

Helping people through pressure points in life

Caring for emotional needs

Introduction

John Powell in his book 'Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?' claims that there can be no real communication between human beings until they relate to each other on the level of feeling. I believe that he means that you can know a person's thoughts, ideas, values, judgements and opinions, but until you know how the person feels you are still standing on the doorstep of their life, instead of sitting down in the living room.

As difficult as it is for some people to realise but we are all emotional beings. We are more than body and spirit, we are a whole network of feelings, and for some people this can take a long time for them to realise this reality.

All around us people are in emotional pain. People today fear loneliness, they fear anger, they fear depression. There are people who are worriers, other with low self-esteem, some filled with bitterness, other with unresolved hurts. The call as a follower of Christ is to care for these people to best of our ability.

Through the eyes of Scripture we shall have a look at some emotional needs that people carry, many people we work with, socialise with, worship with can be carrying some of these issues around in their life. We all need to move to be emotionally healthy ourselves, so that from this place we can point people to the reality of God's grace as it is seen through the ragged edges of our life.

Study 1

Caring for the whole person

Introduction

The Old Testament prophet Elijah had served God at a time when it had been unpopular and dangerous to do this. As we catch up with this part of his life story, Elijah has just returned successfully from an encounter with the prophets of the pagan god Baal. On the back of a spiritual victory, the emotional needs of this man become evident. Here God comes to the help of Elijah.

The Big picture

1. Describe what happens to you when you are physically exhausted?

The Biblical picture

Read 1 Kings Ch 19 v 1-18

2. As you look through this passage, what do you see as Elijah's emotional needs? Verses 3-4 10-14
3. His physical needs? Vs. 5-8
4. His spiritual needs? Vs 8. 10-11, 13-14
5. What external and internal factors probably contributed to Elijah's fear?
6. What do you think happened to the faith Elijah had so dramatically demonstrated in the previous chapters?
7. In what different ways did the Angel care for Elijah?

Being in the picture

8. Describe an experience when more than your appetite was affected when you were hungry, or more than just your body was affected when you were tired?
9. Why is it sometimes difficult to hear the Lord's voice when you are feeling especially busy and successful "doing the Lord's work"?
10. What do you think is the significance of the Lord not being in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the gentle whisper?
11. What factors in your life cause you to miss the "gentle whisper" of God?
12. What helps you hear it?
13. What emotional as well as spiritual needs of Elijah were met by his encounter with God?
14. When caring for someone, it is important to know that they are an integrated whole. What have you learned from this passage about the interactions of the emotions, spirit and body?

Study 2

Caring for those who worry

Introduction

Worry has been described as the most urgent problem of our day. It has also been described as the most 'pervasive psychological phenomenon of our time.' Although worry is as old as human existence, the complexities and the pace of modern life have altered us more to its presence and perhaps have increased its influence, It is not always easy to stop perpetually worrying, we may see it decline in our life but for some people worry is always a challenge for us. However we do need to look at how we help others who are more prone to worry to those with the strong tendency to worry.

The big picture

1. What has caused you to worry recently?

The Biblical picture

Read Philippians Ch 4 v s 4-9

2. What instructions does Paul give in this passage?
3. How might rejoicing in the Lord, help relieve worry?
4. What are you like when you worry?
5. Paul says 'let your gentleness be evident to all.'
What does a gentle person look like?
6. How readily do you bring your anxiety to God?
7. What truths about God do these verses express to you?
8. How should these truths about God affect the way you think about God?
9. What stops you from praying with thanksgiving?
10. How are you affected by what you think?

Being in the picture

11. If you were to follow the mental discipline of verse 8, what would you focus your thoughts on?
12. How might following this mental discipline affect the way you deal with your most worrisome situations?
13. Think of someone you know who is consumed with worry. How could you help that person experience the peace of God?

Study 3

Caring those who are fearful

Introduction

Fear can come in response to a variety of situations. Different people are afraid of failure, achieving success, rejection, intimacy, conflict, meaninglessness in life, sickness, death, loneliness, and a host of other real or imagined possibilities. Sometimes these fears can build up in one's mind and create extreme anxiety, often in the absence of any real danger. Therefore fear and anxiety may well be similar, even though they may not be identical, but the same inner apprehension, which characterises none, can also be seen in the other. We just need to be alert as to how we help others.

The big picture

1. What are you like when you are afraid?

The biblical picture

Read Matthew Ch 14 vs. 22-33.

2. What fears attacked the disciples? [For clues look at verses 24,26,30]
3. If you had been with them in the boat, what would you have seen, felt, heard?
4. Long before Jesus acted on behalf of the disciples he spent time alone in prayer. How could prayer be a resource for you when facing your own fears, or caring for someone who is fearful?
5. If you consider the miracle of Jesus walking on the water for a moment, what does it say to you about the power of Jesus?
6. Notice the result when Peter looked at the wind instead of at Jesus. When have you been like Peter?
7. What did Jesus do to enable the disciples to say with confidence. 'Truly you are the Son of God?'

Being in the picture

8. Think about something which makes you anxious. How does a firm belief in the power of Jesus ease your fears?
9. When Jesus and Peter got back in the boat, the response from the disciples was worship. When Jesus has calmed your storms, how does your response compare with that of the disciples?
10. If you were with someone caught in uncontrolled fear, how might your relationship with Christ enable you to help that person?

Study 4

Caring for those who are lonely

Introduction

Loneliness has been described as 'one of the most universal sources of human suffering'. Loneliness is the painful awareness that we lack meaningful contact with others. Loneliness involves a feeling of inner emptiness, which can be accompanied by sadness, discouragement, a sense of isolation, restlessness, anxiety, and an intense desire to be wanted and needed by someone. Loneliness is not the same as solitude. Solitude is a voluntary withdrawal from other people; loneliness comes when we are forced to be alone. Solitude can be refreshing and enjoyable; loneliness is painful, draining and unpleasant. We need to be aware of loneliness, both in ourselves and other people.

This study looks at how the Apostle Paul dealt with loneliness himself.

The Big picture

1. What does loneliness feel like to you?

The Biblical picture

Read 2 Timothy Ch 4 vs. 6-22

2. Put yourself in Paul's circumstances, and try as much as you can to feel what he felt. What reasons are there for Paul to feel lonely?
3. What do you think it would be like to know that a martyr's death is imminent for you?
4. What is Paul's confidence? [Vs. 7-8, 18]
5. What initiatives does Paul take in response to his own needs?
6. In what ways does God meet Paul's needs [vs. 16-18]?
7. In what ways does God not meet his needs?

Being in the picture

8. When do you feel lonely?
9. How does our confidence in God, in heaven, and in your own response to God change when you are lonely?
10. How does your confidence in God, in heaven, and in your own response to God change when you are lonely?
11. What initiative can you take when loneliness engulfs you?
12. What can you ask God to do?
13. What are possible reasons why God does not step in and instantly take away loneliness?
14. How sensitive are you to loneliness in others? Explain.
15. Think of a person you know who is engulfed in loneliness. Based on this study and what you have learnt, how might you help that person?

Study 5

Caring for those who are angry

Introduction

Most of us struggle with anger in one form or another, and with differing degrees of intensity. Many absorb their anger internally, and they do this so well, that they themselves don't realise that they are angry, and after years of this type of abuse, their body begins to show the wears and tears of this approach to anger management. Other lash out. They express anger freely. They hurt people in the process, and the person they have lashed out at is often left with feelings of remorse and grief. If repression of anger is not the answer, and expression of anger only continues to damage, then we need to explore another solution.

The Big picture

1. How do you feel when you have responded to someone with angry words?

The Biblical picture

Read Ephesians Ch 4 vs. 1-3, 25-32.

2. Paul urges his readers to live a life worthy of their call. How would the characteristics he describes in verses 1-3 lay the foundation for both preventing and dealing with anger?

3. From Paul's statement in verse 26 we know that anger itself is not sin. It is what we do with that anger that is potentially sinful. When have you experienced the devil getting a foothold in your life or in a relationship, because too much time has passed between you and dealing with your anger?

4. In verse 31 Paul says to get rid of anger. What instructions does he give in verses 25-32 that could have direct effect on getting rid of anger?

5. What does it mean to 'put off falsehood and speak truthfully' to our neighbours?

6. How might this both prevent and soften anger?

7. In an encounter where anger is being expressed, when does talk 'build other up' and when does it become unwholesome?
8. How does listening long and hard to an angry person help you talk in a way that could benefit that person?
9. What are the ways that we can grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in our relationships with others?

Being in the picture

10. Which of the instructions in verses 25-32 do you have the most difficulty following when you are angry with someone?
11. What practical steps might you take this week to work on those areas of difficulty?

Study 6

Caring for those who are bitter

Introduction

Bitterness can be like a seed that gets planted inside of a person and then is allowed to grow into a monstrous plant, so that it engulfs the whole personality. The Old Testament King Saul was engulfed in bitterness. His bitterness was directed towards David, a young man from the hill country. David had changed the course of a 40- day standoff with the Philistine army by single-handedly killing their giant leader. Suddenly all the people were praising this boy from the sheep pasture lands. Rumour had it that one day David would be king.

The big picture

1. How do you usually respond when you are afraid that someone or something important to you will be taken away?

The biblical picture

Read 1 Samuel Ch 18.

2. What causes can you find for Saul's hostile behaviour?
3. Often if not always behind anger is fear. What specifically was Saul afraid of? Look at verses 8.12.15.28]
4. What did Saul do as a result of his anger?
5. What do you think is the difference between anger and bitterness?
6. How as Saul affected by the bitterness that he allowed growing within himself?
7. What evidence is there that the problem became not only an emotional but spiritual battle? [Look at verses 10,12,28]

Being in the picture

8. Think about a time when you were bitter. What were you afraid of?
9. How was your relationship with others affected?
10. How was your relationship with God affected?
11. What warnings do we get from this passage about the destructive nature of bitterness?
12. How might these warnings and being aware of your own fear and anger help you to deal with bitterness, in your life or someone else's?

Study 7

Caring for those who are depressed

Introduction.

Depression or melancholia has been recognised as a common problem for more than 2,000 years. Some would describe our era as the age of melancholy, as opposed to the previous age of anxiety. Depression is something, which everyone experiences in some degree and at different times in life. The author of Psalm 42 was a musician who used to lead the procession of worshippers to the temple in Jerusalem. But as the holy temple of God lay in ruins, the fields and vineyards burned, and the bulk of the people some six hundred miles away in Babylon, the Psalmist grieves over the circumstances. He shows all the signs of depression. Loss of energy and fatigue, a negative self-concept, and self-criticism, worthlessness and helplessness, loss of spontaneity, along with many other things.

The big picture

1. How do you feel when you are depressed?

Biblical picture

Read Psalm 42

2. Look for the progression of thought throughout the Psalm, offer a short summary of each section.

Verses 1-3

Verses 4-5

Verses 6-8

Verses 9-11

3. Verses 5 and 11 form a refrain or this Psalm [see also Ps. 43v5]. What do you find in this refrain that makes it important to repeat?
4. The Psalmist speaks honestly and openly to God. What words does he use to tell how he is feeling?
5. Why might the Psalmist's honest words with God about his past and his present help to strengthen his faith?
6. What do you talk with God and with others when you are depressed?
7. What do you usually remember during such times?
8. Not all of what the Psalmist says is about himself and his past. He also focuses on God. What aspects of God's character does he acknowledge? [Look at verses 5,8-9]
9. How might a firm belief in a God of this character bring hope, even to an ancient Hebrew in exile?

Being in the picture

10. What kinds of things are likely to throw you into depression?
11. Based on this Psalm when depression comes what measures can you take to begin to cope with it?
12. What are unhelpful responses to a depressed friend?
13. How might you help a troubled friend cope with depression?

Study 8

Caring for those who have low self- esteem

Introduction

Self-esteem has been described as 'the global evaluation or judgement about personal acceptability and worthiness to be loved, which carries with it pleasant or unpleasant feelings. It is strongly related to the perceived views of the person by important others in his or her life.' There are many symptoms, which testify to a poor self-esteem. A crucial one is an intense desire to appear better than someone else. Sometimes we try to make that happen by cutting the other person down. That's the warning. When this desire appears, it is time to take a close look at what we think of ourselves.

The big picture

1. What are you like when you feel good about yourself?
2. What are you like when you feel bad about yourself?

The biblical picture

Read Mark Ch 9 v 33-35.

3. If you could reconstruct the conversation between the disciples here, what do you think they would be saying?
4. How do you see yourself or others around you expressing the same concern?
5. The disciples were quiet when Jesus asked what they were discussing. How honestly and openly do you admit your needs of self-esteem?

6. Jesus gave specific instructions for being first. How is the need for esteem satisfied through the servant relationship? [Consider both the servant and the one being served]
7. Read Mark Ch 12v 28-34. In verses 29 we are told how to love God. What is involved in loving him with all your heart?
8. With all your soul?
9. With all your mind?
10. With all your strength?
11. What does this type of love have to do with self-esteem?

Being in the picture

12. How does 'loving your neighbour as yourself' relate to being the 'very last and servant of all'.
13. Why can't you love others if you do not love yourself?
14. In what ways do you struggle with loving yourself?
15. How is this evident in your life and relationships?
16. How does loving others increase your self-esteem?
17. How does it increase their self-esteem?

Study 9

Finding Emotional wholeness

Introduction

No matter how we try to put our life together it sometimes always feels like it is wrong. Because we are human and always affected by the brokenness of our world, none of us has complete emotional health. Just as we have physical and spiritual imperfections, we have emotional wounds as well. Sometimes it is fair to say that what we think is spiritual ill health can be emotional ill health. Similarly what we speak of as spiritual health can also be seen to be emotional health. We need to think about not only growing to spiritual health but also emotional health at the same time.

The big picture

1. Think of a person that you feel is emotionally healthy. What is he/ she like?

The biblical picture

Read *Galatians Ch 5 v 16-26*

2. Consider carefully the acts of the sinful nature listed in verses 19-21.

In what ways do they reflect a person's emotional health?

3. List and define the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

4. How does the presence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit reflect emotional health?

5. What fruit would you like to see further developed in you?

6. How does this passage increase your understanding about the inner conflict that you/ or others experience?

7. How can we 'crucify the sinful nature with its passions and desires'?

Being in the picture

8. Consider the desires of your sinful nature that you struggle with now. How will your emotional health be affected as the Spirit of God helps you to work through this struggle?

9. What does it mean to live by the Spirit?

10. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?

11. What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit?

12. When have you been able to care for others by encouraging them to focus on this work of the Spirit in their lives?

13. How does the state of your emotional health affect that of those around you?