

DO NOT SHOOT:

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND PAIN

PLEASE START HERE!

During Nkhani za M'maboma on 19th August 2001, it was announced that a certain man dived into a speeding vehicle in Blantyre after testing HIV positive at Malawi AIDS Counseling and Resources Organization (MACRO). He could not take the news.

A friend lost his first-born daughter several months ago. She was staying with a sick aunt and her husband. During the hospitalization of the aunt, the husband (the girl's uncle) started sleeping with her to quench his libido, the aunt died (of course with all signs of HIV/AIDS) and her uncle discovered the girl pregnant. Her stepmother could not take her in the house. She was tossed back and forth and finally lived with her sickly aged granny. She had all the signs of depression. The rejection by her parents, the sexual abuse by her uncle and the fear of the possibility of being infected with the virus might have contributed to her premature death.

The HIV pandemic continues its relentless march into every corner of our beloved country, leaving untold misery in its wake. Malawi is a nation that is mourning. Is there anyone who has not been affected by the scourge? It is reported that up to 70% of our hospital beds are occupied by persons with HIV/AIDS related conditions and that 46% of the new HIV/AIDS infections in 1997 were in young people aged between 15 and 24 years of age. These are not just statistics; they are not figures but human beings: husbands and wives, parents, brothers and sisters.

Victims, victims, victims. Victims are scattered all over. Some are victimized through marriage, while others through birth and yet some through sexual abuse. Of course some are victims of their own carelessness. But all these have one thing in common: they are dying. Both young and old, rich and poor; educated and illiterate are victimized. The church is not spared either. We have lost and continue to lose a lot of members from the body of Christ. In the wake of such tragedy, is there anything we can do as a Church? Is there any corrective; preventive measure we can employ to reduce the spread or better still put to halt the deadly advance of the pandemic? For both the infected and affected, is there any message of hope we can give?

There is indeed pain in the society. People are hurting and in need of help. In the early church, hurting or troubled individuals found support, security, practical help, love and wise counsel under one roof; the church. It was not only the church leadership that did the helping. It was everyone's responsibility. It was a key part of the ministry of the Church. It is my prayer that this Bible study will give hope to those who are hurting and persuade the "I don't care" to start caring for those around them. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine (the hungry, strangers, poor, sick and prisoners) you did for me (Mathew 25:40).

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This study was borne out of a concern that the SCOM UCS leadership has towards the HIV/AIDS crisis. We cannot pretend that the pandemic is not our problem. We know that the HIV problem is not only a medical problem. It is a moral and spiritual problem besides being medical. It affects the whole human being.

This study aims at appealing to all of us to join hands in fighting the problem. John Stott says, "if something can be done, to do nothing is evil". We know that something must be done and we do not want to be spectators but participators in finding the right solutions to the problem. We must be involved in prevention to check the spread; we must be involved in restoring those who are knocked down by the killer virus (the wounded) and also offer comfort to those who are terminally sick.

I am so thankful to the UCS leadership for their tireless efforts in ensuring that something is done to address the problem. I do hope that the contents of this study will speak to us all and stir us into prompt corrective action. It is my prayer that the study will prepare us to handle the crisis humanly and promptly.

Enjoy a fruitful Study.

Patrick Kaudzu.
March 2007.

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STUDY ONE:

CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES: HIDING BEHIND SELF DECEPTION

Introduction

Some said “ of all deceptions, self deception is the most deadly. And of all the deceived people, the self deceived are the least likely to discover their fraud!” Despite what HIV/AIDS has done in our world since it was first reported, there are still some people who think it is just the government’s way of trying to keep people from enjoying the pleasure of sex. In one West Africa country for instance; AIDS is defined as “America’s Intention of Discouraging Sex”. While others think it is the Western World’s way of reducing overpopulation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet others, believe that there is nothing we can do about it; all we need to do is enjoy sex and then die. The consequence of this denial of reality has created a field day for the virus and it continues to wipe nations.

The truth about AIDS is that it is real and has potential to wipe whole nations if people chose not to change their sexual behaviors. If the view held in some Christian circles that AIDS is a punishment from God to the world; then the church is responsible for the punishment God is inflicting in the world. Where was the church when the world was decaying morally? Of what use is Christianity if it cannot reverse the moral decay in world in which it is meant to make an impact as salt? As watchmen in the walls, did we blow the trumpet louder when things began getting sour?” if the society is rotting and the virus progressing at alarming rates, what has happened to the preservatives? Have we become irrelevant and useless, fit for the refuse pit?

Study Questions: Read Hosea 4:1-

A NATION THAT MOURNING.

1. Describe the situation of Israel as reported by Hosea.
2. What are some of the social ills described in this next? In what way(s) would the situation of Israel during Hosea’s time be likened to our situation?
3. **“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge”. Verse 6.**
 - (a) What do you think led to this ignorance that destroyed the people?
 - (b) If the people had known that knowledge was important for their survival, could they have rejected it?
4. People in Malawi know that adultery and sexual immorality are spiritually sinful and morally unacceptable and yet they seem not to care.
 - (a) What do you think is the reason why the sexual behaviour of Malawians seems to be far from improving?
 - (b) What would happen to the AIDS crisis in Malawi if people choose to treat it lightly?

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B. LIKE PEOPLE; LIKE PRIESTS.

5. What are some of the weaknesses of the ‘Men of God’ of Israel at this time?
6. **“You stumble day and night and the prophets stumble with you...” verse 5.**
 - (a) Between the prophets and ordinary people, who has influence on the other?
 - (b) There is surely an increase in “priestly” people in our land; what do you think is the reason why the moral decay seems to be getting worse?
7. If the prophets stumble with the people, and priests lose their prophetic voice, is there any source of direction and hope for the people in a nation?
8. Instead of promoting abstinence, our rules urge us to accept the condom as an alternative; how does this scenario liken to that of Israel (verses 16-18)? What is the likely consequence of this?
9. What do you think is the reason why sub-Saharan Africa; the Christian part of Africa has 23 million AIDS cases out of the world total of 33 million cases?

Memory verse

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I will also ignore your children”. Hosea 4:6.

Study two: WHEN PEOPLE DIE.....!

Introduction

A story is told of an eight-year-old boy who witnessed a fatal road accident while in the company of his parents. He was so affected by what he saw that he uttered no word nor ate anything for many hours afterwards. He even refused to sleep. His parents were so worried that past midnight his father tried to persuade him to sleep. Overcome by emotion, he asked his father; “Daddy, when people die, can we sleep”?

Malawi is a nation that is grieving; hundreds of people are dying everyday and others are battling with life on their deathbeds. We see people wasting away; you can count the number of their hair. Life is being lost just like that. We are told that every day 19 new cases are added on the list of the infected. Yet we seem not to notice that all around us death is claiming multiples of victims. It is said that in the university of Malawi, one person dies of AIDS every week but the annual total is over three hundred deaths. Death of course is inevitable but most of the deaths today are premature. Can we do something to ensure that these premature deaths are prevented?

Study Questions:

1. How do you describe the nation of Malawi?
2. What are some of the outstanding issues that weigh us down as a nation?
3. What do you think are the factors that have contributed to these issues?
4. Life has become unbearable for many people; there is an acute shortage of food, high rate of unemployment, increased crime rate, mass suffering from HIV/AIDS related infections.
 - (a) What corrective actions can we take to reverse the situation?

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- (b) Is it possible for the government alone to handle the situation?
5. Behavior change is deemed to be a very important aspect of prevention of HIV/AIDS.
 - a. Why do you think change in behavior is critical in the fight against AIDS?
 - b. In your assessment, do you think we have made any achievement in this area?
 6. Some of the premature deaths we see are a result of wrong choices made in the area of sexuality. What role can we play as members of the body of Christ to help to help people make right choices?.
 7. **“Just as a man is destined to die once after that face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.....” Hebrews 9:27-28.** What message of hope can we give to those who are facing death?

Memory Verse.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” Matthew 9:27.

Study Three.

THE TROUBLED AND DISGRACED SURVIVORS (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

Introduction

Our society is increasingly becoming individualistic. Ours is a society where everyone minds his own business. Just as fences are erected around our houses (to keep away armed robbers which in turn keeps away our neighbors), social fences are rising from time to time. It is not uncommon today to see people neglecting those around them as they pursue their visions in life. Shauli Yako (that’s your problem) seems to be the slogan most of us operate by. We do not mind stepping on those who are in our way if that will help us reach our goals in life. What a tragedy!

Nehemiah was leading a comfortable life in the Citadel of Susan. All was well for him as he served the king. To use contemporary language, the Lord has prospered him. He was wallowing (or was it swimming?) in comfort. Probably he had the 3c’s of his time! He needed not worry of the future. But when he got news of the condition of Jerusalem; thousands of kilometers away; he was so affected that he wept, fasted and prayed. We are very close to those suffering in our land yet we seem to have developed a kind of immunity. The spirit of Nehemiah has not yet consumed us! We cannot pretend that all is well when actually people are suffering and in disgrace.

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Study questions:

A A DISTURBING REPORT (vs 1 – 4)

1. Where was Nehemiah and what was he doing?
2. What was the condition of Jerusalem and its inhabitants at this time?
3. Jerusalem lied in ruins while the survivors were troubled and disgraced.
 - (a) Who was responsible for this state of affairs?
 - (b) Why was Nehemiah so concerned about Jerusalem when he was in comfort in Susan?
4. In what ways would Malawi's present situation be likened to that of Jerusalem. Who is to blame for our situation?
5. Those who survived the exile might have felt lucky when others were taken captive. Yet they eventually suffered disgrace, what lesson does this offer to those who may feel the same in our time?

B. HEART RENDING PRAYER (v 5 -11)

6. What was Nehemiah's immediate response when he got the report?
7. Nehemiah was comfortable in exile and therefore not directly responsible for what was happening in Jerusalem at that time.
 - (a) What do you think made him assume responsibility for the condition of Jerusalem (vs 6 -7)?
 - (b) If sin was the great trouble in Jerusalem, can we say the people deserved the disgrace they were in?
8. What role has sin played to push Malawi's situation to where it is?
9. What is the most responsible thing for the church at this time? Are we prepared to enter into Nehemiah's shoes?

Memory verse.

“when I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven”
Nehemiah 1:4, Emphasis, mine.

Study four

LET US ARISE AND REBUILD (Nehemiah 2).

Introduction:

When a crisis arises, people respond in so many ways. The HIV/AIDS crisis has given birth to a lot of organizations (NGO) that try to address the situation. While some of these NGOs are genuine and committed to addressing the situation, others use it as a springboard for personal poverty alleviation. It is not surprising therefore to see that while a number of NGOs is increasing, the HIV/AIDS situation is getting worse by worse by the day.

Nehemiah saw the crisis in Jerusalem as one that needed an immediate response. He took an unpaid leave from master and left Jerusalem. He was ready to leave aside his comfort in Susan in order to help those who were in great distress. Usually those who are directly affected rarely see the right course of action. They focus on their trouble. We must be driven by compassion, like Nehemiah, to take the right corrective action; rebuild the broken society.

Study Questions:

a. SHOULD I NOT BE SAD....! HEHEMIAH 2:1-10

1. How did King Artaxerxes come to know of the situation in Jerusalem?
2. (a) After weeping, praying and fasting; what next step did Nehemiah take to correct the situation.
(b) Will prayer and fasting alone enable us deal with the HIV/AIDS crisis in Malawi? What else do we need to do?
3. Why was it necessary for Nehemiah to ask for letters from the King? In what ways, can the circular world help the church in restoring godly values in our society?

B. SHARING THE VISION: verses 11-18

4. Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah set out by night to inspect the walls of Jerusalem.
(a) Why did he choose to do it with a few men under the cover of the night?
(b) How would research in the cause and impact of HIV/AIDS in our society enable the church to tackle the situation better?
5. “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned by fire....” Verse 17a.
(a) How did Nehemiah’s approach to the problem help inspire the troubled remnants to join forces with him in the rebuilding programmed?

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- (b) Would the people's reaction be the same if Nehemiah had chosen to accuse them as responsible for the situation they were in?
6. Though guilty of breaking God's laws, the people were made to see themselves as part of the solution.
- (a) How can this strategy help the church rebuild Malawi whose morality has sunk so slow?
 - (b) In what way would the knowledge that God is gracious motivate those who have given up hope in life due to the disgrace we are in?

C. HANDLING THE CRITICS: v 10, 19-20; 4:16-23.

- 7. Tobia and Sanballat were very disturbed when they got the news that someone was promoting the welfare of the Israelites. What do you think is the reason why these guys were disturbed in this way? Is it possible that they benefiting from the misery of the Israelites?
- 8. We know that the condom is not an answer to the HIV/AIDS problem in Malawi. What would be the reason why the "pro-condomists" criticize the Church's emphasis on abstinence?
- 9. What lesson can the church learn from Nehemiah's response to the critics(4:16-23

Memory verse

"..come, let us rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. 2:17b"

Study Five

TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. (NEHEMIAH 3)

Introduction

"If something can be done; to do nothing is to do evil. (John Stott). The situation in Jerusalem was so bad, the inhabitants were disillusioned. They never thought rebuilding would be possible with the enemy in their midst. It took one Nehemiah to step onto the scene with a determined radical heart to change things. His presence made a very big difference. He mobilized and motivated the same people who were satisfied with the status quo to change the situation.

The situation in Malawi seems hopeless. The HIV/AIDS crisis seems irreversible; corruption seems to reign even in high places, the economy diving at a terrible speed; unemployment torturing the unemployed etc. Is there hope for this nation? Can the efforts of a few young people who do not even have a voice make a difference? The answer is a resounding "Yes" we can make a significant difference! Usually we miss important opportunities because we want to do what every body else is doing. We must start from where we are good at and others will do they are good at also.

Study Questions.

A. A TIMELY AND A GODLY INSPIRING. Example vv 1-2, 17, 22, 28.

1. What is so unique about the way the walls of Jerusalem were build?
2. “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priest went to work and build the sheep gate.....” verse 1.
 - (a) Why was it necessary for the “men of God” to get involved in the initial stages of the project?
 - (b) Would an active involvement of the Church in the fight against HIV/AIDS, corruption and other social ills make any difference in our society?
3. Nehemiah means “The Lord Comforts”. In what ways did his arrival in Jerusalem bring comfort to the troubled and disgraced remnants? Does the Church today have the ability to bring comfort to the afflicted?
4. Eliashib and his fellow priests had been in Jerusalem long before Nehemiah’s arrival to rebuild the ruins:
 - (a) Why did these men of God fail to embark on the project?
 - (b) In what way(s) does this situation describe the state of the Church in Malawi today? Why have we been reactive and not pro-active?

B. PARTICIPATORS AND NOT SPECTATORS (vv 3-32)

5. Rebuilding the wall wasn’t going to be an easy task. What made it possible for Nehemiah to accomplish it in 52 days?
6. Perfume-makers (v 8) and daughters (v 12) had their part to play in the project. If the HIV/AIDS issue is to be contained in this nation, is there room for spectators among the citizens of Malawi? In what way can you participate as an individual?
7. Nehemiah knew what needed to be done for Jerusalem to regain its glory. He motivated the remnants instead of condemning them.
 - (a) Does the church know what needs to be done to combat the HIV/AIDS crisis, corruption, deforestation, unemployment, etc?
 - (b) How can the Church and Para-church organizations successfully correct the situation in Malawi?
8. We know that the condom is not the solution to the high infection rates of HIV/AIDS (despite the attention it receives):
How can we actively participate in the fight against HIV/AIDS without necessarily condemning the efforts of those who see the condom as their only practical answer?

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Memory Verse

*“Above the Horse Gate, the priest made repairs, each in front of his own house”
Nehemiah 3:28.*

Study Six

IN DEFENCE OF THE POOR (Nehemiah 5:1-19)

Introduction

The poor are the voiceless in any society. They are the most taken advantage group of people. Others believe that poverty is a curse and nothing can be done about it. If you are poor, then you must remain silent. On the other hand we hear the money talks. Money has a mouth and an ability to talk. The poor are a majority in our society. Poverty robs people of their dignity. President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki is on record that poverty; and not HIV; causes AIDS. Whatever people believe and say about poverty, one thing is clear that the poor undergo a lot of pain; mentally, socially and physically. They have lost their ability to voice out their feelings, who would pay notice after all?

As the work progressed, Nehemiah was soon to discover that the disgrace of the remnants had many faces. There was poverty that robbed some of the citizens their status. They were enslaved by fellow Israelites!. They had no food, no inheritance and no power. Slaves do not have rights. They dance to the tunes of their masters. Nehemiah had to deal with the problem if the programme was to really to liberate the people. Fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic must not only be done on the medical front. It must be done on the social, spiritual and economic fronts as well if we are to be successful.

Study Questions

A. THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR MASSES: Nehemiah 5:1-5

1. What charges did the poor among the remnants raise against their fellow Israelites?
2. **“We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards and houses....., we have had to borrow money Verses 3 and 4.**
 - (a) What are the reasons that led to the poor doing the above things?
 - (b) Did mortgaging their property and borrowing money from lending institutions and individuals improve the people’s situation?
3. As the shortage of food rages on during the months of December to March 2002 people were forced to sell whatever property they have at give away prices (goats at K200, chicken at K50.), while maize ranges from K850 to K1500 for a fifty-kilogram bag. People are taking advantage of the suffering of the masses.

- (a) In what ways are Malawians guilty of the same sin as those of Israel's during the time of Nehemiah?
- (b) When people take advantage of the poor instead of helping them, can God bless them?

B. A SHARP REBUKE (5:6-11)

- 4. How did Nehemiah react to the charges that were filed by the poor against their well to do brothers?
- 5. Many individuals, organizations and churches have amassed wealth at the expense of the people.
 - (a) If God were to make a radical response to the cries of the poor masses, what would happen to those found guilty?
 - (b) What would be the most effective means of empowering the poor masses for self-sufficiency?
- 6. What example did Nehemiah and associates set as regards business transactions? How did Nehemiah expect the others to respond to his example?

C. NOBLES AND OFFICIALS WITHOUT HONOUR (55:21-19)

- 7. Priests, nobles, officials, governors were meant to speak on behalf of the masses. In what way did these honorable lose their honour? vv 12, 15.
- 8. Did Nehemiah exercise his rights as a governor? Why is the spirit of sacrifice essential among the “nobles” in the fight against the social ills?
- 9. Unless we do something to improve the welfare of the poor, they will remain in that vicious circle of poverty for life. What can we do as Christians to meaningfully alleviate the poverty and improve the welfare of the poor masses in Malawi?

Memory verse

“...what you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? Neh 5:9”.

Study Seven

PREVENTION IS THE CHEAPEST OPTION: MINIMISE THE AMBULANCE SERVICES (Ephesians 5:1-33).

Introduction.

A story is told of a church that stood between a hospital and a factory. It so happened that everyday someone got injured in the factory and would be carried to the hospital on a stretcher by fellow workers. The victims ended up losing a lot of blood in the process. To reduce the loss of blood and of course life, Christians from this church decided to do something; they raised funds and bought a brand new ambulance, which they operated between the hospital and the factory free. Thus victims could reach the hospital faster and lose less blood. This pleased the members of the churches.

After sometime in the ambulance business, members realized that the number of casualties kept increasing and the ambulance was kept busy cruising between the factory and hospital. The Christians decided to find out for themselves what was wrong in the factory. What was it that caused these casualties? Could the church do something to minimize or better still stop the injuries? They contacted the management for an inspection of the factory. When they did, they discovered that most machines were below standard and running parts were not covered as recommended. These were the ones that injured people. The church lobbied for improved working conditions and replacement of the machines. Once this was done, very few casualties came from the factory; the ambulance was no longer a priority.

The HIV/AIDS situation in Malawi is a serious one. The rate at which it is claiming lives of our dear ones, the number of orphans widows and widowers; it leaves behind, the impact it causes on the socio-economic status of the country etc must cause us to critically look at our methods of dealing with it. Surely we cannot only rely on medical means to handle a problem that is moral, medical, social and spiritual in nature. Perhaps this is the right time for us to overhaul our value systems as regards our sexuality, who else can successfully lobby for behavioural change apart from the church?

Study Questions

A. ABSTINENCE MOTIVATED BY THE FEAR OF GOD: vv 1-7

1. What does it mean to be imitators of God? Is it possible to achieve this especially in our time?
2. Mention some of the things Paul cautions must never occur among Christians? Are they really absent in our lives or groups?

The sexual pressure is real struggle for many people both young and old; what with the pleasure that is derived from it. Many would rather enjoy pleasure of sex now and handle the pain that come with pre-marital and extra-marital sex later (pleasure before pain). How would the words of Paul to the believers in Ephesians motivates us to endure the pain of delaying sex before marriage rather than enjoying the short pleasure of sex outside marriage?

B. GOD FOR THE WILL OF GOD! Vv 8-21

4. There are a lot of activities that are done under the cover of darkness.
 - (a) Why does Paul call them fruitless? Do we not see some of the fruits of these acts in our society?
 - (b) Instead of being party to these deeds, what is Paul encouraging us to do?
5. How would knowing God's will for our lives helps us to live wisely in this world were sex is regarded as a commodity for sale? What is God's will for us regarding sex?
6. **"Do not get drunk with wine which leads to debauchery, instead be filled with the spirit?" verse 18.**
 - (a) How would being filled with the Holy Spirit determine our actions in this world?
 - (b) In what ways would be principle in verse 21 help us in our relationship with one another?

C. FOCUS ON THE FAMILY: vv 22-23

7.
 - (a) What is the role of each one of these in the marriages set up:
 - husband?
 - wife?
 - (b) If the couple ignores these roles, will the family still run as expected?
8. **"As the family goes, so goes the nation" is an important principles that spells the expected impact of the family in society.**
 - (a) How would a string family help in the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis in our country?
 - (b) What role does the church play in strengthening the family?
9. What would happen to the HIV/AIDS situation in Malawi if abstinence was the goal for all singles; the will of God the pursuit for all people and biblical principles the basis for every family?

Memory verse

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them"
Ephesians 5:12

PART B:

RESTORING THE FALLEN: AND HEALING THE WOUNDED.

Introduction

In every generation, there are always people who are selfless, they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. They consider their lives of less value than the lives of others. They think of the others more than themselves. Such people are “other centered” while the majority of us are self-centered. For other centered people, what happens to others is more important than what happens to them. Such sacrifice often leaves us amazed.

The situation in Malawi about AIDS, Corruption, unemployment, poverty etc is so bad that unless some of us deliberately choose to forgo our comfort for the sake of others, things will go from bad to worse. Nehemiah left the pleasures of the palace to those in need; Esther had to put her position at stake for the sake of the Jews. We must be willing for the sake of Christ and our nation, to move out of our comfort zones and do something. By the way, if Malawians suffer and perish, will God blame non-Malawians for not doing something?

Study Questions.

A. WHEN DEATH THREATENS THE MASSES... 4:1-8

1. What caused Mordecai, uncle to Queen Esther, to tear his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes?
2. “...is there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes” v 3.
 - (a) What significance did sackcloth and ashes make in times of great distress?
 - (b) What would be our form of sackcloth and ashes in times of trouble?
3. What was Queen Esther’s immediate reaction to the news that her uncle was in sackcloth and ashes? What made her react like that?
4. When calamity strikes, very few people want to be associated with it.
 - (a) What is your first reaction when you see or hear that someone is HIV positive?
 - (b) Why has it taken a long time for the church to get involved in HIV/AIDS issues? Could the current situation be different if the church got involved earlier?

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B. YOU ARE NOT IMMUNE... vv 9-17.

5. When Esther understood the magnitude of the problem, she was prepared to take a risk and ignore the traditions.
 - (a) What would happen to any individual who approached the king in the inner courts without being summoned?
 - (b) What made Esther break this law despite knowing it very well?
6. In trying to protect her life and position in the palace, Queen Esther would lose them both; in risking her life for the sake of the Jews; she protected both her life and positions (**v 13**). If faced with a similar situation, what would be your reaction?
7. Often times Christians have remained silent and inactive when issues of national importance crop up. We bury our heads in the sand (the ostrich way). What lesson can we learn from the arguments of Mordecai in verse 14? If solutions do not come from Christians, what impact does that make in the nation?
8. **“When this is done, I will go to the king even though it is against the law...”**
verse 16.
 - (a) How did Esther and the rest of the Jews prepare for the risky, unscheduled, illegal encounter with the king?
 - (b) What role would fervent prayer by Christians play in reversing the life threatening issues we face as a nation?
9. Joseph, Daniel and Esther were all young people who had to make serious decisions that affected nations. What is common in these three young people? In what ways can we as young people impact this nation in our time?

Memory verse

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house, you of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another house, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows that you have come to royal position for such a time as this? Esther 4:13:14?”

Study Nine

COMPASSION THAT STIRS ACTION: A LESSON FROM THE GOOD SAMARITAN. Luke 10: 25-37.

Introduction.

A story is told of people who were driving on a road that passed through a forest at night. The forest was known to harbor wild animals. On their way they passed a man going the same direction who desperately tried to stop the vehicle for a lift. They ignored him.

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After driving for some minutes, they met a pair of lions going the opposite direction. Their first reaction was to accelerate in case the lions choose to attack them. Then they remembered the lone man they had just ignored, what will happen to him when he meets the beasts?. They decided to go back to rescue him, they found the lions sharing his carcass. They acted late.

Compassion springs from an attitude that puts you in the same shoes with others. It humbles you to consider others better than yourself. Seeing yourself in the situation of others is the beginning of compassion. How would you feel if you were in their situation and they did nothing to help you? most often we act too late or in time but wrongly. It is not uncommon today on the scene of road accident to see people searching for valuables and not saving life. It is not usual in our time for NGO's and government official to get a lot of money from HIV/AIDS workshops when the infected are lacking proper care, where is the compassion? Is this the way we would want to be treated if the situation was reversed?

Study Questions

A. SELF-JUSTIFICATION: A SERIOUS CONDITION! Luke 10:25- 29

1. What prompted Jesus to say this parable?
2. “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up” 1 Corinthians 8:1. What serious spiritual condition is revealed by this expert in the law? Did this knowledge of the law make him a better person? Why?
3. Most of us are guilty of the sin this expert committed. We have a very good command of the scriptures but fail miserably in applying it in our lives. How would the right knowledge and application of the word of God help us in our response to those who are in need?
4. Self-justification is a common problem among us. What are some of the excuses we make as we try to justify ourselves for not helping those who seek our assistance?

B. MEN OF GOD WHO SHOWED NO PITY! Vv 30-37

5. Recall of a time in your life when you came into contact with someone who was in need of help. How did you respond to the situation? Is that the best you can do?
6. What do you think was the reason why both the priest and Levite took no action to assist the victim? Could it be due to religious obligations?
7. The Samaritan was prepared for inconveniences in his efforts to assist the victim.
 - (a) Mention some of the sacrifices the Samaritan made that made a difference in the life of the victim.

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- (b) What sacrifices can you make as an individual that can make a difference in the life of a victim of HIV/AIDS
8. The subject of my neighbour is a difficult one to define. In the context of the text under study, who is your neighbour?
9. No-governmental Organisations have been found to respond rapidly to situations when they occur. Between the church and NGO's, who is best suited for rapid response in times of crisis?

Memory verse

"...which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The one who had mercy on him.go and likewise" Luke 10:36-37.

Study Ten

COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED: THE POWER OF LOVE.

Introduction

Most of us bad comforters. We rarely offer right comfort to those who need comfort or else we do the right thing at the wrong time. There are times when all those going in pain, needs is not our words but presence. Just to sit by those who are grieving makes a lot of difference. Most often we persuade people to stop weeping when they do so without realizing that the weeping process itself can be a positive step towards healing. The Lord must help us demonstrate our love for those who are in pain even without offering a word. We must learn to be there when we are needed.

Showing compassion, comforting, peace making are the duties of every Christian because our God is a God of compassion, who comforts those in pain. Yet contemporary Christianity has been rightly described as "privately engaging but socially irrelevant". Most of us hold the opinion that my faith is a private matter. We are most often the last in reacting to social issues. But of what significance is Christianity if it cannot address the social ills and issues in society? Has it lost its influence? The love of God must permeate through us to those in need. It is worth nothing that love never fails. May the Lord of love demonstrate His love through us.

Study questions

A. PRIVATELY ENGAGING: Isaiah 58:1-4.

1. Describe the religious practices of these people of God. Was God pleased with their practices?

2. Was God fair to His people when he rebuked them of not doing what is right and not obeying his commands when in actual fact fasting in sackcloth and ashes was their way of life?
3. By pursuing their religious practices, these people had ignored things that really mattered before God.
 - (a) What did God expect these people to do as the real form of fasting?
 - (b) Is God trying to discourage them from carrying out these religious disciplines?
4. Night of prayers, days of prayer and fasting, chain fasting etc are some of the common current practices among God's people.
 - (a) What is supposed to complement these practices if our faith is to be socially relevant?
 - (b) What blessing does God promise the people if they would follow the right practices? (vv 8 -14) .Are they relevant today?

B. COMFORTED TO COMFORT: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

5. Did Paul and his associates as anointed men of God experience any pain and suffering in their ministry. How did God treat them?
6. Suffering and pain is part of our daily life. How can we use our experience to assist those who are facing pain in their lives? If Paul didn't have his share of pain what could be the source of his comfort to others.
7. Could it be possible that the Lord could deliberately allow us to go through certain painful experiences in life in order to prepare us for specific assignments? Compare with Luke 22:31-2
Is it possible for those who have not had any painful experience in life to offer practical assistance to those in pain?
8. Assisting those in pain and those going through hardships demands sacrifice, other centeredness and compassion. What must motivate us to do these despite the cost? (Refer to 2 Corinthians 5:14).
9. Are there any people you know in your community who are desperately in need of your assistance? Will you do something about it?

Memory verse

***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort who comforts in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from god”.
2 Corinthians 1:3-4)***

Study Eleven

IF YOU REALLY KNEW ME: A PLEA AGAINST FINISHING THE WOUNDED

Introduction.

We are quick to judge others and defend ourselves. If others make mistakes, they are a disgrace in the body of Christ and must not be tolerated. If we make mistakes, it is just a weakness that must be understood. God is not yet through with us and need more time. We are hypocrites! We use double standards. The truth is that all of us are not yet perfect; God is still at work in us. He is not yet through. We are all pilgrims in the same pilgrimage. We must thus be able to understand and more so appreciate the fact that having different backgrounds, our struggles are not the same. We struggle at different failure, the Lord does not give us because he sees us as objects of His grace. We must also be patient with those who are fallen and gently help to be in their feet.

Study Questions

1. What sin did King David commit?
2. Nathan the prophet had the freedom, as a man of God, to confront David in a judgmental manner; yet he chose to approach the king gently.
 - (a) Why did he do it this way?
 - (b) What could have been king David's reaction if Nathan came to condemn him harshly?
3. We must condemn sin but spare the sinner. How did Nathan achieve this as he confronted the king?
4. Sin is no respecter of persons, positions and anointing. Sin crouches at our doors desiring to have master us (**Genesis 4:7**).
 - (a) How can the knowledge that the fallen brother or sister is a man being just like us and not immune to temptations help us be more human and understanding in our approach to them?
 - (b) In what way(s) does the pain of others remind us of our own vulnerability to the same? How does this make us more responsible over their predicaments?

B REPENTANCE: A SPIRITUAL MEDICINE (PSALM 51:1-19)

Thomas Watson in his exposition on of repentance declared that it is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients: sight of sin, sorrow for sin, confession of sin, shame for sin, hatred for sin and turning from sin.

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5. Are these ingredients evident in David's confession prayer? Could he have prayed in the same way if he had not understood the effect of sin in his life?
 6. The sexual sin is one that almost all of us struggle with (lustful looks masturbation, physical and sexual contracts) so much so that we stand guilty before God.
 - (a) How would the knowledge that we are all sinners by birth and practice enable us help those who are caught up in sin or suffering the consequences of sin?
 - (b) Does the fact that someone is tested HIV/AIDS positive suggest that he/she is guilty of sexual sin?
7. God's purpose for showing us our sin is not to scare us of His ability to expose and punish us; rather it is to draw us back to him. How did David react when he understood this? (**verses 1-12**) is true repentance possible without this understanding?
- 8. "Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you" verse 13.**
- (a) What would make David well placed to teach transgressors and sinners to turn to God?
 - (b) How would those who have had their share in pain and suffering be of use in the body of Christ? Would we benefit from such rich experiences if we finish our wounded off?
9. How can we make the Gospel of Jesus Christ a real message of hope for those who are in pain?

Memory verse

"Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing Spirit, to sustain me" Psalm 51:10-12).

Study Twelve

I WISH I COULD GET BACK MY LIFE: MAKING RIGHT CHOICES!

Introduction

A young man was dying of HIV/AIDS related infection in a hospital. When an AIDS counselor asked him what his greatest wish was, he had this to say, "**I wish I could be given back my life. I would definitely.**" As he laid in bed seeing his body wasting away, his plans shattered and life cut short in its prime years; he realized that he could have made better choices in life but he did not. He was surely very aware of mistakes he made that cost his life and knew how best he could live his precious life if only he was given a

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second chance. He had finally discovered that life is a gift from someone and when one use or misuses it, a day will come when the owner will task it back from them. Moyo ndi obwereka.

Life is full of choices. Unfortunately have consequences. The consequences may be immediate or delayed. Consequences may affect the chooser and others as well. It is therefore very important that we make right choices lest we face the painful consequences. The principle of “Sowing and Reaping” is a very important principle. You cannot run away from the consequences. They will catch up with you one day. Blessed are those who make right choices in life for they shall avoid painful consequences.

Study questions

A. CHOICES VERSUS CONSEQUENCES (Deuteronomy 30:11-20)

1. What two alternatives did God give for the Israelites to choose from?
2. What does it mean to choose life and what are the benefits?
3. “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficulty for you or beyond you reach.” Deuteronomy 30:11
 - (a) Why do you think most of us opt for choices that displease God despite the fact that His demands from us are within our abilities?
 - (b) What do you think is the reason why many people’s lives are full of regrets? Is it possible to live without regrets?

B. REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE.....Joshua 24:14-27

4. How could remembering what God has done in our lives improve our commitments to Him in the midst of temptations?
5. Joshua knew what was right for Israel yet he did not choose for them. What important lesson does this teach us about choices and consequences?
6. Most of the commitments we see are based emotions.
 - (a) Why did Joshua insist that the people were not able to serve God? Why did he remind them of the nature of God?
 - (b) What is the reason why many Christians compromise their faith when faced with serious decisions to make?

C. IF IT FEELS GOOD; DO IT: CAUTION TO THE WISE. Ecclesiastes 11:7, 12:1-8

7. How does the teacher describe life in this passage? Is this a right description?

8. “The heart is deceitful above all things and above cure...” (Jeremiah 17:9). How would pursuing desires of one’s heart irrespective of God’s will, be dangerous? What do you think is the reason why the teacher seems to encourage this dangerous thing?
9. How best can the youth live their lives in our time with all the pressures young people face?

Memory verse

“Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them...” Ecclesiastes 12:1

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