

Life Issues ● Offering Support to Those in Need

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” –Philippians 2:4

Chance Meeting or God’s Appointment?

Most of us have made the mistake. Not knowing how to respond to someone’s troubles, we blurt out a well-intended “I’ll pray for you.” We may remember that promise...we might not. One remedy is to determine to pray for, or with, that person right there on the spot. In doing so, we acknowledge God as the ultimate source of counsel. Then the question becomes whether or not that’s the *only* response God is calling us to. In our busy culture, it’s so easy to see someone else’s problems as an inconvenience. Worse yet, we might quietly (or not so quietly) wonder what kind of sin led to their difficulties. To do so is to ignore plenty of Scripture that insists we each will meet up with trials, tribulations and temptations of many kinds in life. It also puts us “safely” at arms length from any deep woundedness another person may have experienced in life. Our western brand of Christianity isn’t very comfortable with pain, is it?

Again, the question is, “How would Christ want us to respond?” Take a look at the lives of the godly men and women we run across in the Bible, not to mention the sinful people with whom Christ Himself rubbed shoulders. From those examples, it’s hard to imagine that He’s calling us to the “safe” road of looking the other way or throwing out an uninvolved offer of prayer.

The Good Samaritan

Other people’s problems may very well get in the way of our plans, but the story of the “Good Samaritan” gives some clues as to how to view those situations from God’s perspective—as an opportunity to see Him at work, bring Him glory and help bring healing to others. It’s a familiar story, but one in which Christ lays out some very clear direction for us. Take a moment to review Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and note a few observations:

- A determining factor in the Samaritan helping the man in need was not how well the men knew one another or how much the injured man had done in the past for the Samaritan. It appeared they were strangers and it basically came down to the fact that God had allowed the hurt man to be in the Samaritan’s path.

“Don’t pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically. Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. When God’s children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or, if they need lodging, for the night.” –Romans 12:9-13, “The Message”

Compassion

- The Samaritan was led by compassion—“he felt deep pity” for the injured man. This was not a matter of religious duty or obligation. He felt genuine concern for the life and future of another individual. Does your busyness, fear or practicality ever get in the way of hearing God’s call to step out and assist in the healing process of someone else?

Flexibility

- He wasn’t afraid to get involved or “get dirty.” “...Kneeling beside him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds.” Others might have warned that he’d be taken advantage of or to watch out for his own interests. Instead, he didn’t stop to consider how helping might affect his reputation or even endanger his life. He felt an inner compassion and knew that this was the right response. Sure, he may have gotten his clothes dirty—he may have even missed a deadline, but God obviously had other plans for him that day!

Action

- He didn’t just pass along a few Scriptures or the promise to pray—he attended to the man’s needs at a cost of time, money and convenience. This was done by bandaging the man’s wounds, giving away his spot on the donkey and paying the bill at the inn. This man put “hands and feet” on his prayers and promises.

Limitations

- The Samaritan seemed to recognize his own limitations. That’s when he got others involved. He personally made arrangements for the innkeeper to care for the injured man after he left. This meant providing for future needs to help get the man up on his feet again. He was careful to consider the time this particular healing might require.

A Broken Heart

- There isn’t a lot said about the response of the injured man. He must have accepted the help, which required some vulnerability and humility. He probably didn’t feel like he had a lot of options, being left “half-dead.” So often, isn’t that also true of us? We wait until we come to the end of our own resources before allowing someone’s help. While Jesus’ emphasis here is on going the extra mile to support someone, Scripture is also clear that we must recognize our need for God. Psalm 147:3 says, “[God] heals the heartbroken and bandages their wounds.” It takes something to be broken for God to fix it. The Psalmist also said, “I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives, ready for love, don’t for a moment escape God’s notice.” (Isaiah 66:2, “The Message”).

“Go easy on those who hesitate in the faith. Go after those who take the wrong way. Be tender with sinners, but not soft on sin. The sin itself stinks to high heaven.” –Jude 22-23, “The Message”

“There is a power within the life of every Christian waiting to be released—a power that can lead to further and deeper change, a power that can help someone else join more intimately to the heart of Christ, the power to heal soul wounds.” –Larry Crabb

Luke 10 isn't the only place we see people go to great lengths to help someone in trouble. Revisit Mark 2:1-12 and Matthew 9:1-2. In the Gospel of Mark, several men had such compassion on a paralyzed man that they put a hole in a roof and lowered him down into the presence of Jesus. They could have focused on the obstacles, like what the onlookers think, or the "impossible" task of getting through the dense crowd. Instead, they determined to bring this friend before Jesus and boldly believed He could heal. In both Gospel passages, it was the faith of others that touched Jesus and led Him to forgive sins. We might gather from this that the healing was meant as much for those who were helping as for the ones needing physical healing. The miracles were platforms from which to reveal His grace to heal and forgive the deep pain that comes from sin. What a contrast these friends and the Samaritan provide to the two "religious" individuals who passed by the injured man on the road. Those who responded to the compassion in their hearts received the blessing of seeing God at work.

The Power of Christian Community

In his book, "Connections," psychologist Larry Crabb contends that Christians have left a gaping hole in their understanding of attending to one another's needs: "there is a power within the life of every Christian waiting to be released—a power that can lead to further and deeper change, a power that can help someone else join more intimately to the heart of Christ, the power to heal soul wounds. That power is released by connecting with the hearts and souls of other people and allowing God's grace to flow freely through us to them."¹ This doesn't mean trying to solve all their problems or making thoughtless decisions about how to help, but it does mean being open to whatever God leads us to do—even if it's inconvenient or calls for sacrifice. In the least, it often calls for taking a step or two out of our comfort zones. That's where we find God providing healing in our own lives as well. He loves to stretch us—those kinds of experiences seem to most refine and restore us, and reveal His power.

Revealing God's Glory

Do you know a friend, family member, co-worker or neighbor who has experienced injury—physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually? Maybe a co-worker's wife left him and he's alone with three children. Perhaps a woman in your fellowship group lost her job and wonders how she'll buy groceries. Or, a neighbor just learned that his child has a serious illness. It may even be that a friend is struggling with sinful patterns and the enemy has her right where he wants her...drowning in guilt. Does getting involved feel like an inconvenience—or a bit messy? In God's economy there are no mistakes or chance occurrences. In fact, showing this kind of love is at the core of finding life in Christ. (See Luke 10:28.) Consider the possibility that He may want to use this situation to show His glory. Don't miss out on an opportunity to see what He can do in the lives of others, as well as your own!

Each of us can use extra support now and again. As a church family, let's commit to rallying around those in need. When you have an opportunity to "get your hands dirty," take time to pray about how God may want you to get involved. Sometimes all it will take is a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear. Other times, it

means letting God "disrupt" your own life a bit. Whatever the case, remember to recognize your own limitations. You may find yourself at a loss as to how to help. In your lack of understanding, don't leave someone hanging. Consider involving outside resources and the community of believers around you.

"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad."

—1 Corinthians 12:26, NIV

When extra help is needed, Care Ministries offers support for many of life's difficulties. Brochures on these ministries are available in the Information Centers. Contact Katherine Bentley at **763-971-5123** about getting help or serving in this vital ministry.

Care Ministries Support

- Assessment and Referral Counseling
- Disability Ministries
- Focus Group Ministry (small groups)
- Freedom Ministry (freedom from strongholds)
- Health Ministry (education and support)
- Hospital Care and Visitation
- Prayer Chain Ministry
- Stephen Ministry (one-on-one support)
- Theophostic Ministry (inner-healing prayer)
- Time of Need Ministry (physical needs)

For further study on helping others, also explore Galatians 6:

"Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day is out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.

Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others...Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith."

—Galatians 6:1-10, "The Message"

¹"Connecting," Larry Crabb; Word Publishing; 1997.



See Lifelissues at: cefc.com