

**Care-Fully Living**  
**Small Group Study by B. Callen, June 2021**

**Session 1: Care-fully Living: People**

**Opening Prayer:**

*Holy, Holy, Holy God*

*We are humbled by your wisdom.*

*Praise and thanks to you, Father of the Light*

*Every good gift we have comes from you.*

*Jesus, in your own words you came to bring us life and life in abundance.*

*During our time together may we learn more about a fully lived life.*

*Holy Spirit, you are our great counsellor.*

*Lead us in this journey together to live with care in our world,*

*to not take for granted the great blessings you have given us,*

*to see the world with eyes of wonder and in awe of the responsibilities you give us,  
to reach out with your wisdom and energetic power to redeem the times and make the most of the  
opportunities you provide.*

*May your kingdom come.*

*To God be the glory.*

*Amen*

Every night without fail as a child, my mother would go to each of my two other siblings and myself to literally tuck us into bed by squeezing the bed sheets in tight. She would then kiss our foreheads and recite the words of the following prayer:

*"Gentle Jesus meek and mild,*

*look upon this little child,*

*Suffer me to come thee,*

*Pity my simplicity.*

*Amen and God bless... Adam, Benjamin and Emily. Nanna and Poppa and (the list went on...)*

I never really understood much of the words of the prayer, but I understood the importance of blessing everyone in the family and extended family. Over my time in ministry, I have asked groups of people to write prayers of thanks on cards or notes or whichever format we wanted to use at the time. No matter the group of people, young or old, the most common thing we are thankful to Jesus for is for other people, mostly family but often friends too. When we look at stewardship of all that we have in life, I want us to begin with something we care deeply about, but one that the busy-ness of life's tasks often obscures: people. Our close friends and loved ones.

***Question: Think about why you are here right now (in this church group or even how you became a Christian). Was there a friend or close family member who helped you? Invited you? Welcomed you? Nurtured your Christian faith? Share briefly with the group a few stories of these wonderful people.***

***OR Take a few quiet moments to write down a few names of good friends either now or in the past. Think about what made them good friends. Briefly share in the group (or in pairs) your stories of friendship.***

In encouraging the early church, the great church planter Paul didn't write software programs, manuals and top 10 lists of church management essentials. He wrote letters to actual people and mentioned their actual names. I've always been impressed by the number of Paul's letters that finish off reading more like a church directory than a thesis of ecclesiology (e.g. Romans 16). He was clearly very good at long distance relationships. Paul understood that the church is more than an organisation, it's a body of organs with Christ as the head and those organs are people, and those people had names. He cared for people. His letter to the Macedonian city of Philippi is a great example. He begins with an expression of such heartfelt joy and love for the people of the church.

***Read through Philippians 1:1-11 together and take note of the many ways Paul describes their friendship. Make a list of the different ways he understands their relationship together. Are there people in your life who match any of these descriptions? In which of these ways might others be able to describe you?***

Rev. Graham Humphris has often noted that Philippians 2:25 is great picture of the church. Here Paul calls Epaphroditus, who had been sent from the church in Philippi to help Paul while in prison, "my brother, fellow worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger whom you sent to take care of needs". Graham notes that in church we are to think of each other as **brothers and sisters** in Christ, friends whose company we enjoy. Also, we are to think of each other as **fellow workers** for the Kingdom of God, people on mission together. My wife Nicole and I got to appreciate each other more fully while 'working together' and observing each other for the same fruitful cause of kids and youth ministry. By being fellow workers, we saw each other's heart for God and people. Then we are to think of each other as **fellow soldiers**. This is a recognition that the breaking through of the Kingdom of God, that Jesus ushers in, is a battle of cosmic proportions. Light against dark, justice against oppression, freedom against slavery, abundant life against permanent death, the Spirit of God against the spiritual forces of evil. There was an obvious mutual care for each other. When working hard in ministry and striving for fruitfulness, I must admit that it is easy to focus on the programs we offer and the success of our activities, and to lose sight of the relationships God has given me to nurture and care for along the way. Paul doesn't do this.

**God gives us people to love and care for. At times we take this for granted or lose sight of the value of friendship. In this study I hope and pray we might recapture a deeper value of gratitude for the friendships God has given us.**

"God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8). Jesus called us friends. He was sent to earth to become "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34).

***Read together John 15:13-17 noting what Jesus says about being friends.***

When it comes to doing relationships well, Jesus is a great teacher. Brene Brown gave a great TED and GLS talk on the difference between empathy and sympathy. Both can be ways to show compassion, though empathy expresses the deepest sense of friendship. Empathy is “feeling into” someone else’s experience and sympathy is understanding someone else’s suffering but not letting it reach the heart. Brene Brown says “*Rarely can a response make something better, what makes something better is connection.*”

***From what you know about Jesus discuss what we can learn about making great friendships. (Here are some examples: John 19:25-27, John 13:1-5, John 11:32-44, John 21:4-13, Acts 9:1-6, Rev 3:19-21, Luke 18:15-17, Luke 19:1-10, Luke 9:1-2, Luke 4:38-40, Luke 5:18-20, Mark 6:30-44, Matt 17:1-8)***

**Would others describe you as task-oriented or people-oriented?** When you go to a meeting do you care more about getting through the items on the agenda or how everyone’s feeling? As an example, I know some task-oriented westerners who have travelled on mission to serve overseas and have found themselves in a culture clash regarding timing. A friend who spent several years in the Pacific Islands discovered there is a difference between standard time and “Pacific” time. Things happened, eventually. People there are very good at waiting. A gam meeting often meant before lunch, and 2pm was some time before sunset. This was partly a practical outworking of a difference in values: people and tasks. Stereotypically the westerner was there for a short amount of time, realised a giant ‘to do’ list was mounting up each day, and out of love for people wanted to get in and get the job done. I don’t believe task-oriented people are somehow lacking in love for people. It’s more a service-orientated way of expressing love. However, it can assume that others receive love in that same way. What if they prefer to see love expressed as quality time, sharing stories, hospitality and sharing food or relationship by being together rather than doing together?

Are there places in your day to focus on conversation with each other. Think about the family or extended family dinner table. Traditionally, for many Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, it’s shared plates and big circular tables or sitting low to the floor together. For others, it might be individual servings, maybe at a dinner table, maybe sitting in a line on a couch while watching that important TV program together. For some of us it was easy during lockdown but through the complications of life mixed with work and school and everything else, you may only achieve that ideal setting on Christmas and holidays?

**Take a step back and look with fresh eyes on how you eat your meals. What might your eating habits say about the way you ‘do’ relationships? Are there some things to learn or changes you might make (hint: start small and achievable)?**

**Action:**

Take time to quietly and individually write down between 1 to 10 close friends or 'partners in the gospel'. How often do you talk together? Why do you enjoy each other's company? Would you consider someone on that list an 'absent friend'? Assess whether you have good balance of spending time with friends over your other commitments? What would it take (and what may need to change) to make time to invest in the mutual joys, love and encouragement of godly friendship? Discuss your thoughts with another person in the group (or the whole group, if that works best). Can each of you commit to contacting and spending time with at least 2 people on that list?

**An invitation to further action:**

1. Commit to re-ignite a healthy friendship that you have not had the time or energy for in a while.
2. Take a friendship 'up a level'. Go through a list of your friends and tell one of them how thankful you are for their friendship. Maybe pray with a friend.
3. Take the time to make a new friend.

**Final Prayer:**

Write down the friends you have been thinking about.

Pray for them and each other in the group with a prayer adapted from Paul's prayer to the people in Philippian church (Philippians 1:9-11 NLT).

Think of them while saying the following prayer together.

*God of empathy and friendship,  
you know how much I love the people you have gifted me with.  
Help me to love them with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.  
I pray that my love and the love of my friends will overflow more and more, and that we will keep on  
growing in knowledge and understanding.  
Help us all to understand what really matters, so that we may live pure and blameless lives until the  
day of Christ's return.  
May we all and always be filled with the fruit of our salvation—the righteous character produced in  
our life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.  
In the love of God, the compassion of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit we pray,*

*Amen*