

## Prayer, Care, Share – Part 2

# The Role of Caring for Others in Evangelism

*Pastor Tim Melton*

When you hear the testimonies of other Christians they often start like this: “I had a neighbor . . . there was a coworker . . . I met a classmate . . . I had a family member.” They tell of a relationship that God used to draw them to Himself. Not that a relationship has the power to bring someone to Christ, for that can only be done by the Holy Spirit, but somehow, God worked in the lives of these believers in such a way that it turned the attention of the unbeliever towards Christ.

We find this truth in Matthew 5:16, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* First, God transforms our lives so that we selflessly begin to care for others. He then uses our love for others as a tool to turn an unbeliever’s attention towards Himself.

It is an expression of 1 John 4:19, *“We love each other because he first loved us.”*

Our care or love for others is not rooted in the idea that we must initiate good actions or that we are even good enough to produce loving acts. It is based on the idea that Christ now lives in us. We are merely displaying the love that Christ has now birthed in our hearts. It is the natural overflow of an unconditional love that God has for us.

Through Christ, our lives are transformed so that we love our enemies, forgive those who have wronged us, give to those in need, speak blessings instead of curses, bear each other’s burdens, and even lay down our lives for one another. As a supernatural love for others takes root in our lives, a watching world will see that we are different. It will provoke questions causing unbelievers to ask the reason for

the way that we live and the hope that we have. Jesus will be proclaimed and He will draw people to Himself.

John 13:34b-35 says, *“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

God uses our love for unbelievers to shine His light and point them to Himself. In addition, scripture tells us that **the love** and care we have for other believers also is a clear sign to the unbelieving world that we belong to Christ. This is especially true in a multi-cultural church like ours. The world struggles to make peace between different ethnic groups, but as we grow in our love for each other the world will take note that we have been with Jesus. They will not be able to attribute our Christ-likeness to our culture or country of origin, because the only thing we have in common is Christ. He alone will receive the credit and the glory.

The only reason that we are moved to die to self and bear each other's burden is because Christ lives in us. Our good deeds do not have the power to lead someone to Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin, reveal the good news of Jesus, and grant faith to a sinful heart. Our caring is just a tool in the hand of our Savior.

The love of Christ, that births a love for one's fellow man, is seen in various places in scripture. In **Luke 19:1-9** it tells a story of a man named Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector. In his day he would have been known as a traitor and a thief. Jesus met him and went to Zacchaeus' house to eat. In the process Zacchaeus became a believer and follower of Christ. In response to the love and forgiveness that Zacchaeus found in Christ, he stood before all of his guests and proclaimed, *“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house.’”*

This is the kind of caring that results from experiencing the love of Christ firsthand. God then uses this type of transformed life to draw people to Himself. Zacchaeus' response surely provoked people to question what had so dramatically changed his life, and must have pointed many to Christ.

The **Apostle Paul's** life did the same. He had first been known for persecuting the Christians. He then met Christ in a vision, and his whole life was changed. The hatred that he had known before for the Christians was dramatically transformed into love for Christ, the church, and all who were lost and in need of Christ. He cared so much for those who were lost, that for the sake of sharing the gospel he was willing to endure “Five times, at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. Three times he was shipwrecked; a night and a day he was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there was the daily pressure on him of his concern for all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

It was his care and love for the people that made him willing to suffer, if that was what was required, so that they could hear the gospel and be saved. He loved because Christ had loved him first.

Please understand what we are talking about today. It is more than being friendly, diplomatic and helping others when it is convenient. It is a denying self, bearing each other's burdens and putting others before ourselves. It is Jesus' greatest commandment, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."***<sup>38</sup> ***This is the great and first commandment.***<sup>39</sup> ***And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.***<sup>40</sup> ***On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*** (Matthew 22:37-40)

It is loving God and then loving others as He loved us. That is our calling as believers, ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"*** (John 15:12). And how did Jesus love us? By denying self and dying on the cross. It was utter selflessness and unconditional love. Not based on who we are but who He is.

As we think about caring and loving others, it helps if we pause for a moment and talk about repentance. Multiple times in scripture we are told that to come to Christ we must repent and believe, but what is repent? Repent is a total changing of mind, a total change of our way of thinking. It is God bringing us to the point in our lives where we finally realize that the selfish ways of the world are empty and the ways of Christ give life. Where we choose to put all of our trust in Christ. Like already discussed, it is Zacchaeus turning from money, greed, power and selfishness, and towards honesty, generosity, reconciliation and service. Zacchaeus experienced the love and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ and found that the world as he had known it was a complete lie. Money was not the greatest treasure. Living for himself was not the best way to live. Trusting in his own abilities to meet his own needs was not sufficient. Living for pleasure could not silence his conscience that haunted him. Living for the present was nothing compared to living for eternity. Loving self was empty now that He had come to love and be loved by Christ. Zacchaeus had escaped the false reality of this world and now lived in the reality of God. Zacchaeus now loved because Christ had loved Him first and it changed everything. The same should be true of our lives.

Loving like Christ is giving of yourselves to others as a way of life. The Gospel in our lives should transfer into a life that puts others first. We must not only preach Christ crucified, but we must live Christ crucified, clearly connecting the practicality of the cross to the way that we now live.

If we are in Christ we should pray that God would stir in our hearts a love like Christ had. ***It should be a love that permeates every part of our lives.*** A selflessness that puts others before ourselves. From the simplest of things like giving up your seat on the metro, giving up your place in line at the restaurant, or giving up your place in the football game so someone else can play. Giving away your money, reaching out to the lonely, or giving of your time to help someone in need. Walking with a person in the midst of tragedy, adopting a child in need, or changing careers so that your life lines up with God's priorities. It's putting your spouse's needs before yours. It is reserving quality time with your children. It is living more simply so you can have money to help others. It is the willingness to help another person even though you know that it will make your life more complicated. It is loving others more than yourself for their salvation and God's glory.

It brings us back to Matthew 5:16. ***"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."***

If we want to be used by God so that more people will come to know Jesus Christ, we must first pray for ourselves. That God would give us a clear picture of our sin and His forgiveness. That His love for us

would result in our love for others. That our hearts would be burdened and broken for the unbelievers around us. That we would take seriously the world's desperate need for salvation. That we would draw near to Christ, find our needs met in Him, and be compelled to share His good news with others . . . no matter the cost.

May Christ's love be evident in all of our lives and may people be turned towards Christ as we love as He loved.

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James 3:13-18 - *"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*

Too much emphasis on "care" also can seek to give us more influence in the evangelistic process than is true. Salvation comes through the hearing of God's word. Our lifestyle only plays a role as God uses it to draw people to Himself.

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Now there is no doubt that we, as Christians, are called to piety, good works, to love our neighbor, and to otherwise care for those in need. And it is obvious that the lack of these things can call into question the sincerity of our profession that we are Christ's ambassadors to a lost world. But, whatever merit our own lifestyle may convey, it is not our merit we proclaim. Rather, we proclaim ourselves sinners and hypocrites of the worst sort and tell others that this condition needs a remedy and that the only remedy was and continues to be the blood of the Son of God. To put it more starkly, we preach not ourselves (as good) crucified but rather Christ crucified.

*"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)." Ephesians 5:8-13*

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**Gladys Aylward** (1902-1970), a mailman's daughter born near London, converted at age eighteen to Christianity. While employed as a parlormaid, she set her heart on China.

The way she shared Christ's love in Yangchen was by proclaiming Christ with her actions and behavior. Before she finished her ministry in Yangchen, the Mandarin, who was an official authority from the government in this town, approached her and said to her: *"Ever since you came to Yangchen I have kept an eye in your mission, I watched you care for my people, would your God accept this lonely Mandarin's heart, for I have seen him so clearly in you, your actions, behavior. May your God be my God and may He watch over us."* By living out a life of faith, Gladys Aylward shared the gospel in such a way that the Mandarin received its good news.

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### **Joni Eareckson Tada and PCS**

<http://www.joniandfriends.org/radio/5-minute/love2020/>

Hi, I'm Joni Eareckson Tada with a great idea for sharing Christ's love.

And I can speak from personal experience because it was the way people first shared Christ's love with me when I was newly injured and in the hospital. Let me tell you how they did it: First, it was prayer. When I broke my neck, I now know of at least three or four prayer groups that were formed for the specific purpose of praying for me back then, a teenager with a broken neck. These groups prayed against depression and discouragement; people prayed that I might not succumb to resentment or bitterness. Then they prayed that my heart would be open to the Word of God as well as their encouragement. So prayer was the very first thing in sharing Christ's love.

Then, after prayer, the idea was to care. When many of these same friends visited me in the hospital, they brought their guitars, their record albums; they brought in pizza or teen magazines. I remember one girl friend polishing my nails during a hospital visit; another brought a book of poetry. Mrs. Miller, bless her heart (she was the mother of a high school classmate), came by with freshly baked sugar cookies. These Christians were all about prayer, and then care. Finally, after prayer and care, you have to share. When these friends opened up their Bibles, they had already won the right to be heard. I was willing and able to listen because the prayer and the care had softened my heart.

Isn't that a great strategy for giving the love of Christ to someone: prayer, care, and then share.

You know when I look back on that time when I was first paralyzed; yes, I was hurting terribly; I was confused and depressed; I was right on the edge, I could have gone either way. And all I needed was someone to offer up prayer for me, then care for me and then share Jesus with me. And you know what? It tipped me in the right direction. I was able to direct my pain in the right way, toward God, toward His Word and toward His hope and help.

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**One great example of this principle is found in Eric Michael Bryant's book, *Peppermint-filled Piñatas*.**

In the days when I served with a youth group in Seattle, Christy, a girl new to our community, invited us to her sixteenth birthday party—an invitation she issued in passing as she left an event one night, which made it seem almost like an afterthought. As the day approached, Debbie felt we should go, thinking it would be a great way to get to know Christy and her parents. Christy's dad was the one who first took her to our youth events, much to the displeasure of her mom, who didn't want Christy to have anything to do with church. Nonetheless, into this hostile environment we decided to enter. Filling our car with three teenagers, we drove to the skating rink and arrived just a few minutes late. Balloons, streamers, and cake decorated this festive moment. Though we assumed other guests were on the way, since the table was set for thirty people, we were still a bit surprised that when we walked in, we were the only people there besides Christy and her parents. Thirty minutes passed, and then an hour, but no one else showed up for the party. (Three kids did breeze in, but only to wish her a happy birthday on their way to another event.) I remember looking at Debbie in the middle of this party and thanking her for insisting that we come and being so grateful that we had brought three other people with us. By the end of the night, we all had a blast playing video games, falling on the ice as we skated around together, and eating cake. (Man, we had a lot of cake that night!) Most important, I will never forget the response of her family. A few weeks later, Julie, Christy's mom, the same mom who had harassed and berated her for coming to church, sat on the couch in the youth lounge, tears streaming down her face. Julie had decided to follow Christ. Curious about the reason for the dramatic turnaround, I asked Julie what had happened to move her from mocking Christy for her involvement at our church to now desiring this same relationship. Through her tears she looked at me and Debbie and revealed, "I changed my mind about God and Christians because you came to my daughter's party." Stunned and silent, I thanked God that we had not missed this moment. In fact, it has changed the way we view invitations from those around us. If we receive an invitation from someone to see their school play and it happens to be the same night as our small group, not only do we miss the small group, but we also invite the small group to join us. We need to say no more often to our busyness so that we can create room for spontaneous adventures with others. We need to look for those who need a hug. We need to turn off our televisions and spend time in coffee shops. Ultimately, we need to reorient our lives so that we begin to invest in the people we already know and start investing in people who need a friend.