

# **The Benevolence Transformation Process in the Local Church**

**Oliver McMahan, Ph.D., D.Min.**  
**Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN**

## **I. SEARCH FOR A CARING CHURCH**

What are the priorities? What is the process that transforms a church from complacency to care? The remaining chapters of this book outline a strategy for transforming insight and change that moves a church from the comfort of "church as usual" to the doorway of all ministry, care. This is the same doorway that Christ and the apostles stepped through when they reached out to the outcasts of religion, the same doorway that the disciples stepped through when they left the temple to find a lame man ignored at the temple gate and the same doorway that Christ stands at today with the lonely, hurting and impoverished waiting for the church to step forward and start church there at the doorway of care.

## **II. STARTING WITH THE HEART OF OUR FATHER**

*A church should be aware of the source of care Himself. The origin of care in the church is the care of the heavenly Father. The Father gave the Son for the purpose of care. The care of the Church finds its formative roots in the Father's care. Care is not a human service but a divine gift. Humanity does not know how to care for itself. Pure motive is only in God. Care comes first from the action of God, not the activity of individuals, even in the church.*

## **III. BROKEN TO BE Poured OUT**

*A church must be aware of the necessity of being a suffering church. The church today avoids brokenness. Health is equated with relief. Strength is painless. Reconciliation is without burden. Reproof is non-existent. The problem of the cross is only a quick and easy solution and never a broken vessel ready to be mended. We in the church act like the already whole who opt for "holiness" in a "crossless" pursuit.*

Pain is not the great escape of the church but rather the gateway to care. Following Jesus is not only writing a mission statement but the mission of traveling to the travailing of the world. Care is only opened at the doorway of brokenness. Rather than escape, the Church must embrace brokenness for it is the gateway of care.

## **IV. BEING THE WOUNDED HEALER**

A church must be aware of its "sinew," care. Without care, the body of the church is without wholeness. The members of the body can become disjointed and dislocated. Care is the

"sinew" that holds the various parts of the body together. No matter how strong the pieces of the system of the church may be, no matter how gifted individuals may be, without care, the body is not only dysfunctional, it is dismembered. Care must be structured and connected to every person in the church. The feeling level of the church must turn sentimentality into structure. Without a system of care, the needy hear only words and never experience actions.

## V. THE PLACE FOR THE FALLEN, FAILING AND FORGIVEN

A church must have an awareness of the failure underlying a success oriented church. The church sees itself as only containing successful people. The tolerance of the modern church for failure is very low. The desire and passion of the church is not expressed in care but career. In greater and greater numbers the fallen of society and the failed within the church no longer look to the church for comfort. Care cannot be an option or an occasion for the church. Care cannot be merely another priority among many others for the church. Care must become priority one for both the fallen and those riding upon mountains of success.

## VI. LEARNING TO LEAN

A church must be aware enough to be a Spirit-led church. The church leads itself today. The problem is that the final leadership of the church needs to be divine in origin. The extensions and results of divinely led leadership include you and me. But, care ultimately is led by divine leadership before human leadership. The best care of the church follows the leadership of God's care. The Holy Spirit is continually providing care for those within the church. The nature of the Holy Spirit is to come and be present with us, right where and when we are in need of care.

## VII. THE ABUSE OF FALSE CARE

A church must be aware enough to be a sensitive church. In the church the absence of care is not just the absence of passion. It is the abuse of passion. The church may be passionate about many things, but if care does not temper the sentiment of the church, then passion becomes abrasive. Care is like unto love, without it, the work of the church is nothing (1 Corinthians 13). Care seeks not only to do the will of God but also to carefully apply the work of God to persons in need. Good deeds without care become instruments of deception. Our actions say one thing but our heart says another. The genuineness of care is important because God requires not only that needs be met but also those vessels of care reflect honesty and truthfulness.

## VIII. GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

A church must be aware of the necessity for single-mindedness. The church desires to fulfill its God-given mission. However, the actual work of the church may not match that desire.

Programs may not match principles. The church may say one thing that reflects its heart but then carry out its agenda in resistance to its heart. The care of the church must match the intention of the church. The church may begin by speaking the language of intention. Then the church may communicate the language of care in action. If the two languages are not one and the same, those within and outside of the church will know the church as inconsistent. The lack of care is compounded by the inconsistency of the two languages. The double-speaking church is then both uncaring and hypocritical. The church that is also double-minded about care is hypocritical, uncaring and lacks a basic, underlying authenticity of ministry.

## IX. STEPPING THROUGH THE DOORWAY AND STAYING OUTSIDE

A church must be aware enough to be an extended church. The Gospel by its very nature is constantly reaching out beyond boundaries of comfort and familiarity to those outside of its circumference. Once a person becomes a believer, that person is to reach out to others. The modern church has made preaching equivalent to reaching. The preacher may reach someone but the church may not. Care by its very nature must reach out to those beyond us. Care will expand our vision. Our care will take us to people we not only do not know but may have never considered knowing.

## X. WHEN WE HAVE CARED ENOUGH

A church must be aware enough to be a church with expanding limits. 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. If God's work encompasses the world, then the church's care should be known by its expanding breadth and not its rigid limitation. We are ever learning who needs care and how we should care for them. Care is a constant, expanding process of knowing and including what and who we may have never thought of before.

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.

## XI. CARE FOR THE ONE YOU ARE WITH

A church must be aware enough to be present. The presence of the church must accompany its care. The church has become present at many functions and tragically delegated its care. When care comes from the church, people may not know that it has come from the church and/or may come to know no more about the church than they previously knew. Care without presence is not possible. The messenger is just as important as the message. God chose to deliver His care by being present and in relationship with humanity. Without relationship,

care is not just reduced to mere deeds but it becomes an act that runs counter to the purposes of care.

## XII. OUT OF MIND, OUT OF MINISTRY

A church must be aware enough to be mindful. The church forgets to care. Care is an afterthought of an occasional conscience. The last footnote of the budget is the column committed to care. Care is done among people but the business of the church is not as much about people as it is in preserving an institution. The priorities of a group of people are reflected as much if not more in what occupies the minds of the people. Many churches think about personal goals and not corporate care. Care must be a preoccupation of the mind if it is truly a burden of the heart. The thinking of the church must be about care. Care must be "minded" in order to avoid being neglected.

## XIII. THE BOTTOM LINE IS A CROSS

A church must be aware enough to be a sacrificing church. The church is fearful of any kind of decline, any backward look or any reflective retreat. As a result, the effort toward not only self-preservation but aggressive assent, leaves the task of care woefully in a trail of dust. The church may progress but its care may simultaneously decline. Waiting upon others that need our care requires not only patience but sacrifice. Sacrifice may call us to wait, stay behind, even retreat back to someone who has fallen. We will progress as a church at a different pace if we take the time and sensitivity to care. Those who need care are going to be slower, weaker and less able to keep up than the caregiver. The movement toward the needy and searching may cause a "decline" for the upwardly mobile.

## CONCLUSION

The searching church may look backward more than forward. Reconciliation keeps us caring more than forward "progress." The search for a caring church is risky, painful and somewhat "backward." But, that may be where the care of the church is. However, more than likely, the care of the church is the point at which you and a fellow believer reach out to each other in order to meet with God. The search for the caring, caring church is very close to the question asked of Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The question for the church is, "Who is my church?" The answer is also similar, the person by the side of you on the road of life that you would rather pass by.