

How Can I Really Care For Others?

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MOST PEOPLE WHO labor for Christ doubt at times the sincerity and depth of their concern for those whom God has given to their charge. They wonder if they have "what it takes"—in terms of character—to accomplish the task they've been given.

MORE THAN EMOTION

Recently I've been challenged by Paul's commendation of Titus in 2 Cor. 8:16, in which he thanked God for giving Titus the same concern for the Corinthians that he himself had. I wonder how Titus demonstrated this "earnest care" that Paul should be so excited to see its development. Do I have this same degree of earnest care for the people I am ministering to? Thinking about this question, I initially felt sick at heart because I often think of intense concern only in terms of having an emotional response toward others. But was Titus's concern purely emotional—or was there more to it?

As I did further study, I discovered that the Greek word describing Titus's concern in this verse is often translated "diligence." The word's meaning is "earnestness, zeal, or sometimes the haste accompanying this." Showing this kind of care for someone can be roughly defined as "being zealously persistent in his behalf." It means going beyond the usual parameters of an interpersonal relationship in order to take a watchful interest in the spiritual welfare of another. This discovery was a real encouragement to me. Intense concern is more than just feeling for people. It includes acting in their behalf. I'm not excused or prevented from having earnest care for those around me just because my emotional state is so changeable.

One day I'm riding the heights and the next I'm down deep in the valleys. But even if I am not buoyed up by the feeling of love, I can be diligent to act in another's behalf. I can be sure to pray for that person. I can be eager to think about how to make a contribution toward what God is doing in his life. I can spend time with him. I can be thoughtful in the little things. I can demonstrate earnest care.

Laboring For Christ

Another quality required of the laborer for Christ can be seen in the special commendation Paul had for Timothy, his dear son in the faith. "I have no one else like him," Paul said, "who takes a genuine interest in your welfare" (Phil. 2:20). Timothy's concern for those under his charge was sincere. He placed their concerns above his own pursuits and pleasures. He was single-mindedly focused on what would benefit them.

It's easy to slip into thinking of others solely in terms of how they can further my own ministry or

help me accomplish my objectives. When this unhealthy mindset creeps in, genuine interest in those who are “slow growers” creeps out. The people I serve begin to feel they are only cogs in a big ministry machine that is set up solely for the manufacture of one product, and an unspoken message comes through: “Either fit in, or get out.”

Paul and Timothy exercised selectivity in their ministry in order to see healthy “reproducers” raised up, but their selectivity did not become an excuse for exclusiveness. They trained the few, but they ministered to all. Certainly both Paul and Timothy had a mind to see their ministry advance and the workers for Christ multiplied. But they did not allow this zeal for growth in the kingdom to become a selfish ambition. They did not allow God’s work to become their god. They kept the perspective that ministry means helping people, and that it is not a means for expanding one’s accomplishments or ego.

The qualities Titus and Timothy were commended for are not unrelated. In fact, they go hand in hand. A genuine interest in the welfare of others is expressed in the diligent pursuit of their spiritual development; intense concern for them is guaranteed when I am truly seeking their best.

PAINFUL EXPOSURE

This type of love is beyond my natural capacities—and it is beyond yours as well. In being able to love the way God loves in Jesus Christ, is laid bare. But this painful exposure can be an integral part of the solution. How I respond to it will determine my progress in becoming a vessel through whom Jesus can love. It can thus have a refining effect in me—or else it can lead me to despair.

In the Bible

There was a king, who had an army of only 580,000, and he had to face an opposing army of one million. He had a real problem. He faced overwhelming odds, and he could not prevail. 2 Chronicles 14. But King Asa who believed in God, allowed this situation of desperation to cast him freshly upon God. He said, “No one but You can stand up for the powerless against the powerful”. So he prayed, placing his reliance upon God, and he saw a great victory.

Rely on God's Power for Victory

In the same way, our sense of powerlessness in loving others as Jesus Christ loves, can also cast us upon God as also a few other things can. It destroys the pride that results from depending upon our strength and power.” It crushes the attitude and the reliance that we can place upon ourselves. It can allow God to painstakingly teach us to die to the “self” and to cast ourselves fully upon him, so that the life of Jesus Christ as characterized by his unique love can be lived through us. We need to stay aware and in tune with those things that are truly important.

It reduces us to the truly essential—that which fulfills the law—to pure, honest love, not just in the way we feel, but true love in word, deeds, and actions. Perhaps in ministering to others, you have, as I have, neglected the very essence of ministry: The love of Jesus Christ. Maybe you have perceived shallowness in your earnest care and in the sincerity of your interest in the welfare to those allotted to your charge. If so, let me encourage you not to turn to despair or to turn away from ministry. Turn to the Lord, Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit, and to fulfill his love through you, for only he can help the powerless as they struggle in the grand battle of life. He can produce his love through you.