person you need to encourage and build up with your words? How can you do this in the coming days?

If we want to use our voice constructively there's no higher plane than the worship of God.

10. Name a song that really helps you express worship to God. What is it in this song that helps you communicate your praise and love?

11. Take some time as a cell/ group to express your love for God. Simply tell each other why you love the Lord and what He means to you. Why not sing a song together.

Study 5 New Hands

Introduction

For those who suffer with arthritis, new hands seem a good deal to pursue. However, God wants to transform our hands so they are useful to Him. In developing our intimacy with God we need to look again at how God can use our hands to extend His kingdom. To allow Him to use us as people of influence in the world for Him. To allow God to work through us by offering our bodies and our hands in service to Him.

The Big picture

1. There is a famous picture by the 15th Century German artist Albrecht Durer called praying hands. Why do you think so many people find such deep meaning in a picture of praying hands?

The Biblical picture

Read Proverbs Ch 6 v 16-17 Ecclesiastes Ch 10 v 8 Matthew Ch 5 v 30

2. These passages give us warnings about our hands. What warnings do you need to hear when you read these passages?

3. How would you translate these warnings into today's language?

Read Luke Ch 18 v 15-17 Matthew Ch 8 v 1-4.

4. Through His ministry Jesus often reached out and touched people with His hands. Why do you think this was so important to Jesus?

5. How is that an example to us as we interact with others?

Uplifted hands can symbolise a great deal. Firstly they can speak of someone who needs to be rescued. Secondly, they can symbolise intense prayer, we need resources, which we do not have, and we need to discover God's power. Thirdly, they can symbolise worship. Through the Bible we read of people lifting up their hands in worship.

6. What are some of the things that have happened in your life that led up to you finally lifting your hands to heaven and calling out to God for forgiveness of sins?

7. What one need in your life right now do you need to lift to God in prayer?
8. What different body postures help you express worship to God [standing, kneeling, folding hands, lifting hands, bowing your head etc]?
9. Why does expressing your worship physically help you express what is in your heart?

Being in the picture ourselves

Picture a hand firmly grasping the hand of someone else either in fellowship or in help. It's the picture of extending an invitation of community to someone who is looking for community.

10. What are some practical ways that you can extend your hand to other believers in an effort to build Christian community?
11. What is one specific thing that you can do in the coming week to reach a hand out to another follower of Christ?
12. What is one practical way that your cell/ group can extend a hand of Christian care to a brother or sister in need?

The Bible speaks about putting our hands to the plough of service. Luke Ch 9 v 62.

13. Describe a ministry you have been involved in and how this ministry was or is an expression of your love for God?
14. What is one area of ministry you have always desired to participate in but have never pursued?
15. What can you do to put your hands to the plough and become involved in this area of ministry?

Session 6

A new Spine

Introduction

Intimacy with *God* is not something we do once and then forget about it; it is a daily process we engage in. From the minute we give our heart to *Christ* we begin the process of transformation and intimacy begins to grow in our life. The encouragement to change habits, attitudes, and behavioural patterns are something, which we are to engage in for the rest of our life. In each moment of truth we will have to decide whether or not to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in this process of transformation. This is about developing the spine to desire to continue the transformation and deepening the intimacy. It's about following *God's* desires and not your own. This takes courage on the road of transformation.

The Big picture

1. What is one act of courage you have witnessed in your lifetime?

The Biblical picture

Read 1 Samuel Ch 17 v 20-51

2. How did David show courage in the following ways?

In the presence of his brothers

Before the King of Israel

Standing before Goliath

Before God

3. Respond to this statement. David's courage greatness and faith were formed during the years he committed himself to do the thankless job of shepherding. David learned courage when no one else was watching, and he became great by doing a common thankless job with excellence. David was a person of courage long before he met Goliath

4. What are some of the daily commitments and responsibilities that teach you courage?

Being in the picture ourselves

5. We live in a world that is hostile to the message of Christ and antagonistic to followers of Christ who really stand up for their faith. In the following situations what kind of courage does it take to stand for the Christian faith?

In the workplace

In your neighbourhood

Among family members who are not believers

Around friends in various social setting who are enquiring about the Christian faith.

6. What are some of the sacrifices of lifestyle changes you have made since becoming a follower of Christ?

7. How have these changes and sacrifices demanded courage?

8. What is one commitment you know God wants you to make, but you have been resisting?

9. What is it going to take for you to have courage to make this commitment?

To have a new spine is to live as a fully devoted follower of Christ in a world that is unsympathetic to Christian values.

10. Can you tell about a time you had the courage to express your faith in some way and stand up as a Christian?

11. What gave you courage and bravery in this situation?

12. Describe a time when you know you should have communicated your faith, but something kept you from doing it?

13. What was it that stood in the way of you communicating your love for Jesus in this situation?

14. What have you discovered that helps you communicate your faith with courage and clarity?