

Part 3:

Providing and Developing Member Care



Jesus Christ: The Heart Of Member Care

“What are you two intending to do with the rest of your lives?” That’s the question a retired missionary put to us when we stood at one of life’s crossroads in the early 1990s. For 19 years we had pastored a thriving church in England. Sensing that God was calling us out of that ministry, we handed over the leadership to others, then took sabbatical leave on the island of Cyprus—to rest, reflect, and contemplate the question, “What next?” The missionary’s question, therefore, was timely.

We had been looking after a study center for missionaries for six weeks when this question was put to us. Set in a beautiful village on the island, this center provided mission partners with a place where they could come to study a variety of subjects. There was a well-stocked library with shelves packed with Bible commentaries, books on mission-related topics, books on relationships, and so on. There were teaching tapes, too, which mission partners could listen to and learn from. The missionary who was asking us about our future was aware of the work we had been doing at the center. “I feel that God might be calling you to work overseas long-term,” she said. “Would you mind if I wrote to the International Director of my mission and told him about you?”

Responding to this question changed the course of our lives. A year later, we returned to Cyprus to begin an entirely new ministry. Aware that most mission partners are too tired to take time out to study, for six years we provided a place where, instead of working for examinations, they could respond to Jesus’ invitation to “come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and take some rest” (Mark 6:31). Although we have now returned to England, we continue this member care ministry in our home. “The Hiding



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While here on earth,
Jesus’ effectiveness in
ministry stemmed from the
loving support given Him
by God the Father and
God the Holy Spirit.
In turn, Jesus gave
equally effective support
to His disciples.
He forged deep and
loving relationships with
each of them, modeled
an alternative lifestyle
to them, and showed
them how life on earth
can and must revolve
around His Father.
Jesus, the Master Carer,
has much to teach
member care workers
and mission partners.

Place,” as it is called, is a place to which mission partners delight to come: to reflect on the months or years they have been working overseas, to prepare prayerfully to go overseas for the first time, or simply to enjoy the quietness and the beauty of a place where they can meet with God without being disturbed.

Over the years, as we have been listening to such people, we have attempted to understand and apply Jesus’ approach to ministry. The subject of Master care is, then, one in which we are intensely interested. By Master care, we mean the way God, having created us, puts the ongoing finishing touches to us: growing us up spiritually and emotionally, loving us, giving us the grace to love Him in return, and giving us the grace, too, to love His people and His ministry. In particular, we place the spotlight in this paper on the way Jesus trained, mentored, equipped, supported, and loved the Twelve, and we seek to relate this ministry to the ministry of mission partners and member care workers.

Rooted in Relationships

As we have studied Jesus’ ministry over the years, the conviction has deepened that Master care is rooted in establishing, developing, and maintaining relationships—first the relationship between God and the caregiver and then between the caregiver and the partner being cared for. We say this because, before Jesus began His public ministry, He enjoyed a deep relationship with His Father and with the Holy Spirit. He also formed close relationships with a dozen key people, the Twelve. Indeed, one of the moving things about the method of earthly ministry Jesus models is that He called His disciples to be *with* Him before He asked them to do anything *for* Him (Mark 3:14).

We have a beautiful example of Jesus’ relationships in the first chapter of John’s Gospel: “The next day John was back at his post with two disciples, who were watching. He looked up, saw Jesus walking nearby, and said, ‘Here he is, God’s

Passover Lamb.’ The two disciples heard him and went after Jesus. Jesus looked over his shoulder and said to them, ‘What are you after?’ They said, ‘Rabbi, (which means “Teacher”), where are you staying?’ He replied, ‘Come along and see for yourself.’ They came, saw where he was living, and ended up staying with him for the day” (John 1:37-38, *The Message*).

Notice that, instead of simply *describing* the place where He stayed, Jesus invited them to “come and see.” The result of their day together was that Jesus and Andrew became firm friends. This new relationship had such power that Andrew immediately led his brother, Simon, to the Master.

The emphasis on relationships does not end there, however. After much prayer, and from the large number of disciples who were already attracted to Him, Jesus chose just 12 men. He carefully and lovingly formed community with them *before* He sent them out on any mission. A study of the Gospels shows how deeply He loved them (John 15:9), how He called them friends (John 15:15), and how they became as family to Him. They ate together, traveled together, and in all probability bathed in the Sea of Galilee together. The Twelve watched Jesus turn water into wine, heal the sick, and cast out demons. They heard Him teach, pray, admonish, and encourage. They walked together, talked together, and went fishing together. They became one with Him in the bonds of friendship. They were open with one another. This closeness grew *before* they started to work with Jesus.

Rooted in Rhythm and Rest

Soon after Jesus involved them in His mission, however, Mark paints a picture of the group being pressured by people—so much so that “because so many people were coming and going ... they did not even have a chance to eat” (Mark 6:31).

Seeing and sensing what was happening, Jesus acted: “Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”

(Mark 6:31), He insisted. He did not say *go* and take some rest. No. The invitation is to *come*: “Come with Me. Let’s do it together.” On another occasion, He gives them a similar invitation: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace” (Matt. 11:28-30, The Message).

Again, notice the language: “Come. Get away *with me*. Watch how *I* do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” This is the language of Jesus’ heart. It is the language of Master care *par excellence*.

In her book *Jesus Man of Prayer*, Sister Margaret Magdalene (1987, p. 41) reminds us, “Jesus was rarely without a crowd around Him. His own personal space was constantly invaded—not just in terms of time but in actual physical contact. Jostled and pushed by the throng (Mark 5:31), forced to preach from a borrowed boat in order to distance Himself a little from the growing crowd on the shore (Matt. 13:2), the picture builds up of someone under incessant pressure. His compassion for the crowds meant that mothers came crashing in with their children.” Jesus’ need for space, then, was urgent, and He did not hesitate to make sure He had such space, even though at times this caused Him to close His ears to cries for help and to turn away from people (Matt. 5:1; Mark 1:37).

Life offers us many similar choices. In saying no to being driven and becoming too busy, Jesus was saying yes to relationships—first to His relationship with the Father and the Spirit and secondly to His relationship with His disciples. His life was rather like the ebb and flow of the sea or the rising and setting of the sun. For Him, there was a season for everything: aloneness and togetherness, busyness and rest, fruitfulness and fallowness, quality time with His Father and quality time with the disciples, with whom Jesus forged warm, loving, lasting relationships.

Rooted in a Realistic Lifestyle

The Master provided care for His disciples in three main ways: by example, through teaching, and through mentoring. In this section, we examine each of these types of care in turn.

Jesus’ Example

He refuses the “tyranny of the urgent”

The example Jesus sets presents a challenge to those of us who find ourselves overwhelmed by work, overstimulated by people and ideas, living cross-culturally, and traveling often and far. Mark sums up the situation well when he recalls how, very early one morning, Jesus escaped to the hills to pray. The previous day had been hectic. Jesus had preached in the synagogue in Capernaum, healed Peter’s mother-in-law, and then ministered to countless other needy people who begged for His help. Although He had gone away to meet His Father in prayer, the disciples searched Him out. “Everyone is searching for you,” they said (Mark 1:37). If they were imagining that Jesus would stop His prayer time because of the needs of the crowd, they were mistaken. Jesus says, quietly but firmly, “Let’s go somewhere else.” They went to another part of Galilee to continue the work of evangelism, but between Capernaum where the conversation took place and the other villages lay miles of open countryside. The walk not only gave them time and space to reflect, rest, have their energy restored, and renew their relationship with God, but also gave them some much-needed time together.

Commenting on Jesus’ attitude, Sister Margaret Magdalene (1987, pp. 41-42) writes: “He refused to submit to the tyranny of the urgent. He would not let the crowds or even human need dictate the priorities. He had an inner freedom to say ‘No.’ He could say ‘No’ with integrity because in His times with His Father, He

clearly discerned and adopted the Father's priorities and perspectives. Not in bondage to the need to achieve, nor neurotic about the success of His mission, nor puffed up by popularity, He is free."

He ensures that output is matched by input

Jesus modeled the need to live a balanced life for the sake of our soul and our relationships. Someone has summed up this need with this piece of advice:

input=output=input=output

In other words, if we are to give out to others effectively, we must make sure that we take in as much as we give out. Output for member care workers might mean traveling to visit mission partners, relating to them, loving them, listening to their worries or pain or struggles, feeling inadequate for the task of being involved in member care, and not knowing where to turn for help. Output for mission partners might include stressful activities such as language study; adapting to a new climate, diet, and culture; coping with transition; and facing the challenge of using professional skills in an unfamiliar environment and without the tools and finances that were available in the home country.

Input for both member care workers and mission partners might include rest days and holidays, letters or emails from home, and well-planned conferences. By well-planned conferences, we mean conferences where there are spaces between sessions, with time to make and deepen relationships, time to relax, and time to enjoy periods of personal prayer, as well as informative teaching and discussions and the opportunity to talk in depth with someone qualified to listen. Input might also come in the form of a retreat where the emphasis is on one's relationship with God and/or on personal growth, rather than on listening to talks. Above all, input comes in the still, hushed place where God's voice is most clearly heard and His love most keenly felt.

He models a ministry saturated in prayer

Jesus sets us the example, not only of a balanced life, but also of a *prayerful* life. He was praying at His baptism when the heavens opened, the Spirit descended on Him, and He received the Father's affirmation (Luke 3:21-22). He was praying on that morning we mentioned earlier when, after a hectic Sabbath, long before dawn, while it was still night, His disciples found Him in a secluded spot (Mark 1:35). He was praying right through the night after He had fed the 5,000 and insisted that His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead (Mark 6:45-46).

Jesus' disciples would have been men of prayer long before their Master came on the scene. They had a prayer place—the synagogue. They had a hymnbook—the Psalms. They listened to the Old Testament being read and learned passages of it by heart. They also said prayers each morning on waking and each evening before sleeping. Certain "blessings" were also part of their vocabulary—like this early morning wake-up call: "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." They kept the Sabbath too. The God to whom they prayed, though, was distant, demanding, and too holy for them to come near. In fact, the name of God was considered too holy to pass a person's lips.

When Jesus came into their lives, by His own example, He taught them a new way of praying. Here was a man who obviously felt secure in the Father's love. This influenced the *way* He prayed. Intimacy, warmth, delight, and spontaneity are words that best describe His own conversations with the Father. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that those who lived alongside Him begged Him, "Lord, teach *us* to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Did His very first suggestion surprise them? "When you pray," He suggested, "say *Abba*—daddy" (Luke 11:2). Since the Old Testament speaks often of God as Father, the Twelve would have been familiar

with the *picture* of God as Father (see Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Hos. 11:1-4). It would never have occurred to Jesus' disciples to *call* God "Father," however. As Professor Joachim Jeremias (1967) reminds us, there is not a single example of the use of "Abba" as an address to God in the whole of Jewish literature.

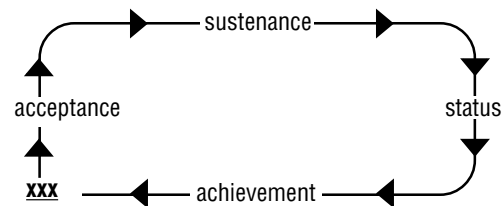
We are not told whether or not the disciples acted on Jesus' advice in the early days of their School of Prayer. What we are told is that Jesus tried to make sure that the disciples' image of God was accurate. His main method, in true Middle Eastern style, was to speak to their hearts by telling them stories. Take the three unforgettable stories in Luke 15, for example. Here Jesus shows that God is like a Middle Eastern shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is lost. He searches everywhere until the sheep is safely in his arms and on its way back to the fold. When it has arrived home, the shepherd throws a party to celebrate.

God is not only like a man. Jesus also compares Him to a Middle Eastern housewife who sweeps and sweeps the floor of her home and refuses to rest until her precious coin has been found. Most moving of all, Jesus likens God to a Middle Eastern father whose two sons both wish he would drop dead. Even though they treat their father cruelly, the father offers them nothing but love.

Love is what God is. Goodness is what God is. Compassion is what God is. This is the message that Jesus wanted His disciples to believe. He wanted them to know that each of them was personally loved by His Father. Little by little, His friends accepted the good news. Brennan Manning (1994, p. 16), in *Abba's Child*, reminds us what a huge step forward this was: "It takes a profound conversion to accept that God is relentlessly tender and compassionate toward us just as we are—not in spite of our sins and faults—but with them."

Jesus not only assured His disciples that they were loved by a compassionate, tender God, He also taught them the transforming power of God's love. He did this

by allowing them to see how these truths gave *Him* the power to fulfill His God-given calling, even when the way was hard. To explain what we mean, we use an adaptation of a tool the British psychiatrist Frank Lake (1966, p. 205) developed, The Dynamic Cycle of Being and Well-Being:



The Dynamic Cycle of Being and Well-Being

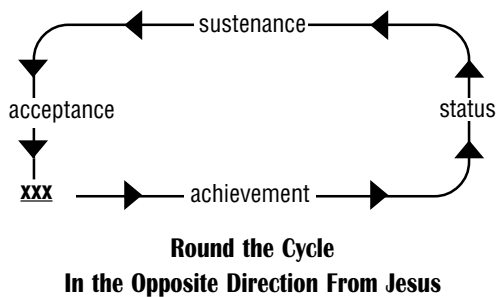
Lake used this diagram to illustrate two truths: first, to demonstrate the sense of well-being that is given to a child who experiences its mother's love and, second, to show how Jesus' sense of well-being found its roots in His Father's felt love.

Regarding the first truth, Lake reminds us how a good mother gives her child acceptance. Then, as she feeds the child, not only with milk but also with warmth and love, the child's sense of belonging in this world expands. Acceptance, welcome, and sustenance provide the child with a sense of belonging and status—so much so that it is ready to learn the achievement of relating to and giving love to others.

Jesus' relationship with His Father was not unlike the relationship a child enjoys with a good mother. While He was here on earth, He frequently retreated into His Father's presence—particularly when He was in any kind of pain, such as the bereavement He must have felt so keenly after the murder of his cousin, John the Baptist. In the silence, He poured His pain into the lap of His Father. The Father, in turn, gave Him acceptance—not in spite of the pain but *with* the grief. Jesus found Himself not only accepted, but also supported and sustained. The intimacy that bound Him to His Father reassured Him of His status. His Father had spelled this out at His baptism: "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased" (Mark

1:11). From the fullness of acceptance, sustenance, and the status of being a beloved child, Jesus was able to return to continue the work the Father had sent Him to do: to continue to pour out redeeming love and compassion to others.

In contrast, we are reminded of an occasion when we traveled overseas to lead a prayer retreat for a group of mission partners. After the retreat, one of the partners admitted, “I love God and really want to serve Him, but I’ve never quite grasped that God loves *me*.” Many other mission partners would echo this admission. The problem with this lack of assurance that we are loved is that we are tempted to move around the dynamic cycle in the opposite direction from Jesus:



Some of us who want to achieve great things for God seem to believe that our achievement brings us status. We believe that we are accepted because of what we do. We are sustained by these false ideas. We therefore try to achieve more and more to earn more and more favor with God—only to collapse from exhaustion or to suffer from burnout. “No,” whispers Jesus. “The secret of fruitfulness is not work, work, work. The secret of fruitfulness is intimacy with me.” “Live in me. Make your home in me, just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing (John 15:4-5, The Message).

One of the saddest things that we have felt since we have been attempting to provide member care for mission partners is the reaction we frequently receive when teaching the ideas we have outlined above: “I couldn’t possibly pray like this,” some object. “Just look at the length of my prayer list. Life is just too busy for this kind of commitment.” On the other hand, one of the greatest joys and privileges that comes our way is when someone comes to The Hiding Place and says, “I’ve heard about intimacy with Jesus. I’ve read about it. Now show me how I can experience it!”

Jesus assures us that we *can* experience such closeness anywhere and everywhere. One of the things that is so refreshing about His own relationship with the Father and the Spirit is that it grew, not only in solitude and silence, but also in the busyness of life. When Jesus was about to feed the 5,000 with five small fish and two little loaves, it was natural for Him to ask His Father to bless the meal. When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was natural for Him to cry out to the Father. When He was walking in the countryside, it was natural for Him to invite His disciples to “look at the birds ... they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Father feeds them.... See how the lilies of the field grow” (Matt. 6:26, 28).

The 17th century French monk, Brother Lawrence, called this kind of prayer “practicing the presence of God.” When asked *how* we pray in this way, he said, among other things, that we should “settle ourselves firmly in God’s presence by constantly talking to Him” and that we should ask for God’s grace to sense His presence at odd moments of the day, reminding ourselves frequently that God loves us (Blaklock, 1981, pp. 11-12).

Not long ago, a mission partner came to The Hiding Place for a prayer retreat. She shared many joys and sorrows. Among the sorrows was the cry that “our mission prayer meetings are so *boring*!” We understood. We have been to too many mission

prayer meetings that are boring, because they start in the wrong place—with the task and not with the Master. Prayer meetings that begin with Jesus, meet with Jesus, listen to Jesus, and from that starting line focus on needy, hurting, helpless people can surely never be boring. They may be painful, because often the only prayer we can pray is one of silent grief. For those who learn to pray in the way Jesus taught, prayer meetings may be painful, even powerful, but never boring!

Jesus' Teaching

He taught the disciples before and after ministry trips

Having carefully laid the spiritual foundations and having allowed His disciples to watch Him at work and at prayer, *then* and only then Jesus sends His team out on a mission. He sends them out, not one by one, but in pairs. He sends them out with careful instructions about what to do and what not to do; what to take and what not to take; and, as far as is possible before a mission venture of this kind, He prepares them for difficulties that they might encounter. Luke paints the picture of this proactive preparation beautifully (Luke 9:1-6).

Imagine the scene. For months, these men have listened to Jesus teach and preach. They have watched Him perform miracles. Now they listen to His instructions as He prepares to send *them* into the villages to prepare people for the day when He Himself will come.

They were to preach, to heal, to cleanse, to exorcise, to trust, to bless, and to be aware of their vulnerability. They were to exercise caution and wisdom, to listen, to be prepared for difficulties, and to be like their teacher. Jesus empowered them for the task, gave them authority, and personally commissioned them. He also gave them careful instructions concerning their luggage and accommodation. They were to travel light, live simply, and be content with what they were offered. On the other hand, they were to be shrewd

and, where necessary, to exercise the ministry of shaking the dust from their feet in places where they were not welcome. Mark sums up the mission in this way: “They preached with joyful urgency that life can be radically different; right and left they sent demons packing; they brought wellness to the sick, anointing their bodies and healing their spirits” (Mark 6:12-13, *The Message*).

They then return to Jesus. He had obviously been praying for them while they were away. As soon as they return, we see them gathering around Him, telling Him story after story. We also see Him listening to them and responding with affirmation and rejoicing. He is intimately involved in all that they have been experiencing, enjoying, and achieving. Equally, He is concerned for their welfare, so He does not just listen to them, then immediately send them out on another mission. Instead, as He hears them, He senses their need and insists that they take a break. In other words, Master care provides compassion, opportunities for ministry, passionate prayer support, vision, listening, empowering, care, and rest.

He underlined their need for mutual support

Notice that Jesus did not send His disciples out alone. He sent them out in pairs. Was this because the Old Testament stresses that “it is not good for man[kind] to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) and that the alien, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan should be protected, cared for, and placed in families? Or was it because He Himself suffered from loneliness, even though He had done everything possible to make sure that He was surrounded by those who loved Him? We are not told. What we now understand, though, is the effect that loneliness can have on people and their relationships. Ronald Rolheiser (1979), in his book *The Restless Heart*, puts it powerfully when he explains that loneliness, if not understood, can be destructive of human intimacy, can result in being over-possessive in relationships, and can pre-

vent us from entering into any kind of creative solitude. If not faced and grappled with, loneliness can lead us to become hardened and desensitized persons. Jesus seems here to be attempting to safeguard His disciples from such subtle pressures.

***He gave them
a sense of vision***

Jesus not only safeguarded His disciples from the scourge of loneliness by providing them with companionship and support, but also gave them a sense of vision and privilege. As He prepares to send them out, Jesus sounds like someone full of passion and vision who is inspiring His companions to share His passion and ensure that His vision is realized. He is like a teacher sending fully equipped students out into the world—or a king sending carefully schooled and *inspired* ambassadors to carry out His orders and to speak for Him. This way of preparing His team must surely have given them a sense of privilege and worth, of value and honor. They were, indeed, ambassadors *for Christ*, and they were understanding this more and more. Jesus not only commissioned and inspired them, but also empowered them. Did He breathe on them in the way He did in the Upper Room on the first Easter Sunday? We are not told. What we are told is that He did not give them a list of instructions and expect them to follow them in their own strength. He knew all too well that, if they were to achieve anything for Him, it would be by grace. The necessary grace was His free gift to them—grace for them as individuals *and* grace for them as a group.

Jesus' Mentoring

Jesus didn't just teach those who lived in community with Him. He disciplined them as well. By discipling, we mean teaching through personal encounter and close relationship. Jesus did this in a variety of ways.

***He showed them
His glory***

One way was to give the disciples the privilege of seeing His glory. So far as we are aware, the first time He revealed His glory to them was early in His earthly ministry, when He and His disciples attended the wedding at Cana. John remembers how Jesus turned gallons of water into wine and how this revelation of His glory persuaded the disciples to “put their faith in Him” (John 2:11).

***He assisted them
in their ministry***

Another way in which Jesus disciplined those whom He had called was to stay alongside them and support them while they helped Him with *His* ministry. Think, for example, of the occasion we referred to earlier, when 5,000 men plus women and children were sitting on the grassy banks that slope down to the Sea of Galilee: “‘We’re out in the country and it’s getting late,’ the disciples warned Jesus. ‘Dismiss the people so they can go to the villages and get some supper.’ But Jesus said, ‘There is no need to dismiss them. *You* give them supper.’ ‘All we have are five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they protested. Jesus said, ‘Bring them here.’... He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted His face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and *gave the bread to the disciples*. The disciples then gave the food to the congregation” (Matt. 14:13-19, *The Message*; emphasis added).

It is almost certain that the bread and the fish were multiplied *as the disciples gave them to the crowd*. If this is indeed what happened, imagine the impact that the nature and size of this miracle must have had on Jesus' friends. Jesus could have chosen to meet the needs of the crowd in a variety of ways. He chose to disciple His team by giving them the privilege of helping Him.

***He showed them how
He healed the sick***

On other occasions, too, Jesus gave His disciples the privilege of watching Him heal the sick and raise the dead. He also allowed them to listen to His compassion, that is, the way He hurt in the very depths of His being for the poor. Is it any wonder, then, that in Acts 3 we find Peter making his way to the temple at the time of prayer? When he meets a crippled beggar, instead of responding to the beggar's plea for money, he responds in the way the Master would have responded had He been there in person: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (Acts 3:6).

***He exposed them to
His revolutionary views***

While traveling with Jesus, the disciples were given the thrill of hearing His teaching on a variety of subjects: fasting, love for enemies, judging others, forgiveness, and the suffering and death He must go through. They heard Him spell out the meaning of the Beatitudes, and they were present when He gave the listening crowd a revolutionary way of ordering their priorities. Quoting Genesis 2:24, "A man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh," Jesus addresses a culture that, even today, believes that men are of much greater value than women and that women are the property of their husbands in the same way that the house or the vineyard is the husband's property. Instead of agreeing with these ideas, Jesus challenges them. A wife is not a piece of property. She is a *person* loved by God. Because it is all too easy to sweep this particular piece of Jesus' teaching under the carpet and because this can cause endless damage to marriage and families, there is an urgent need in member care to tease out the implications of such practical teaching.

Marriage as God planned it, Jesus seems to insist, means that the top prior-

ity in life for a husband and wife, after their relationship with God, is that they should cleave to one another. One way of cleaving to one another is to spend quality time with each other in times of joy and to support one another in times of change or difficulty. Although an individual's relationship with God must take priority over all other relationships, married people must be given space in which to make sure that their relationship *with one another* also deepens and that they become one spiritually, emotionally, and sexually. They must therefore "leave" not only father and mother, but also many other demands to ensure that this space is always in place. The third priority for married couples—after God and the marriage relationship—is children, if God entrusts them with this precious gift. When these three priorities are safely in place, husbands and wives are then free to explore other ways of serving God and using the gifts God has given them. Sadly, many Christians—particularly mission partners and other Christian leaders—make their service for God a higher priority than their family. The family unit is then endangered and suffers unnecessarily in a way that is dishonoring to God.

For single people, too, their first priority is their relationship with God. Next, if they model themselves on the single Jesus, the priority is *not* work, work, work, but rather it is to create close relationships with friends. As Carmen Caltagirone (1983, pp. xi, 5) reminds us in *Friendship as Sacrament*, "We can look at some of our deepest relationships and find there a clue to the unfathomable love of God.... The love we share in human relationships is part of the grandness of a God who cradles us tenderly in his all-loving embrace."

***He gave them
privileged insights***

As well as teaching His disciples while they were walking with Him or listening to Him address the crowds, Jesus frequently took them aside and gave them

deep and concentrated insights that He had not shared outside of their community. Think of the time when He first told the parable of the sower, for example. He left the masses to work out the symbolism for themselves, but when He was alone with the disciples, He allowed them to ask questions. “Why do you tell stories?” they ask. “To create readiness,” He replies, and He adds, “To nudge the people toward receptive insight” (Matt. 13:13, *The Message*). He then goes on to explain in detail the hidden meanings of this His first parable.

He prepared them for a painful transition

Most memorably of all, we recall those last few hours of Jesus’ life, when, once again, we see Him engaging in proactive preparation of His disciples. He knew that they would find the transition of His death and resurrection difficult to cope with. “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34), He earnestly said, underlining once again the need to serve others from the base of good relationships. During this long session with this team that was soon to take over the ministry from Him, Jesus emphasized the need to trust. “Trust in God; trust also in Me,” He begged them (John 14:1). He went on to remind them where their resources were to come from. Be open to the Holy Spirit’s ministry, He pleaded, knowing full well how much He personally owed to His relationship with and support from the third person of the Trinity. “He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.... He will testify about Me” (John 14:26; 15:26).

As well as teaching His disciples as a group, Jesus frequently addressed *crowds* of people. These Middle Eastern crowds would have consisted of individuals, couples, and whole families. Jesus gave them unforgettable, life-changing lessons in relationships and in personal and spiritual growth. From time to time, too, we see Jesus *drawing alongside* individuals and families, close friends, and couples.

On the first Easter Day, for instance, He walked along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. On this journey, He came across two of His disciples, whom many believe to have been a married couple. After listening to their bewilderment, He gave them a thrilling account of the Jewish Scripture’s teaching about Himself. Their hearts burned within them, the scales fell from their eyes, and they could scarcely bear to be parted from Him. Or again, one week later, we watch Him cooking breakfast on the beach for His bewildered disciples. After breakfast, He comes alongside Peter, the disciple who had publicly denied Him three times. The memory of the way he had failed the Master must still have been plunging Peter into despair. No condemnation comes from Jesus, however, only love and understanding, restoration, and recommissioning with all that that entailed in terms of trust. Jesus is entrusting people to Peter. He is also showing confidence that Peter will, in fact, love Him to the point of death.

If we are to follow faithfully in the footsteps of the Master Carer, we in member care will take note of Jesus’ attention to detail, as well as His concern for the welfare of *individuals* (including *couples*, *close friends*, and *families*). We will ensure that, as well as arranging occasions when mission partners are taught in traditional Western ways—through talks and lectures and seminars and conferences—we will provide opportunity for partners to be listened to *one-to-one*, to be cared for, to be understood, and to be healed of hurts.

A Ministry Full of Mystery

The Stature of Waiting

Some of the most powerful teaching Jesus gave was lived rather than talked about. We think, for example, of the manner in which He modeled the “stature of waiting” (Vanstone, 1982). Over and over again, we find Jesus refusing to rush into ministry but rather waiting for the right moment to act. So He leaves the wonder

of His Father's presence and waits in a woman's womb. For 30 years, He is content to live and learn and love, first in Egypt, then in the obscurity of Nazareth. Even when He does make His first public appearance, He insists that John the Baptist should baptize Him, and He is prepared to wait a while longer. The crowd is eager to hear, thirsting to meet their Messiah, but Jesus knows that the really *ready* moment is the right moment. So, instead of preaching or teaching or healing, He follows the Spirit's prompting and goes on a prolonged retreat in the desert. Author Sue Monk Kidd (1990, p. 14) reminds us that Jesus' earthly ministry was punctuated by such retreats: "When important times of transition came for Jesus, He entered enclosures of waiting—the wilderness, a garden, the tomb. Jesus' life was a balanced rhythm of waiting on God and expressing the fruits of waiting. There are reasons why Jesus was prepared to wait. He recognized that when you're waiting, you're *not* doing nothing. You're doing the most important something there is.... If you can't be still and wait, you can't become what God created you to be."

Mission partners, too, are frequently asked to wait. We wait for visas, we wait to learn the language, we wait to make relationships with members of our team and with our neighbors in the country to which we have been called. We wait for news from home, we wait to discover some of the reasons that God has called us to work overseas. Such waiting can seem endless. Many mission partners have not yet learned that the deep things of God do not come quickly. They are revealed in the fullness of time—God's time, not ours. Unless mission partners have grasped the value and "the stature of waiting" that the Master models, waiting may seem irksome, futile, and a waste of time and talent. It may trigger feelings of failure or a lack of self-worth. Our task in member care may therefore be to point 21st century partners programmed by secular thinking to the strange success story of the Waiting One—the Master Carer who is our model in mis-

sion and who is one in a long line of those who have discovered the rich rewards of waiting.

The Power of Powerlessness

Jesus not only endured and grew through endless waiting, He also demonstrated the power of powerlessness. We see this peculiar power at work in the Garden of Gethsemane. Having poured out His pain and dread to His Father, Jesus hands over the reins of His life to His captors. From this point on, He who had healed the sick, preached so powerfully, and master-minded the Last Supper organizes nothing. He goes where His captors lead Him. Yet John, His closest friend, helps us to see how powerful His powerlessness is. "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out [to His captors] and asked them, 'Who is it you want?' 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I am He,' Jesus said.... When Jesus said, 'I am He,' *they drew back and fell to the ground*" (John 18:4-6, emphasis added).

Why did they fall to the ground? John provides no answer to this question. Do we find a clue, though, in what happened the following day? As Jesus hung on the cross, the penitent thief begged Him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). A little later, after Jesus had breathed His last breath, the centurion standing at the foot of the cross cried out, "Surely He was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). Just as the centurion and the penitent thief saw beyond the bruised and broken body of Jesus to His glory, did His captors in the Garden similarly see His divinity shine through His human form in all its powerlessness? Possibly. Why else would they fall to the ground?

In the hours that follow, Jesus is insulted, flogged, spat upon, criticized, and crucified. But note carefully: The miracle is that He achieved more in those hours of utter powerlessness than He achieved in His three years of astonishing ministry. In these hours, He won the salvation of the world. This is Master care in action.

Many mission partners also experience powerlessness. Take the experience of being de-skilled, for example. Workers may be well qualified in their chosen profession and have proved that, in their own country, they can make good use of their qualifications. When they work overseas, though, there may be many reasons why some or all of those skills cannot be used. These individuals might then experience not just powerlessness but frustration and a creeping feeling of failure. Our role as member care workers will then involve more than identification with the frustration and feelings of the partner. We will need to unfold the mystery of a Master who has also been in this situation and is able to understand, to support, and to bring forth much fruit from this seeming powerlessness.

The Value of the Desert

We have already seen that one of the places where Jesus exercised “the stature of waiting” was in the Judean desert. It would appear that, at first, He was reluctant to go there. We say this because in his Gospel Mark uses the powerful Greek word *ekballo* (“to thrust”), when he tells us how Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had publicly identified Himself with John the Baptist. He had witnessed the crowds waiting to hear God’s new message. He was poised to begin His public ministry. The Spirit recognizes, though, that before people act, they need space to listen—to their own hearts, to God, and even to the tempting voice of the evil one.

Jesus tuned in to the voice of God before He entered the awesome arena of the desert. The Father’s message, “You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11), must have been the food that sustained Him through His long and lonely fast. The message was particularly powerful coming at this moment in time. It reminded Jesus that, since His public ministry had not yet begun, He was loved, not for anything He had done but simply for who He was. When a person

absorbs that kind of love, it elicits a response of love. In the desert, then, we hear Jesus spell out His life’s motto: “*I have come to do your will, O God.*” This motto must surely have been part of the armor that He wore when He engaged in spiritual warfare against the enemy.

Almost certainly, some of the questions that Jesus was thinking through as He entered the desert included, “How am I going to carry out the task My Father has given Me to do?” “How am I going to reveal the kingdom to the waiting, watching world?” Satan was quick to make persuasive suggestions: “Make yourself popular; accumulate possessions; exercise power.” “Get behind Me, Satan!” With that uncompromising rebuke, Jesus rejected each of these proposals. He chose, instead, to fulfill His Father’s mission in His Father’s way, with the help of the Holy Spirit. He thus emerges from the howling wilderness equipped and empowered to return to the clamoring crowd and to serve the Father with authority.

Jesus was not the only one to be refined in the desert. All of the giants and giantesses of our faith were wooed into the desert by God: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Elijah, the Psalmists, Paul, and so on.

Mission partners may never be required to sweat it out in a physical desert, but as part of the maturing process they will almost certainly find themselves in an inner desert from time to time. The inner desert refers to any period of our life when the landscape of our heart is like the bleakness and barrenness of the actual desert. We may feel this barrenness when all of our natural, human resources have dried up or when we seem to have been tested almost beyond our ability to cope. It might be an inner place where we experience a huge emotional emptiness or loneliness or where our soul seems as dry as soil that cries out for water. It might be a feeling of helplessness, hopelessness, or fear. It might also be a feeling of wonder or awe—a place where we meet with God in a special way.

In Hannah Hurnard's (1966) delightful story *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, the heroine, Much-Afraid, is seen serving the Chief Shepherd. Content though she is in many ways, she is nonetheless conscious that the picture of the Chief Shepherd that others gain through her is spoiled for a variety of reasons. She is a cripple, for one thing, and she has a twisted mouth. The Chief Shepherd comes for her and takes her on a long, healing journey to the "high places"—a journey that is rather like the inner journey we all have to make. At first, Much-Afraid is excited. Her excitement turns to dismay, though, when the Chief Shepherd warns her, "All My servants on their way to the High Places have had to make [a] detour through this desert.... Here they have learnt many things which otherwise they would have known nothing about" (p. 55).

Master care—the methods God uses to ensure that those who serve Him grow spiritually and emotionally—*includes* leading His loved ones into the desert. As God said to Hosea concerning Hosea's wife, Gomer, "I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards.... There she will sing as in the days of her youth" (Hos. 2:14-15).

As member care workers and mission partners, it is our responsibility to study and grasp the meaning of the mysteries that Jesus fleshed out for us. Only then will we be able to support partners who are being required by God to learn the stature of waiting, the power of powerlessness, or the value of the desert. One way to do this is to pause, ponder, and respond to questions like the ones that follow.

■ Can you think of occasions when God has asked you to wait? How did you feel? What can you learn from the way Jesus was prepared to wait? How does this help you in your work in member care—and in your own life?

■ Can you remember times when you felt powerless? Looking back, how do you

think God used that time to help others and to teach you? How do you feel you can best support mission partners who are feeling helpless at the moment?

■ Jesus' life motto became very clear for Him while He was in the desert. What is your life motto?

Now that we have paused to ponder the mysteries Jesus modeled to us, we urge you turn to the following questions from time to time to think through the vital subject of Master care for yourself.

Reflection and Discussion

1. Reread the opening pages of this chapter, focusing on Jesus and His relationship with the Twelve. If you are the leader of a team, would people observing your group recognize that you are making Master care your model? Would it be obvious to them that you are more concerned about people than projects? Ask yourself, "How can I get to know the mission partners who are under my care?"

2. Do *you* have the courage to be like Jesus—to look for resources for yourself *before* you minister to others and after you have served them? If not, why not?

3. If you could work out a rhythm for yourself that balanced busyness with stillness, what might that rhythm look like in terms of time spent alone with God (daily, weekly, monthly, annually) and time spent serving Him?

4. Jesus gave His disciples a new understanding of prayer. As you think about the prayer patterns of Jesus, do you think your own prayer life needs to be changed in any way? If so, how might you go about making it more effective?

5. Look carefully at Jesus' priorities. Compare these with your own lifestyle, and ask yourself whether there are any changes that need to be made. How does your response relate to the way you are moving on the Dynamic Cycle of Being and Well-Being?

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