

Main Idea: In Philippians 2:1-5, we’re given a call to care for one another. To put it another way, we are called to be a caring community, and this entails three things.

- I. We have resources (1).
 - A. We have encouragement from being in Christ.
 - B. We have comfort from His love.
 - C. We have fellowship with His Spirit.
 - D. We have tenderness and compassion.
- II. We have responsibilities (2-4).
 - A. We’re called to think right (2).
 1. We must pursue the same mind.
 2. We must pursue the same love.
 3. We must pursue the same purpose.
 - B. We’re called to do right (3-4).
 1. We must not be driven by selfish motivation.
 2. We must consider others ahead of ourselves.
 3. We must not focus on our own interests.
 4. We must focus on the interests of others.
- III. We have a resemblance to maintain (5).
 - A. We’re called to be like Jesus.
 - B. We’re called to be servants.

Getting Intentional: What does it take to be caring people?

1. We can’t care as we ought without Christ.
2. We won’t care as we ought without the church.
3. We mustn’t see care as an end, but a means.

In the past couple of months we’ve been learning that God has given us an incredible resource for helping us live for Him in this age of suffering, namely, His promises. We called our previous series, “Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering.”

But there’s more. In His kindness, the Lord has given us something else to enable us to honor Him in the tough times. Not just promises, but *people*, and specifically, *a people to live with* in the crucible of suffering.

By God’s design, we’re not alone. The moment He saves us, He enters our lives and will never leave. But He also places us into a body, a family, a community of people called the church. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” So if you are in Christ, you have been placed by the Spirit of Christ into a connection with the rest of the members of His body, the church.

This is a fact. If you are in Christ, you are also in His church. He doesn’t have a lone ranger option. Right now, if you’re in Christ, you are connected to the rest of His people.

Yet what is true in fact must be lived out. The tragic reality is that there are many who are in Christ who are living like they aren’t connected to His body. They are doing so to their own detriment, and to the detriment of the rest of the body.

As sinners our tendency is to go our *own way*, and that’s not only away from the Lord, but also away from His people. Sin alienates. On the other hand, grace reconciles. And as we experience the Lord’s amazing grace, it results not only in a closeness with Him, but also with His people.

With this in mind, we’re going to do something very special in this evening’s service. We’re going to launch our revised deacon care groups for 2013. Our four deacons have prayerfully organized the entire church family into four smaller care groups, and this evening these groups will meet for the first time, to eat together, and then to explore ways

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

to care for one another this year. And there will be a group for non-members, too, led by Pastor Matt and I and our wives. For the next four months these care groups will be meeting together twice a month on Sunday evenings, giving attention to the application of God's Word, to fellowship, to breaking bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

So I invite every one to participate. We need each other, by God's design. And I want us to see this design this morning from God's Word.

I want us to open the Scriptures and see the connection between our care groups and our calling. I want you to know exactly why we have care groups and why we want every person in this church to plug into one.

There are many passages that could help us, but I've chosen Philippians 2. In Philippians 2:1-5, we're given a straightforward, unmistakable call to care for one another. Or to put it another way, in the text before us, our Savior calls us to be a caring community.

What's involved in being a caring community? What makes it possible? What must we do practically as a whole and as individuals to experience this care? We'll find out as we walk word by word through this practical text.

By way of background, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to one of his dearest churches. He loved the church at Philippi. In fact, he wrote this letter, in part, to tell them thank you for their partnership in his ministry.

But he also wrote to address a problem. The unity of the church was under attack, both from false teachers on the outside, and from members in conflict on the inside.

So while this was a good, sacrificing, ministry-oriented church, they had room to grow, as every church does. And one of the areas they needed help had to do with their relationships. So Paul gave them this charge in 1:27-28: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel. Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you *stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*"

Hold on. How does a church of *many* people learn to stand as *one*? How can *many* people, many very different people, learn to exhibit true unity and function as *one*? And by the way, if a church can do that, verse 28 says it will have a great impact on the onlooking, unsaved world.

So what does it take? We find the answer in the first five verses of chapter two, where we learn that being a caring community involves three things—resources, responsibilities, and a resemblance to maintain.

I. We have resources (1).

Paul tells the church in verses 1-2, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

Notice the "if/then" structure of this sentence. *If you have, then do such and such.* The "if" could just as well be translated "since," because it's a reality. If we are in Christ, we have these. They belong to us. What do we have? In verse 1 Paul identifies five resources that we possess as believers.

A. We have encouragement from being in Christ. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ." If you have, and we do.

To be united with Christ is to be saved. Remember, we used to be alienated from Him. As sinners, we weren't on speaking terms with Him. But because He reached out to

us in His grace, because He became a man and took our place on the cross, because He conquered death and is alive, we now have encouragement (*paraklasis*) from being united with Him.

Let that sink in. If He could make us right with Himself, which is our biggest problem, then we have reason to be encouraged. And this courage He has put in our hearts is a valuable resource that enables us to have relationships that please Him, as we'll see.

B. We have comfort from His love. “If you have any comfort from his love,” and we have it. The Greek word for “comfort,” *paramythian*, is made up from *pará* (“toward”) and *mythéomai* (“to speak”), *paramythéomai* has the basic sense “to speak to someone in a friendly way.”¹ Just think. While we used to be God’s enemies, we’re now on friendly terms. We’re loved by Him, and that love produces comfort in us.

C. We have fellowship with His Spirit. “If you have...any fellowship with the Spirit.” And again, we do. If we know Christ, we have a partnership, a connection, a bond with God the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent His Spirit to live in us the moment He saved us, and His Spirit helps us live as He intends. That’s another incredible resource, and it’s ours. And so is this...

D. We have tenderness and compassion. The Greek word for “tenderness” is *splanchna* which literally means “intestines” or “inward parts.” It’s where we feel. So the word signifies desires, affection, compassion. And the word for “compassion” is the Greek *oiktirmoi* which speaks of sympathy, mercy, and compassion. The verb means “to show mercy and concern, with the implication of sensitivity and compassion,”² as in Romans 9:15, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.”

And in Christ, this is what we have, the capacity for tenderness and compassion. He has given us a new heart with new abilities for expressing His love.

So what’s Paul doing here? Four times the apostle says “if” in this verse. Why? He wants the church to ponder its resources. *If* you have encouragement from being united with Christ--do you have it? Sure you do. *If* you have comfort from His love--do you? Has the love of Christ changed your life? Sure it has! *If* you have any fellowship with the Spirit--do you? Has the Spirit of God brought you into communion with God? Sure He has, if you’re a believer! *If* you have any tenderness and compassion--do you? Yes, we have the capacity for expressing tenderness and compassion.

These are our resources, given to us by our gracious God. That brings us to the next word, *then*. If you have, *then*. Something is supposed to follow. This leads to that. Resources lead to *responsibilities*.

II. We have responsibilities (2-4).

What are they? Paul spells them out in verses 2-4, “...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Paul says, “Make my joy complete.” The verb, *pleroo*, means “to fulfill, to finish, to provide fully, to make complete, to come to an end.” We’re talking about maximizing

¹ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (784). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (750). New York: United Bible Societies.

joy here. What follows isn't just a grind. It's the key to joy, for Paul, for the Philippians, and for us.

Let's be honest. Good relationships don't just happen. If you have a good marriage, it didn't just get that way, did it? It takes work, which again is in fact why Paul's writing this to begin with (there were some people in the Philippian church, two ladies in particular according to 4:2-3, who weren't getting along). So what's required? Two responsibilities...

A. We're called to think right (2). And how are we supposed to think, according to verse 2? Our thinking is to be marked by three characteristics...

1. *We must pursue the same mind.* The NIV says we're to be "likeminded." But the literal reading is, "Think the same thing." That's a strange command, isn't it? For one, it's certainly not natural. We don't naturally think the same. You have your opinions. I have mine.

And then it raises the question, "Think the same about what?" Must we become clones? Is Paul calling us to get rid of all personal differences? Obviously not. God loves variety.

But He also loves it when His people, which are different, lay down their own personal tastes in the pursuit of something greater.

How can different people have the same mind? It happens when they submit their own opinions to a common standard, and as they do that, they begin to exhibit the same mind. The standard, of course, is God's Word.

2. *We must pursue the same love.* "Having the same love," says Paul. Have you ever noticed how when two people love the same thing it brings them together? I'll give you an example.

"Jim Kurtz, you are a Steeler fan. Are there any other Steeler fans in this room?" There are. How did he know that? Their mutual love for the same thing brought them together in the past. It gave them common ground for conversation, for being together.

Now answer this. Is there anything or anyone that all of us in this room love? There sure is! We love the same Savior, don't we? And when a group of people love the same thing, it has incredible power to bring them together.

3. *We must pursue the same purpose.* Verse 2 says, "Being one in spirit and purpose." The Greek that's translated "being one in spirit" is one word, *sympsychos*, which is a combination of two Greek words "together with" and "soul." It means "to be united in soul," "to be harmonious." It appears only here in the NT. It's a call for the church to be united, not just in its thoughts, but also in its affections. So we're not only to pursue the same mind and the same love, but also the same affections.

I love how the Young's Literal translation puts it, "Minding the one thing." Paul uses the Greek participle *phronountes* which comes from the verb *phroneo*. It means "to think." It carries the idea of "to have attitude, to ponder, to set one's mind on, to hold a view," and even "to honor."³

Brothers and sisters, this takes work. If we're going to please our Savior in the way we relate to each other, we need to work hard at *our thinking*. If I'm not thinking rightly, I won't relate rightly. That's true in my marriage. That's true in our workplace. And in our church. Minding the one thing.

Friends, we have the capacity for a depth of relationships the world doesn't know. We have a common Savior, a common eternal destination, a Bible that we all love, a

³ DBL Greek

mission to which we're all called. And if we will work hard at the way we think, if we will work hard at having the same mind, the same love, and the same purpose, do you know what will happen? We're experience an incredible bond with each other, the conviction that we truly belong to a caring community.

But thinking isn't the end. Our second responsibility...

B. We're called to do right (3-4). Notice verses 3-4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

To be a caring community, we must think right and then *do right*. What specifically are we called to do? Paul gives us two double assignments, each containing a negative and a positive.

1. *We must not be driven by selfish motivation.* "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit." Selfish ambition. The Greek, *eritheia*, speaks of "rivalry, hostility, a feeling of strife." It indicates "a feeling of resentment based on jealousy," and it implies rivalry.

You know what a rivalry is. It's the desire to show you're better than someone else. It happens in sports all the time. Think of the OSU-Michigan rivalry. Why, Woody wouldn't even buy gas in the state up north. That's rivalry. And that should never happen in the church.

Friends, selfish ambition must go. Selfish ambition is the "What I want is more important than what you want" attitude. That will kill a caring community.

Vain conceit must go, too. What's that? It's the "I know what's best for this church and no one else does" way of thinking. That too puts the dagger into a caring community.

The Greek for "vain conceit" is *kenodoxian*, from *kenos*, "empty," and *doxian*, "glory." It's "vain glory," "cheap pride," "pride without proper basis, empty conceit." It speaks of a "vain opinion."

Those two things, selfish ambition and vain conceit, are like cancer in the body of Christ (or in any other organization, for that matter). And so we must, by God's grace, root out every trace of it from our own hearts on daily basis.

Let's take a little inventory. Do you value what your brothers and sisters in this church think? Are you open to their opinions and perspectives? Do you seek them?

Frankly, you really can't answer that question in a Sunday morning worship service sitting in a pew. The answer is seen by what you do with your brothers and sisters the rest of the week. Are you spending time with them? Are you working to get to know them?

That's what our care groups are all about. We want to help you get to know one another, for unless we know one another, we can't truly express care for one another.

So we must do nothing in the church marked by selfish ambition and vain conceit. What's the positive alternative?

2. *We must consider others ahead of ourselves.* "In humility," says Paul. The word for humility is *tapeinophrosynē*, from *tapeinos*, meaning "low, weak, poor," and *phrosyne*, "mind, thinking." It means "humbleness of mind, lowliness, to have a deep sense of one's littleness."⁴

Humility is a key value at WBC. We're committed to killing pride in our own hearts and pursuing humility by God's grace.

⁴ Strong's Greek

“In humility, *consider⁵ others better than yourselves.*” Interesting word, *better than*. It’s *hyperchontas* and it means “to tower, to stand over,” and here carries the idea “to surpass in value, hence, to be better than.”

Now what does that mean? I don’t know LeBron James’ spiritual condition, but suppose he was a Christian and a member of this church. Suppose we played a pickup game together. Does this verse (“Consider others better than yourselves”) mean LeBron is supposed to say, “I can’t play ball as well as you, Brad.”

Does this verse mean that someone with a beautiful voice is supposed to respond, “Oh, I just can’t sing as well as you,” when she’s thanked for her ministry in music? Certainly not. That’s false piety, if not an out-right lie. The truth is, God has gifted us differently. We are better, by His design, at certain things than others.

So what does it mean to consider others better than yourselves? The issue is our motive. Our motive must be the good of the team, not our own good. It’s to put the spotlight on others, not ourselves, all to the glory of God.

For LeBron to have this attitude means he’s going to put his own interests aside, and pour his energies into the good of the team. He’s going to be willing to turn down shots if that’s what the team needs.

This verse says to the person gifted in music: “I’m not singing for man’s applause. In fact, if my name isn’t listed in the bulletin and people don’t pat me on the back, it doesn’t matter. My motive is the glory of God and the good of the team.”

It says to the Sunday School teacher, “It’s my privilege to be able to teach God’s Word to my class, but if someone else could better edify the body, I would be glad to take a back seat, because ministry isn’t about me, but the Lord and the good of His people.”

It says to the young parent, “I don’t know everything I need to know about parenting, but God has put in my life people who’ve been down this road before. And I will humble myself and learn from them, and seek their counsel.”

It’s a beautiful thing to belong to a church where people, by God’s grace, are thinking that way. Teachable. Approachable. Moldable. That’s a church that’s well on its way to experiencing what it means to be a caring community.

Bear Bryant, the University of Alabama’s late football coach claimed that being a good team required three ingredients:

*If anything goes bad,
then I did it.*

*If anything goes semigood,
then we did it.*

*If anything goes real good,
then you did it.*

*That’s all it takes
to get people to win football games for you.*

The Lord does amazing things with people who don’t care who gets the credit. Recently I’ve been reading, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House*. One of the things that strikes you about Billy Graham is his humility. Listen to this story about a conversation Billy Graham had in the 1950s with then President Dwight Eisenhower:

They were in the den, Graham seated, Eisenhower pacing in front of the fireplace, when he got to what was on his mind. “Billy,” he said, “could you explain to me how

⁵ The verb, *hegeomai*, means “to consider, to be of an opinion, to regard.”

a person can be sure when he dies he's going to heaven?" Surprised, Graham said, "I'll try," pulled out his New Testament, and walked him through those passages that explained salvation and its terms. He hoped he had provided some reassurance that salvation came through grace, and "not by anything we can do for ourselves." But many years later he was still weighing the conversation. "It was an interesting visit. And a very humbling one for me," Graham said. "I didn't feel that I could answer his question as well as others could have."⁶

How's that? Billy Graham, as you know, is probably one of the most famous evangelists to have ever lived. He has preached the gospel to 210 million people in 185 countries in 417 crusades over the course of more than half a century. Billy Sunday didn't preach to that many people, nor did Dwight L. Moody or any of the great evangelists all the way back to Paul. Yet Billy Graham says others could have done a better job than he in presenting the gospel to the president.

That's our calling. *Consider others ahead of ourselves.* And so is this...

3. *We must not focus on our own interests.* Verse 4 says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests." Now, that's hard to do. As sinners, we're wired to focus on ourselves. When we miss church, we're bothered when others don't notice. When we're hurting, we're aggravated if nobody checks on us. Our natural tendency is to focus on our own interests.

If we succumb to that inclination, however, we won't demonstrate the kind of care for others that God desires. That's because, to demonstrate care, fourthly...

4. *We must focus on the interests of others.* In verse 4 Paul says that each should *look*. The verb is *skopeo*, which means "to watch out for, to notice carefully, to be concerned about, to keep thinking about." In Romans 16:17 he says to "watch out for those who cause divisions." Here we are to *watch out for each other*.

Again, that's what our care groups are all about. We want to help you *look*. You can't really see what's happening in your brother's life sitting in a Sunday morning worship service. You don't see that he's hurting because he lost his job, or his wife isn't speaking to him, or that he's thrilled because God just met a need in his life. But by spending strategic time with that brother in a care group, you will look and see and hear and be able then to show you really care.

And be cared for. It goes both ways. You can't look at others, and others can't look at you, unless we invest some time with each other, focusing on the interests of one another.

This is already happening in our church. Last week a sister opened her home for another sister in need. On Monday a team of people brought food for a funeral meal. On Wednesday a brother checked on someone after a surgery. So this looking is happening all the time.

But we're still not seeing all we should see, and one of the reasons is we're not as organized as we could be to care. We live such fast-paced, independent lives, that we flat out miss seeing many opportunities to show we care. By getting intentional, by carving out time to get close to a team of 20 or so of our brothers and sisters, we'll see and be seen even more.

Now, lest we think this is just for the social types in the church, notice what Paul does next. He knows our bent is to be self-absorbed, so he gives us a powerful reason as to

⁶ Gibbs, Nancy; Duffy, Michael (2007-08-14). *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (Kindle Locations 1181-1187). Center Street. Kindle Edition.

why all this caring is worth the effort. It's not just that we have resources, and responsibilities, but thirdly...

III. We have a resemblance to maintain (5).

Notice verse 5, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

To focus on others rather than self is what Jesus did, isn't it? When He left heaven, He did it for us. When He became a man, when He made himself nothing, when He became a servant, He did it with our interests in mind. And when He became obedient to death, even death on the cross, it was for our benefit, was it not?

And now Paul reminds us...

A. We're called to be like Jesus. Which means...

B. We're called to be servants. It's all about Jesus. We're His people. He cared, and He did it in very specific and practical ways. And He calls us to do the same.

We have the *resources* to care—we can do it. And we have clearcut *responsibilities* to show us how to care. And the incentive couldn't be more compelling, for we have a great *resemblance* to maintain, a Savior to put on display.

I'll say it again. In His kindness, the Lord has given us, not just promises to live by, but a *people to live with in the crucible of suffering*.

Getting Intentional: What does it take to be caring people?

Three things.

1. *We can't care as we ought without Christ.* You don't have the power to do what we've learned today with knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Until He saves you, you are enslaved to yourself, to your own interests. Oh, you can care for others, but there's always an angle, an expectation. And you can't break it. But Jesus can. Only He can set you free, first from the penalty of your sin, but also from its power, so you can then serve Him and others as you ought.

So make sure you know Christ. We can't care as we ought without Him.

2. *We won't care as we ought without the church.* Oh, we can isolate ourselves from the church and do some caring. But we can never care as we ought without the church, because the church, by God's design, is the caring community. Jesus said, "A new command I give you, that you love one another (John 13:34-35)." Paul said, "To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:21).

Friends, the church isn't just a good idea. It's God's idea, God's instrument for putting His glory on display in this age.

So you need the church, and the church needs you, if you want to experience and contribute to the kind of care God intends.

But there's something else we must do, namely...

3. *We mustn't see care as an end, but a means.* "By this all men will know that you are my disciples," said Jesus, "if you love one another." We're on a mission, beloved. We're not a holy huddle. The reason we're to care for each other is so the lost world will see our care and come to know Him.

So one of the things we're going to be doing in our care groups this year, in addition to caring for each other's needs, is mobilizing ourselves to show this community we care for their needs, so they'll come to know and love Him.

Again, I hope you'll come back this evening. We'd love to have you as we grow to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of being a caring community.