

3 - TAKING CARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 9/18/22

We are in a short sermon series called Covenant of Care – Creating a Culture of Care. My sermon today is called Taking Care of the Household of Faith. What is the household of faith? Ephesians 2:19-22 says:

You are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

God is building a household in which He can dwell. The biblical word translated household has two meanings – a dwelling and a family. Put it together and you get a family home. It is the place where a family dwells. The church is God's family. The church is also the place God's family dwells. I'm not talking about a physical building – it's a spiritual house. God lives in us as we live together in unity as the household of faith. 1 Timothy 3:12-15 says:

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well... I am writing you these instructions so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The first use of household in this passage refers to a physical family. The second use refers to a spiritual family – the family of God. As family members, we have responsibilities for each other. Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. The NIV says to the family of believers.

The church is not perfect, but we do our best to meet people's needs. We visit them in the hospital. We help them with financial needs. We provide food for the hungry. We pray for the sick and all other kinds of needs. But God is calling us as a church to a higher level of care. And doing that will require a Great Commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Jesus spoke of the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37-40:

'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

Jesus gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 when He said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

That's the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. But what is the Great Commitment? The Great Commitment is an outward expression of the second aspect of the Great Commandment which Jesus states as "love your neighbor as yourself." It is basically the instruction for us to take care of those that God has entrusted to us — to tend to the sheep. 1 Peter 5:2-3 says:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

This verse tells the elders of the church to care of the flock. And we must have a great commitment to caring for the flock. It's a big responsibility. But notice that is to be done as overseers. Elders and pastors don't do every single bit of caring that takes place in the church – but we have the responsibility to see that it happens. We are to be examples of caring our church family and we are to equip others to care for our church family.

Caring for our church family is not just the pastors' job – it is a ministry for all of us.

1 Corinthians 12:25 says:

There should be no division in the body, so that all the members care for each other equally.

There is a great example of this in the early church. Pastor Deb mentioned it in her sermon last week. It's found in Acts 6:1-7

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

I want you to see here that as a church grows – the potential for conflict grows. I also want you to see that when the leaders are trying to do all the ministry rather than overseeing the ministry through others – people will get overlooked.

The absence of overseeing care for people results in overlooked people!

The answer is not for the leaders to work harder and longer. Look at what they did.

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group.

So they turned this care ministry over to other believers in the church. When they did, verse 7 says:

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly...

The church was already growing, but when ministry began to be shared with the church members – the church grew rapidly.

Sharing the caring ministry is essential to personal growth and church growth! Creating a culture of care is a biblical mandate. Jesus shared the ministry of caring for people with His disciples. Then the disciples shared it with the early church congregation.

Before Jesus returned to heaven, His concern was for the sheep He was about to leave behind. He chose Peter to be one of the main ones who instructed the church to care for those who are part of the household of faith.

In John 21:15-17 Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. Every time Peter said yes, Jesus responded with a command. He told Peter to commit to feeding His lambs – the young believers. To commit to feed the sheep – the mature disciples. And to commit to take care of the sheep.

Caring for His flock was clearly a high priority with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is emphasizing this truth to the Church in these days and as a congregation we are going to act by implementing a proven ministry that will provide ongoing care to ALL our members. We are going to get serious about caring for those the Lord has entrusted to us. After all –

If we are not caring for those the Lord has already given us, why should He send us anymore?

We may be doing well on winning the lost, discipling new believers, and filling our calendars with programs, BUT if we do not provide congregational care to every member we will not retain all the people, as we should. We will just bring them in the front door but lose them out the back door.

There needs to be a balance between the GREAT COMMISSION and the GREAT COMMITMENT. The Apostle Paul brought these two into balance in his ministry — he followed up his evangelism with pastoral care.

Only a nurtured and cared for church will be strong enough to continue making new disciples.

WHAT IS THE POINT of trying to get new people to come when we have not established a system of care in the congregation? In John 13:35 Jesus said:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. We can't reach the world if we don't care for one another!

Hebrews 6:10 says:

For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and how you have shown your love to Him by caring for other believers.

We love and serve God by loving and serving people. Don't say you love and serve God if you don't care for people.

That's why we are determined as a church to create a culture of care — a place where the love of God can be felt in a tangible way! This does not mean we are not presently a loving church, but it means we are going to become more intentional and establish a system of care whereby nobody will fall through the cracks.

SO, HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT? We are going to establish a *Care Ministry Network* in our congregation that will ensure that all our members receive the care they should.

WHAT IS THE CARE MINISTRY NETWORK? It is an authentic and proven system of congregational care, which enables God's people to care for one another.

One of the greatest expectations people have when they become part of the local church is the sense of belonging and care. In many cases, however, they become disillusioned and feel neglected in the care they had hoped to receive from their Christian family.

Oftentimes people do not feel cared for. They feel their cries are not being heard and their needs aren't being met. Oftentimes people in nursing homes, and other aged and infirm people feel neglected.

The reason for all this is primarily because, in most cases, care is left to being done by a select few people. Regardless of the size of a church it has been proven over and over that the *Pastor Cannot Do It Alone*. And the truth is that most churches cannot afford to employ enough staff to get it done either. THE RESULT . . . is that much of pastoral care is left undone, and the church ends up in stagnating or goes into decline.

That may be the very reason why more than 1,700 pastors quit per month across the USA.

Not taking care of the people may also be the reason why 85% of our churches have stagnated or are in decline. If people do not feel cared for, they leave the church to find another. It's happening every week across America and literally thousands of people are drifting in search of a church that will truly care.

Most churches do not provide *pastoral care*; they only provide *crisis care*.

Only those who face crisis such as being hospitalized, or facing death, experiencing emergencies, going through divorce, etc., get the care that is needed while *most members* never receive the love and attention they deserve. If they don't face a crisis, they don't receive care. That's not the way it should be. As your pastor I want to say, "You are important enough for us to create a ministry whereby you can know you are loved and cared for."

David complained to God in Psalm 142:4

I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me.

WE HAVE NO IDEA . . . how many people darken the doors of our church with pain, heartache, and misery, and LEAVE with the same hurts, because we didn't take the time to show care to them.

Let's say this again: If we are not adequately taking care of the people God has given us, why should He send us anymore?

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO THIS CHALLENGE? The answer is clearly to provide a system of effective congregational care that will reach every member within our church and then gradually also connect those who are becoming part of this fellowship.

AND THIS "CARE" . . . cannot be done by the pastor alone. Many pastors have tried — most have failed. AND WHAT'S MORE . . . is that God never intended for it to be done that way. All of God's people — pastors and church members alike should be involved in doing ministry together. Ephesians 4:11-12 says:

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service . . .

It is my task as your pastor to equip (to prepare) YOU for the work of the ministry. (I have my ministry, and I will teach you how to do yours!)

I am going to see that you are trained to partner with us in providing care to each member in this congregation. Our intention is to raise an army of trained people to become Care Ministers. There are many of you who already have the basic qualifications: I am not talking about some professional qualification.

If you can love people, you can minister to people.

LET'S GET BACK TO AN EARLIER QUESTION: WHAT IS THE CARE MINISTRY NETWORK? *It is an authentic and proven system of congregational care, which enables God's people to care for one another.*

"It's a system . . ."

We are going to implement congregational care intentionally and systematically. That means we are not going to let it happen by itself. We have developed a structure and a concept that will help us get the job done effectively without complications.

". . . of congregational care . . ."

Others may concentrate on crisis care, but we are going to train and equip YOU to do congregational care. (Our pastors will still focus on crisis care).

". . . God's people . . ."

That means YOU. There are many people who sit on our pews every Sunday who can provide care as efficiently as the pastoral staff, if trained, equipped, and given the opportunity. Basically, again, "If you can love people, you can pastor people."

". . . to care one for another . . ."

This is going to be for all those who call this church their home. It won't be only for a select few.

Before I close this morning let me set your mind at ease and help you understand how we are planning to do this. We are going to equip and utilize you to fulfill the need and be involved in this very exciting ministry. And we are going to set you up for success. You won't be thrown into the deep end. We will thoroughly train you and equip you to be a competent Care Minister.

No one should ever be released into the work of ministry without in-depth training — and you won't!

We are bringing in Dr. John Bosman who is THE authority on this subject to help us equip you.

You won't be left alone. We are going to implement a proven and tried system of care whereby someone will be there all the time to guide you and help you when you run into some challenges.

Everyone needs a mentor, and you will have one too.

We have arranged for a *Care Pastors Training Conference*. On this Friday and Saturday we will equip you for the work of this ministry. You will attend with many others and receive a complete *Handbook* with all the information.

I am inviting all of you to attend this training conference.

(Feel free to attend even if you are not sure if this is for you — this may help you determine your giftedness).

After the conference, if you are selected as a Care Minister, you will be commissioned and authorized publicly in the presence of the entire congregation. Unless Care Pastors are commissioned and recognized they will never feel they have the authority to do the work of pastoral care. On the day of commissioning the pastors/elders will lay hands on you, and present you to the church as a Care Minister. You will be qualified for the role!

You will become part of the Care Ministry Network in our church. You will be energized to be part of the most thrilling group of people you can think of. You will attend fellowship meetings, receive ongoing training, and have the mentorship of great men and women of God.

CLOSING NOTE: It is only a healthy church that can effectively reach out to the world and win the lost, do missions, and disciple people.

And a church can only truly be healthy when the members care for one another systematically and intentionally.

By the grace of God, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we are going to become “Game Changers” in this world God has placed us. This is going to become the launch pad for us to go higher for God!

Our leaders have determined to develop a healthy balance in our church. We are going to add the *missing key! We are going to the next level.*

I INVITE YOU to come alongside me and the other leaders and embark on one of the most exciting ministries you could ever imagine!

Together we can touch heaven and change earth!!!

I ask you to fill out the *Care Ministers Training Registration Cards*.

I encourage everyone to attend and check it out.

By attending you are not obliged to become involved.

Either way – you will be equipped to care for people.

But, this is your chance to get in on the ground floor of a ministry.

You can help us launch this ministry!

Together we can create a culture of care!

You can become a big part of the ministry leadership of our church!

And you can have the honor and privilege of ministry to the household of faith – the family of God – the body of Christ – the church!

As Jesus said to Peter, If you love me, care for my sheep!