

EQUIPPING THE LAITY TO CARE FOR OTHERS IN CRISIS

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GORDON R. POLEY

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife Debra. She is the greatest care giver I have ever known. She loves as Jesus loves. The ongoing crisis of raising our cerebral palsy children would have been virtually impossible without her constant compassionate care. She makes it a joy. Through twenty-two years of marriage and ministry she has been a tremendous partner and blessing from God. With her by my side the blessings have been multiplied and the burdens have always been cut in half. Her deep conviction of the call of God in our lives is witnessed by her willingness to go anywhere and sacrifice anything so that we may be in the centre of His will, serving Him. The man, husband, father and pastor that I am today is because of the loving way she has encouraged and challenged me.

Thank you, Debbie, for modelling the great “Care-Giver” to Rebecca, Robin, Raquel, Rose and me. I thank God for you all.

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First, I wish to acknowledge the godly heritage handed down to me by my parents, Robert and Shirley Poley. I feel a great indebtedness to them. Their prayers and encouragement have been a constant staple of my spiritual diet from childhood until now. How strange and sweet it is to find myself, at this stage of my life, ministering to the same church where my parents attend. What a joy to be working with them in building our heavenly Father's eternal kingdom.

Second, I wish to acknowledge the congregation of Sunny Brae Baptist Church in Moncton, New Brunswick. My gratitude flows to this congregation. They literally opened their hearts and exposed their deepest painful experiences that I may learn with them how to care for others in crisis the way Jesus would. They also provided the time and resources to assist me in the pursuit of a personal and professional overhaul at Gordon – Conwell Theological Seminary. I thank God for these people who have loved me, encouraged me, corrected me and laboured with me so that our church would provide the healing Gospel to the community of Sunny Brae.

Finally I wish to acknowledge those who helped in the process of making this project presentable. Several assisted in endless revisions. Esther Langille, our part time church secretary, who has been finding my grammatical errors for years now. She makes each day coming to the office a joy. Dr. Anna Burditt, who helped me improve every paragraph. Dr. Ken Swetland and Dr. David Horn who served as advisor and reader for this project. Your patience, tenderness and focussed comments made this a stronger work. I take responsibility for those places where it is not even more detailed.

EQUIPPING THE LAITY TO CARE FOR OTHERS IN CRISIS

ABSTRACT

This work focuses on equipping and motivating the church to care for others in the specific areas of death, critical illness, suicide, gambling, alcoholism, depression, conflict with the law, homosexuality, pain at Christmas, divorce and pornography.

The thesis begins by surveying the congregation to learn about their three greatest personal crises. Thirteen messages were delivered on Sunday mornings to address these crises. Detailed fill-in-the-blank sermon notes were included in each Sunday's bulletin. These inserts were accumulated into a resource booklet after the project as a quick reference tool to assist the congregation in caring for their neighbours, family and friends during a future crisis.

The work includes the results of the congregational survey and concludes with a chapter highlighting the outcomes established by the study.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

It is the poet, gifted with pen and prose who seems to strike with clarity the problems and shortcomings of man. It is no different in the church. Music seems to bridge truth, making a connection between the mind and the heart. As I reflect on the topic before me of “Equipping the Laity to Care for those in Crisis,” the lyrics to a *Casting Crowns*’ song keeps pounding in my head:

But if we are the body
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?
There is a way.¹

These are legitimate questions. They are all asking the same root question, “Is the church being the church?” The emotional pull of the song comes from the anticipated answer “No, the church is not reaching, healing, loving ...” or at least, “not like it should be.” A similar question can be asked in the context of caring. Is the church, not just the pastor, caring for those in their sphere of influence who are experiencing personal crises? After all, God has called us to care. Caring was the very first ministry skill that was

¹ Hall, Mark. *Casting Crowns* (Milwaukee: Hal-Leonard, 2003), 12.

taught and modelled after Jesus called his initial disciples. In Matt 4:18-22, Jesus begins to call his designated disciples. Immediately following this, in Matt 4:23-25, he

demonstrates to the disciples his caring nature by healing “those with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed.” In each of the Gospels, Jesus models caring immediately after selecting his inaugural team: in Mark 1:21-28, an evil spirit is driven out, in Luke 5:12-16 a leper is cleansed and in John 2:1-11 a wedding is rescued by turning the water into wine. Each evangelist uses a different caring event, however they all elevated caring as central to being a follower of Jesus. I cannot ignore the chronology between the **Calling** and the **Caring** in the Gospels. One seems to flow naturally into the other. God calls us as disciples and then trains us to care for a hurting world and for those going through personal crisis.

The question before us is this, “How can we improve our caring practises?” This question may even seem offensive to many Christians. A quick self analysis of any congregation would probably lead every church to the declaration, “Of course we are caring” citing a barrage of examples. Yes, most churches are caring, but to whom -- themselves? If the world found the church caring wouldn't they flock to it? Is the church caring to the satisfaction of God's standard?

God's standard of caring can be seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan. There was *risk* in helping someone of another race and culture, there was commitment of *time* and there was a *sacrifice* of a financial kind. Certainly there were risk, time and sacrifice when it came to the greatest demonstration of caring in the history of man – the cross.

My goal is to equip the people of the Sunny Brae Baptist Church (SBBC) so that their competence and confidence in caring for those in crisis is elevated to a new high water mark.

Historically there are two factors that play a part in why caring has not been actualized to a degree that would be satisfactory to our Saviour: 1) the Pastor and 2) the People.

Barriers to Caring

The Pastor - According to Eph 4:11, the pastor is called to equip the people for ministry. The responsibility for carrying out ministry ultimately belongs to the congregation. The text states that, “God gave... pastors... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service.” This work of service would, of course, also include the ministry of care giving. However, church congregations tend to see care as ‘pastoral care,’ that is, it is the pastor’s responsibility. The obvious reality is that there are just too many sheep for one shepherd. We can thank God for Jethro’s counsel to Moses to share the ministry by training and delegating.² However, logic follows that if the pastor is not equipping care givers, then the people will find it more difficult to excel in care giving.

The pastor does impact the church’s care giving. Perhaps one reason why I believe I have floundered in this area of equipping is my poor academic training in the area of counselling. I have always felt that the weakest discipline in my master of divinity toolbox was counselling. There is a connection between care giving and counselling. They are interrelated. Training in the latter will enhance the capabilities of the former. Unfortunately, not all seminary programs have comparable strengths. I have always felt that the weakest discipline in my master of divinity toolbox was counselling. I do not remember taking a counselling course. For years I have felt inadequate in the field of crisis care giving. How could I ever train others in an area where I have lacked competence?

The pastor impacts a church with more than his teaching, he also impacts a church with his temperament. Every pastor plays a significant role in the attitudes and actions of the congregation that he or she serves. This influence can be for better or for worse. Hans Finzel reminds us that, “No matter how skilled or gifted we are as leaders, one or two glaring blind spots can ruin our influence. A few bad habits can foil the effectiveness of all our talents and accomplishments.”³ McIntosh and Rima would call this a failure in

² Exodus 18:13-27.

³ Finzel, Hans. *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: Cook Publishing, 2000), 19.

overcoming the dark-side of leadership. The dark side refers to our inner urges, compulsions, motivations, and dysfunctions that drive us toward success or undermine our accomplishments.⁴ Was there something in my dark-side or temperament that was interfering with my ability to properly care for the people of Sunny Brae?

It is a well documented fact that only about fifteen percent of a person's business and engineering success is due to technical knowledge and that eighty-five percent is due to "human engineering" skills, such as the ability to lead and influence people. Of the people who are fired from their jobs, only 20-40% are fired because they lack technical skills while 60-80% are let go because they lacked human relation skills.⁵ What about my own "human engineering?"

More alarming than my limitations as a properly trained care giver was the fear that I was not sure I cared for my congregants. I arrived at the Sunny Brae Baptist Church after over twenty years in pastoral ministry. There had been several unexpected surprises in the pastorate that had left me somewhat disillusioned and disoriented. I was beginning to conclude that the job was too hard, the rewards were too few, and my abilities and giftedness were suspect by some. Discouragement was setting in like a dense fog.

It was over three years ago that I settled in at Sunny Brae. I had soon discovered that the church was not what I expected. As I have heard Leith Anderson say, "Every pastor soon discovers that the pulpit committee lied to them."⁶ Things were not what they were supposed to be.

⁴ McIntosh & Rima. *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1997), 29.

⁵ Sehnert, Keith. *Stress/Unstress* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 100.

⁶ Anderson, Leith at the Conference on Evangelism, "2000 and Beyond." St. Andrews, N.B., Canada. October 25-28, 1999.

In my last three pastorates, I had enjoyed a fairly lengthy “honeymoon” stage at the beginning of each ministry, but at Sunny Brae there was no honeymoon. I began to question why God would allow such a mismatch of pastor and people.

The problem was compounded by the fact that the church and I were both, at the time, “damaged goods.” We had each been hurt in ministry and neither of us had yet started our healing process. We were each stuck in bitterness, resentment and self-centeredness.

I wondered how long I could go through the motions without doing serious damage to the church. Visiting someone in the cardiac care unit just to keep myself out of trouble is not the high standard I am reaching for in ministry. Recognising the gravity of my own heart condition before God I began to pray in earnest that God would teach me how to love (care for) this church.

David Hansen writes, “Perhaps the greatest spiritual issue between a pastor and a congregation is whether a bond is formed between them or not... that is where they can show one another *hesed* (promise-keeping-love).”⁷ I yearned for that bond. However, sometimes real life gets in the way. The pain and drain of ministry tempts us to make family into clients and to turn compassion into bedside manner. After twenty-two years of pastoral ministry, it becomes easy to lose your passion to serve and feel a gravitational pull to simply go through the motions. One’s heart becomes disconnected from people, even God’s people. For the most part, our people know this is happening and the result is lukewarmness, bitterness, backsliding and atheism.

The good news is that God’s grace overflowed preventing a potential travesty. I recognized the unhealthy and sinful condition of my heart and intentionally sought help. My constant prayer became, “O sovereign LORD, give me a love and compassion for these people.” It is now three years later, and the love of Christ has formed a covenant bond that is deep and rich.

⁷ Hansen, David. *The Power of Loving Your Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 61.

With this background in mind, one of the goals for this project, “Equipping the Laity to Help those in Crisis,” is my personal growth and development as a care giver. Even though the target group of this project is the laity, every teacher knows that the teacher himself is the greatest benefactor from the preparation and presentation of any material on a particular subject. I also want to grow in love for the people that God has called me to care for. I believed that this project would provide ample opportunity for me to connect heart to heart with the people of Sunny Brae.

The People - The attitudes, actions, and competence of a congregation determine its effectiveness in care giving to those in crisis. Specifically, there are four barriers that I have personally found in ministry that have acted as a deterrent to the laity for caring in crisis.

1. “It is the Pastor’s Job” - The first barrier to congregational care giving is the lack of understanding of their purpose and identity. As stated above, church congregations tend to see care as ‘pastoral care,’ that is, it is the pastor’s responsibility. However, the pastor is not the Body of Christ. The congregation is the Body of Christ. The crisis in caring for those in crisis is more than anything else an identity crisis. The church needs to embrace the biblical truth that we are all priests, that every member is a minister. “It is no surprise that nonbelievers do not really know much about the church’s identity or mission. But when Christians themselves are undergoing a widespread identity crisis, then we are in big trouble.”⁸ There seems to be a growing chasm between the biblical foundation of Christians today in our society as compared to those of a generation ago. The ramifications of this lack of understanding were stated long ago by Hosea when he declared, “my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”⁹

⁸ Colson, Charles. *The Body* (Word, Dallas, 1992), 30.

⁹ Hosea 4:6

Jack Hayford summarises the role of the Christian by saying “Every member of the body has the potential to be – and should be fed and led toward functioning as – a fully equipped agent of Jesus Christ, as His minister.”¹⁰ The church’s role in the world is not a series of independent items on an action checklist. Instead the church’s role (what it *does*) is dependent on its character (what it *is*) as a community of believers.¹¹ What we *do*, therefore flows from who we *are*. We need to understand who we are. It is the church’s mandate to be care givers, not just the pastor’s.

Many times have I cringed from words such as, “That is why we hired a pastor” or “That is not my job, that is what the pastor is paid to do.” Even if these words are not spoken verbatim, often they are implied by the attitude and mood of a congregation. If the sick are ministered to by a deacon or a member in their small group visits and prays with them they often still expect the pastor to visit or they would feel short changed.

A short while ago, I heard that a parishioner had been in the hospital and now was home. At first, I was not too alarmed that I had “missed” someone. People had fallen through the cracks before when it came to hospital visitation. I immediately went to the house for a pastoral visit. Janice (not her real name), the spouse, was home and received me at the front door but the countenance on her face revealed that she was not herself. In fact even though she was being gracious to me in the content of our conversation, I could sense by her body language and demeanour that she was sickened by my very presence. She had wondered where I had been. Why hadn’t I been to visit? There was a stack of bulletins beside her chair. She referred to them and wondered why her husband’s name was not in the list of people to pray for who were ill. It was an extremely awkward set of circumstances. During the conversation I picked up on the fact that several church members had been in to visit them, bringing them a casserole or providing ministry care in one form or another. But none of this seemed to count unless the pastor was there in

¹⁰ Colson, Charles. *The Body* (Word, Dallas, 1992), 281.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

person as well. I believe that this expectation of the pastor to “do it all” is the single greatest factor preventing our churches from being unleashed to the ministry of caring.

2. Fear - A second reason that prevents us from caring for those in crisis is fear. Too many of us run from “emotional blood.” Even the strong can be fearful. My first pastorate was in the small fishing community of Jeddore, Nova Scotia. You could tell the old time fishermen from the next generation by their handshake. The difference in their handshake was the result of the modern addition of hydraulics. Today, lobster fishermen have the heavy lobster pots (traps) pulled up from the deep by a motorised fly wheel that pinches the rope and retrieves the pot. The pots are weighted down so that the sea doesn’t shift them around. The older fishermen did it all by hand. Many of the fishermen of Jeddore had fingers that were thicker than my wrist. They had developed “Popeye” forearms from hauling up three hundred waterlogged wooden lobster pots in a single day.

These fishermen were hard core. It was a hard life they lived as they braved the seas day in and day out. Yet I remember several of them who had never been to a funeral home. “That is not my cup of tea,” they would say. As rugged as they were, some of them could not stand the sight of emotional blood. They were terrified facing the awkward emotions so commonly present with those who are bereaved. Their fears paralysed them.

Larry Crabb tells us that the fear of failure is one of the basic obstacles of man.¹² When it comes to someone’s personal crisis (eg. suicide) we often become too afraid to enter into the stress of that disaster and we balk. Franklin D Roosevelt quipped, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”¹³ The Bible repeatedly encourages us not to be

¹² Crabb, Larry. *Effective Biblical Counselling* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977), 130.

¹³ Tan, Paul Lee. *Encyclopaedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Assurance, Rockville, 1979), 440.

afraid. When Jesus speaks He often begins, “Fear not!”¹⁴ We are told that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-discipline.¹⁵ We are even told that the man who fears has not been made perfect in love.¹⁶ If all through the scriptures we are encouraged not to be afraid, why do we constantly struggle with all types of fear? To be afraid is not to trust God fully. God says do not be afraid, promising that if we cast our anxiety upon Him He will take care of us.¹⁷

Fear and lack of trust go hand-in-hand; where you find one, you will find the other. So if we are to understand why we *do* fear, we must understand why we *do not* trust God.¹⁸ During this project, there will be an emphasis on encouraging the people to step outside their comfort zone and trust God to use them to comfort. The overall theme of this project from the pulpit is called, *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

3. Lack of Pertinent Information - Often when tragedy strikes in the neighbourhood, people are prevented from giving care because they do not know what to do or say. What eradicates many of mankind’s fears? Knowledge! The scripture says, “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”¹⁹ In the same way, it is through knowledge and understanding that one is able to comfort others. Disciples need to be disciplined. We need to be taught the things to do as well as the things to avoid in caring for those in crisis.

¹⁴ Matthew 10:28; Luke 8:50; 12:7; 12:32; John 12:15

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 1:7

¹⁶ 1 John 4:18

¹⁷ 1 Peter 5:7

¹⁸ Morley, Patrick. *The Man in the Mirror* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997), 252.

¹⁹ Proverbs 24:3-4

During this project, I want to help raise the congregation's confidence and competence in helping through information and inspiration. The motivation is not to get the church to do *something* but to do the *right* thing. Randolph Sanders writes that the first essential element of ethical care giving is competence.²⁰ Know your abilities and limitations. Egan concurs with, "The principle resources needed are *working knowledge*—that is, information or knowledge that enables one to *do* something – and *skills*."²¹

This project is not going to turn all of the congregants at Sunny Brae into professional counsellors. However, care giving is not only for those with a master's degree in psychology. Larry Crabb describes counselling in terms of three separate categories:²² 1) encouragement, which is available to every Christian, 2) biblical principles of living, which is available to pastors, elders, church leaders, and 3) specialized counselling of deep problems, which is for specially trained counsellors. It is the first category that this project is presently focussed on. As Jay Adams would say, every Christian equipped with the Holy Spirit and God's Word is competent to counsel.²³

The purpose of this project is to provide basic awareness of personal crises such as loss of a loved one, critical illness, suicide, addiction, divorce, depression, legal troubles, homosexuality, job and/or financial loss, rebellious teenagers, etc. Each of these crises comes with dynamics that are peculiar to itself.

4. Platitudes & Myths - A fourth factor that inhibits us from providing helpful care is that, when we do get involved in a crisis situation, we often say or believe the wrong things.

²⁰ Sanders, Randolph. *Christian Counseling Ethics* (Intervarsity, Downers Grove, 1997), 13.

²¹ Egan, Gerald. *The Skilled Helper* (Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, 1995), 272.

²² Crabb, Larry. *Effective Biblical Counselling* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977), 15.

²³ Adam, Jay. *Competent To Counsel*. (Baker, Grand Rapids, 1970), 18. The theme verse of this work is

Romans 15:14 (Williams) As far as I am concerned about you, my brothers, I am convinced that you especially are abounding in the highest goodness, richly supplied with perfect knowledge and *competent to counsel* one another.

We can be well meaning and actually say something that causes more pain, rather than brings comfort. Sally was brought up at Sunny Brae Baptist. She lost her dad when she was a teenager. His death was sudden and without warning. A friend was trying to be helpful when she said, “I know exactly how you feel.” While it was true that this person also had lost a father, the words did not have a soothing effect but a stinging effect. “How does she know how I feel?” I remember Sally telling me. “I will never have my father walk me down the aisle when I get married like she did.”

Gerald Egan states, “It would be unfair to tell those thinking of a career in the helping profession that all is well in Camelot.”²⁴ Because of inept helpers, some clients get worse from treatment. It is never neutral, treatment is either for better or for worse.²⁵ The same is true for all levels of care giving.

Then there are the spiritual cliches. “It was meant to be.” “It was God’s will.” Religious people can be the worst offenders when it comes to platitudes. It is a dangerous thing to speak for God without really knowing what we are saying. I want to clarify, in this project, why some of these cliches are so offensive.

Some personal crises are taboo or awkward to talk about. Some even have a stigma attached to them. Personal crises such as suicide, addictions, homosexuality, or having special needs children also have myths attached to them. I want to expose the myths that only prolong and deepen the wounds of the family members.

Christianity vs. Psychology - I would like to comment on the long standing battle between Christianity and psychology. Are they enemies or allies?²⁶ Is there a fallout from this battle that impacts this project? There are those who believe that secular psychology is committed to radical humanism – man is the highest being, the central

²⁴ Egan, Gerald. *The Skilled Helper* (Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, 1995), 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ Crabb, Larry. *Effective Biblical Counselling* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977), 31.

event of history. Everything revolves around man and is evaluated in terms of its advantages to man. In psychotherapy there are also many who have resentment against religion. It is prone to subtle errors or departures from truth. There are some very seductive elements in certain psychotherapies that can ensnare the immature or unwise Christian.²⁷

The reaction of the church to this ongoing battle has been that portions of the church have rejected the totality of psychology. The work of the church has also suffered from those who promote either hastily “baptized” versions of secular models or superficial rendering of “biblical” models.²⁸ I believe that it is reasonable to assume that a lot of this negativity has possibly filtered down into the general care giving of the church. Some of my congregants believe that to seek help from a counsellor or psychologist is to deny their faith in God.

During this project I will keep in mind the historical tension that exists between psychology and Christianity. However, I believe that all truth is God’s truth. Just as the LORD causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust,²⁹ He also gives truth to the just and the unjust. The task of this pastor is to study psychology in the light of biblical revelation. What we need is an integration of Christian theology and psychology. I trust that the integrity of this project will in some way help bridge the gulf between these two needless adversaries. A desired outcome of this project is that those from Sunny Brae who may need help from a mental help professional will overcome any internal stigma and seek therapy from a certified Christian counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist.

Methodology

The purpose of this project is “Equipping the Laity to Care for Others in Crisis”

²⁷ Jones, Stanton. & Butman, R; *Modern Psychotherapies* (InterVarsity Press, Dowers Grove, 1991), 23-25.

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁹ Matthew 5:25

encouraging them to “Dare to care like Jesus.” Specifically, I wish to prepare the Sunny Brae Baptist congregation to minister more adequately to their family, friends and neighbours when tragedy strikes. My methodology will be to 1) survey the congregation through a questionnaire seeking to identify the problems or crises that are specifically characteristic of our church, 2) preach a series of sermons on the identified calamities with the intention to motivate and equip the congregation to care, and 3) illicit feedback from the congregation to evaluate the project.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAME WORK

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question, “Why?” Specifically, why should pastors equip the laity to care for others in crisis. Contained in this subject are several significant theological issues: Key Biblical Words, The Care Giving God of the Old Testament, The Nature and Teachings of Christ, The Role of the Pastor, The Character of the Christian and the Problem of Human Pain.

Key Biblical Words

Caring for those in crisis cannot happen without specific virtues. Caring can only be genuine if there is true love, compassion and mercy. The truth is you cannot possess these qualities and not care. What do the scriptures teach about these virtues? They will be briefly discussed.

Compassion - In the Old Testament, the foundational word used for God’s compassion is *racham*, which also means “womb.”³⁰ God’s compassion for us is like the compassion a mother has for the child in her womb. “As a father has compassion (*racham*) on his children, so the LORD has compassion (*racham*) on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”³¹

God has always shown compassion to mankind who is in constant crisis because

³⁰ Hansen, David. *The Power of Loving Your Church*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1998), 71.

³¹ Psalms 103:13-14

of his sin. The prophets were deeply aware of the wonder of God's mercy to sinful men. They taught that anyone who had experienced this would feel it his duty to have compassion on his fellow man, especially >the fatherless, the widow, and the foreigner= (frequently named together as in Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:19; Je. 22:3 *etc.*) and also on those in poverty and the afflicted (Ps. 146:9; Jb. 6:14; Pr. 19:17; Zc. 7:9B10; Mi. 6:8). It seems clear from these references that God expected his people to show compassion not only to each other but to foreigners who lived among them.³² God's expectation of man is to show compassion to anyone who is in crisis.

A prominent word for compassion in the New Testament is *splaxna*. It is used for almost all the vital organs but basically it means something like "guts." We get the word spleen from it. *Splaxna* is the shakiness we feel in our guts when moved by contact with suffering.³³ In both Hebrew and Greek, compassion is literally a "gut feeling" for the needs of others.³⁴ The interesting thing is that in the Gospels the word is never used of anyone except Jesus; it is characteristic of him.³⁵ When he saw the crowds like sheep without a shepherd, he was moved with compassion.³⁶ When he saw the hungry people, far from home, he was moved with compassion.³⁷ Jesus acts instinctively, not stopping to count the cost, not questioning if the one in need is "deserving." He is deeply moved from within to act. His compassion never evaporated in a feeling.

³² Wood, D. R. and I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 218.

³³ Hansen, David. *The Power of Loving Your Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1998), 70.

³⁴ Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible Vol. A-C (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 932.

³⁵ Barclay, William. *And He had Compassion*. (Toronto, Ontario: GR. Welch Co Ltd., 1975), 116.

³⁶ Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34

³⁷ Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:2

Compassion is incarnational love: “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.”³⁸ Let’s now look at this word “love.”

Love - There are only two times in scripture that it emphatically defines God with the statement, “God is...” and then fills in the blank with one word.³⁹ One of the times is in 1 John 4:16 where it says that “God is love.” The scripture does not say that God *has* love it says that it is his very nature. It is important for us to investigate this word ‘love,’ for it is at the very heart of caring for those in crises.

Within the constellation of the Hebrew words for love is the spectacular word *hesed*. Nelson Glueck published a watershed in the discussion of this word.⁴⁰ *Hesed* can mean “love, kindness, mercy and loyalty.” But the backdrop behind each of these is “keeping covenant.” God’s *hesed* is a stubborn, steadfast love that will not let us go because of his commitment or covenant. In *hesed* God stays faithful to us long after we have forfeited our right to remain in the covenant with him. In that sense, to show *hesed* is to show grace. The idea that *hesed* expresses grace caused the translators of the *King James Version* to translate *hesed* with words like “mercy” and “kindness” and with the most beautiful neo-logism in the history of the English language, “loving-kindness.”⁴¹ We are to manifest God’s loving-kindness to those in need because of the moral covenant. We have an obligation to help those in crisis because we are our brother’s keeper.

The New Testament words for love include *philos* (the love of a friend), *eros* (erotic love), *agape* (sacrificial love) and *stergo*, (brotherly love). As Christians, we often

³⁸ John 1:14 [The Message](#).

³⁹ 1 John 1:5 “God is Light.” and 1 John 4:16 “God is Love.”

⁴⁰ Harris, R. Laid, Archer, Gleason L., Waltke, Bruce K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
Vol. 1 (Chicago, Illinois; Moody Press, 1981), 698.

⁴¹ Hansen, David. *The Power of Loving Your Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Pub., 1998), 54.

give *philo* a quick glance compared to the attention we adorn on *agape*, relegating *philo* to human love while exalting *agape* to divine love. But historically speaking they crucified Jesus not because of whom he loved but because of whom he *liked* (*philo*). The Pharisees did not accuse Jesus of loving sinners; they accused him of befriending (*philos*) sinners. Luke 7:34 says, “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look a glutton and a drunkard, a friend (*philos*) of tax collectors and sinners!’” Caring for those in crisis is deliberately, stubbornly and consistently liking people who do not necessarily like us. That means liking people who are not nice and who are not nice to us. Liking people who hate our guts is one of the great *agape* sacrifices of being a Christian to the world. It is one of the hardest things any of us is called to do. *Philos* is a friend to whom one is under a basic obligation (cf. Lk 7:6; 11:5; 14:10, 12; 15:6,9,29; 23:12; John 11:11; Acts 10:24;19:31; 27:3).⁴² Certainly caring for those in crisis is one of those obligations. We too, like Jesus, need to befriend sinners and sinners by their condition are those in need or crisis.

Now let us move on to *agape* which is esteemed by Christians as the great word for God’s love in the Bible. But this word, like the Christian symbol of the cross, has been sanitized. The cross was at one time an instrument of torture and death. But now we adorn our buildings and bodies with this symbol. *Agape* is likewise known in Christian circles as the highest of loves, but in essence, *agape* is brutal love. Why else would the Greeks eschew this word? Was it because they knew what the word really meant? A dictionary definition of *agape* would be “a moral goodwill that proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty rather than attraction of charm.”⁴³ It is very similar in meaning to *hesed* in that both denote dedication. However, this lacks the punch and power of the descriptive John 3:16 passage which is *agape*’s central meaning for the New Testament.

⁴² Brown, Colin. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 549.

⁴³ Elwell, Walter A., Philip Comfort. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2001), 827.

“For God so loved (*agapao*) the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Peter, who adored Jesus’ steadfast love and compassion and who could never get over the fact that Jesus liked being with fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes, completely rejected Jesus’ decision to act out *agape*. If we have *agape* for the people we serve, being loyal (*hesed*) to them, having compassion (*splaxna*) for them, and liking (*philos*) them will be a cinch. Jesus mustered the latter three loves without difficulty, but when faced with showing *agape*, he sweated as it were blood. *Agape* love hurts.

Mercy - The biblical meaning of mercy is exceedingly rich and complex, as evidenced by the fact that several Hebrew and Greek words were used to express the concept. Consequently, there are many synonyms employed in translation to express the dimensions of meaning involved, such as “kindness,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness,” “grace,” “favour,” “pity,” “compassion,” and “steadfast love.” You can see how it is interconnected to our two previous word study discussions.

The theological significance of the concept of mercy is the love of God, which is freely demonstrated in his gracious saving acts to those in the covenant relationship. God continually is merciful to his disobedient and wayward people and persistently seeks them out to draw them back to himself. Hosea pictures God as a loving and merciful father to his rebellious and wayward people (Hos 11; cf. Jer 31:20). Israel is portrayed as an unfaithful and adulterous wife whom God loves as a faithful husband in spite of her apostate and sinful condition (Hos 1–3; cf. Is 54:4–8).

Because of what Israel as a covenant nation had learned about the steadfast love and faithfulness of God, devout Jews instinctively lifted their voices in petition for divine mercy and forgiveness in times of need, eloquently expressed in the penitential psalms

(Ps 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143), as well as other Old Testament passages (Ex 34:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 57; 79; 86; 123; Is 33:1–6; Dn 9:3–19; Jl 2:13).⁴⁴

The word “mercy,” has nothing to do in the Old Testament, except accidentally, with the question of forgiveness of sin.⁴⁵ The use of the word in the New Testament is similar, where the Greek word is almost invariably *eleos* (pity, mercy). *Eleos* and its derivatives are found 78 times in the New Testament.⁴⁶

Because God has freely extended his mercy regardless of one’s worthiness or faithfulness, people are to respond by showing mercy to others, even though they do not deserve it or seek it. Indeed, people are commanded to be merciful, especially to the poor, the needy, widows, and orphans and those in crises (Prov 14:31; 19:17; Mi 6:8; Zec 7:9–10; Col 3:12; Lk 10:25-37).

The Care Giving God of the Old Testament

Civilla Martin wrote the hymn, *God Will Take Care Of You*, when she herself needed to learn the lesson of resting in God=s care. Her husband, the Reverend W. Stillman Martin, was a well-known Baptist evangelist. One Sunday in 1904, Mrs. Martin became ill suddenly and was unable to accompany her husband to his preaching assignment some distance away. As Mr. Martin considered cancelling his trip, their young son exclaimed, **A**Father, don=t you think that if God wants you to preach today, He will take care of Mother while you are away?⁴⁷

Be not dismayed whate’er betide, God will take care of you;

⁴⁴ Ibid., 882.

⁴⁵ Richardson, Alan. *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London, England; SCM Press, 1982), 143.

⁴⁶ Brown, Colin. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 595.

⁴⁷ Osbeck, Kenneth W. *101 More Hymn Stories*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1985), 106.

*Beneath His wings of love abide; God will take care of you.
Chorus: God will take care of you, thru ev'ry day, o'er all the way;
He will take care of you; God will take care of you.*

The first crisis recorded in the scripture is the fall of man in Genesis chapter three. The LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."⁴⁸ Certainly there were serious ramifications from the rebellion of the first couple. Each had received a specific curse. The woman would now have to deal with increased labour pain during child birth and her desire would be for her husband. Adam would now have a more difficult time scratching out a living in the dirt. They both were banished from God's presence. However, the skin with which God clothed Adam and Eve perpetually reminded them of God's provision.⁴⁹ From the very beginning we see the caring nature of God. He provided everything for them in the garden before they did anything to deserve it. And he provided and cared for them immediately after the fall when there was no merit, only grace.

Each of the Patriarchs experienced a personal crisis of various sorts: Abraham had no idea where he was going, he had no heir, his nephew Lot was about to be annihilated in Sodom and Gomorrah; Isaac needed a wife and Joseph was sold into slavery by his own flesh and blood. In each circumstance they came to know God as the One who was caring for them, providing for their needs. In fact Abraham called his God, Jehovah Jireh, *AThe Lord will Provide@*.⁵⁰ Genesis ends with Joseph on his death bed sharing his

⁴⁸ Genesis 2:16-17

⁴⁹ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*
Vol. I. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 33.

⁵⁰ Genesis 22:14

last words with his family and the next generation. What message is it that he wants to pass on to this next generation? Twice he tells them, “God will take care of You.”⁵¹

Four hundred years later, the LORD personally leads the Israelites after their miraculous liberation from Egyptian slavery. In the beginning of the exodus, it was enough that God directed Moses where to march: he knew the country and the road well enough; but when they had come to the *edge of the wilderness* (v. 20) they now needed a different guide; and a very good guide they had, one that was infinitely wise, kind, and faithful. God supernaturally demonstrates his care by guiding them by a pillar of cloud in the daytime, which became a pillar of fire at night. Besides guiding them, the *shechinah*, symbolizing God=s presence, assured them of His goodness and faithfulness.⁵²

This cloud, that led the way in that vast howling wilderness, was a living reminder of a God that cares. When they marched, this pillar went before them, at the rate that they could follow. It appointed the place of their encampment, as Infinite Wisdom saw fit. It eased them from care and secured them from danger, both in moving and in resting. It sheltered them by day from the heat, which, at some times of the year, was extreme. It gave them light by night when they had occasion for it, and at all times made their camp pleasant and the wilderness they were in less frightful.⁵³

The Psalmist also declares the caring nature of God with the phrase “the Lord is gracious (or merciful) and compassionate” (cf. 111:4; 145:8; 86:15; 103:8; 116:5). This word pair refers to God’s emotions that are moved by human need. The Psalmist frequently appealed to God’s mercy and/or compassion when they were overwhelmed by powerful enemies or by their own sinfulness (Ps. 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:6, 16; 26:11; 27:7;

⁵¹ Genesis 5:24,25 NASB

⁵² Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*
Vol. 2. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 131.

⁵³ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible:* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996),
Exodus 13:17.

30:10; 31:9; 40:11; 41:4, 10; 51:1; 56:1; 57:1; 79:8; 86:3, 16; 119:58, 77, 132, 156; 123:3).⁵⁴

God's care and provision is not just a theme throughout the Pentateuch and the Psalms but also throughout the Prophets. "The Lord comforts His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones" (Isaiah 49:13, NIV). So sing the people of God as they contemplate their future deliverance, but the people of the Captivity and those left in "the desolate inheritances" are not so happy. Instead of singing, they are complaining: "The Lord has forsaken me. And my Lord has forgotten me" (v. 14, NKJV). The Lord assures them of His love by comparing Himself to a compassionate mother (vv. 14–23), a courageous warrior (vv. 24–26), and a constant lover (Isaiah 50:1–3).

The Bible emphasizes the fatherhood of God, but there is also a "motherhood" side to God's nature that we must not forget. God is compassionate and comforts us as a mother comforts her children (Isaiah 66:13). Isaiah pictures Israel as a nursing child, totally dependent on the Lord who will never forget them or forsake them. The high priest bore the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders and over his heart (Ex. 28:6–9), engraved on jewels; but God has engraved His children's names on His hands. The word "engraved" means "to cut into," signifying its permanence. God can never forget Zion or Zion's children.⁵⁵

The caring nature of God is evidenced by the fact that Israel will find God merciful. Joel 2:13 (NIV) tells us, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." Nehemiah voices the same reassurance with "They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to

⁵⁴ Zuck, Roy B. *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. (Chicago, Moody Press 1991), 298.

⁵⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Comforted*. An Old Testament Study. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996),

Isaiah 49:1.

their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them.”⁵⁶ God’s compassionate care goes out toward both the good and the evil, the deserving and the wasteful. It is need alone which stirs Him. Throughout the entire Old Testament, God is consistently portrayed as one who cares for his creation which is often in crisis. His love, compassion and mercy move him to care for humanity whether it is deserved or not.

The Nature of Christ

We will briefly discuss the nature of Christ as manifested from his ministry to others. First, let us deal with a few of his actions demonstrating his compassion and caring.

Jesus cleansed lepers.⁵⁷ It is the oldest recorded disease, and the one most feared.⁵⁸ It was literally a living death as pieces of the individual kept dying and falling off. In the middle ages, when a man became a leper, the priest, having donned his stole and taken his crucifix, brought the man into the church and read the burial service over him.⁵⁹ A leper’s greatest pain is not physical. Dr. Brandt discovered that leprosy patients suffer for the simple reason that they have a defective pain system.⁶⁰ No, their greatest suffering was emotional and social. Because of the contagious nature of the disease the leper was forced to warn society of the danger of himself by yelling, “Unclean! Unclean.”⁶¹ These strict isolation laws resulted in lepers not only being outcasts of society but emotionally and psychologically feeling like the rejects of the world. One can

⁵⁶ Nehemiah 9:17

⁵⁷ Mark 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 5:12,13; 17:11-19

⁵⁸ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 37.

⁵⁹ Barclay, William. *And He had Compassion.* (Toronto, Ontario; GR. Welch Co Ltd., 1975), 34.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Leviticus 13:45

only imagine the significance to the leper of Jesus reaching out and *touching* him *before* his cleansing takes place and saying “I am willing, be healed.”⁶² Jesus was caring enough to touch the untouchable.

Another unsavoury situation was the condition of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar just outside the city limits of Jericho. When he heard that Jesus was passing by he cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me.”⁶³ Although the crowd was annoyed with the clamour that Bartimaeus raised, one person was not; and that was Jesus. Immediately he stopped. Jesus was teaching at that moment; but the master teacher always knew that people are far more important than words. It was important to teach them but it was still more important to care for those in crisis and need.

When Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat, his disciples awoke in distress and queried, “Do not You care that we are perishing?”⁶⁴ Jesus stood and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” His actions were saying, “Of course, I care.” Jesus had transformed the “great” storm to a “great” calm, both the physical storm outside and the emotional storm inside the disciples.

The one miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels (excluding the resurrection) is the feeding of the five thousand.⁶⁵ It had become late in the day and the people were tired and hungry. The text reveals that the disciples had suggested that the Master send the people away because it was a desolate place. But again, loving action is the response of Jesus as his compassion moves him to supply their need.

There are many other occurrences of Christ’s compassion and mercy being lavished on those in crisis: the paralytic lowered from the ceiling (Matthew 9:1-8); the woman in the crowd with the haemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34); the deaf and mute man (Mark

⁶² Luke 5:13

⁶³ Mark 10:48

⁶⁴ Mark 4:38 NASB

⁶⁵ Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:4-13

7 31-37); the demonic possessed by Legion (Luke 8:26-40); the man at the pool (John 5:1-9); the man born blind (John 9:1-7); the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) to name a few. Through Jesus' actions, he teaches how important it is to be a compassionate care giver to those who are enduring a personal crisis.

Let us turn from Jesus' miracles of mercy to his message of mercy since his words and works both testify to his nature. Part of his message was for us to care for one another in the most basic of ways. If Matthew 10:42 tells us that "giving someone a drink of water" was considered praiseworthy, how much more praiseworthy would be caring for those in serious crisis. Jesus indicated that helping those in crisis was the same as ministering to himself (Matt 25:34-40). The Golden Rule tells us that "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12). His message had caring for one another throughout the Gospel.

Perhaps the greatest teaching of Jesus on caring for those in crises is the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁶⁶ It illustrates the depth of God's love, while also calling everyone to follow this example of compassion. This famous story is given by Jesus to answer a lawyer who questioned, "Who is my neighbour?" The "expert in religious law" was one of the scribes, who spent their time studying and copying the Jewish law. It was a dishonest disciple who asked, "Who is my neighbour?"⁶⁷

In reply to this question Jesus said:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on

⁶⁶ Luke 10:25-37

⁶⁷ Hughes, Robert B., Laney, J. Carl; *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 450.

his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

There are several important features in this story with regard to caring.

1. God Puts the Onus on Us to Take the Initiative in Caring. The lawyers asked "Who is my neighbour?" When Jesus replied "Go and do likewise" he was in essence saying, You are asking the wrong question. The right question is not "Who is my Neighbour?" No, the right question is "To whom can I be a neighbour?" God puts the onus on us to care.

Jesus taught the same ethic with the "golden rule" in Matthew 7:12: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The "golden rule" was not new in Jesus' day. It is not difficult to find this rule in Jewish teaching or even in other world religions in its negative form; but there is no parallel to the positive form in which Jesus put it.⁶⁸ The attitude which says, "I must do no harm to people," is quite different from the attitude which says, "I must do my best to help people."⁶⁹

This taking of the initiative is reflective of the nature of God. God is a seeker. He is portrayed in the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son as the God who is constantly seeking those who are in need, even if it is simply daily looking to the horizon to see if your wayward son is coming home. Jesus revealed his nature of taking initiative when he said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1*. (Burlington, Ontario; GR. Welch Co Ltd., 1975), 274.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 276.

⁷⁰ Luke 19:10

2. We must Care Even If it Costs Us Personally. The Samaritan was taking a huge risk in helping a Jew. Remember, the Samaritans and Jews had been feuding for four hundred years. What if he bumped into others of Jewish decent on the way to the hostel? What if they suspected that he was the assailant? Was not he putting his life on the line?

Helping was a costly decision. It also cost the Samaritan precious time and money. If rates in Palestine at this period were comparable, the Samaritan was paying for about two month's board.⁷¹

3. Our Caring Should Not Be Conditional upon Circumstances. It matters not a person's race or social status, or gender.⁷² It matters not whether the individual caused his own crisis through stupidity or neglect. The Samaritan cared for the victim not knowing whether he deserved it or not. He only knew that this man needed immediate medical attention.

Jesus was teaching that a person should be a neighbour to anyone he meets in need. The ultimate Neighbour was Jesus, whose compassion contrasted with the Jewish religious leaders who had no compassion on those who were perishing.⁷³ In fact, the lawyer could not bring himself to answer the question by saying "the Samaritan!"⁷⁴ The evasive question of the lawyer, "Define your terms!" is an old trick of lawyers and

⁷¹ Morris, Leon. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Luke*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 190.

⁷² Galatians 3:28

⁷³ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*
Vol. 2. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 234.

⁷⁴ D. Carson, D. Guthrie, and J.A. Motyer D. A. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*.
Rev. ed.
n.p. CD-ROM. Downers Grove, IL: .InterVarsity Press, 1994.

debaters.⁷⁵ Instead of getting involved in abstract terms, Jesus presented a concrete case; and the lawyer understood the point. The point of the parable of the Good Samaritan was made in Luke 10:37. All are called to show compassion to those in need.

Another key passage on the caring nature of Christ is found in 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is referring to Christ's classic words of encouragement in the Sermon on the Mount,⁷⁶ while quoting Psalm 55:22: "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you." All of a believer's anxieties can be *cast . . . on Him*. Christ sustains *because He cares*. A Christian's confidence rests in the fact that Christ is genuinely concerned for his welfare.⁷⁷

The Nature of the Church

The early church saw care giving as a primary emphasis to their total being. They would literally sell their possessions and goods in order to care for anyone's need.⁷⁸ The church is the body of Christ, the literal hands and feet of Jesus. What would Jesus have us do? What needs should we be meeting? Central to the church's essence of faith is caring for others. The church is, by definition, a result of God's initiative in caring for us. It is God's caring community. The initiatory declaration of Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:18-19 has care-giving at its core.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

⁷⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1997), 173.

⁷⁶ Matthew 6:25-32

⁷⁷ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* Vol. 2. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 856.

⁷⁸ Acts 2:45

As disciples or protégés of Jesus, our goal is to learn to be like Him. Ephesians 5:1 tells us to “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.” We are to become like the Great Care-Giver and be His healing presence to a broken world that needs love and acceptance.

Surely, when we go through a crisis our desire is *not* to go through it alone but for someone to be with us, to help us, to care for us because we are in too much emotional pain to care for ourselves. Paul says it this way, “Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). In Hebrew 13:15-16, we are told that believers have a two-fold function: to offer the sacrifice of worship to God and to offer the sacrifice of service to others. Certainly this includes helping in times of crisis.

Our mandate to be care givers cannot be clearer than the verses in 1 Corinthians 1:3-5.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Here we are told emphatically to “pass it on” when it comes to comfort and compassion. God comforts us so that we will be skilled at comforting others. We are to put our painful experiences to good work and not waste our pain for nothing. What is the sense of going through such terrible times if we do not put value into the experience by using it for good?

The church is called to care and show compassion for others through prayer. James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

Compassion and prayer both have healing power. A couple of decades ago health professionals discovered that genuine compassion shown by those caring for the sick helped them get better faster. In recent years, they also discovered that prayer helps people get better too. But when you combine compassion and prayer, one and one equals three. This is well known. The sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Members of the Christian church are to show compassion and practical concern for each other. They are to give aid and relief, love and comfort to one another, as Christ freely gave to them in their need.⁷⁹ The apostle James teaches the essential nature of such good works as being of the very essence of genuine faith (Jas 2:14–26). To be full of mercy is a distinguishing virtue of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:7).

Interestingly, the primary indictment brought against the Church today by its contemporary critics is its failure to display compassion toward the poor, the black, the different.⁸⁰ Of course I am speaking of the church in the West. Materialism, comfort and status have all had a seductive impact upon the church and its attendees. Certainly one of the essential tasks of contemporary Christianity in North America is to reappraise the meaning and application of compassion for today.

The Role of the Pastor

The pastorate is among the most difficult vocations today.⁸¹ In an age in which specialists abound, the pastorate requires a wide variety of skills. It is essential that we remain generalists. For example, the pastor requires the skills of a planner, a recruiter, a people manager (directing people in groups), a financial manager, a master of ceremonies

⁷⁹ Elwell, Walter A., Philip Comfort. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2001), 883.

⁸⁰ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible Vol. A-C* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 932.

⁸¹ Cedar, Paul A., R. Kent Hughes, and Ben Patterson. *Mastering the Pastoral Role*. (Portland, Or.:

Multnomah; Christianity Today, Inc., 1991), 11.

(leading worship), a negotiator (resolving conflict) a musician (if the church is small) and a preacher. However, at the core, a pastor is a care giver.

What is a pastor? This is a rich word, which is found in no other religion.⁸² The twenty third Psalm opens with the declaration that “The Lord is my Pastor.” The essence of a pastor is being a shepherd of people. This picture embraces the idea of the shepherd’s taking care of tired, weary, worn sheep. A large part of pastoral work consists of reviving sheep. Pastors must know how to take tired, discouraged sheep to restful waters and green pastures. They also must protect their sheep from dangers. The human side of this analogy is that pastors are called to care for the flock and especially those in crisis (danger). Jesus reminds us that there is a clear distinction between the hireling and the shepherd. The former is only contemplating his wallet and the latter desires what is best for the sheep to the point that he is willing to put his life on the line. In fact, in ancient times, if a beast ravaged the flock and took flight with a lamb, it was incumbent upon the shepherd to pursue the assailant and return with a portion of the animal proving that he engaged the assailant, laying his life on the line.⁸³

The verb “to shepherd” (to pastor) is used to describe the work of local church leaders (Jn 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2), and often the congregation is called a flock.⁸⁴ The leaders are to care for the congregation. However, in another sense, the congregation itself is to minister to itself as we all care for one another. Rick Warren says “We are saved to serve (minister to) each other.”⁸⁵ Many people have the misconception that only

⁸² Adams, Jay *Competent To Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), 65.

⁸³ Amos 3:12 “This is what the LORD says: “As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones
or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved...”

⁸⁴ Elwell, Walter A., Philip Comfort. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2001), 993.

⁸⁵ Warren, Rick. *Better Together – What on Earth are We Here For?* (Lakeforest, CA: Purpose Driven Publishing, 2004), 124.

the spiritual leaders in the church are “called” by God. Some in the pew mistakenly think that serving or caring is exclusive to missionaries, pastors, nuns, or anyone that is on the paid staff of the church. But the Bible says that everyone is called to serve God by serving others. “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”⁸⁶ Notice that the motivation for caring or serving one another is love. God is far more interested in why you serve others than he is interested in how well you serve them. He is always looking at your heart. The royal law of love is the greatest commandment.⁸⁷

There is a distinction between what pastors do on Sundays and what we do between Sundays.⁸⁸ The former has not changed in essence down through the ages but the latter has changed with the times. What needs to happen throughout the week can best be described as the pastoral work of the cure of souls.⁸⁹ The phrase sounds antique. It is antique. But it is not obsolete. This is the pastoral work that is historically termed the cure of souls. The primary sense of *cura* in Latin is “care,” with undertone of “cure.”

The word pastor, which has come to be one of the most common and preferred designations of Protestant clergyman, has very few occurrences in the Scriptures. Jeremiah alone uses the word in the Old Testament (Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 17:16 12:10; 22:22 23:1,2).⁹⁰ Of the 12 times the word is used in the NT as a metaphor for “leader,” it

⁸⁶ Galatians 5:13

⁸⁷ Matthew 22:36-40

⁸⁸ Shelley, Marshall. *Building Your Church Through Counsel and Care*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1997), 30.

⁸⁹ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1989), 65.

⁹⁰ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible Vol. M-P* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 611.

is translated as “pastor” only in Ephesians 4:11⁹¹ Let us turn now to this solitary occurrence.

This familiar text clarifies the purpose of the church leadership like no other. God gave “pastors ...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13). The phrase “helps the other parts grow” (4:16), or “build itself up” (NIV), is used in ancient medical literature of setting a bone.⁹² You can hear the pastoral overtones. A lamb in crisis has broken its leg and the shepherd carefully sets it in place.

The key verb in verse 12 is “equip” (*katartismos*; the verb *katartizō* in Matt. 4:21, “mending” or “preparing” nets; in Gal. 6:1, “restore” for proper use; cf. 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21).⁹³ Gifted people (Eph. 4:11) are to pastor, mend or restore the flock. They are to minister to others so that they in turn are readied to get involved in ministering to others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). This shows that all saints and not just a few leaders should be involved in the “ministry.”

The ministry encompasses a wide range of specific tasks. This project merely focuses in on one of those tasks. It is, in this writer’s opinion, a fundamental and foundational one. The pastor is to equip the people to care for others in times of crises.

The Character of the Christian

⁹¹ Elwell, Walter A., Philip Comfort. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 2001), 993.

⁹² Hughes, Robert B., Laney, J. Carl;. *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 594.

⁹³ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures Vol. 2*. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 635.

The basic principle of Christian personal ethics is that those virtues which have characterized God's dealing with mankind are to be internalized and become descriptive of the life of the believer. The term "Christian" is mentioned only three times in Scripture.⁹⁴ The only definite information we have about its origin is the statement in the first of these passages, that the disciples were called Christians for the first time in Antioch.⁹⁵ Notice that it does not say that the disciples called themselves Christians. On the contrary it was a term that was applied to the followers of "the way" by those from the world. It was a term of scorn given to them by the citizens of Antioch who seemed to be somewhat prone to name calling.

However, instead of feeling ridiculed and debased with this term "Little Christs," the disciples felt honoured to bear the name of their Lord. The point here is for us not to miss the reason for the applied label. The disciples were reflecting the nature of Christ which manifests itself through behaviour, conversation and attitudes. Perhaps we should, in the same way, never apply the word "Christian" to ourselves, but instead leave it up to our neighbours to judge if there is enough evidence from our lives to warrant whether we resemble Christ.

The apostle John writes to the early church, "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."⁹⁶ We are to walk with the same compassion, mercy and love that Jesus had toward those in need and care. The theological support for this project can be seen all through Scripture, as well as the very nature of God and the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.

⁹⁴ Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1Peter 4:16

⁹⁵ Richardson, Alan. *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London, England; SCM Press, 1982), 46.

⁹⁶ 1 John 2:6 (NASB) The passage is referring specifically to Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (Cf. v. 1)

The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter or the “One called along side to Comfort and be with us forever” (John 14:16,26;15:26;16:7). His very nature in us yearns for us to do the same. Perhaps we are never more like God than when we are comforters.

God’s desire is for us to be fashioned into the image of Christ. The character of the Christian is to flow from the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) and the qualities of Christ. A passage of Scripture I memorized recently is 2 Peter 1:3-11:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

For if you possess these **qualities** in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God’s divine power is not an ‘it’ or a ‘force’ but a person, the Spirit of Christ. God’s Spirit living inside us desires to continue the process of our sanctification and transformation, that is, he wants us to become like him, to be fashioned back into the image of Christ as we were in the very beginning of time. Notice how we must work in cooperation with the Spirit. Even though he is ‘everything we need,’ we must make ‘every effort’ to allow this metamorphosis to take place. The divine nature produces godly character or qualities. These qualities are connected to our topic of caring. Goodness, perseverance, knowledge, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love are all linked to our subject of caring. As one thinks about these virtues it becomes apparent that

they are not passive but compel us into action. They compel us to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

The Problem of Pain

How can one engage in the theological dialogue of caring for those in crisis and not at least briefly discuss the age old dilemma of the existence of suffering? Why do we have crises? The issue of suffering is a frequently raised objection to the Christian faith. John R. W. Stott writes, “The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair.”⁹⁷ CS Lewis states the dichotomy in this manner. “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power or both. This is the problem of pain in its simplest form.”⁹⁸

The problem of pain is as old as man himself. Many biblical scholars date the book of Job as the oldest in the Bible, and it amazes me that the questions Job voiced so eloquently have not faded away. However this generation seems to take the subject more personally than those throughout history. It is as if we in modern times think we have a corner on the suffering market. Do we forget that Luther and Calvin lived in a world without ether and penicillin? When life expectancy averaged thirty years, Bunyan and Donne wrote their greatest works, in a jail and a plague quarantine room respectively.⁹⁹ Helmut Thielicke, the well known German pastor and theologian was asked what he had

⁹⁷ Stott, John R.W. *The Cross of Christ*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 311.

⁹⁸ Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 16.

⁹⁹ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 10.

observed as the greatest deficiency among American Christians. He answered, “They have an inadequate view of suffering.”¹⁰⁰

Philip Yancey is convinced that pain gets a bad press.¹⁰¹ Up close under a microscope, the pain network is seen in an entirely different light. It bears the mark of genius. Pain is not an afterthought, or God’s great goof. Without pain our lives would be fraught with danger, and devoid of basic pleasures. Without hesitation Dr. Brand declares, “Thank God for inventing pain! I do not think he could have done a better job. It is beautiful.”¹⁰² As one of the world’s foremost experts on leprosy, a disease of the nervous system, he is well qualified to make such a judgment.

Let me explain. Dr. Brandt has discovered that leprosy patients suffer for the simple reason that they have a defective pain system. He has learned that his patients were living in great danger because of their painlessness. Lepers were losing appendages because there was no pain when they placed their hand in the fire or when the rats were gnawing off their fingers in the middle of the night. Pain allows us, the fortunate ones at least, to lead free and active lives. If you ever doubt that, visit a leprosarium and observe for yourself a world without pain. Pain is not an unpleasantness to be avoided at all costs.

Listen to your pain. The typical response to pain in our society is to take an aspirin at the slightest ache and silence the pain. That approach only deals with the symptom of the problem. We dare not shut off the warning system without first listening to the warning. Ninety-nine percent of all pain is short term-- correctable situations that call for medication, rest or a change in lifestyle.¹⁰³ Pain demands the attention that is crucial to recovery.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

¹⁰³ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 34.

We must admit that most of the time, pain is a wonderful gift. However, it is a gift that nobody wants. Then there is the pain that makes no sense. For instance, I have two mentally and physically challenged daughters that were born with cerebral palsy, Robin (16) and Rose (10). They are my second and fourth daughters, respectively. They do not walk or talk and are still in diapers. When Robin was eight months old, the pediatrician told us that she was “globally developmentally delayed,” which meant she was slow in all areas. We didn’t know until she was five years old that she had cerebral palsy. By that point, five years of reality had softened the blow of the bad news. However, when Rose was eight months old and we were told that she too was “globally developmentally delayed,” the shock and pain was beyond words. I remember thinking, “God, you’ve taught me so much about compassion, love, sensitivity and understanding through our first special needs child, but God, what more can I learn from a second child with cerebral palsy that I did not learn from the first?” There is a kind of pain that makes no sense.

Dr. R. T. Kendall, the gifted senior minister of Westminster Chapel in London, talks about the “betrayal barrier.” In his opinion, 100 percent of believers eventually go through a period when God seems to let them down¹⁰⁴ and more than 90 percent of us fail to break through this betrayal barrier after feeling abandoned by God.¹⁰⁵ True faith, wrestling with the problem and burden of suffering, does not require an immediate and

¹⁰⁴ Dobson, James. *When God does not make any Sense*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 26.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

complete justification of God. ¹⁰⁶ Habakkuk and I have learned that true faith can wait in the darkness. ¹⁰⁷

There is evil in this world, and certainly we do not always comprehend what God is up to (Isaiah 55:8-9), but there is also good. It is ironic almost to the point of comedy that people should so focus on evil that they blindly overlook the immeasurable abundance of good, happiness, even pleasure carried by this planet at every given point in time. ¹⁰⁸ Should we count the thorns without counting the stars?

God did not create the world in the state in which it is now, but evil came as a result of the selfishness of man. There was no suffering in the world before humanity rebelled against God. There will be no suffering when God creates a new heaven and a new earth. ¹⁰⁹ If Genesis chapter three did not exist, we would have a very short Bible indeed. The rest of Scripture is God's answer to man's problem of sin, separation and suffering. God's ultimate answer was the person of Jesus Christ and the redemption and restoration that he offers through the cross.

An important component in the dialogue on pain is the truth that God is love as seen through the cross at Calvary. But genuine love cannot exist unless freely given

¹⁰⁶ Wood, D. R.; I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1136.

¹⁰⁷ Habakkuk. 2:2-4 Then the LORD said to me, "Write my answer in large, clear letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell everyone else. 3 But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed. 4"Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked; but the righteous will live by their faith.

¹⁰⁸ Murphree, Jon Tal. *A Loving God and a Suffering World*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 13.

¹⁰⁹ see Revelation 21:1-4

through free choice and will, and thus man is given the choice to accept God's love or to reject it.¹¹⁰ Love provides free choice. Wrong choices lead to pain.

The general tendency is to blame God for evil and suffering and to pass on all responsibility for it to him.¹¹¹ How interesting when the majority of the problem lies from our own free will. C.S. Lewis writes,

When souls become wicked, they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the suffering of men. It is men, not God who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slaver, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not but the churlishness of nature that we have poverty and overwork.¹¹²

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book called, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. It became a surprise best seller. I became interested in reading this paperback because Kushner like myself had a mentally challenged special needs child. Kushner writes, "I do not believe God causes mental retardation in children, or chooses who should suffer from muscular dystrophy. The God I believe in does not send us the problem: He gives us the strength to cope with the problem."¹¹³ Philip Yancey agrees that it is futile to dwell on the cause of the problem, "Why am I suffering?"¹¹⁴ Nicky Gumbel also concurs.¹¹⁵ God did not give Job that option. He deflected attention from the issue of cause to the issue of response. Frederick Buechner writes, "God does not explain. He explodes. He asks Job who he thinks he is anyway. He says that to try to

¹¹⁰ McDowell, Josh; Steward, Don. *Answers to Tough Questions*. (San Bernardino, CA.: Here's Life Publishers, 1980), 152.

¹¹¹ Little, Paul. *Know Why You Believe*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 80.

¹¹² Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 86.

¹¹³ Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. (New York: Avon Publishers, 1981), 127.

¹¹⁴ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 105.

¹¹⁵ Gumbel, Nicky. *Searching Issues*. (Paris, Ontario: David C. Cook Publishing, 1996,) 21.

explain the kind of things Job wants explained would be like trying to explain Einstein to a little neck clam. God does not reveal his grand design. He reveals himself.”¹¹⁶

This biblical pattern is so consistent that I must conclude that the important issue facing Christians who suffer is not “Is God responsible?” but “How should I react now that this terrible thing has happened.?”

Yancey agrees with Kushner that it is response which needs to be the vital focus in suffering and not the cause. However, Yancey takes exception to “Kushner’s statement that he learned to accept God’s love but questioned God’s power. In other words, God is as outraged by the suffering on this planet as anyone, but his hands are tied.”¹¹⁷

Kushner’s God has limitations.¹¹⁸ He is powerless to interrupt the laws of nature to protect the righteous from harm.¹¹⁹ God wants justice and fairness but can’t always arrange it.¹²⁰ The Holocaust is evidence that God is not in charge of the world.¹²¹

Kushner’s God created the world eons ago and left us with chaos and chance.¹²² He wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can’t bring that about.¹²³ Finally, Kushner ends his book by asking, “Are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you have found out that he is not perfect”.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 106.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹⁸ Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. (New York: Avon Publishers, 1981), 134.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43, 114.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

I believe that Job 38-41 vehemently opposes Kushner's view of God's hands being tied. These chapters contain as impressive a description of God's power as you will find anywhere in the Bible. Elie Wiesel might have had the most perceptive comment on the God portrayed by Rabbi Kushner: "If that is who God is, I think he ought to resign and let someone more competent take his place."¹²⁵

It is vital to remember that not all suffering comes as a direct result of sin. Job's so-called three friends thought his suffering was because of his own doings – but they were wrong.¹²⁶ Jesus expressly repudiates the automatic link between sin and suffering.¹²⁷ We further know from the teachings of Christ that natural disasters are not necessarily a form of punishment from God.¹²⁸ The apostle Peter writes his epistle to a suffering church and draws a distinction between suffering as a result of our own sin and suffering that has no connection with our sin.¹²⁹

Suffering can be what economists call a "frozen asset."¹³⁰ It is buried treasure. It may not look remotely like an asset at the time, but gradually we can find meaning in it, and enduring meaning that will help to transform the pain. Suffering is never good in itself, but God is able to use it for good in a number of different ways.¹³¹ First, God uses suffering to draw us to Christ. C.S. Lewis says that "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.... It plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul."¹³²

¹²⁵ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 105.

¹²⁶ Job 42:7,8

¹²⁷ John 9:1-3

¹²⁸ Luke 13:1-5

¹²⁹ 1 Peter 2:19-21

¹³⁰ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 201.

¹³¹ Romans 8:28

¹³² Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 91, 94.

Second, God uses suffering to produce Christian maturity. Even Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered.”¹³³ The New Testament uses as a parallel the discipline we received from our parents in growing up. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”¹³⁴

Peter communicates a completely different analogy-- that of a metal worker refining silver and gold. He encouraged the suffering church with

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”¹³⁵

Third, God often uses suffering to accomplish his good and perfect purposes.¹³⁶ Romans 8:28 says that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Although I believe this with all my heart I would caution anyone and everyone never to use this verse as a platitude to someone who is in the very eye of the storm of suffering. It is much more helpful after someone has passed the intensity of pain. Use Joseph’s life as an example (Genesis 37-50). He suffered from rejection by his close family and separation from those he loves. He was sold by his brothers for silver, forcibly removed to Egypt, away from his father, whom he did not see again for twenty years. In Egypt, he was unjustly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. For thirteen years, he faced trials, temptations and testing. At the age of thirty he was made ruler over Egypt and was in a position to save the lives of not only his family but all of God’s people. Toward the end of his life he was able to say to his

¹³³ Hebrews 5:8

¹³⁴ Hebrews 12:11

¹³⁵ 1 Peter 1:6,7

¹³⁶ Gumbel, Nicky. *Searching Issues*. (Paris, Ontario: David C. Cook Publishing, 1996), 18.

brothers about his suffering, “you intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”¹³⁷

In view of this we can say that most of the time there is a by-product of good that comes from suffering. God always has our good in the forefront of his mind when he permits suffering to touch our lives. The pattern of Jesus’ response should convince us that God is not a God who enjoys seeing us suffer. I doubt the disciples tormented themselves with questions like “Does God Care?” There were times when they were confused,¹³⁸ like us all, but Jesus embodied incarnational love. In reply to pain, God did not give us words or theories on the problem of pain. He gave us himself.¹³⁹ Apart from the incarnation, our faith would have little to say to the suffering.

The cross of Christ plays a pivotal part in the perspective of suffering to the Christian. The work of Christ is to deliver man from suffering, corruption and death (Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:26), as well as from sin (Mt. 1:21).¹⁴⁰ He could have come to earth in one afternoon and accomplished all of these things. But he came and did so much more.

For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is **B** limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death **B** He had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience from the trivial irritation of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat,

¹³⁷ Genesis 50:20

¹³⁸ Mark 6:45-56

¹³⁹ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 226.

¹⁴⁰ Wood, D. R.; I. H. Marshall. *New Bible Dictionary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1136.

despair and death. When he was a man, He played the man, He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.¹⁴¹

At the end of the book of Job, God responded to questions about suffering by delivering a splendid lecture on his power. After Calvary the emphasis shifts from power to love.¹⁴²

For the person who suffers, Christianity offers one last contribution, the most important contribution of all. As we have seen, the entire Bible, representing three thousand years of history and culture and human drama, focuses like a magnifying glass on the execution at Calvary. It is the crux of history, the cornerstone. But death is not the end of the story. There is a glorious resurrection! Jesus holds out the startling promise of an afterlife without pain.

I believe God has given the church a mandate of representing his love to a suffering world. We usually think of the problem of pain as a question we ask of God, but it is also a question he asks of us.¹⁴³ Where are we the church when there is suffering, when there is crisis. C. S. Lewis, in his book, *A Grief Observed*, testifies that at the moment of his most profound need, God, who had always been available to him, suddenly seemed absent. Lewis felt fear, and abandonment, and in the end it was the community of other Christians who helped to restore him.¹⁴⁴

This is the purpose of this project. To equip and inspire the laity to *Dare to Care Like Jesus* during times of crisis. Being a Christian is living out three interlocking commitments: a commitment to Christ, a commitment to the body of Christ and a commitment to the work of Christ. They are inseparable, our calling and our caring are

¹⁴¹ McDowell, Josh. and Steward, Don. *Answers to Tough Questions*. (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life

Publishers, 1980), 153.

¹⁴² See John 3:16; Ro 8:31-32

¹⁴³ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 10.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

equally indivisible. Jesus has called us to minister His love to a hurting and broken world. Let us go out and do the same.

*Hebrews 13:3 (JBP) "Think too of
all who suffer as if you shared their pain."*

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The number of sources that could be considered under this generic topic of caring is mammoth. However, it is more challenging to find sources on specific caring categories, e.g. “Caring for those in Conflict with the Law.” Therefore I found myself at times being both overwhelmed with material, wondering when to stop the research and start the writing, and also frustrated in not being able to find a single example of a sermon on caring for ex-offenders.

Since the Project “Equipping the Laity to Care for Others in Crisis” is chiefly executed through a preaching-teaching method on Sunday mornings, I have divided this literature review into three categories: Sources on Preaching, Generic Sources on Caring and Sources on Specific Crises. The sources listed are books as well as articles from periodicals.

Sources on Preaching

Biblical Preaching by Haddon Robinson is the classic text on preaching in the evangelical world. His commitment to expository preaching is well known. Although some would characterize expository preaching as a style, at its core it is more a

philosophy than a method.¹⁴⁵ Expository preaching is rooted in the conviction that the Bible, the entire Bible, is God's Word. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. In passage

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 20.

exposition as well as topical exposition, the thought of the Scripture must shape all that is said in defining and developing the topic.¹⁴⁶ However, sermons can assume many forms and the shoe must not tell the foot how to grow; therefore ideas and purposes should be allowed to take their own shape.¹⁴⁷ One needs to test the form with two questions: “Does this form communicate what the passage teaches?” and “Will it accomplish my purpose with this audience?”

To preach effectively an expositor must know three worlds: the Bible world, the contemporary world and his congregation specifically.¹⁴⁸ This project seeks to incorporate relevant application from all three worlds.

Public Speaking by Duane Litfin gives a thorough discussion on the scientific breakdown of oratory and dissects each component showing the dynamics of communication, listening, the audience, attention, formulating ideas, the personhood of the speaker and the interrelation of these elements to each other. Litfin recognizes that in a world so dependent upon communication, Christians who are willing to think deeply and speak out effectively can have a lasting impact.¹⁴⁹ Though he does refer to preaching specifically, most of the book can be applied to the topic of public addresses in general. Key to speaking effectively is the organization of your presentation. Outlining is a crucial skill of a speaker. Any unity, order, or progress will likely be sacrificed without it.¹⁵⁰

In The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text, Sidney Greidanus embraces hermeneutical principles and how they relate to the homiletical process. Although he reminds us that the Bible does not separate teaching and preaching into iron clad

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 57.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁴⁹ Litfin, Duane. *Public Speaking Handbook of Christians*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academics, 1992), 36.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 176.

categories,¹⁵¹ he emphasizes the need to apply specific principles to specific genres within the text, namely Hebrew narratives, prophetic literature, Gospel and epistle. This text will obligate the preacher to read a specific text within its historical setting.

The preacher stands at the intersection of the ancient Scriptures and the contemporary congregation and has a responsibility to both.¹⁵² The implications of such faithful preaching are staggering for the church as well as for the world.

In Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible by Thomas G. Long, the issue raised by preaching is not how to use the Bible, but how to approach it.¹⁵³ The literary form (psalms, proverbs, narratives, parables, epistles) of a biblical text is hermeneutically important and should exert influence upon a sermon. It is important to distinguish between the *features* (genre) of the text and the *function* of the text, that is, what is this genre designed to “do?”¹⁵⁴ The noticeable difference between this book and the previous one is Greidanus’ solidly evangelical stance toward the Scripture versus Long’s focus on the human involvement in the production of the Scripture.

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart. This is a layman’s guide to understanding the Bible. It too, gives clarity to appreciating the different genres and proper hermeneutics as the books previously discussed, but additionally gives guidelines for studying and reading of Scripture with the purpose of application of biblical truth and obeying the will of God. The single most serious

¹⁵¹ Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 6.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁵³ Long, Thomas. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 7.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

problem people have with the Bible is not with a lack of understanding but a lack of doing.¹⁵⁵

Christ Centered Preaching – Bryan Chapell. While Haddon Robinson’s approach to expository preaching is rooted in the “Big Idea,” Chapell challenges preachers to centre their sermon around the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF), that is our mutual human condition.¹⁵⁶ A clear FCF provides the sermon with a distinct aim and allows the preacher to organise the sermon around a unified purpose.¹⁵⁷ The theological ground for designing messages with an FCF is 2 Timothy 3:16.

Chapell emphasises three elements (classically they are: logos, pathos and ethos) that compose every persuasive rhetoric: first there is the power of the Word of God, it is without peer.¹⁵⁸ Secondly, there is the deep conviction and passion of the preacher, you must bring fire to kindle the fire. And thirdly, vital is the integrity of the messenger. The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a man.¹⁵⁹ In this project I seek to synthesize the Word of God (logos), empathy (pathos), and integrity (ethos) in the hope that the congregation will be inspired and equipped to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

Preaching That Connects by Mark Galli & Craig Brian Larson. These journalists share their experience in order to help pastors in their task of preaching. The Word of God is supreme. However if our preaching does not connect we will lose the listener. The problem is that sometimes parishioners skip worship if something more appealing comes along. The first act of love in preaching is an act of self-denial to become more interested in people than in the subject. The authors elucidate the dynamics of good story

¹⁵⁵ Fee, Gordon and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 15.

¹⁵⁶ Chapell, Brian *Christ-Centered Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 42.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

telling and the different ingredients for salting a message to make it palatable. They explain angle, purpose, and psychology in sermon drafting, but nothing so immediately communicates order to the listeners as rhetorical ropes (alliteration, clear and logical outline, the text itself, an analogy, a repeated key word or phrase, a controlling metaphor, a good story).¹⁶⁰

The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching edited by Keith Willhite & Scott M. Gibson. Several previous students of Robinson show how expository preaching informs the various elements of sermon preparation and is still a relevant approach to preaching in our current culture. The human mind craves unity, order, and progress. That is why communication theorists have held to the value of the single proposition (one big idea).¹⁶¹ It is the presence of a central idea that proves “unity” and “unit-ness.” The book is honest with its readers that the big idea preaching is not always easy and they include then ten challenges for big idea expositors.

Toward an Exegetical Theology by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. This is another helpful text on preaching using the syntactical - theological method of analysis. Kaiser’s contribution includes highlighting a current crisis in exegetical theology. At the heart of the debate is the problem of how the interpreter can relate “what the text *meant* in its historical context” to “what the same text *means* to me.”¹⁶² To correct this crisis, he lays a foundation of following the historicity of exegesis from the Apostolic Age to the Post-Reformation Age.

Generic Sources on Caring

¹⁶⁰ Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching That Connects*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 50.

¹⁶¹ Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 20.

¹⁶² Kaiser, Walter C. *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 23.

The Art of Pastoring by David Hansen. Pastoral ministry is life, not technology, and life is suffering. Bernard Ramm, asked Hansen this question at his ordination council, “Have you ever suffered?” After twenty years of ministry, Hansen concurs with a hearty “AMEN.”¹⁶³ Pastors must frequent and socialize with suffering people, and they themselves must suffer. Pastors need to smell the bad breath of the cancer patient. In fact, Hansen goes so far as to say that God forsakenness is necessary to pastoral ministry (Psalm 22:1). Even Jesus suffered (Heb 5:8). At issue is self-denial. There are no shortcuts to effective ministry. There is no glory in ministry without suffering.

Ministry is loving people. There are two parts to the pastor’s heart: love for people and love for God. Love for people must be differentiated from love of the experience of people. That is, it is easy to confuse loving being around people with actually loving people. Love of experience of people is a form of self-gratification. Love of people requires compassion.

The Power of Loving Your Church by David Hansen. Showing real, genuine, deep-down, honest to goodness love to well- intentioned dragons is a challenge to any pastor. This book is kind of a theological word study of the different kinds of love in the Bible. I have heard all of the words explained before but this time they were in full technicolor.

This book is about caring for your congregation. Caring is simply love in action. You cannot care for people unless you love them. “Perhaps the greatest spiritual issue between a pastor and a congregation is whether a bond is formed between them or not. When we think we are grumbling about our church, maybe we are grumbling against God.”¹⁶⁴ This thesis project is about equipping the congregation to show love and care

¹⁶³ Hansen, David. *The Art of Pastoring*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 35.

¹⁶⁴ Hansen, David. *The Power of Loving Your Church*. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1998), 61.

for others in crisis. This simply will not materialize unless your congregation has experienced genuine love/care from their pastor.

Stress/Unstress by Dr. Keith W. Sehnert, is an informative little book that explains the dynamics of stress and gives suggestions on how to manage it in our lives. This information is paramount to our topic on caring in crisis. Stress, of course, has been around since the beginning of man. However the science and research of stress is a fairly recent phenomenon. One of the interesting methods of stress reduction is called altruistic egoism,¹⁶⁵ helping others actually lowers your own stress load. The more you focus inward and on yourself, the more stressed out you will be.

A significant element during most crises is the loss of control. Sehnert reminds us that we cannot control outside forces, but we can control the way we respond to those forces. Most of us blame situations, people and things “out there” for making us angry, sad, or distressed. But it is not the “outside things” that cause us stress, it is our “inside perceptions” that cause our “emotional cuts and bruises.”¹⁶⁶ He elaborates on five ways to manage stress: change your environment, understand your emotions, take care of your body’s physical needs, learn unstress remedies and provide for your spiritual needs.

The Overload Syndrome by Dr. Richard Swenson is another good book on the problem of stress in today’s society. The previous book by Dr. Sehnert, was more technical and laid a better clinical foundation for the topic. In this book on the other hand, biblical applications and scriptural references to the problem of stress were prolific, making it very practical. At the end of each chapter on different life stresses is a prescription for that specific overload. By the time I had finished the book I thought I had taken an overdose of anti- stress potions. His concept of “margin” was most helpful. Margin is the space that once existed between our load and our limits. Margin is the opposite of overload. We work hard, play hard, and crash hard. What is needed today, is

¹⁶⁵ Sehnert, Keith. *Stress/Unstress*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1981), 62.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

more margin, more blank page around all the writing that we cram onto the pages of our lives.¹⁶⁷

In Solution Focused Pastoral Counselling, by Charles Kollar, the author leaves the traditional position of understanding the problem before the implementation of caring. The problem does not necessarily need to be clearly defined for effective caring, just the solution needs to be clearly defined.¹⁶⁸ The *solution focused* four step strategy (active listening, track options, vision clarification, and supportive feedback) has merit, especially with the qualifier of it being a “short term approach.” Our topic also is generally dealing with short term crises. Kollar confuses things with his term “FIT” in lieu of empathy. Empathy is clear enough.

Competent to Counsel by Jay Adams. Kollar refers to Jay Adams’ methodology as “Quote a Bible verse and send them forth.” Adams may not be as simple as that, however, his dissatisfaction with the mental health view point is obvious. He saw psychiatry in the 1970s as an utter failure for the grandiose claims that it had made in the past.¹⁶⁹ He believes problems are solved not by ventilating feelings, as set forth in the Rogerian style, but by the confession of sin. “It is not because they are sick but sinful.” It is true that sometimes people’s problems are of their own making. However, like most, Adams seems to have a tendency to overstate his point. The directive and “yanking”¹⁷⁰ approach of nouthetic counselling is not the sole method of care giving. Surely in the spirit of Ecclesiastes chapter three we would say that there is a time to be direct and forceful and there is a time to be indirect and soft.

¹⁶⁷ Swenson, Richard. *The Overload Syndrome*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 15.

¹⁶⁸ Kollar, Charles. *Solution Focused Pastoral Counseling*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 190.

¹⁶⁹ Adams, Jay. *Competent to Counsel*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

Jay Adams has some helpful reflections but his book and he himself may be somewhat out of step with society. Regardless, Adams is helpful in driving home the point that care giving is utterly dependent on God himself, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, Scripture principles, prayer, and the fellowship and support of the body of Christ.

Effective Biblical Counselling, by Larry Crabb. A foundation in methodology of counselling is essential to helping others in crisis. However, it appears that Crabb (and even more so Adams) assumes most of those who come into the pastor's office desire to have God at the centre of their lives and seek biblical solutions for life's problems. The reality today is that many in society who come to the church for help during crises do not have the slightest bit of spiritual formation or orientation whatsoever. It takes skill, timing and competency to help them make the transition or shift from what they perceive is the problem to the spiritual reality of their broken relationship with God. The answer is not so much a "what" as a "who" – Jesus.

Crabb believes that people have one basic personal need, the sense of self-worth. This basic need requires both "significance" (purpose) and "security" (permanent acceptance). The former is primary for a man and the latter is primary for a woman. His thesis is that problems develop when the basic needs for significance and security are threatened.¹⁷¹ Significance depends on understanding who I am in Christ while security comes from knowing God's eternal love/acceptance. Understanding a person's basic needs is vital to caring for them during crisis.

It sounds as if Crabb has been influenced by Beck and Cognitive Therapy in his basic approach, that the solution to a problem starts with right thinking. Counselling is learning right thinking which leads to choosing right behaviours which then leads to experiencing the right feelings.

¹⁷¹ Crabb, Lawrence, *Effective Biblical Counselling*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 69.

Christian Counselling Ethics by Randolph Sanders is a very helpful tool, especially in this day and age of relativism and individualism, which makes ethical standards a slippery slope. It was beneficial for me to understand the historical and contemporary ethical issues that are relevant to professional care givers. It seems that even in the Christian profession “every man does what is right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). I have had too many friends, as well as fellow clergy, who have ship wrecked their professional calling and their own personal lives because their ethical moorings went adrift. The lines became too blurred. The church is paying an extravagant price, so is a society that exalts the individual to the extent that ours does. The result is a culture that is riddled with psychological and emotional issues.

The Skilled Helper by Gerald Egan gives a premier model on systematic care giving in the Counselling context. Egan loves Carl Rogers. Adams loathes him. Of course, an eclectic method of borrowing the best from several approaches is necessary in counselling because of the diversity of life and the variety of troubling scenarios. One facet of counselling that Egan and Adams do have in common is the importance of assertiveness, that is, being careful of not falling into the trap of being all talk and not action. You can be the most gifted communicator in the world but if you do not have a plan or strategy for solving issues you will go no where. To apply the principle of 1 Corinthians 13, you are just a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Egan fleshes out his discussions with real life helper - client dialogues throughout the book. These examples help clarify the theory and principles that were presented in the helping process. To me, Egan brought specificity to the role of the skilled helper.

Christian Counselling: A Comprehensive Guide by Gary Collins. I am always a little sceptical of books that claim to be comprehensive. True, this is a helpful guide that covers *many* topics but it falls short of the *entire* field of counselling. For example, Lampman’s work, Helping a Neighbour in Crisis, deals with about twenty new topics that are not mentioned by Collins. I was most disappointed that Collins omitted the important topic of suicide. Another difference between Lampman and Collins is that Lampman had

specialists deal with each topic. However, Collins' work is a great handbook for quickly understanding a variety of personal crisis issues and ministering to people with these issues in a biblical context.

Pastoral Care Emergencies by David Switzer was a most helpful contribution to this project of caring for those in crisis. Before dealing specifically with the common scenarios of caring for those who are ill, dying, suicidal, divorced, violent, bereaved, or addicted, Switzer begins with a healthy discussion on who we are as care givers and what does it mean to say that "we care."

The discussion of the family as a system was also very helpful. We are not simply helping an individual who is isolated but one within a complex system. Understanding the family system is vital because what affects one person in that system affects everybody else¹⁷² (e.g. an alcoholic).

Called into Crisis by James Berkley deals with the nine greatest challenges of pastoral care. In descending order of perceived difficulty they are: 9) domestic violence/family abuse, 8) suicide, 7) homosexuality, 6) death of a child, 5) drug/alcohol abuse, 4) divorce, 3) adultery/sexual misconduct, 2) death of a spouse, and 1) catastrophic or terminal illness. Unfortunately the tenth crisis, congregational personality conflicts, was not included.

This book is comparable to a carbon copy of David Switzer's Pastoral Care Emergencies. They both deal with the same issues. What gives Berkley's work more utility is the *quick scan* sections in each chapter that succinctly give you the dynamics as well as well as what to do and say for each crisis. These sections are a valuable tool when immediate information is needed. Berkley also synthesizes the methodology of Egan's The Skilled Helper into a single chapter.

Helping a Neighbour in Crisis edited by Lisa Lampman is comparable in content to the previous two books above. This is a useful tool on how and how not to give care in

¹⁷² Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), 148.

thirty-four different crisis scenarios (I was surprised that pornography and homosexuality did not make her list of thirty-four). What makes the work so relevant is that each chapter is written by an expert practitioner in that corresponding discipline. It seems to me the premise of the book is that when suffering is shared by others, its impact can be downsized and reduced to a manageable level.

Some of the recurring themes I found throughout the book were: 1) Do not ask “why” questions, they only compound additional guilt and pain. 2) Resist the temptation to fix the person in crisis on the spot. Your ministry is primarily that of presence and practical service. Give time for the victim of the crisis to process the trauma before you apply cognitive therapeutic processes. 3) Do not presume that the crisis is God’s will.

Current Psychotherapies by Raymond Corsini and Danny Wedding. This was the first book I read on the mammoth field of psychotherapies. Starting with Sigmund Freud and classical psychoanalysis they explain the historical development of different psychotherapies and how they differ from each other. The whole history of psychotherapy is replete with personality clashes and other signs of struggles for superiority. It seems that the myriad of helping systems all have their own technical vocabulary to legitimize their existence and scholarship.

Psychology: Themes & Variations edited by Wayne Weiten is a university text that is more exhaustive and interesting than the previous one. Weiten includes many graphs, tables and articles to accent each chapter. He is more thorough in his comparison of both the psychotherapies as well as their founders.

It seems to me that the really successful therapist adopts or develops a methodology congruent with his own personality. Do not try to be someone you are not. Understand the approaches that are available and personalise one as your default mode. No one can be an expert in all the approaches. However, besides your major or default approach, have one or two back- up approaches that may be needed when circumstances are not appropriate for your default mode.

Modern Psychotherapies by Stanton Jones and Richard Butman is a work parallel to the previous two books. Stanton & Butman differentiate from Corsini & Wedding by giving a Christian perspective on the topic of psychotherapy. Their last two chapters were very helpful, especially the section on the counsellor “imaging God” while in therapy sessions.

What value did I get from the field of diverse psychotherapies? To be effective one needs to know many different theories and systems because a panacea is far from reality. It seems to me that wisdom demands one to have a variety of methods in the toolbox. Wisdom chooses the right tool for the right situation.

The Soul Care Bible edited by Tim Clinton, President of the American Association of Christian Counsellors. This edition of the New King James Version of the Bible is filled with notes and articles on one hundred and sixteen of life’s most difficult problems and God’s way through each one. It is a tool to help God’s people survive, even thrive, in the midst of the difficulties in life. Each of these life problems is covered in four different ways: A theme article, a key passage note, a personality profile of the person struggling with this life crisis and soul notes throughout the Bible when verses deal with the topic in question.

Modern research is confirming what the Bible has been saying all along: It is the person and the character of the helper, not the technique or model of counselling that is the more crucial variable for counselling success.

The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis is the classic treaty on the topic of the theological reason of why there is suffering in our world. The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love,” and look on things as if man were the centre of them.¹⁷³ Man is not the centre, a theme that Rick Warren has recently re-echoed. Love may cause pain to its object, but only on the supposition that its object needs alteration to

¹⁷³ Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 40.

become fully lovable. The reason that we need alteration is because of the “Fall of Man.” According to that doctrine, man is now a horror to God and to himself. He is a creature ill-adapted to the universe not because God made him so but because he has made himself so by the abuse of his free will.¹⁷⁴ It is men, not God who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slaver, guns, bayonets, and bombs. It is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature that we have poverty and overwork.¹⁷⁵

A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis is a stark contrast to his earlier work, The Problem of Pain, which was solicited and given reluctantly. Lewis confesses, “I feel myself so far from true feeling of that I speak, that I can naught else but cry mercy.”¹⁷⁶ Later in life Lewis married Joy Davidson who soon died of cancer. Lewis returns to the problem of pain not from the academic side but straight from the heart. He writes about the theology of pain with his feelings completely displayed. “The bath of self-pity, the wallow, the loathsome sticky-sweet pleasure of indulging it – that disgusts me.”¹⁷⁷ It reminds me of the honesty of the Psalmist who cries out to God, sometimes even blaming him.

Lewis compares his grief over his wife to a man who has lost his leg. The stump will heal and the terrible pain will be over. He will “get over it.” But he will only have one leg, which will change him forever. Even with an artificial leg the man will never have two whole legs again.¹⁷⁸ In this journal, Lewis confesses his doubts, his anger, and his awareness of human frailty and through the pain rediscovers his faith.

Where is God When it Hurts? by Philip Yancey is a more contemporary version of the problem of pain. A unique contribution is his explanation of the benefits of pain and

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., xi.

¹⁷⁷ Lewis, C.S. A Grief Observed. (Toronto, Ont: Bantam Books, 1980), 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 43.

the genius of the whole nervous system. If there is pain there is a reason and it would be foolish to ignore signs. Yancey personally follows two case studies over many years of two famous contemporaries, their responses to pain and what they have learned. He also examines the book of Job and unearths several helpful truths for application. For Yancey, suffering involves two main issues: cause and response. Most of us spend untold amounts of energy on the former which is vain and without utility. However, God did not give Job that option. He deflected attention from the issue of cause to the issue of response. This biblical pattern is so consistent that Yancey concludes that the important issue facing Christians who suffer is not “Is God responsible?” but “How should I react now that this terrible thing has happened?”¹⁷⁹

More Than Coping by Elizabeth Skoglund also deals with the age old discussion of suffering and how Christians can triumph over emotional pain. She examines the lives of famous Christians like Charles Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, Hudson Taylor and C.S. Lewis, relating their specific circumstances in dealing with suffering. Skoglund shows that we have the same resources at our disposal for turning defeat into victory as these saints practised.

Love Beyond Reason by John Ortberg is required reading for the course “Preaching as Counselling” (PR925) at Gordon Conwell. Ortberg does not make this connection directly but much of the book simply answers the question, “How can there be a God who loves us when there is so much pain in the world?” In lieu of pain, Ortberg would use the word “raggedness.” Two concepts that will always stay with me are first, his discussion on “Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder” and how our stillness (Ps 46:10) is always the prerequisite for receptivity.¹⁸⁰ Those who love will listen. The second concept comes from a word play “Immaculate Infection.”¹⁸¹ Touching the leper meant

¹⁷⁹ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1990), 106.

¹⁸⁰ Ortberg, John. *Love Beyond Reason*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1998), 41.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

being infected. However, instead of the leper infecting Jesus with His sickness, Jesus infected the leper with His life.

Sources on Specific Crises

Grieving the Unexpected – The Suicide of a Son by Gary LeBlanc. Dr. LeBlanc is professor of sociology at the Atlantic Baptist University. Seven years ago, the oldest of his three children, suddenly and without warning, shot himself. Gary bravely recounts the shock of those early days and the process of learning to live again. Logically, given his family, friends and his faith, suicide should never have been an option, however it was, and there lies the dilemma.¹⁸² LeBlanc explores healing from a suicide when one will never know the reasons why.

The Unexpected Legacy Of Divorce by Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee follows a twenty five year study of a core group of 131 children and their families recruited in 1971. This book also draws on extended interviews by comparing adults from intact families within the same neighbourhoods. That generation has now come of age and they are telling us volumes. Children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive toward their parents and teachers, they experience more depression, they have more learning difficulties, they have more relational problems with peers, they have earlier sexual activity, they have more children born out of wedlock, they marry less and they divorce more often, and they have more psychological problems as adults, than children from intact families.¹⁸³ It is in adulthood that children suffer the most from divorce. The impact of divorce hits them most cruelly as they search for love, sexual intimacy and commitment.

¹⁸² LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence Pub., 2003), 32.

¹⁸³ Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee *The Unexpected Legacy Of Divorce*. (New York: Hyperion, 2000), xxiii.

As a sociologist, Judith Wallerstein surprised me in one regard. It is interesting that she does not mention the statistics or the effects that living together before marriage has on divorce. It is ironic that someone who has used so much data in her findings would completely omit the implications of “common law without commitment.”

Emotionally Free by Grant Mullen M.D. This book on depression is a prescription for healing body, soul and spirit. The book was recommended by a group of local professional Christian counsellors in Moncton called “Touchstone.” Dr. Mullen states that there are three giant links in the chain of emotional bondage. It is imperative that we understand all three, the physical (bio-chemical), the spiritual and the psychological needs of the patient. To become completely free one needs healing in all three areas.¹⁸⁴

I appreciate the word pictures, illustrations and comparisons that the author uses. He helps those without medical training to understand the dynamics taking place in the physical body of those struggling with depression, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsion disorders, attention deficit disorder or other bio-medical problems. This clearer understanding of what it is really like to live with such challenges helps a practitioner, like myself, to genuinely empathize with those who suffer with something so complex that it cannot be measured scientifically. The last thing a person suffering with this affliction needs is superficial answers.

Everyman’s Battle by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker is a discussion on lust and pornography. One of the authors states, “I always thought marriage would take the desire of masturbation away, but it is not any better. I am so ashamed.”¹⁸⁵ The blame and guilt is enormous in this department. Rarely has there been a book for the average

¹⁸⁴ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003). 21

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker. *Everyman’s Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2000), 23.

layperson that deals with such a silent pervasive subject without talking down to the reader. The book reminds us that we are all in the battle for purity together.

The explanation of the four step addiction cycle – preoccupation, ritualization, compulsive sexual behaviour, and then despair – is very helpful in describing the yo-yo pattern on the journey to despair. Like any addiction, sex addiction is progressive. It is like “athlete’s foot of the mind.”¹⁸⁶ It never goes away. It is always asking to be scratched, promising relief. To scratch, however, is to cause pain and intensify the itch. Practical strategies are discussed to combat this powerful force.

Suicide Intervention Handbook by Living Works Education is the recognized foremost national model. It comes as a resource after the completion of a two day training seminar. Common attitudes are often a reflection of much older societal views. Some are so deeply a part of our beliefs that we do not recognise that there is little evidence or logic to support them.¹⁸⁷ LivingWorks exposes these attitudes.

The intervention model consists of three stages-- connecting, understanding and assisting, each dealing respectively with the past, the present and the future of the person at risk. The care giver has six tasks-- exploring the signs, asking the direct suicide question, listening to the reasons for dying and living, reviewing the risk situation, contracting a safeplan and following-up on your commitments. There are example dialogues throughout the book on each of the three stages and six tasks. The care giver must not hurry the process realizing that you cannot move on to the next level of the model until the person at risk is ready. You have to go at their speed.

The Facts on Homosexuality by John Ankerberg and John Weldon is an informative tool for understanding the current issues on homosexuality, a topic that is filled with many partial truths. They look at the scriptural passages as well as the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸⁷ Suicide Intervention Handbook, 10th ed. (Calgary, Alberta: Living Works Education Inc. (2004), 22.

scientific data hoping that the information itself will clear up many of the misunderstandings held by society and Christians alike. They are careful to cite documentation throughout and recommend sources for further investigation.

Grief Aftercare by Kevin Ruffcorn is an article in *Leadership Journal* on the significance of preparing families who have lost loved ones of the scope of the grieving process. Most people do not understand grief. They mistakenly think, “As soon as the funeral is over, we can put our lives back in order.” The truth is it usually takes a year or longer depending upon the circumstances surrounding the death. Ruffcorn reflects on how pastors and caregivers also make the same mistake and neglect the follow up that is needed after the funeral. He distinguishes between early aftercare, extended after care, expanded after care and ever after care. He also discusses a strategy for enlisting congregants who have gone through similar circumstances to visit the grieving family.

A Look at Grief by Dayton and Peggy Bell is another article in *Leadership Journal*. Dr. Bell presents ten principles that he found himself employing in the caring process of a parishioner who lost four members of her family suddenly via a plane crash-- her husband, their son, their daughter and their son-in-law. Included in the article is the widow’s diary reproduced in full portraying powerfully that those who grieve endure a painstakingly long process. If we are to truly minister, we must sense the depth of the valley, for grief devastates day after day after day.¹⁸⁸

The Big Book by Alcoholics Anonymous is the Bible for alcoholics worldwide. There is no editor mentioned. The first third of the Big Book is on the history of AA, the nature of alcoholism, the recovery program (The Twelve Steps), and how family and employers can best understand and help the alcoholic. There is also an interesting chapter written to agnostics explaining the necessity of a spiritual component in their program. “If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to

¹⁸⁸ Clayton and Peggy Bell. “A Look At Grief.” *Leadership Journal* Vol., I No. 4 (Carol Stream IL: Christianity Today Inc., 1980), 43.

overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But no philosophy saved us, no matter how hard we tried.”¹⁸⁹ The main object of the book is to enable alcoholics to find a “power” greater than themselves which will solve their problem. The rest of this 550 page manual consists of inspirational stories on how specific individuals were rescued from a life of alcoholism.

Pornography: The Dangerous Deception by Jerry Kirk. This is a two volume audio cassette talk between Jerry Kirk and Dennis Rainey. I remember how awkward and uncomfortable I felt when I tackled this topic in the past. However, the presentation of this discussion is very non- threatening. Jerry presents informative content that is helpful especially to wives who discover that their husbands are caught in this affliction but he also has one of the most calming voices I have ever heard. He speaks slowly, confidently and with a tone that simply reeks with love. This trait was also more than noticeable during his discussion on and personal experience of challenging local store owners on the harmful effects that come from the sale of pornographic material. His soft tone completely diffuses the explosiveness of the topic.

Gambling and the Lottery by Tony Evans. Gambling is a three hundred billion dollar a year enterprise. Whether we are talking about playing cards, the casino or the lottery, gambling touches all of us at some point. Evans gives plenty of data and biblical guidance but admits that answers are not always black and white, not that God’s word is not clear, but he approaches the topic with the understanding that people have to answer the questions themselves. He divides his book into ten questions that everyone who gambles needs to answer before God and themselves.

Preaching Tough Topics: Homosexuality by *PulpitTalk*, an audio journal from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary produced quarterly. There are four separate articles on this compact disc, each discussing an aspect of the homosexual debate from a different perspective and including personalities from top evangelical national leadership.

¹⁸⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book –Third Edition* (New York City: AA World Services, Inc., 1976), 45.

The articles are often in a format of interaction or discussion between two or more professors from Gordon-Conwell. One provocative article on this volume is the personal testimony of a seminary student as he shares his former homosexual lifestyle and how God has brought about healing.

Picking Up The Pieces by Grace Boneschansker answers who is caring for the divorced in Canada. This article in the magazine *Faith Today*, states that even though the church may seem an unlikely place to get help when going through a divorce it is the best place because ultimately, the deepest healing comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Tools that the church can use, like DivorceCare, Covenant Keepers, New Hope Ministries, are introduced as vehicles to minister to a group of people who normally take twice as long as those grieving from a literal death.

“Who Cares?” by Dale S. Ryan is only one article in a whole *Leadership Journal* dedicated to the theme *Crisis*. In this article, the author laments over the fact that some parishioners feel cared for while others feel so neglected they end up leaving the church. Ryan discusses six different strategies on how to minister to the personal needs of the individuals in the pews. He compares the strategies to each other and shows their advantages. Since no single care strategy is free from limitations it is best to implement several strategies and even customize your church’s own care plan.

“The Blessings of Mental Anguish” by Stephen Evans is an article from *Christianity Today*. When it comes to depression, everyone looks for and expects to be cured. However sometimes physical, psychological and emotional ailments are chronic. Evans discusses the long term melancholy struggles of Charles Spurgeon, Soren Kierkegaard and even the Apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” What should be the goal of Christians who battle daily with such personal health issues? Evans, with the help of Vernon Grounds, shares the importance of glorifying God, a process that can even be enhanced by the loss of mental health.

Summary

This project of “Equipping the Laity to Care for Others in Crisis” will be accomplished primarily through a preaching-teaching method on Sunday mornings. Preaching God’s truth requires expertise in various components including competently handling the text, the art of communication, and knowledge of the audience. There are sufficient sources available on the subject of preaching. The challenge will be choosing the most suitable Scripture passage on each specific category of crisis. It may be preferable in some messages to choose a variety of Scripture sections in lieu of a single passage.

To accomplish this project a thorough understanding of the issues surrounding caring is a necessity; these include: ethical issues encompassing caring, counselling approaches and procedures, a basic knowledge of the plethora of current psychotherapies, the nature and management of stress, experience in pastoral care and a tested theology of suffering. Added to these disciplines, will be the prerequisite of researching particular types of crisis. The above sources have given an adequate preparation for the launching of this project.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT DESIGN

One could think of several methodologies to implementing the task of “Equipping the Laity to Care for Others in Crisis.” I have chosen to accomplish this through teaching and preaching during the Sunday morning worship services. A most important component of the project is the accumulation of the “fill-in-the-blank sermon notes” which are to be kept as a future resource. People simply cannot remember all that they are taught. One kind elderly woman who was starting to lose her memory was embarrassed when her pastor visited late in the week and asked what she thought of last week’s message. Her quick reply was, “Well, pastor, I cannot remember every meal I have ever eaten either, but I know that I was fed.”

The purpose of this project reaches farther than simply feeding the flock. The goal is to produce a tool that will help equip them for action in the future. If, two years later a suicide strikes a neighbouring family, a congregant may ask, “What did the pastor say about how to help when there is a suicide?” My hope is that they will be able to turn to this project “keep-sake” and quickly review the things to do, the things to say, and the things to avoid.

Steps to Implementation

The first phase of the project involves the gathering of personal crisis experiences by the worshippers of the Sunny Brae Baptist Church. The operative word here is the word, “personal.” The challenge can be seen immediately in the difficulty of this task.

Most people are embarrassed by their painful experiences and therefore are reluctant to share them. They have successfully endured the pain once and most are not in a hurry to re-live such agony. However, the premise of this project is that there is a stewardship to our painful experiences and they must be given to God, for God wants to use them for his honour and glory. God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from him.¹⁹⁰ There is a definite stewardship to our suffering.

There are three reasons for acquiring this personal information. First, from the standpoint of equipping, one needs to decipher the most relevant and specific topics of caring. No two congregations are alike. To ensure that this project meets the specification of relevancy one needs to perceive precisely the past hurts of the people. A second reason would be purely pastoral. The purpose of this project is also to assist me in becoming a more effective pastor to the people in the congregation. Without this information it would be like ministering in the dark. A third reason for wishing to understand the past pains of my parishioners would be truly educational. I certainly have not experienced everything in life. My people have learned from life in various areas where I have not. They have lessons that they could pass on to me.

The second phase of the project will be the teaching of how to care in specific crisis situations through Sunday morning messages. “That lonely figure in the pulpit may have what the fools in front of him need, but they won’t listen unless he knows how to say it.”¹⁹¹ The understanding of dynamics for effective communication are a must. The task is even more intimidating because the project’s design also goes against the grain of general homiletical procedure. Haddon Robinson says that a sermon should be a bullet and not buckshot.¹⁹² However the topics that need to be addressed are so complex and

¹⁹⁰ 2 Cor. 1:3-5

¹⁹¹ Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching That Connects*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 3.

¹⁹² Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 33.

deep that the buckshot approach seems mandatory even if the topic is broken down over more than one Sunday. There is simply too much ground to cover for exegetical preaching from a single passage on many of the topics on caring.

Another anomaly is the process in selecting a Scripture passage. The standard practise in expository preaching is that the first stage of sermon preparation is the selection of the passage of Scripture.¹⁹³ However, in this case, we are forced to start out with the topic and then proceed to the Scripture. One will need to do a thorough study of the crisis topic (e.g. suicide, grief, addiction, the incarcerated, depression, pornography) before he even selects the passage. The difficulty comes in asking what single passage thoroughly deals with all that you want to teach on the given topic. The answer of course is none. Even though a Scripture passage will be selected for public reading, the message will be more of a teaching from various scriptural texts that relate to the general topic.

The purpose of the messages is not merely educational; they must also be inspirational. What I mean by this is that most of us are intimidated at getting involved in someone else's troubles. Our fear of not knowing what to say or do often paralyzes us from action. Therefore, the messages are not just to inform us but to inspire or motivate us to help. Unfortunately, many believe we are "not called" to this kind of ministry or it is not in our personality.

The third stage of the project is a solicitation from the congregation of their evaluation of the project. Did the people find the project helpful? Are they better informed on the topics of crises? Do they now feel better prepared to help out in the areas discussed?

The Research Survey

The actual questionnaire was handed out on September 11, 2005. It can be viewed in its entirety, including its preamble, in the appendix of this paper. Because the

¹⁹³ Litfin, Duane. *Public Speaking Handbook of Christians*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academics, 1992), 334.

survey will intimidate most, to elicit the greatest response the questionnaire was explained and presented for clarity during a Sunday morning message. The content and format of the questionnaire was finalized in consultation with a few parishioners of our church who have been blessed with analytical minds. There were only four questions that were presented to keep the questionnaire simple.

The intent of the questionnaire was firstly, to receive knowledge and understanding on the personal crises of those at the Sunny Brae Baptist Church. Secondly, to gauge where they are now with regard to recovery and coping. And thirdly, to illicit advice on how the church can better assist someone else who may go through a similar experience.

Summary of Sermons on Caring in Crisis

The full manuscripts of the sermons as they were presented to the church in Sunny Brae are in Appendix B. The thirteen messages were preached from September 11, 2005 to January 22, 2006. I deviated from the preaching schedule on October 9 (Canadian Thanksgiving), November 6 (Sunday before Canadian Remembrance Service with Legionaires), December (Advent), and January 1 (New Year's Day).

1. THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT, 2 Corinthians 1:1-11. Life can be brutal. Paul, John the Baptist and Jesus himself could give us personal examples. The fact is that all of life revolves around three continuous stages of crisis. We are either just coming out of a crisis, or we are in the middle of a crisis or we are shortly going to enter a crisis. All of us are now in one of these three positions in life. Unfortunately, when crises hit we spend endless amounts of energy on seeking the often unanswerable question of "Why?" and blaming God. One of Satan's tactics is to entice us to focus on the calamity instead of the comfort. 2 Cor 1:3 calls our Heavenly Father as the "God of all comfort." We need to focus on God being the source of comfort not focus on the source of the calamity.

During this sermon I launched my thesis project and explained the role of the questionnaire. This sermon played a key role in motivating the congregation to share their greatest crises in the survey (see Appendix A). The heart of our text in Corinthians says God “comforts us in all our troubles, **so that** we can comfort those in any trouble **with** the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The truth is, there is a stewardship to our comfort. Our pain, our suffering, our trials and the lessons we have learned from these experiences is not to be wasted, or buried in the sand. God holds us accountable to be stewards of our pain and use it for His honour and glory. Remember, God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

2. DARE TO CARE LIKE JESUS, Luke 10:30-37. *Dare To Care Like Jesus* was the name of the entire series of sermons that were preached. The purpose of the sermons were both to inform and to motivate. This refrain of daring to care like Jesus was repeated throughout the project to inspire the people to respond in compassion to hurting people. Caring like Jesus is both risky and radical, as portrayed by the Good Samaritan who gave time, money and emotional energy to help a cultural enemy in crisis.

This sermon lays a biblical foundation for caring by answering the question, “Why should we dare to care like Jesus?” The first of several reasons for caring is purely out of obedience to Christ. The very essence of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a battle cry for all of us to minister on the front lines to those in crisis. We are, as Jesus said, “To go out and do the same.” After answering the ‘why’ of caring, next the sermon deals with the question of ‘how.’ Several skills or tools are discussed that enhance the effectiveness of caring; they include: courage, the Holy Spirit, being present, active listening, respect and courtesy, empathy, self disclosure and, at times, confrontation. The Good Samaritan is a wonderful model on how to care for those in crisis. He uses many of these skills. These techniques can be summarized by simply saying “practice incarnational ministry.” We are Jesus’ hands and feet. We need to be Jesus to people. We need to go out and do the same as He would, to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

3. CARING WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES, John 11: 17-37. The number one personal crisis that the church shared through the project questionnaire was the death of a loved one. This was no surprise. The topic of grief was central to this message. First of all, our text demonstrates that grief is universal. Everyone grieves, even “Jesus wept” as he stood outside of the tomb of Lazarus. Grieving is normal, so it is important not to stifle the emotions of grief. We must not bottle up our grief or it will eat away at us. Secondly, grief is unique. Everyone does not act in the same way to the loss of a loved one. Verse 20 of our text says that when Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. Notice how they handled their grief differently. We must be careful not to expect others to grieve as we do.

The remainder of the message explores seven practical ways to *Dare to Care Like Jesus* when a loved one dies. These include respecting the person’s feelings, empathy, visitation, notes of encouragement, acts of kindness, avoiding platitudes and recognizing the length of the grieving process. You will notice that some of these have already been mentioned in an earlier sermon. Repetition of some of the more staple elements of caring will be echoed throughout the series in a variety of applications for reinforcement.

4. CARING WHEN THERE IS CRITICAL ILLNESS, Matthew 4:18-25. The Matthew passage was used simply to introduce the strong link between our *calling* and the ministry of *caring*. After Jesus calls his first disciples he immediately models for them a ministry of caring. This flow of calling and caring can be made from all four Gospel accounts after Jesus chooses his disciples. The second most common crises from our church survey was *critical illness*. The purpose of this sermon was to explain and help people to understand the “Grief Process” which is vital for helping in just about every crisis. The person going through a critical illness is wondering about the meaning of life and his or her existence. Grief impacts you physically, mentally, biologically and spiritually. By understanding the “Grief Process” we can better empathize with a

sufferer, know their needs, and avoid harmful cliches. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler–Ross’ five stages of grief was the model that was used. The five stages are: 1) shock and denial, 2) anger and frustration, 3) bargaining and guilt, 4) depression and then finally 5) acceptance. The sermon gives a scriptural antidote for the first four stages from selected passages in the Bible.

This sermon happened to fall on a communion Sunday. It was an appropriate reminder that our Saviour endured the full impact of grief. In the garden of Gethsemane he prayed earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.¹⁹⁴ Matthew tells us that Christ was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.¹⁹⁵ We have a Saviour who understands all about grief. We too need to understand grief if we are called to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

5. CARING WHEN THERE IS SUICIDE – Part I, 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

There are eight families in our small congregation of a hundred who have been touched by the tragedy of a suicide, six of the families responded to the project survey. One of the reasons that the pain of suicide is so hard to heal is because we do not talk about it. Suicide carries a strong stigma. So we shove the pain way down deep and pretend it is not there. It only prolongs the healing. We must talk about it. Stigmas are mostly from a combination of ignorance, lack of information and misunderstanding.

This message briefly covers the seven suicides recorded in the Scriptures answering the question, “What does the Bible say, and not say, about suicide?” Yes, suicide is in the Bible. It has always been part of society. Many folks struggle with hopelessness, sadness, life, anger, loneliness. Mental illness is a factor in eighty percent

¹⁹⁴ Luke 22:44

¹⁹⁵ Matt. 26:38

of all suicides.¹⁹⁶ Surely suicide must be seen from a mental health perspective and not solely from a theological perspective.

This message also elaborates on the facts and fiction of suicide in Canada. There are many myths that need to be exposed. Correct information eliminates stigma and allows healing to take place. When suicide comes to a family we know, information is the first step in caring and removing the stigma that keeps the pain in isolation. As Christians we offer comfort and hope to those with such unspeakable pain. The Psalmist says, “Sustain me according to your promise (O Lord), **and I will live**; do not let my hopes be dashed.”¹⁹⁷ God wants us to choose life, he wants to give us hope. We are the channel and vessel that God wants to use to give his hope to a broken world if we will only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

6. CARING WHEN THERE IS SUICIDE – Part II, 2 Samuel 16:23-17:5, 14,23.

Part II of our suicide topic centres on two objectives; caring for a family after a suicide has occurred, and suicide prevention. During the attempt to overthrow King David, Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed so he put his house in order and then hanged himself. Though the context of suicides today mostly differ from situations surrounding suicide in the Bible, grief is still a common denominator. This message specifically applies the grief process that was explained in the sermon “Caring for Those with a Critical Illness” as well as the healing process in the topic of suicide. The week before, I personally interviewed Dr. Gary Leblanc, professor of sociology at Atlantic Baptist University about his experience of grief and recovery from the unexpected suicide of his twenty-seven year old son. It is important to understand the shock, anger, frustration, guilt and depression that occurs around a suicide if we are going to care in appropriate and effective ways.

¹⁹⁶ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 28

¹⁹⁷ Psalm 119:116

Caring for the suicidal is usually a very scary and intimidating event. We have to remain calm to help. Calmness comes from knowing what to do and what to avoid. Those caught in the grips of suicidal thoughts need professional help. The goal of this part of the message was to provide front line help and make the individual safe for the next twenty four hours until professional help can be secured. When confronted with suicide or its possibility, we usually find a thousand reasons not getting involved.

The disciples were once caught in a terrifying storm and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."¹⁹⁸ The same message applies to us. When suicide strikes a loved one or family that we know, we need to take courage and *Dare to Care Like Jesus*. He will help us bring hope to a troubled soul.

7. CARING WHEN THERE IS ADDICTION – Part 1, Gambling & Alcoholism, Proverbs 23:21. 29-35; John 5:1-15. This message was originally going to address alcoholism only, however the top story in Canada that week was the 6/49 Lottery and its record jackpot. For scores of people, winning the lottery is the dream of a lifetime. However, for many lottery winners, the reality is more like a nightmare.¹⁹⁹ Lottery money brings tremendous strain on relationships with siblings and the extended family. Because the lure of gambling often starts with the initial habit of buying lottery tickets, I began this message on addiction with four reasons why I don't play the lottery.

Alcoholism is another addiction that causes much pain. The Scripture lesson in Proverbs is a good description of the deplorable ramifications of alcoholism. It is a cesspool. The passage in John is about a healing at a 'cesspool.' Although it is not specifically about addiction, we can apply biblical principles from this story to addictions. Like the affliction of the lame at the pool, addiction becomes a way of life and it cannot be conquered by yourself.

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 14:27

¹⁹⁹ Goodstein, Ellen. "Unlucky In Riches" An article at Bankrate.com

Addiction is a problem of original sin – addicts believe they can control their lives better than God can.²⁰⁰ The goal in caring for those with addiction is to break the hold and grip of dependency. The goal is freedom. However there is a greater freedom than the one from addiction. Jesus said to the healed man, “Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” So what can be worse than a life without health. The answer is a life without spiritual wholeness. A relationship with Christ is the greatest freedom of all, an eternal freedom. And Christ wants us to be instruments of that freedom, if we will only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

8. CARING WHEN THERE IS DEPRESSION, 1 Kings 19:1-18. Elijah experienced what years ago the ABC Wild World of Sports would say was, “The thrill of victory... and the agony of defeat.” After his great win on Mt. Carmel he sunk deep into depression and prayed that God would take his life. Yes, even the most spiritual people can be smitten by depression. This message shares the statistical facts of depression in Canada and describes what life is like for those in this seemingly inescapable black hole. Again, correct information eliminates stigma and permits healing to take place. Interestingly enough, I found eight practical lessons in this story of Elijah that demonstrate how to care for those who are struggling with depression

Through all of this Elijah learned that God would never forsake him. Even in the depths of depression God shows loving concern and a way out. There is hope. Because we are children of an omnipotent heavenly Father, we can have hope. Because there are unique resources available to the Christian, we can have hope. Even as we confront the hellish demon of emotional depression we can have hope. God can use us to bring encouragement to those who struggle with depression if we have the courage to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

²⁰⁰ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 1187.

9. CARING WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT WITH THE LAW, Matthew 25:36.

Our text says, “I was in prison and you came and visited me.” The Bible often talks about prisoners. In fact, it uses twenty-two different Hebrew and Greek words to describe incarceration.²⁰¹ The point is, prisoners are very close to the heart of God. His heart reaches out to them over and over again. Several major biblical characters were prisoners. Jesus often used the topic of prison as illustrative material in his teaching. God cares for those in conflict with the Law and so should we. We need to care for those who are in prison, for their families during the incarceration and for ex-offenders during the difficult transition after their release.

This message attempts to describe the unique challenges and fears of those who are in conflict with the law, as well as correcting unbiblical attitudes found in society. Two helpful interviews in preparation of this message were with Rev. David Way of the Community Chaplaincy for Ex-Offenders and Brigadier-General Richard Parsons, former Director of Young Offender and Adult Correctional Facilities for the province of Nova Scotia.

God’s plan is for the church to be a place that totally accepts people, a place where even offenders can come and feel comfortable and welcomed, a place where they would have no fear from people knowing their past, a place of grace, love and acceptance. After all, we are **all** offenders. It is a level playing field in God’s eyes. And the world is always watching us, testing to see if we not only preach love and grace but practise it as well. For me the bottom line is this, if Jesus was ministering to an offender with his last dying breaths, how much more should we care for them? Let us *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

²⁰¹ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible. Volume Four: M-P. (Grand Rapids, Regency

ReferenceLibrary, 1976) 869.

10. CARING WHEN THERE IS HOMOSEXUALITY, Galatians 6:1. This is an emotionally charged issue because it deals with relationships. Homosexuality causes crises. For the one who discovers personal affection for the same sex there is perhaps fear, shame, guilt, confusion. For parents and other relatives who first become aware of it there is out right shock and at times anger. And for a church whose sons and daughters veer from the standards of centuries there are sirens and alarms. We are called, as our text says, to “restore *gently*.” Usually everyone starts this discussion by citing the prohibition passages in Scripture on homosexuality, and they are there. However, biblical thinking about homosexuality begins with creation, in the book of Genesis, with a series of affirmations that lay the foundation for the instructions which follow.²⁰² These positive passages are every bit as important as, if not more important than, the negative passages. Thinking Biblically about homosexuality means saying, “Yes” – yes to gender, yes to sexuality, and yes to marriage.

As with several of our other topics (e.g. depression, ex-offenders, suicide) there are many myths and untruths that promote confusion on this issue. The first step in caring is understanding the facts on homosexuality. These are discussed. Next we revisit the issue of gentleness in this emotionally charged issue and the need to suspend critical judgment. Homosexuals have learned to expect revulsion, fear, and rejection from the heterosexual population. They need to experience genuine love more than they need condemnation or browbeating. We are called to bring the hope of the Gospel that changes lives. Unfortunately too often when a homosexual “comes out of the closet” the church side steps the need and says, “You can get help over there, at that national organization.” Homosexuals need help in the local church, especially if it is their home church. The only hope for the homosexual is the power of praying people, the light of the truth of God’s Word, the forgiveness of Christ, the hope of the Gospel that changes

²⁰² Wilkerson, Bryan. Pulpit Talk: Preaching Tough Topics: Homosexuality, Vol. 3, No. 4 (South Hamilton, MA; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2005)

people and the support of a loving church. Can we be that church? Yes, if we *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

11. CARING WHEN THERE IS PAIN AT CHRISTMAS, Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7. If you have had a family tragedy during the advent season, then you are acutely aware that Christmas is not joyful for everyone. There is a crescendo of stress on families at Christmas time.²⁰³ In fact, Christmas is a litmus test of a marriage's health. Good marriages flourish during the holidays, but Christmas is the straw that breaks the back of many bad marriages. This message explores six things to remember when there is pain at Christmas: 1) the first Christmas was filled with crisis, 2) God cares about hurting people, 3) God works through suffering, 4) God suffers alongside us, 5) the need to control your thinking, and 6) the need to celebrate what you can celebrate.

For those who are in pain at Christmas, it is my deepest prayer that you understand the message of Christmas and the peace and hope that Christ brings. Be honest about the pain and grab hold to the promises He has given. For those who don't understand this idea of a painful Christmas, I say to you, "open your eyes!" Watch for the sad face, the eye that wells up with tears, the person who seems to withdraw. We are his body, his hands and his feet. We can make someone's Christmas just a little bit more merry, if we only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

12. CARING WHEN THERE IS DIVORCE, Lamentations 3:17-23. Those in the church from intact families often are critical and judgmental of others who have experienced divorce. Although Jeremiah's lament is not from divorce, I chose the Lamentations passage because it describes a hurt and brokenness that is similar to the pain left in the wake of divorce. It is compassion and understanding that needs to be felt first before one is motivated to care. Lam. 3:17-20 (NLT) says, "Peace has been stripped

²⁰³ Harley, Willard. http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi5064_qa.html

away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is.... The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.”

The issues addressed in this message are: the facts on divorce in Canada, the great myths of divorce in society, God’s perspective on the issue, the causes of marital break ups and most importantly for our project, how to care for those who have experienced the brokenness of divorce. Nine practical suggestions are given to initiate and maintain healing. The Lamentations passage was also chosen to express the God’s *hesed*, his steadfast love. God was sticking by the people He had chosen. He had made a covenant with Israel. The Lord’s loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, “for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” When others have abandoned us or broken their promises, God is faithful. There is hope for the divorced! It is amazing what God can do if we give Him all the broken pieces. We can be ambassadors of the hope, if we will only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

13. CARING WHEN THERE IS ADDICTION - Part 2, Pornography, Proverbs

9:1-18; Job 31:1. In the book of Proverbs, Folly is personified as a strange woman who seduces many men. Only today she does not sit at the door of her house, as it says in the text, she is right in our houses, calling out from the click of the computer mouse. We hardly need to be reminded in western culture that we live in a sexually-charged society. However, we are still called to purity.

Two problems in dealing with this topic are: 1) that pornography is so embarrassing and 2) , that it is predominantly a male issue. Again, this message seeks to give correct information, bring understand and permit healing to take place. Christian men are not immune to the seduction of pornography. It is addictive and progressive and usually leads to some form of negative consequences. The cause and pain of pornography is also explained in this talk. However the primary purpose of this message is to equip others to care in proactive and reactive ways.

There will be no victory in this area of life until one chooses manhood with all their might. One gets into this problem by being male, one gets out of this problem by being a man. Like the prodigal, the addict needs to come to his senses and make a decision. Job made a decision. “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young woman” (Job 31:1(NLT)).

The Book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance of *looking ahead to see where your actions will lead you.*²⁰⁴ The wise person checks on the destination before buying a ticket (Prov. 4:26), but modern society thinks that people can violate God’s laws and escape the consequences.²⁰⁵ The consequences are destroyed lives. There are too many people out there captive who cannot get free by themselves. They need our help but they are too embarrassed to ask. However if they do ask, or you spot the signs or red flags of the problem then you can offer the support and encouragement that is needed if you only *Dare to Care Like Jesus.*

Conclusion

These thirteen messages attempt to educate, equip and motivate the people at the Sunny Brae Baptist Church to care for others in crises. In the following chapter the results of the congregational survey on personal crises will be disclosed. Conclusions will be drawn based upon the survey results. However, the primary endeavour of this project is to produce a resource from all of the messages delivered to the congregation, and supply each parishioner with this tool so that they will feel more adequately equipped to help others in crises.

²⁰⁴ See Proverbs 5:11; 14:12-14; 16:25; 19:20; 20:21; 23:17-18, 32; 24:14, 20; 25:8.

²⁰⁵ Wiersbe, Warren *Be Skillful. An Old Testament Study.* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Prov. 5:1.

CHAPTER 5
RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Table 5 - 1.

<i>Preaching Schedule</i>	
September 11, 2005	“The God of All Comfort”
September 18, 2005	“Dare to Care Like Jesus”
September 25, 2005	“Caring When a Loved One Dies”
October 2, 2005	“Caring When There Is Critical Illness”
<i>October 9, 2005</i>	<i>Thanksgiving (Canada)</i>
October 16, 2005	“Caring When There Is a Suicide” Part I
October 23, 2005	“Caring When There Is a Suicide” Part II
October 30, 2005	“Caring When There Is Addiction: Part I - Gambling & Alcohol”
<i>November 6, 2005</i>	<i>Remembrance Service with Royal Canadian Legion.</i>
November 13, 2005	“Caring for Those in Depression”
November 20, 2005	“Caring When There Is Conflict with the Law.”
November 27, 2005	“Caring When There Is Homosexuality”
<i>Dec 4, 18, 25</i>	<i>Christmas Messages</i>
December 11, 2005	“Caring When There Is Pain at Christmas”
<i>January 1, 2006</i>	<i>New Year’s Message</i>
January 15, 2006	“Caring When There Is Addiction: Part II - Pornography”
January 22, 2006	“Caring When There Is Divorce”

Reflections on the Messages

There were several challenges in this project pertaining to the messages. A continuous difficulty was the pressure of choosing from a plethora of information on each crisis topic and through synthesis and reduction choosing what to say in the short time allotted in a Sunday morning service. Normally I would preach for about twenty-five minutes. However, during the project I found that on several occasions the messages took thirty-five to forty-five minutes in length. I questioned individuals in the congregation periodically throughout the project to discern if the length was overbearing to the congregation.

It was not only the length of the talks that concerned me, it was also the weight of the talks. Usually a sermon has several illustrations, making the message more palatable and adding colour to the subject. However the constant bombardment of information that was needed to properly equip the congregation even with the basics worried me. I wondered about the staying power of the people's concentration. The good news is that I never did hear of one complaint throughout the project of the unusual length of the messages. In fact, the response and encouragement from the congregation after each message was generally greater than usual in quality, quantity and specificity.

A second challenge in preaching was the apprehension I felt because I was aware of the sensitivity of each particular topic to specific individuals in the congregation. For example, when one is preaching on a topic like suicide and you know of eight families (only 6 completed the survey) in the congregation who have walked through this kind of a fire, it is very intimidating. The preacher may become overly sensitive or fearful of saying something that may be true generally but may not apply specifically. The series, *Dare to Care Like Jesus* was aptly named, not just for my parishioners, but I also needed courage to preach on topics like homosexuality, imprisonment, divorce, alcoholism, pornography, gambling, etc. Every message was delivered to someone in the pews whose life was consumed by that day's topic. Therefore, the messages had to be presented in the light of great sensitivity and pastoral care.

Let me give an extraordinary example of what God was doing each Sunday during the project. I felt compelled to preach on caring for those with legal troubles. I believe strongly that it was a leading from the Holy Spirit. I had never preached on this topic in twenty three years of ministry.

At the time I had published the preaching schedule in an early September bulletin, I was only aware of two families in our church that had experienced the pain of a conviction process. After the message “Caring for Those in Conflict with the Law” on November 20, I discovered there were eleven in our church who had lived through a conviction or were presently going through the process.

Ironically, I almost passed on preaching this message. About a month earlier, Sally (not her real name) came to me privately to confide that her sister had been charged with a felony in another country. Her sister would be extradited to the city of the alleged crime at some time in the near future to face the charges. Sally would have to travel on a moment’s notice when the extradition took place to give emotional, legal and financial support to her sibling. She wanted me to be privy of the circumstances so that I could assume her responsibilities at the church for that weekend while she exited in stealth. I maintained pastoral contact before, during and after that weekend. However, a dilemma for me arose when she returned. I discovered that the following Sunday was the service that I was slated to preach on caring for those in prison. I was concerned that such a rare topic would be perceived as a “tailored” sermon for her family alone. Was this message too soon, chronologically speaking, to the current event? It was only after consultation with Sally that I felt I could proceed. “If God has laid this on your heart, Pastor, then you’ve got to preach it!” was her reassurance.

The service went well. I was most pleased to see the attendance of a particular couple (both ex-offenders) who recently started to come to church but had stopped their worship attendance. They were afraid of getting too close to people in the church and that folks might find out who they “really are.” They were afraid of rejection. After the service I noticed tears in both their eyes. God had done a mighty work in their lives

through the message. We embraced and affirmed to each other our desire that Sunny Brae Baptist Church would be a place of refuge and grace for *all*.

What caught me totally off guard was the reaction of Penny (not her real name). She was highly animated and insisted on meeting with the deacons and myself in my office immediately after church. “I can’t believe you preached on this topic this morning of all mornings. Why did you preach on this topic? I have never heard a sermon on prisoners before.” I wondered if I was in trouble. I wondered about the meaning behind her vivacious mannerisms. It turned out that Penny had been living under the duress of legal problems at work. The very next morning the papers were going to report that the government would be charging one of her subordinates for embezzling \$81,000.00. The individual had also been stealing from Penny personally. She clarified her purpose in meeting with the deacons with, “Tomorrow I am to gather my staff together and break the news about what has really been going on these last few months. I had my mind set on dealing with the situation in a very definite and particular way. But Pastor, after hearing the message this morning, I know I need to honour God and handle the situation with grace, so I’m looking for advice on what to say and do.” It was an amazing moment as each deacon offered words of spiritual wisdom.

Other Sundays during the project may not have been as sensational. However, each Sunday there were comments from the congregants affirming their personal connection to and relevancy of each message. From the personal interaction I had with the people after each Sunday, I believe the church was very engaged in this project.

The Results of the Survey

My desire was to illicit maximum participation in the survey. This was a difficult in light of the personal nature of the questions on the survey. Some parishioners said they were willing to participate but just didn’t know how to put their thoughts down on paper. Therefore, in order to gain a legitimate number of responses to the questionnaire I interviewed many of my parishioners and recorded their data myself. It was very time consuming. Another key element in procuring sufficient responses was my pledge of

confidentiality. The reporting of the survey will be faithful to the promise made to my parishioners. In order to provide some sense of identification and comparison in examining the results each respondent has been assigned a number, 1 through 57. The numbers were assigned at random with no presupposed criteria influencing the process. The survey results are as follows:

1. What have been your top three most personal crises?

As you can see from the table below, not every one came up with three different life crises. Four of the fifty-seven surveyed could only think of one crises that they have ever experience. Another four individuals could only think of two life crises. There were many others who could supply me with many more than the three I had asked for. While it appears true that everyone, given time, will experience a significant painful experience, it is also true that the amount of painful experiences is not distributed proportionately. Some have been through many trials while others have been through only a few. Besides the diverse range in the number of trials, there is also a difference in the magnitude of the pain. While it is difficult to compare one person's pain with another, we can generally surmise that there is a difference from the pain of experiencing your grandmother's death from natural causes and the aftermath of pain from your seven year old daughter dying in your arms after being hit by a school bus. The table below reveals that pain comes to us all in different amounts and magnitudes. It is proportioned in society in different quantity and quality.

Table 5 - 2.

Three Most Personal Crises			
	First	Second	Third
1	Rape of Daughter	Divorce	Death of Parent
2	Depression	Illness - Spouse	Cancer
3	Aneurism surgery		
4	Death of child	Death of grandson	
5	Death of son	Illness	Illness - Spouse
6	Alcoholism	Abuse	
7	Four Sudden Death	Divorce	Parent's failing health
8	Suicide	Alcoholism/Abuse	Teen pregnancy
9	Homosexuality	Suicide	Identity crisis
10	Divorce	Depression - Daughter	Sister's Depression
11	Death & anorexia	Divorce of parents	House burned
12	Divorce	Loss of custody; Daughter	
13	Death of Mom at 14.	Death of dad at age 2	Suicide
14	Custody of Grandchild	Rebellious Teen	Legal troubles
15	Divorce	Domestic violence	Finding Mom dead; age 1
16	Alcoholism	Illness - Husband	Death of Dad
17	Death of Spouse	Death of infant child	Addiction to prescriptions
18	Illness - Cancer	Illness of a child	Death of Spouse
19	Death of Dad	Anger/Rage issues	Loss of Job
20	Illness - Anorexia	Rape	Death of Grandfather
21	Death of Spouse	Death of Dad	Miscarriage
22	Divorce	Single Parenting	Health Issues
23	Conflict with the Law	Disowned by family	Suicidal
24	Rape	Gave child for adoption	Addiction - gambling
Three Most Personal Crises			

	First	Second	Third
25	Chronic Illness	Death of Grandmother	Death of baby bother
26	Conflict with the Law	Alcoholism	
27	Suicide	Alcoholism	Domestic Violence
28	Death of Spouse	Hysterectomy	Illness - Cancer
29	Death of Spouse	Illness - Cancer	Illness - gall bladder
30	Death of Parents	A "break and enter"	
31	Rape	Death of Parent	Illness of a child
32	Death of Spouse		
33	Alcoholism	Death of Spouse	Death of sister
34	Death of Parent	Death of Parent	Loss of Job/Home
35	Death of Spouse	Death of a child	Auto accident
36	Loss of Job		
37	Rebellious Teen		
38	Chronic Illness	Loss of Job	Empty nest
39	Loss of Job	Chronic Illness	Depression
40	Death of child	Death of Spouse	Financial loss
41	Conflict with the Law	Prison	Prison Release
42	Illness - Cancer	Divorce	Death of Parent
43	Death of Parent	Divorce	Depression
44	Death of Grandmother	Loss of friends	Death of a friend
45	Abuse	Illness - Acute	Illness - Chronic
46	Marriage	Death of Parent	Illness - Acute
47	Death of Parent	Home Burned	Home burned again
48	Illness - chronic	Job Loss	Illness of Parent
Three Most Personal Crises			
	First	Second	Third
49	Illness - chronic	Illness of Parent	Parenting
50	Illness of child	Adultery	Death of Parent
51	Conflict at work	Auto accident	Death of infant
52	Job loss	Marriage	Financial Loss
53	Death of a Friend	Identity Crisis	Depression

54	Suicide	Abuse as child	Marriage
55	Alcoholism	Death of Mom	
56	Death of Mom	Job Loss	Homicide - Death
57	Death of Brother	Infidelity	Divorce

Table 5 - 3. This table is a summary of 57 individuals who reported 157 life crises.

Summary of Top Three Crises	
Death	45
Critical Illness	30
Divorce	11
Prison/Legal issues	9
Addictions	9

Summary of Top Three Crises	
Job Loss	8
Suicide	6
Depression	6
Financial Loss	5
Abuse	5
Rape	4
Marriage	3
Rebellious Teen	2
Teen Pregnancy	2
Parenting	2
Disowned	2
Identity crisis	2
Homosexuality	1
Anger/Rage	1
Loss of Friends	1
Empty Nest	1
Murder	1
Infidelity	1

Table 5 - 3 above attempts to list one hundred and fifty-seven personal life crises into twenty three separate categories. At times this procedure became difficult when the crisis overlapped into several categories. Allow me to elaborate on the several of these groupings.

Death - Of the 157 responses to 57 parishioner's top three crises, death was chosen 45 times. This did not include suicide which is dealt with separately. Those surveyed indicated that a death experience comes in a variety of ways: terminal illness, car accident, murder, drowning, natural causes etc. Eight of the respondents indicated that

the crisis was the death of a young child. Each of these specific stories deeply personalizes the pain and grief that comes from death. It is apparent from the personal testimonies that very few people are prepared for dealing with grief emotions or are knowledgeable of the grief process. The two messages on death and critical illnesses addressed these issues and the sermon-notes resource booklet given to the congregation will be help for future reference however, because this is the most significant area of crises in our church, future strategies for grief care should be implemented. It is my desire, as some point in the future, to offer *GriefShare* to those in our congregation. *GriefShare* is thirteen week biblical teaching seminar and support group for people grieving the loss of someone close. This program will equip others in our church to take caring for others in grief to the next level.

Critical Illness - Of the 157 responses to 57 parishioner's top three crises, critical illness was chosen 30 times. This was the number two top personal crisis. In fact, the top two crises in our survey, death and critical illness, are dramatically more frequent than any other type of crisis. This underscores the importance of the need of future considerations in equipping the congregation with a program like *GriefShare*. If well advertised in the community, it could be a wonderful opportunity of outreach to the non-churched. Some of the critical illnesses experienced in our congregation came in the form of a brain tumour, aneurism, cancer, sever diabetes, anorexia nervosa, automotive accident, major surgery, stroke, etc. These types of critical illnesses were life altering experiences. One family in our congregation had a ten year old son who went to bed healthy but the next morning was unconscious from a brain haemorrhage. He spent five weeks in ICU and then was sent out of province to special hospital where he had a tracheotomy for five months. From the brain damage he had to relearn how to walk, talk and perform other bodily functions.

Divorce - Of the 157 responses to 57 parishioner's top three crises, divorce was chosen 11 times. This is not to say that all 11 had been through a divorce. In some cases it is a parishioner's sibling who had been through the divorce. The pain and ramifications of divorce reach far beyond the mere couple that has split up. Some surveyed were in effect saying, "My greatest life crisis was the sister's divorce." For others it was their son's or daughter's marriage that had ended. Sometimes divorce affected the entire church when a prominent church leader would leave a spouse and children to start another relationship. Divorce is the third and final category to make double digits in our survey with 11 respondents. To further provide caring in this area, I plan to enlist some mature congregants who have recovered from this pain to initiate a program in the near future called *DivorceCare*. It is a 13-week program that features weekly videos of topics like facing your anger and forgiveness. This too, if it is well publicised in the community, could be an effective outreach tool.

A surprise that has surfaced in our survey is the fact that only three people have indicated that a crisis in their marriage. Considering how high divorce was on our survey you would think that marriage problems would be more prominent. After this surprise was discovered I checked the survey (see Appendix A) to see if "marriage" was in the list of the twenty-five examples of personal crisis. It was not. Did this omission affect the results of the survey? It would be hard to conceive of such. Though marriage problems were registered as low, other categories are linked to the topic of marriage and relationships e.g. divorce, addictions, job loss, depression, financial loss, abuse, rebellious teen, anger/rage, empty nest, infidelity. Perhaps in lieu of using the topic of marriage as a crisis the crisis was simply stated in another way or category. The low rating of marriage problems is still a surprising feature of the survey.

Conflict with the Law - These respondents included victims as well as ex-offenders. However, the five abuse respondents and the four rape respondents are each in a separate category. One respondent had all three crises in this single category, reporting legal

troubles, a prison sentence and release from a thirty year prison sentence as his most painful experiences in life. Some of the legal troubles were years, even decades ago, while some were very current. Some were blue-collar offences while others were white-collar offences. Sin transcends all social levels. One result of this project was that a deacon and I went to a government sponsored seminar on caring for those incarcerated, those recently released as well as the victims. We are currently looking at a ministry called “Find My Way” to explore how our church can get involved in ministering and helping ex-offenders “find their way” back into the community and society.

Addictions - This project dealt with addictions in general as well as alcoholism, gambling and pornography, specifically. There was no one in the survey who stated that they had an addiction to pornography. Given the gender that is usually associated with pornography as well as the shame and misunderstanding that is attached to this issue, I did not expect anyone to acknowledge this addiction. None did. However, in light of the current statistics on pornography in both society and our churches as stated in the corresponding message, the need for addressing this issue is self evident. Even if it were true that no one in the church was struggling with this issue, which I highly doubt, it is still important to give instruction on how to care for those in our society with this affliction.

In this addiction category, there were seven respondents to alcoholism, one to gambling and one to prescription drugs. In light of the findings, a further possible ministry opportunity for our church could be to establish a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. There are several chapters that are meeting in the city of Moncton. However, in our community of Sunny Brae there is none. The AA organization itself tells me that there are several alcoholics that travel outside of the Sunny Brae community because no local chapter exists.

Job Loss - Table 5 - 3 reveals that this is the sixth top crises that was reported. Surely one of the short comings of this project was the omission of this topic. It could be combined with the ninth category, Financial Loss. Originally it was recommended that this project include eight messages on caring. This project included thirteen messages and was unable to address several additional topics that could be included. The reason why I chose not to include this category in the teaching is that though several shared that this pain was in their past, generally speaking, it was not a current need. It is sufficient to say that this project has revealed that this need is part of our community demographic and should be addressed within the near future .

Suicide - In Table 5-3, the "6" that is associated with those have been afflicted with this type of grief needs to be clarified in two ways. On the one hand, a couple of the respondents are referring to the same suicide, therefore the number of suicides appears to be less. However, as in so many of the other categories, several others within our church who did not fill out the survey, came forward to reveal their pain after the respective sermons were preached. In my opinion, the messages were strong on suicide awareness and caring but weak with respect to suicide intervention. Intervention, according to ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), needs to be, at the very least, a two day seminar. This is another ministry training opportunity that has come from the results of our project and survey. There are several certified ASIST instructors in our province that are willing to come and teach a clinic for our church. It could be promoted within all of the churches in the city of Moncton.

Depression - Depression was tied with Suicide for the seventh most common crisis in our congregation. Another connection with suicide is the fact that after sermons on each of these topics there were parishioners who expressed relief that the topic was discussed and clarified in a church setting. It was as if their struggle was now shared with others and they were no longer in isolation. In fact, a few of the congregants met together to discuss

strategies with each other on what they had discovered “worked for them” in coping during the more difficult days.

Let us continue with the second question on the congregational survey.

2. Please write about the circumstances, setting and time period, surrounding your greatest crisis that you mentioned in question 1. (Please use the space on the back of this page, or better still email me at grpoley@fundy.net).

The responses to this question varied greatly in length and in detail ranging from a short paragraph to over five hand written pages describing what could be called the most significant event of their lives. On average each parishioner wrote about a page in response to this question. It does not seem prudent to include these sixty plus pages in this project from a relevant, logistical, or ethical standpoint. Suffice it to say that the specific responses to this question assisted me in the determination of the preaching topics.

3. On a scale from 1 – 10, please rate your present recovery from your greatest crisis.

Please Circle one: Not coping < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 > Completely recovered.

Of the 57 questionnaires that were submitted, 49 answered this question.

Number 10 was circled by 13 respondents.

Number 9 was circled by 16 respondents.

Number 8 was circled by 11 respondents.

Number 7 was circled by 5 respondents.

Number 6 was circled by 1 respondent.

Number 5 was circled by 1 respondent.

Number 4 was circled by 1 respondent.

Number 1 was circled by 1 respondent.

A question that immediately surfaces from the result of this question is, “Why did eight people choose not to answer the one question on the survey that requires the least amount of effort?” All of the other three questions required some writing. Two of the four questions required significant writing. Did some of the eight choose not to reply to this question because it was a non-issue to them? Perhaps, however this is mere speculation. In support of this proposition is the fact that 92% of the respondents replied that on a scale of recovery they circled (on a range of 0 to 10) a “7” or above. The results to this question also reveal that perhaps four individuals had either not sufficiently healed from a past crisis or were presently in the midst of the storm. There was immediate follow up and pastoral care in each case.

4. How can the church better help those who will go through a similar experience like yours? What did you learn?

14 of the 57 responded to this question. Their quotes have been synthesized to spare duplication.

- It was at this time I became a Christian. My faith steadily grew.
- Human contact is very important and helps relieve the stress and frustration.
- The church should try to always be there for people as they are going through crisis.... I am not a very good person when it comes to helping out people in crisis but I know that there are people in our church who have this gift.
- If was after this crisis in my life that I found my way back to the church and learned that God’s people know through the love of God how to support someone going through a crisis. My non-Christian friends kept their distance at a time when I needed them most... I think the best way to help someone is to be there for them and be willing to just LISTEN.
- The church can help by matching up the divorced with strong Christian couples to mentor the single parents and their children.

- The church can help through prayer, comfort, love and hope... Just listen and give support. A sense of humour also helps.
- Our pastor and his wife were both very supportive. However ‘The Church’ did nothing that was evident. They may have prayed and no doubt they talked...
- To try to bring people with similar past history situations together for discussion, support and recovery. I have learned personally that God had planned these situations in order to bring me back to Himself.
- How can the church help others? Ask, Ask, Ask - before - during - after their crisis.
- The church can help by simply being there. Those in crisis will have lots of questions and no answers... No one contacted me at all from the church after our tragedy.
- I believe that I would have been less angry if I had been able to find someone to talk to...

Parents are too judgmental, too emotionally involved, at least mine were. Youth ministers need to confront them in a loving way to “pull them over” before something more awful happens.

- I am not sure how the church could help someone who was in my shoes.
- Encourage them to seek the appropriate professional help.
- Our church was wonderful during our crisis with cards, meals, visits and acceptance.

What do these responses, as well as the lack of response to this question, reveal? First of all, the ministry of presence is paramount. Standing with people in the midst of their crisis is foundational for any kind of caring. Secondly the church has historically been only “fair” when it comes to caring for those in crisis with a “hit or miss” record. Sometimes we care well, other times we fail miserably. Thirdly, there is a great ministry opportunity when it comes to a crisis. Many people have been drawn to the Lord and experienced personal and spiritual growth through painful circumstances. There is a component to the healing and restoration process that the church alone can fill.

Lastly, it is apparent from the lack of response (less than 25% responded to this question) that most people do not know what to do when a crisis comes. They also do not concretely know what the church should or could do. This strikes at the very purpose of this project. I have laboured extensively to equip the laity with a basic understanding of the dynamics of various kinds of crises as well as to give practical suggestions on what to say and do as well as what to refrain from saying or doing.

Evaluation of the Project by the Congregants

The following evaluation form was given to the congregation on November 27, 2005. The preaching schedule was not completed by this date. However, I felt that it was prudent to inquire from the people before we rejoined the series five weeks later after Christmas and New Year's. There were three more messages that came after the evaluations.

Twenty one evaluation forms were completed and handed in. Seventeen supplied their names while four remained anonymous. Some only answered one of the two questions.

Evaluation Is a Critical Component of this Project "Equipping the Laity to Care for Their Neighbours in Crisis."

Name _____ (Optional)

1) Please take a minute now to give me your feedback on the overall series:

- Sept. 11 - "The God of All Comfort"
- Sept. 18 - "Dare to Care Like Jesus"
- Sept. 25 - "Caring When a Loved One Dies"
- Oct. 2 - "Caring When There Is Critical Illness"
- Oct. 16 - "Caring When There Is Suicide" Part I
- Oct. 23 - "Caring When There Is Suicide" Part II
- Oct. 30 - "Caring When There Is Addiction: Part I - Gambling & Alcohol"
- Nov. 13 - "Caring When There is Depression"
- Nov. 20 - "Caring When There Is Conflict with the Law."

Nov. 27 - "Caring When There Is Homosexuality"

(Possibly still to come: Caring when there is a Rebellious Teenage,
Job/Financial Loss, Addiction II: Pornography, Divorce)

2) Please comment on a sermon or two that you found most helpful and why?

Selected narrative from question #1

- You sure did your homework.
- You are very courageous to speak on these topics. I have never heard a pastor preach on so many taboo or controversial subjects. The church here 25 years ago probably would not have been ready for such sermons. You have given me some new insights....
- The overall series was just awesome, it was clear and informative. It explained the effects and causes that lie behind a person's life and relationship with others and God.
- very helpful and informative.
- It was very helpful to find out more about these topics.
- The overall series is very appropriate for our day. It was presented concisely and thoroughly. Lots of food for thought and an even greater challenge to have compassion and understanding for all.
- A great teaching series on hard subjects to tackle in the pulpit. Thank you for your insight and research.
- These messages have been presented in a very positive and informative way. These sermons have been designed to teach how to care in specific situations as Jesus would, in a loving and caring way.

- These messages have been very enlightening. You could maybe add one more – Singleness or Single Again – ministering to those who have felt the sting of being alone and made to feel incomplete.²⁰⁶
- Informative and well researched. Challenging and inspiring. You should write a book, seriously.
- The sermon on suicide was too long because it hit so close to home. More care is needed on those left behind.
- I did not attend all the sermons but I found the ones on *Conflict with the Law* and *Homosexuality* very informative. You did an excellent job.

The enthusiastic answers to the above question are evidence that the project seemed to have “hit a nerve.” An original goal that I set for myself before the topic of this thesis was even chosen, was to commence on a project that would be relevant to our church in Sunny Brae. The assumed need in the area of caring has, I believe, been vindicated by the responses to this question and the personal comments after each sermon.

Selected narrative from question #2.

- The most helpful sermons to me were on Death, Suicide and Homosexuality. The first because it universally happens to us all. The second and third were opportunities to alter perception and beliefs on challenging topics. It is admirable to present such controversial subjects with such gentility.
- Critical Illness and Homosexuality. The first because of my own personal health issues and the second was interesting since I’ve read about it lately in the Bible and I was curious to hear your input.

²⁰⁶ Actually, we did target this need on October 16, 2005 at a special evening service. I assume that this person (anonymous) did not or could not attend. This “Salute to Singles” was sparked from a specific chapter I read on singleness is Gary Collins’ book, *Christian Counselling*. The evening was a combined pot-luck and service. I did not include the message in my thesis although it was birthed from this project.

- Depression, because it hits closest to home and the public does not really understand the bio-medical aspect of the problem.
- Suicide and Homosexuality. These had to be difficult to preach on. Thank You. I think we all needed to learn to be loving and non-judgmental in these situations.
- Conflict with the Law. That Sunday God put two people who had been in that situation close-by and opened my heart to them in a way I didn't think possible. I believe the direction the congregation is receiving is truly God inspired. Thank you.
- Nov. 13th. I have a sister who faces deep depression and struggles with the illness. I sent her the program I enjoyed all of the series, it opened my eyes to new insight.
- Nov. 13th. I loved that you shared your personal testimony with depression.
- I enjoyed all the messages but a special spot in my heart is for those suffering from depression. It was such an encouragement to hear it presented in such an understanding and caring way. To have it stated openly that clinical depression is much different than just a case of the blues was significant. I appreciated it being said that there is "no shame" in having to be on medication or have "shock" treatments. Praise God!! We are all broken needy vessels.
- I found the suicide sermons helpful, as I have struggled with suicide many times.
- I found today's (Nov. 27) very informative and helpful because my roommate is a homosexual. However, he is also not a Christian. I also found the clinical depression topic very useful since I know people who struggle with this as well. I am really enjoying this whole series. I find it informative and helpful!
- Depression, Homosexuality, Death, Critical Illness. All situations that we are faced with daily. Helpful in knowing how to support our friends in these situations.
- Sept 11, Nov. 13, Nov. 27. I very rarely experience God's love and I do have periods of depression. God does help me in that area as it will go away for a time.
- Today's was the most helpful sermon, although a few years late. It did confirm that I did well in speaking to a friend who announced his homosexuality. Against the advice of many we stayed friends. My husband was even good to him when at

first he was adamant that we should not remain friends. Over the years this young man has looked to me as a second mother.

- Death and Critical Illness. These sermons were helpful simply as a reminder on how to talk to people.

There are a few factors that need to be highlighted as one attempts to interpret the comments above. First of all, from my personal knowledge of those who made the above comments it seems obvious to me that the sermons that people appreciated the most were on the topics that concerned them most. Conflicting with that statement is the fact that the sermon that generated the most interest was the message on homosexuality. In fact, the most helpful messages in descending order were (tied at number 1) homosexuality and depression, (tied at number 2) suicide, critical illness and death, and lastly conflict with the law. One reason that the sermon on homosexuality may be rated so helpful may simply be because that sermon was given the morning the evaluation was handed out. In other words, the freshness of the sermon may have been a contributing factor. It was the message that they remembered the most and were able to dialogue about the easiest. One message that was not mentioned as being helpful was "Dare to Care Like Jesus." However this message was introducing the series and did not deal with a specific crisis or personal need. That means that the only crisis not mentioned in the evaluation was Addiction: Part I - Gambling & Alcohol. (This does not include the sermons on pornography and divorce. They were preached in the new year, several week later, after the evaluation form was filled out.)

Outcomes

I have been surprised by *who* took part in assisting me with my project and also surprised by *who*, for their own personal reasons, decided to opt out. I experienced that same kind of puzzlement after the completion of three different church building campaigns that I have led. It always seemed to amaze me where the finances came from

for each project. Some, especially from the leadership, whom I expected to support the project decided not to. Others, whom I would never have thought would be interested in the building project gave lavishly of their finances. The same became true with regard to acquiring responses to this project's questionnaire. I wish that I could have received more than the fifty-seven responses.

Regardless, a common denominator is that those who took part received the most benefit. One woman had remarked to me, "Pastor, this questionnaire wasn't easy. It has been a long and painful experience writing my story on paper. However, it has also been a very therapeutic experience."

A second outcome was the sky-rocketing escalation of my love for the congregation as I read their personal accounts of crises. A pastor's emotional connection to a congregation usually is established from experiences during the pastor's tenure with the congregation. The bonding historically has been over a long process of time and interaction during funerals, weddings, births and other significant events. However, when, in a span of a couple of weeks, over fifty different people relive with you their most traumatic personal experiences including, rape, prison, suicide, shock therapy, alcoholism, anorexia, homes burned, cancer, brain tumours, divorce, murder, etc., the result is a compassion and love that soars.

This leads into a third outcome, the need of transparency. Many of the crises chronicled in the questionnaire by the people happened years, even decades ago, yet each past crisis is very much a part of or has greatly contributed to who they are today. Most in the church have no idea of these significant events in the lives of their fellow members. We need to share more deeply with each other the grace that God has extended to us to help us through such trials. If there was a greater transparency in the church, I believe there would be more patience and forbearance with each other.

For example, sometimes even in the church, anger is expressed and people who feel targeted are personally hurt. We usually either lunge out and strike back or we withdraw and ignore the individual. Either way the relationship is damaged and

resentment or bitterness is the result. We often forget to ask ourselves what pain may lie behind someone else's actions. What may have caused the thoughtless word or deed? However, an understanding of another's painful past gives more appreciation and sympathy causing us to choose compassion instead of destructive confrontation. This project attempted to address this dilemma with the biblical teaching that there is a stewardship to our pain (2 Cor 1:3-4). It is a teaching that needs to be ongoing to counter the private tendencies of individuals.

The most significant outcome of the project was the accumulated resource of the sermon notes. The bulletin inserts of all thirteen messages, as they appear in the Appendix C, were compiled into a forty-seven page, coil-bound booklet and passed out to the entire congregation for future reference. The booklet is conveniently the same dimensions as a church bulletin, 8.5" X 5.5". The objective from the beginning of this project was to equip the congregation with a tool so that when a tragedy strikes they would be able to refresh themselves with the basic understanding of the nature of the crisis as well as how to care in that situation.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project I stated that there are two factors which play a part in effective caring in ministry: the pastor and the people. While it may be more difficult to know the precise impact of the project on the congregation, I am more than satisfied with the tremendous influence this thesis has had on me, both professionally and personally. Professionally I feel more competent than ever ministering in a variety of crisis situations. I have a deeper appreciation for the complexities of various mental health issues as well as an admiration for psychology in general. This project helped me to integrate truth from theology and psychology. There is much common ground.

As mentioned above, the project was also beneficial for my relationship with the congregation. The formation of a stronger bond became evident. As the people shared their painful experiences in the questionnaire and as I became transparent in the pulpit

with my past struggle, a deeper love for each other grew. Openness with humility breeds closeness in humanity.

The second factor to effective caring is the church members themselves. Four barriers were mentioned in chapter one: 1) believing that caring is solely the pastor's job, 2) fear, 3) lack of information, and 4) incorrect information. I believe these barriers were addressed and overcome during the project.

Correcting the misunderstanding that caring is solely the pastor's job is an ongoing educational process. It will not cease with the end of this project. Rick Warren deals with this need in the shift of emphasis in his sequel to the *Forty Days of Purpose* campaign. The sequel is called *Forty Days of Community*. The former answered the question, "What on earth am I here for?" The sequel answers the question, "What on earth are We here for?" The church as well as the individual Christian needs to understand they are here. We are here to reach out and care for the community around us. The crisis in caring for those in crisis is more than anything else an identity crisis. Who are we? Why are we here? The sermons in various places addressed these issues.

A second barrier to the laity caring for those in crisis is fear. A constant recurring theme in the messages was for Christians to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*. There were isolated individuals and small groups who on their own applied the theme to particular servant acts of love. This was a joy to see. An improvement in this project would have been to add this question to the evaluation form, "Do you feel you are more willing to overcome your fears and help someone in crisis as a result of this project?" Motivating the church to action is an on-going challenge.

A third barrier to caring was lack of information. There seemed to be an overwhelming consensus from the evaluation response that the project had satisfied this goal. The fourth barrier of misinformation, myths and platitudes was also addressed in the messages.

Effective caring is an ongoing educational process. The pastor himself needs continuous professional development as well as annually including in his preaching

schedule sermons that both motivate and equip the congregation to care. Caring takes place when we understand who we are in Christ and our calling to serve God by fulfilling the great commission and the great commandment. Caring takes place when we are willing to use the comfort that God has given us in the midst of our struggles for His honour and glory. Caring takes place when we *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

APPENDIX - A. The Congregational Questionnaire

Dear Friend of Sunny Brae Baptist Church

As you may know I am currently pursuing studies at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. My desire is to grow in my relationship with Christ and to become a better pastor of the Sunny Brae Baptist Church. I am now beginning my Theses Project titled **“How To Be A Better Care Giver To Those In Crisis.”** I cannot accomplish this goal without you. You have had life experiences that I have not and I would like to learn from your experience. I am asking you to share the most painful experience that you have had in your life. I know that this is a tremendous

thing for me to ask. For some of you it will be difficult thing to do. Here is a verse to remind you of the significance and value that your experience has.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Let me assure you of my confidentiality. I will not reveal your name or personally embarrass you in any way.

Name: _____ Birth date: _____

1. What have been your top three most personal crises?

(For example: Loss of a spouse, loss of a job, loss of a child, loss of your health, unfaithful spouse, domestic violence, natural disaster, crime victim, substance abuse, rebellious teenager, financial loss, teen pregnancy, serious physical injury, life threatening illness, legal troubles, addiction of some kind, child with special needs, HIV/AIDs, victim of a crime, imprisonment of a family member, automobile accident, incest, rape, suicide, miscarriage)

1. ** _____ **
2. _____
3. _____

2. Please write about the circumstances, setting and time period, surrounding your greatest crisis that you mentioned in question 1. (Please use the space on the back of this page, or better still email me at grpoley@fundy.net)

3. On a scale from 1 – 10, please rate your present recovery from your greatest crisis.

Please Circle one: Not coping 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely recovered

4. How can the church better help those who will go through a similar experience like yours? What did you learn? (Please use the space on the back.)

Please hand in to the Pastor ASAP (this week)

APPENDIX - B. Thirteen Messages on Caring

**THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT
2 Corinthians 1:1-11; September 11, 2005**

This morning I am going to share with you my Theses Project. It is the last and final requirement before I graduate from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with a Doctor of Ministry degree. One of the main reasons that I have enrolled in this program was to upgrade and sharpen my skills in the area of care giving. It has been over twenty years since my seminary training and I have always felt overwhelmed by the complex and diverse needs of the church and the community. I am not a professional counsellor but I always wanted to improve my competency in ministering to those who are in crisis. The title of my Thesis Project is “Equipping the Laity to Help Those in Crisis.” It is my prayer and desire that this project will help me become a better pastor, as well as help all of us to minister more effectively to the broken world around us.

I have known for over a month now that I would be launching this project *today* and preaching this sermon *today*, **The God of All Comfort**. My first point is ...

1. Life Can Be Brutal

I was going to illustrate the fact of how life has been brutal from my own life and from pastoral experience by giving personal examples. But who would have thought that Hurricane Katrina would have arrived the week before I began sharing my thesis project “Equipping the Laity to Help Those in Crisis.”

Look at the headlines of this newspaper (Tuesday August 30, 2005), *Hurricane Katrina Hits New Orleans*. It was one of the most punishing storms to hit the US in decades. Over eighty percent of the city is now under water. Winds reached a whopping 233 kph. Can you imagine the fear, the pain, the heartache, the loss? To be literally whipped out! To wait stranded, 3, 4, 5 days or more marooned on top of your roof with no food, no drinkable water, exposed to the elements. Life at times is certainly brutal.

The Bible is full of examples of life being brutal. Paul could easily testify to the brutality of his life. We have a partial list of his sufferings and the brutality he endured. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.²⁰⁷

John the Baptist rotted in jail and was finally beheaded at the whim of King Herod.²⁰⁸ Joseph suffered from rejection by his close family and separation from those

²⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

²⁰⁸ Matthew 14:10

he loved. He was sold by his own jealous brothers for silver, forcibly removed to Egypt, away from his beloved Father, whom he did not see again for twenty years. In Egypt, he was unjustly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. For thirteen years, he faced trials, temptations and testing.²⁰⁹

Jesus, the Righteous, was flogged and then in great simplicity the Scripture plainly records, “And they crucified him.”²¹⁰ One of the criminals hanging beside him testified that, “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”²¹¹ Even the innocent Lamb of God suffered a life of brutality.

The fact is that all of life revolves around three continuous stages of crisis. We are either just coming out of a crisis, or we are in the middle of a crisis or we are shortly going to enter a crisis. All of us are now in one of these three positions.

2. God Is the Source of Comfort Not the Calamity

The heart and soul of this morning’s text is that God is the source of all comfort. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of compassion** and the **God of all comfort**, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.²¹²

The word “comfort,” whether used as a noun or a verb, occurs no less than ten times in 2 Cor 1:3-7. Paul employs the term here in its basic (Greek) sense of standing beside a person to encourage him when he is undergoing severe testing.²¹³ Paul is driving home the point that God is the source of comfort, not the source of the calamity.

What is going through everyone’s mind when such a crisis comes? “Why me, God? What lessons am I supposed to learn from this? Why did you send this trial? I must have done something to deserve this.” We all think these kinds of thoughts. We focus on the calamity instead of the comfort. But God never sends evil our way.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Genesis 37, 39, 40

²¹⁰ Mark 15:24

²¹¹ Luke 23:41

²¹² 2 Cor. 1:3-5

²¹³ Hughes, Philip. *The New International Commentary on 2 Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 11.

²¹⁴ James 1:13

Jeremiah has recorded, “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”²¹⁵

One of Satan’s tactics is to entice us to focus on the calamity instead of the comfort. So we dwell on the timeless question “Why is there suffering or evil?” We dwell on what we do not have control over (calamity) instead of what we do have control over (trusting in the God of all comfort).

Let me get deeply theological with you. Do you remember the Road Runner and the Wile E. Coyote? In a scenario that transpires time and time again, Wile E. Coyote is chasing the Road Runner. Sure enough, Wile E. gets lost in the dust of the Road Runner once again. The scene goes from a frantic, wild chase to a still shot. As the dust begins to dissipate and the smoke clears, the Road Runner is standing on solid ground at the edge of a cliff and the Wile E. Coyote discovers he is standing on nothing, in mid air. He falls to the sound of a descending whistle until you hear the impact of him smacking the ground at the base of the cliff.

My point is this, when it comes to a personal life crisis, where are you standing: on solid ground or just thin air? Make sure you stand on what you know, NOT on what you do not know. We know that God loves us (Rom 5:8). We simply have to look at the cross (John 3:16) for assurance of that love. We do not know why certain things happen in life. No one has the full answer. It belongs in the category of the “secret things that belong to the Lord our God.”²¹⁶

Paul directs our focus on the God of all comfort . He does not talk about why the crisis came. Too often we immediately presume that God sent the calamity. That is what Job’s three “friends,” I use the term loosely, believed and they were wrong. Who was the sender of Job’s calamity? Satan!

Our text states that “God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.” That is what we need. **We need Divine Comfort.**

Not Escapism – Too many in crisis try to drown their pain with alcohol, gambling, pornography, or an affair. Escapism is not the answer.

Not Pop Psychology – We do not need cliches like, “Chin up,” “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” “There is a silver lining in every cloud.” It is not true.

We certainly appreciate the support of good friends and family, but we need something more. We need Divine Comfort

3. There Is a Stewardship of Comfort

²¹⁵ Jeremiah 29:11

²¹⁶ Deuteronomy 29:29

Do you know what I mean by that? This is an important biblical truth that most of us Christians have missed. You see, Christians are at the very core managers,²¹⁷ or to use the biblical word, *stewards*.²¹⁸ We own nothing;²¹⁹ God owns everything.²²⁰ We only manage what God entrusts to us. Listen to these words again, carefully, and you will see that God is saying that there is a stewardship of comfort.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, **so that** we can comfort those in any trouble **with** the comfort we ourselves have received from God. “For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”²²¹

Our pain, our suffering, our trials and the lessons we have learned from these experiences is not to be wasted, or buried in the sand. It is to be passed on. The same is true with comfort. There is a stewardship to comfort. God wants us to use the painful experiences that we have in life for his honour and glory. He wants us to channel that painful experience to help others who are going through the same thing. **God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.**

The last verse of our text (v. 5) says, “For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.” When a cup is filled beyond its capacity, whatever spills over the edge is the same as what is being poured in. That is a natural process that I can understand. But here is a supernatural process beyond my understanding. If suffering is poured into a Christian, the Christian will overflow, but what spills over is different from what is poured in. Suffering goes in but comfort comes out. This law of flow and overflow is expressed in 2 Corinthians 1:5, “For just as the sufferings of Christ **flow over** into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”

²¹⁷ Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 134.

²¹⁸ See the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25:14-30; The Parable of the Shrewd Manager, Luke 16:1-13.

²¹⁹ Job 1:21

²²⁰ Psalms 24:1

²²¹ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

The word for “flow over,” means “to exist in abundance, to exceed a certain measure, to remain.”²²² It is the same word used of the twelve baskets of food “left over” after Jesus miraculously fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish.²²³ When we experience tribulation as Christians, and suffering is poured into our lives, God will transform it by His supernatural grace and power. When trouble flows in, look to God for His overflowing comfort--first to us, then through us to others.

This morning I am challenging you to present yourselves to God saying, “God, help me to be a comforter like You.” Four times in his Gospel, John calls the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.²²⁴ As Christians we are called to imitate his nature and live like him.²²⁵ God’s purpose is to conform us back into the image of Christ²²⁶ as things were before the fall. Perhaps we are never more like God than when we are comforters, caring for others in crisis.

Now, as I have said, this morning I am launching my thesis project called “Equipping the Laity to Help Others in Crisis.” Every thesis project has a research component to it, which normally means there is a questionnaire. Friends, you have had experiences that I have not. Please let me learn from you. I pledge to you my confidentiality. I am asking you to tell me about your three most personal crises. (Go over the *Project Questionnaire* with the congregation).²²⁷

Help me to help (equip) you! I do not know if you have seen Tom Cruise in the movie *Jerry McGuire*, but a famous line was “Help me to help you.” So help me to help you so that we may be the comforters that God has called us to be. Remember, **God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.**

²²² David McCasland, “Flow and Overflow,” *Our Daily Bread*. (August 27, 1998): Cited Sept. 5, 2005.

Online: <http://www.rbc.org/odb/odb-08-27-98.shtml>.

²²³ John 6:12-13

²²⁴ John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7 King James Version

²²⁵ 1 John 2:6; Galatians 5:22,23; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Ephesians 5:1-2

²²⁶ Romans 8:29

²²⁷ See Appendix “A” on Page 99.

DARE TO CARE LIKE JESUS
Luke 10:30-37; September 18, 2005

Dare to Care Like Jesus! Caring is risky business. It takes courage to voluntarily step into someone else's crisis or mess and say, "Can I help you?" You have to be brave to offer comfort in times of calamity. The root meaning of comfort is the Latin *fortis* and *fortis* means brave.²²⁸ We get the word fortitude from it. You have to be brave or courageous to comfort. You have to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*. What a wonderful new worship banner in our sanctuary - *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

²²⁸ Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible - Corinthians*. (Burlington, Ont.: G.R. Welch Co. LTD., 1975),

A lot of us faint at emotional blood. A lot of us faint at physical blood. Do you remember the opening scene of the old TV drama “Quincy, MD?” It starred Jack Klagman as the investigative coroner who solves murders through forensic medicine. The opening scene each week on the trailer was a cadaver lying on a gurney table in the examining room with a sheet over the body. A host of medical students are gathered around the gurney table ready for instruction to start. Quincy whips the sheet off the body exposing the cadaver. One by one the students all pass out.

In the same way, many of us squirm at emotional blood, too. If our neighbour across the street is suddenly faced with a family death, a divorce, or a suicide we usually hesitate at getting involved. The fear of not knowing what to say or do is paralysing. But we are called to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

Caring is risky business. Jesus knew that, yet he compassionately paid the price to meet our deepest needs. When the expert in the law stood up to ask Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life,” the answer was 1) to love God above all else, and 2) to love your neighbour. Loving our neighbour is not always simple or easy. There are times when we have to be courageous like Christ, and *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

Caring like Jesus is not only risky, it is radical. Caring like Jesus is not as simple as just giving a donation to the Red Cross or the food bank, it is getting your hands dirty, it is getting involved, it is throwing your personal schedule out the window because there is an immediate crisis in someone’s life. Jesus tells us to follow the fine example of the good Samaritan. He tells us to go out and do the same. When someone needs help and God has placed that person in your path, then dare, radically dare, to care like Jesus.

There are several biblical stories that I could have used to demonstrate the fact that it takes guts to get involved in crisis. Most of the time our fears cripple us and rob us from the opportunity of 1) the joy of ministering in Jesus name, 2) the satisfaction of helping others or, 3) the privilege of administering the healing love and grace of the Saviour.

Here are some examples of radically caring, that is, caring at a price.

i) The Towel and Basin²²⁹ - Think of the courage it took to wash the feet of your betrayer.

ii) Talking to the Woman at the Well²³⁰- As Jesus dares to care for this woman he is crossing the boundaries of gender (a respectable man would not converse with a woman in a public place), race (there was racial tension between Jews and Samaritans) and social status (Jesus was associating with a most promiscuous woman).

iii)
Touchi
ng the

²²⁹ John 13:5

²³⁰ John 4:1-42

Leper
231 -
Jesus
was
risking
the
chance
of
being
infected.

iv) The Good Shepherd²³². - My favorite stained glass window in my home church when I was a boy was of Jesus the Good Shepherd. He had a rescued lamb reclining across his shoulders. One can only imagine the risk of the shepherd rescuing this helpless lamb from wild beasts as the Good Shepherd *lays his life*²³³ on the line for the lamb.

v) The Cross - Think of the courage it took for Jesus to leave the glory and comfort of heaven to literally associate with mankind for a while.

vi) The Good Samaritan - The Samaritan had several good reasons for not getting involved with the alleged victim that he encountered. First is the obvious reason that they were enemies. Because of cultural barriers they were, in fact, “arch-enemies.”²³⁴

Let me draw a modern day parallel. You are vacationing in Harlem and you find a half dead black man at two o’clock in the morning. How would it look if you, the only white man in sight, walked through Harlem with a beat up black man on your donkey? Is not there a gigantic risk that the locals will mistake you for the assailant rather than the

²³¹ Matthew 8:3

²³² John 10

²³³ This phrase is used five times in John 10 alone. The Good Shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. It is also used in Jn 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that one **lay** down his life for his friends.”

²³⁴ Geldenhuys, Norval. *The New International Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1979), 311.

rescuer? It takes courage to help in a crisis. It takes fortitude. It also takes, at times, finances. The Samaritan paid for two and a half months of caring at the inn.²³⁵

1. The Biblical Basis for Caring - Why would you *Dare to Care Like Jesus*? What would be your motivation? Why do you want to help in times of crisis? It is important to have the right reasons for caring. If we always need to feel safe and secure, or our need to be needed is greater than our motivation to care, then we may be manipulating (albeit unconsciously) the other person for our own presumed benefit.²³⁶ Our reasons for caring have to be biblical, not selfish.

i) “Go and Do Likewise” - Our first reason for caring is purely out of obedience to Christ. The very essence of the parable of the Good Samaritan is a battle cry for all of us to minister on the front lines to those in crisis. We are, as Jesus said, “To go out and do the same.”

ii) The Great Commandments - Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

These two great pillars are at the very heart of our faith. How can we love our neighbour and not care for his or her needs during a crisis? To love your neighbour as yourself is to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

iii) Jesus’ Opening Declaration and Description of His Ministry - Luke 4:16-21 is central to the church’s essence of faith. Notice that Jesus came to care for us in crises.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. (a crisis)

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners (a crisis)

and recovery of sight for the blind (a crisis),

to release the oppressed (a crisis),

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

iv) The Church is, by Definition, a Caring Community. - The early church saw caring and healing as a primary emphasis to their total being.²³⁷ We are the body. We are Jesus’ hands and feet. We are called to carry each other's burdens (or crisis), and in this

²³⁵ Morris, Leon. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries - Luke*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 190.

²³⁶ Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 25.

²³⁷ Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), 11.

way we will fulfill the law of Christ.²³⁸ We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and when crises come to weep with those who weep.²³⁹

Peter was asked three times if he truly loved the Saviour. If we do sincerely love Him then we are called to “care for” or, literally, “shepherd” his sheep.²⁴⁰

Caring was considered so foundational to the early church that the first church fight broke out in Acts chapter 6 when the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were not being cared for as they should be. The first church fight broke out because the caring barometer had sensed a low pressure system, and the first seven deacons were chosen.²⁴¹

2. The Prerequisite for Caring. What skills or tools are mandatory for the effectiveness of caring? Let me give you a template for caring that you can use regardless of circumstances. In the next few weeks we are going to talk about caring for others when there is death, sudden illness, suicide, addiction, homosexuality, depression, divorce, etc. I want to talk about what prerequisites or tools we will need to use in any situation. Now the Good Samaritan is a wonderful model on how to care for those in crisis. Let me use the example of the Good Samaritan and add other teachings from the New Testament.

i) Courage - we have already seen that we need courage to care. Our caring is always limited by the nature and intensity of our own needs and our repressed feelings and conflicts.²⁴² Therefore, you will need to understand yourself better and overcome your own fears and hang ups if you are going to help someone else. You need courage. Courage comes from being filled with Christ.²⁴³

ii) Holy Spirit - The Holy Spirit had not yet come during the parable of the Good Samaritan, however the primary counsellor (comforter) in caring is always the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁴ You need to be led by the Holy Spirit, to depend on the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, before you go to help someone in crisis you need to pray for guidance, strength, wisdom and grace. You want to work in cooperation with

²³⁸ Galatians 6:2

²³⁹ Romans 12:15

²⁴⁰ John 21:16 Compare the NASB with the NIV.

²⁴¹ Acts 6:1-6

²⁴² Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), 22.

²⁴³ Philippians 4:13

²⁴⁴ Kollar Charles A. *Solution - Focused Pastoral Counselling*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 7.

the primary care giver, the Holy Spirit. The Scripture says, “But the **Comforter**, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”²⁴⁵

iii) Ministry of Presence - The Good Samaritan could have done a shabby job at caring and still it would have been more commendable than the priest or the Levite simply because he did something. He took him to the inn. Most people’s fears prevent them from getting involved. Panic sets in while we ask ourselves, “What do I say, what do I do?” The fact is that the most important part of caring for others in crisis is just being there. Simply say, “I just did not want you to be alone right now.” Being *with* a person is at times the most significant thing you can do. It is called incarnational ministry. We know that God cares for us because he came to be *with* us. Remember what the angel told Joseph that the Saviour would be called in the Christmas story? “They will call him Immanuel—which means, God with us.”²⁴⁶

Little Johnny runs into his parent’s bedroom terrified from the thunder storm. His father says, “It is ok, Johnny there is nothing to be afraid of, you go back to your bedroom, God is with you.” Little Johnny replies, “I know that God is with me but right now I need someone with skin on.”

Too often we do the same thing when someone we know goes through a crisis. We say God will be with them. But what they need is someone with skin on. You are the body of Christ, you are his hands, you are his feet, you are his skin.

James 2:15-17 says, Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Now let me paraphrase this passage. “Suppose a brother or sister is in the middle of a crisis. And you say “Go, I wish you well; I will pray for you,” but does nothing about his crisis, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

iv) Active Listening - The importance of listening was not part of the Good Samaritan story because the victim was half dead. However, you will find that listening is a major part of caring for those in crisis. James 1:19 says, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” God has given us two ears and only one mouth. Perhaps a good rule of thumb is to listen to others twice as much as we offer advice. And when it comes to those in crisis, listening is even more critical.

Do you remember the story of Job? In one day he lost his ten children, his livestock of over 11,000 animals, and his health, and most of his hired hands were

²⁴⁵ John 14:26 KJV

²⁴⁶ Matthew 1:23

murdered. In one day he was totally wiped out. His three best friends came and practised the ministry of presence with him for seven days.

Job 2:11-13 When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

For seven days these three were his best friends. Then they opened their mouths and the quality of their care giving went down the toilet from there. Do not feel that you have to say anything. In fact, here is a good axiom, “The harder the impact the longer you bite your tongue.”

Simply listen and be present with them. The correct time to answer the deep theological questions of life is not during the numbness of crisis. When someone asks, “Why did God do this?” Simply listen and be present.

v) Respect - The Bible says “Show proper respect to everyone.”²⁴⁷ A deep human need is respect, prizing others simply because they are human.²⁴⁸ We are to extend respect regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Sometimes we bring crisis on ourselves from our poor decision making. Sometimes we could have averted the calamity with simple common sense. However, it is crucial in caring to suspend critical judgement. The Good Samaritan showed respect for this half dead Jew by caring for him regardless of his race or the circumstances of his misery. He suspended critical judgment and simply did what needed to be done.

There will come a time, after you earn trust, to give advice or sound judgment. However, at the beginning of a crisis, you value the hurting simply because they are human beings. Be careful of self-righteous attitudes. What you do is secondary to the attitude with which you do it.²⁴⁹

vi Empathy - The difference between the priest or the Levite and the Good Samaritan is that the Samaritan “took pity” on the victim. It matters not whether you use the word pity, or compassion or mercy. It literally means to “have one’s heart go out to

²⁴⁷ 1 Peter 2:17

²⁴⁸ Egan, Gerald. *The Skilled Helper* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1995), 55.

²⁴⁹ Stanton Jones and Richard Butman. *Modern Psychotherapies*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 263.

someone.”²⁵⁰ You are so moved by what you have witnessed you get squeamish on the inside and your emotions compel you to act. A vital tool in care giving is empathy. In every situation where you want to reach out and help you will need to empathize.

Empathy is identifying with and entering into another’s feelings and situation. Empathy comes from the Greek *empathēia*²⁵¹ (*en-* in + *pathos* feeling). It is entering into another’s feelings, imagining what it must be like. It is related to the word sympathy. However, sympathy means you have had the same feelings yourself (*syn* = together + *pathos* = feeling).

Again, techniques in care giving are secondary to the helper’s attitudes, sensitivities and skills. It is true that people do not care how much you know, they just want to know how much you care. If you truly care for someone during their crisis you will want to connect with them emotionally. You do this through empathy, entering into their suffering circumstances with them, emotionally and psychologically.

vii) Self Disclosure - If you can easily identify with a sufferer’s plight the last thing that you should do is ramble on about your own similar trauma. After all, the present pain is not about you, so you do not want to dominate the focus of attention. However, stating something simple like, “My father died last year too, it was very hard” will be very helpful. You can connect with the sufferer, but do not give details.

viii) Confrontation – There are times, if we genuinely want to help those in crisis, that we must challenge²⁵² their wrong thinking or self destructive actions. Such correction is extremely difficult to execute in such a way that it will be receptive. You must be sure that you are the right person to give such advice. Make sure that you have plenty of relational currency with the individual. For your advice to be receptive the other person must truly believe that you have their best in mind and that your motives are altruistic.

For example, if someone has lost a spouse suddenly, now is not the time to enter into another intimate relationship. Most people need at least a year of grieving so that they are emotionally stable enough to make such a significant decision as marrying someone else. The right person with the right tact is vital when challenging the self destructive actions of someone who is numb from the intense pain of crisis.

Conclusion - Caring like Jesus is risky business. When you offer to help someone in crisis you never know what you are getting yourself into. Caring like Jesus is radical

²⁵⁰ Swanson, James. *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, Vol. 7 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.2001), 548.

²⁵¹ *World Book Dictionary* (Toronto, Ontario: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1981), 691.

²⁵² 2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

business. It may cost you time, money, and lots of energy. It certainly cost the Good Samaritan. Jesus, through this story, tells us why we should care, why we should go out and do the same, because we are our brother's keeper; because we are neighbours. And the great commandment tells us we are to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Jesus tells us through this parable, and the rest of the New Testament, not only *why* we should care but *how*. We have mentioned several biblical and practical techniques in caring. These techniques can be summarized by saying simply practice incarnational ministry. You are Jesus' hands and feet. Be Jesus to people. Go out and do the same as He would. *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

CARING WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES

John 11: 17-37; September 25, 2005

Listen very closely to me, church. You – are – priests! If you are a Christian, you are God’s priests. Do you understand who you are? Before God gave Moses the Ten Laws, he instructed Moses to tell the people they were to be a kingdom of priests.²⁵³ The New Testament repeats this theme twice in 1 Peter 2:5,9.

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV) But you are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

At the conclusion of the holy Scriptures, God echoes the same theme again, not wanting Christians to forget that they are a kingdom of priests.

Rev 1:6 (NIV) (Christ) has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God & Father—to him be glory & power for ever & ever! Amen.

Primarily, a priest is a person who mediates between God and another person. A priest is a channel of forgiveness, grace, mercy, and healing.²⁵⁴ A priest provides pastoral care. This is what God has called every believer to do and to be. “You are priests.” Every member of the body of Christ is a minister or a priest.²⁵⁵ My prayer is that we would fulfill our role as God’s healing agents, that we would all *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

The overall, number one, personal crisis that you have shared with me (through the project questionnaire) is the death of a loved one. This is no surprise. So let us step back and look at the topic of grief so that we can be better equipped to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

1. Grief Is Universal. Grief is normal. Every person, at sometime in his/her life, grieves. The Bible is a realistic book which often describes the deaths and grieving

²⁵³ Exodus 19:6

²⁵⁴ Bruce Larson, Paul Anderson and Doug Self. *Mastering Pastoral Care*. (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1990), 126.

²⁵⁵ 1 Cor. 12:7 “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good..”
1 Cor. 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

circumstances of various Bible characters. Everyone grieves. It is not true that spiritual people do not grieve or do not need comfort. Some in our church family have been surprised by how long the grief process takes after their spouse has died. But the Bible has always been clear that everybody grieves.

Psalm 23:4 reminds us of the presence and comfort of God as we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Why does it remind us of this? Because we all need such comfort. During such times we all need his presence. Isaiah 53:3 reminds us that the Messiah was to be “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.” Why does it say this? Because the Saviour came to establish a connection with mankind and everybody suffers. So did he. John 11:35 of our morning text reminds us with clarity and in the simplicity of two words, that “Jesus wept.” Everyone grieves, even Jesus.

Grieving is normal, **so do not stifle the emotions of grief.** They need to come out in appropriate ways. Do not bottle it up or your grief will eat away at you. And please, do not prevent others from grieving. Allow grief to be expressed, even through expressions that may seem odd or bizarre to you, as long as they are not hurting themselves.²⁵⁶ Talk about the loved one. Most people will not. Give the family opportunities to remember.

I have a family member who, when his brother died, never talked about it. His brother’s name was not mentioned for about five years. That is unhealthy. Speaking about one’s shock, pain, sadness, anger or even crying in the presence of each other is strengthening for the family. Mentioning the name of the deceased does not cause pain; the pain is there already.²⁵⁷

Since grief is so common you might think that grief is a well understood experience,²⁵⁸ but it is not.

2. Grief Is Unique. Everyone does not act in the same way to the loss of a loved one. There is no standardized way to grieve. Grief is unique therefore, **never say, “I know exactly how you feel.”** Making this is probably one of the most common mistakes in caring. People sincerely are trying to comfort but unfortunately the comment more often than not stings instead of soothes. This is for two reasons: First, you do not know how they feel. A young lady was lamenting to me one day about how this comment had hurt her after her father’s death. A girl friend had come up to her and said, “I know exactly how you feel.” But the comment only inflicted more pain. The lamenting young woman said to me, “How does she know how I feel, her father walked her down the aisle but I will never have my daddy walk me down the aisle.”

²⁵⁶ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 149.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁵⁸ Collins, Gary. *Christian Counselling*. (Waco Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1980), 411.

A second reason why this platitude is one that you must be very careful in using is that even if you think you know how someone feels you are not respecting their feelings by saying so. Not that long ago, I had lunch with a friend. I shared a personal heartache with this individual. The response I got was “Oh, everybody goes through that.” My feelings and anguish were brushed aside. It was very disappointing. Please acknowledge and validate a person’s grief. Do not belittle it.

Grief is unique, but what are some of the factors that make it unique? What is it that determines the variety of responses to how we react to grief?

i) Circumstances Surrounding the Death:

- a) Was the death anticipated or sudden?
- b) The age of the deceased.
- c) Your relationship to the deceased.

ii) The Background of the Griever. How was grief modelled for this person in the past?

iii) The Personality of the Griever. People who are insecure, dependent, unable to control or express feelings and prone to depression often have more difficulty handling their grief.

iv) The Beliefs of the Griever. Feelings are a product of our thinking. Albert Ellis, postulates that our perceptions of events affect our behaviour more than the events themselves. Ellis maintains that you feel the way you think²⁵⁹ If we think a monster is in the closet or a bogeyman is under the bed we will be scared of the dark. This probably describes all of us when we were small. But now we know there is nothing there and our feelings have adjusted accordingly. Feelings are a product of our beliefs.

Therefore, your beliefs about death and Jesus’ conquering of death are paramount. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. **Do you believe this?**"²⁶⁰

Your beliefs, that is, your faith affects your feelings. That is why you pray with people when they are grieving, that is why you tactfully share Scripture with them when tragedy comes. You want to give them truth because truth affects feelings and brings comfort. Jesus told us this plainly when he said “Truth shall set you free.”²⁶¹

So, grief is unique. Let us test this truth with our text in John 11. Did Mary and Martha respond in the same way to the death of their brother or did they act differently? Verse 20 says that “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him,

²⁵⁹ Weiten, Wayne, ed. *Psychology – Themes & Variations*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth Publishers, 2004), 552

²⁶⁰ John 11:25, 26

²⁶¹ John 8:32

but Mary stayed at home.” Notice how they handled their grief differently, one went out and the other stayed at home. Be careful not to expect everyone to grieve like you do.

How do we *Dare to Care Like Jesus* when a loved one dies?

1. Respect the Person’s Feelings. How would you describe the feelings of Martha and Mary? Do you not think that they were a little angry with Jesus. Notice that both of them said the exact same thing as a greeting to Jesus. The first words out of their mouths were, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” First Martha states this in verse 21 and then later when Mary greets Jesus she says the same thing in verse 32. Notice how there is a little innuendo of blame in the tone of their voices. But Jesus did not respond and say, “Now Martha, now Mary, this is not my fault.” He did not correct them. He absorbed the hurt. He suspended critical judgment. He respected their feelings whether they were right or wrong. We need to do the same. When people are in crisis they often lunge out from the pain and attack. We need God’s shock absorbers of love.

2. Empathize With The Hurting. Notice three times in the text Jesus is emotionally connected to those who are grieving. He enters into their suffering and pain.

i) v. 33 “When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews ... with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved** in spirit and troubled.” Jesus is not using a psychological tool or technique here. He is not saying to himself, “Oh, I should be empathetic about now.” No, this is who he is. He genuinely feels their sorrow.

ii) v. 35 **Jesus wept.** 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

iii) v. 38 Jesus, once more **deeply moved**, came to the tomb.

What other practical ways can we demonstrate caring to those in grief?

3. Visit Often. The text tells us that Jesus stayed two more days before leaving to visit the family. The very purpose of him tarrying was so that the glory of God may be demonstrated.²⁶² Jesus had a reason to tarry but we do not. When someone dies, visit immediately. Jesus says in Matthew 25:36 with words of appreciation and commendation, “I was sick and you visited me.”

Remember, the survivors need a loving presence more than answers. Be present but do not preach. You will not be able to explain away the death or “fix” the situation. Do not get theological. Be resigned to walk beside the family rather than trying to raise them above the situation. Your number one ministry is a “Ministry of Presence.” It is an incarnational ministry. You represent the presence of God. You are his hands and feet.

Your greatest gift may be a warm touch, a sympathetic tear, an errand run, or your silent company. It is after the funeral, when friends and family get back to their

²⁶² John 11:4, 11, 40

responsibilities that the widow or widower experiences the greatest loneliness. Visit often, include them in your activities.

4. Send a Card with a Short Note of Encouragement. In it share a personal memory of the deceased. In some ways it is better than a phone call because it can be saved. During the long lonely evenings it can be read again and again.

5. Do Acts of Kindness. Drop off a casserole. Mow the lawn. Babysit the kids. Find a need and fill it.

6. Avoid Platitudes. Stay clear of cliches. We have already mentioned that the number one cliché to avoid is, “I know how you feel.” Other statements that we often carelessly use are: “It was for the best.” “It was meant to be.” “God must have wanted another little angel in heaven or a flower in his garden.” These kind of statements make light of a tragedy and tend to paint God as a tyrant who toys with our lives.

A miscarriage is another time when we try to say something that soothes but often instead leaves a sting. Things like, “At least you can get pregnant, you are young; you can try again, or there was probably something wrong with the baby. It is nature’s way.” The problem with such cliches is that they brush aside or ignore one’s feelings. They minimize the sense of loss and downplay the significance of the death.

7. Recognize That Grieving Is a Long Process. There is no quick fix for the pain of grief. In my experience it takes between two to five years before most widows have more good days than bad ones. 1 Thess 5:14 says to “Encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” Grieving takes time.

I find that many have their expectations too high. The separation of death in marriage can be a time when the heart is torn in two. Have you ever seen layers of plywood ripped apart. It is never a clean break! There is always part of one layer of the plywood that is on each half of the ripped sheet. That is what it is like for many widows. It takes a long time for them to be able to “breathe” again. Healing comes very slowly.

Keep these sermon notes for future reference. They will come in handy some day soon. They will remind you that grief is universal and part of everyday life in our society. These notes will also remind you that grief is unique in every situation. These are great practical tips on how to administer God’s healing, mercy and love. Remember you are priests. He wants to minister to others through you. So, when tragedy strikes a neighbour, do not let the anxiety of not knowing what to do paralyse you. Take “courage” let God help you “comfort.” Be brave and be an agent of his grace. You can be a profound blessing, if you only “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

CARING WHEN THERE IS CRITICAL ILLNESS
Matthew 4:18-25; October 2, 2005

Did you notice during the Scripture reading the two apparently separate events. First there was the calling of the first disciples: Peter, Andrew, James and John. Then there was the account of Jesus doing ministry and caring for people with various diseases. I cannot help but see the connection between these two passages of Scripture. To me there is a strong link or correlation between the **Calling** and the ministry of **Caring**. Did you catch the relationship of the call of the disciples followed by Jesus healing the sick. Can you see how one flows into the other?

Gods calls us as disciples and then trains us to care for a hurting world and the critically ill. We are called to “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*” The pages of Scripture are filled with those who have serious health issues. Our text tells us the scope and breadth of the hurting with these words.

Matt 4:24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them. So the ill are brought to Jesus. But it is not just one way. In each of the Gospels Jesus also sends his disciples to go to the hurting. A little later in the his ministry it says,

Matthew 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions... 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.

Freely you have received, freely give.

Mark 6:7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits... 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Luke 9:1 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Jesus calls his disciples and immediately trains them to "*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*" He says, "Freely you have received, freely give." 2 Corinthians 1:3 says the same thing.

2 Cor 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

In other words, God has freely given us comfort and we are to freely give comfort to others. Remember, four times in the Gospel of John Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Comforter."²⁶³ Perhaps we are never more like God than when we comfort in the name of Jesus. Perhaps we are never more Christian than when we "*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*"

God's concern for the sick can be seen in the fact that almost one fifth of the Gospel is devoted to the topic of healing.

When sickness comes, it comes in one of two ways. There is **gradual** sickness when we have time to prepare and adjust or there is **instantaneous** illness. We could say this in another way. Sickness can be chronic (meaning long time: we get the word chronology from chronos) or acute (a word that means "having a sharp point"). Acute sickness is kind of like wham, bam, shazam and we are hit with the bad news. It is very sharp. These two types of illnesses are different in circumstances but each powerfully traumatic and hard to deal with.

Examples of Critical Illness

²⁶³ John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7 King James Version

1) Cancer: How many times have all of us had an unusual pain, a kind of pain that we have never had before and the first thing that pops into our mind is the worry of getting the dreaded news of the big “C.”

2) AIDS/HIV - Did you know over fifty percent of people with AIDS are women and children? One in every three hundred in North American have the HIV virus. That means whether we are aware of it or not, probably all of us know someone with HIV. Everyone with HIV will eventually develop AIDS. AIDS is fatal and incurable. And death is usually quite painful and often lonely.

Rick Warren says that he believes the HIV/AIDS pandemic is the church’s greatest opportunity to visibly demonstrate God’s love to skeptics.²⁶⁴ As members of God’s family we must choose to care, not whom we care for. AIDS has often been compared to the social outcast ramifications of leprosy in the Bible. I believe if Jesus was on earth here today, people with AIDS would be on the top of his caring list. Should it not be on the top of ours?

3) Serious Injury - e.g car accidents. These kinds of critical illnesses are both acute and chronic. The impact is both overwhelmingly sudden and long term, even life altering. Jeremiah 10:19 says, “Woe to me because of my injury! My wound is incurable! Yet I said to myself, ‘This is my sickness, and I must endure it’.”

4) Teen Pregnancy - Not technically an illness, but we would all admit that it is a crisis.

Individuals normally exist in a state of reasonable equilibrium within established boundaries, based on a certain order and understanding of the world. A “critical incident” (traumatic event) throws people out of equilibrium into a crisis state that makes it difficult to restore a sense of balance. Therefore, **do not expect people to be spiritual or say and do the right things.**

I want to share with you this morning something that applies to just about every crisis. I could have mentioned everything that I am going to say this morning during last week’s message “Caring When a Loved One Dies,” but time prevented it. However I did say this last week, and I want to expand on it this morning, that **Grief is a Process.** Adjusting to crisis and especially a critical incident is a process. Most often it is a psychological-biological process.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Rick Warren, “Six Ways Your Church Can Attack the AIDS Crisis,” n.p. [cited Sept. 27, 2005].

Online: <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=217>

²⁶⁵ Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), 88.

The person going thru a critical illness is wondering about the meaning of life and their existence. Grief impacts you physically, mentally, biologically (your body chemistry) and spiritually. By understanding the “Grief Process” you can better **empathize** with a sufferer, know their **needs**, and avoid harmful **cliches**.

I am going to share with you a five stage grief model by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler – Ross. Her landmark book on *Death and Dying* in 1969 is the standard on the grieving process.²⁶⁶ However let me give you one caution. Not everyone *has* experienced these five emotions, not everyone *must* experience these five emotions, not everyone *will* experience these five emotions and not everyone *should* experience these five emotions.

I will give you this popular model on the five stages of grief and after each stage I will give you what I believe are the Bible’s antidotes to each stage.

FIVE STAGE GRIEF MODEL (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross)

Stage 1. Shock and Denial – This is the stage when we say, “Not me, it cannot be true.” Psychologically and Emotionally it is very tough.

What is shock? It is when the blood pressure drops and the proper blood flow does not get to the vital organs (brain). You are told some devastating news and you react as if you were physically hit by a baseball bat. You are stunned and go into shock. Shock is God’s way of protecting the individual from the immediate and full impact of the event or loss.²⁶⁷

It is an acceptable guest, but not a welcome long-term visitor.²⁶⁸ Prolonged shock always kills you. But in the short term, shock and numbness insulate the bereaved person, allowing them to gradually absorb the magnitude of the loss.²⁶⁹ Feelings of loneliness, isolation, helplessness are at times overwhelming and shock gives you time to adjust to the blow. It can become so overwhelming that you may think that you are losing your mind, that you are going to go crazy. But it is okay. It is not normal to act normal in an abnormal situation. You are not crazy, the situation is crazy.

Now friends, you cannot expect yourself or anyone else to be spiritual when one is in shock, when you have been hit by a psychological truck, so extend grace. Let folks in the midst of crisis ventilate vertically to God. The Psalmist did. Do not correct him/her. Do not say, “O honey you do not believe that.”

²⁶⁶ Collins, Gary. *Christian Counselling*. (Waco Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1980), 411.

²⁶⁷ Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 18.

²⁶⁸ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 162.

²⁶⁹ Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 18.

During such times of calamity there may be several crying spells. That is okay, too. Tears cleanse the body of toxins while providing an important release of tension.²⁷⁰ Tears are the safety valves of the heart when too much pressure is laid on it.²⁷¹

The Antidote to Shock - Ministry of Presence

Isaiah 43:2 (NIV) When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’

Psalms 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

No one wants to be alone when they are in pain, physically, psychologically or emotionally. Just as the presence of God is a comfort to us when we are afraid, so we can be a comfort to others by simply standing with them in trials and tribulations.

Stage 2. Anger and Frustration – This is the “Why me?” stage. There is rage and resentment. If we are the ones who are dying there is even envy of those who are not dying. The person’s pain is projected on to others. This reaction of the suffering will be particularly difficult for you to handle personally if you are trying to *Dare to Care Like Jesus* because often those in turmoil will be quite irritable, complain about everything and blame you for their predicament. Nurses can tell you about patients who are “difficult and ungrateful.” They frequently receive angry reactions from patients as they try to care for them.

The Antidote - Respect and Validate their feelings. Suspend Critical Judgment. Extend grace and forgiveness. It takes the grace of Christ to be able to care for someone who is grieving and angry and frustrated. You will need grace from Him who said, “Father forgive them, for they do not realize what they are doing, they do not realize what they are saying.” Remember, Jesus said this when the nails were being driven into his flesh.

Here are two more verses that will help you to absorb the attacks of those afflicted in pain. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 18.

²⁷¹ Albert Smith cited in *New Dictionary of Thoughts*, Tryon Edwards ed. (New York: Standard Books Co., 1954).

multitude of sins.” Proverbs 15:1 tells us, “A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Stage 3. Bargaining – Guilt. During this stage there is a last effort at overcoming death by "earning" longer life. We bargain with God saying things like, “God, if you will heal me then I will go to church every Sunday or be a missionary in Africa.” There may also be feelings of guilt - that the sufferer may deserve his/her fate because of some failure, e.g., moral failure before God, failure to take care of his/her body or failure to be a good parent, spouse or friend.

The Antidote - The Need to Receive Forgiveness. We need to let God forgive us. We also need to forgive ourselves and let go and let God be God.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Stage 4. Depression – Proverbs 18:14 says, “A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” I’m not talking about clinical depression here where the chemistry in your body is out of whack. I’m talking about situational depression. Depression is somewhat appropriate in the grief process. It has some protective and positive qualities in the short term. Dr. Alan Wolfelt writes, “Depression is nature’s way of allowing for a time-out while one works to heal the wounds of grief. Depression shuts down the physiological and prevents major organ systems from being damaged.”²⁷²

The Antidote - Engage in Life How can you help a friend in this stage? Help those who are grieving resist the temptation to isolate themselves and completely withdraw from others. Find ways to help them engage with life. Include them in your outings that are non- threatening. Invite them to church where they will hear good news, hope, eternal life and peace. Psalm 122:1 says, “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’”

Stage 5. Acceptance – I am not talking about Kubler-Ross’s idea of acceptance. Not the “It is me and I accept it.” I am talking about an acceptance based on letting go because you trust in a sovereign and loving God.

²⁷² Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Pub., (1997), 21.

The Prayer of Serenity on the walls of many of our homes says, “God, grant me the peace to **accept** the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

It is saying “Lord, I accept this. I do not know why. But I believe you when you said your plan for me is abundant life.²⁷³ I do not know why but I do know how. It is through the strength and sustaining grace of Christ. For I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.²⁷⁴

As we come to the Lord’s Table this morning, we know that our Saviour endured the full impact of grief. In the garden of Gethsemane he prayed earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.²⁷⁵ Matthew tells us that Christ was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.²⁷⁶ We have a Saviour who understands all about grief. The table spread before us is a demonstration of real love. Real love is caring with sacrifice. Real love is and has always been a mother stumbling to her baby’s crib for the fifth time in one night, or a passenger giving up his place on a life boat to save someone else for a sinking ship. Real love is Christ on a cross dying for us.²⁷⁷

The words on our altar say, “Do this in remembrance of me.” What are we to do? This morning we are reminded that our calling is directly connected to our caring. If we do not care, we are not part of the called. Part of our doing (Do this in remembrance of Me) for Jesus is caring in his name. I trust that when your neighbour is struggling with grief that you will “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

²⁷³ John 10:10

²⁷⁴ Phil. 4:13

²⁷⁵ Luke 22:44

²⁷⁶ Matt. 26:38

²⁷⁷ Warren, Rick. *Better Together*. (Lake Forest, California: PurposeDriven Publishing, 2004), 16.

CARING WHEN THERE IS SUICIDE – Part 1
1 Samuel 31:1-13; October 16, 2005

I am a bit nervous this morning. Especially since I know that at least seven of our church families have walked through the tremendous pain of a suicide. There are some families who have stayed away today because the topic is too close to home and not enough time has elapsed since the event. On the one hand I wanted to avoid this topic myself out of fear of saying the wrong thing. But on the other hand one of the reasons that the pain of suicide is so hard to heal is because we do not talk about it. We shove the pain way down deep and pretend it is not there. It only prolongs the healing. We must talk about it.

My expectations are high this morning. My goals may be a bit unrealistic; but this is what I want to do.

I. Answer, **“What does the Bible say about Suicide?”** What does it not say?

II. I want to give you a little **Suicide Awareness**: What are the facts of suicide in Canada? What are some myths that we can destroy? What we need is proper understanding and wisdom. Proverbs 24:3-4 says, “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.” That is exactly what we need when it comes to caring for those who have grieved through a suicide. We need knowledge of the facts, understanding of what it is like to lose a loved one to suicide and wisdom to care effectively in the name of Christ.

III. I want to equip you to **Care for the Family of a Suicide Victim.**

IV. Lastly, I want to equip you to **Care for the Person Who Has Suicidal Thoughts.**

Well, I do not want to do much this morning, do I? It is a tall order. Some of these topics are going to overlap. Let us get started.

I. What Does the Bible Say about Suicide?

I have to be honest, it was a challenge to decide which passage of Scripture to use on this topic of suicide. Do I use one of the seven suicides recorded in the Bible (six in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament)? Let us briefly recall these together.

i) Saul's suicide is recorded twice (1 Sam 31; 1 Chron 10). He fell on his sword. Tim Clinton, the president of the American Association of Christian Counsellors says that because Saul had turned away from God he was left completely to his own devices.²⁷⁸ He had great potential as the chosen king of Israel, but he squandered it with jealousy, anger, and disobedience. In the end, when all was lost, he believed that there was nowhere to turn but to death. Suicide is attractive to the desperate person. Such people need to be shown God's gracious love and forgiveness.

ii) Saul's armour bearer. Recorded in the same passages. (1 Sam 31; 1 Chron 10).

iii) Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon and a concubine, who lived a life of violence that finally caught up with him and took his own life like Saul after he was wounded in battle (Judges 9:1-57).

iv) Ahithophel who took his own life when Absalom did not receive his counsel (2 Sam 17:23).

v) Zimri, king of Israel chose to burn his palace and kill himself rather than be captured by enemies (1 Kgs. 16:18).

vi) Judas Iscariot was filled with remorse and despair when he realized he had betrayed innocent blood and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5).

It is important to note that none of these six suicides was viewed favourably or as a legitimate option, even in the most difficult of times.²⁷⁹ Unfortunately these examples are not "typical" (if I can use that word) of suicides today. But they do open our eyes to the fact of suicide being in the Bible. Let us open our eyes a little bit more. Let us look at two more situations in the Bible.

vii) Samson; who technically also committed suicide bringing the roof down on himself. What is most difficult about this passage is that Samson prayed to God for help to complete the task (Judges 16:28-30).

²⁷⁸ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 386.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 322.

viii) Jesus. One of the three temptations that he endured during those 40 days of trials and testings could be considered a temptation of suicide. Satan took him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said... “If you are the Son of God throw yourself down. For it is written He has given his angels charge over you.”²⁸⁰ Again it is not a usual circumstance of suicide where depression and despair are present, but the reality is that Jesus was tempted to jump, if we believe that these temptations are real and I believe they were. His reasons for doing so are different from others who commit self injury or suicide but the temptation was there.

Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” The Bible says, “every way.” Why do I mention this?

I am trying to normalize those who have thoughts on suicide. People who have suicidal thoughts do not tell anyone. They think they are the only ones with such bizarre thoughts. They are too scared to talk to anyone about it out of fear that people will laugh at them or think they are crazy. So I want you to know that Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He was without sin. Many others struggle with such thoughts as we will see.

Some have described suicide as a permanent solution to a temporary problem. From a Christian perspective, however, suicide is not permanent and solves nothing. Each individual is created in God’s image and is an immortal being with responsibilities and accountability beyond the grave.

What Does the Bible Not Say? First and foremost, suicide is not the unpardonable sin! Nowhere in the Bible does it say this. From my reading, I believe that it is hardest theologically for someone with a Roman Catholic background.²⁸¹

Many folks struggle with hopelessness, sadness, anger, loneliness. Added to this in eighty percent of all suicides is the factor of mental illness.²⁸² The world in the mind of the suicidal person is not the real world but a radical distortion of it. Studies by scientists at the Royal Ottawa Hospital claim that a mutated gene may lead to suicide²⁸³. Surely suicide must be seen from a mental health perspective and not solely from a theological perspective. Our focus is how to care for those who are impacted from this unspeakable tragedy.

²⁸⁰ Matthew 4:5

²⁸¹ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 76.

²⁸² Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 28

²⁸³ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 99.

However, even from a theological view we are reminded by the words of the Apostle Paul who said, “For I am convinced that neither **death nor life**, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation**, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”²⁸⁴ Suicide is not the unpardonable sin.

II. Suicide Awareness: What Are the Facts? Are there some myths?

It seems that some health issues have huge unfair stigmas attached to them, a mark or token of disgrace, or reproach. Why is there such a stigma or taboo of shame with such things as suicide, depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibro myalgia, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or even individuals with hyper allergenic problems? These stigmas are mostly from a combination of ignorance, lack of information and misunderstanding.

When Canadian General Roméo Dallaire, commander of the United Nations coalition forces, came back from the Rwanda genocide in 1994, he eventually started having suicidal tendencies. He could no longer live with the psychological pain of everything he witnessed. He was diagnosed with PTSD. In the documentary, Witness the Evil, he said, “I wish I had come back with my arm or leg blown off, then people would know and understand that I was a casualty of war. But because I got my marbles scrambled, and my injury is not physical or visible, no one understood what I was going through. Help was hard to find.”²⁸⁵

Correct information kills stigma and allows healing to take place.

What is Suicide? Let us break down the meaning of a family of words: homicide, suicide, genocide insecticide. Each is a compound, that is, two words cemented together. Homicide comes from the Latin “homo,” which means “man” (homo sapien) and “cide,” to cut or kill. Suicide is “self-kill” while genocide is the wiping out of an entire generation.

²⁸⁴ Romans 8:38-39

²⁸⁵ “Witness the Evil,” National Defence Headquarters – Ottawa: A Canadian Forces Production, Video #31-0898, 1999. See also – Dallaire, Roméo. *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*. Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2003.

I believe that suicide is probably the biggest hurt known to mankind.²⁸⁶ The death of a child creates the highest stressors known to mankind. Add to the death of a child the scenario of a suicide and you have exponential pain. Eighty percent of families who experience the death of a child will not recover from it intact.²⁸⁷ This particular tragedy will facilitate the break-up of most homes in which it occurs.²⁸⁸ However it also has the potential to strengthen families as they draw love and support from each other.

Losing a child at anytime wields a blow like nothing else on earth. Suicide compounds the pain even more because of the following factors:

- i) You grieve both the loss of the loved one and the method by which it happened.
- ii) The question “Why?” becomes more pervasive.
- iii) There is increased fear for other family members to die of suicide.
- iv) With a suicide, grief is accompanied by substantial guilt.

Let us expose some common suicide myths.²⁸⁹

Myth: Young people rarely think about suicide.

Reality: Teens and suicide are more closely linked than adults might expect. In a survey of 15,000 grade 7 to 12 students in British Columbia, thirty-four percent knew of someone who had attempted or died by suicide; sixteen percent had seriously considered suicide; fourteen percent had made a suicide plan and seven percent had made an attempt. Young people are actually a high suicidal risk.

Myth: Talking about suicide will enhance the likelihood. It will give a young person the idea, or permission, to consider suicide as a solution to their problems.

²⁸⁶ Though this message was preached on October 16, 2005, this chapter was formatted in late December.

Prolific in the sports news this week was the apparent suicide of James Dungy, the eighteen year old son of Tony Dungy, coach of the NFL's league leading Indianapolis Colts. Coach Dungy is immensely popular around the league and known for his soft-spoken style and commitment to balancing family life with football -- a rare trait in NFL coaches. Reading all the dozens of quotes from those in the football world that genuinely know Coach Dungy has reminded me of the unspeakable pain of suicide.

²⁸⁷ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 63.

²⁸⁸ I witnessed this personally as a child. I was twelve years old when I went to my first funeral. The boy who died was my buddy, Christopher Cross. Our dads sang together in the Victoria Street Baptist Church Quartet. His parent's marriage did not survive the pain.

²⁸⁹ Jane E. McNamee and David R. Offord, “Youth Suicide report - Canadian Task Force on Preventive

Health Care” n.p. [cited Oct. 13, 2005]. Online: http://www.canadiancrc.com/Youth_Suicide_in_Canada.htm

Reality: Talking calmly about suicide, without showing fear or making judgments, can reduce the risk. A willingness to listen shows sincere concern and brings relief to someone who is feeling terribly isolated. Naming the dragon may well be the first step toward slaying it.²⁹⁰ If you see several red flags, or hints of suicide, ask the question straight out, “When you say you want to ‘end it all,’ do you mean you are thinking of suicide?” The person usually will be relieved to talk about it because they have been carrying the burden by themselves for so long. “Finally, someone who understands.”

Myth: Suicide is sudden and unpredictable.

Reality: Suicide is most often a process, not an event. Eight out of ten people who die by suicide gave some, or even many, indications of their intentions.

Myth: Suicidal youth are only seeking attention or trying to manipulate others.

Reality: Efforts to manipulate or grab attention are always a cause for concern, but all suicide threats must be taken seriously.

Myth: Suicidal people are determined to die.

Reality: Suicidal youth are in pain. They do not necessarily want to die; it would be more correct to say they do not know how to live, they just want their pain to end. If their ability to cope is stretched to the limit, or if problems occur together with a mental illness, it can seem that death is the only way to make the pain stop.

Myth: A suicidal person will always be at risk.

Reality: Most people feel suicidal at some time in their lives. The overwhelming desire to escape from pain can be relieved when the problem or pressure is relieved. Learning effective coping techniques to deal with stressful situations can help.

As a chaplain in the Canadian Armed Forces, I have annually taught several lectures on suicide awareness.²⁹¹ Let me show you a few of the slides from that power point presentation.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 168.

²⁹¹ I have also just recently taken the internationally acclaimed ASIST course (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). This two day course developed by LivingWorks Education, Inc., prepares you to integrate principles of intervention into everyday practice.

²⁹² See Appendix D for the all of the power point suicide awareness slides. USED WITH PERMISSION

Slide 5: First of all let me blow away the myth that suicide is a minor issue. The reality is that it robs more years of life from society than any other killer with the exception of cancer and heart disease.

Slide 6: The problem is that we only see the tip of the iceberg. Let us look at the whole picture for a moment. Let us look at how much of the iceberg is underwater and not as visible.

Slide 7: Two ways of looking at Suicide: 1. The number of suicides which have been growing steadily since the 1950s.

Slide 8: 2. The ratio of suicides to population. The ratio does not fluctuate greatly. It hovers at 13.4 suicides per 100,000 Canadians.

Slide 9, 10 : How does Canada's suicide ratio compare to other countries in the

world? As you can see, in countries where there is more social and political unrest, suicide is higher.

Slide 11: Here is a province by province break down. We could spend a lot of time on this slide but suffice is to say that suicide is lowest in Newfoundland and highest in the northern territories. Notice that our province of New Brunswick is the same as the national suicide rate.

Slide 12: For every complete suicide there are one hundred people who have self inflicted injuries.

Slide 13: In all age groups males are at about four times at greater risk of suicide than women.

Slide 14: Here is a break down of methods of self injury/suicide. Notice the number one method chosen by males compared to females. It is more difficult to rescue someone from a gun shot, chronologically speaking, than from an overdose of pills..

Slide 15: Suicide rates are affected by loss and aloneness. Divorced men are at the greatest risk

Slide: 16: A person who has previously attempted suicide is at approximately forty times higher risk of dying by suicide than someone who has never attempted suicide before.

We have covered a lot of territory this morning. Suicide is a huge topic. Next week we will shift from suicide awareness to how to care when there is suicide. I hope you keep your sermon notes and file them away. When suicide comes to a family you know, information is the first step to caring and removing the stigma that keeps the pain in isolation. As Christians we offer comfort and hope to those with such unspeakable pain. The Psalmist says, “Sustain me according to your promise (O Lord), **and I will live**; do not let my hopes be dashed.”²⁹³ God wants us to choose life, he wants to give us hope. You are the channel and vessel that God wants to use to give his hope to a broken world if you will only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

²⁹³ Psalm 119:116

CARING WHEN THERE IS SUICIDE - Part II

2 Samuel 16:23-17:5, 14,23; October 23, 2005

King David's family life was filled with strife and jealousy. His son, Ammon fell in love with his beautiful step sister, Tamar. The love was not returned. Tamar was raped. Her full brother, Absalom avenged the rape by killing his step brother Ammon and fled for safety. After three years he returns to Jerusalem and starts a "PR" campaign. He secretly has ambitions to be king. He uses two weapons:

1) His good looks

2 Sam 14:25 (NLT) "No one in Israel was as handsome as Absalom. From head to foot, he was the perfect specimen of a man."

2) His charm - He smooth talks all who came to Jerusalem with a grievance.

2 Sam 15:6 "... he stole the hearts of men of Israel."

At an appointed time Absalom takes control of the people. David and those loyal to him run for cover. There are many heavy weights backing Absalom including Ahithophel, the king's chief counsellor.

Our text says, "Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice."²⁹⁴ David plans a strategy to foil Ahithophel's council. "When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb."²⁹⁵

Let us review what we discussed last week when we started our topic of suicide.

I. What does the Bible say about Suicide? Not much. It is quite silent on the subject. However there are seven examples of suicide in the Bible. Most noteworthy is the account of Jesus' forty day temptation. He was, at some time during these forty days, tempted to jump off the temple.

Though the circumstances are radically distinct compared to the usual (if it possible to use that word) suicide, it helps to eradicate the stigma of suicide when we remember that Jesus himself was tempted in every way as we are.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ 2 Samuel 16:23

²⁹⁵ 2 Samuel 17:23

²⁹⁶ Hebrews 4:15

It is most significant to realize what the Bible *does not* say about suicide. Suicide is not the unpardonable sin. Some think that because suicide is not God's will for our life that people who die from suicide, die in sin. Well, the truth is we all die in sin. We are all sinners. I am sure that most Christians who die, especially if death is sudden, have not repented of some sins. We need a better understanding of grace. If Christ is our Saviour, then God's grace of forgiveness extends over all sins. Suicide is no exception.²⁹⁷

II. Suicide Awareness: What are the facts?²⁹⁸ (Review)

- \$ The suicide rate for Canadians is 15 per 100,000 people. (February 2003)
- \$ Every two hours someone in Canada commits suicide; twelve people every day.
- \$ At high risk are: the youth, especially children of single parents, the elderly, inmates, people with a mental illness, and those who have previously attempted suicide.
- \$ Children from single-mother households (compared to two parent) are five times more likely to commit suicide.
- \$ Men commit suicide at a rate of four times higher than that of women.
- \$ Women, however, make 3 to 4 times more suicide attempts than men do.
- \$ Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians aged 10-24.
- \$ Suicide rate actually decreases at Christmas time but depression increases. Studies suggest that while the holidays can bring up some very difficult emotions, they also tend to evoke feelings of familial bonds and these feelings may act as a buffer against suicide.
- \$ August has the highest suicide rate out of all the months of the year.
- \$ Ninety percent of suicide victims have a diagnosable psychiatric illness.
- \$ Suicide is the most common cause of death for people with schizophrenia.

III. Caring for a Family After a Suicide

Now many of you may know Dr. Gary LeBlanc, Professor at Atlantic Baptist University. At one time he was a member here at the Sunny Brae Baptist Church. Gary wrote a book called *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. Many of you can recall the shock when Shawn took his life seven years ago. In preparation for this message, I interviewed Dr. LeBlanc a week ago on what he has learned from the suicide of his son. He has given me full permission to use his name and to quote from our discussion.

²⁹⁷ 1 John 1:9

²⁹⁸ "Suicide Statistics," *Canadian Mental Health Association*. n.p. [cited Oct. 19, 2005]. Online: http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about_mental_illness/suicide.asp?cID=3965

Step 1 – Understand the Grief Process²⁹⁹

Since grief is so intense during the shock of a suicide it is mandatory to understand the grief process if you want to be able to help others through it. Let us review the grief process and apply it specifically to a suicide.

i) Shock and Denial Stage – Gary LeBlanc talks about the utter pain and agony of the loss. “I felt I had not just lost a son, but part of me was gone and would never return. Then there were physical manifestations of grief which I had naively not expected and was not prepared for. Both Peg and I were literally sick to our stomachs for weeks after his death. When Jacklyn our daughter received the news in Orlando she experienced vomiting and shook all over for hours.”³⁰⁰

Our bodies are whole systems and something that affects one part will have ramifications on other parts. This is what makes grieving such a dreadful experience, it affects our whole being.

“Then the rescue fantasies started, I was constantly reviewing in my mind how I could have prevented the suicide. Then there was the ongoing battle between my heart and my head. The head realizes what had happened, knew the facts of the case, could logically relate what had happened, but my heart could not accept it. By denial, I do not mean that the person was not cognitively aware that the loved one had died (suicide), but rather that the heart had real trouble accepting that it had happened.”

Here is a caring tip for you. During the initial stages of a suicide, do not label the death a suicide until the family does. Show some tact.

The antidote for this initial stage of shock is the “ministry of presence.” If you are close to the family simply be there with them.³⁰¹

ii) Anger and Frustration Stage – Anger is usually expected when a parent loses a child as anger is the most ready emotion we experience when deprived of something we value and love. One father writes, “I felt rage, violent and consuming. I was angry at God, then at myself and eventually at my son. Sometimes I even felt guilty because I was so angry at my beloved child. A sense of inescapable injustice haunted me.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ See message on “Caring When There is Critical Illness.”

³⁰⁰ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 30.

³⁰¹ See Isaiah 43:2; Isaiah 41:10

³⁰² Rando, T.A. ed. *Parental Loss of a Child*. (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1986), 29

A woman whose fiancé committed suicide writes, “When I first found out, all I could think was ‘I want to die too.’ I was so angry at God, I yelled, ‘God, you cannot do this; he was mine!’ Then I just cried for hours”³⁰³

Part of the pain and anger comes from a lack of understanding. The “why?” question is haunting. Gary LeBlanc writes, “Not knowing the reasons for something is much harder for me than knowing even a very hurtful reason. Logically thinking, given his family, his friends and his faith, suicide should never have been an option. But it was, and there lies the dilemma.”³⁰⁴

The antidote for this stage of anger is a) respect and validate their feelings, b) suspend critical judgment and c) extend grace and forgiveness.³⁰⁵

iii) Bargaining and Guilt Stage – Guilt is often a dominating presence when a child dies. We second guess ourselves to distraction. If a child dies by sickness, we blame ourselves for not doing enough to facilitate his or her healing or not doing enough to prevent their illness. If a child dies by accident, we play over and over in our mind what we could have done to prevent it. In most cases the truth is we did all we could and had very little control over the actual events of the suicide. The feeling that you could somehow have prevented this is overwhelming and the blame and guilt almost unbearable. The parent is plagued with questions like, “What did I do or not do that caused his/her life to be so unbearable that suicide was seen as the only way out?”

Loved ones will feel guilty for missing suicidal signals, for not being available if a final call for help was made. They will feel guilty if they allowed the suicidal instrument to be available. How do we deal with guilt? Families of a suicide victim need to understand this: “We cannot judge what happened yesterday by what we know today.”³⁰⁶

In October 2005, just a few days ago, the personnel of the naval dockyard in Halifax witnessed a tragic scene.³⁰⁷ At about 09:00, it became clear that there was a jumper on the Angus L Macdonald Bridge, prepared to commit suicide. The Halifax Police were called in, and managed to persuade the young man to go with them to the

³⁰³ Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 241.

³⁰⁴ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 32.

³⁰⁵ See 1 Peter 4:8; Proverbs 15:1

³⁰⁶ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 41.

³⁰⁷ “Persistent Man Jumps to Death,” *The Halifax Chronicle Herald Newspaper*, October 6, 2005, 1,4.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital. There, he was examined by the psychiatrist on duty, and it was determined that he was not a danger to himself or others. He was released.

At 11:00 that morning, he was back on the bridge, determined to end his life. Once again, the police were called in; once again they convinced him to return to the hospital and get some help. Once again, he was seen by the psychiatrist on watch - who determined that he was not a danger to himself or others - and once again, he was released. At 14:00, for a third time that day, he made his way back to the Angus L Macdonald bridge, and jumped to his death.

My point is this. There are times when even a professional can be looked in the eyeball and told, "I am OK, this is all blown out of proportion." There are times that even a trained professional can be fooled or miss red flags. I am not saying that we should not be looking for signs but after a suicide has already taken place, we must understand that, "We cannot judge what happened yesterday by what we know today."

The antidote for guilt is to receive the forgiveness of God.³⁰⁸ He alone gives perfect peace.

We also may need to forgive ourselves for some short comings as a parent or spouse. Nobody is perfect.

iv) Depression – We have said in the past that not everyone has experienced, or must, will or should experience these five emotions. I do not believe Gary experienced depression like so many others have when suicide comes. He writes about the terrible feeling of helplessness. "It is so exasperating to hurt so deeply, to feel such a tremendous sense of loss and pain and not be able to do anything about it. My helplessness is compensated by His sufficiency."

The antidote for depression is to encourage and tactfully motivate those in despair to re-engage in life.³⁰⁹ Start with small and easy activities first. Help them to get a few wins under their belt. Slow and steady, easy does it in the beginning.

v.) The Acceptance Stage – No one ever totally recovers from a family suicide but the goal is to help people to accept the event and move forward.

Step 2 – Know the Healing Process

Our first priority is to make the choice of healing. The healing process takes a substantial amount of time and effort but what is most important is that a deliberate decision needs to be made to let or make healing happen. We have to choose healing rather than despair.

Our second priority in the healing process is to be willing to express the emotions that grip us. Sharing our grief in a safe and therapeutic setting allows us to experience some release of the intense feelings that can overwhelm us. Sharing our grief can provide

³⁰⁸ See Romans 5:1; Romans 8:1; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7

³⁰⁹ See Psalm 122:1

strength to carry on. Grieving is normal, so do not stifle the emotions of grief. It needs to come out in appropriate ways.

Do not bottle it up. It will eat away at you. Do not prevent others from grieving. Allow grief to be expressed.

Third, reaching out to others in their pain can assist us in our own pain. There is a catharsis in helping others however, do not neglect your own healing.

Finally, recovery is a process that is unsteady, difficult and perhaps very long. Recognize that when it comes to suicide, healing is a marathon, not a sprint. Be careful of your expectations.

Step 3 – Know Your Resources

i) The Role of Friends - Lean on them

ii) The Role of the Local Church – For many, the local church has not been a supportive environment when serious trials befall. To expect the church as a whole to meet the very personal needs of support and comfort is courting disappointment, and yet we continue to have such expectations

iii) The Role of Professional (Structured Help) – There is lots of help out there grief classes, videos on grief, books, pamphlets, the internet etc. It is not time that heals but how you use time.

iv) The Role of Faith - Read God's Word (Psalm 27:1; 46:1-2; 91:2,4; Isaiah 50:7; John 14:1-3; Hebrews 4:14-16), lean on God's People, and seek God's Presence.

vi) The Role of Work – Gary LeBlanc says, "I admit much of the time my head was in a daze. Activity, however, is a way I am able to cope with difficulties and returning to work was very beneficial for me. Some thought I was being very courageous and was handling Shawn's death so well. But the truth is, I was going through my usual routines as a way to survive the terrible pain I was experiencing."³¹⁰

Helpful things to Say

"Do you need help notifying people of ____'s death."

"I cannot imagine the pain your are going through."

"It was not your fault. It was ____'s choice"

Hurtful things to Avoid

"Did you see it coming"

"Does suicide run in your family?"

"How did ____ kill himself?"

IV. Caring for the Suicidal Person

³¹⁰ LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 41.

There have been several times when I have come face to face with someone struggling with major suicidal tendencies. They are very scary situations. You have to remain calm to help. One such situation was the day I got a telephone call from Susan (not her real name). “Pastor, I am lying behind the corner store and I have just slit both of my wrists and I do not want to die alone so would you come and be with me.” Fortunately I was able to get Susan to the hospital in time for emergency care.

If you ever get such a call, I know you too will pray for grace and strength as I did. But the thing you need to remember is that you did not cause the person’s problems, and you may not be able to fix them. Your responsibility is to try to help; you cannot be held responsible to succeed. The person may die.

How do you help the suicidal? Recognize the signs. The suicidal rarely make a direct plea for help as in Susan’s case, however most will exhibit some of these warning signs:

- \$ Sudden change in behaviour (positive or negative)
- \$ Apathy, withdrawal, change in eating patterns
- \$ Unusual preoccupation with death or dying
- \$ Giving away valued personal possessions (e.g. golf clubs)
- \$ Signs of depression; moodiness, hopelessness
- \$ One or more previous suicide attempts
- \$ Recent attempt or death by suicide by a friend or a family

member

After you explore these signals with the individual you must ask the direct question, “Are you thinking about suicide.”³¹¹ The person will probably be relieved to finally talk to a caring individual about his or her despair. Listen closely to his or her reasons for wanting to die. Do not rush this process. They need to be heard. Empathize with their struggle. Then ask them what their reasons are for living. Do not be fooled by the reply, “I do not have any.” The truth is that if they did not have any reasons for living they would already be dead. There must be some reasons for living that has kept them going to this point.

Now it is time for you to review and summarize in your own words all that they have said. Make sure you explain to them that they are presently at great risk so contract with them a safe-plan. Diffuse their original plan. Ask for their pills, gun etc. Solicit a promise. Say something like, “John, everything you have been saying tells me that you are not safe right now. Can you promise me that you will make yourself safe until (tomorrow) when we can get the appropriate help for you? Who can you stay with until then? You need to be with someone right now that you know and trust.” Make sure you follow up on your commitments of caring.

³¹¹ Suicide Intervention Handbook, 10th ed. (Calgary, Alberta: Living Works Education Inc. (2004), 49.

I know that suicide is a scary thing. When confronted with it you will find a thousand reasons for not wanting to get involved. When the disciples were in a terrifying storm, they cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid."³¹² This morning I have the same message for you. When suicide strikes a loved one or family you know, take courage and *Dare to Care Like Jesus*. He will help you bring hope to a troubled soul.

³¹² Matthew 14:27

CARING WHEN THERE IS ADDICTION - Part 1: Gambling and Alcoholism
Proverbs 23:29-35; John 5:1-15; October 30, 2005

One of the top stories in Canada this week was the 6/49 Lottery. The headlines promised that this would be the largest jackpot lottery in Canadian history, forty million dollars to the lucky winner, (or unlucky depending on your perspective and experience). For scores of people, winning the lottery is the American dream; but for many lottery winners, the reality is more like a nightmare.³¹³ After winning millions there is always a drastic life change. Statistics tell us that three quarters of lottery winners go bankrupt after five years of winning the jackpot.³¹⁴ Others endure unexpected lawsuits from former partners or others who greedily want a share of the windfall. One man was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill his jackpot winning brother, hoping to inherit a share of the winnings.³¹⁵ Lottery money brings tremendous strain on relationships with siblings and the extended family.

I did not plan on talking about gambling this morning however, in light of the national lottery headlines this past week, let me give you four reasons why I do not buy lottery tickets.

1) Gambling Replaces Dependence on God with Lady Luck

Bowing the knee to "Lady Luck" is a form of idolatry since we are putting our hopes on the jackpot not Jesus. The Bible teaches us to seek the lordship and leadership of God, where gambling looks to fate, destiny and luck. The chance of scoring a big windfall is a statistical monstrosity. Winning the popular 6/49 is one chance in 14,000,000. Riches appear to be within a moment's reach. The allusion is seductive.

In two days this past week, the jackpot went from 40 million to 54.2 . It was already the largest in history. Why did the figure sky rocket just before the draw? It is

³¹³ Ellen Goodstein, "Unlucky In Riches," n.p. [cited Oct. 24, 2005]. Online: <http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/advice/20041108a1.asp>

³¹⁴ Bulletin Insert produced by the Stewardship Commission of the Convention of the Atlantic Baptist Churches, Fall 2002.

³¹⁵ Goodstein, "Unlucky In Riches," n.p.

the illusion that easy money is so close to one's grasp. Statistics say the reality is that it will never be grasped. False hope pushes gambling victims to pursue an elusive dream.

2) Gambling places the Material ahead of the Spiritual.

Jesus issues the Christian his priorities with, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."³¹⁶ The Word of God says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."³¹⁷ Luke 12:15 says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

God wants you to take a sure path to a treasure that lasts, not to get side tracked by get-rich-quick-schemes. The love of money nourishes cravings that cannot be satisfied. The substance of life consists in the love of God and others, contentment and gratitude, friendship and family, peace and harmony. Gambling often draws one away from these realities.

3) Gambling Undermines the Biblical Principle of Stewardship.

To be a steward means that you are a manager of somebody else's property. You own NOTHING. The Bible says it is all on loan. We came into this world with nothing, and we are leaving the same way.³¹⁸ The only reason we are not going out naked is because someone else will dress us.³¹⁹ It is not good management to carelessly throw away resources that God has entrusted to your care. As Christians, we do not believe that ten percent belongs to God, that is, not just the tithe, but we believe that He owns EVERYTHING.³²⁰ As the hymn writer records, "This is My Father's World."

When Jesus returns we will be called to give an account of the use of the resources He entrusted to us.³²¹ Playing the lottery says, "I cannot trust God to meet my needs so I'll help God along by going for a lucky strike."³²²

³¹⁶ Matthew 6:33

³¹⁷ 1 Timothy 6:6, 9-10

³¹⁸ Job 1:21; 1 Timothy 6:7

³¹⁹ Evans, Tony. *Gambling and the Lottery*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 47.

³²⁰ Psalms 24:1

³²¹ Matthew 25:19; Luke 19:13

³²² Evans, Tony. *Gambling and the Lottery*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 49.

4) Gambling Contradicts the Biblical Work Ethic.

Gambling mocks the work ethic by deluding one to believe something can be gained for nothing. You are asking God to bless nothingness.³²³ I want to teach my children to trust in God, plan wisely, and work hard. A man should be worth his salt.

Each person is compelled under God to work. Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working"³²⁴ Paul stated that, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."³²⁵ When God made Adam, the first charge he gave him was to be productive. Even in a perfect environment, Adam had a job to do. God's way out of poverty and into financial health is through productivity not chance.³²⁶

My parents used to say, "Do you think money grows on trees?" That is a good question, because evidently children do think that money grows on trees. I could give you plenty of examples. If you have kids you could give plenty of examples too. The question is, how are they going to learn differently? Not by watching the significant adults in their lives trying to strike it rich in the lottery!

In conclusion (with regard to the topic of gambling, the sermon is not over) gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, mocks work, robs children, enslaves its addicts, subverts governments, and poisons whatever it touches. Biblical teaching leads us to reject gambling's false premises.

Let me make a transition from gambling to another addiction – alcoholism. I called an addiction agency (Alcoholics Anonymous) this past Tuesday in preparation for this message. Half way through the conversation, the man on the other end of the phone (lets call him Joey) said, "Did I not meet you before about two years ago? Was it not in the intensive care unit of the Moncton hospital when so and so (Pete) was dying?" I felt a leading from God that I should talk to this man and enquired if we could get together. A meeting was set for 3:00 that afternoon at Dooley's on Mountain Rd. When I arrived at Dooley Billiards establishment, I did not realize that there were actually two separate sections to the establishment: Dooleys & Dooley's Sports Bar. I mistakenly went into the Sports Bar. No Joey. There were only two pool tables. I thought this to be strange. But what was even more strange was the fact that the only people in the establishment were all sitting in front of the VLT (video lottery terminals), the slot machines. Everyone of them was in use. After I had realized I was in the wrong location I exited outside and entered the alternative part of the establishment. The only difference between the two was that instead of two pool tables there were about fifteen. The only person playing

³²³ Ibid., 12.

³²⁴ John 5:17

³²⁵ 2 Thess. 3:10

³²⁶ Evans, Tony. *Gambling and the Lottery*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 19.

pool when I entered was Joey. Everybody else in Dooley's was sitting in front of the VLTs. Joey shook his head and whispered to me that there is usually a line up for these slot machines each time he comes in.

As I entered into both places I found it interesting that as I walked through the door the gamblers would all look to see who was entering the premises, human nature I guess. They did not strike me as the same kind of people that are portrayed on the Casino commercials which we see on TV, happy, having fun. No, these people all had the look of misery, the look of pain, the look that says I do not really want to be here; the look of guilt that says, I know I should not be here.

This morning's Scripture lesson is about a healing and not necessarily about addiction. However, we can apply the biblical principles from this story to addictions. There are interesting parallels here. What are they?

I. Addiction Is a Cesspool of Pain In our story, the pool near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem is a gruesome, pathetic, heart wrenching scene. Verse three tells us that near the pool a "great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralysed." Nothing but pain and misery.

Addictions, whether you are talking about gambling, alcohol, pornography, or drugs is a cesspool of Pain. It is an agonizing pain for the addict as well as for his or her family.

Proverbs 23 describes it well.

v. 29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? 30 Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. 31 Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! 32 In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. 34 You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 35 "They hit me," you will say, "but I am not hurt! They beat me, but I do not feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"

When I met Joey at Dooley's, he told me his life story. He told me how his alcoholism led to the break up of his marriage, the loss of his family, the loss of his finances, the loss of his job and almost the loss of his life through suicide. He told me about the time he had tried to kill himself but could not reach the trigger on the rifle. Did you know that people who drink excessively are twice as likely to commit suicide?³²⁷

³²⁷ Jonathan O'Beirne, "Alcoholism Revealed," n.p. [cited Oct. 25, 2005]. Online: <http://www.alcoholism-revealed.com>.

Here are some more alcohol statistics.³²⁸ Four percent of the population are alcohol addicts impacting heavily one fifth of our entire population with alcoholism. One in ten social drinkers will become an alcoholic. Heavy drinking is the cause of eighty percent of fire and drowning accidents, sixty percent of violent crimes, and thirty percent of suicides. Someone dies because of drunken driving every twenty-two minutes. Alcoholism is our third-worst national health problem, following only cancer and heart disease.

In one year (1995) it is estimated that³²⁹

- 6,507 Canadians died due to alcohol consumption, mostly by impaired driving
- 82,014 Canadians were admitted to hospital because of alcohol misuse.
- 43% of all motor vehicle fatalities were attributable to alcohol.

II. Addiction Cannot Be Conquered by Oneself. You cannot do it alone.

i) The Invalid - Let us take a look at our text in John chapter five. It is noteworthy that Jesus takes the initiative (as in the case of all the “signs” in the Gospel of John, except the healing of the nobleman’s son).³³⁰ Jesus asks, “Do you want to be made well.” At first, one may assume that the answer is obvious; but Jesus still asks the question. The Teacher often uses casual statements or questions to see if people will acknowledge the truth about themselves.³³¹ “What were you arguing about on the road?”³³² he said to the disciples when they were debating about who was the greatest. “Where is your husband?”³³³ he asked the woman married five times. “How is it going, did you catch anything?”³³⁴ he said when he wanted to see if the fisherman would admit utter failure. “We have caught nothing,” was their reply.

There were often times when Jesus considered it important for people to verbalize their need and specifically ask him to heal them. So he asks the chronic invalid, “Do you want to get well?” Just because we are spiritually sick or just because we are

³²⁸ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 183.

³²⁹ G. Dingle, P. Samtani; J. Kraatz & R. Solomon. *The Real Facts on Alcohol Use, Injuries and Deaths*. (Mississauga, Ontario: M.A.D.D., August 22, 2002), 3.

³³⁰ Morris, Leon. *The New International Commentary on John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 303.

³³¹ Ortberg, John. *Love Beyond Reason*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 64.

³³² Mark 9:33

³³³ John 4:16

³³⁴ John 21:5

near a place of healing, does not necessarily mean we want to be made well. We may attend church regularly, but choose to remain sinful.³³⁵ The invalid had to ask for help.

ii) Salvation - The same is true with salvation.. You have to admit your own helplessness. The Scripture says that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.³³⁶ The very essence of our baptism is that it is a public profession of our sinfulness.³³⁷ It is a confession that we have asked Christ to save us and have yielded our life to him. Salvation is by grace alone through our faith in Jesus Christ but we have to ask. John 1:12 says that we have to receive him, that is, we have to ask. The word picture in Revelation 3:20 is of Jesus knocking on the door of our heart but he does not force his way in. We have to open the door. We have to invite him in. We cannot conquer our sin problem by ourselves, we have to ask for help. Jesus is the only help for sin.³³⁸

iii) Addiction - Alcoholics Anonymous is built around the Twelve Step Program . Step one is, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable."³³⁹ The symptom of denial is a major block to the alcoholic and the source of an unbelievable frustration, often enough to anger the family and any desiring to help.³⁴⁰

Let us look at our Proverbs 23 passage again.

v. 31 Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! 32 In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. 34 You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 35 "They hit me," you will say, "but I am not hurt! They beat me, but I do not feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?"

Verse 34 tells us with alcoholics it is only a matter of time before their life will fall apart. As sure as a sleeping sailor will fall from the top of the rigging in the high seas

³³⁵ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby. *Experiencing God Day by Day*. (Nashville, Tennessee:

Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 338.

³³⁶ Romans 10:9

³³⁷ Garrett, James. ed. *We Baptists - Baptists World Alliance*. (Franklin, TN: Providence House Pub., 1999), 26.

³³⁸ John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5

³³⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book –Third Edition* (New York City: AA World Services, Inc., 1976), 59.

³⁴⁰ Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989), 191.

an alcoholic left to himself will one day hit bottom. Verse 32 tells us, "In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper."

Listen to the denial in verse 35. "They hit me," you will say, "but I am not hurt! They beat me, but I do not feel it!" Once again, a major truth to understand about alcoholism is that healing can only begin to happen when the alcoholic admits that he needs help. What was true for the invalid, and is true of salvation is also true of the alcoholic, you cannot do it alone. You must ask for help. The drunk in the Proverbs 23 passage is far from help. He says in the last verse of the chapter, "When will I wake up so I can find another drink?" Alcoholism is a way of life.

III. Addition Becomes a Way of Life

Thirty - eight years is a long time to be an invalid, confined to a bed. Living with the handicap had become a way of life. It affected almost every minute of every day. The same is true of an addict. Addiction becomes a way of life. Not just for the drunk that lives on the street. Addiction becomes a way of life for all addicts. Ninety seven percent of all alcoholics are persons raising families, holding jobs, struggling to do their best to function in the face of a killer disease.³⁴¹

Substance abuse is so destructive and yet so subtle in its progression that it is often only the family members who first recognize and feel the pain of the hurt they have incurred.³⁴² The guilt and remorse and depression from constant failure is overwhelming.

The word "addiction" technically means that the brain has become dependent on a substance (chemical).³⁴³ It is a way of life because the brain has become dependant on this chemical substance. The substance can come from without (ingested, or injected) or from within the brain itself through certain behaviours. Let me say this another way. Addiction can come from substance abuse (alcohol, drugs etc. from without) or addiction can come from addictive behaviours (gambling, pornography etc. from within). The behaviour triggers a chemical in the brain which produces the excitement or high that one becomes dependent on or addicted to.

The word "tolerance" refers to the amazing ability that the brain has to adjust to whatever is put into it. Therefore, over time, more of the substance is required to achieve the same high or pleasure. An addiction will get worse over time; it will always lead to destructive consequences.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 190.

³⁴² Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 74.

³⁴³ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 1186.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

Proverbs 23:34 says. “You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging.” It will only be a matter of time before you fall and hit bottom.

The treatment of any addiction is often a very specialized program and will require caregivers with experience. However, encouragement to join a specialized program and support throughout recovery should be our vital role if you will only “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

Now, as you can see from your sermon notes, there are two appendices to this message. I knew that I would not have the time this morning to deal with specific do’s and don’ts of caring when there is an addiction but I wanted you to at least have this resource. The second appendix is a host of helpful ideas for the alcoholic.

Now allow me to close with this last point.

IV. A Relationship with Christ is the Greatest Freedom of All.

Addiction is a problem of original sin – addicts believe they can control their lives better than God can.³⁴⁵ Addiction is a bondage. It holds so many people captive. Remember, that Jesus’ self-proclaimed purpose in coming was to set captives free, to release those held in bondage.³⁴⁶ The goal in caring for those with addiction is to break the hold and grip of dependency. The goal is freedom.

The lame man did not know who healed him John 5:14 says that later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” There is something worse than physical health issues, as significant as they are. There is something worse than being enslaved to alcohol or drugs, as destructive to life as many of you know them to be. A relationship with Christ is the greatest freedom of all, an eternal freedom.

Addicts need a new master. One that will not destroy them but one that will renew them and give them hope and joy, not pain and misery. Jesus is the greatest freedom of all, and he wants you to be an instrument of that freedom, if you will only “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

³⁴⁵ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 1187.

³⁴⁶ Luke 4:18

CARING WHEN THERE IS DEPRESSION
1 Kings 19:1-18; November 13, 2005

Elijah was one of God's great prophets. In 1 Kings 18, the chapter before our text, we have the great showdown between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. It was 450 to one. The drama and suspense were intense as Elijah duked it out with 450 opponents in this duel of prayer on Mount Carmel.

Who was going to show up and answer? Elijah's God showed up in a powerful way, vindicating the name of Jehovah, the one true God, and authenticating the prophetic ministry of Elijah. Yet as we can see, the story did not end there. After his resounding success, Elijah, exhausted and drained, fell into a deep depression.

Do you remember years ago, every Saturday, the opening trailer for ABC Wild World of Sports? In the midst of athletic cameo shots and the music came these famous words, "The thrill of victory... and the agony of defeat." I remember the scenes as the bone crushing words "agony of defeat" were proclaimed. There was a skier wiping out. The impact of the fall had knocked him out cold as his unconscious body continued to slide and ripple down the ski slope. Then there was an Indy race car crashing into a cement wall. There certainly is agony in defeat.

To me, 1 Kings 18 is the thrill of victory as Elijah scores a gigantic victory over 450 prophets of Baal. Then we have 1 Kings 19, the agony of defeat, as Elijah slips into such a deep depression that he begs God to end his life. The chapter starts out with Queen Jezebel steaming mad that her prophets have all been wiped out. She swears by her own life that Elijah will be dead within twenty four hours. Verse 3 tells us that Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

There are times when everybody feels sad, down, and blue. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says "there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." Hebrews 4:16 assures believers they would have times of need in their lives.

Depression, however, is a deeper level of emotional turmoil. It is much more than discouragement. The public does not correctly differentiate between normal discouragement and abnormal depression. Discouragement is temporary mood fluctuation, the blues. Depression on the other hand, is prolonged, sometimes for years. Understanding what a person is thinking and feeling is the only way to separate these conditions.

How does a depressed person feel? Well, they lose interest in all activities. They feel defeated, useless, hopeless, and they are unable to pray. They believe God is angry with them and is punishing them. They feel unworthy of anyone's love including God's forgiveness. Those struggling with depression consider themselves a failure as Christians and people. They have difficulty in falling asleep because of uncontrollable racing thoughts. Fatigue becomes overwhelming in eighty percent of depressed people. Fifty percent cannot stop worrying. Often pain is present. Sixty percent of chronic pain patients have a medical depression.³⁴⁷ Depression is like being uncontrollably sucked into the vortex of a black hole.

I. Depression: What are the Facts³⁴⁸

Depression is one of the most undiagnosed and disabling medical conditions in society today. Its medical cost in the US is \$27 billion annually, \$5 billion a year in Canada. The depressed person has to cope with the scorn of society as well as the illness itself. No other chronic illness is treated so unfairly by the public. Six to ten percent of the public is depressed at any given time. What is most tragic is that eighty percent go undiagnosed and therefore without proper treatment..

Depression is more common as people age. Twice as many women as men suffer. It is found in all races, social classes, even the unstressed. If a parent has a depression there is a thirty percent risk of their child having the same. If both parents have a depression there is a seventy five percent risk of their child having a similar struggle. Fifteen percent of untreated people with depression will commit suicide. Eighty percent of suicides have a treatable mental illness.

Does this not sound like the downcast of society that Jesus was so concerned about? Did Jesus not publically declare that his purpose in coming was to bring

³⁴⁷ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003). 37

³⁴⁸ These statistics are from two sources.

Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003). 27-28
Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 780.

“freedom to the captives, and to release the oppressed?”³⁴⁹ Are we not called to “*Dare to Care Like Jesus?*”

Stigma is the single greatest obstacle to treatment. Only one third of all those afflicted will seek help or treatment.³⁵⁰ Nearly one in five will experience significant and persistent levels in depression.³⁵¹ Significant and persistent depression causes people to miss more work than diabetes and heart disease.³⁵² The number of people diagnosed with anxiety disorders has doubled. Struggles with fear, anxiety and panic attacks have surpassed alcoholism and depression as the number one psychological disorder in America.³⁵³

What did Abe Lincoln, Marilyn Monroe, Kurt Cobain, Vincent Van Gogh, Ernest Hemingway, Winston Churchill, Janis Joplin and Leo Tolstoy have in common?³⁵⁴ All suffered from severe mood disorders that typically lasted 3-12 months. Mood disorders disrupt physical, perceptual, social and thought processes. There are two types: Unipolar (emotional extremes at just one end, usually depressed) and, Bipolar (extremes of both mania [excitement and elation] and depression).

II. Depression can Occur in the Most Spiritual People

What did Job, Jonah, David, Elijah and Moses have in common? A depression so severe that they begged God to take their lives. Depression disrupts all relationships including your relationship with God. It affects Christians, it affects pastors. No one is immune to depression simply because he or she is Christian. In fact, in the August 1998 edition of Dr. James Dobson’s letter from *Focus on the Family*, he stated, “Our surveys indicate that 80% of pastors & 84% of their spouses were discouraged or dealing with depression. More than 40 % of pastors, 47% of spouses reported that they were suffering from burnout, frantic schedules and unrealistic expectations.³⁵⁵ In the opinion of Dr.

³⁴⁹ Luke 4:18

³⁵⁰ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 7.

³⁵¹ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 780.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 7.

³⁵⁴ Weiten, Wayne, ed. *Psychology – Themes & Variations*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth Publishers, 2004), 576.

³⁵⁵ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 51.

Mullen and Dr. Dobson, pastors are a very discouraged lot. Reluctant to seek help from fellow ministers due to embarrassment, they suffer in isolation.

Let me make this a little more personal. I too, have suffered from depression. I, too, know the deep dark pit of despair. Sometimes it lasted a few months, sometimes it lasted a couple of years. There were days that the emotional pain was so bad that I just wanted to crawl into a black hole and die. I went to see my doctor, I went to see the hospital psychiatrist. I went to see a Christian psychologist at the University of New Brunswick. There were days that it would take all the strength within me just to try to cope and guess what? It was not working. I was not coping. In fact, my nerves and concentration and focus were so bad I wrote off both of my vehicles in a span of two months, two painful air-bag experiences: December 18th and February 14th.

Significant and persistent depression hits Christians too. Many times we suffer alone. I remember the day I visited one of my deacons in the psychiatric ward of the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton. He was an emotional train wreck. After we prayed together he shared how embarrassed he was to be in that part of the hospital and he did not want anyone to know about it.. I will never forget the change of look in his eyes when I said, “Bob, do you think you are the only member of our church I have visited in here?” Then I said, “Bob, do you think you are the only deacon from our church that I have visited in here?” (Notice I was so intimidated by the stigma of depression that I did not share my own struggle with it, only that of others.)

III. Depression: Caring Lessons from Elijah’s Experience

Doctors today believe that most depression is chemically based rather than psychological.³⁵⁶ Whatever the basis of depression, God’s way of dealing with Elijah helps us see how to help ourselves and others who are depressed. Here are eight practical ways to care for the depressed.

1. Encourage Physical Fitness, Eat Properly - There are three fundamental God-given building blocks of personality: emotions, mind, will (feelings, thinking, and choice)³⁵⁷. They are inter- connected. For instance, your emotions affect the other two: how you think and how you choose. Man is physical and spiritual. To be fully human according to God’s design we must be healthy and functioning in both worlds. The first step in prevention or restoration from depression is eating properly and exercising regularly.³⁵⁸ Exercise will help burn off toxins in the body that make you feel sluggish.

³⁵⁶ Richards, Lawrence O. *The Bible Reader’s Companion*. (Wheaton, Illinois; Victor Books, 1991), 236.

³⁵⁷ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 10.

³⁵⁸ Sehnert, Keith. *Stress/Unstress*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1981), 83.

In 1 Kings 19, after Elijah ran for his life and then begged God to take his life, it says in vv. 5-6, “Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water.” Is it not interesting that God was caring for Elijah by looking after his physical needs?

2. Encourage Activity but Keep it Simple

19:5 ... All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water.

Elijah ate and drank and then lay down again. Notice that God simply told him to get up and eat. It was a simple task but it got him moving. We can encourage those with deep and persistent depression to get up and do basic functions. This does two things. It starts them moving in the right direction so that hopefully they will not slide even deeper into depression. And secondly, simple activity helps them to get a few wins under their belt to build their confidence for bigger tasks.

3. Do not Let Them Blame Themselves

Elijah was blaming himself for failure. He says, “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Negative self-talk contributes to depressive disorders.³⁵⁹ Notice the compassion and caring nature of God. God does not blast Elijah and condemn him for his lack of faith. He does not say, “Elijah snap out of it, you have no right to be depressed. I vindicated you in front of 450 prophets of Baal. Why are you scared of one little old cantankerous woman. If you just have enough faith in me you would not have these problems.”

God did not blame or attack Elijah; he cared for him. He was even willing to provide nourishment so His prophet could run away (vv. 7–8). Instead of giving Elijah a tongue lashing, God spoke to the hurting in a gentle whisper, not through a powerful wind, or an earthquake or a fire. Do not imagine God is angry or disgusted with you, he is as gentle as a hen that gathers her chicks under her wings.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Weiten, Wayne, ed. *Psychology – Themes & Variations*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth

Publishers, 2004), 615. Aaron T. Beck believes that although there is something to be said for recognizing one’s weaknesses and taking responsibility of one’s failures, he agrees with Albert Ellis that excessive self-blame can be very unhealthy. Beck goes on to say that “Most people are barely aware of the automatic thoughts which precede unpleasant feelings and auto inhibitions.” People’s cognitive interpretations of events make all the difference in how well they handle stress. Cognitive factors play a key role in the development of depression and other disorders.

³⁶⁰ Matthew 23:37

Side Note: Did you notice how long Elijah was able to travel on this supernatural nourishment? Forty Days. There is the number again, forty days. It seems when ever God wants to change someone or prepare someone for a specific task he uses forty days. We are starting our next 40 Day campaign (40 Days of Community) on April 23/06. We already have our campaign team in place and the working groups are gearing up for 40 Days of growing deeper with God.

4. Do not Suppress Your Frustrations

Express your feelings. Elijah needed to talk, even though what he says seems only loosely related to the fear that triggered his bout of depression. You can express your feelings freely to the Lord, or you can find someone willing to serve as God's listening post. Notice how Elijah felt comfortable enough with God to share exactly what he is feeling. He even shared it twice (vv. 10,14) Keeping your frustration pent up inside will only eat away at you.

v. 10 Elijah replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

5. Encourage and Support a Goal Oriented Plan

Return to work. Inactivity feeds depression. God had a task for Elijah that would give him a renewed sense of purpose He is told to travel back the way he came and anoint Hazael the king over Arman and then anoint Jehu, king over Israel, and thirdly to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet (vv. 15–17). Elijah is not defeated; God's work continues.

6. Encourage Involvement in Helping Others

Phillip Yancey tells an old Chinese tale about a woman overwhelmed by grief after the death of her son.³⁶¹ When she goes to the holy man for advice he tells her, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life. The tale recounts how the woman goes from house to house, asking if the home has known sorrow. Each one has, of course, and the woman lingers to comfort her host until at last the act of ministering to others drives the sorrow from her life. Helping others counters depression.

Gary LeBlanc from Atlantic Baptist University here in Moncton says the same thing. When his son committed suicide it was the helping of others who had gone

³⁶¹ Yancey, Philip. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 193.

through the same ordeal that was a major contribution to his own therapy and healing.³⁶² The call to help others is a common antidote to the disabling self-absorption and social withdrawal of depression.³⁶³

Remember our theme verse in this series, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

7. Encourage Listening to God and His Perspective

Reality-test your perceptions. Anyone who is feeling despair will have his or her view of things coloured by the emotion³⁶⁴. Albert Ellis maintains that you feel the way you think. Unfortunately we are prone to what Ellis calls catastrophic thinking.³⁶⁵ We imagine things to be far worse than they really are.

Elijah felt alone. He cries out to God, “I am the only one left.” The reality was that things were not nearly that bad. God told His prophet he was one of thousands who worship Him (v. 18). Let facts shape your feelings, rather than letting your feelings distort the facts.

8. Encourage the Development of Some Good Friendships

God knew that depression and loneliness walk hand in hand. So he gave Elijah an assistant, a partner. He instructed Elijah to go and anoint Elisha as prophet. Elijah obeys

³⁶² LeBlanc, Gary. *Grieving the Unexpected - The Suicide of a Son*. (Belleville, Ont: Essence, 2003), 60.

³⁶³ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 464.

³⁶⁴ Richards, Lawrence O. *The Bible Reader's Companion*. (Wheaton, Illinois; Victor Books, 1991), 236.

³⁶⁵ Weiten, Wayne, ed. *Psychology – Themes & Variations*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth

Publishers, 2004), 552-553. Albert Ellis' Cognitive Therapy involves unrealistically negative appraisals of stress that exaggerate the magnitude of one's problems. He explains this with an A-B-C sequence

A- Activating Event: a stressor.

B- Belief system: their perspective of “A.”

C- Consequence of negative thinking.

Ellis says most people think A causes C. They do not understand the importance of phase “B.” Unfortunately people often view minor setbacks as disasters. People largely disturb themselves by thinking in a self-defeating, illogical, and unrealistic manner. If they change “B” they change their outcome.

and lays his cloak (mantle) around him. This was an investiture with the prophetic office.³⁶⁶

Share with a friend. If you have no close friends, ask the Lord to give you a companion.

Through all of this Elijah learned that God would never forsake him. Even in the depths of depression God shows loving concern and a way out. There is hope. Because we are children of an omnipotent heavenly Father, we can have hope. Because there are unique resources available to the Christian, we can have hope. Even as we confront the hellish demon of emotional depression we can have hope. May God use you to bring encouragement to those who struggle with depression, to bring hope to those who are downcast. May God give you the courage to “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

³⁶⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments.* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1 Ki 19:19.

CARING WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT WITH THE LAW
Matthew 25:31-46 (v. 36); November 20, 2005

One of the reasons I love the Gospel of Matthew is because Matthew alone includes this wonderful parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Though often described as a parable, it is not an illustrative story, but a vision of the future.³⁶⁷ Do you not just love the setting? The majesty of Christ coming in triumph and glory with an honour guard of holy angels as an entourage. He sits on a glorious throne and the judgement begins. There is great suspense during the separation process. Who is going to the left and who to the right? Who is getting into heaven and who will be banished? The basis for entrance was faith, evidenced by works of kindness (25:35–39). No unbelievers (“goats”) would be permitted to enter.³⁶⁸

Matt 25:34-36 “Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Of course, the Christians standing there, listening to the King, are confused. They do not get it. So they start asking questions of clarification. When? When? When did

³⁶⁷ D. Carson, D. Guthrie, and J.A. Motyer D. A. *New Bible Commentary* n.p.

³⁶⁸ Robert B. Hughes, J. Carl Laney, and Robert B. Hughes. *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 420.

we do these things? We do not remember ever doing this. Then comes the twist to the story and the surprise is unveiled.

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).

This morning let us focus on one verse. Actually, it is not even a whole verse, just a sliver of a verse. *Matt 25:36c “I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

Jesus is saying, “I want you to care for the incarcerated, I want you to minister to them. I know what it is like to be in chains. I know what it is like to be a prisoner. In fact, the reality of your faith will be tested by whether you “Dare to Care” for these, the least of my brethren.”

I was talking to David Way this week, director of the Moncton Community Chaplaincy for Ex-Offenders. This is what he says about verse 40 in Matthew 25, “Jesus is saying whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. You did not do it on my behalf, no, you did it to me. Sometimes it is frustrating trying to help ex-offenders, so many are scarred so deeply they are dysfunctional people. Sometimes you want to give up. So whenever I am trying to care for someone who has been or is in conflict with the law I say to myself, ‘**Is that you Jesus?**’ I think of Matthew 25:40.”

The Bible often talks about prisoners. In fact, it uses twenty two different Hebrew and Greek words to describe incarceration.³⁶⁹ I did a word search of just one of those words (prison) and it was used 126 times in Scripture. The point is, prisoners are very close to the heart of God. His heart reaches out to them over and over again.

Can you think of different Bible characters who were prisoners? (Interaction time with the congregation). There is Joseph (Gen. 39, 40), Samson (Judges 16), and Jeremiah (Jer. 37, 38). Then in the New Testament there is John the Baptist (Matthew 14), the Apostle Paul who calls himself the prisoner of the Lord³⁷⁰ and John on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1). Jesus himself was in prison. He also used the topic of prison as illustrative material in his teaching on at least four different occasions (Matt. 5:25; 18:30; 25:36; Luke 12:58).

Finally, we have the **Thief on the Cross**; he was executed with Christ while he was a prisoner. Does it not just grip you to think that in Jesus’ last moments on this earth he was ministering to an offender! Christ cared for prisoners so much that one of his last

³⁶⁹ *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible Vol. M-P* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 869.

³⁷⁰ Paul was also in prison when he wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians which are

interestingly enough called the Prison Epistles:

dying statements was to comfort and encourage a prisoner with these words, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”³⁷¹

The Psalmist refers to prisoners seven times. Psalm 79:11 says... “May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.”

God cares for those in conflict with the Law.

I. THE SCOPE OF OUR CARING

1. Dare to Care for Those in Prison. That certainly takes courage. In seminary we had one professor who had a great love for prisoners. His name was Dr. Charles Taylor. In fact he received the prestigious ORDER OF CANADA MEDAL for his pioneer work. I remember the first time I went to visit in the Springhill Penitentiary while studying at seminary. I was a little nervous. I was surprised to meet some of the old friends that my brother used to hang out with. One of the inmates yelled across the chapel, “Hey, Frank, this guy is a Poley, Donnie Poley’s brother. Can you believe that, Donnie Poley’s brother is becoming a minister?”

Looking back at that situation it was pretty comical, but it was scary to go to the prison for the first time. We need to dare to care for those in prison.

2. Dare to Care for Prisoners During Their Release and Transition. A friend of mine, whom I baptised here at Sunny Brae Baptist Church, tells me that one of the top three crises in his entire life was his release from prison. Can you imagine that? After 30 years behind bars you would think it would be the greatest day in his life. But the phobia and anxiety of “What do I do now” is tremendous. For thirty years all of your decisions are made for you and now all of a sudden you are responsible for yourself. “How am I going to survive?” It is a genuine fear. David Way earlier this week said, “Gordon, there is more fear from coming out of prison than from going in.”

3. Dare to Care for the Families Without Their Provider. When a family member goes to prison, the whole extended family is affected. With ninety-four percent of the national prison population being men, it is most often the wife and children who are left to fend for themselves when the husband and father is incarcerated.³⁷²

II. HOW DO WE DARE TO CARE FOR EX-OFFENDERS?

1. Awareness - Let us take a look at this power point slide.

Table 4 - 1.

³⁷¹ Luke 23:43

³⁷² Lampman, Lisa B. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1997), 169.

2003 Canada (except Manitoba)				
	Total Convicted Cases	Prison	Conditional	Probation
Total cases	257127	90916	13267	118379
Crimes of violence	57562	20166	3619	43857
Property crimes	64192	26064	4215	35271

Table 4 - 2.

Number of prison sentences	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total cases	74309	74941	86399	88990	83077

Do you see the number of people that need care? God calls us to administer love, compassion, grace and friendship. These are the ingredients that are needed and the Body of Christ has them in ample supply.

What Do We Need to Be Aware Of?

i) There are those in conflict with the law in your community. Let me bring this a little closer to home. In the past three years, since I have been the pastor here, SBBC has had seven families that I am aware of, who have gone through a conviction process. (There are probably more that I am not aware of.) Confidentiality forbids me to talk about specifics publically but what I am saying is that there are people with these needs around you. If you are aware of them, the Lord says to “Dare to Care” for them.

ii) Most marriages do not survive the prison experience. By some estimates, as many as eighty percent of marriages end in divorce when one partner goes to prison for a significant period of time.³⁷³ These are staggering odds for keeping the family together. The church must help.

iii) There are 185 ex-offenders that come to Moncton every year to be assimilated back into society. Ninety percent of them have addiction problems.³⁷⁴ They need a Barnabas, some one to encourage and support them.

iv) Try to understand what inmates are going through. Empathize with them. However, hopefully you know by now not to use the cliché, “I know how you feel.”

³⁷³ Lampman, Lisa B. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1997), 170.

³⁷⁴ David Way, Director of Moncton’s Community Chaplaincy for Ex-Offenders.

If you want to know how an ex-convict feels when he gets on the outside watch the movie *Les Miserables* starring Liam Neeson. The setting of the movie is within a different time and a different culture but the same stigma and fear exists today in ex-offenders trying to adjust and live life on the outside. In the [video clip](#) I am about to show you, the main character, Jean Valjean has just been released after serving nineteen horrific years of hard labour in a prison camp for stealing a piece of bread. He has a deadline to get to a certain town to check in with a parole officer or back to jail he goes. It is a hard journey. He travels at night. He stops at a certain village to sleep on a bench in the town square. (Watch closely and notice the stigma and fear that weighs him down.)

Video: “Can you spare any food,” Jean Valjean gruffly asks. “Come in we have plenty,” says the bishop. “I cannot I am a convict” Valjean says as he believes he would not be welcome. He holds out the dreaded paper that declares that he is a free man but it is a yellow paper, the passport of a convict. “I cannot read,” he says, “But I know what it says. It says that I am a dangerous man.” Valjean is surprised that the bishop persuades him to come in and dine with him and rest in a comfortable bed. He has never rested in a comfortable bed. As he gulps down the stew he cannot help but notice the expensive silverware. “Why are you being so kind to me? How do you know I will not kill you in the night?” “How do you know I will not kill you?” says the bishop. “I guess we will have to trust each other.” Valjean explains where he is going. “I have to get to Pontarlier by tomorrow and check in with my parole officer. Who is going to hire me? How am I going to survive. I guess that is when my real sentence starts.”³⁷⁵

Can you imagine what it must be like to constantly have a past conviction hanging over you, especially in a world that is so unforgiving. No wonder Jean Valjean calls himself *one of Les Miserables*, one who is so miserable.

There is a perception that anyone who has done “time” is dangerous. This is a myth. Pastor David Way of The Community Chaplaincy for Ex-offenders says, “This is the safest ministry I have ever had. I have more honesty in my office with ex-offenders than in all the years I have had in pastoral ministry.”

2. Realize That We Are All Offenders.

Let me ask you a question. What cuts us off from fellowship with God, a big sin or a little sin? The answer, of course, is any sin, big or minuscule. God does not have degrees of sin. He only has one category: “Sinner.” And we all qualify!

One hundred percent of the population has broken man’s laws and God’s Laws. The only difference is that some have been caught and some have been convicted.

³⁷⁵ Based on the book by Hugo, Victor. *Les Miserables*. (New York City: Pocket Books, 1964), a paraphrase of pages 13-16.

However, we are all offenders. In God's eyes we are all the same, sinners who need to be saved. For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.³⁷⁶ Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Here is a picture (power point) of R.G. Parsons; Brigadier-General, Commander Land Force Atlantic Area. A few weeks ago, I had lunch with the General and his lovely wife, Mildred. In his civilian career, Brigadier-General Parsons was employed with the Nova Scotia Department of Justice for thirty years. He was Director of Young Offender and Adult Correctional Facilities for Nova Scotia.

I asked the General, with his vast experience dealing with those that are in conflict with the law, "How can we in the church effectively care for ex-offenders?" This is what he said, and I quote verbatim, "But for the grace of God go I. Do not judge their actions or their behaviour unless you have walked in their shoes."

In other words, have an attitude of humility. Understand, that given a different set of circumstances, it could easily be you who had done time. God's word tells us "Be humble and consider others more important than yourselves. Care about them as much as you care about yourselves and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought..."³⁷⁷

General Parson's continued in our dinner discussion with, "Remember, at one point in life this person was a small infant cuddled in somebody's arms. What? How? Why did things work out this way?"

Watch your attitude when you are ministering to others. Ex-offenders, like anyone, can smell a phony a million miles away. Remember, in the eyes of God we are all offenders.

3. Acceptance - (Suspend Critical Judgement)

Jesus knows what it is like to be rejected. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, despised and rejected. But He accepted us when we were just simply ragged dolls.³⁷⁸ God demonstrated His own love for us in this: "While we were still sinners [ragged dolls] Christ died for us."³⁷⁹ God's word exhorts us to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

³⁷⁶ Romans 3:23 (NLT)

³⁷⁷ Phil. 2:3-5 (CEV)

³⁷⁸ Two weeks ago, on Nov. 6/05, we had a special service with the Legionaries here in Sunny Brae and the war vets. It was the Sunday before Remembrance Day. The sermon was called "The Ragged God" and focussed in on our raggedness.

³⁷⁹ Romans 5:8

Yes, there are some people who consciously choose the life style they lead and relish in it. This group is relatively small and can best be categorized as the hardened criminals. Most people who are in conflict with the law are as much a victim of the circumstances that they find themselves in as the life style they lead. Ultimately we are responsible for our own actions, but is it not a shared responsibility? Do circumstances and environment not play a part? Did Jesus not warn that “**if anyone causes** one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”³⁸⁰ You see, given the right causes, the right circumstances it could be you or me serving time. We need to suspend critical judgement and accept those who have paid their debt to society.

The greatest example of “Daring to Care like Jesus” to those in conflict with the Law comes in the opening scene of my favourite movie, *Les Miserables*. Let me show you the next scene after our last [video clip](#). Jean Valjean has just been released from nineteen nightmare years of prison for stealing a piece of bread because he was starving to death. In the middle of the night he was caught by the bishop stealing the silverware. In order to get away Jean Valjean hits the bishop so hard he knocks him out. In the middle of the morning the next day, two constables arrive with Valjean in shackles and the sack of silverware. Jean Valjean waits for the condemnation that he knows he deserves. Watch what happens... ([Video clip](#))

Instead of judgement he is blind-sided by grace. One moment he faces poverty and prison, the next, freedom and abundance. Before Valjean leaves, the bishop says to him, “You must never forget this moment, your soul and your life have been redeemed. You no longer belong to evil. From now on, you belong to God. Go and serve God with your new life.”

Would it not be nice if there was a church that totally accepted people, a place that would suspend critical judgment, a place where even offenders could come and feel comfortable and welcomed, a place where they would have no fear if people knew their past, a place of grace, love and acceptance? Would it not be great if Sunny Brae Baptist Church would be that place. Friends, we are all offenders. It is a level playing field in God’s eyes. And the world is always watching us, testing to see if we are a safe environment. God is always watching too.

For me the bottom line is this, if Jesus was ministering to an offender with his last dying breath, how much more should we? Will you not “*Dare to Care Like Jesus?*”

³⁸⁰ Matthew 18:6

CARING WHEN THERE IS HOMOSEXUALITY

Galatians 6:1; November 27, 2005

Dare to Care Like Jesus. I began this series by saying the root meaning of the word “comfort” in the Latin is *fortis* and *fortis* means brave.³⁸¹ We get the word fortitude from it. The idea behind the Latin word *fortis* is that you have to be brave to comfort. You have to be courageous to step into someone else’s crisis and “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*” You have to be brave to even preach about this material. Some of my most fearful Sundays have been giving these talks on topics like Suicide, Depression, Conflicts with the Law, and today it is not getting any easier: Homosexuality. How can we care for those families where there is homosexuality?

Some of you may be looking for a fire and brimstone message this morning where the pastor lays the truth right on the line. However, this is an emotionally charged issue because it deals with relationships. Many of you have homosexuals in your extended families, or maybe even in your immediate families, so we must speak the truth in love,³⁸² in the most sensitive and compassionate way.

Homosexuality causes crises because it is an emotionally charged issue. For the one who discovers personal affection for the same sex there is perhaps fear, shame, guilt, confusion. For parents and other relatives who learn of it there is outright shock and at times anger. And for a church whose sons and daughters veer from the standards of centuries there are sirens and alarms.

I. WHAT DOES THE Bible SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

The Bible says little about homosexuality. Seven passages mention it and in each case the reference is relatively brief.³⁸³ Clearly, it is never approved of, but neither is it singled out as being worse than other sins.³⁸⁴

Usually everyone starts this discussion by citing the prohibition passages in Scripture on homosexuality; and they are there. The Scripture states emphatically that God’s will is for us not to practise this behaviour. But biblical thinking about homosexuality does not begin with these prohibitions. It begins with creation, in the book of Genesis, with a series of affirmations that lay the foundation for the instructions

³⁸¹ Barclay, William. *The Letter to the Corinthians* (Burlington, Ontario; G.R. Welch Co Ltd. 1975), 171.

³⁸² Ephesians 4:15

³⁸³ Gen. 19:1-11; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Judges 19:22-25; Rom. 1:25-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9-10
(Five other passages refer to homosexuality in the context of male prostitution: Deut 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7)

³⁸⁴ Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling*. (Waco, Texas; Word Books Publishers, 1980), 318.

which follow.³⁸⁵ These positive passages are every bit as important as, if not more important than, the negative passages that we will look at in a minute.

Gen 1:27-28 “God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said, Be fruitful and increase in number.”

Gen 2:18 “It was not good for the man to be alone, so God created a suitable helper, a counter-part.

Gen 2:21 “God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.”

Gen 2:24 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were naked, and they felt no shame.”

There are several wonderful and foundational affirmations made in these verses.³⁸⁶

1. Gender is Good. God created mankind specifically in two varieties – male and female, each reflecting a distinctive dimension of God’s character which includes both masculinity and femininity. It takes both the man and the woman together to reflect the image of God. A male by himself does not reflect the image of God. The same is true for the female. Men and women were created to be similar to one another, and yet different from one another in some very important ways.

2. Sex is Good. God created us as sexual beings. Sex was God’s invention. It was His idea., “Be fruitful and increase.”³⁸⁷ Sex is not something human beings thought of afterward, sneaking around behind God’s back. God did not look down one day in shock and say, “O my land, what are they doing?” Sex was God’s idea from the very beginning,

³⁸⁵ Bryan Wilkerson, “Preaching Tough Topics: Homosexuality,” *Pulpit Talk: An Audio Journal* on

Developing Preaching Excellence 3, no. 4 (Summer 2005): Compact disc.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Genesis 1:28

and it was a very good idea. Sexual intercourse is the reaffirmation of the vows and bonds of marriage.³⁸⁸

3. Marriage is Good. God's first purpose for creating man and woman and joining them in marriage was to mirror His image,³⁸⁹ his oneness. One-ness is what God is up to in this world, but it is not the one-ness that is achieved by bringing together two or more of the same thing, it is the oneness that is attained by bringing together two or more different things to form one new thing. One-ness in the church is the union of Jew and Gentile into one body. One-ness in marriage is the union of man and woman into one flesh. Complementarity, not similarity, is the secret of oneness. The genius of marriage is that $1 + 1 = 1$. It is lousy math, but great theology. One man plus one woman equals one flesh, perfectly suited for one another and fitted together, but it does not work that way in same sex relationships. One man plus one man equals 2 men. There is no complementarity, so there is no oneness.

John Stott points out that when God created the woman he did it by taking something out of the man. In marriage, he brings a man and woman back together to reclaim the fullness of the divine image – masculinity and femininity. No such union takes place when members of the same sex come together.³⁹⁰

Thinking Biblically about homosexuality means saying Yes – yes to gender, yes to sexuality, and yes to marriage.

Having established that positive foundation, I will simply refer to the biblical prohibitions. I wish we had time to look at them in depth but we do not. These are God's words, not mine, words from our Creator and Designer, the God who loves us and wants what is best for us. Notice that they are in both Old and New Testaments.

i) Genesis 19 – The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this very unsavoury episode, God rescues Lot and destroys the cities for their sin. What was the sin? Homosexuality gone wild. The New Testament book of Jude also makes clear that it was their sexual immorality that led to their destruction.³⁹¹ In fact, you may be aware of the term “sodomy” (from Sodom) which has become a universal synonym for

³⁸⁸ Dennis Rainey, & Jerry Kirk. *Pornography: The Dangerous Deception* (Family Life Radio Broadcast,

1994) Cassette tape.

³⁸⁹ Rainey, Dennis. *Staying Close*. (Vancouver, BC; Word Publishing, 1989) 106.

³⁹⁰ Wilkerson, “Preaching Tough Topics: Homosexuality,” n.p.

³⁹¹ Jude 7

homosexuality.³⁹² The story seems to reveal pretty clearly God's view of homosexual activity.

ii) Leviticus 18:22 (NIV) "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable." Leviticus 18:22 (NLT) "Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin." The command is repeated in Lev 20:13. The prohibition is worded so strongly in this passage that a Saskatchewan Court recently ruled that the Bible could be considered hate literature. You can read about this in your bulletin insert from the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada called, "Bible Censored."

iii) Romans 1:24, 26 (NIV) "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie...." 26 "Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another."

Notice the passage says that same sex desire and activity is unnatural and contrary to God's will. However, we must also remember that homosexual lust and behaviour is not the only sin Paul mentions, nor is it the most awful sin, but it is certainly one of them.

iv) I Cor. 6:9-11 (NIV) "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

These are God's words, not mine, but our Creator and Designer. The God who loves us and wants what is best for us. Sin separates us from God and from one another. These things are outside the will of God for us, they degrade the image of God in us, they undermine human society around us, and they ultimately bring pain and heartache to us and to other people.

II. HOW DO WE CARE WHEN THERE IS HOMOSEXUALITY?

1. Awareness. What are the facts?

i) What Percentage of the Population is Homosexual? The statement 10-15 % of the general population is gay is simply wrong.³⁹³ Recent and more reliable studies

³⁹² John Ankerberg and John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 49.

³⁹³ Sanders, Randolph K. *Christian Counselling Ethics*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 155.

reveal that about 1-3 % of males are homosexually active and female homosexuality continues to be estimated at about half the rate of males. The most recent scientific studies have consistently shown that between 1-2 % of the population is exclusively homosexual.³⁹⁴

ii) Are Homosexuals Born that Way? Gay activists frequently claim that they are born homosexual and that their sexual orientation is comparable to the colour of your eyes or being left-handed. It is a speculation that is basically accepted as truth now in society. Where did this notion or speculation come from?

It came from the research of a Dr. Simon Levay after examining 41 cadavers. He theorized that if homosexual men had smaller neurons in the brain than heterosexual men then possibly these smaller neurons were responsible for causing these men to be homosexual. However the hypothesis of Dr. Simon Levay is suspect for several reasons.

- a) The research was from only 41 cadavers. This a very small sample.
- b) The sex orientation was not clear so how can he be sure of his findings?
- c) All of the subjects died with AIDS. What about the influence of their medications?
- d) The results have never been replicated. This fact alone is a giant killer.

iii) In Fact, Many Leading Scientific Researchers Conclude That Homosexuality Is Not Biologically or Genetically Based.³⁹⁵ Drs. Charles Socarides, Benjamin Kaufman, and Joseph Nicolosi founders of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality; DR. John Money, professor emeritus at John Hopkins University. Dr. John DeCecca professor at San Francisco State University and

³⁹⁴ John Ankerberg, & John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 34.

³⁹⁵ John Ankerberg, & John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 27.

editor of Journal of Homosexuality; Dr William P.I. Wilson professor emeritus of psychiatry at Duke University Medical Centre are just a small sample of experts that I could quote.

Dr. Nicolosi says, “I myself have reviewed all the literature, and I certainly do not believe, and I do not think any scientist really believes, that there is a biological predetermination for sexual orientation. There is much more evidence for early environmental factors that would set the stage for a person’s sexual orientation.”³⁹⁶

John R. W. Stott, that great Anglican preacher and writer for InterVarsity Press says, “The true “orientation” of Christians is not what we are by constitution, but what we are by choice.”³⁹⁷

My personal assumption is that homosexual *orientation* is not, in itself, a sin. But whatever the cause of the orientation, what one *does* with it is a choice. In other words, the condition may not be a free choice, but the behaviour is. It is the same with those who are single (who represent one third of the adult population). Many people choose to stay single. However God still holds our sexual behaviour accountable.

iv) Does it Matter If Homosexuality Orientation Is Genetically Based? No, it does not change God’s code of behaviour. Even if it was proven that homosexuality has a genetic cause, would that matter to those of us who are Christian? What if it were proven that your or my anger problem was genetic. That does not make your anger, or physical abuse, or violent actions morally right. If our anger was genetically based, this would not give us permission to fly off the handle. Genetics aside, that does not negate the moral consideration. This does not give us permission to violate God’s code of behaviour.

On the other hand, yes, the basis of one’s sexual orientation does matter because it affects the motivation factor to those who want to change. If people are confused about the possibility of change then their motivation will be weak to nonexistent. But if people understand that change is possible then their motivation will be much higher.

v) Is Homosexuality Really Learned? Homosexuality is a learned activity.³⁹⁸ Family Research Institute of Colorado Springs, conducted a national random survey of 4340 adults. What were the results? 96% of heterosexual males and 97 % of heterosexual females indicated their first sexual experience was heterosexual. But 85% of homosexuals and 29 % of lesbians reported their first experience was bisexual or homosexual.

³⁹⁶ John Ankerberg, & John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 27.

³⁹⁷ Berkley, James D. *Called into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas, Word Book Publisher, 1989), 93.

³⁹⁸ Adams, Jay. *Competent To Counsel*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baker Book House, 1970), 35.

Even though the evidence points to homosexuality being a learned behaviour; because of the subtleness of this learning, most homosexuals experience it as something they **are** rather than something they **choose**.

I wish I could say a lot more on this. The environment and exposure factors are many, complex and subtle, over a long period of time. Adolescence and the teenage years are characterized by great change, confusion and stress, especially in the area of personal identity. This confusion will only increase with the exposure of our youth to the smorgasbord of sex acts so available on the internet. Our people are being exposed to the idea that anything goes. Television shows daily portray homosexuality as normal.

vi) Can Homosexuals Change? In their 1970 report, the Kinsey Institute noted that 84% of gays shifted or changed their sexual orientation at least once. Further, 32 % of the gays reported a third shift, and 13 % of gays reported at least five changes.³⁹⁹ This is a devastating blow to the claims of the Homosexual Movement that proclaims, “But we cannot change.”

There is an old joke with a nugget of truth in it that goes something like this: How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is: Only one, but the light bulb has to really WANT to change. The number one criterion for the success in crisis intervention is the desire of the homosexual person to change.

The 1984 Masters and Johnson Institute Report revealed a 79.9 % success rate of homosexuals changing their sexual orientation to heterosexuality.⁴⁰⁰ Their six-year followup rate was a highly impressive 71.6%.⁴⁰¹ However, do not underestimate the struggle and anguish of those homosexuals who are trying to change.⁴⁰²

The evidence of lives transformed by the power of God is irrefutable. Some former homosexuals live like dry alcoholics — one day at a time — knowing they remain only a slip away from returning to their affliction. Others appear miraculously

³⁹⁹ John Ankerberg, & John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 32.

⁴⁰⁰ Saunders reports a different view by saying , “Reported ‘success’ rates have never been great for change for the homosexuals, 33-60% at best.” Sanders, Randolph K. *Christian Counselling Ethics*. (Downers Grove, Illinois; InterVarsity Press, 1997), 142.

⁴⁰¹ John Ankerberg, & John Weldon. *The Facts on Homosexuality*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1994), 32.

⁴⁰² Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, New Jersey; Paulist Press, 1989) 184.

Switzer talks about committed Christians who have prayed, and gone to church, and read their Bible, and fasted, and talked to their ministers, and still could not change.

transformed within, so that even the temptation seems a vague memory. In either case, change is possible but certainly not easy.

2. With Gentleness - We care for those struggling with homosexuality firstly through awareness and secondly, with gentleness. The New Testament says, “Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.”⁴⁰³

Keep in mind that homosexual orientation and behaviour is a complex, painful problem. Success rates, without the best professional help, are not good. This will likely be a wrenching, difficult, and long process. We are called to “gently and humbly help” as the King James says in Galatians 6:1, **restore** (*katartizete*, used in secular literature for setting broken bones and in the New Testament for mending fishing nets).⁴⁰⁴ The challenge to restore is not for fledglings in the faith but by those **who are spiritual**, in the homosexual’s case we are talking about a Christian professional counsellor who is competent in dealing with homosexuals. As we encourage and support homosexuals who want to change, this delicate work must be done “gently”⁴⁰⁵ and with the consciousness that no one is immune from falling into sin.⁴⁰⁶ Yes, given the right set of circumstances, you or I could be struggling with this affliction.

3. By Suspending Critical Judgment. Homosexuals as a whole are among the most self-condemning individuals. Add to this the judgmental actions of some parents who are not even able to touch the child any longer, usually it is the parent of the same sex. Can you imagine the emotional hurt and pain from this type of rejection?

Homosexuals have learned to expect revulsion, fear, and rejection from the heterosexual population. They need to experience genuine love more than they need condemnation or browbeating. To break with one’s gay friends is threatening and involves a real grief process as one loses the people who to this point have been most supportive and accepting.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ Galatians 6:1 (NLT)

⁴⁰⁴ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*

Vol. 2. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 609.

⁴⁰⁵ This is the same word that is used in Galatians 5:22 (The fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness).

⁴⁰⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NKJV) “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”

⁴⁰⁷ Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling.* (Waco, Texas; Word Books Pub., 1980), 325.

Along with awareness and gentleness, we demonstrate caring for homosexuals by hearing them out and suspending critical judgment. Just listen. There is a time to listen and a time to confront. When do we confront? When we have sensed we have gained the right to be heard,⁴⁰⁸ and then in a spirit of gentleness and compassion. It is not unusual for a homosexual in crisis to be suicidal.

4. With Prayer and the Hope of the Gospel. In a courageous and insightful chapel address, a Christian seminary student once spoke of his own homosexual tendencies and his ministry among the gay community.

“Come to one of the dozens of gay bars in Chicago with me tonight and at 3: a.m. I will show you some of the nicest people in the world who are crying out to be loved –hundreds and hundreds of them – and where are we who know the love of Christ?”⁴⁰⁹

We are called to bring the hope of the Gospel that changes lives. Unfortunately too often when a homosexual “comes out of the closet” the church side steps the need and says, “You can get help over there, at that national organization.” Homosexuals need help in the local church, especially if it is their home church.

Yes, practising homosexuality is a sin. Unfortunately the world is embracing and even promoting it. But we are called to bring salt and light to this misled world. Does God love homosexuals. Absolutely! Does Christ love homosexuals? Most definitely, He died for them.. However, the proper question is “Do we in the church love homosexuals?”

The only hope for the homosexual is the power of praying people, the light of the truth of God’s Word, the forgiveness of Christ, the hope of the Gospel that changes people and the support of a loving church. Can we be that church? Will we “*Dare to Care Like Jesus?*”

⁴⁰⁸ Unfortunately, I do not believe most Christians have earned the right to be heard by homosexuals.

⁴⁰⁹ Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counselling*. (Waco, Texas; Word Books Pub., 1980), 324.

CARING WHEN THERE IS PAIN AT CHRISTMAS
Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7; December 11, 2005

If you have had a family tragedy during the advent season, then you are acutely aware that Christmas is not joyful for everyone. There are many who do their best to simply endure the holiday. Their hearts are not filled with joy but with sadness and heartache. Let me give you some examples; those who have lost someone in death this last year (or many years ago), those enduring a degenerating illness either in themselves or someone else, those who have had a sudden health change, those who have recently experienced a breakup in a relationship, those facing financial mountains, those who are part of an alcoholic family, those who are alone, or those who have families that are separated for the holidays.

There is a crescendo of stress on families at Christmas time.⁴¹⁰ In fact, Christmas is a litmus test of a marriage's health. Good marriages flourish during the holidays, but Christmas is the straw that breaks the back of many bad marriages. On January 2nd, divorce attorneys and marriage counsellors alike are usually swamped with new business that will keep them busy until Spring. Many find Christmas to be more of a holiday to "survive" than to celebrate. It does not have to be this way.

TRUTHS TO REMEMBER WHEN THERE IS PAIN AT CHRISTMAS

1. The First Christmas was filled with crisis. All was not calm, all was not bright. Do you realize that the first Christmas was celebrated in less than ideal circumstances? Put yourself in the shoes of Mary and Joseph.

i) The scandal of being pregnant and not married.

ii) Joseph contemplating ending the relationship.

iii) The hard journey to Bethlehem while being nine months pregnant.

iv) The anxiety of finding a place to stay. There was no room in the inn. Imagine how you would have wanted to celebrate the birth of your first child, knowing it was God's son. You would have wanted to be home, in a clean environment, surrounded by your family and friends. Instead you are far away from home, in a cold, drafty stable, surrounded not by friends, but by animals.

This is certainly not the way you imagined your son's birth taking place.

v) The rejection of your husband's family. Why did they go to Bethlehem? The Scripture tells us it was because it was Joseph's home town.⁴¹¹ Now, you cannot tell me that Joseph did not have any family there! Apparently, no one would take them. It would have been tempting to be discouraged and depressed if you were Mary and Joseph, would it not?

vi) The assassination attempt on your son's life. Remember the story of the magi. King Herod had asked them the exact time that they first saw the star. Then he planned a massacre of all the infant boys in Bethlehem, two years and younger.

There was plenty of crisis, turmoil and stress during that first Christmas.

2. God Cares about Hurting People

Listen to these words from Isaiah 61:1-4 that Jesus applied to Himself:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to

⁴¹⁰ Willard Harley, "How to Keep Christmas from Ruining Your Marriage," n.p. [cited Dec. 5, 2005].

Online: http://www.marriagebuilders.com/graphic/mbi5064_qa.html

⁴¹¹ Luke 2:3

proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, **to comfort all who mourn**, and provide for **those who grieve** in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.

Did you hear the significance of those verses? The whole point of Christ's coming into the world that first Christmas was to reach the hurting. He came because He cares about the brokenness of our hearts and lives. The Lord is less concerned with the tinsel, the lights, the presents and the birthday party than He is about the pain that rips at your heart.

Christmas is for you, my friend. It is God's bold move to embrace you and to heal you. Christians are not immune from heartache but approach it differently. There is nothing in the Bible that tells us that the loss of a loved one will not hurt. There is no promise that pain will not crush our lives. But there is the promise that God is here, God cares, God loves, and His love heals.

3. God Works Through Suffering

Suffering can be what economists call a “frozen asset.”⁴¹² It can be like buried treasure. It may be excruciating at the time but very beneficial in the long run. Suffering is never good in itself, but God is able to use it for good in a number of different ways.⁴¹³

i) God uses suffering to draw us to Christ. C.S. Lewis, who wrote the story of Narnia, that block buster movie that opened this weekend, says “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.... it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.”⁴¹⁴ Suffering draws us to Christ.

ii) God uses suffering to produce Christian maturity. The New Testament compares suffering to the discipline from our parents we received when growing up. Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Peter communicates a completely different analogy, that of a metal worker refining silver and gold. “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you

⁴¹² Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 201.

⁴¹³ Romans 8:28

⁴¹⁴ Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 91, 94.

may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”⁴¹⁵ Suffering produces Christian maturity.

iii) God often uses suffering to accomplish His good and perfect purposes.⁴¹⁶

Romans 8:28 tells us, “In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Though I believe this with all my heart I would caution anyone and everyone never to use this verse as a platitude to someone who is in the very eye of the storm of suffering. It is much more helpful after someone has passed the intensity of pain. Consider Joseph in the Old Testament as an example (Genesis 37-50). He suffered from rejection by his close family and separation from those he loved: sold by his brothers for silver, forcibly removed to Egypt, away from a father whom he did not see again for twenty years, unjustly imprisoned by Potiphar for a crime he did not commit. For thirteen years, he faced trials, temptations and testing. At the age of thirty, he was made ruler over Egypt and was in a position to save the lives of not only his family but all of God’s people. Toward the end of his life he was able to say to his brothers about his suffering, “You intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”⁴¹⁷ God can use suffering to accomplish His purposes.

4. God Suffers Alongside Us.

I doubt the disciples tormented themselves with questions like “Does Jesus really care?” His compassion was evident everyday. He embodied incarnational love. In reply to pain, God did not give us words or theories on the problem of pain. He gave us Himself.⁴¹⁸

Apart from the incarnation, our faith would have little to say to the suffering. God does not just know about suffering – He has suffered Himself. He knows what we are feeling when we suffer.

A beautiful athletic teenager named Joni Eareckson had a terrible diving accident on Chesapeake Bay that left her a quadriplegic. Gradually, after bitterness, anger, rebellion and despair, she came to trust the sovereignty of God. She built a new life of painting (using her mouth to hold the paintbrush) public speaking and singing (she became a recording artist). At fist Joni found it impossible to reconcile her condition

⁴¹⁵ 1 Peter 1:6-7

⁴¹⁶ Gumbel, Nicky. *Searching Issues*. (Paris, Ontario: David C. Cook Publishing, 1996), 18.

⁴¹⁷ Genesis 50:20

⁴¹⁸ Yancey, Philip. *Where is God When it Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 226.

with her belief in a loving God. One night especially, Joni became convinced that God did understand. Pain was streaking through her back, causing the kind of torment that is unique to those with paralysis. A healthy person can scratch an itch, massage an aching muscle, or flex a cramped foot. The paralysed must lie still, as victims without defence against pain.

Cindy, one of Joni's closet friend was beside her bed, searching desperately for some way to bring encouragement. Finally she clumsily blurted out, "Joni, you are not the only one . Jesus knows how you feel – why, he was paralysed too." Joni glared at her, "What are you talking about." "Remember he was nailed to the cross. His back was raw from beatings, and he must have yearned for a way to move to change position, or shift his weight , but he could not, He was paralysed by the nails." This realization that Christ was paralysed by the nails was profoundly comforting. That Christ suffers along with us is a unique Christian concept. Our God understands suffering.

5. Control Your Thinking

Paul tells us in Philippians, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."⁴¹⁹ Paul reminds us that we can control what and how we think. We need to take charge of our thinking. We can mourn our loss or give thanks for our memories. We can grumble about what we do not have or give thanks for what we do have. We can focus on the present struggle or on the God who stands with us in the struggle. We can dredge up the painful memories or replay the happy memories. We can choose to feel sorry for ourselves or can choose to find ways to use our situation. We can choose to be bitter or we can choose to forgive. Do you understand that the difference between a joyful Christmas and a painful Christmas is the attitude that we choose? 1 Cor. 2:16 says that "We have the mind of Christ." One of my favourite hymns is the one we have already sung this morning, May the Mind of Christ My Saviour.

*May the Mind of Christ my Saviour, Live in me from day to day
By His love and power controlling all I do and say.*

6. Celebrate What You Can Celebrate

Let us be honest, when pain strikes your life, it is tough to celebrate like those who are not presently suffering. You do not have to pretend that there are no difficulties. Find the things that you can celebrate and then rejoice. Even though circumstances may be difficult, you can still celebrate the One who stands with and sustains you through those circumstances. You can celebrate the entry into this world of the One who has set you free from hopelessness. You can give praise and glory to Christ who upholds you

⁴¹⁹ Philippians 4:8

and has transformed you, even though your circumstances are less than ideal. You can lift up the One who cared about your pain and did something to bring healing. You can sing about the one who is planning an eternal reunion for all those who have died in Him. There is a reason for the believer to be joyful, even in the midst of sadness.

Friend, is your heart heavy this Christmas? Are you hoping to survive the season? Do you dread the carols, the presents, the smiling faces? Do you feel the world is moving on fast forward and you are moving in slow motion? How are we to conclude this morning?

First of all, it is my deepest prayer that you understand the message of Christmas. Have you received the One who came to bring you life? Have you responded to the Saviour's simple invitation, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.?" If you have not, why not do so today. Make this Christmas the one where you meet the Guest of honour.

If you are already a believer and struggling with Christmas pain, then turn your focus to the HOPE that Christ gives you. Celebrate the difference He makes in your life. Be honest about the pain and grab hold of the promises He has given.

Finally, for those who do not understand this idea of a painful Christmas, I say to you, "OPEN YOUR EYES." Watch for the sad face, the eye that wells up with tears, the person who seems to withdraw. Watch carefully. Make sure your spiritual antenna is all the way up. And when you see someone who hurts, gently love them. Listen to them, understand them and be their friend.

One of the greatest blessings of Christmas is that Christ not only came to give us eternal life and healing, He wants to bring healing through us. We are His body, His hands and His feet. Have a Merry Christmas and be ready to make someone's Christmas just a little more merry, if you would only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

CARING WHEN THERE IS DIVORCE

Lamentations 3:17-23; January 8, 2006

Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet.⁴²⁰ His tears flowed from a broken heart. Lamentations is aptly named. Can you not just picture Jeremiah sobbing all through the writing of this book? He wept because the people had rejected God. They had left him. They had divorced and deserted the One who created them and loved them. Jeremiah's heart was broken because he knew of the suffering and exile that lay ahead for the people who had abandoned God for another relationship.

This morning I am comparing Jeremiah's brokenness with the anguish of those who have experienced a marital break up. This morning I want to revisit the topic, "Dare to Care Like Jesus." How do we care for those who are going through the gut wrenching experience of divorce? Jeremiah, of course, is not writing specifically about divorce but see if you can pick up on how this passage applies to our topic.

Lam. 3:17-20 (NLT) Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. I cry out, "My splendour is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the LORD is lost!" The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter⁴²¹ beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. That to me, describes the hurt and the brokenness left in the wake of divorce.

Every relationship, at sometime, struggles. Do you not agree? If marriages were made in heaven, they should be happier⁴²². But the truth is they are made, and broken, here on earth. Only the naive expect to live happily ever-after. Once in a while, when I hear of a couple married dozens of years who have "never quarrelled once," I always

⁴²⁰ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*.

(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1141.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 1217. The word "bitter," "wormwood" in the NASB, refers to the most bitter plant in Palestine.

⁴²² Thomas Southerne cited by Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), 43.

wonder if they are amnesiacs or liars.⁴²³ The truth is that anytime you place two people with feelings together in marriage, conflict is bound to occur. After all, if you agree about everything, then one of you is unnecessary. In measured doses, conflict can be productive; it forces growth and change, collaboration and resolution. It releases tensions constructively rather than letting them build to dangerous levels.

Every relationship at sometimes struggles but unfortunately many are destroyed on the rocks of crisis.

I. What Are the Facts of Divorce

Table 4 - 3.

Number of Divorces by Provinces					
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Newfoundland & Labrador	892	913	755	842	662
Price Edward Island	291	272	246	258	281
Nova Scotia	1,954	2,054	1,945	1,990	1,907
New Brunswick	1671	1717	1,570	1,461	1450
Quebec	17,144	17,054	17,094	16,499	16738
Ontario	26,088	26,148	26,516	26,170	27,513
Manitoba	2,572	2,430	2,480	2,396	2,352
Saskatchewan	2,237	2,194	1,955	1,959	1992
Alberta	7,931	8,176	8,252	8,291	7960
British Columbia	9,935	10017	10115	10125	9820
Total	70910	71,144	71110	70155	70828
Number of Marriages by Provinces					
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Canada	--	157395	146,618	146,738	145048

⁴²³ Berkley, James D. *Called Into Crisis*. (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1989), 43.

- Since 1970, in the US alone, at least a million children a year have seen their parents divorce.⁴²⁴
- **No matter how common it seems, divorce is still a trauma that can impact every part of one's life.**⁴²⁵
- **Divorce is likely the most severe adult rejection experience.**⁴²⁶
- **Second marriages with children are much more likely to end in divorce than first marriages.**
- **It is clear in our divorce culture that the youngest children suffer the most.**
- **Studies show that children from divorced families are less committed to marriage in adult life.**
- **Divorce is a Process – It does not happen all at once. Fifty percent of those who divorce actually considered it 1-3 years before the event.**⁴²⁷
- **Many couples headed for divorce have truces. It is like a dying patient who has rallied , looks better but is still dying. Unfortunately children have no opportunity for anticipatory grief.**

II. What Does God Think of Divorce?

i) I am sure God thinks about divorce the same way that most couples do, it breaks his heart. He hates it.⁴²⁸

ii) **God has always intended each married couple to remain married for life (Gen. 2:24). Jesus knew that the option for divorce was included in Moses' law because of our sinful human nature. However, He still defended the importance of the permanence in marriage. God expects couples to do their best – with His help – and to keep their marriage intact. If a divorce occurs, God's compassionate love can heal even the deepest wounds.**⁴²⁹

iii) **Divorce is no where commanded or encouraged in Scripture.**⁴³⁰

⁴²⁴ Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee *The Unexpected Legacy Of Divorce*. (New York:

Hyperion, 2000), xxvi.

⁴²⁵ Grace Boneschanker, "Picking up the Pieces." *Faith Today* (July/August 2005), 29-31.

⁴²⁶ Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 174.

⁴²⁷ Switzer, David K. *Pastoral Care Emergencies*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 160.

⁴²⁸ Malachi 2:16

⁴²⁹ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 1261.

⁴³⁰ Collins, Gary. *Christian Counselling*. (Waco Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1980), 189.

iv) Divorce is not an unforgivable sin.

v) God deeply loves and cares for those broken by divorce (John 4 - The Woman at the Well).

As painful as divorce is for all involved, and as heart breaking as divorce is for those who face it without wanting it, God can touch broken hearts and lives and make them whole again

When the unthinkable occurs, God is there to help us pick up the pieces. Just as he revealed Himself to the woman at the well (John 4), who had been divorced five times, He does the same for those today who seek Him out of their brokenness. He can put together the pieces of our lives and makes us whole again.

III. Three Great Myths of Divorce

Myth #1 - If the parents are happier, the children will be happier

National studies show that children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive toward their parents and teachers, experience more depression, have more learning difficulties, have more relational problems with peers, have earlier sexual activity, and more children born out of wedlock. Fewer marry and more divorce, and they have more psychological problems as adults than children from intact families.⁴³¹

Myth #2 - The anger will subside. The truth is that anger does not end with divorce. Contrary to what most people think (including attorneys and judges) the vast majority of divorcing parents do not drag their conflicts into the courtroom. Although only 10-15 % of couples fight in court, unfortunately many stay intensely angry with one another. One third of the couples in one study were fighting at the same high pitch ten years after their divorce was final.⁴³² The notion that divorce ends the intense love-hate relationship of the marriage is another myth of our times.

Myth #3 - Divorce is a temporary crisis and the most harmful effects are on the parents and children at the time of break up. The truth is that divorce is a life transforming experience.⁴³³ Its effects impact every phase of a person's life.

IV. Causes of a Marital Break Up

Every couple needs to understand clearly that there is a gravitational pull in every marriage away from oneness and intimacy. Every couple automatically drifts toward

⁴³¹ Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee *The Unexpected Legacy Of Divorce*. (New York: Hyperion, 2000), xxiii.

⁴³² Ibid., 5.

⁴³³ Ibid., xxvii.

independence and isolation.⁴³⁴ **Couples who do not recognize this instinctive, seductive pull to isolation will find that their holy wedlock can calcify into an unholy deadlock. The solution to isolation is the intentional striving toward oneness. It takes continuous effort.**

Your marriage certificate is only the permission under God to “start” to build your marriage! Here is my marriage certificate. If you have been in my office you have seen it hanging on the wall right beside my desk (beautifully framed by Coral Pellerin). What is unusual about this presentation is that there are two certificates in this single frame. One is my marriage licence and the other is an old building permit from city hall. I have explained this word picture to every couple that I have ever married. You see, nobody walks out of city hall with a new building permit in hand and declares, “My new home is all built.” No, you have just received permission from the government to “start” your new home. The same is true of marriage. Your wedding certificate should simply be a reminder that you have permission under the blessing of God to start building your relationship as husband and wife. It is a building process that never ends and needs continuous attention.

There is no one cause of divorce. Here are some of the contributing factors:

i) Sin and Selfishness - Even Paul wrote, “I do not understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I do not do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate.”⁴³⁵

ii) Life Stresses - There are financial pressures, health problems, demanding work schedules, etc. Everyone knows that if you put too much pressure on something it will break

iii) Sexual Unfaithfulness - People are constantly being sexually bombarded by Hollywood and the Internet.

iv) Satanic Assault - He is the great confuser and the ultimate liar. He magnifies people’s weaknesses and fears, and uses them as wedges in their marriages. He is a roaring lion out to take a big bite out people’s marriages.

v) Social Attitudes - Society ‘s changing values has made divorce easier and more acceptable.

vi) Unrealistic Expectations - Most couples are caught off guard with difficulties in marriage. These unrealistic expectations need to be fought with biblical ones. People need to understand that everybody has unresolved personal issues and nobody is perfect. No one person can fulfill all of your needs. Only God can do that. Marriage brings two ordinary people into such close proximity with each other that every detail and flaw is exposed. Therefore, it takes a lot of patience,

⁴³⁴ Rainey, Dennis. *Staying Close*. (Vancouver, BC; Word Publishing, 1989), 7.

⁴³⁵ Romans 7:15 (NLT)

understanding and deep forgiveness to maintain a healthy relationship. A good marriage takes a lot of work.

There are many assaults on marriage today. Everyone's marriage is under attack. God's Word cautions, "if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!"⁴³⁶ Therefore, extend a mountain of grace and understanding to those caught in this pain.

V. How to Care/Help During a Marital Break up

i) Understand that divorce is like a death. It takes two years to grieve the loss of a spouse's death and about four to five years to grieve a divorce. It takes longer because the connections through children, friends and finances remain.⁴³⁷ **An ex-spouse can move in and out of one's life, reopening the old wounds over and over, making the healing process much more difficult.**⁴³⁸

ii) Understand the grief process.⁴³⁹ - **There is much anger, blame and depression in divorce. Depression feels awful,⁴⁴⁰ but it is actually the healthiest phase of the process⁴⁴¹ because they have finally hit bottom and are now ready to heal. As a loyal friend you can gently help your divorced friend rebuild his or her life.**

iii) Understand the importance of a ministry of presence. - **Make sure you visit your friend personally. The fact is that many family and friends do not want to take sides or do not know what to say, so they say nothing and do nothing. We are called to *Dare to Care Like Jesus*. Make the visit. Be present but do not preach, at first just listen.**

iv) Encourage participation in a healing ministry. Perhaps you can locate information on a healing support ministry and share it with your friend, even offer to go with your friend on the first night. The most widespread of these programs is called DivorceCare. The website is on the bottom of your sermon notes. It is a 13-week program that features weekly videos of topics like facing your anger and forgiveness. Would it not be wonderful to offer this healing ministry to our

⁴³⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:12

⁴³⁷ Boneschansker, Grace. "Picking up the Pieces." *Faith Today* (July/August 2005): 29-31.

⁴³⁸ Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 35.

⁴³⁹ See more on the grief process in Sermon #4 "Caring When There Is Critical Illness."

⁴⁴⁰ See more on the dynamics of depression in Sermon #8 "Caring When There Is Depression."

⁴⁴¹ Lampman, Lisa. *Helping a Neighbour in Crisis*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, (1997), 37.

community? This could be a great outreach opportunity for our own congregation with some internal fringe benefits as well.

v) **Understand the emotional needs.** There are two general ways that people respond to emotional pain:⁴⁴² 1) inward (withdrawal, shame, manipulation), and 2) outward (anger, revenge, bitterness, control). Divorce is like an emotional roller coaster. It can be an extremely debilitating time. One person writes, “I felt like I had a huge hole in my chest, like part of me had been ripped away. I walked around feeling as if people could see right through me. I was embarrassed and ashamed.⁴⁴³” I cannot emphasize enough how vulnerable one can become. This vulnerability can make the divorced person prone to other hurts. Therefore absorb the anger and caution them against any major decisions (e.g. selling the house).

vi) **Empathize but try to stay neutral.** - Two people, and usually a vast supporting cast, have caused this conflict. Rarely is there a true villain and victim. Although fault may not be equal, it takes two. While there are always two sides to every story, you should not try to point out the person’s contribution to the break up, at least not right away. At some point the divorced person may need to take inventory of their own behavioural patterns but the immediate need is for support, comfort and empathy.

vii) **Caution against new relationships.** - During recovery, such people are extremely vulnerable. They need to focus on full recovery and emotional wholeness. When hurried by a new love, healing does not happen properly. It is like a broken bone that is set improperly, it may have to be broken again in order to heal right. Rebound relationships usually cause more pain. If both of them enter into a new relationship it could mean that there will be four miserable people instead of two.⁴⁴⁴ Divorced people should wait at least two years before involvement in romantic relationships. The emptiness in one’s soul after a divorce requires God’s healing and completeness. No human can substitute for the work of God in someone’s life.⁴⁴⁵

viii) **Understand the need for forgiveness.** - There are times when we need to forgive ourselves as well as others. Without such forgiveness, we can never truly be healed and released. At some point the divorced need to make a decision to forgive – even though the process of forgiveness may take a lifetime.

⁴⁴² Mullen, Grant. *Emotionally Free*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), ??????????

⁴⁴³ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 250.

⁴⁴⁴ Collins, Gary. *Christian Counselling*. (Waco Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1980), 199.

⁴⁴⁵ Clinton, Tim ed. *The Soul Care Bible*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 251.

viii) **Encourage them to give back.** - Lest you misunderstand and take this the wrong way, let me explain. The final step to recovery, according to the Scriptures is to focus on giving back to others. The God of all comfort, comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Perhaps assisting in running a course in DivorceCare, here at Sunny Brae could be a way that a divorced person could give to others and at the same time nurture your own healing.

Well, is there hope for the divorced? Again Jeremiah writes, Lamentations 3:19-23 (NLT) The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The unfailing love (lovingkindnesses; NASB) of the LORD never ends! By his mercies (compassion NASB) we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day.

The word for “unfailing love” is *hesed*, which has the idea of loyal love.⁴⁴⁶ **God was sticking by the people He had chosen. He had made a covenant with Israel. The phrase “His compassions never fail” showed His gentle feeling of concern for those who belonged to Him. “Compassions” is the Hebrew word *rehem*, (womb). It is in the plural for intensity.**⁴⁴⁷

God’s “loving-kindnesses” (NASB) are new every morning. God offers a fresh supply of loyal love every day to His covenant people. Much like the manna in the wilderness, the supply cannot be exhausted. This truth caused Jeremiah to call out in praise, **Great is Your faithfulness.**

There is hope for the divorced! It is amazing what God can do if we give Him all the broken pieces. You are ambassadors of the hope, if you will only *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

⁴⁴⁶ John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*.

(Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1217.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

CARING WHEN THERE IS ADDICTION - Part 2 Pornography
Proverbs 9:1-18; Job 31:1; January 15, 2006

In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom and Folly are personified. They are portrayed as real people and they are contrasted. Wisdom brings righteousness, life and leads to God. In fact, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10). Folly, on the other hand, leads to sin and brings death. Proverbs proclaims a loud warning to be careful of Lady Folly, she is trying to seduce you. Nine times Proverbs calls this woman “adulterous” in the NIV⁴⁴⁸. **The NASB uses the term “the strange woman.” The word translated “strange” basically means “not related to.”⁴⁴⁹ The “strange woman” is one to whom the man is not related by marriage, and therefore any sexual liaison with her is evil. I want to talk to you this morning about Lady Folly, this strange woman and how she seduces many men through pornography. Only she does not sit at the door of her house, as it says in the text, she is right in his house, calling out from the click of the computer mouse.**

Pornography is sexual gratification from explicit pictures of strangers.

I. God’s Will Is Our Holiness and Purity

We hardly need to be reminded in western culture that we live in a sexually-charged society. Everything from automobiles and underwear to vacations and wine is sold on its sex appeal.⁴⁵⁰ **That is the world in which we live . However, we are still called to purity.**

1 Thess 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God... 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Eph 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such

⁴⁴⁸ Proverbs 2:16; 5:3,20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 22:14; 23:27; 27:13.

⁴⁴⁹ Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Skillful. An Old Testament Study.* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Prov. 5:1.

⁴⁵⁰ John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, and Aldous Huxley. *Ethics for a Brave New World.* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 148.

good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Did you know that we are commanded to avoid sexual impurity in nearly every book in the New Testament?⁴⁵¹

II. Facts On Pornography

1. Tidbits⁴⁵²

- **The average boy sees pornography by age 11**
- **The average pornography addict does not seek help until age 35!⁴⁵³**
- **There was a 345% increase in child pornography sites between 2/2001-7/2001 (N2H2, 8/01)**
- **25 million Americans visit cybersex sites for between 1-10 hours per week (MSNBC Survey 2000)**
- **9 out of 10 children 8-16 yrs. have viewed porn online, mostly accidentally while doing homework (UK News Telegraph, NOP Research Group, 1/07/02)**
- **26 popular children's characters, such as Pokemon, My Little Pony and Action Man, revealed thousands of links to porn sites. 30% were hard-core. (Envisional 2000)**
- **At least 200,000 Internet users are hooked on porn (MSNBC/Stanford/Duquesne Study, Ass.Press 2/29/2000).**
- **51% of pastors admit that looking at internet pornography is their biggest temptation. (Christianity Today, Dec 2002)**
- **Every day, up to 30 million people log on to pornographic web-sites (CNET.com, April 28, 1999).**
- **Americans spend an estimated \$8-10 billion annually on pornography. This exceeds the combined gross of ABC, CBS, & NBC, (\$6.2 billion). This is also more than all revenues generated by rock music, country music, Broadway productions, theater, ballet, jazz and classical music combined.**
- **Laboratory studies show that viewing violent pornographic films can increase aggression against women.**

⁴⁵¹ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man's Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 45.

⁴⁵² "Porn Facts," n.p. [cited Jan 10, 2006]. Online: <http://www.xxxchurch.com/pornpatrol/facts.asp>.

⁴⁵³ Teresa Cook, "Mom, I am Addicted to Pornography," *Leadership Journal* Vol. 43, No. 5, (September/October 2005): [cited Jan 11, 2006]. Online: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2005/005/13.30.html>

- It is believed that 70% of women involved in pornography are survivors of incest or child sexual abuse.
- Nearly 900 theaters show X-rated films and more than 15,000 adult bookstores and video stores offer pornographic material, outnumbering McDonald's restaurants in the U.S. by a margin of at least 3 to 1.
- According to NetValue, children spent 64.9 percent more time on pornography sites than they did on game sites in September 2000. ("The NetValue Report on Minors Online" 12/19/2000).

“Wives, the world is throwing bodies of women at your husbands and sons. A wife is absolutely foolish who does not lavish herself physically on her husband. I know that it is critical that he be attentive and show affection and be tender in communication. However, when the wife begins to use sex or the lack of it as a club to keep him in line or as a means of control or manipulation, she is the one who is deceiving and wounding herself.”⁴⁵⁴

2. Christian Men Are Not Immune to the Seduction of Pornography. In fact, the most sought after article published by *Christianity Today* (Leadership Journal) was on pornography, it was called “The War Within: The Anatomy of Lust.”⁴⁵⁵ **It was the story of one Christian leader’s battle with pornography.**

3. Porn Leads to Solitary Sex. Let me give you a working definition of porn. Pornography is explicit material with the specific intention to seduce, to excite sexually, to trigger the hormones. Porn leads to masturbation, it leads to solitary sex and is devoid of relationship.⁴⁵⁶

4. Pornography is Fantasy, an Illusion. It is not a real relationship. They are not real people in the photographs. All the imperfections are deleted, the photo has an air brush finish and in many cases her features have been surgically enhanced. Pornography destroys real relationship because it leads to comparison and unrealistic expectations.

A real relationship costs, it takes a lot of work. A fantasy *looks free*. However, Proverbs 9 says it has a very high cost. “Come home with me she urges the simple.... But

⁴⁵⁴ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio, 1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁵⁵ “The War Within: The Anatomy of Lust,” *Leadership Journal* Vol. 3, No. 4 (1982): 30-35. Cited Jan. 11, 2006. Online: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/classics/war1.html>.

⁴⁵⁶ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man’s Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 28.

men do not realize that her former guests are now in the grave” (Prov 9:16,18 NLT). The end result is DEATH. Porn destroys a marriage. It destroys our dependence on one another. It brings deceit. The man may think that it is a secret deal. “Nobody else will ever know.” Not only does God know, but it also affects the wholeness, the well being, the energy and the vitality of the relationship. It may be imperceptible for a time but its effects become very decisive over time.

5. Pornography is Addictive. Men receive a chemical high from sexually charged images - a hormone called epinephrine is secreted into the blood stream, which locks into the memory whatever stimulus is present at the time of the emotional excitement.⁴⁵⁷ **The images become burned into the mind, just as you would burn pictures onto a CD. The younger a person is when they see porn and the longer they are exposed to it, the more imbedded it becomes. Dr. Jerry Kirk says, “It is the strongest addiction I know, stronger than drugs, stronger than alcohol, stronger than nicotine. It consumes the mind, heart and imagination.”**⁴⁵⁸

Pornography releases endorphins many times stronger than morphine.⁴⁵⁹ **Unlike drug or alcohol addicts, who ingest something from outside the body, pornography addicts have their addictive substance available to be called up at will, or many times *against* their will. Eventually, even when an addict is not looking at pornography, the images continue replaying in his or her mind. Recovery is not a quick, easy fix.**

6. Pornography is Progressive. Like any addiction, sex addiction is progressive. It is like Athlete’s foot of the mind.⁴⁶⁰ **It never goes away. It is always asking to be scratched, promising relief. To scratch, however, is to cause pain or intensify the itch. Porn leads to...**

⁴⁵⁷ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man’s Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 30.

⁴⁵⁸ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio, 1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁵⁹ Teresa Cook, “Mom, I am Addicted to Pornography,” *Leadership Journal* Vol. 43, No. 5, (September/October 2005): [cited Jan 11, 2006]. Online: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2005/005/13.30.html>.

⁴⁶⁰ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man’s Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 29.

- 1) **Addiction - Dependence on epinephrine locked into the brain by sexual images.**
 - 2) **Escalation - The vicious obsessive cycle becomes all consuming.**
 - 3) **Desensitization - One needs more of it to get the same high.**
 - 4) **Behaviour Adaptation - You begin to model what you see in the material.**
- It has been estimated that 10% of men have no sexual temptation, 10% are sexual addicts and 80% are in the shades of grey in the middle.⁴⁶¹ As you can see, sexual activity for many becomes progressively worse and usually leads to some form of negative consequences.⁴⁶²

III. The Cause of Pornography

1. Just by Being Male. Dr. Gary Smalley says that every fifty seconds a man has a testosterone attack.⁴⁶³ **It is the nature of the beast to be drawn to the beauty of a woman. A lot of porn is very degrading to men but much of it is attractive to a man. I am not making excuses here, there is no excuse for pornography, however, we must understand the nature of the beast if we are to tame the beast. There are four male tendencies.**⁴⁶⁴

- i) **Males Are Rebellious by Nature.** 90% of major crimes of violence, 99.9 % of rapes, 95 % of burglaries, and 94 % drunk drivers are men. As men, we will often choose sin simply because we like our own way.
- ii) **Males Find the Straight Life Dull and Boring** - See Dr. Dobson's "Straight Talk"
- iii) **Males Have A Strong Regular Sex Drive** - Most women stand in amazement at how regularly their husbands desire sex.
- iv) **Males Receive Sexual Gratification Through the Eyes** - For women, their ignitions are tied to touch and relationship. Men in general do not necessarily need the relationship to be stimulated. That is why Proverbs warns not to be seduced by "strange" women. Remember

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁶² Nils C. Friberg and Mark R. Laaser. *Before the Fall* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 25.

⁴⁶³ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio, 1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁶⁴ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man's Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 62.

the definition of strange. “Not related to.” Men do not need the relationship to be stimulated. However, we must choose to be more than male. We must choose manhood. Since we were created by God and for God, being a *man* means hearing God’s word and doing it. The hands and eyes of Jesus never touched or looked at a woman with dishonour. Job was just a man as we are and he made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman (Job 31:1; also 31:9).

Dr. Jerry Kirk, President of the National Coalition for Pornography describes the mixed emotions, the Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde dilemma, when he stumbled upon hardcore porn on a hotel TV as he was flipping channels.⁴⁶⁵ “I was shocked to find in myself a mixture of both revulsion and attraction simultaneously inside myself.” He was surprised that he was attracted to the sexually explicit pictures and did not turn away from them as quickly as he knew he should. “And I am a nationally know speaker against pornography.” We get into this affliction simply by being male.

2. Mixing God’s standard with the world’s standard. This is a second causes that leads to pornography. God’s standard is obedience. The world’s standard is excellence. Just do your best. Excellence is a *mixed* standard, while obedience is a *fixed* standard. Many young men are addicted to pornography and hoping that marriage will be the cure. When marriage comes they are surprised to discover that the addiction does not diminish. To change you have to recognize that you are impure because you have mixed God’s standard with yours.

Those who commit sexual misconduct are often starved for love. GK Chesterton said, "A man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God"⁴⁶⁶

IV. The Pain of Pornography

Porn is not designed to help you fantasize about your spouse, but about someone else’s spouse. Therefore porn leads, at least initially, to intense guilt. When people feel

⁴⁶⁵ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio, 1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁶⁶ Nils C. Friberg and Mark R. Laaser. *Before the Fall* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 32.

guilty their behaviour deteriorates.⁴⁶⁷ **They will either not function well personally or not relate well with others. One person lamented, “I seem to be dying inside” (see James 1:13-15). Pornography decreases self-esteem.**

- **Addiction leads to an almost irreversible downward slide vocationally.** ⁴⁶⁸
- **Sex addicts in general suffer from chronic depression.** ⁴⁶⁹
- **Sexual addiction is a life time problem⁴⁷⁰. It is repetitive, degenerative, and destructive.**
- **“One man plucked out both his eyes (Mt 5:29) because of his uncontrollable addiction.”⁴⁷¹**

There is also the pain of the addict’s spouse. Anger and shock is normal. However there is also self doubt, betrayal and loneliness. Anger is healthy ; the other feelings are destructive. The spouse starts thinking, “Has everything been a lie?” They see pornography as personal rejection, and it is. Their husband has a mistress called pornography or as Proverbs says, Lady Folly. At the altar he promised her that his sexual gratification would only come from her and he has betrayed her..

V. Proactive Caring to Prevent Addiction

If you struggle with sexual addiction, or simply want to protect your family from the temptation of pornography, consider these practical steps.

1. Cast a safety net.

- Keep all TVs and computers in open family areas.
 - If you must have cable TV, install a filter on your line to avoid any unwanted channels.
- Guarding yourself and your family is not always popular. Several months ago our family down-graded their cable TV package. I had enough of channel 42, “Show Case.” Its motto is “TV without borders.” However I want borders. I need borders. So do you. It was not a popular decision because we also lost some of our favorite channels by going to basic cable. Personally, I loved the History Channel and TSN, the sports channel.

⁴⁶⁷ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio, 1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁶⁸ Stanley Grenz and Roy Bell. *Betrayal of Trust*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 136.

⁴⁶⁹ Nils C. Friberg and Mark R. Laaser. *Before the Fall* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 26.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

Debbie loved A & E. Here is an email from one of my daughters when she found out. This is an exact quote as it appeared in the email.

- "You got rid of the superstition!?!?!?!? That is nuts!!!!!!!!!!SICK!"

2. Use an accountability software - X3watch is an accountability software program that helps with online integrity. Whenever you browse the Internet and access a site which may contain questionable material, the program will save the site name on your computer in a hidden folder. A person of your choice (an accountability partner) will receive an email containing all possible questionable sites you may have visited within the month. This information is meant to encourage open and honest conversation between friends and help us all be more accountable. X3watch is on both of my computers, the one at home and the one at the office. Two pastors in town here are our accountability partners.

3. Have an accountability partner. Christians who try to play the Lone Ranger get themselves into trouble.⁴⁷² **Addictions cannot be conquered alone. Do not ask your wife to be your accountability partner. Most men will not get real with their wives about a predominantly male problem.**

4. Equip your spirit. Read your Bible regularly and memorize Scriptures that you can recite when tempted (e.g., Rom. 6:13-14 and 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Pray for strength (Phil. 4:13) and sing or listen to Christian music while doing mundane tasks.

VI. Reactive Caring to Liberate Addiction

Get professional help. If you are addicted to porn, find a Christian counselor who specializes in sexual addictions. Addictions cannot be conquered by yourself. If you have a friend who is addicted to porn you must encourage him to build three perimeters of defence into his life; around the eyes, the mind, and the heart⁴⁷³

1. Build a Perimeter Around Eyes - Learn to bounce your eyes. Train this reflex action like the jerk of a hand off a hot stove. Experts say that anything done consistently for twenty one days becomes a habit. Find a way . Consistency is important.

⁴⁷² Wilson, Earl. *Sexual Sanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 121.

⁴⁷³ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man's Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2004), 104.

It is important to remember that it is not the first look that is sinful.⁴⁷⁴ **Men do notice women. Women take a great deal of time to make themselves look noticeable. It is not the first look but the lingering look that leads to lust after what it sees. If you bounce your eyes for six weeks and totally starve them, you can win this war. With no food for the mental fantasies, the sexual fever will be broken. You are sexually pure when no sexual gratification comes from anyone/thing but your spouse.**

2. Build a Perimeter Around the Mind - 2 Cor 10:5 says, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” The problem is that a man has a mustang mind that runs wild and free.⁴⁷⁵ **The mind is harder to tame than the eyes so the eyes must be won first. The good news is that the defence perimeter of the eyes works with you to build the perimeter of the mind. By starving the eyes you starve the mind as well. The defence perimeter of the mind is less like a wall and more like the customs area in an international airport. Choose to reject the contraband! “Red Alert! Shields Up! Bounce your eyes!”**

3. Build a Perimeter Around the Heart - Honouring and cherishing are your key actions to establishing this perimeter around your heart. Christian recording artist, Steve Green, sings a beautiful song about the absolute necessity of building a perimeter around your heart.

Guard your heart, Guard your heart.
Do not trade it for treasure do not give it away.
Guard your heart, Guard your heart.
As a payment for pleasure it is a high price to pay.
The human heart is easily swayed, and often betrayed at the hand of emotion,
You dare not leave the outcome to chance you must choose in advance,
Or live with the agony, such needless tragedy.

There will be no victory in this area of your life until you choose manhood with all your might. **You got into this problem by being male, you get out of this problem by being a man.**

Like the prodigal, you need to come to your senses and make a decision. Job made a decision. “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young

⁴⁷⁴ Dennis Rainey and Jerry Kirk, *Pornography: the Dangerous Deception Vol. 1-2* (FamilyLife Radio,

1994), Cassette Tapes.

⁴⁷⁵ Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey, *Every Man's Battle*. (Colorado Springs, CO:

WaterBook Press, 2004), 163.

woman” (Job 31:1(NLT). Jesus also made a decision. “And for their sake I consecrate myself” (John 17:19). If the Son of Man needed to make a decision to consecrate himself (for his disciples), how much more do we need to make a decision to consecrate ourselves? Jesus did so for the sake of his disciples. Who are the people for whom you need to consecrate yourself?

Every Christian who has struggled with obsessional thinking *wants* to be delivered. Deliverance is only used twice in the New Testament (Lk 4:18; Heb. 11:34). Both times it has to do with *escape*. In other places it is conveyed by *release* or *rescue*. How can we escape and be rescued? Deliverance is a function of three things⁴⁷⁶

- 1) **Christ’s sacrifice to make it possible**
- 2) **God’s power to enable us to be delivered**
- 3) **Our willingness to walk in the Spirit.**

The beginning of this sinful alliance may be exciting and sweet, (Prov. 7:13-20), but in the end, the “sweetness” turns to bitterness and the honey becomes poison (Prov. 5:4). The Book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance of *looking ahead to see where your actions will lead you.*⁴⁷⁷ The wise person checks on the destination before buying a ticket (Prov. 4:26), but modern society thinks that people can violate God’s laws and escape the consequences.⁴⁷⁸ The consequences are destroyed lives. There are too many people out there captive who cannot get free by themselves. They need our help but they are too embarrassed to ask. However if they do ask, or you spot the signs or red flags of the problem then you can offer the support and encouragement that is needed if you only *Dare to Care Like Jesus.*

APPENDIX - B. Fill-in-the-Blank Sermon Notes as Bulletin Inserts.

The God Of All Comfort 2 Cor. 1:1-11; September 11, 2005

My Thesis Project is called “Equipping the Laity to Help Those in Crisis.”

1. Life Can Be Brutal.

Current Example
Hurricane Katrina
(August 30, 2005)

⁴⁷⁶ Wilson, Earl. *Sexual Sanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 129.

⁴⁷⁷ See Proverbs 5:11; 14:12-14; 16:25; 19:20; 20:21; 23:17-18, 32; 24:14, 20; 25:8.

⁴⁷⁸ Wiersbe, Warren *Be Skillful. An Old Testament Study.* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Prov. 5:1.

Biblical Examples

Paul

2 Cor

11

John the Baptist

Matt 14:10

Joseph

Gen

37,39,40

Jesus

Mark

15:24

2. God Is the Source of Comfort, Not the Calamity .

2 Cor 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

The word “ comfort ,” occurs 10 times in verses 3-7.

Too often we dwell on what we do not have control of (**the calamity**) instead of what we do have control of (**trusting in the God of all comfort**).

Jer 29:11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

Dt. 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever; that we may follow all the words of this law.

We need Divine Comfort ,

Not **Escapism** - Drowning the pain with alcohol, gambling, pornography, affairs.

Not **“Pop Psychology”** - “Chin Up,” “When the going gets tough....”

3. There Is a Stewardship of Comfort

2 Cor 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

Do not let your painful experiences be a **waste**, do not let them be for **nothing**.

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters .

Dare to Care Like Jesus
Luke 10:30-37; September 18, 2005

Caring Like Jesus is **Risky Business** .

The root of comfort is the Latin *fortis* = Brave

We get the word fortitude from it.

Caring Like Jesus is **Radical Business** .

It is more than making a donation to the Red Cross

- Examples: i) The Washing of the Disciples Feet.
 ii) Talking to the Woman at the Well.
 iii) Touching the Leper and Risking Infection
 iv) The Good Shepherd Laying His Life Down for the Sheep
 v) The Cross - The supreme example of radical cost.
 vi) The Good Samaritan

I. The Biblical Basis for Caring-

- i) “Go and Do Likewise” - Luke 10:37
- ii) The Great Commandment - Matthew 22:39 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
- iii) Jesus' Opening Declaration and Description of His Ministry
*Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (a crisis).
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners (a crisis)
and recovery of sight for the blind (a crisis),
to release the oppressed (a crisis),
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*
- iv) The Church is a Caring Community .
Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn
John 21:16 Take care of my sheep

II. Prerequisites for Caring.

- i) Courage
Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- ii) The Holy Spirit - He is the primary Comforter .

John 14:26 (KJV) But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

iii) Ministry of Presence - Folks in crisis need practical help.

James 2:15-17 (paraphrased) "Suppose a brother or sister is in the middle of a crisis. And you say "Go, I wish you well; I will pray for you," but does nothing about his crisis, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

iv) Active Listening

*James 1:19 (NIV) My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,
Job 2:11 Job's three friends ... sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*

The harder the impact the longer you bite your tongue.

v) Respect - Suspending Critical Judgement

1 Peter 2:17 "Show proper respect to everyone."

vi) Empathy - entering into another's feelings

John 10:33 the Good Samaritan "took pity on him."

What you do is secondary to the attitude or way you do it.

vii) Self - Disclosure Connect with the sufferer, but do not give details.

"My dad died last year too, it was very hard".

viii) Confrontation - Sometimes we must challenge their self destructive actions.

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

Jesus tells us through this parable and the rest of the New Testament not only *why* we should care but *how*. We can summarize the how by saying simply practice incarnational ministry. You are Jesus' hands and feet. Be Jesus to people. Go out and do the same as He would. *Dare to Care Like Jesus*.

Caring When a Loved One Dies
John 11: 17-37; September 25, 2005

Listen very closely to me, church. You are priests.

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV) But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Rev 1:6 (NIV) (Christ) has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory & power for ever & ever! Amen.

A Priest is a channel of forgiveness, grace, mercy, healing.

S/He provides pastoral care. *Dare to Care Like Jesus!!*

1. GRIEF IS UNIVERSAL . Grief is normal.

It is not true that spiritual people do not grieve or do not need comfort .

Even Jesus grieved. John 11:35 “Jesus wept”

Isaiah 53:3 - the Messiah was “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.”

Grieving is Normal, **So Do not Stifle the Emotions of Grief.**

2. GRIEF IS UNIQUE . It is never the same.

John 11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. (They responded differently.)

So “NEVER SAY, “I know exactly how you feel .”

Factors That Contribute to the Various Responses to Grief.

- 1) The Circumstances Surrounding the Death:
- 2) The Background of the griever.
- 3) The Personality of the griever.
- 4) The Beliefs of the griever.

Feelings are a product of our Thinking, our Beliefs .

Your beliefs about death and Jesus' victory over death are paramount.

*John 11: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. **Do you believe this?**"*

John 8:32 "Truth shall set you free."

How do we *Dare to Care Like Jesus* when there is a death of a loved one?

1. Respect the Person's Feelings

John 11:21,32 "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Notice the undertone of blame.

But Jesus suspended critical judgment. He respected their feelings.

2. Empathize with the Hurting. Notice three times it mentions Jesus' empathy.

i) *John 11:33 When Jesus saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.*

ii) *John 11:35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"*

iii) *John 11:38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.*

3. Visit Often.

- Your number one ministry is a "Ministry of Presence."

- Your greatest gift may be a warm touch, a sympathetic tear, or silent company.

- Be present, but do not preach.

Angry questions addressed to God are often more felt than meant. The time for orthodox theology will come later. What is needed now is loving care that mirrors God's feelings for the downtrodden.

4. Send a Card with a Short Note of Encouragement.

5. Do Acts of Kindness.

6. Avoid Platitudes and Cliches. They downplay the significance of the death.

7. Recognize that Grieving is a Long Process.

Often it takes between 2-5 years before most widows have more good days.

1 Thess 5:14 "Encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

Remember you are priests. He wants to minister to others through you. So, when tragedy strikes a neighbour, do not let anxiety of not knowing what to do paralyse you.

3)
Serious injury
(Car
accidents)

2) AIDS/HIV 4) Teen Pregnancy (not an illness but still a crisis)

Individuals normally exist in a state of reasonable equilibrium within established boundaries, based on a certain order and understanding of the world. A “critical incident” (traumatic event) throws people out of equilibrium into a crisis state that makes it difficult to restore a sense of balance. Do not expect grieving people to be spiritual and say or do the right things.

GRIEF IS A PROCESS It is both a psychological and a biological process.

By understanding the Grief Process you can be in a better position to empathize with the suffering, know their needs, and avoid harmful cliches.

5 STAGE GRIEF MODEL (Elisabeth Kubler–Ross)

Caution. NOT everyone has experienced these five emotions.
 NOT everyone must experience these five emotions.
 NOT everyone will experience these five emotions.
 NOT everyone should experience these five emotions.

1. Shock and Denial

It is not normal to act normal in an abnormal situation.

The Antidote - Ministry of Presence

Isaiah 43:2 (NIV) When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’

Ps. 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

2. **Anger and Frustration** Often people in grief will lunge out at loved ones.

- The Antidote** - i) Respect and Validate their feelings.
ii) Suspend Critical Judgment.
iii) Extend Grace.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger

3. Bargaining and Guilt (God, if you will... Then I will...)

When bad things happen, we feel we have done something to deserve this pain.

The Antidote - The Need to Receive forgiveness.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 8:1 There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

4. Depression

Proverbs 18:14 A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?

The Antidote - Engage in Life - Help those who are grieving resist the temptation to isolate themselves and completely withdraw from others.

Psalms 122:1 I was glad when they said unto me,

Let us go into the house of the LORD.

5. Acceptance - Lord I Accept this. I do not know why, but I do know how.

Phil 4:13 For I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength.

God, grant me the Peace to **accept** the things that I cannot change,

The courage to change the things that I can

And the wisdom to know the difference between the two.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, we know that our Saviour endured the full impact of grief. Remember, the one who calls us, calls us to care. Our "calling" and "caring" is inseparable. I trust that when your neighbour is struggling with grief that you will "*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*"

Caring When There is Suicide Part II

2 Samuel 16:23-17:5, 14,23; October 23, 2005

2 Sam 17:23 When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

Review

I. “What does the Bible say about Suicide?”

There are seven examples of suicide in the Bible.

Jesus’ 40 Day temptation included Jumping from the top of the temple.

The Bible does NOT say that suicide is the unpardonable sin.

II. Suicide Awareness: What are the facts?

The suicide rate for Canadians is 15 per 100,000 people. (February 2003)

Every two hours someone in Canada commits suicide. Twelve people every day.

At high risk are: youth, elderly, inmates, and people with a mental illness.

Men commit suicide at a rate four times higher than that of women.

Women make 3 - 4 times more suicide attempts than men do.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians aged 10-24.

August has the highest suicide rate out of all the months.

90 % of suicide victims have a diagnosable psychiatric illness.

Suicide is the most common cause of death for people with schizophrenia.

III. Caring for a Family after a Suicide

Step 1 - Understand the Grief Process (Review message “Caring When There is Critical Illness)

i) Shock and Denial – Includes...

Pain and loss Physical manifestations of grief

Rescue fantasies Heart vs. Head Struggles

The Antidote - Ministry of Presence Isaiah 43:2, Isaiah 41:10

Tip: Do not label the death a suicide until the family does.

ii) Anger and Frustration – Often from the unanswerable “why” of the suicide.

The Antidote - Respect and validate their feelings, suspend critical judgment, and

extend
grace
and
forgiveness /
Peter
4:8,
Proverbs
15:1

iii) Guilt - The feeling that you could have prevented the suicide is overwhelming.

The Antidote - Forgiveness: from God and ourselves. Romans 5:1;
8:1
“ We cannot judge what happened yesterday by what we know today .

iv) Depression – It is so exasperating to hurt so deeply and feel so helpless.
The Antidote - Re-engage in life Psalm 122:1

v) Acceptance – The goal is to help people accept the event and move forward.

Step 2 Know the Healing Process

- i) Our first priority is to make the choice of healing.
- ii) Express these grief emotions that grip us and do not stifle them.
- iii) Reaching out to others in their pain can assist us in our own pain.
- iv) Recovery is a process that is unsteady, difficult and long

Step 3 Know Your Resources

- i) Your friends
- ii) Your local church
- iii) Professional or structured help
- iv) Your Faith: God’s People, God’s Presence and God’s Word
See Psalm 27:1; 46:1-2; 91:2,4; Isaiah 50:7; John 14:1-3; Heb 4:14-16

Helpful things to Say - “I cannot imagine the pain you are going through.”
“Do you need help notifying people of ___’s death.”
“It was not your fault. It was ___’s choice”

Hurtful things to Avoid - “Did you see it coming?”
“Does suicide run in your family?”
“How did ___ kill himself?”

IV. Caring for the Suicidal.

You did not cause the person’s problems, and you may not be able to fix them.

i) - Recognize the signs

- \$ Sudden change in behaviour (positive or negative)
- \$ Apathy, withdrawal, change in eating patterns
- \$ Unusual preoccupation with death or dying

\$	Giving away valued personal possessions (i.e. golf clubs)
\$	Signs of depression; moodiness, hopelessness
\$	One or more previous suicide attempts
\$	Recent attempt or death by suicide of a friend or family member

- Things to do or say:**
1. Always take Suicidal Language Seriously
 2. Keep the person talking.
 3. Show love, compassion, concern, respect.
 4. Absorb anger, accusations, bitterness, manipulation.
 5. Diffuse the suicide plan if possible. Flush drug. Unload firearm.
 6. Offer better options than suicide.
 7. Remember to pray the person to safety, too.

- Things not to do/say:**
1. Do not promise secrecy.
 2. Do not make light of the situation.
 3. Do not load guilt onto thoughts of suicide.
 4. Do not leave the person alone.
 5. Do not allow your anxiety to show.

Resources and links - <http://yspp.org/resources-Links/resources.htm>
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5322.pdf>
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm>

Caring When There is Addiction – Part 1: Gambling & Alcoholism
Proverbs 23:21. 29-35; John 5:1-15 October 30, 2005

Winning the lottery for many is not the dream promised, but more of a nightmare.

- 75 % eventually go bankrupt after winning the jackpot.
- The money brings tremendous strain on relationships with family and friends.

FOUR REASONS WHY I DO NOT BUY LOTTERY TICKETS.

1) Gambling Replaces Dependence on God with Dependence on Lady Luck.

The chance of scoring a big windfall in the 6/49 is one in 14,000,000.

The Bible seeks the Lordship/Leadership of Christ, where gambling looks to fate.

False hope pushes gambling victims to pursue an elusive dream.

2) Gambling places the Material ahead of the Spiritual.

*Matthew 6:33 Seek ye **FIRST** the kingdom of God.*

1 Tim 6:6, 9-10 Godliness with contentment is great gain. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
Luke 12:5 "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"

3) Gambling Undermines the Biblical Principle of Stewardship.

It is not good management to carelessly throw away resources that God has entrusted to us.

4) Gambling Contradicts the Biblical Work Ethic.

You are asking God to bless nothingness.

Gambling mocks the work ethic by deluding us that something can be gained for nothing.

Jn 5:17. "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working"

2 Thess 3:10 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' ...

Gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, mocks work, robs children, enslaves its addicts, subverts governments, and poisons whatever it touches. Biblical teaching leads us to reject gambling's false premises.

FOUR BIBLICAL LESSONS ON ADDICTION

I. Addiction Is a Cesspool of Pain.

John 5:3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralysed.

Proverbs 23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?

30 Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.

32 In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.

People who drink excessively are twice as likely to commit suicide.

4 % of the population are alcohol addicts.

20 % of our population are impacted heavily by alcoholism.

10 % social drinkers will become an alcoholic.

Heavy drinkers cause of 80 % of fire and drowning accidents, 60 % of violent crimes, and 30 % of suicides. Someone dies because of drunk driving every 22 minutes.

Alcoholism is our third worst national health problem.

- 6,507 Canadians died due to alcohol consumption. (Mostly by auto)
- 82,014 Canadians were admitted to hospital because of alcohol misuse.
- 43 % of all motor vehicle fatalities were attributable to alcohol.

II. Addiction Cannot Be Conquered by Yourself. *Prov 23:35*

- i) The Invalid (John 5) - He was powerless to help himself.
- ii) Salvation - We are powerless to help ourselves Eph 2:8-9, Romans 10:9
- iii) Addictions - Addictions cannot be conquered by yourself.

Alcoholics Anonymous' Step 1 of the Twelve Step Program says -
 "We admit we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives have become unmanageable."

III. Addiction Becomes a Way of Life - Prov 23:35

It is progressive.

Prov 23:34 paraphrased says, "It is only a matter of time before you fall."

It is a way of life because the brain has become dependent on a chemical substance.

IV. A Relationship with Christ is the Greatest Freedom of All. Luke 4:18

John 5:14 - Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

The addict is cured when s/he is set free from the bondage of dependency.

Jesus Christ came to set us free from every kind of bondage.

Addicts often need a very specialized program with experienced care-givers. However, you can play a vital role by...

- 1) Understanding the issues and dynamics of addiction.
- 2) Encourage those who need a specialized program to join and perhaps go with them.
- 3) Support them throughout their recovery

You can offer this vital help and play a significant role in someone's journey to wholeness if you only "*Dare to Care Like Jesus*."

Resources/Links - <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>
<http://www.alcoholism-revealed.com>
http://madd.ca/english/research/madd_alcohol_facts.pdf
<http://www.madd.ca/>

CARING WHEN THERE IS ADDICTION - (Congregational Handout)

Things to Do or Say:

1. Drugs and alcohol can be toxic — deadly.
Obtain immediate emergency medical aid if there is an overdose
2. Suggest, urge, *shanghai* the person to go to AA or Narcotics Anonymous meetings.
3. Obtain help for family members affected by an addicted member.
4. Help loved ones arrange for an intervention led by a competent professional.
5. Provide literature and help educate everyone involved about addictions.
6. Provide love, encouragement, and support
WITHOUT sheltering the addict from consequences of his actions.

Things NOT to Do or Say:

1. Do not try to reason with a drunk.
Get medical help and talk later when the drunk is sober.
An alcoholic can outtalk you with denial and rationalization.
Reason will not sway the alcohol addict; the pain of consequences may.
2. Do not attempt to restrain a drunk unless heroic efforts are called for.
Drugs/Alcohol can make a person violent and dangerous.
3. Do not use guilt, especially with Christian addicts.
They feel great guilt already, even if it is not spoken.
Further guilt without release pushes them toward suicide.
4. Do not become an *ENABLER*. Let them bear the consequences of their actions.
Crises can actually be good, *if* the addicts bear the consequences themselves.
6. Do not expect an alcoholic to quit by will power.
An addict is powerless over his addiction. God must intervene.
7. Do not be too hard on yourself if your efforts seem wasted.
You cannot rescue someone. God can, and he may use you. And he may not.
That is up to the addict, not you..

**Brainstorming Helpful Ideas for the Alcoholic⁴⁷⁹ (Congregational Handout)
(Not all of these are appropriate for everyone. They are ideas)**

1. Join AA
2. Move to a “dry” community declared by local government.

⁴⁷⁹ Egan, Gerald. *The Skilled Helper* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1995), 55.

3. Take the drug Antabuse; it causes intense nausea when you drink alcohol.
4. Replace drinking with other rewarding behaviours.
5. Join a self help group other than AA.
6. Memorize Bible verses on Self Control or Alcoholism
7. Get rid of all liquor in the house
8. Take the “pledge” not to drink: make it more binding..
i.e. in front of a minister
9. Join a residential hospital detoxification program.
10. Do not spend time with friends who drink heavily.
11. Change social patterns; do not socialize in bars, etc..
12. Use behaviour modification techniques to develop an aversion for alcohol;
13. Eliminate defeating self talk “*I have* to have a drink” “One drink is OK.”
14. Volunteer to help others stop drinking.
15. Read books and view films on the dangers of alcohol.
16. Stay in counselling as a way to get support.
17. Share intention to stop drinking with family and a few close friends
18. Spend a week with someone who works with alcoholics (on the job).
19. Walk meditatively around Skid Row.
20. Discuss with family members the impact of the drinking problem on them.
21. Discover things to eat that might reduce the craving for alcohol.
22. Develop an interesting hobby that will take up a great deal of attention.

Caring When There is Depression
1 Kings 19:1-18; November 13, 2005

Elijah’s depression came right after a great victory on Mt. Carmel.

Often after the “Thrill of Victory” comes the “Agony of Defeat.”

1 Kings 19:3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

Eccl. 3:4 "There is a time to weep/mourn and a time to laugh/dance.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I. Depression - What are the Facts

One of the most undiagnosed and disabling medical conditions in society.

\$27 billion annually in U.S. medical costs. \$5 billion a year in Canada.

A depressed person has to cope with the scorn of society as well as the illness.

No other chronic illness is treated so unfairly by the public.

Stigma is the single greatest obstacle to treatment.

Only one third of all those afflicted will seek help/treatment.

Depression is more common as people age .

Twice as many women suffer as men.

15 % of untreated people will commit suicide.

10-20 % of people will suffer from a mood disorder at some time.

Nearly one in five will experience significant levels in depression.

Depression causes people to miss more work than diabetes and heart disease.

Most depression is chemically based rather than psychological .

Two Types of Depression

Unipolar - emotional extremes at just one end, usually depressed

Bipolar - extremes of both manic (elation) and depression.

II. Depression Can Occur in the Most Spiritual People

What did Job, Jonah, David, Elijah and Moses have in common?

A Depression so severe that they begged God to end their lives.

Depression disrupts all relationships including your relationship with God .

Dr. James Dobson of *Focus on the Family*, stated that 80 % of pastors were discouraged or dealing with depression. There is a reluctance to seek help from fellow ministers due to embarrassment, so they suffer in isolation..

III. Depression: Caring Lessons from Elijah's Experience

1. Encourage Physical Fitness

For prevention and restoration eat properly and sleep regularly.

v. 5 Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked around, and there by his head

was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

2. Encourage Activity but Keep it Simple vv. 5-6

3. Do not Let the Depressed Blame Themselves.

Negative self-talk contributes to depressive disorders.

vv 11-13 - Remember God speaks to the hurting in a gentle whisper.

4. Do not Suppress Your Frustrations v.. 10

Keeping your emotions pent up inside will only eat away at you and build pressure.

5. Encourage and Support a Goal Orientated Plan

Return to work. Inactivity feeds depression. vv. 15-17.

6. Encourage Involvement in Helping Others.

The call to help others is a common antidote to the disabling self-absorption and social withdrawal of depression.

2 Cor 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

7. Encourage Listening to God and His Perspective. (v. 18)

Despair will colour your perception as well as your emotions.

We are prone to what Albert Ellis calls catastrophic thinking.

Let facts shape your feelings, rather than your feelings distort the facts.

8. Encourage the Development of Some Good Relationships.

God knew that depression and loneliness walk hand in hand.

So he gives Elijah an assistant/partner (Elijah).

Share with a friend. If you have no close friends, ask the Lord for one.

Through all of this Elijah learned that God would never forsake him. Even in the depths of depression God shows loving concern and a way out. There is hope. Because we are children of an omnipotent heavenly Father, we can have hope. Because there are unique resources available to the Christian, we can have hope. Even as we confront the

hellish demon of emotional depression we can have hope. May God use you to bring encouragement to those who struggle with depression, to bring hope to those who are downcast. May God give you the courage to “*Dare to Care Like Jesus.*”

Caring When There is Conflict with the Law
Matthew 25:31-46 (36); November 20, 2005

*Matt 25:34-36 Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... for **I was in prison and you came to visit me.**”*

Can you think of different Bible characters who were prisoners?

<u>Joseph (Gen. 39, 40)</u>	<u>Apostle Paul</u>
<u>Samson (Judges 16)</u>	<u>Apostle John (Rev 1)</u>
<u>Jeremiah (Jer. 37, 38)</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
<u>John the Baptist (Matt. 14)</u>	<u>The Thief on the Cross</u>

Psalm 79:11 May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.

The Scope of our Caring

- 1) Dare to Care for Those in Prison.
- 2) Dare to Care for Prisoners During Their Release and Transition.
“There is more fear coming out from prison than going in.”
- 3) Dare to Care for the Families Without Their Provider.
94 % of the national prison population are men.

**HOW DO WE DARE TO CARE
FOR THOSE IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW?**

1. Awareness - Be informed

2003 Canada (except Manitoba) - Number of prison sentences in Canada.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total cases	74,309	74,941	86,399	88,990	83,077

What do we need to be aware of?

- There are those in conflict with the law in your community
- 80 % marriages do not survive a long term prison experience.
- 185 ex-offenders come to Moncton every year to be assimilated.
- 90 % of them have addiction problems.

- Try to understand the dynamics of living with a past conviction.
- **Myth:** “Anyone that has done time is dangerous.”

2. Realize That We Are All Offenders .

God does not have degrees of Sin. He only has one category: “Sinner.” We all qualify. 100 % of the population has broken Man’s Laws & God’s Laws.

Rom 3:23 For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Isa 53:6 “ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Brigadier-General R.G. Parsons, “But for the grace of God go I.”

In other words, given the right set of circumstances it could be you/me that is behind bars.

Phil 2:3-5 (CEV) “Be humble and consider others more important than yourselves. Care about them as much as you care about yourselves and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought...”

Watch your attitude when you are ministering to others.

Ex-offenders, like anyone, can “smell a phony” many miles away.

3. Acceptance . (Suspend Critical Judgement)

Romans 5:8 While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...”

An Example of Acceptance and Grace: *Les Miserables*.

After Jean Valjean has been arrested for stealing the bishop’s silverware, he is brought before the bishop by the constables and awaits the condemnation that he know he deserves. But instead of judgement he is blind sided by grace. One moment he faces poverty and prison, the next freedom and abundance.

Would it not be nice if there was a church that totally accepted people, a place that would suspend critical judgment, a place that even offenders could come and feel comfortable and welcomed, a place where they would have no fear if people knew their past, a place of grace, love and acceptance? Would it not be great if Sunny Brae Baptist Church would be that place. Friends, we are all offenders. It is a level playing field in God’s eyes. And the world is always watching us, testing to see if we are a safe environment. God is always watching too. Will you not “*Dare to Care Like Jesus?*”

Additional Tool - Helpful Things to Say and Do for Offender and Family

- 1) Give practical, physical help with finances or daily management.
- 2) Give non- judgmental companionship with a listening ear and gentle advice when asked.
- 3) Be a channel of spiritual strength.
- 4) Provide transportation for families to visit their incarcerated loved ones.
- 5) Offer assistance in home repairs.
- 6) Holidays are tough.
Give a gift to the children in the name of the incarcerated parent.
- 7) Do not inquire about details of the crime.

Caring When There is Homosexuality Galatians 6:1; November 27, 2005

Homosexuality causes crisis.

It is an emotionally charged issue because it deals with relationships.

I. WHAT DOES THE Bible SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

Biblical thinking about homosexuality begins with the creation account.

Gen 1:27-28 God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said, Be fruitful and increase in number.

Gen 2:18 It was not good for the man to be alone, so God created a suitable helper, a counter-part.

v. 21 - God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man.

v. 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were naked, and they felt no shame.

Foundational affirmations in the Creation Account:

1. Gender is Good

It takes both the man and the woman together to reflect the image of God.

2. Sex is Good

Sexual intercourse is the reaffirmation of the vows and bonds of marriage.

3. Marriage is Good. The purpose of marriage is Oneness.

Thinking Biblically about homosexuality means saying Yes.

Saying yes, to gender, yes, to sexuality, and yes, to marriage.

Prohibition Passages on Homosexuality

1) Genesis 19 – The Story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The term “sodomy” has become a universal synonym for homosexuality.

2) Leviticus 18:22 (NLT) "Do not practice homosexuality; it is a detestable sin."

3) Romans 1:24,26 (NIV) “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie...” 26 “Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.”

4) 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (NIV) Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

II. HOW DO WE CARE WHEN THERE IS HOMOSEXUALITY?

1. Awareness. What are the facts?

i) **What Percentage of the Population is Homosexual?** 1-2%

ii) **Are Homosexuals Born That Way?** No

iii) **Leading Scientific Researchers Say Homosexuality Is Not Genetic.**

Dr. Nicolosi says, “I myself have reviewed all the literature, and I certainly do not believe, and I do not think any scientist really believes, that there is a biological predetermination for sexual orientation. There is much more evidence for early environmental factors that would set the stage for a person’s sexual orientation.

John R. W. Stott - “The true “orientation” of Christians is not what we are by constitution, but what we are by choice.”

Homosexual *orientation* is not, in itself, a sin. But whatever one *does* with it is a choice.

iv) Does it Matter If Orientation Is Genetically Based?

No, it does not change God’s code of behaviour.

Yes, because it affects the motivation factor of those who want to change.

v) Is Homosexuality Really Learned?

Yes, research supports this. However, most homosexuals experience it as

something they are rather than something they choose.

vi) Can Homosexuals change? Yes

The famous Kinsey report states 84 % of gays shifted or changed their sexual orientation at least once. Further, 32 % of the gays reported a third shift, and 13 % of gays reported at least five changes.

The #1 criterion is the desire of the homosexual person to change.

2. With Gentleness .

Galatians 6:1 (NLT) Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

3. By Suspending Critical Judgment.

Homosexuals need genuine love more than they need a browbeating.

There is a time to listen and a time to confront, the latter is only productive after you have gained the right to be heard.

4. With Prayer and the Hope of the Gospel.

The only hope for the homosexual is the power of praying people, the light of the truth of God’s Word, the forgiveness of Christ, the hope of the Gospel that changes people and the support of a loving church.

Can we be that church? Will we “*Dare to Care Like Jesus?*”

THINGS TO DO OR SAY:⁴⁸⁰

- 1. Listen, empathize, draw out, show concern.**
2. Give them hope in Jesus Christ. God does not want them to be deceived, and He can make them whole and free.
3. Value them as people and build their good points, even when you cannot agree with their life choices.
4. Bring to bear all the written and human resources you can muster. Referral to experts is highly advised. Accountability is essential. Like alcoholism, change is extremely unlikely by one's self.

THINGS NOT TO DO OR SAY:⁴⁸¹

- 1. Do not "rescue" them from all the consequences of their behaviours.**
Crisis brings desire to change.
2. Do not condemn them or heap scorn on them. They already dislike themselves and cope with low self-image.
3. Do not waver about the sinfulness of homosexual practices. You do them no favour by encouraging them to continue in sin, even when the alternatives appear full of difficulty and heartache.
4. Do not reveal someone's homosexuality without compelling reasons, and then only to those who must know.
5. Never make light of the homosexual's plight through jokes or ill-chosen words.

Caring When There Is Pain at Christmas Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7; December 11, 2005

Many find Christmas more of a holiday to survive than to celebrate.

TRUTHS TO REMEMBER WHEN THERE IS PAIN AT CHRISTMAS

I. The First Christmas was Filled with Crises

- i) The scandal of being pregnant and not married.
- ii) Joseph was contemplating ending the relationship (Divorce).
- iii) The hard journey to Bethlehem while being nine months pregnant.
- iv) The anxiety of finding a place to give birth.

⁴⁸⁰ Berkley, James D. *Called into Crisis* (Waco, Texas, Word Book Publisher, 1989), 110.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

- v) The rejection of Joseph's family in Bethlehem .
Apparently no one would receive them.
- vi) The assassination attempt on the baby's life

II. God Cares about Hurting People

*Isa 61:1-4 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the **poor**. He has sent me to bind up the **brokenhearted**, to proclaim freedom for the **captives** and release from darkness for the **prisoners**, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, **to comfort all who mourn**, and provide for **those who grieve** in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.*

The whole point of Christ's coming that first Christmas was to reach the hurting.

III. God Works Through Suffering

Suffering can be what economists call a “frozen asset” (buried treasure).
It may be excruciating at the time but very beneficial in the long run.

i) God can use suffering to draw us to Christ.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world – CS Lewis

ii) God uses Suffering to produce Christian maturity

Hebrews 12:11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

1 Pet 1:6-7 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

iii) God often uses Suffering to accomplish His good and perfect purposes.

Example - Joseph:

Genesis 50:20 “You intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”

Romans 8:28 "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

IV . God Suffers Alongside Us.

God did not give us theories on the problem of pain. He gave us Himself.
Apart from the incarnation, our faith would have little to say to the suffering.

V. Control Your Thinking

Phil. 4:8 "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

VI. Celebrate What You Can Celebrate.

If your glass is only half full, focus on what is in it, not what it is not.
Find the things you can celebrate and then celebrate and give thanks.

Conclusions

- 1) Above all, understand the Message of Christmas.
- 2) If you are a believer in pain, focus on the HOPE that Christ gives you.
- 3) If you do not understand this idea of a painful Christmas, open your eyes!

Dare to Care for those who are in pain at Christmas!

Caring When There is Divorce Lamentations 3:17-23; January 8, 2006

Jeremiah is not writing specifically about divorce, but picture the parallel.

Lam 3:17-20 (NLT) Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. 18 I cry out, "My splendour is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the LORD is lost!" 19 The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. 20 I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.

Every relationship will struggle, but many are destroyed by crisis.

I. What Are the Facts of Divorce?

Year				<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>
			<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	
Divorces in Canada	71,144	71,110	70,155	70,828	
Marriages in Canada	157,395	146,618	146,738	145,048	

- Since 1970, over a million children a year see their parents divorce in the US alone.
- Divorce is likely the most severe adult rejection experience.
- The youngest children from a divorce suffer the most.
- Children from divorced families divorce more often and are less committed to marriage.
- Divorce is a process : 50% of divorced consider it 1-3 years before the event.

II. What Does God Think of Divorce?

- i) It breaks His heart . He hates it. (Mal. 2:16)
- ii) God always intended us to remain married for life. (Gen 2:24)
- iii) Divorce is nowhere commanded or encouraged in Scripture.
- iv) Divorce is not an unforgivable sin.
- v) God deeply loves and cares for those broken by divorce. (John 4)

III. Three Great Myths of Divorce

- i) If the parents are happier, the children will be happier.
National studies show that children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive toward their parents and teachers, experience more depression, have more learning difficulties, have more relational problems with peers, have earlier sexual activity, more children born out of wedlock, fewer marry and more divorce. They have more psychological problems as adults than children from intact families.
- ii) Anger will subside after divorce.
One third of couples were intensely fighting 10 years after divorce.

iii) Divorce is a temporary crisis. No, divorce impacts every phase of adult life.

IV. Causes of a Marital Break up

Every couple automatically drifts toward independence and isolation.

The solution to isolation is the intentional striving toward oneness.

View your wedding certificate as only God's permission for you to START building your marriage.

There is no one cause of divorce. Here are some of the contributing factors:

i) Sin and Selfishness - Even Paul wrote, *"I do not understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I do not do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate."* (Rom 7:15)

ii) Life Stresses - Financial problems, health issues, work schedules.

iii) Sexual Unfaithfulness - We are bombarded by Hollywood and the Internet.

iv) Satanic Assault - He wants to destroy marriages

v) Social Attitudes - Divorce is now easier and more acceptable.

vi) Unrealistic Expectations - Most are surprised by difficulties.

There are many assaults on marriage today. Everybody's marriage is under attack. God's word cautions, "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" Therefore extend grace and understanding to those in this pain.

V. How to Care/Help During a Marital Break up

i) Understand that Divorce is like a death - But divorce grief takes twice as long because of the connections through children, friends and finances remain.

ii) Understand the grief process - There is much anger, blame and depression.

iii) Understand the Importance of a ministry of presence.

Many family and friends do not want to take sides or do not know what to say. So they say `nothing and do nothing. Be present but do not preach, at first just listen.

iv) Encourage Participation in a Healing Ministry.
A great program is called DivorceCare.

v) Understand the emotional needs.

Two ways that people respond to emotional pain:

1) Inward - withdrawal, shame, manipulation

2) Outward - anger, revenge, bitterness, control

This vulnerability can make the divorced person prone to other hurts.

vi) Empathize but try to stay neutral. Fault may not be equal, but it takes two.

Two people, and usually a vast supporting cast, have caused this conflict.

vii) Caution against new relationships

During recovery, such people are extremely vulnerable.

The divorced need to focus on full recovery and emotional wholeness.

viii) Understand the need of forgiveness.

Without it, we can never truly be healed and released.

ix) Encourage them to give back and encourage others who have been through divorce.

2 Cor. 1:3-4. The God of all comfort, comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God

Is there hope for the divorced?

Lamentations 3:19-23 (NLT) 19 The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. 20 I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. 21 Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: (NASB) 22 The LORD'S loving-kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

God is sticking by the people He has chosen. He has made a covenant with His people. He will stick by those broken by the pain of divorce (John 4).

Resources - <http://www.divorcecare.org/>

Caring When There is Addiction - Part 2 (Pornography)
Proverbs 9:1-18; Job 31:1; January 15, 2006

I. God's Will Is Our Holiness and Purity.

1 Thess 4:3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God... 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Eph 5:3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

II. Facts on Pornography

1. Tidbits

- The average boy sees pornography by age 11,
- The average pornography addict does not seek help until age 35 !
- 90 % of kids 8-16 years have viewed porn online.
- 26 popular children's characters, such as Pokemon, My Little Pony and Action Man, revealed thousands of links to porn sites.
- At least 200,000 Internet users are hooked on porn
- Every day, up to 30 million people log on to pornographic web-sites
 - Americans spend an estimated \$ 8 - 10 billion annually on pornography. This exceeds the combined gross income of ABC, CBS, and NBC.
 - Nearly 900 theatres show X-rated films and more than 15,000 adult bookstores and video stores offer pornographic material, outnumbering McDonald's restaurants in the US by 3 to 1.
- Children spend 64.9 % more time on porn sites than on game sites.

Wives, the world is throwing bodies of women at your husbands and sons.

2. Christian Men Are Not Immune to the Seduction of Porn.

51 % of pastors admit internet pornography is their biggest temptation.

3. Porn Leads to Solitary Sex. It is devoid of relationship.

4. Pornography is Fantasy, an Illusion.

They are not real people. 1) surgically enhanced, 2) Photos airbrushed.

A fantasy *looks free* but it has a very high cost.

Prov 9:16,18 (NLT) "Come home with me she urges the simple.... But men do not realize that her former guests are now in the grave."

5. Pornography is Addictive.

Men receive a chemical high from sexually charged images - a hormone called **epinephrine** is secreted into the blood stream, endorphins many times stronger than morphine are released.

6. Pornography is Progressive.

Sexual obsession becomes progressively worse

and usually leads to some form of negative consequences.

III. The Cause of Pornography

1. Just by Being Male. Dr. Smalley - Every 50 seconds a man has a testosterone attack.

There are four male tendencies.

i) Males are rebellious by nature.

90% of major crimes of violence are by men.

99.9 % of rapes, 95 % burglaries, 94 % drunk drivers are men.

ii) Males find the straight life boring.

iii) Males have a strong regular sex drive.

iv) Males receive sexual gratification through the eyes.

2. Mixing God's Standard with the World's Standard

The result is disobedience to God.

"A man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God" - Chesterton.

IV. Pain of Pornography

- Intense guilt, Self hatred.

- Addiction leads to an almost irreversible downward slide vocationally.

- Sex Addicts in general suffer from chronic depression.

- One man plucked out both eyes literally from the anguish.

Pain of the Spouse - Anger, self doubt, betrayal, loneliness.
The husband has had a mistress called pornography.

V. Proactive Caring to Prevent Addiction

1. Cast a Safety Net around yourself.

- Keep all TVs and computers in open family areas.

2. Use Accountability Software - It is free at <http://www.xxxchurch.com>

3. Have an Accountability Partner.

Christians who try to play the Lone Ranger get themselves into trouble.

4. Equip Your Spirit.

Memorize Scriptures that you can recite when tempted (Rom. 6:13-14).

VI. Reactive Caring to Liberate Addiction

Get help from a Christian counsellor who specializes in sexual addictions.

With his/her help, Build a Perimeter

1. Around Your Eyes - Learn to bounce your eyes.

Train this reflex action like jerk of hand off hot stove.

Experts say that anything done consistently for 21 days becomes a habit.

2. Around Your Mind

2 Cor 10:5 We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The eyes must be won first. By starving the eyes you starve the mind as well.

3. Around Your Heart

Honouring and cherishing your wife are your key actions to establish this.

Steve Green sings a song, "Guard Your Heart."

Guard your heart, Guard your heart,

Do not trade it for treasure do not give it away.

Guard your heart, Guard your heart.,

As a payment for pleasure it is a high price to pay.

The human heart is easily swayed, And often betrayed,

At the hand of emotion,

You dare not leave the outcome to chance

You must choose in advance.

Or live with the agony, such needless tragedy.

You got into this problem by being MALE, You get out of this problem by being a MAN.

Like the prodigal, you need to come to your senses and make a decision.

Job 31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young woman."

Deliverance is a function of three things

- 1) Christ's sacrifice to make it possible
- 2) God's power to enable us to be delivered
- 3) Our willingness to walk by the Spirit.

Proverbs emphasizes the importance of *looking ahead to see where your actions will lead you* (see 5:11; 14:12-14; 16:25; 19:20; 20:21; 23:17-18, 32; 24:14, 20; 25:8). The wise person checks on the destination before buying a ticket (4:26). You cannot violate God's laws and escape the consequences.

Resources: Pure Intimacy website at www.pureintimacy.org

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APPENDIX - D. Power Point Slides on "Suicide - Part I"⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² Slides 4, 6-14 from Living Works Education Inc. # 208-1615 10th Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta

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VITA

The author of this work is Gordon R. Poley. Born June 11, 1961 in Saint John, New Brunswick, he spent his childhood years in all three of the Maritime Provinces. After graduating from Charlottetown Rural High School (1979) in Prince Edward Island, he attended Winnipeg Bible College (now Providence College and Theological Seminary) and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1982. He then attended Acadia Divinity College and graduated in 1985 with a Masters of Divinity degree. He lead his first three churches through successful relocation, expansion and building campaigns. Jeddore United Baptist Church (1984-90), Eastern Passage United Baptist Church (1990-94), Rusagonis United Baptist Church (1994-2002). While living in Halifax he enlisted in the

Canadian Armed Forces in 1992 as a reservist Chaplain. He has served in the following units: HMCS Scotian (Halifax, NS), 31st Service Battalion (Saint John, NB), 1st Royal New Brunswick Regiment (Fredericton, NB) and currently is Chaplain for the 8th Canadian Hussars Princess Louise's (Moncton, NB). He received the Canadian Forces Decoration medal in 2006.

This project is presented in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His studies shall be completed in May, 2006.

Rev. Poley currently resides in Moncton, New Brunswick with his wife, Debra, and their daughters Rebecca, Robin, Raquel and Rose. He is the pastor of the Sunny Brae Baptist Church.