

13. Developing Caring in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purpose of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the fourth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Caring.

In Acts 2:44-45, we read, "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." In these verses, we see that the early church had a great concern for one another. They both saw needs and determined how to meet those needs. Sometimes, needs are physical, and other times, needs are spiritual. We become aware of these needs most commonly when we meet together in small groups. In these verses, we see several keys to knowing and meeting the needs of others.

- The early believers were meeting together
- The early believers saw themselves as stewards rather than possessors (they realized that all they had was given to them by the Lord)
- The early believers were concerned about every believer
- The early believers were willing to make sacrifices
- The early believers were willing to share
- The early believers met genuine needs

As we think about the one another's given in the New Testament, many of them relate to meeting the needs of one another. An illustration of this is found in Galatians 6:2, where we read: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The word that is translated burdens speaks of something that is a heavy weight, burden or trouble. Many Christians have burdens. Some may be physical, while others are spiritual. To bear those burdens has the thought of taking it with our hands and carrying it. Here, we see that we are to help carry the things that burden another Christian. One of the places where we most commonly learn about such burdens is in small groups as we pray for one another.

However, we should not just stop with prayer. Sometimes, there is a need for additional help. James 2:15-16 says, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it profit?*" Here, we see that we are to help one another with basic necessities. (This does not mean that we are to meet every need but rather basic necessities because 1 Timothy 6:8 says, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." 2 Thessalonians 3:10 gives the other side if people are unwilling to work, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.") Sometimes people need food but also need counsel about how to manage their finances in the future.

People also need help with their spiritual burdens. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." In this verse, we see several areas where people need different kinds of help:

- Warn the unruly – this word was used in Greek society for those who did not show up for work

- Comfort the fainthearted – those who are fearful and doubting need to be encouraged and made bold
- Uphold the weak – those without spiritual or moral strength need to be held up so they do not fall
- Be patient with all – this includes those who say or do things without thinking

There are many things besides burdens where we need to show care as Christians. 1 Corinthians 12:22-25 says, “No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our representable *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.” In these verses, we see that we are to look out for the needs of each other just as the various parts of our physical bodies care for each other. Those members of the body of Christ who need special care include:

- ◇ Those who are weaker
- ◇ Those who we think are less honorable
- ◇ Those who are deformed (physically or spiritually)

Today, there are many Christians who are weak. Sometimes, this weakness is due to the lack of spiritual parents for new Christians. This was the situation in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 4:15-17 says, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” We help these Christians by providing a spiritual parent who can walk beside them and help them in their spiritual growth.

Sometimes, Christians are weak because of wounds to their spirit which produce a broken spirit. Proverbs 15:13, 17:22, and 18:14 all talk about these wounds to the spirit, “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. ... ^{17:22}A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones. ... ^{18:14}The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?” In Luke 4:18, Christ said the Father sent Him, “to heal the brokenhearted”. We help these Christians by helping them to forgive those who broke their spirits and then helping them to become strong in spirit.

The passage from 1 Corinthians 12 also points out that the parts that we think are less honorable need special care. The word that is translated “honorable” speaks of the price paid for a person who was bought or sold in that day. Applying this to Christians means that some Christians think their lives have little or no value. Since value is based on the price paid for something, we need to help such Christians grow in their understanding of the fact that Christ viewed their lives as having infinite value and that is why He shed His blood for them.

The third group mentioned, in 1 Corinthians 12, that are in need of special care are those who are deformed either physically or spiritually. This points out the need for us to show special care to

those who are physically handicapped. It also points out the fact that some have been deformed spiritually due to false teaching or sinful living. Ephesians 4:14-15 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” In these verses, we see that some Christians are deceived by false teaching. We also see that the way to show special care to such Christians is to help them grow up in all things in Christ.

As you think about each of the things we have mentioned in relation to caring, each of these things are best done by a group of caring Christians who will help those Christians who are weaker. This kind of care should be a part of the ministry of a Bible study and fellowship group. Ephesians 4:16 points out the fact that our goal is to help every Christian become an effective working part of the body of Christ. That will only happen as we provide the kind of care that will help struggling Christians grow and mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Bible study and fellowship groups learn to care for the struggling parts of the body of Christ.