



CARING IS HARD WORK

Lee Bee Teik

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Caring is Hard work

Any of us in the 21st century is able to sense the need and weight of caring for the needy in church and society. In this book, Dr. Lee shares that it is therefore necessary for God's people to hear His call to care for at least those near to them e.g. neighbours or those in His household. Many care till they are exhausted; others have the desire to do so but are directionless. Still others lack confidence or are negligent of others' welfare to the extent that someone suffer while waiting for help. She highlights the fact that this 'negligence' is not always due to a lack of love for the needy but due to several other factors which can be easily prevented or remedied e.g. burnout state, wrong methods in caring and ignorance of personal strengths and weaknesses. Her desire is that readers do not have to make the same mistakes as she had in this God given work of caring for others as Jesus cares for us!

About The Author

Dr Lee Bee Teik worked as a medical doctor before becoming a full-time homemaker in 1984. Her experiences as a woman in God's family and world (as a child, a student, a doctor, a wife, a mother, a pastoral counsellor, a Christian spiritual director and a friend) gave her a burden which eventually led to the writing on the topic of caring by His church. She is married to Dr. Hwa Yung and they have three adult children. She founded Reconre Ministries in 1995 to care for His full-time workers and the wider Malaysian church. After a recent illness, she freelance as a writer as there is a dire need for contextualised material to encourage and strengthen His people at such a time as ours.

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A few names have been changed to protect the privacy of people who have shared their experiences for the edification of the church.

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Madras Lane Hokkien Methodist Church in Penang (1952-1970), which taught and showed me, throughout childhood, that God's church is a family, starting with the local church.

Judy Wong for kindly writing the Foreword amidst her busy schedule as Principal of Methodist Pillay Institute, Sibu, Sarawak.

Lam Kuan Lock once more generously provided his IT skills in delivering *Caring is Hard Work* by Christmas 2016.

All who are involved in any way in the production of this title so that some needy individuals may be helped.

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FOREWORD

It is indeed my privilege to be invited to write a forward for Lee Bee Teik's new book ***Caring is Hard Work***. I must humbly admit that I am the first to be transformed after reading her manuscript. I am very moved by the way she tackles this common issue and the wisdom granted by her much adored heavenly Father.

I have known Lee Bee Teik since she was eight. Even then, as the youngest and most adorable sibling, she was already a care-giver to her eldest sister during her wedding in Sarawak. Lee Bee Teik accomplished flower-girl duty by ensuring the bride was comfortable. Her long experience of being a care-giver since childhood makes her more than qualified to write such a book. Further, it is enriched by the sharing of her personal experience of being cared for in times of need.

Her book is easy to read and vivid; I now understand why caring is indeed hard work. It is amazing that this book will actually help all of us, even the mature Christians, to have a better understanding of the heart of God. It is by caring for others that we are imitators of Jesus and have a closer relationship with God.

I am so thankful that the author has written this book because it will make a difference to many who are

faithful care-givers. The lack of knowledge and understanding of why and how to give care with compassion and Christ-like love has caused many to experience frustration and even guilt in caring for others. A close friend, who genuinely cared for an elderly relative at home, commented,

"It's no longer because of love but of filial piety that I continue to care."

This book does not discuss the practical ways of caring as "the usual bookshop has enough of them", the author explains. Instead, she goes deeply into the biblical basis for showing care to all. The writer's own life examples as a care-giver in her various capacities add weight to her book. She walks the talk as best she could.

As you read on, you will automatically be challenged to ask yourself,

"Am I truly a Christian? Do I care for others as Jesus cares for me? Am I like my heavenly Father as a local church member? Am I answering the cries of those who need care urgently?"

This book is essential for individuals who are care-givers but have fallen into the trap of caring out of sheer duty

and not compassion. It is also for churches and Bible Study groups which continue to face difficulties in recruiting members to serve in formal or informal caring work.

Most of all, ***Caring is Hard Work*** will change the image of a care-giver from being a tired- wounded-downcast person to one who experiences the approval and joy of the Lord!.

Judy Wong
Principal
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Sarawak

PREFACE

In 1960's, the caring of God's people in Malaysian local churches was usually done quietly, often by individuals. Caring for the poor and needy in general was even rarer. Though individuals did care, it was seldom done openly as part of a church project to intentionally reach out among God's people. Being needy was rather embarrassing. Hence, some in local churches were overworked and some, under occupied.

However, attitudes regarding caring for the needy has some what changed, especially with the setting up of organisations such as the Jesus Saves Mission among the urban poor in the late 60's and the MCARE in 1979. The latter seeks to meet a need in our society as well as to encourage churches to do the same as caring communities. No one can do it all but visible caring priorities has to start somewhere for others to follow in Christ's footsteps intentionally. The second aim became more evident as MCARE expands in peninsular Malaysia, and now, in East Malaysia

In the late 60's, Chinese based 'Jesus Saves Mission' was one which was less noticeable. A Singapore pastor's kid (PK) founded it in the Weld Quay area in Penang. My Sunday School teacher took me there while I was

waiting for my senior Cambridge results. It was out of curiosity and the mission's centre proximity to my house (situated in the present Penang Heritage area) that I set foot in the small shelter. It doubled up as accommodation to a single lady staff and tuition-cum-worship centre. The language commonly used there was *Hokkien*, a Chinese dialect of Penangites. As I got to know how Christ's love for the needy was shown to the children and families who came, I kept going back because of the staff worker's love for God and passion for those she served. My ears, eyes and heart were keenly open to what God might want me to do when I was searching for a vocation.

A *career* is something we do to earn a living whereas a *vocation* is something we have a passion for (sometimes it is referred to as a calling to those who obey God's command to serve Him in a particular area in His world or church.) It would be a joyful discovery if a career and vocation coincide. However, they may not and one has to struggle to know which to do eventually. I had no idea of the journey ahead while still a teenager waiting for her Senior Cambridge Certificate results. Meanwhile I was happy to be able to help at the mission on Sunday afternoons. Playing on the little pump organ for them was a delight! I admired the lady worker even more as

she spoke and sweat sacrificially, week after week. Using an electrical fan was not their priority.

Then the door opened for formal training in a course in January 1971. I did not know that God would have to train me through the practice of medicine and marriage for 10 years before my focus would be on Malaysia again.

In Monash University, the Clayton Church of Christ ministered to the Asian students, comprised mainly of Malaysians and Singaporeans. We were encouraged, through our Australian brethren, to take missions seriously. Most of our Asian brethren were converted there. Hence older Christians like me spontaneously take on the role as mentors to the newer Christians. All of us, therefore, stirred up one another to serve God wherever He sent us after graduation. The location for most of us would be Malaysia and not Australia. Only in later years we knew the reason why.

One day after Sunday service, a group of us agreed that when we returned home, we would contribute to society by running an orphanage. It was an idea of caring for the less fortunate through the “more” that God has given us. We kept this desire in our hearts and focused on graduating in a few years’ time. Soon we

parted company as we completed our studies in different years.

However, when I became a pastor's wife in 1981, events popped up without notice nor time to plan. There was no time to be an onlooker. Our first home after starting work, was located right in the compound of the MBS Sentul with the canteen operator as our next door neighbor. Sentul was well known as 'botak' Chin's (former gangster) area. His younger brother dropped into a church service a few years later. Even our more middle-class PJ brethren hesitated to visit us but, instead, kept calling us to visit them. Why is that so when we were in a needier part of town? Those were questions kept to myself as we labour on in the church. Otherwise I enjoyed such an opportunity to serve the people in the hospital, local church or among neighbours. Soon, their problems, joys and needs became ours as my husband and I got to know fellow Sentul citizens at closer range.

From them I learnt much regarding Malaysian multicultural and religious families, due to the close proximity to the Sentul Methodist Boys' School's routines. The care of premises by a team of Malay, Indian and Punjabi men, the sight of primary and secondary school boys playing truant and getting

punished, the sensing of work rivalry in action among the cleaners, gardeners and others, familiarized us to the Malaysian life naturally and fast! They often look up to us when in trouble. However, in my heart, I felt inadequate as a young doctor and wife helping them who had more experience than me in the school of life. But nothing could tempt me to leave that neighbourhood! I felt at home. It was God's place for us; that should be enough reason for us to be there. My husband had to go where he was sent as a Methodist pastor; we landed there by default. But what can I teach them with my MBBS apart from being respected as a doctor? They knew more about caring for in-laws, hard work for the family and eking out enough to survive than I did; they probably sacrifice more in giving time and energy to lift up the standard of living of their children than I had to in a later stage of my life.

“Lord, I like being here but what can I do? They converse in Tamil or Chinese and I, mostly in English!”

Family and individual needs abound. Our immediate neighbours were three generations of a Chinese family who lived in one room. The middle-aged canteen operator did not complain. He was happy to get the tender annually and a place to call home for his mother, wife and three small sons. At night, his mother slept in

the kitchen outside. We later discovered that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. During our third year there, when I just transferred to the nearby Psychiatry ward at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, he had a relapse. As a neighbour, I had to intervene. God takes us seriously when we commit ourselves to His service! He engineers the circumstances; we cannot choose.

When the man became violent suddenly, his mother, wife and small children ran to hide in our parsonage till he had gone out searching for them. At another time, having learnt from the hospital some tips, I had to call the friendly local police to take him for treatment. If my Mum were here now, she would vouch that I was a somewhat protected daughter at home. How did I have the courage to do such things? What I discover is that God does not ask for our permission to train our character the way He sees fit. He just does it and if we are willing to flow with Him, we will be toughened and more fulfilled in the process. Therefore, may I suggest a few questions for us to ponder and assess ourselves in His presence before we read the rest of this book:

- Do I care for those He cares when an opportunity arises right before my eyes?

- Will He then not guide and provide the wisdom to be His hands and feet?
- Are the stronger to help the weaker or ignore them?
- When I have what those needier than I do not have, what must I do in small or big ways, quietly or loudly?

In our country of Malaysia, a nation given the opportunity to be independent for over 59 years, are God's people more committed in caring for others? There are many believers who have taken up the task of simply caring for others like Jesus cares for us. Some have given their lives to do so, in known and unknown ways. Still others, perhaps a smaller number, have answered the call to train others to care meaningfully and systematically. Whatever manner we do it, God's child cares because the Father cares...for all mankind. Otherwise, we would not really have the fruit of His DNA.

The author hopes that this book will lay down a few basic principles for caring, not judging. It acts as a guide to encourage and uphold carers so that they keep caring. It will also caution them against burnout and wrong methods dictated by others, not by their gifts and resources. The recipients of their care maybe family members, local church brothers and sisters, neighbours

or the wider society. The scope is as wide and deep as wherever those made in God's image live. Let us move on...there is much to do...for His sake, not yours or mine.

INTRODUCTION

Caring is by itself a simple act. However, as caring is often not done enough (or can it ever be enough), God's children need to consider caring for one another because we are to reflect His nature. There is no choice. Caring is a natural consequence of being His child. Titus 2:14 reminds us that God...

"...gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good."

Revelations 19:6-7 assert the same proclamation,

"When I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give Him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

*and His bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean,
Was given her to wear.
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”*

Not many would disagree that caring is a righteous act. However, we may need to go beyond agreement to implementing the good works.

Therefore let us explore the many facets of caring for someone, especially those in the household of God:

Firstly, let us think about why His saints do not care sometimes. This may be due to several reasons:

- We have been hurt by fellowmen so much that we have hardly any emotional resource left to care for others who need us
- We have misunderstood Jesus’ mandate “...love one another as I have loved you...” as too tall a mandate for one as unsystematic and imperfect as us (John 13:34).
- We assume that to “love our neighbours as ourselves” is to love perfectly (Matthew 19:19). Therefore, we dare not try to care for others as we are confused over how much and how far we should care. Thus we do not care at all. Let others who can do it better do it and do it all. We better do what we are good at! This may apply to

very specific non-emergency situations but in urgent matters, we need to step in first, even if we are not gifted to help, and refer to the relevant people workers when needed.

- Wrong priorities take the needed resources for caring though we know the divine mandate.
- We are forgetful of the need of caring for those who may need help in some way.

However, when we face a personal need that requires external help, nothing hurts more than knowing that those who are able to care do not do so. All of us saints (those born again into God's family) are guilty, in some way or other, for not caring when we can. I believe that it is not so much that we refuse to do so but, given the benefit of doubt, we neglect this divinely ordained duty because:

- We feel inadequate to help
- We assume the person is strong enough to help himself/herself (a common group of such '*can help themselves*' needy people are wives of pastors or seemingly other apparently strong people).

- We assume that many others are already helping them (a common group being the VIPs in church who may actually be very lonely people because they have put themselves up on a pedestal for too long and others fear being misunderstood if they care for them too closely. However, they may need sincere friendship most-a caring deed too.)
- We would rather not get involved as it is too inconvenient for our lifestyle.

Yes, the task is too deep and wide for casual consideration. The nature of God is too mysterious to discover. But we know that to be in His image means we are to choose to be like Him.

If we want to please God, we have no choice but to care for one another as He cares for us, especially when we seek to identify with Him and call Him *“Father”* (1 John 3:10).

In the Old Testament, He urges us through the Micah mandate,

*“He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
And to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)*

God has the prerogative to command us to be just in our dealings with one another, and He shows us how it is done i.e. in mercy and with humility especially when we are fellow sinners and recipients of His grace.

In the New Testament time and since then, since Christ has died for us and resurrected from the dead to take us home to the Father, God balances justice with grace beautifully and perfectly for us. The ultimate action to save sinners by grace has been completed, finally. Therefore we can celebrate! As part of this celebration, the church, His family on earth, can naturally venture into caring for one another with joy and not with sorrow! This joyful caring will overflow to those around them anywhere and at any time, with the fragrance of gratitude to the only wise God of all!

Indeed, if we know more reasons for caring for others, we need to find out why so that we could join in the celebration of caring with a light and cheerful heart. Thus will all have the mind and heart of Christ as we seek to be like Him in word and in deed. We must be like little children in trusting Father God and love Him sincerely. Did not Jesus, His beloved Son, urge us to...

“Let the children come to me, and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of God,” and “Unless you become

like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God”?

We know that it is *“by grace that we have been saved through faith; it is the gift of God, not by works lest anyone should boast.”* Hence, if we do not unreservedly jump into God’s arms, we shall not enter His family/Kingdom. I already hear many voices protesting that we are not perfect in faith...hence He is not fair to forbid us from entering His Kingdom. But did Jesus ask for perfect faith or even much faith? No. In fact, He said that all we need is a little faith, faith as small as a tiny mustard seed. When that little faith is activated by our wills, He is so glad to catch us and hold us safely in His arms. Any relatively normal parent would do the same for his/her child. We rejoice when our children trust us! We will try our best not to betray that trust.

So it is in routine local church caring. It requires faith in Him as our Example...Jesus cares, therefore we care. But who is able to care like the Good Samaritan, a personification of the Good Shepherd, the faithful Friend?

“I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave His life for me.”

It is knowing that Jesus can and loves to care through His people that energises those who care for others without asking anything in return except to return all grateful hearts back to Him.

Therefore, we must remind one another that caring is an inevitable fruit of His life in us. (1 John 3:10-15; John 13:34-35).

(However, we need to be cautious on one point...that if we don't see a brother or sister actively taking care of the sick, comforting the grieving person, feeding the hungry or visibly giving generously, we cannot assume that they are not caring. After all, did not Jesus counsel that the donor's right hand must keep the secret of giving to her left hand?

As we shall describe later, there are countless ways of caring for those in any type of need. As long as our hearts are compassionate towards those in need and we do our honest best to help them, we are caring, I believe. Caring can be as simply and easily implemented as stopping for a moment to pray for a particular person, even if we are house bound. That we should not be busybodies by interfering in others' lives is an excuse commonly used to avoid caring for others. As long as we provide them relief as soon as we can we must not give the too rampant excuse - that we have to keep our

resources of time, money and space for our old age dues or for our children when we have so much more than we or what our children need, I believe He is pleased. All love, mercy, thousands of hills and mountains of precious stones belong to Him. He does not need these from us. What He looks for is the attitude of caring for those needier than us; what pleases Him is when we translate into action the priority of that attitude.

Why do I believe so?

Because caring is all about friendship with God and not about works. Reconciliation with God is part and parcel of our reconciliation with man precisely because if we love as God loves, we would want the other person to benefit from God's grace as well. Jesus' prayer in John 17:3 indicates that the new life in Christ is all about our friendship with God, and one would see to it that his friend benefits from what he benefits, even in everyday life. We are called to be friends in a childlike (not childish) way. That is why Jesus uses the illustration of a little child regarding faith in God. Children do not work like adults. They relate all the time if allowed to do so. That is why the United Nations' charter does not allow child labour (helping in families is excluded).

Having a normal and healthy childhood means having the time and permission to be themselves and to learn how to befriend others and be befriended in a non-calculative manner. On the contrary, payment is expected and calculated in work.

So we discover that as God started relating to us as our Friend, the whole of human relationships is also about friendship with one another. HE walked and talked with the first man and woman till sin broke that free and sincere mutually trusting friendship. And the Gospel, as related in the Bible, shows us what that true friendship means to those like you and me...friends care for one another.

Therefore, everything we do and how we live are to enhance our Friendship with God and bring His Kingdom into reality on earth even as we wait for heaven. We need to always live in the perspective of being in two kingdoms at the same time where time and space still exist. One kingdom is visible and transient or temporal, the other is invisible and eternal. This is being real though skeptics or cynics may think otherwise!

Being made in God's image imply that we have:

- a significance in the Father's eyes

Each is valued, loved and treasured by Him so much so that He has eternally attached Himself to us because His Son has brought the prodigals home (John 17:22, 23)! Who do you know will do that if they know what we were before being transformed into His likeness!

- a high calling of equality as:
 - man and woman
 - young and old
 - poor and wealthy
 - sick and healthy

It is in this love relationship with God, effected by His having fulfilled justice for us sinners saved by His grace, that we will go on to discuss the issue, 'Caring is Hard Work'.

I hope that this small book will stimulate our minds to consider taking care of others seriously, starting from within natural families and in local churches. It is a Christian's primary ambition to trust and obey the Son of God from whose bosom flows the hard work of caring even if it hurts. All burdens will certainly be turned to infectious joy of our Saviour, our Friend!

CHAPTER 1: BIBLICAL BASIS What God Does We Do

You and I are here today because someone cared to see our worth as babies the moment we breathe at birth. In modern days, a newborn is received by the hands of a doctor or midwife in the delivery room when he slides down the birth canal of his mother. All things being equal, the adults around him diligently see to his needs across cultural methods and norms. He brings joy to those who witness his birth; it is natural to adore and care for him. He is highly dependent on them for his need to be touched, fed, kept clean and warm. Gradually as he grows bigger and more mature, the carers become so used to being there for him that the moment by moment caring may become a mere duty to be performed, if not careful in today's task orientated busy and noisy world.

To most parents it is a privilege to have a child though some feel that it is a mere duty, especially if there is any psycho-socio-economic problem. Most of those who are reading this book can identify with the natural process of parenting. The child is created because two persons, his father and mother, love each other. However, many parents in a broken world do not or cannot feel such a

loving bond. Hence the need to remind one another what it means to care for others in the hope that all people will be cared for gently, logically and wholistically for the One Creator and Father of all mankind.

When we read the news on paper or online, sensational news are often portrayed attractively; the mundane of caring for others is often sidelined or taken for granted. On the other extreme, it is sensationalized! If we are not careful, we may become tired of caring for the living as news of battles, killing, destroying, annihilating or maiming others and even selves, seek to bombard our sensitive nerves and hearts deeply. Being human has its limitations and weaknesses. We are not made to 'tahan' any amount of mind confusing ideas without suffering vertigo in thought and action. God's children are not totally immune from such onslaught. Jesus's warning about the temptation to give up during end times is becoming real. But He does lovingly grant us the hope of change, in His wisdom, grace and faithfulness. We need to persevere to care for one another.

We do not intend to discuss the practical methods of caring for another person except in passing. The usual bookshop has enough of them. Sometimes we have an overload of ideas for caring that they actually make us

tired just reading them. Why? This is because caring is hard work indeed! Therefore, we look to God's word, the Bible, to encourage us to love as He loves and thus care as He cares even if we have to go against the views of others. If we do not act now, God may use other means as humans cannot wait to be cared for. Each individual's lifespan is limited, especially in today's world. We are but God's hands and feet to carry out His orders while together in the world.

We shall focus on caring for those within a local church (specifically) and shall touch on caring for our neighbours (generally). After all Jesus did indicate, before He was crucified, that His priority is for those in God's family and who represent Him in this world (Read John 17).

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “TO IMITATE GOD”?

A. The Trinity is a Community where Mutual Caring Exist

It is heartening to realise that the Father-Son relationship is one of mutual love and caring. They are one in temptations, one in times of trials and one in glory. Watch Jesus in the wilderness and at Gethsemane. The Father sent angels to support His Son when the enemy's onslaught was severe in the wilderness and when all the sins of the world was landing on Jesus. Yes, the event was planned in eternity but became real and horrifying when the time came for Him to be the sacrificial Lamb of God who took away our sins. Jesus obeyed the Father and kept His side of the covenant; the Father was faithful and stood by Him till He shouted,

“Father, Father...WHY hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Jesus learnt compassion through suffering in this world, the world He made with the Father. In humble love, He looked for the lost sheep that has strayed away from Him, betrayed Him and rejected Him. Dare we do less for those in dire need even if they do the same to us?

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”

Examples of God's Caring Heart from the Old Testament

- Genesis 3:7

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

Genesis 3:21

"The Lord made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."

From the beginning, God cares for Adam and Eve. They had sinned against the Creator God and did not know how or where to hide from His perfect holy presence. The best method they could quickly think of was to sew fig leaves together as covering for their naked bodies. However, though grieving that His children had disobeyed Him, God still loved them and cared for them; He sewed stronger and thicker garments to protect them - fig leaves are thin and tear easily but leather is waterproof and will keep Adam and Eve warm.

- Deuteronomy 32:10-12

"In a desert land He found him, in a barren and howling waste.

He shielded him and cared for him; He guarded him as the apple of His eye,

*like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young,
that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.
The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him.*

A mother eagle trains its young to fly by pushing it over a dangerously high cliff so that the younger bird has no choice but to open and flap its wings. Half-way through it gets tired and begins to fall. But the watchful eye of its mother sees the descent and rapidly flies under it to catch it before the inevitable happens. If a bird can do that by instinct, how much more our Father intentionally does that because He loves and cares for us!

- Deuteronomy 15:4-5

“However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, He will richly bless you, if only you obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.”

See how God cares for His lost and found children! He categorically states that no one should be in want.

- Psalm 34:6
"This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles."

God honours the humble poor and respects them enough to listen to them and deliver them.

- Psalm 82:1-4
*"God presides in the great assembly;
He gives judgment among the 'gods':
How long will you defend the unjust
And show partiality to the wicked?
Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
Maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.
Rescue the weak and needy;
Deliver them from the hand of the wicked."*

God practices justice for the needy who cannot stand up for themselves before those who bully them.

- Isaiah 1:1
"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."

The hopeless poor is God's prioritized recipients of His grace regardless of gender, human ancestry or nationality, not because of favouritism but because of their unmet needs. The good news is for all who want it

and some even beg Him to minister to them. The shepherds in the field watching their flock were overjoyed at His coming; they do not need further convincing!

Examples of God's Caring Heart from the New Testament

- Remember the genealogy in Matthew 1
 - Tamar was a Canaanite widow neglected by her father-in-law, Judah.
 - Rahab was a Jericho prostitute and breadwinner who feared the God of the approaching Jews.
 - Ruth was a poor Moabite widow of a Jewish man

These women were aliens and yet they were treated as Jews because they believed the God of their respective husbands was able to regard them justly and gently. They tasted God's kindness through His people and were thus willing to be His people too. He honoured them by treating them like His chosen people and by placing them in the genealogy of the Messiah!

- Matthew 5:3
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The humble in spirit are blessed by God. He shows His concern for their spiritual condition and not only for their outward poverty.

B. The Mandate to Care is from God Himself

We have no choice as His children. We sing so heartily “Because He lives we can face tomorrow”. But do we live as He lives, do we care as He cares while we are still breathing oxygen? Let us take a look at His heart... and consider whether the consequence is true in our individual and church life...

God Cares → Jesus Cares → His Children and Brethren
Care (regardless of natural human relationships).

C. A Christian is a person who has been:

- Transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and transplanted into the kingdom of light.
- Saved from inevitable hatred and filled with the overwhelming love of God.
- Rescued from the trap of resentment and is able to freely offer forgiveness to his enemies.
- Plugged out of the trap of abuse to receive and to be channels of His healing grace.
- A Christian is secure as God’s child. Like Jesus, He knows that the Father keeps him as the apple of His eye and

will see that he is safely home at the right time in human history.

- A Christian has an eternal perspective. Hence in reality, concept of time, history, diseases, prosperity, education goals, family and success are measured relative to eternity, not according to what is visible, tangible and transient only.

Therefore, he is now able to leave a life of selfless neglect in order to give intentional selfless care to those who need to be cared for as fellow human beings, what more as children of the Almighty and Holy God!

God has not left His people alone to figure out what to do when He calls them to care for others. The relationship within the Holy Trinity has left us the example par excellence to imitate in the community of His body. It is heartening to realise that the Father-Son relationship is one of mutual existence of love and caring. We see the Trinity working together - See Jesus in the wilderness facing temptations and at Gethsemane. The Father was watching the Son, sending His angels to uphold Him as He struggled to be faithful to Him who sent Him to be man of sorrows for us. Created in the image of God, we are meant to be like Him...like Father like children. Martyn Llyod Jones, a

medical doctor turned pastor, called it *“a Christian’s necessary pilgrimage.”*

We need to know that God has given us the only security (in His unchanging love) that anyone can have, benevolently bestowed to us without our having to plan for it (better than a huge bank account in old age).

We have been...transferred from the kingdom of darkness, hatred, resentment, abuse and careless neglect into the kingdom of light, forgiveness, healing and intentional caring. Hence, we are secure as God’s children i.e. like Him, safe in the Father’s love and given the eternal perspective of life and death. Living in the certainty of hope to be with the Father, we can care without being afraid of being in want of love and life! Hence the mandate to care for one another is given by God Himself. He has set us the example. Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his commentary on 1 John, purports that it is the failure to realise what has actually happened to us that traps us in our insecurities of the world. How sad. (*Life in Christ-Studies in 1 John* by Martyn Lloyd Jones, copyright 2002 by Bethan Llyod Jones, 5 in 1 original volume p. 338)

Let us ponder on how God cared for His people in the past in history. He is the One who took the initiative to show us how to care for people He has created. As His

children we are to be like Him i.e. we have no choice as His children. It is a matter of who and how we care. Once more:

God Cares → Jesus Cares → His Children Care

Two Examples of God's Care

The often repeated story of the woman by the well is no stranger to us since Sunday School days. The Samaritan woman was following a normal routine of fetching water from the village well. Sometimes it could turn into a boring exercise. However, since she was probably an extrovert, interaction with anyone was welcome. Jesus came along and asked for water to quench His thirst. Of questionable character, cheeky and seductive, the woman talked about what was obvious: the Stranger had no water container to place the water He needed. She had expected Him to bring His own water jug! Jesus sensed her spiritual-emotional condition immediately and took every opportunity to care for her inner needs of which she denied. He switched gear to meet her where she really was, using water as the talking point. Proper mannerism prevented gossips though His disciples felt uncomfortable on seeing them chatting away...she was a woman, He was a man in ancient Jewish culture.

He gently told her the truth about herself and yet offered her living water that would never run dry. He offered the forgiveness of her sins and yet gave her the dignity of choice to receive or reject the living water. She responded to Jesus' acceptance of her as a sinful woman of semi-Jewish descent; she believed His word and was transformed by unstained love. Joy bubbled from her heart! The outcome was that a whole village believed in the Messiah! (Can we beat that in our evangelism zeal?)

Then we read of the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable about loving our neighbours as ourselves (Luke 10:30-37). The Samaritan met with a medical emergency and time was crucial in trying to save the victim. He acted fast till it cost him time and extra unexpected expenditure. He had to do his best in the midst of a heavy schedule, as implied by his having to owe the innkeeper money if the wounded stranger required more. Had the Samaritan man bothered about who he was to the Jewish victim of assault? Unlikely. A fellowman needed quick attention; he was there to meet his need. All other consideration of his identity were inconsequential. Jesus stopped his parable there and asked a question...Who was neighbour to the man in need? We know the answer and He expects us to do the same.

REFLECTION

1. Would you intentionally want to live as God's child?
Why do you make the choice?
2. How has the above lesson affected you i.e. untouched,
caused you to react negatively or to ponder what it is to
be like the Father?
3. Are you God's child?
 - If not, would you want to be so?
 - If you are His child, what changes would you
make in your life now to daily reflect His
existence and fatherhood?

CHAPTER 2: WHO NEEDS OUR CARE? Family Comes First But All Included

We meet people everyday unless we isolate ourselves from them. There are several ways to categorise those we meet daily and one way is to see them as:

- Those in God's eternal family
- Those who have yet become God's eternal family

We may safely say that every single one made in God's image has a particular need for a personal touch some time in his life. They include those we naturally ignore Him because of fear, prejudice or ignorance and those who intentionally reject Him (Matthew 5:43-48). Let us consider who God specifically cares for though His caring heart is open to all who would invite into their hearts. Let us...

- **Watch Him prioritise...** The fatherless, widows and aliens are mentioned in the Old and New Testaments so many times that God must want us to pay special attention to them. Hence relatively normal Malaysians are privileged to have them all for caring in increasing numbers. No one should be jobless in this project whether paid or unpaid! Our online and hardcopy news repeatedly

remind us of the co-existence of migrant workers, street people, the homeless, the poor or the sick, the needy single parents and their young children, the aged who have emotional, social and financial difficulties living due to their children's lack of filial piety and the abused. The list goes on. One just have to do a survey of hospital wards to see a spectrum of people with personal needs waiting to be met. When working in the KL General Hospital in 1983, the problems of psychiatric patients (often admitted for temporary shelter while waiting for treatment to be effective) so overwhelmed me that I had a severe shock reaction. Their problems appeared so much like ordinary human needs gone wrong. Local churches are not exempted from having their fair share of such casualties. There is a minority who do not go near enough to help because they are ignorant of simple ways to help, but the majority of the public just let others do the job, be they the professionals or simply family members.

Many local churches take care of the needy and poor openly in creative ways. We can be sure He is pleased. Of course the ultimate good we can do for them is to prepare them for heaven; but even if they prefer not to come to the Source of all life, we still have to care for them. I have yet to come across passages in the Bible which discourages us to love all even if, for now, they refuse to receive Jesus.

- **Watch Him care...**Ezekiel 34 describes the pastoral role placed upon the few who have been called to help God, the Good Shepherd, care for the spiritual and overall welfare of His sheep. Many believers do not understand this pastoral role as many do not read the Bible accurately or literally. However, one does not need much education or wealth to nurture brothers and sisters in Christ. We need compassion though and it has to be activated deliberately by sharing of needs in small groups, whispering hurts in confidentiality if required and praying out of genuine concern.

Sometimes there is a need to reach specific target groups. Then specialists can come forward to fill in the gap, Most times a willing heart to serve others needier than us is enough. However there are times when we have to pray for appropriate spiritual gifts used to reach target groups - pastoring, counselling and caring (includes correcting and disciplining). We can care for His children so that they in turn care for others who need them and so the ball rolls on. The need is so great. One cannot do it all. Let good works snowball for the glory of the Father, for the good of His people and for the rest of the world.

- **Watch Him** include all who need caring...
...Middle-Eastern men and women in the Bible
...the rich and the poor whom Jesus touched
...those who acknowledge their need to be forgiven of their sins and those needing to be healed spiritually, emotionally, socially, physically or mentally.

Therefore, God's clear example shows us that caring is a sign that we are His children (1 Jn. 3:11-15.) Even if we are limited, we can look for others who are able to care for a particular person we know. The possibility of interfering in others' private matters when they need us is often a lie of extreme individualism, disguised as political correctness or shallow politeness.

By the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40), God has included everyone to receive His love. If we do not know where to start to care intentionally, we may start with His people e.g. see if there are lonely worshippers, talk and listen to them. You may make his/her day by being welcoming and friendly. If he/she has a current problem, your action may become an answer to a desperate prayer.

Example of a Normal Local Church Need

- Couples with marriage and family problems
- Mentally and emotionally weak relative who affects your family social stability
- Financial burdens due to mismanagement of income or poverty
- Medical problems that need urgent decisions
- Spiritually lost and confused person whose job is affected
- Etc.

Example of a Church Used to Help a Nation in Crisis

2 months after the cyclone Nargis hit Yangon in 2008, I was called to teach and minister grief counselling to a group of Myanmar Christian social workers, pastors and Bible college students. The Lord provided timely wisdom though I was inexperienced. Through this event I made contact with a local pastor's wife and leader who later related this information:

“The Christians in Yangon and the delta area started caring for the neglected, grieving and poor when they were hit by the Nargis. Three years later, in more stable times, when the government of the land needed a suitable and reliable man to help prisoners be more controlled and nurtured, they called my pastor husband to help. He developed social programmes for the prisoners and was able to share the love of God with them to enable them to become more disciplined in prison. I was also able to teach women prisoners in the cells to sew. Building a positive relationship with officers has opened doors to continuing fellowship with hardcore men and encouraging them to be good and responsible citizens in future. The prison officer in charge was appreciative of this good work among the prisoners and God was honoured through his people.”

Example of a Popular Servant of God

Every living person is in contact with another, even the mentally challenged. Henri Nouwen, the much read author, was a Jesuit priest, an intellectual and a spiritual formation lecturer. In his later years, God sent him to live with and pastor a small community of emotionally and physically challenged people who were also slow learners. After a number of years of fellowship in the community, His view of Christian pastoral ministry was

revolutionized. As he identified with these needy brethren, he discovered that though their worldview was smaller than his, their hearts were bigger. Henri had not noticed or cared for them before knowing them. He gradually opened up his inner self to them. Hence he became real as a brother. Consequently, he genuinely understood them as well as himself; He was enabled to accept himself as God saw and accepted him. His deeper brokenness surfaced for the Lord Jesus to reach out to him. Amazingly, God did this as Henri lived among these brethren, who, in the eyes of the world, were lowly and almost incapable of significant contribution to the society. Yes, by His grace, miracles do happen in those willing to see them. Those handicapped brethren probably did not even realise they were caring for someone so esteemed by the worldwide church through his readers and parishioners. God's miraculous love prevails. Yes, we can care for others as Jesus cares for us.

Which Part of Need Do We Meet First?

Care for the whole person. Though the job may not be simultaneously done, each part overlaps with the rest of the person cared for:

- **Body**

We are familiar with this as proven by visitation of the sick members of a local church. Other relevant needs such as funds for medical expenses may be needed too. But the attention and gentle concern shown by brothers and sisters in Christ is as therapeutic e.g. when I had concussion, a 2nd degree loss of memory and a fractured leg from a KTM train freak accident in 2004, my local church members, who were also close neighbours, surrounded my family with carefully planned daily lunch and dinner for three whole months at their own initiative and expenses even though we offered to refund. Each meal arrived punctually and pleasantly presented. My family experienced koinonia as never before, especially when my husband was working in Singapore!

Another elderly church member was taken care of and followed up when found unconscious in the house where she lived by herself. Now living long-term in a convalescent home, another member faithfully visits and holds her hands weekly without being ordered by the pastor. After a while, the elderly lady cried with joy to express that now she knows she has a friend!

- **Soul**

Constant companionship in times of grief for a spouse was offered by a late senior pastor's wife to a lady church member because she knew how lost one could feel as she had experienced the loss of her own husband before.

In another instance, another lady church member invited an older lonely-depressed -complaining pastor's wife to stay with her for a week while the pastor was busy. The action gave her an opportunity to form a friendship when others have failed before. Even her ten year old son was roped into giving 'therapy' by playing poker with the amused special aunty (who grew up thinking that poker was 'bad' for a pastors' family?).

- **Spirit**

Opening our homes for a break from busy home life could open doors for an intimate time with God alone. I once longed for such homes as my lifestyle could not allow me to rent a hotel room...too expensive when living from hand to mouth! Some others lend out their books for those who need them, often at a risk of of having them lost. I personally keep two copies of good books in case one goes missing!

The Meaning of being Human in God's Eyes

Jesus' humanity is often ignored when we misunderstand His perfection of character and completeness as a human being. We need to see Jesus the Man as fully human yet without sin. Hence we need to tease out bit by bit of our yet broken image in us so that we do not get overwhelmed with our imperfections and become discouraged altogether in trying to live His life. Hence we need to get our directions from Scriptures though the Author expects us to listen to His implications through the use of our minds.

How?

General caring –

anyone is to be available in an emergency situation.

Otherwise, fellowship and friendship may be offered anytime and anywhere

Specialised caring –

pastoral counselling, teaching, preaching, praying, healing, deliverance, education, corrections, providing accommodation, funds, advice, etc.

Exercise

- Pray for one another in your local church to continue to give and receive gentle gracious caring according to God's will for us.
- Find means of nurturing God's compassion...pray / read / visit / ponder / share...visit homes, hospitals, needy individuals/groups (e.g. refugees, migrant workers) and drop-in centres for those who need friendship.
- Provide human resource:

Local church members (i.e. those with resources of space, time, health, funds or advice), like

- homemakers
- retirees
- those in between jobs
- professionals on call
- students on vacation

Ensure full-time workers do not do it all! They are also made of clay. They may burnout, especially in the 21st century lifestyles!

REFLECTION

1. Who is my neighbour in the village, town or city where I live?
2. What am I going to do for my needy neighbour?
(Thinking small at first may help us to implement our heart's desire to care.)

CHAPTER 3: COMPASSION The Essential Attitude

Without compassion, caring is not internalized in the carer even though the person cared for may be helped in some way. In fact those who do *not* identify themselves as God's people sometimes care more as they are not so critical of the needy. Their effort may not be for eternity but it is helpful here on earth and that is what most people need-to be cared for in a real down to earth space-time world. I have to be cautious here as I may be misunderstood as being judgmental of my own brethren in the Lord. Let me therefore try to clarify the meaning of the word 'compassion' from a book titled '*Compassion*' (by Henri Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill & Douglas A. Morrison).

After three years of brainstorming, research and prayer, the authors concluded that '*compassion*' comes from the root words '*with*' and '*suffering*'. Hence, when we have compassion for someone, we suffer with them. Jesus exemplified having compassion in that when He goes near the suffering person in the gospels, He suffers with them, He feels with them in their predicament. As such, they contrasted the meaning of the word '*compassion*' with the meaning of the word

‘competition’. Competition implies *‘to make it in life’*, *‘to get ahead’*, *‘to be first’* or *‘to be different’*. Hence, they arrive at the conviction that caring as Jesus cares requires the ingredient of *feeling with the sufferer* or *suffering with him or her*.

This is the reason why this book on caring by God’s children is produced after years of pondering. They discovered that their caring is done as His representative and therefore reflects His suffering with the sufferer. Without this ingredient, caring by any individual or group is general, no matter how sacrificial and diligent it may be. In fact, the world has many groups who are in fact more caring than you and I and I take my hat off to them in admiration and respect. We do not wish to compete in this field but to give another view of caring which will so warm our hearts so that we cannot help but care in ways we can, not in ways that we cannot. We need to adopt Jesus’ way for His glory.

We usually receive care without thinking deeply about it. I struggled to recall someone who cared for me according to the above definition. My latest experience of suffering was to be suddenly immobilized by a massive haemorrhagic stroke. In addition to the physical limitations of hemiplegia, imposed on me without warning, the emotional shock of its potential

consequences on my daily life was even harder to bear. I was to be free to join my husband on his travels for ministries, after years of bringing up our three children who are independent now. Feeling the empty nest syndrome was trivial compared to the stroke which made me house-bound! It was the willing prayers and presence of His people that cushioned me through the traumatic shock.

In particular, when I was hospitalized in Kuching for three and a half weeks, a local elderly doctor friend (and brother in Christ) visited us twice just to be with us. He chatted with my husband on medical and mundane things. However, we felt deeply cared for in our time of distress away from home. This brother-friend was not in a hurry. We did not feel as if we were taking his time, even though his wife and son were at home. During each visit, he sat beside the hospital bed for up to an hour. In my medical condition, why did I feel comfortable with his presence? Later, I was to discover that his son has a disability which requires long-term care by he and his wife. They must have gone through much stressful times together... through shock over the diagnosis, through tears and broken dreams of a son to nurture all the way in school, through trials and errors, through constant prayers for God's healing, through medical research, through listening to gossips of well-

meaning friends as to why their son is different from other children his age, etc. In other words, they have suffered for years and borne with it. Finally they have reached a stage of acceptance and thus are able to suffer with other sufferers patiently, prayerfully and actively. When we are impatient with others, we miss the precious moments of grace and salvation because we miss the capacity to be aware of people and their needs. I thank God for someone compassionate who visited me at a time of need.

“God is a compassionate God. That is the good news brought to us in and through Jesus Christ. He is God-with-us, who finds nothing human alien and who lives in solidarity with us. He is the servant God who washes our feet and heals our wounds, and He is an obedient God who listens and responds to His divine Father with unlimited love. In fellowship with Jesus Christ, we are called to be compassionate. In and through Him it becomes possible to be effective witnesses to God’s compassion and to be signs of hope in the midst of a despairing world.” (Compassion p. 45)

God exists in community in the Trinity. The authors believe that consequently, *“The primary quality of community is a deep sense of being gathered by God.”* We begin to see each other as God’s unique gift to one

another. If we pay attention to the suffering other, he will soon recognize his own value to God. Thus compassion is a divine gift; it cannot be achieved through a doctorate in caring or by selfless effort. It is a fruit of God's grace to be recognized; a means of revealing His heart. As we patiently spend time with Him in attentive silence, prayerful action of God's community cannot help but lead the ones we care for to God eventually.

Mother Teresa believed that this is how God wants her to love Him-by loving the poorest of the poor with His compassion. We have a fraction of her abilities, but do we not dare be and do our best for the same Lord Jesus?

"Jesus who is divine loves our broken humanity not as a curse (Genesis 3:14-19), but as a blessing. He did not cure to prove, to impress or to convince. His cures are the natural expression of His being our God."
(Compassion p.17)

Though Jesus did not heal everyone, His healing flows from Him as He is confronted with illness. It is part of His nature to change a situation of despair into one of hope. It is in His nature to be compassionate and caring. He will be at every turn. The writers are right.

It is Compassion that Moves Him to Care

Matthew 9:36

“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Mark 8:2-3

“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

Matthew 9:35-38

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.”

Luke 7:11-15

“Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd went along with Him. As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being

carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, ‘Don’t cry.’

Then He went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.”

REFLECTIVE PRAYER

“Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, speak deeply to my heart I pray. Nurture in me the compassion that brought Your Son to earth willingly to suffer the pains of our wounds ...that we may be healed. In the Name of our Saviour and Lord, Amen”.

CHAPTER 4: STRENGTH TO CARE The Sufficiency Is From God

Matthew 11:2-6 (spacing rearranged for focus)

“When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, He sent His disciples to ask Him,
‘Are You the One who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’

Jesus replied,

‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see:

- the blind receive the sight,*
- the lame walk,*
- those who have leprosy are cured,*
- the deaf hear,*
- the dead are raised, and*
- the good news is preached to the poor.*

Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.’”

When John the Baptist asked Jesus “*Are You the One who was to come...*”, what did he have in mind? It seems a straight forward question expecting a “Yes” or “No” answer. The Jews had always waited for the Messiah but few expected a humble simple man of action to be the chosen One. However, Jesus gave a

long answer and showed him that all that is expected from the Messiah to do was being done by Him; thus He replied with a string of action sentences. This is usually what Jesus did. When a person sincerely came to Him for help, He gave it in action. Only the Messiah could do what He did. This shows His authenticity when He spoke in the synagogue as was in Capernaum and also in in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21):

“He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,
because He has anointed Me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began by saying to them,

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

(Read also Isaiah 61)

Jesus expected the enquirer to answer his own questions by reading the Scriptures and forming his own conclusions; the answer would be obvious if he knew the Scriptures and saw what He was doing. Since His time had come, He did not hide His deeds. He cared for the welfare of the poor and needy and all who needed Him during His time. It was not a secret. The proof was in the actions. Perhaps the tempter was putting doubts into cousin John's mind at a moment of weakness in imprisonment.

Therefore, He continues to embrace those who sought healing and forgiveness anywhere and at any time while He was with them for three years. Others who did not acknowledge their need of Him did not come near e.g. stubborn and proud Pharisees. In the same manner, as His disciples, we are to follow in His footsteps. We want to care for the sick and broken lives before they get worse; suffering is not a joke.

When we cannot help anyone personally, we could refer to those who may help. We would not keep them to ourselves for our own security at their expense. Many have been further wounded when the first person they approach about their problem feels too insecure to ask

for help from e.g. professionals or those with specific spiritual gifts. Sometimes I have to minister to full-time workers after an unnecessary prolonged delay; it is only by His preventive grace that they are finally given a diagnosis and treated accordingly. This is especially crucial in the case of medical/emotional assessment and treatment. Hopefully this will not happen too many times.

We need to be alert for the grieving and those depressed with known or unknown reason. This often includes the spiritually confused, condemned and lost. The least we can do is to listen attentively because he/she deserves our time and attention for them.

For example, a counsellee may have an emotionally dependent tendency. She may not be aware that her inner self does not want solutions to their problems because if she is helped and healed, she would be discharged to an independent life! In this situation, the counsellor, professional or lay, has to use a different method to minister to her. (Read John 5:1-15).

Therefore, in caring for the poor and needy (may not be the poor only as the richer ones may have other needs):

Actions Count, not Words

Focus on the verbs in the following verses where Jesus described what His listeners were to do.

- Matthew 19:21
“Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”

Jesus does not want us to be distracted by our possessions if we truly want to serve Him by serving the poor. Very commonly, it is not so much that we are unwilling to serve the poor but that we have not spent enough time to think about it and actually do it. Our neglect then becomes an excuse for us not to do the needful. The danger is to see everything relative to our obsessions with our possessions. They are so tangible that thinking about them all the time distracts us from loving others sacrificially. Meanwhile, the needy are kept waiting in their suffering. We also may need to change our way of time management in our daily life. Every person has the same number of hours a day to do all that is necessary. How is ours utilized? Somethings may have to go if we do not even have time to be concerned for people in need.

God alone has the top priority when it comes to our loyalty and first love for Him in action. He appreciated the woman who treasured Him in Simon the leper's house. She seemed to have understood that the Master needed her 'extravagant' action. He reciprocated by announcing that her action of love was prophetic.

- Matthew 26:11

"The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have Me."

In other words, if the disciple really cared for the poor, there will always be opportunities to give them what they need. But He who taught them to care for the needy was going away. Just because of the poor, should they neglect Him? Appropriate action at the right time is essential. We can almost hear Jesus saying,

"Don't give Me that excuse to discourage her in her first love for Me!"

Attitude of giving is to be with love and compassion

- 1 Corinthians 13:3

"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Just as compassion is expressed by caring for others in need, love is expressed through active giving of oneself to the other in need. Without love, our action may still be beneficial to the poor, but it will not do us any good.

- Mark 12:43

"Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.'"

Jesus' commendation of the poor widow's offering speaks for itself on His high evaluation of the attitude of giving, not the amount given.

- Acts 10:4

"...Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

Gifts to the poor is laid side by side to prayers as honoring to God. The Scriptures seem to put piety and faith on equal standing as giving to the poor. Yet this is seldom preached or pointed out from Sunday School to Senior Citizens' Fellowship across many local churches.

- James 2:2

"Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a

gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby also comes in. if you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?'

If we honour anyone at all, Jesus wants us to honour the poor. Therefore, as people taught by God's word, we need to remind one another to give without bias because the worth of a man is in the fact that he is made in God's image, not in his attire i.e. not in an external and false sense of worth.

Aliens, widows, the fatherless or orphans are also given priorities as target care receivers because they are often neglected by church and society.

- Exodus 22:21
"Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt" and should, by implication, be those who understand their cries for justice!

The seeming highlight on aliens being mistreated tell us that it was common for them to be mistreated; hence the reminder to be fair in showing mercy, even though they are not citizens. Admittedly, this requires a

paradigm shift as good things are often kept for citizens of a country. Aliens, more often than not, are treated as second-class citizens especially if they belong to the poorer group who do not earn enough to pay tax. We had better be careful, as God is on their side!

- Deut. 10:18-19
“He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the aliens, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.”
- Deut. 24:17-18
“Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this,”
- Deut. 24:19
“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

The repeated reason to treat poor foreigners well is that we were aliens before - the golden rule applies to all: *Do unto others what we want done to us*. Even if we are not

deprived now, our ancestors could have been before us. (My father was a very poor orphan from China who lost his father at two and mother, at nine years. Later in Malaysia, he cared for other boys in similar dilemma when he could because the first stranger to provide him with a job and literacy was a Christian small businessman in Fujien.) Hence we owe all our goodness and prosperity to God alone. If we return all we have to Him in ways that please Him, especially in sharing with the needy, He is delighted indeed!

- Psalm 68:5
“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in holy dwelling.”
- Prov. 23:10
“Do not remove an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; He will take up their cause against you.”

If we are unjust to the defenceless (the fatherless, widows and their children who have no one in authority to stand up for them) by e.g. abusing them by making them sex slaves or domestic or commercial slaves, God will surely take up their cause against us. Tragically, these issues have now surfaced in our society in the 21st Century in Malaysia.

- James 1:27

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted in the world.”

To top it all, God is the Father who is on the side of the poor. Hence, we need to take heed to treat the poor with equality and dignity.

This is so apt for our times...orphans and widows in distress. This instruction, put together with the Old Testament teaching, on the needs of foreigners, widows and the fatherless, exhorts us that even if we cannot help all in need, we can help at least help those who are in distress i.e. those who feel upset deeply because they cannot help themselves. Some richer brethren refuse to give a little out of their abundance as they purport that helping refugees will make them become dependent on the giver and not work hard to feed their families. Further, they may resort to enjoying luxury goods. Honestly, how many of such minded refugees have we met? Even then, aren't they allowed to have some extras to use, eat or keep? We, richer ones, often without thinking further, assume that we are more worthy of the 'rain' that God gives to all. I am sometimes guilty of such irony too...especially when I

feel insecure of my saving for old age...no paid work, no pension...forgotten about having EPF-lah! We forget that we know how to look for other options but the poor can't even try because their needs are so often immediate. (Here, we are not considering the minority of the faked poor we may occasionally meet in the streets.).

Where to Start Taking Action

- Commit to care in small ways, starting at a low-key ordinary quiet level.
- Pray for one another to keep being faithful in caring for others like Jesus cares for us - at home, in small groups, office, etc.

Two Examples

1. The widow gave what and all she could because God says so (in the Old Testament then). Was she richer before? Was she educated? Did she have a family to support or to support her? We are not told. But it is enough for Jesus to tell us she gave her all. Wasn't she worried for her next meal? She does not seem to be so; she probably was just relieved that she could give at all! Here was indeed one who lived one day at a time, in simple trust and obedience.

2. The Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable was half-Jewish. But the man (presumably a Jew) in need had his personal attention so much so that he was not self-conscious of their socio-religious differences. The Samaritan's main focus was to meet the need of one suffering. He was willing to cross barriers in order that the man could live.

The Crux of the Matter

Would you want to live as God's children?

Would you want to be established in the kingdom of darkness or light?

Would you want Jesus the Christ to be the hope of glory for others?

COMMON SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Examples of signs and symptoms of a person who may be in emotional need:

- The appearance of the person i.e. facial expression as different from his/her usual self
e.g. low mood or overexpression of happiness in an otherwise quiet person
- The dressing – is it appropriate for the occasion?
- Signs of weight loss or gain in a usually healthy person

Common home financial management

Poorer couples may look like quarrelling when they may just need advice as to how to control the use of whatever little they have if they are not in absolute poverty.

Look for Stress Points in Life

Note: A happy event may also cause stress e.g. a promotion at work, marriage. Some adults or children cannot take additional stress. This itself may lead to other problems e.g. depression or burnout if they don't have the usual support that their friends have e.g. relatives nearby,

- Growing up pains
- Studies
- BGR issues
- Marital status related issues
- Work related problems
- Children related problems
- Sickness
- Aging parents
- Near death or death related issues
- Infertility
- First child 's arrival
- Non-consummation for various reasons
- Singlehood
- Independence vs dependence issue
- Babysitting issues... women can't have them all re. job security. Priorities are essential if not totally deprived
- Education – what's the limit
- Etc.

Health Care Issues

We do not expect a person not medically trained (e.g. doctors, nurses, therapists) to provide definitive answers, It would not be fair to them and a risk to patients. But the carer may at least suggest who to call for help and pray sincerely for the suffering.

Old Age Issues

Needs – companionship generously offered is top priority. Empathy seems to be lacking in our once more empathetic communities as our developing society becomes more individualistic. If the church can prevent this dilemma, she would be a faithful and true witness to the triune God, Remember: the Holy Trinity is community indeed!

Funds

Whose is it anyway? If God owns all, sharing is the natural consequence. It is a matter of how we share. Paul reminds us to share till no one is in need. How beautiful!

Q. Are we family or not? Watch Jesus in Joseph's family...though He had the world to save, He loved His earthly mother, Mary. He arranged for His disciple John to take care of her when time came for her to relinquish her Son to God completely; He did not just walk out of her house to fulfil His calling.

REFLECTION 1

1. How has understanding the wider and deeper perspective of caring affected your views of caring in and through your local church family?
2. What are the hindrances I need to put off in myself before I can care for others like Jesus cares for me?
3. Who can I care for unobtrusively for His purpose and glory? For example:
 - students-foreign or local
 - lonely singles (unmarried, widows or divorced)
 - someone at the periphery of your church but who needs a friend to notice them because they are as essential for the maturity of the church as anyone else
 - those who may not serve yet due to personal reasons but who still need friendship
4. What action may I take after seeking His direction?
e.g. seriously practice the spiritual disciplines i.e. spend more time with Him in quietness and prayer, look out for people in need of any kind, pray with one person who also want to care and hold each other accountable before the Lord (unannounced).

REFLECTION 2

1. How have you received care in your local church in the last one year? Recall one incident.
2. Pray for brothers and sisters in church that the compassion of Jesus will lead them to care for others as Jesus cares for them...for His delight, glory and praise!
3. Find means of nurturing God's compassion in you... pray/read/visit/ponder/share ... visit homes, hospitals, needy individuals/groups e.g. refugees, migrant workers (Further, the Old Testament encourages us to welcome foreigners who agree to follow the Lord. Often, we are so afraid of them that we keep them at arm's length.)

CHAPTER 5:

WOUNDED BECAUSE WE CARE

A Common Dilemma

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE PERSISTENT IN CARING

Caring as a lifestyle is what His people need to consider. However, it can be very exhausting. This perspective of caring can be tiring in the long haul. Why care then?

The Bible shows us we need to be like Him who has a compassionate caring heart that flows into action. This is His nature and His nature is already in those born again in Him though it is not fully expressed yet. It takes time to nurture the new man/woman into the maturity of Christ. His Holy Spirit in us will see that the process is done. However, meanwhile, we have absolutely no excuse not to care for someone else, especially within His family.

As mentioned before, Heneri Nouwen wrote of the richness of experience he had, through years of living with and pastoring the handicapped. He never knew nor expected to be transformed deeply by his challenged housemates. Since that realization of his own need for

acceptance, gentle love and caring, his view of Christian ministry had been renewed.

Hence, whoever you are as a child of the living loving heavenly Daddy, just be yourself in the truest sense of the word, and you will care for someone else like your Daddy does! Yes, the old selfish self will take time to die but your new self in Christ is longing to love His people and world with and for Him!

FOR THOSE IN A MARATHON OF CARING-TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FOR A LONG HAUL

How do we begin or continue to do this?

1. We Need to have a Personal Ongoing Discipline to Listen to God:

“The words of God which you receive by your ear, hold fast in your heart; for the Word of God is the food of the soul.” (Gregory I)

“The Spirit is more than willing to teach us the words of God Himself. He is available with guidance, revelation, comfort and support. But if we are tuning in to other frequencies, we won’t hear Him very easily...If we want God to speak, we need to have ears to hear...Our door to

divine secrets is right in front of us. The only condition is our willingness to open it.” (Chris Tiegreen)

*“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit.”
(1 Corinthians 2:13)*

2. We Need to Practice the Presence of God through

- Silence in order to listen to God, not with preconceived ideas but with a relaxed and lingering mood
- Solitude:
in order to feel His presence. The author finds that a minimum of 3 days or 72 hours, set aside for Him alone, will help us overcome our restless hearts
- Simplicity:
in order not to be easily distracted by material things or methods of listening to Him. He delights to speak to us in ways unique to the individual!
- Humility:
in order that Jesus alone be lifted up since all things come from Him, (no matter if its our business acumen or inheritance or skills to raise funds or training). Without God given basic raw materials of giftings, resources and character, nothing can be done.

- Integrity:
in private and public life means non-addictive behaviour regarding (e.g.) sex, people, work, leisure, material resources, power, status, prestige, hoarding or unwise giving - because all things belong to God and are to be changed into heavenly eternal treasures which are redeemed people for God. (Matthew 6:20-21).
- Generosity:
in grace in variety of ways - grace received, grace give, especially in forgiveness and reconciliation because the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ is about the truth of His grace to sinners and weaklings like us!

3. When the Going Gets Tough in Relationships in God's Family!

We need to practice "truthing" in love by adopting the attitudes in Ephesians 4. It needs prayer and fasting; it is not easy or quick. But we must persevere in order that the witness of Matthew 5:13-16 is real. Forgiveness is repeatedly needed and, where mutual between two opposing parties, reconciliation must follow. The whole Gospel of Jesus Christ is about forgiveness and reconciliation.

4. PRAY FOR:

*"Courage to change the things I can,
Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Wisdom to know the difference. "*

A Priest

5. Meanwhile, accept external help so that you may:

- Have time for yourself (singular) e.g. exercise, spend a day outside the house, take up a sport/dance
- Have time for spouse e.g. date each other again, go for a vacation by yourselves
- Have time for your other children (or relatives and friends if you do not have children)
e.g. do normal things together specially for each child.
They need your love just as much as the one who is not well.
- Have time for your God who daily waits to listen to you.
Read Rev. 3:20. The Lord Jesus says:

*"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone
hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and
eat with him, and he with Me."*

Middle eastern culture is similar to Asian ones. When Jesus said that to the first believers, He meant that he would have "supper" with them...and talk like friends do over a meal. If we let Him do that with us, we would have a Friends of friends all the time...in joy or in sorrow, in sanity or in confusion...and He would sort us out, comfort us and stand by us.

Taking time to do other things needs planning such as blocking days or hours off for each item mentioned and stick to it unless an emergency crops up.

6. **Go through a Check List:** for own growth from the real today (not from ideal past, before the crisis happened):
 - a. Receive His healing grace and truth. Whether we are Christians or not, the problems of this broken world still descends on us but the solution depends on who we go to for help. Learn to trust Him as your good and strong Father.
 - b. Express your faith like Job when he lost his property, his ten children, and then was ridiculed by his wife for being faithful to God. In addition, he was afflicted with terrible diseases. After being condemned by his friends who tried to help, he cried out...

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."

In the end, God lifted all the afflictions from him, blessed him and asked him to pray for his friends in turn...how his attitude and action echoes that of Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.

"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the Father of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God...."

2 Corinthians 1:1-4

7. **If You are Caring for the Carers**, please ask them what they really need and find ways to meet that need. Insist and persevere in helping them though they may sound rejecting at times. Remember, they too need the reassurance that you really care!

REFLECTION

A Voluntary Exercise on My Journey in Life

- Take your time to recall. It may take months or years for you to fully recover from the shock of your painful experiences.
- It is advisable to walk through this exercise with a trusted friend or pastoral counsellor. At each stage, release those experiences to God and ask for His healing grace to heal your wounds.
- Give thanks for what He will teach you as you walk through the past with His counsel.
- Forgive those who have hurt you intentionally or unintentionally through e.g. unkind remarks from relatives, false accusations from friends.
- Seek God's forgiveness where you have wronged someone else, or if you know that you were partly the cause of the hurts in the life of the chronically needy person. Claim His forgiveness from I John 1:9 and don't let Satan accuse you again...he will try. Thank God for sending Jesus to die on the cross for you. And because His is risen, you live also!

Write down:

- Childhood
 - family background (if needed)
 - achievements and failures
 - expectations and acceptance
- Pre marital stage
 - ambitions
 - ideals for family life
- Marital life
 - before crisis onset: recall
 - how crisis started: recall
 - after special needs become prolonged: recall
 - After you have known forgiveness and forgiven, and are in the process of receiving God's healing for your emotions and renewal of mind, you may like to destroy the list as a symbol that you are now seeing your personal and family life from God's new perspective.

It's best to do this within a group of caring believers who will encourage you and hold you accountable to your decisions as well.

CHAPTER 6: HIDDEN DISTORTIONS IN CARING Beware!

Most of those who care for others do care of genuine concern. However, a few care because they have a need to be needed although they may not be aware of this weakness. If left undetected and unhealed, a caring relationship that relies on an emotional dependency may lead to severe disappointment, deep wounds and a confused state of mind in both the carer as well as the person being cared for. Hence this issue should be gently surfaced in local churches so that the relevant people can find help through pastoral counselling or otherwise. I do not write about it to embarrass pastors, church workers or any persons assigned to do people work, but so that they may seek help from others (e.g. specifically trained and mature pastoral counsellors) first before they embark on caring for their sheep at close proximity. Intentional or unintentional victimization by emotionally dependent carers can be very painful. Many reel in emotional pain when the reality is put before them.

One senior pastor's wife shared how she was shocked to find herself capable of hating their lady church worker for making use of her husband and her to satisfy

her own need for *love* and a *false sense of security*. The deceit, even if not planned, was hard to take from a trusted co-worker in His field. I suspect many victims cover up the 'crime' because they do not understand the dynamics of such a relationship and often blame themselves for their own foolishness in getting into a dependency situation.

The few whom I have encountered in counselling situations readily gave me permission to share about this potentially toxic relationship in order to stop or prevent them happening again. It is not honouring to God; it is like an addiction to people or worship of man. The treatment may not be about salvation but more on sanctification.

Pray centred-psychotherapy helps build healthier relationships among brethren instead of tearing them down. Intellectual ability, religious fervour and good social standing are not good indicators of the absence of this 'virus'. Hence the necessity for its definition so that His people can make a quick diagnosis of the problem and provide suitable treatment to themselves. They may need to seek godly counsel from objective pastoral counsellors. It will also take time to forgive and heal. I thank God that the few that I encountered were willing to follow instructions and be freed from such a

bondage. Friends who are later discovered to have this infirmity are harder to help, however, as they may not be as objective as a referred person. Hence, we dare not keep such counselees to ourselves and must refer those willing for treatment as soon as possible before more people get traumatized secretly.

It is assumed that everyone needs some kind of affirmation for what good he does. However, to some carers, it is never enough. Such an attitude causes problems to the caring relationship.

DEFINITION

This potential problem comes with a few common names. Some call it 'the possessive syndrome'; others call it 'emotional dependency'; still others, 'the obsessive syndrome'. They have a similar pattern of behaviour:

- The Person A excessively attaches himself to the other Person B, even when the reason for them to meet has been accomplished e.g. a counsellor-counselee, comforter-comforted, teacher-student, doctor-patient encounters.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

I. Emotional Dependency

(For more details, look up *Emotional Dependency* by Lori Rentzal, IVP 1984, 1987, 1990)

1. Person A often shows up as the one in need of help as a victim of circumstances. In reality he may be the stronger person manipulating events. Many leaders have been trapped as they like to help others or are obliged to do so.
2. Person A usually makes him (the helper) feel good by saying, *"No one else can help me. I heard that you are a good pastor / counsellor / teacher / etc, but keep our meetings secret as I am afraid others may reject me if they know my problems."* Quite often, out of goodwill, the pastor, for example, believes Person A. Hence, one else, not even his wife, knows about their 'pastor-member' relationship. This situation can be very dangerous but always risky, depending on the opportunity for temptations to be succumbed to. This may happen in a same sex or different sex counselling situation today.
3. If the carer/helper notices something is wrong and calls off an appointment, Person A may exaggerate her problem e.g. abuse, demon possession, etc. to continue the meetings. She may get angry or upset with him

excessively if he stands firm and refers her to someone else. She may threaten the carer with, *“I’ll tell everyone /the church leader that you are a bad pastor because you discharge me before I am helped!”* Sad to say, many people workers want to be known as kind, patient, etc and therefore succumb to Person A’s blackmail. Don’t be scared but tell someone trusted about it e.g. your wife and/or another mature church mature leader, to get out of the situation. It will be for good of both of you. If you realized you are also emotionally dependent, then it is even more necessary to cut off your sessions with her.

Help is available for both sides if only we can be more transparent and loving in a Christian community. However, without firm action, such persons in deep emotional needs will continue hurting someone, even those they care for, without realizing their own need for change. If they don’t get what they want selfishly, their outbursts may destroy others or their relationships.

General Advice

If the persons involved are not a married couple, stop the relationship immediately. They are not to contact each other at all. Hold the dependent person accountable to someone for a fixed period. Then separately counsel each person, depending on their problems. One or both parties may be emotionally

dependent or they may have other problems e.g. wrong teaching.

If they are a married couple, the approach is different as it is not wise to counsel divorce though a short separation may help during the treatment and recovery period. The only exception is when violence is involved. Clear discernment is needed...pray at all stages.

Prevention

In my view, exposure of such a weakness in communities, before problems crop up, may help to grow more loving relationships. Prevention is better than cure, even in God's family.

II. Burnout

Is another issue carers need to watch out for though it is better understood than emotional dependency. (Please refer to *The Heart of Pastoral Counselling* by Lee Bee Teik, Armour Publishing 2009)

One Necessary Debris to Clear in Caring Work – Unforgiveness / Resentment

(Adapted from Building a Love House is Hard Work)

Oneness among God's people is a necessary factor in ministry if we want to be a witness for Jesus. He prayed,

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one. As You, Father, are in Me and I am in You, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."

John 17:20-21

We need to remember that...

"... we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to Christ. "

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Hence, as forgiven sinners on the path of recovery, it is imperative that we forgive those who hurt us right here while we are on earth. Let us humbly ask the Holy Spirit to alert us to who we should forgive. As we obey Christ, we will be further released for fruitful ministry for Him. (If you wish to understand the essential difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, please refer to *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (English, Chinese, Tamil and Bahasa Malaysia) by Lee Bee Teik at website: www.reconre.org)

Note:
**Factors that May Cause an
Increase in the Need for Caring in the Malaysian
Society**

Changing Family Commitment

When a society *urbanises* in face of industrial and technological development, family patterns and lifestyles also change. Let me explain...

In a *rural* setting, traditional families are committed to playing several roles towards their offspring. The family members are their educationists, recreationists, religious models, protectors, financiers and the source of their affection and pride. When the same people urbanise, “*outsiders*” take over the above roles. Schools educate and protect them to some extent, together with the social welfare departments and the police force. Club-houses provide recreation, fast food outlets and restaurants compete to provide the growing child with food which used to be cooked at home by mothers or relatives. If you check the list of provisions, only constant motherly affection and tender loving care cannot be provided for in the urban environment.

This often leads urbanites to seek affection in casual relationships, if not in marriage. But because the general atmosphere in the modern world is that of instant gratification, parents and children alike are overexposed to selfish friendships at the expense of loyalty, responsibility and genuine love. Marriage sometimes slips into a non-binding agreement like a business or work partnership. It is entered into more for emotional companionship rather than for committed relationship. Rejection of children (sometimes subconscious) and fear of parenthood emerge. Noticeably, the family eventually comes to be viewed as a husband-wife relationship rather than as parent-children relationships in content. Even the former is viewed as one of many non-binding commitments. Therefore, children take second place in such families.

In the West, many parents do not simply give away their assets to their families in their life-time but tend to lend them things or money when needed. However, in more traditional families, those who can afford will usually give their resources freely to their grown up children. I sometimes wonder if this is the reason why many children do not personally take care of their aging relatives in the West. Many even lend to their parents what they need instead of freely giving it to them. Mutual respect and sacrificial love seem to have grown

cold in the name of non-interference and individual rights. In the East, this type of relationship pattern sometimes takes the form of family members becoming business partners. They do not seem to realize that they have to change hats while living as close family members while at home.

In other instances, the increasing dissolution of the extended family life-style has brought much freedom as well as pain to many of our Asian families. The more individualistic, non-interference-by-outsiders concept when problems arise within families is becoming common in Asian urban areas too. Increasingly, professional counsellors are admitting that personal psychotherapy needs to be replaced by family therapy once more. Their roles as therapists will probably parallel that of village headmen in the years to come. Within the church, trained lay pastoral counsellors would be in a position to do the same, if they are willing to pray and work hard for Jesus' sake. The needs are too great for pastors to handle alone, apart from the fact that many seminaries do not help potential pastors understand pastoral counselling as an integral part of spiritual formation into the image of Christ, not a mere psychological tool.

Changing Age, Education Level, Wealth and Health of Our Population

Money neurosis, the excessive admiration of high intellect, beauty and comfort, excessive pursuit of perfect health, craving for pleasure and the problems of aging will become more prominent in the coming years.

We may not assume any more that elderly Asians have less to worry about where being cared for by their children is concerned. Many young people today do not understand their elderly parents. Some even look down on them, especially if the elders use different ways of getting what they want. The young sometimes label them as manipulative without realising that they are too, but in more sophisticated and educated ways. If the adult children realise that they have also failed their parents in many ways, they may be more patient with their aging parents or take the trouble to understand them.

THE MALAYSIAN CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Many Christians are first or second generation believers with a large proportion in the young adult age group. Therefore, many are at a vulnerable stage of growth as persons or as younger children of God. They do not find it easy to assess the various doctrinal and behavioural movements that arise in the churches from time to time.

Many converts come from backgrounds steeped in other religious beliefs, doctrines or superstitions. They bring into their new life many *traditions and behaviour patterns which are not from the Lord*. It takes time:

- to *identify* the old;
- to *desire* to discard the old;
- to *actually bring* them to *the Lord* to be dealt with.

In the last 30 years or so, there has been a surge of interest in spiritual matters, coinciding with the refreshing wind of church renewal through the charismatic movement. By themselves, they may be good. However, on hindsight of our Western brethren's experience, we need to be acutely aware of the

emerging trends within the Western church as whatever happens here is moving at a much faster rate than in the West. We are often getting the remnants of that which may already be harmful to them but which we tend to swallow ignorantly across language translations (See "Damaged Disciples" by Ron & Vicki Burks.)

Some clear examples are:

- The prosperity gospel as opposed to Christ's persistent call to self-denial in order to be like Him. It is so easy to choose to ignore some portions of the Gospel that are inconvenient to us. I am also guilty of such intentional blindness. We need to encourage one another to read and meditate on those passages in the Bible that we do not immediately like, and act on them.
- The desire for personal healing. We naturally want healing as it is indeed a blessing to be well. But do we only seek healing from:
 - physical problems,
 - mental and emotional hurts and oppression only?

Do we seek, together with the above, knowledge and conviction of our personal sins so that we may repent and be forgiven and cleansed by the holy God? (Ref. Chapter 1. of *"A Passion for Holiness"* by J.I. Packer)

Where is the emphasis? If the emphasis is on the first three types of healing, without conviction of sin, could not the motive be for self-development and *not* so much for His image to be formed in us? Where is our focus, on God or on the development of ourselves?

It is not easy to recognise the disguise when it looks modern and advanced. I have begun to ask whether we would not have made the same mistakes as our Western brethren have made if the Gospel had reached us first?

REFLECTION

1. Listen to the Good Shepherd's voice everyday, primarily through the meditation of Scriptures. Know what pleases or displeases Him.
2. Ask Him for wisdom and discernment in your desire to serve Him in His ministry of caring in and through the home.
3. Read as widely and wisely as possible in the areas of family oneness.
4. Read the Bible book by book, looking at how God speaks to His people in their times of need in order that we may follow in His footsteps e.g. understand how He counselled Abraham, Moses, Esther, Ruth, Peter, Zacchaeus and the woman at the well.
5. Learn from others humbly when appropriate, e.g. in the study of biblical and good scientific psychology, which is part of God's general revelation to us.
6. Listen to the Holy Spirit's still small voice telling us which way to go, to the right or to the left, in daily life (Isaiah 30:19-22).

7. Go and minister God's presence, His grace and His will to others in the hope that individuals, families and your community will be nurtured for Him.

Becoming more obedient to Christ, therefore, is becoming more sanctified and more holy. The focus is on Him, not on self.

CHAPTER 7: LONG-TERM CARERS Restoration Is Needed

Deuteronomy 15:11

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open-handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”

Caring work, like giving to the needy and the poor, is endless on this passing earth. It will not be completed till the Master comes to take us home. Others care for disabled or sick relatives and hang on to them long-term out of patient love and/or duty; giving up is not in their minds. Therefore, we have to care of the carers who do so till they are burnout. We need to prevent them from becoming too exhausted with care.

The purpose of such caring is to provide temporary relief from long term/excessive stress. Such carers often feel burdened but are too afraid to ask for help in case others are burdened, rejecting or simply do not understand. Therefore, take initiative to offer relief without being patronizing. Ask for nothing in return unless you need a paid job!

Long term carers need our support as well. These may be those taking care of love ones at home. These type

of carers are often isolated from former friends due to their relatively home bound situation for the sake of their '*patients*'. They may have to multitask if no other helper is around e.g. go to the bank, pay bills (though in today's world, most duties can be done from home online)

A PERSPECTIVE FOR THE CARER

(Adapted from *Caring for Carers* – A Reconre Publication)

This chapter is specially written for a group of people who love their families and God's people very much. It is penned from God given opportunities to learn through sharing life experiences with those who are caring for their loved ones. Both painful and joyful shared moments draw us closer to know the God who has suffered most, on our behalf. I have found this pilgrimage with fellow carers a great privilege because they understand what suffering is, what life struggles are and yet stand by their loved ones, by the grace of our enabling God.

Many of these carers are people like you and me...adults with relatives who need long-term caring in their homes because of physical, mental or emotional disabilities.

Others are those who have chosen to care for many for the sake of the wider kingdom of God. These are the faithful pastors and church workers, social workers and interdenominational staff workers. They reach out and care for the lambs and sheep out of gratitude to the holy yet merciful and gracious God. He first loved them and cares for them always.

Hence, when the additional burden of caring for needy loved ones ensue, they also need much understanding and support from their local churches; they cannot simply put aside their lambs and sheep in order to care of their natural families. They need our help to ease the pains of extensive and intensive caring so that no false guilt will crowd into the lives of these precious servants of God. They, who have been called and set apart for Christ's ministry of reconciliation, are as human as we are. They too need to rest, to be healed and be refreshed by your tender care.

AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES

Life Changes

Many families start off with romance and hope of a normal family life after children arrive. Then suddenly, a crisis changes the whole family atmosphere when

singles or married couples in a family are all affected. Increased stress hits all concerned.

Some lose balance when emotionally stunned; others cry in the dark alone, bowed with sorrow and anxiety.

Many become mentally confused but bravely push on in daily life out of necessity. They are often physically exhausted as adrenaline levels rise and stay high.

Even the strongest child of God may reach out into the seeming silence and cry,

"God, where are You?? WHY is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this chronic responsibility and burden in my life...especially when all things seem to go so well me before before?"

Responses

Responses to stress may be negative or positive. Our aim is to try to see things from a positive angle.

1. STRESS means CHANGE

Normal stresses are due to the various cycles of life on earth:

- a. personal life cycle: conception, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle and old age.
- b. family life cycle: courtship, marriage before children arrive, after children arrive (when they are small, adolescents or young adults) and after children leave home as independent adults themselves.

Additional Stresses are due to unexpected events such as:

- a. career needs (e.g. loss of job, demotion, competition)
- b. illness (acute or chronic)
- c. personal hangups leading to interpersonal conflicts (e.g. with spouse, children, in-laws, church members, colleagues)
- d. examination failures or financial crisis.
- e. spiritual depression (e.g. undergoing the "*dark night of the soul*")

When several stresses come closely in time, it is extremely difficult for the person to cope without external support.

For Example:

Stresses rained on me once, while I was caring for my elderly invalid mother and infant son, upholding my husband in fulltime Christian work, facing false accusations from those I trust and pressures from fellow believers. As if those burdens were not enough, my three-year old son fell seriously ill just as our second child was born. Before I could recover from one problem, another surfaced. How did the Lord support me through those years of so many "unending" pains I did not ask for? He surrounded me with people who loved my family. The loving support of good friends in church pulled us through and saved me from a major breakdown. Then two close Christian friends with mental illness committed suicide. In one case, I blamed myself for a few months till the faithful intercession by Christian friends lifted me out of the pit of false guilt and fears. Once more, God sent friends to pray and accept rather than condemn those suffering. It took several years before I dared venture to do something constructive outside the home again! Those in the same cell group felt the same and we thus supported one another.

Lessons Gleaned

The way we perceive reality and problems affect how we cope with pressures of increased stress. Some people are able to see only good in the darkest moments and some are able to see only bad in the brightest ones. As someone said, it is like whether we see that a glass is half-filled or half-empty. But it is God the Creator who is still in control even when everything around us appears to collapse... brick by brick!

Two Common Negative Responses to Stresses and How to Help

- We become depressed which leads to an emotional low mood. There is just so much that a person can handle at any given time. To protect ourselves from more involvement with people, we keep away from them. This is due to our human limitations. If this low mood is short term, soon our heads will be above waters and we will be able to reflect and plan for the future. But if this mood is prolonged to months, we need someone from outside our situation to help us get out of this state, be they doctors, pastors, counsellors or simply understanding friends and relatives.
- We blame others instead of objectively assess the problem. Maybe we need to ask the question,

"How much of our tensions are due to the problem, and how much are due to our personal reactions?"

A Recommended Positive Response

Let's watch Someone who has faced the worst in this earthly life.....Read Matthew 27:45, 46

"From the sixth hour until the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, WHY have you forsaken me?'"

When we are in trouble, the best person to help us is someone who has gone that way before and come out of it safely. Jesus of Nazareth is one such person. In fact, He is the only Person who experienced the worst in this earthly life throughout the history of humanity. He is the only begotten Son of God who became man so that He could be that Guide and Saviour to us. This is not mere religious talk. Having gone to hell for us, Jesus wants to help us, Jesus wants to speak to us. He wants to show us what to do day by day, while we are still in our struggles, as we take care of our loved ones.

In the past years, especially between 1983 and 1991, time and again, it is this God who has answered my cries for help, literally or through others. Once, when I was so

exhausted with worry as well as false guilt over my son's illness, and nursing an infant daughter at the same time, Jesus comforted me with this series of pictures...

I saw Jesus with the eyes of faith. He was sitting under a tree with my son and infant daughter on His laps. Jesus then kindly said to me,

"Mum, you may go now, I'll take care of them."

As Mum, relieved, walked away, my son waved and yelled out,

"Yes, Mum, we'll be alright. You may go now...Jesus will take care of us."

When the vision was over, immediately, the false guilt (of not being able to care for my sick son and protect him enough) was lifted off my shoulders! Amazingly, because I realised that God has actually taken over full responsibility for his health and life, I felt relaxed. I was thus enabled to enjoy life again, even though I was still physically caring for him. Those years of chronic toil in caring for others and my family took its toll on me. I had grown so worn out and haggard that even ministry friends could not recognise me when we met at a seminar...a 34 year old me must have looked like a 50 year old burnout and depressed lady!

Where in the Bible, then, is there a word for us to hang on and talk to God about? Let's read Romans 8:28...

"And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

How then do we start or continue to receive His goodness?

A SUGGESTION FOR THE EXHAUSTED

1. James 1:5

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

ASK GOD FOR WISDOM WHEN AT A LOSS IN ANYTHING.
and
WAIT FOR HIM TO SPEAK
or to
SHOW YOU THE WAY FORWARD.

PRAY FOR:

*"Courage to change the things I can,
Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Wisdom to know the difference."*

2. Meanwhile, humbly accept external help so that you may:
 - a. Have time for yourself (singular) e.g. exercise, spend a day outside the house, take up a sport/dance and/or listen to music that refreshes you
 - b. Have time for your spouse e.g. date each other again or go for a vacation by yourselves
 - c. Have time for your other children (or relatives and friends if you do not have children) e.g. do normal things together specially for each child. They need your love just as much as the one who is not well.

Have time for your God who daily waits to listen to you.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with Him, and he with Me.” (Jesus in Rev. 3:20)

When Jesus said that to the first believers, He meant that he would have *“supper”* with them...and talk like friends do over a meal. If we let Him do that with us, we would have a Friends of friends all the time...in joy or in sorrow, in sanity or in confusion...and He would sort us out, comfort and stand by us.

This taking time to be alone with God needs planning such as blocking days or hours off for each item mentioned, and sticking to it unless an emergency crops up.

After you have known forgiveness by God, has forgiven others, and are in the process of receiving God's healing for your emotions and renewal of your mind, you may like to destroy the 'hit and hurt' list as a symbol that you are now seeing your personal and family life from *God's new perspective*.

(Ref: *Forgiveness & Reconciliation*, A Reconre Publication. Available free at www.reconre.org)

Finally,

Rejoice that the only God of the heavens and the earth
is upholding and strengthening you
all the way in your pilgrimage towards Him!

OVERALL REFLECTIONS

1. How has understanding the wider and deeper perspective of caring affected my views for caring in and through my local church?
2. What are some hindrances I have to put off so that I can care for others like Jesus cares for me?
3. Maybe you will use the BSSF series in your own time over the next one month.
(Byte Size Solid Food Series from www.reconre.org)
4. Who can I care for in an unobtrusive manner for Him and His purpose and glory e.g. foreign and Malaysian students nearby, the lonely singles (never married, widowed, divorced)? Someone at the periphery of church life may who need a friend to notice them, listen to them and show some interest in them because they are as important as anyone else...even if they cannot serve as yet due to personal reasons?
5. What further action will I take after seeking His direction e.g. practice the spiritual disciplines, look out for people in need of any kind, pray with one other person about your commitment to care because Jesus cares (no need to announce)?

GET STARTED

Something to think about if your church wishes to start a caring ministry systematically...

1. Generally, pastors and people alike shy away from acknowledging the fact that many of God's people have some brokenness that need special attention. Pastors probably have to refrain from training because they simply do not have the time or energy to serve this group of people continuously.
2. The people often refrain from learning to care because they too have other commitments which they may deem more important or urgent. Others stay away out of fear of involvement. Yet, we know that the need is real.
3. The relatives of God's people or others who have deep mental and emotional unmet needs are often tired, confused, anxious and hassled. To think clearly and enjoy God's love again, they need to be relieved now and then, on a relatively regular basis.
4. If there is a keen though small group of parents who are supporting one another already. It is a great gift to be able to see the potential good that may emerge from the bad, by God's grace. They may be mobilised to share their benefits and testimony of mutual caring to

churches. When they are ready, bring some of them along in your outreach programme.

Hence, my suggestion is that carers draw its strength from the experiences and joy of this support group by:

- a. Organise its services to include temporary residential care of those members whose relatives
 - b. need a short break to recover from long term caring of their needy children or relatives.
5. Make the need for a room to rest for a few days known to your church. Make this temporary relief service known to those in the main ministry, because this is something not many others would do though they can do so. I am sure that many exhausted workers will take up this offer. Gradually, when others in the church see that such caring is within their reach, they will have more interest and courage to help their members in the same way. Read Mark 6:31 to be convinced of the need for a convenient hiding place for ministry brethren!

A FAMILY PRAYER

Dear Father,

Thank You for Your everlasting love that enables and
sustains us,
to care for one another as You care for us,
through the thick and thin of this world.

Help us to submit to You when You care for us
through discipline,
through hardship and through tears which we,
in our stubborn rebellion, may have caused.

In trials to stretch us to maturity in Christ,
we dare not ask
'WHY'?

We only plead with You
to be our Constant Companion, Intercessor and Saviour
through the storms of life,
that we may fulfil Your purpose for us
... to be like Your Son Jesus Christ.

In Your mercy,
hear Your children's prayer
in Elder Brother's Name.

Amen.

EPILOGUE: GOD'S HEART IS A CARING HEART God Is Pleased When We Care

God knows the poor in any land will always be there before He comes again. He knows that side by side, there will be members of the family who need help ...our siblings in our families and brethren in God's wider family. Hence the command for the haves to be ever ready to provide for the have-nots. It is a just and compassionate command from a fair and loving God. Surely we bring Him delight if we say "Yes" to Him!

God's heart feels,
God's heart is soft and compassionate,
God's heart is alive,
God's heart bleeds for us who have His rich resources

Yet we do not provide enough for our brethren and others in need...

The spiritual is expressed in the physical, mental, emotional and social aspects of our lives...

*"But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The punishment that brought us peace was on Him,
and by His wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)*

“For God so loved the world...that He gave us His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him...”
(John 3:16,17)

*“Jesus said to them,
“Come and have breakfast.””*

*“And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.”*

(Joel 2:28)

APPENDIX 1: Practical Guidelines For Caring in a Local Church

1. Every congregation or small group of His people needs encouragement to care for one another as He cares for us (John 13:34, 35). Our Lord Jesus ensures the new commandment summarises the behaviour of His church before a watching world. Therefore we do not need to scratch our heads to search for ways and means to be His witness. Just obey and follow Him.
2. However, He only expects us to do our best in our endeavour to please Him. To expect 100% care is unrealistic before He comes again.
3. Ask yourself, *“When did I intentionally care for someone in need?”* This is to focus on my duty rather than on others’ duty.
4. Be the neighbour in the parable of the Good Samaritan and *“Go and do likewise!”*
5. **Rejoice** always,
Pray constantly and
Give thanks in all circumstances!

It works...to enfold you with His rest, even in the midst of a broken world and church on the mend, because ***it is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

Shalom in Christ

Author

APPENDIX 2:

Resources In A Local Church For Caring

- A Pastoral Care Team to keep members on their toes
- Tools for Lay Pastoral Counsellors-in-house ongoing training
- Funds and storage space for Caring for the Needy in Kind
- Library to educate members if they don't have own library...a reading Christian is a growing Christian!
- Youth (20-40)

Malaysia has many talented young people (below 40), especially in the cities. I did not realise what I had missed till age caught up with me physically. The aged's experiences and wisdom though, has many lessons for us, largely gleaned from their mistakes. The succeeding generations will repeat the process through aging. However, youth have muscle power and stamina which are largely left untapped for caring work which may be voluntary or paid. Much has been initiated by some. But imagine the potential to be unleashed for the good of needy and poor neighbours. The place to start, if you

haven't, is right where you walk, work and live; the time to catch up is now. Don't wait...do what you can, not what you can't. Start with your own family...Dad and Mum will notice your care, even if others don't, and let it flow from home...God will be pleased!

- Middle Aged (40-60) – those planning for a change in careers or vocations
- The Elderly (>60) – the healthy may be waiting for opportunity to serve even the younger but are often sidelined in local churches. Rich with experiences, they may welcome your request for help with open arms!
- You, a friend in Christ – just be available

I think I am quite safe to state most local churches do have more than enough resources to give...if only someone starts to organize their own availability. In this way, no one is overworked.

Action

1. Sharing - about who to care for...countless?
2. Commitment to care – at a low key ordinary quiet level first
3. Pray for one another...continue at home, small groups, departments, etc.

SUGGESTED READING

1. Compassion by Henri J.M. Nouwen, Donald McNeill & Douglass A. Morrison
2. On Being Family by Ray Anderson & Dennis B. Guersey 1985
3. The 8 Stages of Life
4. Your Soul Print and You
5. The Gift of Feeling
6. Forgiveness & Reconciliation
7. Heart of Pastoral Counselling, Armour Publishing 2009
8. Listen to Their Heart Cries
9. Listen to God's Whispers
10. Looking at Creation, God's Other Book
11. Listen to the Stories
12. Listen to the Children
13. BSSF No. 1-5 (Byte Size Solid Food Series)

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