

Developing Excellence in Care

Lesson 1. What Does It Mean to Care?

Read Philippians 2:19-21

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

God wants us to be a church full of people like Timothy, who will sincerely care about other people. This is very different from the “every-man-for-himself” attitude of our society. But this is precisely the reason why it is so powerful. When people observe us in our every-day lives, they may not agree with everything we stand for, but they should at least believe that we genuinely care about them.

The dictionary defines “to care” as having a deep feeling of concern for the well-being of another person. This clearly connects the idea of caring to the biblical concepts of love and compassion. For example, the Bible says that it was because God “so loved the world” that He “gave His only begotten Son.” In a similar vein, when Jesus was moved with compassion for the hungry multitude, He fed them with bread and fish. God did these things because He sincerely cared about people. These examples show us that genuine care always results in a willingness to do something to help. Caring is the inward attitude of the heart; the biblical term for the outward expressions of caring is “doing good.”

Read Job 10:12

When Job spoke these words, he was in the midst of terrible suffering. But He knew deep within his heart that God cared about him, and this knowledge kept him from falling apart. This shows us the vital importance of recognizing God’s care for us. Sometimes when life isn’t going very well, people question whether God really cares about them. Here are two examples. The first is when a storm came up and Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat.

Read Mark 4:38

Of course Jesus cared about His disciples, and He soon proved that by commanding the storm to cease. But through this situation He showed them the anxieties that lay deep within their hearts, which caused them to fear that maybe Jesus didn’t really care. On another occasion, Jesus was talking to a woman named Mary when her sister Martha stepped into the room.

Read Luke 10:40

Of course Jesus cared about Martha, but she revealed through this question a certain selfish attitude lurking deep within her heart. When we are facing a difficult situation or feeling overwhelmed by circumstances, instead of charging Jesus with not caring about us, we ought to confess our unwavering faith in Him and do what Peter tells us to do.

Read 1 Peter 5:6-7

The more we get filled up on the love and compassion that God has for us, the more we will become like Timothy, our hearts being filled with sincere care for others. Let’s never even suggest that Jesus doesn’t care about us, but instead let’s cast all of our cares upon Him, being confident of His care for us.

Discussion Points:

1. We have seen that genuine care issues forth in doing good. Can the doing good be separated from the attitude of care?
2. What might sometimes block a person who cares about someone from doing something to help that person? (The person may not be accepting of help or may be out of range.)
3. What are some thing you could do to move toward a greater excellence in caring?

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Lesson 2. Caring for Our Family Members

Read Psalms 27:10

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.

Sometimes our own family members get the feeling that they are last on our list—that we care more about everyone else than them. Perhaps it is precisely because they are part of our family that we sometimes take them for granted or give scant attention to their needs. This ought not to be so.

Let's focus on how we can be more excellent in caring for our family members. The first thing we ought to commit ourselves to is treating the members of our family with the same dignity and respect we show to our friends, co-workers, and fellow church members. Just because a couple has exchanged marital vows does not mean they are free to speak harshly to each other. It does not mean that they are free to be unkind to each other.

Read Colossians 3:12-14

When Paul wrote these words, he meant for us to apply them to everyone we come across, in every situation. He did not exclude men from treating their wives and children this way. Neither did he exclude wives and mothers from acting this way in their homes. We must not make excuses for ourselves in this area. If we really care about our family members, then we must commit to showing it in the way we treat them and speak to them. If we are questioning whether or not we really care about them, this indicates that we are nowhere near as close to Jesus as we need to be.

Read Colossians 3:18-22

The next thing we can do to show that we care is recognize our place in the family and not try to usurp authority that is not ours, not resist the authority that God has established, and not fail to exercise the authority God has given us to exercise. This means that God's plan is for men to be

the heads of their families and for their wives and children to submit to their lead.

But just as important as children obeying their parents is husbands loving their wives and not being bitter toward them. Godly authority is always intended to be exercised in love, not domination. In homes where one parent is missing, the parent who is present must take on the role and responsibilities of the one who is absent. This may increase the challenges of parenting, but by God's grace the home can be established in order and peace, and the children can grow up to live godly lives.

Read 1 Timothy 5:8

One of the most important ways we can show that we care for our families is by working to provide for them. We should not expect others to do this for us, not even the government. God made men to work and provide. When a man is not present or is unable to earn enough to support the family, sometimes the wife and/or mother may have to work outside the house. This is not ideal, especially when the children are young, but reality may sometimes require it.

It has been said that when we lie on our death bed, we will not be thinking about our jobs or careers or how nice a house we owned or how much money we made. No, the only thing we will be thinking about is our family members. So let us commit to showing them the same kind of genuine care that God is continually showing toward us. Let's be excellent at it!

Discussion Points:

1. Tell about a single-parent family you know of where the children are now living godly lives as adults.
2. What are some ways in which you may have given the impression that you didn't really care very much about someone in your family?
3. What are some ways that you can ensure that your family members know at a heart level that you really care about them?

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Lesson 3. Caring for Our Church Family

Read 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

God has placed us in this local body of believers. It is here that he will test our faith and work in our lives to prepare us for eternal life. This means that we ought to think of our brothers and sisters in the Lord as long-term relationships, since we have every reason to believe that they will be with us in eternity.

In many ways we can think of the present life as nothing more than the training ground for the life to come. God does not want eternity populated with people who are harsh and critical and hateful and judgmental (the list could go on). He wants to be surrounded by people who are peace-loving and kind, who are genuinely concerned about the well-being of others. He is therefore committed to teaching us how to treat other people now, so we will have it in our hearts on the day when we go to be with Him.

Read Galatians 6:9-10

As we have seen, the evidence of sincere care is doing good for others. Sometimes this can become weariness, especially when it seems as though others don't have much appreciation for what we are doing. But we must keep in mind that we are not doing good solely for their sake, but also for Jesus' sake. He certainly knows what it's like to do good yet be unappreciated. So Paul's words should encourage us to keep at it and not lose heart.

Does this mean we run around looking for every opportunity to do some good deed for someone? Not necessarily. It is possible to do good but for the wrong reasons. Some people do good because it makes them feel good

to so it. Others do good because they are trying to draw attention to themselves or make themselves look good in front of other people. But this is not what God is looking for.

Paul put it this way: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Notice the emphasis: "Especially to those who are of the household of faith." And notice that we do not have to create opportunities to do good. Paul simply says: "As we have opportunity." In other words, when opportunities come our way, let us show our genuine care by doing what we can to help out.

Read 1 John 3:16-19

To fail to help our brothers and sisters when we can is to "shut up our hearts." This is contrasted with "laying down our lives." Some people give lip service to their concern for others. They talk about their love for the brethren, but when the time comes to roll up their sleeves and actually do something, they are no where to be found. This is hypocritical love. John tells us that we must do more than just talk about it (loving in word and tongue); we must actually do something (loving in deed and truth).

Read 1 Peter 4:8-11

The idea of having "fervent love for one another" is similar to the way Paul described Timothy as having "sincere care." In other words, to be excellent in care means caring so deeply about the well-being of others that it burns in your heart. This is fervent love.

Discussion Points:

1. What are some words that describe the absence of sincere care? (indifference, apathy, complacency, unconcern, coldness)
2. Are these words you would want people to use to describe you? Why or why not?
3. Does God expect us to give someone what we don't have? Why is it important for us to understand this? (Some people have harmed their family by using what God provided for their family to help someone else, whether it be time, food, money, or anything else.)

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Lesson 4. Caring for Our Community

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

What does it mean to “walk properly” toward those who are outside (which is referring to those who are in our community but not part of our church family)? Clearly this means it is not enough to treat our fellow believers well and to sincerely care for them; we must also show Christian love and kindness toward those who are not part of the household of faith. So let’s look at some of the ways we can do this.

Read Colossians 4:5-6

To “walk in wisdom” means that we must be careful not to say or do anything that would make it difficult to share the gospel with someone. It also means we must be alert to use the opportunities God gives us for personal witnessing. When Paul tells us to “redeem the time,” he pictures us as faithful stewards who know an opportunity when we see one. Just as a wise shopper seizes a bargain when he sees one; so a wise Christian seizes an opportunity to win a person to the Lord.

Walking in wisdom also includes doing our work well, paying our bills on time, and keeping the promises we make. It also means always speaking with grace, which is to say always using kind, wholesome, uplifting words. Jesus is our example in this department. Psalms 45:2 speaks prophetically of Jesus when it says, “Grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed You forever.” Could the same be said of us? If grace were always upon our lips, would we be blessed by God forever? This shows the great importance the Bible attaches to how we speak to others. May the people of our community be just as impressed with how we speak as the crowds were of Jesus, of whom it is said that they “marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22).

Read 1 Peter 3:15-16

The word “defense” means to give a reasonable answer. This shows one of the important ways for us to demonstrate that we really care about those around us: when we are asked about our faith, we must always be prepared and ready to respond in a reasonable way. It is one thing to seize an opportunity; it is another to seize it and make the most of it.

The way we prepare is by learning as much as we can from the teaching we receive and from our own personal study of the Scriptures. It is also by staying close to the Lord Jesus through faithful prayer. Many times it will be the way we respond when we are asked about our faith that opens the door to an invitation to church or even a Bible study.

Read 1 Timothy 3:7

What would your neighbors say about you? How about your co-workers or the check-out girls at the grocery store or extended family members? Do you have a “good testimony” among them or do they see you as unfriendly, unreliable, or unkind? Do you live your life properly when you’re around them or improperly?

If we want to be excellent in care, we must strive to be the same person, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. When we’re around the guy who cut us off in traffic, we should be exactly the same person we were when we greeted a first-time guest on Sunday morning. The Bible warns that when spiritual leaders do not have a good testimony among those who are outside the church, they risk falling into reproach and the snare of the devil. This shows the great significance God attaches to being both exemplary and consistent in our walk with God. Let us care enough to walk properly toward those who are outside.

Discussion Points:

1. Tell about a time you damaged your testimony to someone outside the church by your improper words or conduct.
2. What does it mean that our speech would be seasoned with salt? (See addendum)

Addendum to Lesson 4

Seasoned with Salt

Why did Paul add “seasoned with salt” in Colossians 4:6? What did he mean? In that day, salt was used as a preservative as well as a seasoner. We should never say to anyone, “Now, take this with a grain of salt.” We must put the salt of grace into our speech to make sure it is pure and properly seasoned. As a preservative, the salt will help us guard against a corrupting of our speech: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.” As a seasoner, it will help keep our words savory and desirable, “good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

In the Old Testament, salt was added to the sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13). Perhaps Paul was suggesting that we look upon our words as sacrifices offered to God, just as our words of praise are spiritual sacrifices (Hebrews 13:15). It would no doubt help us to say the right things in the right manner if we remember that our words are looked upon as sacrifices to God.

It is unfortunate when a Christian speaks in a rude or coarse manner, particularly when the unsaved are listening: “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:4). Instead, as Peter advised, “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Meekness is the opposite of harshness, and fear is the opposite of arrogance. There is no place in a Christian’s conversation for a know-it-all attitude. While we need to have convictions and not compromise, we must also cultivate a gracious spirit of love.

The Christian’s walk and talk must be in harmony with each other. Nothing will silence the lips like a careless life. When character, conduct, and conversation are all working together, it makes for a powerful witness.

Always be ready!



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Lesson 5. Caring for Our Enemies

Read Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Who is your enemy? In a spiritual sense, we can think of our enemy as anyone who seems to be opposed to our Christian faith, anyone who seems to resent our commitment to Jesus, or anyone who is actively trying to hinder our walk with God. In a larger sense, it could be someone at work who seems to be undermining your position or who falsely accuses you to others, even if the reason for their animosity toward you is unclear. It might be a neighbor whom, try as you might, you just can’t seem to get along with.

There are many people in life whom we might construe to be our enemy. The point is, just because they are our enemy does not mean that we should be theirs.

Read Romans 5:6-10 and Colossians 1:21-23

Jesus is our example. And the Bible tells us that He loved us enough to die for us even while we were His enemies. Once He had saved us, He made us His friends. But at the time He died, we were His enemies. We need to let that thought sink deep down into our hearts.

Many times our natural tendency is to avoid people whom we perceive to not like us or to be against us. But even though it may not be possible to form a close friendship with such people (since that would require their

cooperation), there are still some things that Jesus has told us to do. *But I say to you, love your enemies.* The question is, how do we show love to people who have positioned themselves as our enemies? How do we make a statement to them that in spite of their animosity toward us, we sincerely care about their well-being?

According to Jesus, there are three things we must do: 1) we must bless them, 2) we must do good to them, and 3) we must pray for them.

Jesus said that it’s really no big deal if we show care and concern for the people who show care and concern for us. It’s really not even that big a deal when we show care and concern for people who seem fairly indifferent towards us. But when we show care and concern for someone who is acting like a treacherous enemy towards us, that is the mark of Christian perfection. *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Discussion Points:

1. Why does Jesus equate loving our enemies with Christian perfection? Explain what you believe He means by the term “perfect.”
2. What are some practical ways you could bless someone who seems to be set in opposition to you?
3. What are some ways you could do good to such a person?
4. Read Romans 12:17-21 and discuss what this means and why good is able to overcome evil. Tell about a time when you personally saw this happen.

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Lesson 6. Caring for the World

Read John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

When Jesus told us to love our neighbor as ourselves, He indicated that we have a responsibility to care for those who are near us, those within reach, those whom we can actually provide assistance to in a practical way. But we should not think that Jesus was placing some sort of limitation on whom we are required to care about.

Jesus cared about the whole world enough to lay down His life for us all. He then sent out His disciples into “all the world, to preach the gospel to every creature.” There are certainly no limitations in the command. If we want to excel in care the way Jesus did, then we need to think beyond the local, beyond the people we know, beyond the people we can see, and begin to care about the billions we will never see.

There is no doubt that care must begin at home. We cannot be neglectful of our own family members and think we are pleasing to God. But it must not stop at the home. We must also care about the members of our church family, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors, and our extended family members. We must care about everyone in our community, even those who seem to be our enemies, for who can say whether any one of them may one day be a fellow-believer in our local assembly. But we must go beyond even our local community and reach out to the entire world: Europe, Africa, India, South America, the Middle East, China, Russia, Southeast Asia, Australia—the entire world!

You may be wondering how you can do this in any kind of a practical way. After all, it is one thing for us to *say* that we care about the whole world, but it another to actually show that we do in a practical way. How, after all, do we do good for someone in Mozambique? How do we show someone in New Zealand that we care? Obviously it would not be possible to do some good work individually for every person on the planet. That is not what God has in mind.

There are, however, some things that we can do. The first is to regularly lift up our foreign missionaries in prayer. Everyone can do this at the very least. And we need to believe that our prayers can make a difference.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Notice that Paul credited the prayers of the believers in Corinth for his deliverance in Asia. Your prayers can also make a difference!

The next thing we can do is provide consistent financial support for our missionaries. All foreign missionaries depend on the support of the believers in America to be able to carry on their work. Without our support, they would have to come home and the world would never have a chance at salvation.

Read Philippians 4:10-20

Paul was a missionary and the Philippian believers were supporting him. Notice the great promise he extended to those who were sending him aid: *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

These first two things are ways that every believer can show their love and concern for the whole world. Both our prayers and our financial aid can make a big difference in the eternity of many people. The last two things are more limited but are ways that some people may be able to express their sincere care. The first is by going on a missions trip, and the second is by becoming a missionary and going to a place where the gospel has not yet been preached. If you are feeling that either of these might be an option for you, then please speak to the pastors about it.

Discussion Points:

1. What are some things you have noticed about some of the missionaries who have visited our assembly over the years?
2. Discuss what you have learned about *excellence in care* over the past six weeks?