

## **Helping people through the challenges of life**

### **Introduction**

All of us face times in our life when we face a challenge which threatens to slow us down or de-rail us from the track of self-improvement we have put ourselves on. We need to learn how to identify those things which trip us up, and then find a way to defeat them.

A moment of truth for ourselves can be enlightening for us. The great Egyptian leader Anwar el-Sadar put it, 'Great suffering builds up a human being and puts him within reach of self knowledge.' So adversity can be a great opportunity to introduce us to ourselves, if we want to know ourselves better. However we don't have to cave in when we are threatened by what would seek to knock us out of the race of life, or discipleship. We have to find a different way to live, and God wants to help us do this, which is what this study is all about. While adversity may well introduce us to ourselves, it may well open our eyes, it may plumb the depth of our heart, it may well test our strength, it may well teach us a lot, there is always the availability of God's presence through the Holy Spirit and Scripture to help us combat those things which would attempt to drag us down. The reality is that, with the power of the risen Christ made available to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can be overcomers, which is what this study will help look at.

### **Study 1**

#### **Dealing with the challenge of adversity**

### **Introduction**

We all need to learn how to face adversity and still stand strong. In my experience it usually come down to three things. What you believe, how you grieve and lastly who you lean on. Adversity can cause spiritual vertigo. It is the time when we begin to lose our balance and direction, when this happens we need to go back to basics. We need to anchor ourselves again in the truth of God's goodness to us. So that we can be honest about the pain we are feeling, and find the support we need through the challenge we are facing.

### **The Big picture**

1. Take one of the following areas below and describe a time when you faced adversity
  - a. in your home
  - b. in a friendship
  - c. in the church
  - d. in your work
  - e. in any other area of your life.
  
2. What helped you make it through the time?

### **The Biblical picture.**

Read Isaiah Ch 43; 1-3

3. In light of this passage how would you respond to the following
  - a. if you live a good life and are faithful to God, you will never face adversity or suffering
  - b. when you go through hard times, you have a feeling that God has deserted you, in your time of greatest need.
  
4. Isaiah speaks of waters, rivers and fire. What is he talking about?
  
5. What is God doing while we are going through adversities?
  
6. What are some of the waters, rivers, fires, you are facing right now?

### **Being in the picture**

7. We need to be careful about what we believe. We need to remember that God is not the author of evil [James 1: 12-18] God limits the severity we suffer [1 Cor. 10: 13] Philipians 4: 13] God is available to help us [Psalm 34:18 Psalm 23] God is committed to us [Romans 8:28]

Why do you think each of these beliefs are essential to overcoming adversity?

8. Take each of the beliefs in question 7 and turn them around. If it is not true, what implications would this have on how you face adversity?

9. We tend to forget in our grief about the adversity that God is ruling over the challenge we face 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 speaks about giving us hope.

Can you identify a time when you were grieving over an adversity, and you were able to pour your grief out to God?

10. How did this reflection on grieving help you?

11. Describe if you can a time of struggle when you did not fully pour out your grief to God?

12. What kept you from grieving like question 11?

13. When Jesus faced the challenge of Gethsemane he took his three friends, Peter James and John with him. He knew that in the adversity he faced he needed a few friends.

What areas of adversity have you been trying to face alone?

14. How can your cell/ group members pray for you and offer you support?

15. If possible is there someone who you as a cell / group could help as they go through a time of adversity. What can you offer them in terms of practical help, encouragement, support?

## Study 2

### Dealing with the challenge of fear

#### Introduction

We need to remember that constructive fear can be helpful to us. We need to acknowledge it, and learn from it. Jesus often spoke the words 'fear not', but also said 'be afraid of the evil one, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.' So some fear is legitimate.

But some fear needs to be overcome. This is overcome by a joint venture. God will do his part, but we must do our part. We need to pray that God will give us courage.

#### The Big picture

1. Describe a time when you faced intense fear

## **The Biblical picture**

Read Psalm 23 and 2 Timothy 1; 7

2. What hope and encouragement does Psalm 23 offer to those who are facing fear?

3. In 2 Timothy 1; 7 the apostle Paul draws on a contrast between a fearful [timid] spirit, and a fearless spirit. How does each of the following aspects of a fearless spirit help you become an overcomer?

- a. a spirit of power
- b. a spirit of love
- c. a spirit of self-discipline

## **Being in the picture**

4. What are some common fears people face?

5. where are the most likely breeding ground for the birth of such fears?

6. Describe a fear you have overcome, or one you are still struggling with. If you reflect, how do you think this fear was born?

7. If we are going to overcome our fears we need not only to identify the birthplace of our fears, but also the fears lies. In John 8; 44 Jesus referred to the evil one as being the father of lies. With that in mind, what are some common lies the enemy tells us in the following situations.

- a. if I don't find the right partner soon, I'll...
- b. if I don't get a salary increase, I'll....
- c. if I keep ageing, keep getting more wrinkles, losing my hair, I'll...
- d. if I become a follower of Christ, and really live my life for Him, I'll

8. what is one lie the enemy is telling you right now?

9. How can your cell/ group pray for you and help give you perspective as you seek to disarm this lie of the enemy?

10. Winston Churchill said that if a person turned their back on a fear it would not go away, only double, and keep gaining strength. He said that if fear was faced promptly, and powerfully, it would be cut in half. Exposing the lies and speaking the truth is the best way to deal with fear. So.

Write down one area of fear in your life and the lies that accompany this fear.

- a. the area of fear
- b. the lies of the enemy
- c. if you can read these out to your cell/ group, and invite them to speak God's truth to you in this area of fear

### **Study 3** **Overcoming Apathy**

#### **Introduction**

We may not want to admit it but this topic affects us all. We all have an internal pull towards self-centred, apathetic, unconcerned lifestyles. In the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan we see two veteran religious leaders walk right past a person in obvious need. They seem to have both cold hearts and cloudy minds, and a frightening ability to keep their hands in their pockets. Jesus reminds us that it quite possible to be very religious and yet devoid of even normal levels of human compassion.

We need to be reminded of the story of the young boy and the starfish on the beach. As the young boy walked on the beach he saw thousands of starfish washed up on the beach due to a large storm. The boy felt for the helpless starfish, so one by one he started to fling them back into the sea. A cynical elderly man, saw what the boy was doing, and spoke to him. 'Do you think that your are going to make a difference with all these thousands of starfish washed up, do you think you can really make any difference what so ever by what you are doing?' The little boy happened to be holding a starfish as the man spoke to him. He held the starfish up to the man's face, and said. 'Well, I am pretty sure I am making a difference to this one.' And with that he flung it back into the safety of the sea.

#### **The Big picture**

1. Describe a time when you felt like the young boy in the story in the introduction.
  
2. Describe a time when you felt like the older man in the story, and you wondered if your little contribution to the world's problems really made any difference at all.

### **The Biblical story**

Read Luke 10; 25-37

3. What do you learn about apathy from this story?
4. The Samaritan in this story had the antidote to apathy. What do you see in his attitudes and actions that challenge you to overcome apathy?
5. The World Missional Organisation World Vision has a motto; 'Let your heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God'. Describe a time this happened to you.
6. What is one area in which you are experiencing a broken heart for the needs of others?
7. What is one area where you feel that your heart is calloused and needs to be broken?

### **Being in the picture**

8. What plans and strategies has TVBF established to help meet the needs of others in your community, and around the world? What plans does your cell/ group have?
9. How can God breath new vision into this area of TVBF/ your cell, your group?
10. What are some of the things followers of Christ can do in order to make a difference in the life of someone in need?
11. What obstacles tend to stand in the way of you moving into action and meeting the needs of those who are hurting?
12. What is one action goal you need to set that involves getting your hands busy serving others in the following areas.
  - a. your cell/ group
  - b. your church
  - c. your community
  - d. your world

## **Study 4**

### **Overcoming Greed**

#### **Introduction**

This can be a bit touchy, simply because greed is one of the most socially acceptable sins in our culture. In fact there are so many manifestations of acceptable greed around us that we have begun to think that greed is normal. In our culture if a person starts a business, pounds his employees mercilessly, undermines his competitors deceitfully, overcharges his customers regularly, but also make a fortune in the process, we call him or her, a success.

The Bible tells us to be on our guard against any form of greed. Greed motivates us to try and earn more than we need, own more than we can, and to ache for stuff, that in reality, we have a sense will not even satisfy. Greed can cause us to overwork, overspend, and overrule our most deeply held convictions.

#### **The big picture**

1. Have you ever had a 'price tag moment' when you have seen something in shop, you are really excited about, until you see the price tag, then you have a decision to buy or not to buy. Have you ever had such a moment?

#### **The Biblical picture**

Read Luke 18; 18-30

2. what was this man seeking to buy and what was the price tag?
3. What do you learn about the man's 'price tag moment'?
4. What do you learn about the heart of the ruler in the story?
5. What do you learn about the power of riches?
6. What do you learn about the heart of Jesus?
7. What is an area of greed that you have battled with and experienced victory?
8. What helped you say no to the seduction of greed in this area of your life?

### **Being in the picture**

9. Identify the sources that perpetuate the greed. If you can finish the following

- a. The message the commercials feed the greed gene by telling me...
- b. the heartbeat and pulse of the business world fuel the greed gene by driving me to...
- c. seeking the 'British Dream' can encourage the greed gene by..

10. If we are going to overcome greed we need to reflect on the following

- a. earn money according to our potential-the push to do more feeds greed
- b. enjoy the fruit of our labours- give thanks to God and enjoy what he provides
- c. learn to live within our means
- d. give a percentage of our income to God's work- by doing this we acknowledge God's rule over our personal finance
- e. seek guidance from God on a regular basis regarding money management

11. Which of the above do you find easiest to follow?

12. What has helped you develop this practice in your life?

13. Which of the guidelines in question 10 do you find the most difficult to incorporate into your life?

14. How can your cell/ group members support you as you learn to develop in this area of your life?

## **Study 5 Overcoming Lust**

### **Introduction**

This is a sensitive subject to look at. Someone described lust a like a lion who seeing a stag, thinks of nothing else but the meal it is about to enjoy; fun for the lion, but not much fun for the stag. Lust like gluttony is disordered desire. We need to be careful concerning the tone and spirit as we go through this study.

In your mind think back to when you were growing up and the expectations of Christmas. What images fill your mind and your heart?

Now think of a favourite holiday spot. Allow your mind to be filled with the various colours, sounds, smells.

Now focus back on the present, the here and now. The human imagination is pretty amazing. The power of imagination can be awesome.

### **The big picture**

1. Finish the following

a. When I imagined Christmas from my childhood, some of the images and feelings were....

b. when I imagined my favourite holiday spot, some of the images and feelings were.....

### **The Biblical picture**

Read Matthew 5; 27-30

2. Our imagination is a great gift from God. However it has a shadow side to it. Not only can we imagine things that are God honouring, but we can also imagine things that break the heart of the God we love. What does this passage teach us about the shadow side of our human imagination?

3. How does God feel about a person using his/ her imagination to exploit another person by lusting?

4. A hyperbole is an exaggeration used to make a point. What hyperbole does Jesus use in this passage, and what is the message Jesus is seeking to communicate through such extreme statements?

5. Here's a definition of lust. 'Lust is taking a complete, complex human being, made in the image of God, and reducing that person to just a body dedicated to the gratification of the luster's sexual desires. Lust is fundamentally self-seeking and completely devoid of love.'

What therefore does lusting do to another human being?

6. How would you feel to discover that someone was using you in this way?

7. How therefore does lusting hurt

a. the one lusts?

b. the one who is the object of lust?

c. the heart of God?

d. our society?

## Being in the picture

8. There are basically three levels of lust

- a. level one- this is infrequent, accidental, surprising, it is involuntary, rarely a cause for deep shame
- b. level two- wrestling with lustful thoughts, often such people are racked by guilt, simply because of the power and the frequency of their lustful thoughts
- c. level three these are people who are consumed by lust- they are addicted, which sets up a tension between their normal self, and their lustful self, they arrange their life around the object of their lustful thoughts

What do you see in our culture, which feeds lusts, and pushes people from level one to level three?

9. How do men and women differ when it comes to the battle of lusting?

10. The challenge of recovery from lusting is not easy, but here are four helpful steps to help break the cycle

- a. own up- admit there is a problem
- b. dig in- time to look at feelings, get professional help if need be
- c. reach out- come out of hiding, talk to a close friend, break the secretive world
- d. pitch in- fill the recovery time with meaningful Christian service, spend time serving, and building others up.

What do you think God would say to a person battling to overcome lust, who believed the following lies about lust

- a. I am a bad, unworthy person
- b. no one could ever love me the way I am
- c. my needs will never be met
- d. sex is the most important need in my life

11. What are some of the practical ways that we can cut off the sources of lust producing images?

12. How could your cell/group, function as a place for support and help in the battle against lust?

## Study 6 Overcoming sorrow

### Introduction

One hard reality we will all face in life is sorrow. The loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, health problems, an uncertain future, and losing a job are just a few of the possible sources of sorrow. When loss comes our way we often wish that we could take a couple of months off from life and find a quiet place to heal. The reality is that we have to press on with our daily lives. We have to repeat the same things day in day out, but thankfully God has give us some tools for living with sorrow and walking through it in his power

### The big picture

1. What message did you receive about how to deal with grief as you were growing up?

### The Biblical picture

Read John 11; 32-44 and Psalm 116; 1-9

2. From John 11, what do you learn about how Jesus dealt with sorrow?

3. In Psalm 116 the writer is in the midst of sorrow and struggle. What do you learn about how the psalmist deals with sorrow in this passage?

4. What can a person in the midst of sorrow learn about God from Psalm 116

5. There are probably six elements to the conventional approach to sorrow these are

- a. bury your feelings- stiff upper lip
- b. replace your loss as soon as possible- turn the page gets on with life
- c. grieve alone- grin and bear it
- d. time will heal- just wait and see everything will be OK
- e. learn to live with regret- just accept it and carry on
- f. once burned, twice smart- build defences around your life, so you will not be hurt again.

How can the conventional approach to sorrow be counter productive to the healing process?

6. How would you respond to the following statements?
- a. I just need to get away from everyone and everything until I can pull myself together. I really don't want to interact with anyone until I have my act together
  - b. I'm just trying to focus on what I have. There is no use on dwelling on what I have lost
  - c. I guess I'll just have to wait until my heart heals itself. I suppose in a few months everything will be back to normal.

7. If you were raised on the conventional wisdom of dealing with sorrow, what are you learning about the errors of question 5's thought patterns?

### **Being in the picture**

8. God's pattern of dealing with sorrow is very different. There are probably six elements to it
- a. be open with your grief—grieve with hope
  - b. review your loss-feel the fullness of the loss
  - c. grieve in community-never go through sorrow on your own
  - d. the Holy Spirit heals hurts not time alone- 2Cor 1;3-4
  - e. realise you don't have to carry regret the rest of your life- God lifts the load of guilt, regret
  - f. as Christ's follower you never lose your ultimate treasure- Jesus is our ultimate treasure, regardless of what life throws at us.

How does God's management plan fly in the face of conventional wisdom?

9. Why are the two systems so radically different?

10. Is there a sorrow that you have been burying instead of communicating openly? Take time to tell your cell/group about this sorrow.