

Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom & Love

Oaks Ministry Collaborative | Training based on the book by Edward Welch

Basic ideas:

- Those who help best are the ones who both need help and give help. A healthy community is dependent on all of us being both. p. 11
- Jesus introduced a new era in which weakness is the new strength. Anything that reminds us we are dependent on God and other people is a good thing. p. 12
- We ordinary people have been given power and wisdom through the Holy Spirit and are called to love others (John 13:34). p. 13

Part 1: We are Needy

“Your neediness qualifies you to help others.” p. 15

Chapter summaries

1. **Life is hard.** Hardships in life impact these categories (and more): our bodies, relationships, work, spiritual beings and the world, the triune God and his Kingdom. p. 18
2. **Our hearts are busy.**
 - a. *Emotions come from the heart.* Emotions are our first response to the world around us, and yet they say more about us than the world around us — they reveal what is important to us. p. 24
 - b. *Good comes from the heart.* There is good in every human being because we are made in the image of God, and we have capacity to reflect his character in Christ. p. 26

- c. *Bad comes from the heart.* Sin is loving and pursuing our desires apart from fulfillment in God and instead of loving others and pursuing their good. Sin happens when we are not conscious of God and living for ourselves, or a conscious choice.
 - d. *Spiritual allegiances come from the heart.* At the very center of our hearts is connection to God, or who we worship. Who we love above all else is who we worship, and who we worship controls us.
- 3. Hard circumstances meet busy hearts.** When difficult circumstances and our hearts meet, a conversation breaks out between the two—back and forth, back and forth—and the conversation can be wise and hopeful, or it can be foolishness that parades as wisdom. This is the essential question of: Why is this happening to me?
- a. We keep talking *to* God, not grumbling *about* him (example: Psalm 22).
 - b. When trouble comes, we aim to create our own psalms in which we:
 - i. Pour out our complaint to the Lord
 - ii. Review God's promises and his faithfulness
 - iii. Find our rest and comfort in Jesus
 - iv. Let others know that they, too, can find rest and comfort
 - c. One of the critical spiritual skills for every follower of Jesus is to bring order to the internal ruckus and grow in trouble rather than rage or wither in it. Tribulation will not win in the end.
- 4. Sin weighs a lot.** Suffering feels like our biggest problem and avoiding it like our greatest need—but we know that there is something more. Sin is actually our biggest problem, and rescue from it is our greatest need.
- a. Suffering exposes the sin in our hearts. When our lives are trouble free, we can confuse personal satisfaction for faith. When life is hard, the allegiances of our hearts become more apparent.
 - b. Sin is a heavy weight. Forgiveness is deliverance.
 - i. *See the weight.* Seeing the weight of sin is intended to drive us to Jesus, it brings humility, and it is the beginning of power and confidence. p. 43-45.
 - ii. *Lay it down.* Our sin is against ourselves and others, but it is ultimately against God. Bring it to him. Bad behaviors, even those that are culturally acceptable, like a little grumbling, are expressions of our spiritual allegiances. p. 46-47

5. **Say “help” to the Lord.** We need to pray, but we resist it. God Indicted all of Israel by saying, “They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds” (Hosea 7:14). We can cry to the Lord for help in suffering and forgiveness for sin, and pray that we would know him better. p. 49-54
6. **Say “help” to other people.** Even though spiritual neediness is one of the most attractive acts of a human being, we have our own views of strength, honor, and what is most becoming, and pleas for help are not on that list. p. 60.
 - a. *It requires and produces humility:* The apostle Paul was thoroughly schooled in rejection and humiliation. Having learned that Jesus made himself of no reputation before others, Paul was unconcerned about his own reputation. That is how he was able to ask for prayer. p. 60
 - b. *It is grounded in spiritual realities:* If we desire to be perceived as competent and in control, we will not ask for prayer. If we know that humans, by nature, are spiritually needy, and God’s plan is that we turn back to him and to other people for help, we will ask for prayer. (Please note this is referring to asking for prayer for ourselves! Not on behalf of others, especially without asking them if we can share with others.) p. 60
 - c. *How to ask:* Ask for things seen (the circumstance) and unseen (God’s promises, Scripture, character in us). p. 60
 - d. *Recognize help when it comes:* When we recount with our community God’s answers to prayers, we set up spiritual monuments of his faithfulness that provide hope. Express thankfulness to God for others, and to others. p. 62-64

Part 2: We are Needed

“This is the way the church moves forward, through mutual love and care.” p. 65

Chapter summaries

1. **Remember: We have the Spirit.** Apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we would be referral agents who simply introduce needy people to the real experts. With the Spirit, we move toward other people and are amazed that God uses ordinary people to do his kingdom work. p. 67

- a. Even with the Spirit, we remain fully capable of saying stupid and hurtful things. But it does mean that our ability to help will bear the marks of the Spirit, such as patience and kindness. p. 68
 - b. You are an ordinary person. Yet, God has determined that run-of-the-mill people do most of his work—not professionals, not experts. p. 70
 - c. The kingdom of God doesn't move forward by mere knowledge, but by love. p. 70
- 2. **Move toward and greet one another.** God has moved toward us. We move toward others in his name. This is one thing that differentiates community care in the church from professionalized, clinical care. p. 73
 - a. *Limitations and priorities:* We cannot move toward everyone, and so in the church community, here is who we prioritize (p. 76):
 - i. The visitor
 - ii. The visitor who returns
 - iii. The less popular, the introverts, the marginalized, or those sitting alone
 - iv. The children
 - v. A hello can be offered to everyone even if you don't have capacity for a full conversation.
- 3. **Have thoughtful conversations.** We don't aim to draw out problems so that we can be helpers. We are simply interested in knowing another person, which is a basic feature of everyday love. p. 79
 - a. *Follow the affections:* We keep our ears open for details that are important to someone. This may sound clinical, but it's not. It's what you do naturally when you are interested in someone. p. 82
- 4. **See the good, enjoy one another.** We will not be able to have growing relationships in which we help other people unless we see the good in them, and they know we see the good in them. God has determined that help takes place in the context of love and respect. It is not rooted in pathology or what is wrong with us. p. 87
 - a. *Look for the good:* All humanity has been created in God's image. All Christians are an important part of the body of Christ and have been given spiritual gifts. As Christians, we are called to exhort one another and encourage one another in faith, maturity, love, and good deeds. p. 92
- 5. **Walk together, tell stories.** Invest in short stories with love and trust, and you will share longer stories. Trust and intimacy in friendship are a process, and are grounded on the character and love of the individuals.

- a. *Avoid matching stories:* Instead, draw out another: “What happened next?” p. 98
 - b. *Follow and draw out what is most important:* Love naturally moves to what is important in someone’s story and follows up. p. 98
- 6. **Have compassion during trouble.** When you follow what is important to someone, that path will take you to the primary struggles of life: suffering and sin. Suffering is the trouble that comes at us. Sin is the trouble that comes out of us. p. 102
 - a. *Compassion:* compassion is enjoyment’s companion. We enjoy the good things in someone and have compassion during hard things. Compassion grieves with those who grieve, and remembers the suffering of others. p. 102 - 103
 - b. *What not to say* (p. 104-106):
 - i. “It could be worse.”
 - ii. “What is God teaching you through this?” or “God will work it together for your good.”
 - iii. “If you need anything, please call me anytime.”
 - iv. We don’t make a 1-1 connection between a particular sin and a particular hardship. Even Jesus matured through suffering.
 - c. *In our attempts to help, we can overinterpret suffering.* Suffering is not an intellectual matter that needs answers; it is highly personal: Can I trust God? Does he hear? Suffering is a relational matter, and it is a time to speak honestly to the Lord and remember that the fullest revelation he gives of himself is through Jesus Christ, the suffering servant. Only when we look to Jesus can we know that love and suffering can coexist. p. 106
 - d. *It is important we get the story of suffering right.* Suffering reminds us that the world and everything in it, including us, are not quite right. Everything will not be right until Jesus returns and his will is done on earth as it is presently done in heaven. So we are people of hope. We look ahead, yet we also know that Jesus’ incarnation changed everything, even now. p. 108
 - e. *Suffering exposes our hearts.* We see where we put our trust: in people, money, pleasure, our own power, etc. p. 109
- 7. **Pray during trouble.** Offer to pray now if the person has shared a hardship or sin with you. Do not presume a hardship on someone based on how they look or act.
 - a. *Pray for healing.* If someone asks you to pray for healing, ask them “How should we pray?” Do not presume what healing looks like. p. 114-115
 - b. *Pray for comfort.*

- c. *Pray for faith.*
 - d. *Pray for everything and anything included in the Scriptures.*
- 8. **Be alert to Satan's devices.** Satan waits for times people are in the wilderness – vulnerable, desperate, and God seemingly far away or absent altogether. p. 123
 - a. *Examples of temptations, suffering, and sin in the garden / wilderness:*
 - i. Eden
 - ii. The Israelites in the wilderness
 - iii. Jesus in the wilderness
 - iv. Gethsemane
 - v. The resurrection garden
 - b. Satan progresses from temptations to accusations. p. 130
- 9. **Prepare to talk about sin.** Our posture toward talking about sin should not be to be “right”; in the case of sin in our friend's life, we are right to be grieved and to *wish* we were wrong. Suffering hurts more, but sin is more serious. Suffering will not last, but the consequences of sin are eternal.
 - a. *Examine yourself first.* Humility means that we see our own sins as worse than others' sins. Humility has nothing to defend. p. 135
 - b. *Be patient.* Patience is not interested in outcomes or how fast people are changing, but rather in what direction people face. Do they face Jesus? When anger and irritability are present, humility and patience are absent. p. 136-137
 - c. *See the good.* Cheer on and call out the good in the other person. p. 138
 - d. *One at a time.* We don't have to talk about every sin we suspect or witness. Just deal with one. It isn't our role to convict people of sin or sit in the judgment seat. That is the Holy Spirit. p. 138-139
- 10. **Help fellow sinners.** The hardest sins to talk about are those we see someone commit, but we receive no invitation to speak. Here, we must decide if the sin is to be called out or covered.
 - a. *Don't be silent out of fear.* p. 144
 - b. *Don't be silent out of anger:* When angry, we might be excellent at talking to others about someone's sin, but wretched at talking to the actual sinner. p. 144
 - c. *Get help:* Consult up, not out. Share and seek the least amount of information necessary to resolve the issue or question at hand to help care for the person. p. 145

- d. *Just the facts.* Share only what you know: specific, observed speech or actions. You cannot know a person's motivations. Ask the person about what you observed. p. 145
- e. *When someone discloses or confesses sin.* In this case, our help takes a different form. See the good. Don't simply commiserate - "Oh, that's so tough!" "I have struggled with that, too!". Get to the heart and support them in the messy nature of growth and change. p. 146-150

11. Keep the story in view. The Bible tells the master story of our past, present and future. We help each other see ourselves in God's master story.

Scripture References

Life is Hard

1. John 16:33
2. Psalm 30: 8
3. Ephesians 6:10-12
4. Acts 17:28

Our Hearts are Busy

1. Proverbs 4:23
2. Proverbs 20:5
3. John 7:38
4. Jeremiah 17:5-8
5. Matthew 6:19-21
6. Psalm 25:17
7. Psalm 45:1
8. Exodus 34:6
9. Romans 2:15
10. Ephesians 1:16-17
11. Ephesians 3:14-19

Hard circumstances meet busy hearts

1. 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
2. Psalm 22

Sin weighs a lot

1. Hebrews 12
2. John 16:8
3. Matthew 9:13
4. Matthew 7:3-5
5. Luke 18:13-14
6. Psalm 51
7. Exodus 16
8. Numbers 14
9. James 4
10. Matthew 6
11. Hebrews 10

Say “help” to the Lord

1. Philippians 4:6-12
2. Hosea 7:14
3. Psalm 86:1
4. Psalm 88:1-2
5. Luke 11:1
6. Psalm 130
7. Matthew 6:12
8. Psalm 46
9. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18
10. Ephesians 1:17
11. Ephesians 3:17-19
12. Psalm 62:1-2
13. Psalm 62
14. Ephesians 6:5-6

15. Ephesians 4:32

Say “help” to other people

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:25
2. 1 Corinthians 1:10-11
3. Ephesians 6:19-20
4. Colossians 4:3
5. Joshua 4:1-7
6. Luke 17:11-19
7. Ephesians 1:8
8. 1 John 3:1
9. Psalm 130:7-8

Remember: We have the Spirit

1. Jeremiah 31:33-34
2. 1 Corinthians 1:20-29
3. Galatians 5

Move toward and greet one another

1. Hosea 1:2
2. 1 Corinthians 16:20
3. Mark 9:37

Have thoughtful conversations

1. Psalm 139

See the good, enjoy one another

1. 1 Corinthians 1:4
2. Genesis 1:27

3. 1 Corinthians 12-13
4. Hebrews 10:24

Have compassion during trouble

1. Exodus 34:6
2. Galatians 6:2
3. Romans 8
4. Hebrews 12:1-12

Pray during trouble

1. James 5:14-16
2. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
3. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
4. Romans 5:3-10
5. Hebrews 12:1
6. James 1:5
7. John 17:29-31
8. 1 Thess. 3:10
9. Phil 1:9-10
10. Col. 1:9-11
11. Luke 22:32
12. Galatians 5:22-23
13. Ephesians 6:10

Be alert to Satan's devices

1. Genesis 3:1-5
2. Exodus 16:2
3. Mark 1:12-13, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13
4. Mark 14:32-38
5. Luke 11:13
6. John 20:15-16
7. Revelation 12

8. Ephesians 3:16-19
9. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
10. 1 Peter 5:8-9
11. 2 Corinthians 2:11
12. 1 Corinthians 10

Prepare to talk about sin

1. Hebrews 12:1-3
2. James 5:19-20
3. Matthew 7:2-5
4. Luke 18:9-14
5. Galatians 5:22
6. 1 Corinthians 13:4
7. Proverbs 10:12
8. 1 Peter 4:8
9. 1 Thess. 5:14

Help fellow sinners

1. Ephesians 1:4
2. Titus 2:11-12
3. 1 Timothy 6
4. 1 Corinthians 10:13
5. James 1:2-4
6. Leviticus 19:17
7. Matthew 18:15-16
8. Exodus 20:2
9. 1 Corinthians 6:20

Keep the story in view

1. Ephesians 1:3-14
2. Matthew 6:12
3. 1 Thess. 1:2

