

## Caring For Others Within Our Life Groups

Intro:

Thanks to all of you, who are working and investing in the lives of those in your life groups. And, your service is especially important..... as we continue to grow in numbers of people, as well as in multiple venues.

What we are going to discuss tonight, is something I believe - is so extremely critical for the health and growth of our life group members.

What I want to do tonight, is to take some time to look more specifically at the "Care" aspect within our life groups.

This component is reflected in Riv's Life Group Mission Statement:

***To encourage and challenge our people to live Gospel centered lives, that are on mission, and in community.***

This is what we are wanting to accomplish and be purposeful in doing. Whether it be through our life group ministry, or in our relationships.

### **What does it mean to 'Care'?**

Providing 'care' can mean a lot of different things....to a lot of different people.

\*Example: I was reading a survey recently – that discussed the issue of people and their autos. Specifically – if and how people...on average - take care of their car/truck/suv.

As I was reading this survey – it was contrasting the 'care' or 'lack of care' for the average owner:

For instance:

#### a)Tires

some: checked the air pressure in the tires weekly or monthly, depending on the temp. They checked the tread wear/rotated the tires every 5kmi....

Others: don't check them at all....even if the 'low tire pressure gauge' comes on. They don't take notice....until either the inside or outside of the tire tread becomes bald and the steel belts show through – and/or have a blow-out. (What caused that to happen?!)

#### b)Engine oil

some: check it weekly/ change the oil every 5k or whatever the manuf. Recommends

Others: drive until the oil pressure gauge on the dashboard comes on(that red blinking thing!) or the engine begins to make this awful 'knocking' sound – or it stalls or simply stops.

c)Windshield washer fluid

some: check the w.washer fluid regularly. They put 'bug remover' in the summertime – put anti-freeze up solvent in the winter time. They also check how the wiper blades are working, making sure that the rubber blade is not broken or worn.

Others: wait until it's muddy or dirty....and then realize the w.washer fluid tank is empty. Or, they fail to check the wiper blades....until the metal on the wiper has 'scored' the windshield – in a nice arc!

d)Interior

some: clean out the trash/junk weekly....if not daily. They empty the ashtray –or-the side pocket of the door regularly.

Others:wait to empty the trash....until there is no more room on the seats or on the floor – for their book bag or groceries.....(kind of like losing your groceries in the car!). There is junk everywhere – Mickie Ds bags, pop bottles/energy drink cans.....And, when they open the door, junk just falls out.

The point is: most people who provide good care for their vehicles do what?

-they're observant....

-they're pro-active.....

-they're intentional.....(it just doesn't happen on its own)

\*Preventative maintenance – vs – major repair from neglect!

So for us, caring for others – means being intentional / taking initiative / being observant / taking responsibility.

From a Biblical perspective – caring for others is not just our responsibility – but it is an incredible opportunity. It involves:

- intentionality, observation and initiative

-loving others just as Jesus loves us...

Let's look at a passage of Scripture that captures this truth so clearly and succinctly.

**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**

John 13:34-35

If you remember, Jesus made this statement in the N.T. account – after Lazarus' death....when we see Jesus weeping over Lazarus' death and feeling the sorrow and loss that Martha and Mary were feeling, and then raising him from death. After Mary has anointed Jesus' feet (Judas created a big issue about this.....). After Jesus' entry into Jerusalem – after He washed His disciples' feet – and after Jesus' announcement that a close friend would betray Him.

Then, He gave this statement to His followers.....

Jesus had invested many years loving, instructing, encouraging, challenging, and caring for those who were closest to him, in His immediate sphere of influence and care. And now, He was on the verge of making the greatest demonstration of love and care that the world has ever known – giving His life.

If we study through the NT, as well as the history of the early church, we see that it was widely understood, that the disciples were known by this love that they had for one another. It was what set them apart from all others in their day. The early Christians, as well, were particularly known by this among the Gentiles.

Jesus is simply saying: I don't want you to be known by special habits or rituals; not by the way you dress or how fluently you speak; not by unusual customs like the Pharisees or Scribes adhered to – **but** by a deep, genuine and tender love and affection for each other. I want you to be known for the love and care you show for one another.

Ex: Ames/hospital....

This command is demonstrable. It is to be demonstrated and clearly seen. It is to be intentional.

So, we may say - what's with this 'new commandment'? What is Jesus talking about? Didn't He already command us to love already? See, this command is not new (10 Commandments/"love your neighbor as yourself...") But it was 'new' in other ways.: the Holy Spirit would come and indwell and empower believers to obey it. It was "new" in that it was superior to the old. The new "law of love" toward others is NOW explained with more clarity – mandated with new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example – and to be obeyed in a new way. It is calling for a higher degree of love....."as I have loved you...."

\*verse 33 ".....little children...." – Jesus uses these words....as a term of endearment.

And then, in verse 35 "your love for one another will **prove** to the world....". This 'new' radical kind of love – will be a demonstration to the world....even without saying anything . How we treat each other and care and love one another – gives validity & power to the very message we seek to live out and communicate. It **is** new – it is different – it is a higher standard – and it has a greater cost for us.

Jesus did not call it "new".....just to be different. He called it "new" because that's what it was.

In fact, it is 'new' in that before it was 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself', but now it is "You shall love one another". Jesus is adding an important ingredient – a much more far encompassing yet specific way to love. Love each other. The newness of Jesus' command pertains to the new kind of love that Christ followers have for one another, **because**.....they have experienced the love of Christ for themselves.

I like what Matthew Henry says about this passage:

*'Of all the instances of Christ's love to his disciples, which they had already experienced during the time he went in and out among them – Jesus spoke kindly to them, concerned himself heartily for them, and for their welfare. He instructed, counseled, and comforted them, prayed with them and for them, vindicated them when they were accused, took their part when they were run down, and publicly challenged them to be dearer to him than his own mother, or sister, or brother. He reproved them for what was amiss, and yet compassionately bore with their failings, excused them, made the best of them, and passed by many an oversight.'*

In fact, it is also 'new' and doable, because we as His followers - **now** have the Holy Spirit - that enables and motivates and allows us to love and care far beyond our own selfish nature and our human efforts, and to care for others the way Jesus cares for us.

\*So, how do we practically obey and accomplish this command that Jesus gave us?

**Let's look at some practical ways we can do this through the relationships in our life groups.**

Let me first share a few aspects of how we can define 'care'. I like to think of it in these ways:

Caring for others means to:

Listen empathetically

Support emotionally

Help Biblically

Direct spiritually

Let's break down these 4 aspects of care and seek to make them a little more applicable and doable for us.

Caring for others involves:

(learning to....)

**1 Listen empathetically**

We all can relate to those individuals who truly take an interest in us. Right? It can be as simple as asking 'how are you doing?' and asking questions in order to really know what is going on in their life. Listening is not a 'spiritual gift'....as much as it is choice to take the time needed to seek to understand someone. WE all have the human desire to be listened to and understood. Listening is so basic – yet so often neglected – and so greatly needed in caring relationships. To truly listen to the needs, hurts, and feelings of others takes time and diligence. It requires initiation on our part.

Listening empathetically requires us to not just listen and go on...."Wow, that's tough...." but to listen in a way that we can identify with what an individual is going through. And believe me, we ALL are going

through stuff in life. Right? See, empathy involves going beyond simply feeling or expressing concern – it involves becoming involved in what is going on in their life. Feeling and identifying with their problems or issues or challenges – or what they might be celebrating in their life.

I like to think of it like this –as to what it means to listen to others: (It means....)

***Listen to understand, not listening to respond.*** (do you see the difference?)

If you are like me, when I am seeking to listen to someone....i often am so consumed with thinking what I am going to say ..... rather – than simply listening and seeking to draw out what that person is feeling or going through. Once we truly seek to understand what is going on in someone’s life, THEN we can seek to help them deal with whatever is going on. Listening is the first and MOST important step in caring for others.

I like what Proverbs tells us....

**The purpose in a man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.**

Proverbs 20:5

Listen. Ask questions.....take the time to help them express what is going on in their life. Draw them out. Focus on them and their needs and what is going on in their life.

As life group leaders, we want to be intentional in this - with those is our life groups.

## **2.Support emotionally**

In caring for others, it often involves caring for how they feel – right or wrong, good or bad.

Now, I know.....this aspect of care can often conjure up in us a response that is anything but caring. Right? “Feelings? They’re just emotions and not real. You can’t live by your emotions or feelings! I don’t care how you feel.....just buck up and do the right thing!” Ever thought....or said that to someone? I have. And wrongly so....

Let me share something that I think is super helpful in regard to supporting others emotionally.

In our culture – & even in our American Christian culture – many believers often seem to live by ‘their feelings or emotions’. Right? In other words, many Christ followers often allow their feelings or emotions to drive their spiritual life – rather than allowing the truth of Scripture to drive and direct their lives. I agree. \*I deal with this almost on a daily basis. **However**, in caring for others – we need to be careful and purposeful to **NOT** disregard the feelings of others. We all have them.

**Feelings and emotions simply are the internal reactions generated by our own interpretation of people, events, and life experiences.**

They are part of who we are.

Usually they are derived from what has taken place in our lives - and are simply our response to what has happened to us. That doesn't make them right, wrong or sinful necessarily. They just are our response to what is happening or what has happened to us.

In caring for others....i like to think of them like this:

***How we feel does matter. However, how we respond to those feelings matters most.***

Supporting people emotionally – supporting how they may feel – is simply the doorway we need to go through with them – in order to be able to care for them Biblically.

In order to care for others, we need to be willing to allow them to express how they feel. Caring involves emotionally supporting them. It's not 'girlie' thing or a sign of weakness. It simply is a reflection of living - that is expressed through our own lens of life.

Emotionally supporting people can be messy. It can be difficult. It can be challenging. Yet, it is an important aspect of caring for others.

### **3.Help Biblically**

As important as listening is in caring, as well as supporting them emotionally, those aspects are just the *pathway* and *process* for us to help them Biblically.

Example of going to the doctor: For an MD to adequately prescribe a medication –or – a procedure to deal with or address what our ailment might be – a good Dr. takes the time to ask questions and understand what is going on. Right? He listens.....he asks questions.....that will help provide him or her the proper understanding of what is really going on. Rather than simply look and offer a med or procedure w/o FIRST seeking to understand from us....what is happening – they take the time necessary to provide him or her the information needed to help us become healthy again.

'What are the symptoms that you are experiencing?' 'What is happening - that leads you think something is wrong or going with your health?'

So, for us - in order to care for people Biblically, we need to be able to understand what is going on, and then we are able to provide the Biblical help needed.

Building Biblical truth into those we care for in our life groups, is of vital importance. Right? We want our life groups to be intentional in studying the Scripture and seeking to apply its truth to our lives.

We are very fortunate at Riv, in that we have a great wealth of Biblical truth being shared each weekend at our services. We also provide the tools and study guides that allow us all to lead a discussion - that honors Scripture and seeks to help us live out those truths on a daily basis. No matter how spiritual you are, no matter how much of the Bible you have or don't yet have under your belt, we can and need to be focused on digging into and applying that truth on a consistent basis. We help care for people Biblically - by pointing them back to the foundational truths of Scripture.

**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Scripture not only applies to each and every aspect of our lives, but it also equips and trains us in serving and honoring God through changing how we think and live. It does not just address our actions and behaviors, but it digs down into the very attitudes and thoughts that drive those actions. That, is why it is such an important aspect of caring for others.

And, the last aspect of care is.....

#### **4. Direct spiritually**

As we develop an environment of care that is demonstrated by listening, supporting, and honoring God through His Word, the opportunity to then direct their hearts and minds spiritually towards truth -is the privilege that we then have - to help them live out the gospel in their lives in a relevant and God-honoring fashion.

As important as it is for us all – to listen and apply the Scriptures that we are exposed to through the weekend services and our life group discussions, the goal for our life group members should be for them to learn to be feeders and responders to truth individually and consistently, and to be growing in discernment in their lives.. For them to feel and take personal responsibility for their own spiritual life and obedience – sort of like our kids growing up....having a life of their own – as adults – helping our life group members own for themselves the mission God has given each of us as His followers. Helping them own the mission of making the gospel relevant in and through their own lives. Helping them grow up to be responsible and God-honoring in their attitudes and actions.

**Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation...**

1 Peter 2:2

So, as we seek together as life group leaders - to provide the love and care for those in our life groups – just as Jesus has commanded us in John 13 here are some practical steps and habits we can apply and take back to our groups.

##### **a. Be intentional.**

In the busyness of our lives, we will probably need to be intentional about caring for others. It is not a matter of spiritual giftedness – as much as it is choosing and taking the initiative to love and care for others. It is a choice. God provides us the grace and help we need to do this.

Be observant of what is going in their lives. Initiate interest in them. Listen to what really happening in their lives. Ask questions that help them express what is really going on, both spiritually and emotionally.

Look for avenues to love and serve them. Be willing to engage and get involved in the good and bad stuff in their lives. If physical or financial help is needed, be willing to live out the NT model of love and sacrifice....as we see in the book of Acts: sharing with anyone who might have a need.

**b. Demonstrate openness, transparency, and being real about your own life.**

If the purpose in our life groups – is to be real and honest in our relationships – not shallow or surfaçy – it is required of us as leaders to set that bar.

Sometimes the members in our life groups barely scratch the surface on what is really going on with them. It can be scary, if not downright frightening –to share with you, let alone others, the dark areas or challenges they are encountering in their lives. Some may not feel safe, or too exposed, or wonder if others will accept them or think less of them – as they begin to crack open the book of their lives.

Here is a suggestion that may help –and I encourage you as leaders – to set the pace on this.

Let them see your struggles - and let them see your hope.

You lead by example – in taking that all important step of being vulnerable and open and transparent. That does not mean dumping all your ‘dirty laundry’ each and every week. It means allowing yourself to be vulnerable before your life group members. Demonstrating the courage that is needed to be real and transparent. It is no guarantee that they will immediately follow – but without your leadership in this – chances are that they won’t either. Most likely, if we don’t – they won’t. Having the courage to be transparent and real with others – is a process. Often, people will take ‘baby steps’ – cracking open the door of their life ever so slightly. Make it as safe and accepting as you can.

Reinforce that what is shared and communicated within the life group – stays in the life group. Honor the openness of others, and demand that all members honor that sacred trust. Work to create a safe environment for everyone.

**c. Lead your life group in caring for each other.**

This responsibility and privilege –not only falls on us as life group leaders, but it also falls upon all Christ followers. That includes everyone in your life group. As you demonstrate care for others - seek to engage each member in caring and loving each other. THIS, is the Biblical model that Jesus gives us in John 13, right? Encourage, challenge, and engage them in each other’s lives. Help them experience the joy and satisfaction of loving and serving each other.

So, in thinking how we can provide love and care for all those in our life groups, we need to remember – that it is an incredible **privilege** and **opportunity** – in which God has allowed us..... to be involved in the care and loving of those He died for. And know, that God will give you the grace and discernment and ability to do so, for no greater reason apart from the fact..... that He first loved us.



In closing, I want to read part of a blog written by Kirk Cousins(former MSU football player/QB for Washington Redskins). Whether you are an MSU fan or not, I want you to catch the spirit of what he is saying.....

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