

11. Transforming Lives Through Caring

In our last three topics, we said that our goal, in developing a church structure, is to develop a structure that will transform the life and thinking of each person. We saw that was the goal of the early church, from the day that it began, in Acts 2. New believers continually began to meet in small groups to begin that life transformation. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” In Acts 2:41-47, we saw that those small groups focused on at least eight things. Those can be summarized by saying that those small groups were FLOCKS that were praying and praising. FLOCKS stands for:

F - fellowship

L - leadership development

O - outreach

C - caring

K - knowledge

S - service

Today, we will look at the Biblical principles that apply to help transform each person in the group and equip them to care for one another as Christians. The care and concern of the early church is easily seen in Acts 2:44-45. Those verses say, “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Here, we see that there was a great concern for the physical needs of those that lacked. This concern was so great that people sold or shared their possessions to meet the needs of one another.

However, there are many things involved in caring for one another in addition to meeting the physical needs of one another. 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 says, “But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Here, we see that, as a body of Christians, we are to have such a great care for one another that it involves sharing many things. When a Christian suffers, we are to share with that Christian in their suffering. When a Christian is honored, we are to rejoice with that Christian for the honor they have received.

The statement “the members should have the same care for one another” is just one of forty-three “one anothers” in the New Testament. Twelve speak of things we are to avoid in our relationships with one another. Thirty-one speak about things that we are to do in our relationships with one another. The manual “New Life in the Family of Christ” available to download at www.sveq.org has a complete list of the things Christians are to do and to avoid in their relationships with one another. The Bible study group could learn to understand each of these, and how to apply them, if you take a few minutes in each Bible study to discuss one of the “one anothers”. Then, discuss ways that you can apply that particular “one another” in your relationships with one another during the next week.

One very helpful way to help a Bible study group learn to apply these “one anothers” on a continual basis is to number the thirty-one positive “one anothers”. Then, encourage the Bible study group to find some particular ways to apply each one in their contacts with other Christians on that day on that particular date each month. This will help the group become conscious of ways they can show true care for one another every day. The key is to help the group move from knowing about the “one anothers” to finding practical ways to actually begin doing these things to encourage other Christians on a daily basis. This is one of the ways we help a small group Bible study learn to act Biblically as well as think Biblically.

Many Christians are more concerned about their own needs, instead of caring about the spiritual and physical needs of others. As a result, Paul told the Philippians to be concerned about and care for one another. Philippians 2:4 says, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” We are to do what benefits others, not focus on pleasing ourselves. In that same chapter, Paul said, in Philippians 2:19-22, “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.” Paul knew that Timothy had a genuine care and concern for the Christians at Philippi.

Paul was in prison because of his faithful service for the Lord. Instead of being concerned about his own needs, these verses show that Paul was more concerned about the needs of the Philippians. As a result, Paul was planning to send Timothy to Philippi to encourage and strengthen the Christians there, even though Timothy would have been a great help to him as a prisoner. Timothy understood what it meant to care for other Christians. As a result, Paul knew that Timothy would be able to show the Christians at Philippi how to have a greater care and concern for one another. That is exactly what we want to show each member of a small group Bible study, so they can learn to really care for one another, not just think about their own needs.

A small group Bible study provides an ideal place to learn to care for one another as a spiritual family. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” In these verses, we see that God comforts us so that we can learn to comfort one another when others are in any trouble. When a small group Bible study becomes a spiritual family, they are able to show the kind of love and concern mentioned in these verses.

Psalm 23:4 says, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Here, we see that Christ is our Shepherd and walks with us through the valley of death. Christ also walks with us through our other valleys and shows us how to do the same for others. Christians go through times of discouragement and fear. During those times, they need a spiritual family to walk with them through those valleys. Paul described how Titus provided that kind of comfort to him.

2 Corinthians 7:6 says, “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Titus came to Paul and provided comfort.

Timothy also did the same thing for Paul. 1 Thessalonians 3:5-8 says, “For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you--therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.” Paul was comforted, both by the coming of Timothy, and by hearing about the faith and love of the Thessalonians.

Christians also need to know that others care during their times of rejoicing. Romans 12:15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” A small group Bible study, that has become a spiritual family, is able to share the joy with those who are rejoicing. As this verse shows, the two times that we most want to share with others are our times of joy and our times of sorrow. During our times of joy, we want others to rejoice with us. During our times of sorrow, we want others to bear our burdens with us. As a Bible study group grows spiritually, they learn to share these times with the others in the Bible study.

1 Peter 4:8-10 says, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’ Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” In these verses, we see several ways a small group Bible study can show their care for one another. First, they show care by having a fervent love for one another. Second, they show love by not exposing the sins of others. Instead, they help them to deal with those sins. Third, they show care by showing hospitality to one another. Fourth, they use their spiritual gifts to serve one another. This helps us to realize that God did not give us spiritual gifts to bring glory to ourselves. Instead, He gave us spiritual gifts, so we could serve and care for one another, in love.

We see that it is the desire of God that small group Bible study groups learn to really care for one another. 1 John 4:10-11 says, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The reason God wants this to happen was summarized by the world during the time of the early church. The thing that the world said about Christians was, “See how they love one another.” We can learn to show that love, today, as we learn to function as spiritual families that have a great concern for one another. May the Lord richly bless you as you show Bible study groups how to function as spiritual families, by your example.