

Pressure Points in people's lives

Resources caring people have

Introduction.

Paul Goodliff in his book 'Care in a Confused Climate' writes, 'The pastoral care of people as whole persons, the cure of souls as it is still sometimes called, has been the great task of generations of Christian leaders, be they priests, ministers or pastors'. It has also been the task of generations of Church members as well. God not only calls all his people to be caring people but he also equips us and resources us. We just sometimes don't recognise the resources we have.

I am writing this on a computer. The more my knowledge and awareness of how this computer grows, the greater my ease in writing. There are many things about this computer which are of no value to me, simply because I don't know they are there, or I don't know how to use them. In the same way we all carry many valuable resources around with us, which we often don't appreciate. We just need to be made more aware of these resources that every Christian has, so that we can be motivated to use them more freely. It is as we look over these resources and begin to appreciate them then like the resources in my computer we will discover and become more aware of what is available to us, and what God has provided for his people to help them be caring people in his world.

Study 1

The resource of past experiences

Introduction

When we experience pain we can comfort people who are hit with a similar loss. When we have experienced God's comfort we are given the opportunity for us to use that comfort to help others. To have someone go through the experience we are going through, and to share the insights they have gained, can bring us great comfort and understanding.

The big picture

1. How do you respond when someone says you will be able to help others because of what you are going through?

The biblical picture

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 1vs. 1-11

2. Why is Paul so full of praise to God?

3. According to Paul, how do our troubles and sufferings serve a worthwhile purpose?

4. What has suffering taught Paul about God?

5. After talking about suffering in general earlier in the chapter, why do you think Paul goes into much greater details about what he suffered in Asia [vs. 8-11]?

6. How was Paul helped by those he had helped?

Being in the picture

7. How can each of these characteristics of God that Paul learned about through suffering help you in times of trouble?

8. Recall a specific time when you experienced trouble or suffering. What did you learn about yourself, others and God?

9. How have you been able to help others because you went through that experience?

10. We need to experience healing in order to bring God's healing to others. In what areas of your life do you need God to heal you?

11. When have you been helped by someone who has experienced suffering in his or her past?

12. How do you feel more ready to help others because of what you see in this passage?

Study 2

The resource of a healthy self-image

Introduction

Self-esteem [feelings about self] and self- concept [knowledge about self] make up our self-image. The truth is that the way I think about myself has a tremendous effect on the way I feel about myself and the way I respond to others. It is exciting to look at the life of Jesus and see how clearly he knew who he is. Because of this he felt sure of himself, and was able to focus on others, even when he was facing his own death.

The big picture

1. What does it mean to accept yourself?

The biblical picture

Read John 13 vs.1-17

2. What did Jesus know about himself? [vs. 1-3]
3. what was the significance of that knowledge?
4. How was Jesus able to care for others as a result of knowing who he was [vs. 4-5, 13-14, 16]?
5. besides performing the menial task of foot-washing Jesus was able to accept the disciples as they were. What evidence is there of this throughout this passage?
6. Why is accepting people vital in order to be able to care for them?

Being in the picture

7. Jesus's knowledge about himself was directly tied to his secure relationship with God. How does your knowledge about yourself compare and contrast with that of Jesus? [Consider his sense of purpose, timing, and relationship with God in your answer]
8. Does what you know about yourself [self-concept] always correlate with how you feel about yourself [self-esteem]? Why or why not?
9. Jesus said 'You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.' How should your self-image be affected by the fact you are related to Jesus and are his student and subject?
10. As a follower of Jesus, in what ways do you need to grow toward a healthier self-image?
11. How can you do this?
12. How can we help others grow towards a healthier self-image?
13. Jesus knew who he was. He served and accepted others freely. How does your self-image and knowing who you are in Christ affect the way you are able to care for others?

Study 3

The resource of listening

Introduction.

There is an old saying 'enemies talk, friends listen' Paul Tournier the 20th century medical doctor put it 'It is impossible to over-emphasise the immense need human beings have to be listened to, in most conversations, although there is a good deal of talk, there is no real listening, such conversations are no more than a dialogue of the deaf'. It is not easy to be a good listener. We often want to talk; to offer advice when confronted by a person in need, but sometimes being listened to is what a person needs the most.

The big picture

1. Would you describe yourself as more a listener or a talker? Why?

The biblical picture

Read Isaiah Ch 50vs 4-5 [I take it that passage is a prophetic description of Jesus, it finds it's ultimate fulfilment in him]

2. According to this passage, what has God done for you in Jesus?

3. What do you think it means 'to have an instructed tongue' and 'to know that word that sustains the weary'?

4. What does it mean to 'listen like one being taught' and to open your ears?

Read Isaiah Ch 42 vs. 1-4 [This is again another passage which I take it, finds it's ultimate fulfilment in Jesus]

5. How is Jesus gentleness demonstrated in vs. 2-3?

6. How might we 'break a bruised reed' or 'snuff out a smouldering wick' by the way we listen?

7. Often when people are hurting, it is over an injustice. What hope does this passage to such a person?

Being in the picture

8. How do you think listening to God is related to knowing how to listen and respond to people in need?

9 Think of a time when you were weary and someone said just the right thing to you. What was it like?

10. Describe a time when short cuts were taken and someone tried to say the right thing to you without long hard listening?

11. Why is faithfulness to the person speaking vital when listening to someone?

12. Think of a person in your life who needs to be listened to. What can you do this week to begin to meet that need?

Study 4

The resource of obedience

Introduction

Following God is not an easy task, it often calls for a re-adjustment and a re-assessment of our priorities. It can lead us to great pain and suffering, but it can also lead to great peace and contentment. It is important not to oversimplify the process of accepting God's will, what God asks of us is the loan of our body, but to say yes to this can often involve a struggle. Jesus struggled to accept the task his Father had for him. We shouldn't be surprised if there is a struggle for us.

The big picture

1. When have you had difficulty in accepting God's will for your life? Why?

The biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 22 vs. 39-53

2. How do you see Jesus dealing with the agony of facing the cross?
3. What evidence is there that Jesus' statement 'yet not my will, but your be done' was acceptance, not passive resignation?
4. Throughout this passage what signs do you see of Christ's deep sorrow?
5. What signs do you see of the disciples' deep sorrow? [vs. 45]
6. What further evidence is there in verses 47-53 that Jesus meant it when he said "your will be done"?
7. How were others affected by Jesus obedience? [consider the crowd, disciples, Judas, servant whose ear was cut off]

Being in the picture

8. when might your caring for others cause you sorrow?
9. What about how Jesus dealt with accepting the cross might help you to obey God especially in the area of caring for others?
10. In what ways have you experienced the deep peace and the deep sorrow than can come with accepting difficult and painful tasks?
11. How are you affected by those who are able to truly obey God?
12. How is willingness to obey God a resource when caring for someone in need?

Study 5

The resource of Scripture

Introduction.

In 1967 JB Phillips wrote a book called 'The Ring of Truth', in it he spoke of how he went about translating the New Testament into modern English. Although he tried to remain emotionally detached from the work, he put it, "I found again and again that the material under my hands was strangely alive." He described the experience of like an electrician who was trying to rewire an old house where the electricity had not been turned off. The Bible has eternal, historical and literary qualities, so that when we use it as resource to help others we need to take these three qualities seriously. We take the historical nature of the Bible seriously, we learn about the time, language culture and geography of the biblical world. This will help us understand how God's Word spoke to those who first heard it. We take the literary nature of the Bible seriously. The authors communicated through stories, poems, letters, and parables. To appreciate the style will help us understand what God is saying. We need to take the eternal nature of the Bible seriously, as we read it carefully and prayerfully we will be helped to understand how God's Word speaks to us today, and the people we are caring for.

Sharing Scripture may not always be the right thing to help someone, but often it is. We need to appreciate what Scripture is like and how it can help.

The big picture

1. How does God most clearly communicate to you?

The biblical picture

Read psalm 19

2. What does creation reveal about God? vs. 1-6

3. The terms law, statutes, precepts, command, ordinances in this passage are synonyms [word identical] for Scripture. In verses 7-11, how are the Scriptures described?

4 What do they do?

5. From which of these effects of Scripture have you benefited? Explain?

6. What is the overall effect of the Psalmist's encounter with God through nature and the Scriptures [vs. 12-14]?

Being in the picture

7. What have you learnt about *God* through your observation and enjoyment of nature?

8. If you did not have the Bible and could only learn about *God* through nature, what information would you be lacking about him?

9. How has this Psalm been helpful to you as you consider how important Scripture is to someone in need?

10. Sharing Scripture can be done in many ways. Here are three.

- a. Sharing a passage or verse directly
- b. Sharing how we have been affected or changed by Scripture
- c. Simply living out the principles of Scripture

How might you appropriately and effectively share Scripture with someone in need this week?

Study 6

The resource of prayer

Introduction.

Hudson Taylor the 20th century missionary to China said "Man is moved by God through prayer alone". Prayer is an invitation to explore the boundlessness of God. When we think of prayer like this then we can begin to see how it can be a resource for us in caring for others. Sir Thomas Browne the 17th Century Christian writer put it that man is the great amphibian, he lives in two worlds at once. which simply reminds us that people cannot be simply defined by this world alone. So prayer becomes a resource in helping us understand the person we are seeking to help.

The big picture

1 What is a good father like?

The biblical picture

Read Luke Ch 11vs. 1-13.

2. What caused the disciples to ask Jesus to teach them to pray?
3. What is the significance of Jesus telling the disciples to address God as Father?
4. Why can God be trusted more than earthly parents? [vs. 11-13]
5. Think about each petition of Jesus's prayer. What would it mean to you if God granted each one of them?
6. How is each of Jesus's requests a priority of life and therefore central to what we should pray for?
7. According to verse 8, what causes the man to give his friend the bread?

Being in the picture

8. What does it mean to approach God boldly?
9. Sometimes a way to care for someone is to let them help you. What usually causes you to hesitate to ask a friend for help?
10. What is implied about your relationship with a person when you do ask him or her for help?
11. How is our relationship with God like a friendship?
12. In what ways does it surpass friendship?
13. Jesus promises, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you". How do you respond to these words as you think about praying for yourself and for others?

Study 7

The resource of the Holy Spirit

Introduction.

It was the American Church leader Carl Henry who put it " The Holy Spirit is still a displaced person. Whenever the Church makes the Spirit of God a refugee, the Church not the Spirit becomes a vagabond." The purpose of the Holy Spirit broadly speaking is not to make Christians happy but to make them useful and effective. He is given not for our enjoyment, but rather for our employment. Jesus spoke about the gift of the Holy Spirit in the context of living life effectively in the kingdom of God. He said that the basic need of any disciple is power from above. The word he used for power means ability. The Holy Spirit is a person in relation in the Godhead who personally offers himself and his abilities as a resource, which enables us to be effective in how we care for others. What God offers us in the gift of the Holy is in abundance. God offers us the Holy Spirit, we receive what God offers, we don't earn this gift. Rather we experience and enjoy the relationship we have with the Holy Spirit, and so draw on his resources to reach out in our care for others.

The big picture

1. Describe a time when you felt the need of the Holy Spirit's work in your life?

The biblical picture

Read Romans Ch 8vs 1-27

2. Verses 1-4 declare the good news that we have been set free from sin and death by God's Spirit through Jesus. How does Paul contrast this life in the Spirit with life in the sinful nature [vs. 5-11]?

3. According to verses 12-17, in what ways does the Holy Spirit become involved in our lives?

4. How have you experienced the Spirit's involvement in your life in those ways?

5. Why is suffering still present in the lives of Christians[vs. 17-23]?

6. What do you think it means to share in Christ's sufferings?

7. According to this passage, what is the meaning of hope? [vs. 24-25]

8. Describe how God's Spirit helps us in our weakness? [vs. 26-27]

Being in the picture

9. How does hope affect our ability to endure suffering?
10. What potential suffering do you fear?
11. What difference does it make to you that God's Spirit would be living in you; praying for you and giving you hope during such a crisis?
12. What evidence does Paul give to show God cares about you?
13. How can you relate this to someone who is suffering and who might question God's concern?
14. How is God's Spirit a resource to you as you care for someone who is suffering?

Study 8

The resource of the Church

Introduction

A group of visitors were viewing the Vietnam memorial wall in Washington DC, they couldn't understand the significance of the statue next to the memorial wall. The guide explained that the state of three men, one black, a Hispanic and a white soldier all standing close together was symbolic of how it had been fighting in Vietnam, that never before had so many minorities from one country been involved in such a conflict. They were standing close together because in the Vietnam conflict they learned, like never before, how much each soldier needs each other.

The church when all is stripped away, is a gathering of people summoned by God to listen to him and act upon his word. It was the 20th century Christian writer Alan Stibbs who put it "God made man for himself. The chief end of God in the creation of man was to have a people in which he could say I am their, and they are mine. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. It is therefore God's unmistakable purpose to have a people of his own." Here is a resource, which God has provided the Christian community to help in the task of caring for people.

The big picture

1. When have you been supported by a group?

The biblical picture

Read Acts Ch 4 vs. 23-37

2. Imagine that you were in the group of believers to which John and Peter returned. What would have been your reaction?

3. What was the reaction of the believers?

4. What do you think were the physical, emotional and spiritual benefits of such unity in this community of believers?

5. The believers addressed God as Sovereign Lord. How would you define Sovereign?

6. Two thirds of the prayer they offered focused on God. What did they finally request in the last part of their prayer?

7. When they asked for boldness, God answered mightily. The meeting place shook, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God openly and with confidence. What was the community like after this? [vs. 32-37]

Being in the picture

8. When have you experienced the benefits of this kind of unity in our Church life?

9. Verse 34 says, "There was no needy persons among them" How is our Church life similar to the one here in Acts, and how is it different?

10. How is our Church community a resource for our own spiritual well being?

11. How can our Church provide support to someone in your life who is in need?