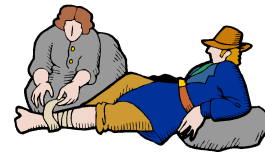


The Church's Wounded Soldiers

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Years ago, I sang a song about the church's wounded soldiers. There were so many hidden "feelings" and "thoughts" that I hoped to communicate through the words of the song. I did my best but there was so much more I wanted to communicate than what could be expressed in the words of one song.

In Matthew 28, Jesus gave what we refer to as "The Great Commission". Jesus gave his disciples, the church, the authority and responsibility to act on his behalf to go and make disciples of all nations. Recently while reading this familiar passage, I was awakened to the realization that there are two parts to this commission. The church is also given the responsibility to teach disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

A teacher is a guide and helper in one's process of learning. They impart knowledge or skills that equip a person for life's journey. Jesus was an exceptional teacher and spent a considerable amount of time in his ministry teaching.

Jesus was a highly effective communicator who was knowledgeable in the subject areas he taught. He had an ability to explain and depict things clearly and often used creative parables (*short allegories*) to illustrate a truth. Jesus goal was for the truths he taught to become a practice in the lives of his listeners. He wanted people to follow his instructions (*to obey*).

Most of us can remember a special teacher from years gone by who has had an influence on our lives. A patient teacher who took the time to help us with a difficult concept we were trying to grasp; a visionary teacher who inspired us to follow our dreams; an insightful teacher who planted in us a seed of pursuing a purpose in life; and of course no one forgets a loving, caring, and compassionate teacher who encouraged us and made us feel special.

Jesus loved his disciples and modeled all of these characteristics and more. Jesus cared for his disciples, taught them, corrected them, inspired them, and empowered them to go into all nations and follow his example.

Jesus also commanded his disciples to "love one another" as he loved them.

John 13:34 (NIV)

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Jesus taught that the way people would know a person was his disciple was by the way they loved one another. He didn't say by the way they effectively evangelized the world. He said by the way we love one another.

John 13:35 (NIV)

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

When we forget about the example Jesus taught of loving his disciples, the result is the church's wounded soldiers (*wounded volunteers, wounded leaders, and wounded people*).

Jesus does not bring in the lost, get us saved, and then say, “OK guys and gals you are now on your own, and you have a job to do. You now must give your all and go and make disciples of all nations. It doesn't matter if you get hurt; it doesn't matter if you feel lonely; it doesn't matter if you need help; it doesn't matter if you are tired - just do it!” That is not the Jesus of the Bible I know.

The Jesus I know continues to love and care for Christians and shepherd us. He continues to be our Father. He continues to walk and talk with us. He continues to love us. He continues to bandage our wounds and hurts as we go and make disciples. He continues to “teach” us.

***When Does a Non-Christian Earn the Right to Not Be Cared for Anymore -
WHEN THEY BECOME A CHRISTIAN?***

“The Great Commission” of making disciples of all nations is an absolute responsibility the church must carry out. However, the church also has an absolute responsibility to obey the commands that Jesus taught. We have a responsibility to teach, love and care for the forgiven sinners (*the disciples, one another, the Christians*).

What is the church's response to the wounded and hurt? Do we care for our wounded? Are they still a part of our family? Are they still a vital part of the flock or do we ignore them and in essence separate them as being not a priority?

If we ignore them and separate them because they are wounded, is the act intentional or is it an unintentional act we commit not realizing what we are doing? Did we just not take the time to decide how we can insure our wounded are cared for? Do we let wounded volunteers, wounded leaders, wounded people, wounded soldiers die when all they need is a little bit of compassion and care?

Leaders, do you take the time to thank and appreciate the people who serve with you? Do you care about them or are they only people who serve to get a job done like a piece of machinery? Does your leadership model a shepherd's heart like Jesus modeled? Do you say, “It's not about you, it's about the lost”? Do you say, “Don't be selfish just give”? Is this what Jesus' commandment to love one another looks like in practical everyday life?

John 21:15-17 (NIV)

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

"Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**"

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "**Take care of my sheep.**"

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?"

He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep.**"

"IF YOU LOVE ME"

~ FEED MY LAMBS ~ TAKE CARE OF MY SHEEP ~ FEED MY SHEEP ~

What does it mean for the church to "Feed My Sheep"? What do the sheep need to eat? Do they get enough to eat?

Do shepherds watch their flock for the type of food required at certain seasons in the life of their flock? Do some of the older flock need special food to help them grow and walk through a stage in life when they can no longer do what they used to do?

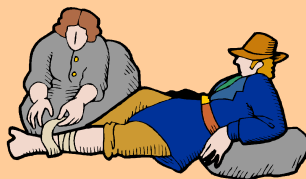
Do some of the pregnant sheep (*people with dreams not yet birthed*) need certain food requirements? Is it winter in your church (*people are tired, cold and need refreshing*) and a certain type of food and vitamins are required for that season? Are their grieving sheep that need to be fed words of encouragement and hope? Do the shepherds know their flock? Do they notice if one wanders away? Do they leave the ninety-nine and seek out the wanderer?

Do Christians recognize, accept, and encourage those who have a passion for Christians to be fed? Do we empower people that have this passion and spiritual gifts needed to accomplish their purpose? Do we believe their ministry is important?

We can all look for food and eat on our own with no guidance or help. However, God has given some people the spiritual gift of teaching, the ability to feed sheep. Not all teachers are local church Pastors. Does the church recognize and accept others feeding them who have the passion, gifts and calling to teach and feed the sheep?

How wonderful it is to see shepherds who have a passionate heart and spiritual gifts that will assist them to follow the example of Jesus to "FEED MY LAMBS", "TAKE CARE OF THE SHEEP", and "FEED MY SHEEP".

DO YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT YOU ARE?



How exciting the day will be when the church arises to be all it is meant to be with ALL the God given passions and gifts of the spirit being recognized and functioning as God intended!