

Have We Cared Enough: The Agony and the Ecstasy of Caring

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I. The Agony: Bearing the Cross of Care

The “agony” of care is that we learn the standard of Christ’s cross through caring for others. Christians and Churches today have measured care according to their own standards. How much we should care can be known only as we change self-centered standards. The church must perceive the breadth of God’s care

Identifying the extent and expansion of our care is the task of every person in the church. The church as an institution is limited. The church as a body of believers is constantly expanding in its care. Care is not an institutional identity, tightly defined and preserved, but an expanding, corporate and caring experience.

- A. “Enough” is a Strange Word to Those in Need
- B. Condition of the Church: Wanting to Make a Difference
- C. Theological Assumptions: A Persistent Virtue
 - 1. Care is a virtue of persistence that continues regardless of the response of the person being cared for.
 - 2. The caring church looks to God first then to a desperate humanity
 - 3. Care by the church is not a business but a mission.
- D. Scriptural Reflection: How Much is Enough?
 - 1. Peter’s question.
 - 2. The response of Jesus
 - 3. The relevancy for us
- E. Strategic Response and Strategy of the Church: Measuring 70 x 7
 - 1. Commitment to continue to care, regardless of the outcome, is the heart of a caring church.

2. A caring church reminds itself, especially that it must continue caring and not measure whether it should continue by traditional standards of success.
3. The questions of a caring church are:
 - a. Has the Lord demonstrated care to us?
 - b. Is the Lord continuing to care for us?
 - c. Does the Lord's commission to care still apply to us?

F. The Persistence of Care

II. The Ecstasy: A Relationship with Christ and Others

A. Co-Suffering: A Three-Way Experience

The "ecstasy" of care is that through care we enter into a glorious relationship with Christ and others in a triangle of care that can be called "co-suffering." The caring Christian suffers and cares with Christ and others.

B. Care, The Heart of Relationships

1. Care is at the heart of relationships.
Alister E. McGrath said, "There is something about human nature which makes us want to care for others and to be cared for by them."
2. The amazing relationship between Jesus and Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

C. A Triangle of Care

D. Co-Suffering as the Foundation of Transformation Through Care

E. Co-Suffering and the Fruit of the Spirit

1. Co-suffering is not only the fruit of the cross but also the display of the fruit of the Spirit.
2. The caring Christian unleashes the work of the Spirit and draws near to the cross through care.

F. Burden Bearing, Care and Restoration

1. Co-suffering means that we are willing to allow others to bear our burdens.
2. Finally, co-suffering as a believer means that we bear the suffering of Christ with Him, we share in His suffering.

G. Dying to Care

1. This presentation focused on a three-part circle of care that includes the believer, other persons and God.
2. The circle is one of both nurture and mission.
3. As a result, in this presentation, care by the individual believer moves from just an act of benevolence, pity or even compassion to an act of faith.
4. Care is vital for faith and faith is vital for genuine Christian care.

III. Models for Implementation

A. Personal Devotional Commitments for Being a Caring Christian

1. Seek the Lord about a person or persons you can enter into Christian relationship with in order to co-suffer and co-care with them.
2. Endeavor to identify someone around you who may be hurting.
3. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to equip you in special ways to show forth the fruit of the Spirit while bearing the burdens of someone else.
4. Identify the ways in which Christ is bearing your burdens.
5. Write a testimony, praising the Lord for a relationship of care you have been able to develop.

B. Small Group Devotion: Being Able to Co-Suffer and Co-Care

1. Identify someone with whom you can become accountable in a relationship of co-care and co-suffering.
2. Set up regular meetings with this person or persons, times to pray, testify and bear one another's burdens.
3. Develop a series of devotions with your care partner that make you aware of Christ's presence.
4. Develop a prayer list of persons who are suffering and in need.
5. List Scriptural examples of care relationships in which persons supported one another in co-suffering and co-caring.

C. Action Steps as Part of a Circle of Care in Your Local Church

1. Find a number of persons in your church who either have or are willing to develop circles of caring relationships, supporting and fellowshiping with those persons.
2. Endeavor to help others develop co-caring and co-suffering relationships with other persons
3. Find a theme scripture such as Galatians 6:2 that communicates the power of co-suffering and co-caring.
4. Develop testimonies in which the fruit of the Spirit enabled burden bearing, sharing those testimonies verbally and in print with others in the church.
5. Dedicate a prayer service for caring around the globe.