



Caring Counts!

by Mark Brunner

Big Feet–Bigger Heart! (Luke 10:33)

A number of years ago I was waiting for a flight that had been delayed. There was nothing to do but bide my time so I headed to a nearby bookstore in the terminal mall to buy a magazine. As I was browsing through the magazines I became aware of a disturbance across the mall in a little coffee shop. A young woman with three kids was struggling to get control of her kids and the noise was apparent to everyone. I felt suddenly compelled to cross the mall and offer some support. I debated the thought for not more than ten seconds. As I began to put the magazine back into the rack, however, someone else beat me to the punch. A young soldier, backpack and all, had stopped and was offering to buy the crying kids some burgers and fries. I guess his reaction time was a bit better than mine.

I think it's true that most of us care enough to want to do the right thing when others need our help. But, often, it's a matter of reacting quickly and bypassing that usual internal debate of "do" or "not do" that really makes the difference.

Here's a story: A little girl, clutching her money tightly, entered an ice cream store. Before she could say a word, the store clerk sharply told her to get outside and read the sign on the door, and stay out until she put on some shoes. She left slowly, and a big man followed her out of the store. He

watched as she stood in front of the store and read the sign: No Bare Feet. Tears started rolling down her cheeks as she turned and walked away. Just then the big man called to her. Sitting down on the curb, he took off his size-12 shoes, and set them in front of the girl saying, "Here, you won't be able to walk in these, but if you sort of slide along, you can get your ice cream cone." Then he lifted the little girl up and set her feet into the shoes. The shining eyes of the little girl could not be missed as she shuffled up to the counter and ordered her ice cream cone. He was a big man; big belly, big shoes, but most of all, he had a big heart. (Author Unknown)

Sometimes the difference between caring or not is reacting and not debating about the risk. When Jesus taught the story of the Good Samaritan he didn't teach that the two individuals who didn't stop to take care of the beaten man had no compassion. Perhaps they did. But what made the difference was that neither stopped to do anything. They may have debated the advisability but they didn't stop. God doesn't want you and I to take foolish risks when we're offering our help to others; but He is asking us to risk our own comfort and time. That goes with the turf. May it be that when others are hurting our reaction time will be quicker than our debating time. We miss so much when we debate too long.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

King's Highway! (2 Timothy 3:2)

Recently a deer was struck on our road. It lay in a ditch just a few yards away from our driveway. Being summer I thought it would be a good idea to alert the local sheriff so that the carcass could be removed as quickly as possible. Although it wasn't blocking the road, I figured that the local dogs (mine among them) didn't need the temptation. I placed the call and a sheriff came and marked the carcass with orange paint. The next morning as I walked I felt good that I had alerted the authorities. In a matter of days the carcass would be moved, I thought confidently. The next morning, day three, I passed the spot and the carcass was gone. "Great!" I thought. But as I approached the

crest of the hill about a hundred yards away I spotted the carcass laying at the edge of the field. It appears that my neighbor decided to do me one better. He moved the carcass away from all temptation, to a field away from all nearby homes.

What I did was thoughtful. My neighbor, however, put in the extra effort that takes thoughtfulness to a level of caring.

Here's a story: Once a king had a great highway built. Before it was opened to the public, he decided to have a contest to see who could travel the highway the best. People traveled the highway all day, but each one, when he arrived at the end, complained to the king that there was a large pile of rocks and debris left on the road at one spot and this got in their way. At the end of the day, a lone traveler crossed the finish line walked over to the king. He was tired and dirty, but he addressed the king with great respect and handed him a bag of gold. He explained, "I stopped along the way to clear a pile of rocks and debris. This bag of gold was under it all. I want you to return it to its rightful owner." The king replied, "You are the rightful owner." "Oh no, this is not mine." The traveler said. "Oh yes," said the king, "You've earned this gold, for you won my contest. He who travels the road best is he who makes the road smoother for others." (Author Unknown)

God's Word says that in the last days, people will "have a form of godliness, but deny its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). That means that doing good is something society says is a good thing. But, the limit is drawn when it affects our own welfare. Looking out for "number one" is more important. God has put us in this world to travel life's road in search of opportunities to excel in godliness. That means we are to glorify God through good works that exemplify Him. God always goes the extra mile; does more than we ask. When you and I are confronted with opportunities to care, to do good, may it be that, like my neighbor, we're always looking for an opportunity to excel and make the road of life "smoother for others."

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When Caring Hurts! (Luke 11:46)

Recently I ran across this news story in a local paper: "Los Angeles, California: Yesterday more than 600 lawyer hopefuls were taking the state bar exam in the Convention Center when a 50-year-old man taking the test suffered a heart attack. Only 2 of the 600 test takers, John Leslie and Eunice Morgan, stopped to help. They administered CPR until para- medics arrived, then resumed taking the exam. Citing policy, the test supervisor refused to allow them additional time to make up for the 40 minutes they spent helping the victim. Jerry Braun, the state bar's senior executive for admissions, backed the decision stating, 'If these two want to be lawyers, they should learn a lesson about priorities.'" (Los Angeles Times)

Priorities? Can there be a higher priority than caring about others before we think of ourselves?

Here's a story: The story is told of an old gentleman who was very wealthy. As far as he knew, he had no living relative upon the face of the earth. He surmised that he had not long to live. As winter came on, the rich man grew quite ill and, during the worst spell of blustery weather, died. It was announced that the man had requested that his funeral be held at four o'clock in the morning. So it was conducted on a pitch-dark, freezing, snowy morning. The only persons who came out at the unearthly hour were three men and one elderly woman. There they sat huddled in the shadows of the silent mortuary as the clergyman spoke a few words of respect regarding the departed friend's life. After the brief service was over, the old gentleman's attorney arose and said it was the dead man's request to read the will at this time. The money had been left to be divided equally among the friends who had cared enough to be present at his funeral. Because they didn't think of themselves and their own comfort or purpose, their's was the reward. (Demia

Knapp Wilson, Signs of the Times)

Thinking of ourselves is always a great temptation. A feminist friend of mine recently remarked to me that she enjoys sacrificing for others but it has nothing to do at all with loving them and everything to do with loving herself.

Through self-sacrifice she builds her own self-esteem. How sad! Putting others before ourselves is the definition of God-pleasing sacrifice. When we make the goal of that sacrifice our own esteem, it isn't a pleasing sacrifice to God but, rather, only a selfish desire for self-fulfillment. There is, however, a reward for those willing to put a caring attitude ahead of their own self-fulfillment. When we make others a priority over ourselves, even when that puts our own comfort and happiness in jeopardy, it pleases God. And, ultimately, can there be a higher priority than that?

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Awe-Inspiring Caring! (Genesis 40:23)

Many years ago I was attending church when I saw something that I will never forget. The choir, sitting in the front of the congregation, had just risen to sing an anthem. That's when a young lady left her spot in the soprano section and walked across the front of the church, past the pulpit and sat down in a pew near the front of the church. She seated herself next to another young lady, obviously a close friend, who was crying. She didn't try going out of the back of the choir loft and sneak around through the back of the church. She just walked right in front the choir, pastor and the entire congregation because her friend was hurting. I can still remember the stunned silence of the entire congregation as they focused on this act of selfless caring. No sermon the pastor could have preached after that could have said more about sin and grace than that simple act of love and caring.

Here's a story: As morning broke on December 14, 1862, the battlefield at Fredericksburg, Virginia revealed a ghastly landscape. More than 8,000 Union soldiers lay dead or dying before a stone, wall where the Confederate Army had entrenched itself. The cries of the dying for help and water were chilling. Nineteen-year-old Sergeant Richard Kirkland of the Second South Carolina Brigade, had seen and heard enough. The South Carolinian jumped over the wall and immediately exposed himself to the fire of every Yankee in that sector. Kirkland walked calmly toward the Union lines until he reached the nearest wounded soldier. Kneeling, he took off his canteen and gently

lifted the enemy soldier's head to give him a long, deep drink of refreshing cold water. Then he placed a knapsack under the head of his enemy and moved on to the next. Racing against the lengthening shadows of a short, somber December afternoon, he returned again and again to the lines where comrades handed him full canteens. Troops on both sides who had watched this unselfish act paid young Kirkland the supreme tribute – not a standing ovation, but respectful awed silence. (Peter Kennedy, Copyright 2006)

Life is an endless parade of choices. We choose to eat; we choose to fast. We choose to work; we choose to play. We choose to help; we choose to hinder. Christian freedom gives us permission to act one, way or the other. The problem isn't in the choosing but the choice. Choosing to care, putting all thoughts of what might or could happen to us, is a choice among many. It's what that young lady in the choir did. It's what that brave confederate soldier did. Frankly, when they chose to take the risk, the rest was a piece of cake. Choosing to care opens the door to love and compassion. When we walk through that sweet, sweet door, risk becomes a mission and fear becomes hope; nothing else really matters.

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Sensing The Need! (Matthew 19:16-23)

When was the last time that you went out of your way to do something for someone else? I'm not talking about the check that you stuck into the Heart Fund envelope recently or the friendly "wave-through" you did at the intersection, allowing another driver to turn before you did. No, I'm talking about doing something that took time and effort, time you probably didn't have and effort that may have burned a few calories in the process. We live, unfortunately, in what I often call an, I AM culture (**It's About Me!**). When we're so focused on our own comforts and inconveniences, it's really hard to find the time and where-with-all to spare the time and effort to care about others, let alone put them first in our lives. Besides, life is getting more and

more complicated and busy all the time. Does God really expect me to put others before myself?

When it comes to caring, how much effort DOES God expect from you and I?

Here's a story: A small plane with no lights and inexperienced pilot was flying up to a little country airstrip where he tried to land before sunset. Unfortunately, he had strong winds against him and he didn't make it. Nearing the airstrip, he found he couldn't see the runway. Panic seized him as he sensed he didn't have much fuel left. The runway was not equipped with lights, and he had no way of getting in touch with anyone. He began to circle. Down on the ground, a man was sitting on his porch and thought, "That guy's in trouble." Quickly he sped over to the runway and began to drive up and down the runway with his lights on bright, up and down, showing that young, inexperienced, pilot how to find his way. The pilot turned. With a great breath of relief he began to land the plane. At the end of the runway the driver turned around and flashed his lights on the high beam and sat there, as if to say, "This is the end of the runway, and there are the lights." That pilot came right in and landed safely. A near tragedy was averted by sensitivity to need.

(Author Unknown)

When people are in trouble, we need to sense their needs and be willing to help. In a sense that means we have to step out of "me" and into a "they" mindset. When we step out of ourselves, however, we become vulnerable, even open to attack. Nevertheless, when someone else is in trouble, we may be the only net they have to jump into. When that net is occupied by our own concerns and needs, there's little room for someone else's. Is there someone in your life today who needs you, all of you? Empty out your own cares and be ready to take on theirs. It may not be the most comfortable when it comes to your own happiness. But, hey, it never really was about you in the first place.

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