

SERVING CONTENTEDLY

Week 8: What Can I Do?

Most people spend a good share of their time caring for themselves. How much time have you spent today thinking about how you feel physically? How much time wondering about your financial condition? Your burden for your family? Your spiritual battles? The list of potential concerns goes on and on. Now, consider how much time you spent today thinking about the physical condition of someone else. How much time did you think about the financial problems, loneliness, spiritual battles, and family burdens of others? If we could keep track of the minutes, we might be embarrassed to see the results. May God help us to be more concerned about the needs of others!

1. Unless we reach out to others, we will never enjoy the feeling of a full existence. Noticing the needs of people in our church or among our acquaintances doesn't happen by accident. It takes conscious effort. We must ask God to help us to be aware of others' concerns. It is not difficult to be aware of our own needs because they are before us continually, constant reminders. However, the verse suggested for memorization brings out that we should think on the things of others. How can we become more aware of the concerns of those around us?

2. Dwight L. Moody once said, "The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves." Reaching out to someone in need is one way to exemplify the true spirit of Christ in our lives. It is important to remember that whatever God has given us is not only for our own benefit, but also for us to share with others. It is His purpose that we become His channels to minister to others. As we try to fulfill this calling faithfully, we will find that it is an effective witness to

unbelievers with whom we come into contact. In addition, it will help us have closer relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

However, real caring cannot take place until we see and understand the other person's needs. Unless we deliberately seek to get close enough to a person to make a real offer of help, our attempts may amount to little more than mouthing words. As Christians, with possibly a number of years of trusting God behind us, we know by experience that God meets our every need. But we want to be willing to translate this spiritual knowledge into practical reality. Look around and take mental inventory. What are some of the definite needs (besides the basics of food, clothing and shelter) that those around you face?

3. Even after we recognize a need, it might be easy to respond as James describes by saying, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," yet not giving those things which are needful. However, if we truly care for others, action will follow our concerns. See James 2:14-18. What does the word caring mean to you? What are some specific ways you can show you care in responding to the needs brought up in response to the second question?

4. Successfully reaching out to others starts with prayer. A caring ministry begins in prayer, is sustained by prayer, and succeeds by prayer. Any other approach is doomed to failure because it soon becomes only an exercise. When we pray for someone, how much easier it is to remember them throughout the day, and to keep their possible needs in mind.

Three aspects of prayer in relation to helping meet the needs of others are: the prayer of preparation, the prayer for direction, and the prayer of intercession. Briefly describe what you think each of these means.

5. When Jesus was on earth He taught the people to love their neighbors as themselves, and gave the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate what He was teaching (Luke 10:30-37). The Apostle Paul emphasizes the care God intends for us to show toward our fellow saints. He compares this with the care we show toward different parts of our physical body. Bring out that our body is composed of many members and every member is vitally important. When an injury occurs to one part, it usually has an effect on our whole body. How should it affect us when one of the body of Christ stands in need? See 1 Corinthians 12:26.

6. Scripture lets us know that there are things for us to do while we wait for Jesus to come. Matthew 25:31-46 tells us that a final day of separation between saints and sinners is coming. The events of that day are compared to a shepherd's dividing his sheep from the goats. As you study these verses, what is the difference between those at the King's right hand and those at His left hand? Compare the deeds that those at His right hand did, with opportunities we have today to show care for others.

7. The principle of reciprocal blessing is always at work when we give ourselves in ministering to others. A true servant finds satisfaction in every step of obedience to God. The joy we receive in giving to others can far outweigh any sacrifices we may have to make on our part. What are some of the personal benefits that await us as we share and care for others? How does Luke 6:38 apply here?

Scriptures used in this session:

Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 6:38; 10:30-37; 1 Corinthians 12:26; James 2:14-18

Supplemental Scriptures:

Proverbs 18:24; Matthew 10:42; Galatians 6:2

Suggested verse for memorization:

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. - Philippians 2:4