

Care for One Another  
1Cor 12:25; 1Thess 4:18; Gal 6:2  
March 3, 2024

Friendship is not true friendship apart from caring for one another, comforting one another, and bearing one another's burdens. This is why true friendship is proven on the road of affliction or suffering. True friends are those who come alongside you when life is hard. They *lean in* to your trials with you.

Following Christ in friendship will lead us to care for and comfort one another as well as bearing each other's burdens. Yet, we will have extremely limited capacity in our care for others unless we are abiding in God's care and comfort for us—the One who is our ultimate burden bearer.

*We care for others as we walk in the care of Christ ourselves.* That is, when we trust God to care for us, we have bandwidth to care for others. *We comfort others as we walk in the comfort of Christ ourselves.* When we turn to Christ for our comfort, we are in a position to comfort others from the free flow of God's grace and faithfulness. *We bear one another's burdens as we entrust our burdens and the burdens of our friends to Christ.* It cannot be overstated that any "one another" ministry must flow out of our own abiding relationship with Jesus. And in fact, as we abide in Jesus what will overflow from our lives is care for one another.

### Care For One Another (1Corinthians 12)

Let's take up this call to care for one another by turning to I Corinthians 12. There are lots of practical ways that we can care for others that range from actually nursing someone when they are sick, to helping someone financially or praying for their needs, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Caring for others always involves our time and especially our thoughtfulness—all of which must flow out of an attitude or heart of care, a Jesus-shaped vision of caring for others based on God's care for us in Christ. Let me add one more essential aspect. Last week after our discussion on encouraging one another, one of our brothers reminded me of the essential role of listening—*listening to understand*. What a good word! Before we jump into "fix it" mode, before

we can even discern the true needs, we need to listen well. Not just for the surface need but for how it is impacting the heart, soul, and relationships of the person. And one of the things that will help us listen well is having an accurate understanding of how God has designed the body of Christ for mutual care and edification.

1Cor 12:24b-26: **"...God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may *have the same care for one another*. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"** (1Cor 12:24b:-26).

Now, let's put these verses into their context. 1Cor 12-14 are about spiritual gifts and the role of *love* in the use of those gifts (ch 13). What difference does love make in the use of our gifts? Well, it will change the focus of our gifts away from self to the God and others. The loving use of our spiritual gifts to build up the body is based on God's design for interconnectedness and unity in the body. Therefore, we are called to use our gifts, not for self-exalting purposes, but rather in service to others for the purpose of building up the body and caring for one another.

So, what will motivate us to care for one another when we are such a diverse body? The answer is found in the interconnectedness that God has designed in the body of Christ. **[1Cor 12:7-27]** What's important for us to see from 1Cor 12 is that is that God Himself has designed the body (11, 18) so that every single member, regardless of his or her role, contributes the wholesome functioning of the body. This means, as vs. 26 clarifies, that "if one member suffers all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." So to not care for one member of the body is detrimental to yourself.

Furthermore, God measures honor by a different scale than the world (which we were trained by). We want to honor those who are great, but God bestows even greater honor on those who have a humble role. Each member should receive special care in the body, without partiality, because God has designed every member of the body to be an essential part of the whole. *So, to care for one member of the body is to build up the entire body.*

But not only does caring for one another strengthen our fellow believers as one body, it also reflects our love and loyalty to Jesus Himself. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that at the second coming, He will separate the righteous from the unrighteous and He will say to the righteous,

*“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me’ (Mt 25:31-40).*

**So deep is the union between Christ and each believer, that when we care for one another, it is an act of love and devotion to Jesus Himself.**

Conversely, when we don’t extend care to one another, it is an act of offense and injury against Jesus who is inseparably bound to His people in covenant love.

This is why 1 John 3:17 warns us that, “whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” **Our care for one another is motivated by a wholehearted love for God and a robust understanding of the union of each member with Christ and one another.**

How has God uniquely gifted you or positioned you to care for others? Who may need your ministry of care this week? When *you* have needs, are you willing to humbly allow others to use their gifts and resources to serve you?

**Comfort One Another** (1Thess 4:18; 2Cor 13:11)

One of the key aspects of caring for one another is *comforting one another* in the midst of life’s harshness. We comfort one another not only in the face of death, but also in the face of stress, disappointment, relational distress, physical pain, emotional anxiety, and much more. Comforting one another not only helps us cope with life, but also draws us together as we bear one another’s burdens and trust God together. No church in the NT had more conflict and issues to work through than the Corinthian church. Listen to Paul’s concluding word to them: **“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you...”** (2Cor 13:11, ESV). By the way, some of your translations may use the word *encouragement* instead of *comfort*. That’s because *parakaleo* can be translated either way. I’m going with the ESV rendering of *comfort* here because it seems to best align with the theme of comfort throughout 2 Cor.

Notice from this verse that God will manifest His love and peace among His people as we seek to live in peace with one another and express love to one another through comfort or encouragement.

Generally speaking, there are 3 ways we can comfort one another. We can point each other to the past, the present, and the future.

- 1. We comfort on another by reminding each other of God’s past faithfulness** (Rom 15:4; Rom 8:31-34).

One of the historical purposes of the OT is to catalog and memorialize testimonies of God’s faithfulness through the ages. Rom 15:4 says, “Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement/comfort [*parakaleo*] of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Furthermore, we can look to God’s record of faithfulness in our own life (and the life of the one we are comforting) as means of comfort and encouragement for the present and the future.

More importantly, we can look back to the cross which secures our future. Paul does this in Romans 8:31-34: “What then shall we say to these things?

If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? [now he looks back to the cross] He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, [He already took our condemnation] yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:31-34).

So, we can comfort one another by pointing to God's past faithfulness, especially through the gospel, and its implications for our present situation. When you seek to comfort someone, help them see how God has already been faithful.

2. **We can comfort one another by pointing to God's present nearness** (Isa 41:10; Ps 23:4).

How many times throughout Scripture do we hear God say, "do not fear, for *I am with you!* One of my favorites is Isaiah 41:10: "**Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand**" (Isa 41:10). Or Psalm 23:4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I *fear no evil*; for *You are with me*; Your rod and Your staff, they *comfort me*."

3. **We can comfort one another by pointing to our future hope—sealed and secure** (Eph 1:13-14; 1Thess 4:13-18).

Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:13-14 that we who believe are sealed in the Holy Spirit of promise as a pledge/guarantee of our future inheritance. We belong to Jesus, kept by the Holy Spirit for heaven. Regardless of what we may endure in this life, we know that faith in Jesus *will* result in eternal comfort.

This is also how Paul comforted the Thessalonians who were misinformed and grieved about fellow believers who died before the second coming. [**1 Thess 4:13-18**]

We comfort one another by looking back on God's past faithfulness, reminding each other of His present nearness, and looking forward to our future hope, sealed and secure.

Now let's get a little more specific. Let's answer the question, "how do we comfort one another" with the answer to a better question, "how does Christ comfort us?"

- **Jesus comforts us with His presence, so we comfort one another with our presence** (2 Cor 7:6). Paul wrote in 2 Cor 7:6, "Our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus." If Christ is in you, you can be a source of comfort by simply showing up and letting Christ minister through you.
- **Jesus listens and intercedes, so we comfort one another by listening and praying, looking to Christ together** (1 Pet 3:12). "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer" (1 Pet 3:12). We comfort by listening and praying.
- **Jesus comforts us through the promises of His word, so we comfort one another with the words of Scripture** (Ps 119:50). "This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me" (Ps 119:50).
- **Jesus endured suffering for our comfort, so we comfort one another from our own experience of suffering** (2 Cor 1:3-5). "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God *of all comfort*, who comforts us in *all* our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" (2Cor 1:3-5). So, Jesus suffered affliction so that we could find ultimate comfort in Him. Then He allows suffering in our lives so that we can experience His comfort and share it with others in their affliction.

One person wrote, "Your suffering is a commission. When you experience the effects of being in a broken world and turn to the Lord

with your pain, you're made into a messenger of mercy, hope, and comfort. God gives it to you; you give it to others.”<sup>1</sup>

- **Jesus identifies with our suffering, so we comfort one another by entering into each other’s suffering** (2 Cor 1:7). “Our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.”
- **Jesus comforts us with resurrection hope, so we comfort one another with the hope of the resurrection** (2 Cor 1:8-9). “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:8-9). *God uses affliction to displace trust in ourselves with trust in God who raises the dead.*

As Christ comforts us, so we can comfort others as we abide in Him.

### **Bear One Another’s Burdens** (Galatians 6:2)

As we consider how to care for one another and comfort one another, we must not overlook Paul’s exhortation to **“Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ”** (Gal 6:2). The law of Christ is the law of love. So, when we actively love one another by helping to bear each other’s burdens, we fulfill Christ’s command to selflessly love one another.

There are countless ways we can bear one another’s burdens—providing meals, financial help, offering our time and services, prayer, listening, encouraging—endless ways. Yet Gal 6 brings another specific burden into view—bearing one another’s burdens in the battle against sin. He says in verse 1, **“Brethren, if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted”** (Gal 6:1). If a brother or

sister expresses a struggle with sin, don’t pull back. Lean in to help restore them with gentleness while guarding your own heart against temptation.

The term ‘burdens’ in vs. 2 refers to especially heavy loads that include difficulties, problems, or sins that people are struggling to deal with.<sup>2</sup> The call to “bear” one another’s burdens indicates a need for endurance in handling extra-heavy loads. This is contrasted by our normal responsibilities in vs. 5 that we are each called to steward: “For each one will bear his own load.”

This highlights an important distinction we must discern as we seek to help others. On the one hand we must help one another with the burdens that are too excessive to bear alone. On the other hand, we must not completely do for others what they can and should do for themselves. We can see this modeled in how Jesus bears our burdens. When it came to sin which we had no ability to bear on our own, Jesus did it for us—all of it! And sometimes we need to do for others what they are incapable of doing at the time as an act of grace. Yet Jesus doesn’t take all hard things away from us. There are many hardships which he requires us to endure while promising to be *with us* and to *help us* along the way. So on the one hand, we must be willing to do hard things for the sake of others, yet on the other hand we need to help others do the hard things they themselves are called to do. Galatians 6 indicates that each one is responsible for their own duties, while at the same time we must be willing to help others with their excessive burdens.

So, let’s consider how we can raise the temperature one degree this week in our care and comfort for one another by helping to bear one another’s burdens.

### **Communion**

As we come to the Lord’s table, we turn to the care and comfort of Christ who has born our excessive burden of sin which we had no ability to bear on our own. Yet, let me remind us that we come to the Lord’s table, not just as

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<sup>1</sup> Haley Mullins & Erin Davis. *Living Out the One Another’s of Scripture: A 30-Day Devotional* (Revive Our Hearts), pg. 48.

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur Study Bible, pg. 1768.

individuals, but as a body divinely knit together. We come to receive forgiveness and to forgive. We come to receive Jesus' empowering grace and presence to walk with us through the struggles of life necessary for our growth. And we come ready to care for one another, comfort one another, and to help bear one another's burdens.

I encourage you to prepare for the Lord's supper by examining your heart in two ways. First, confess any known sin that would be an obstacle to you receiving the care and comfort of Christ—let Him bear the burden of that sin. Second, examine your relationships for any need to be reconciled to one another. Our union with Christ and our union with one another in Christ requires every effort to live at peace with one another.

*Bread: 1Peter 2:24-25*

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

*Cup: Rom 8:31-39*

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.