

Cultivating a Community of Care

Introduction

It has been a joy and a privilege to be with you all this weekend. Your kindness, receptivity, and hospitality has been amazing.

In far less time than we could have done it thoroughly, we have been trying to build and illustrate a biblical theology of mutual care for one another in the local church.

Maybe recommend (*three books that have shaped my thinking on this topic*):

- Side by Side, by Ed Welch
- Counseling One Another, by Paul Tautges
- Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, by David Powlison
-

Over the course of 14 years of pastoral ministry in a small church in New England my desire to equip, and strengthen, and motivate Christians in the pew for everyday ministry of the Word of God to one another just kept growing ...

... growing until it reached a tipping point that I simply desired to devote the majority of my time to doing that—and I'm grateful to God that He provided a place like Faith Bible Church that needed that role, but still gives me the opportunity to travel and teach in places like Shingle Springs.

Part of this desire and conviction grew out of simply seeing what God says in His word about the design of the church, a place where there are vital ministries to "one another" that we are called to engage in, ...

... and it grew by seeing God's design and call for pastoral ministry of "equipping the saints" for the work of the ministry, so that the body will be built up in love, as each member does its part (a passage we will look at again this morning, reviewing a point from yesterday).

One such passage that expresses this "one another" ministry in a mutually interdependent community is 1 Corinthians 12. Let's read verses 14 through 26 as a backdrop and introduction to seeing and unfolding this theme.

1 Corinthians 12:14–26 — **14** For the body is not one member, but many. **15** If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. **19** If they were all one member, where would the body be? **20** But now there are many members, but one body. **21** And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need

of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” **22** On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; **23** and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, **24** whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, **25** so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26** And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

PRAYER HERE!

The simple summary of this passage is:

God constructs local churches, in unexpected and unique ways, to be an interdependent family of mutually caring individuals.

There are so many issues of life that necessitate believers engaging in this mutual care with other Christians in their spiritual family:

- Sadness and grief (death, broken relationships, disappointment, loss of any kind)
- Ongoing weaknesses (physical or otherwise [emotional, spiritual])
- Besetting sins (patterns with food, porn, laziness, media, anger)
- Fears and anxieties (intrusive thoughts and irrational concerns)
- Relational difficulties (family, work, church, neighbors)
-

Yesterday I shared a phrase that has stuck in my head from some training I got years ago, that as pastors, or counselors, or people helpers, or just a good Christian friend ...

... that as we help fellow struggling sinners, our attitude should be that we are just one beggar, trying to show another beggar where to find the bread (explain a bit).

If we do that well, then it will have an impact on what the church projects collectively as a group.

The local church should be a hospital for sinners, not a trophy case for saints.

If our attitude is “this is a trophy case,” then we are desiring to put on display how successful we are at this Christian thing. We are going to want to dress up that trophy cabinet, and keep our trophies shiny.

That translates into Christians maybe feeling compelled to “look good on the outside,” to give the appearance of strength, and spiritual savvy, or knowledge and maturity – even when maybe there are struggles and temptations on the outside, and secretly patterns of sin you haven’t overcome.

But a mindset that says we are a hospital for sinners, means we walk in the door knowing that we all suffer from this same plague that we call sin. And we are to find good medicine for our soul, that will bring us strength and healing.

That mindset will encourage honesty, and transparency, and a desire to seek help from others who understand the symptoms and the suffering of that plague of sin.

And wonderfully, every patient is also a doctor, in this hospital for sinners (though we don't all have the same specialty, in terms of what we know to diagnose or treat).

Just like we can comfort others with the same comfort we have received, sometimes we strengthen others most effectively in those areas that we have been strengthened (*maybe a brief version of the O'Neill's story here*).

Well, this is God's design for the church—to be a place of help, and hope, and counsel ...

... to be a place where we continually point one another to the forgiveness of Christ through the gospel, and to the strength He supplies to grow and change, and to the worthiness of Him as the ultimate object of our worship, and the only true source of our greatest joy, meaning and purpose in life.

So as I wrap up a very great weekend with you all, I want to expand on one of my points from my first message Saturday about "Why the ministry of Soul Care belongs in the local church."

God's design for the church implies that caring for one another spiritually is something we are called to do with humility, and intentionality.

We only have the time we have, so it will be a summarized "biblical theology of soul care in the church." Not everything that COULD be said or expounded on from Scripture. But building on some themes from yesterday, we are hopefully going to ***inspire you to consider how God desires you to both a patient and a doctor, in this hospital where sinners find healing from this sickness of sin.***

So, here are some hooks to hang our thoughts on and keep us on track:

MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.

1. Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER - Gal 5:22-6:2

This passage (Gal 6:1-2) is one place where the Scripture describes the church as a place of spiritual care for one another—restoring our brothers or sisters, when they are trapped, or snared, or caught in some trespass.

But Paul says there is a pre-requisite to doing that kind of ministry well: ***It is that you should be SPIRITUAL!***

It's easy to read that word, and somehow translate it into "you must be a spiritual giant; you must be mature, and holy, and reverent, and a respected leader in the church."

But Paul describes very simply what "spiritual" is, and what "spiritual" looks like here.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness ...

Verse 26 implies "HUMILITY" also, I would think.

You don't need to be a "Super-Christian" to help others, and you don't need to wait until you find a "Super-Christian" to ask for help or comfort or encouragement in some struggle.

Be a person who loves others with kindness and gentleness, or seek those you know that do, and get to the work of helping and caring for one another.

Paul says something similar in Romans ...

Romans 15:14 — 14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

That word admonish means to instruct, or literally to place in the mind ... it can be translated "warn," or "admonish," or "counsel," but whenever you see someone described as doing this, they are concerned to the point of tears—it is an instruction or "warning" that is born out of heartfelt concern for the soul of another.

But notice, the prerequisite isn't some kind of formal training, or technical qualifications.

Paul simply says, "If you have a heart full of goodness, and know the simple truth that is going to help and strengthen someone, then you have the ability to counsel them, to impart spiritual care and wisdom."

We should be striving to grow in character and godliness all the time anyway. We know that.

But in these passages, it isn't minimizing the personal pursuit, for the Lord's sake, and for the sake of your own soul.

It is simply emphasizing that helping others spiritually requires just the basic character traits that God's Spirit is growing and enabling in us every day.

Perhaps the passage that connects growth in character most directly to effective and fruitful ministry is:

2 Peter 1:3–8 — 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. **5** Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, **6** and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, **7** and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. **8** For ***if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

No one who truly knows and loves the Lord Jesus, wants to enter into heaven having been useless and unfruitful, because they have not diligently sought to grow spiritually.

So, ***Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER***

MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.

Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER - Gal 5:22-6:2

2. Willingly BUILD the necessary RELATIONSHIPS - Titus 2:1-8

This passage is advocating and encouraging a model of inter-dependent, and inter-generational ministry.

The “older teaching the younger” is a biblical pattern.

This is part of how God grows us and moves us along in the faith, so that “the word of God will not be dishonored,” and unbelievers will have “nothing bad to say about us.”

More importantly, it results in temperance, dignity, good sense, love, purity, kindness, proper submission, good deeds, pure doctrine, and sound speech.

It doesn’t mean that ALL your encouragement must come from older/wiser saints. It means that this is a good pattern to follow, and we are both encouraged and directed to pursue it.

Philippians 4:9 – part of overcoming anxiety is imitating your spiritual leaders.

Philippians 2:(19), 22 – Timothy was “like a son with a father,” serving the church.

This highlights that the primary way this should happen is with parents/children.

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 — 6 “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. **7** “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. **8** “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. **9** “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

But, I’m so thankful for older, godly men and women that took an interest in my children, and who helped the along in their faith—they all had mentors in the church that helped and counseled them;

... somebody might know your messes! But this is a good and expected thing.

The benefits cut both ways, as well.

Jim Greenup and Jason Hansen example – who learned more?!

2 Timothy 2:22-23 – it takes a mature saint to help younger saints avoid the passions and pitfalls of youth (*thus, the entire book of Proverbs*).

MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.

Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER - Gal 5:22-6:2

Willingly BUILD the necessary RELATIONSHIPS - Titus 2:1-8

3. Humbly PARTICIPATE in the divine DESIGN - Eph 4:11-16

If only our churches were lovingly, and effectively, fitting and holding everyone together because every part was doing its proper work!

We can! We just need to be humbly committed to it as the divine design of the church.

The passage we read to open, that “we should have the same care for one another.”

1 Corinthians 12:14-26 (esp. v. 25)

And ALL of the one anothers ...

Romans 12:3-8

We have gifts that differ. We don’t all do the same kind of ministry.

You might be a servant, or a mercy ministry person. But we all know truth, and we can all speak it in humble and loving ways, if we prayerfully and purposefully are seeking to encourage one another.

Talking through the Ephesians 4:22-24 life together ...

We all need someone helping us, showing us Scripture, identifying our heart issues ...

- Not just “be more involved” with the wife/kids, but stop finding your ultimate meaning in success at work (over-working), and put it in proper perspective.
- Not just “stop yelling,” but stop measuring your competency as a wife and mother on whether or not your house is always neat and tidy, just the way you like it. Learn to be content with imperfection (but maybe not chaos).
- Not just “don’t worry,” but recognize that anxiety happens when our heart and mind is described as “You of little faith” (Matt 6:30). What are you failing to remember or believe about God’s character and promises when you worry? And how are maybe desiring to control things you can’t control, instead of simply focusing on your responsibilities?

MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.

Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER - Gal 5:22-6:2

Willingly BUILD the necessary RELATIONSHIPS - Titus 2:1-8

Humbly PARTICIPATE in the divine DESIGN - Eph 4:11-16

4. Intentionally RAISE UP the next GENERATION - 2 Tim 2:1-2

[In 2 Tim 2:1-2] He means the gospel, and he means defending the truth. But he also means church life, and he means biblically ministering the Word to one another.

Point #2 is about pursuing virtue through inter-generational ministry; point #4 is about equipping the next generation to understand and carry out these principles, and it is about creating a legacy of edification.

Psalm 78:1–7 — **1** Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. **2** I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, **3** Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. **4** We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. **5** For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, **6** That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, **7** That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments,

2 Tim 1:13-14 – follow the pattern, he tells Timothy. Guard the treasure (v. 14) of the gospel and of biblical ministry.

2 Timothy 4:7 — **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

He is longing that Timothy takes on the role of raising up the next generation, and that he proves himself faithful in leading—in whatever place/church he is serving.

Now, we've said ...

MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.

Don't get me wrong ... this isn't some kind of absolute promise that I'm making.

Nor have we said everything that COULD be said about faithful ministry and what a church of loving, mutual, inter-generational soul care looks like.

But to the extent that you understand and live out these principles in the life of Gold Country Baptist Church ...

... to that same extent, you invite God’s blessing for the furtherance of the gospel, for the edification of the saints, and ultimately for the glory of God in the church.

I’m confident that is what you desire, as blood bought saints of God.

I’m extremely thankful for the privilege and joy it has been to bring God’s Word to you all this weekend.

And I will continue to be praying, as I have been, that you will desire and pursue the kind of biblical “caring for one another” that will strengthen the church—

... both strengthen you all together as saints united in Christ ...

... and strengthen the church so that this whole region sees and is compelled to visit a place where souls are loved and cared for, so that your light will shine before men, and that they too will glorify our Father who is in heaven.

CHURCH ... care for souls ...

... and the souls that need care will come and be transformed by the gospel.

<p>MAIN IDEA: FOUR PURSUITS of a local church that will GUARANTEE a LEGACY of spiritual growth for generations.</p>
--

Diligently STRIVE toward the necessary CHARACTER - Gal 5:22-6:2

Willingly BUILD the necessary RELATIONSHIPS - Titus 2:1-8

Humbly PARTICIPATE in the divine DESIGN - Eph 4:11-16

Intentionally RAISE UP the next GENERATION - 2 Tim 2:1-2