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Presentation Transcript
Giving Care– Pentecost
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This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries. And a good day to all of you! Here we are once again, having arrived at the biblical festival called Pentecost.

On this day, I usually talk about some aspect of the church, since the church was founded on Pentecost – more often than not, it’s something about putting on the new man, or coming out of sin, or church history. Today I want to stretch that a bit. When we come to Jesus Christ, we become a part of His body, the church. We’re told one of our duties is to *do* something, found in Hebrews 10:24.

Hebrews 10:24 – *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*

It’s not just about us and our relationship with God, but our relationship to God’s other children in His family. So, with a sincere love for each other, and a newly added ability to speak the truth that comes from the Spirit, how do we help others to do the same? How do we help one another?

Well, there are many ways to talk about this, but the way we’re going to talk about it today is, how would a person stir someone up to love and good works? By helping them out of discouragement, or anger, or jealousy, or other bad attitudes, or other sins that get a grip on us – how to help them figure out which way to go, how to solve personal problems, to get unstuck and start doing good works themselves.

Some years ago, in one of the congregations I pastored, there was a family with a terrible problem. And the more I talked to them, the more I realized what I had to offer wasn’t helping. Sometime before I encountered this problem, another member came to me about a problem he had been able to resolve with the help of a local psychologist. So, in desperation, I called this psychologist and asked him if he could help this family, if I could get them to come to him? And he said to me that his schedule was full, but he also offered to help me help them. He told me that

in the county, where we lived years before, there'd been a program where the therapists helped the ministers, because they knew the ministers were the people with their feet on the ground encountering the problems, and yet without training. So he suggested that I call him once a week, and for five minutes, tell him what was going on. And then, for five minutes, he would tell me what to do next. Once we started doing that, things began moving for this family almost immediately.

Here's what I learned: This man, in just five minutes of telling him about these people, knew about them than I did after talking to them face-to-face for months! I learned that most of my inclinations about what to do didn't work, and all of his seemed to work very well. I learned that, even though this psychologist wasn't a Christian, he knew how to use *their* faith to help them better than I did. I learned that advice wasn't helpful. I learned that doing things for people that they can do for themselves isn't helpful either. In fact, it makes things worse. And the most important thing I learned was that this psychologist had a framework in his head that he used to make sense of what he heard from me every week. And I knew that I didn't have anything like that. I saw that he knew how to help people with mental health problems, and some spiritual problems, better than I, because of that framework.

After involvement with this family was completed, I asked this psychologist how he got that framework. And he said, "Eight years of education and twenty of experience." Pretty encouraging and pretty discouraging all at the same time. I learned there was a way to help people who were mired in sin, and I learned I didn't know how to do that, even though I was a minister. And finally, I learned that I had been trying to solve problems I wasn't equipped to handle. The problem this family had was way outside of my abilities, and also, that I didn't have time to spend as much time as was needed with them.

What does that have to do with all of us sitting here during the Festival of Pentecost? I'm going to present to you today a framework for helping people. Here's the first piece of the framework:

In working with my psychologist friend, I came to see that I missed an important principle of scripture I'm going to tell you about – this first principle. It happened to be the most important part of the helping framework that my friend had in his mind. He was applying it better than I was. And it's why he was a better helper. What is it? Well, when my psychologist friend started to work with me, he said, "Now Bill, when we get into this and you're working with these people, no advice, no preaching, no judging, and no fixing." I said, "Whoa, you just took my four main tools away from me. I mean, I'm a minister. That's what we do. We know better. People should follow us and do what we say. Our job is to give advice and tell people what to do." Actually you know, that's completely upside down from what the scripture says. Every person is autonomous before God. Autonomy is the most important part of the framework. Every person has been given free will – autonomy – by God to live their life the way they want. And to try to control people, to force them, or manipulate them down a path that we choose for them never

works in the long run. So my friend showed me a better way, and now, I'm going to show it to you.

Instead of telling people what to do, good helpers help people find their own solutions. Why is that better? Because the solution comes out of them. They already own it. It's only fair, too, because it's their life. So they need to come up with their own solutions. And most of us, if we really focus on that instead of being upset, we have the ability to find solutions. How do we help people do that?

Well, here's the second big principle: It's in James 1:19.

James 1:19 – *Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.*

Who should do this? Every person. What do you call someone who treats others this way? Well, you call them a helper – a care giver. I was amazed to listen on YouTube to some of the grilling that Neil Gorsuch got from the Senate before he was selected to be a Supreme Court justice. They asked him what he hoped to accomplish as a Supreme Court justice. And he said he had no illusions about making any long term impact on the Supreme Court. He'd seen many justices come and go, and nobody's made any lasting impressions. So he said what he wanted to do while he was on the Supreme Court was be a good husband and a good father. And then he added, "Mild at home, quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Mild, gentle – the way Jesus described Himself in Matthew 29. He wanted to be that to *help* his family. Pretty amazing, really, when you think about it. "Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."

Listening. I had a – I think she was sixteen at the time this occurred – she'd been coming to see me on and off since she was twelve. She had some attachment issues, which made it difficult for her to get along with peers and others. Her parents were divorced. She had been turned over to her dad when she was a year old by her mother, because her mother realized she was too poor and too immature to really do a good job. The girl's father had a lot better chance at it, since he had a good job and he had his parents in town, where they could help him with the little girl. But he knew that she needed a relationship with her mom. Every time she went to visit her mom, she'd come back completely angry and injured. She was a gymnast, and when she would go down to the gym that they'd hired for her when she was in the other town, she'd hurt herself on the equipment she wasn't used to and with the coaches she wasn't used to. She would stay there for six weeks at a time. She'd be all frustrated and depressed when she'd get back – and angry with her mom. So I suggested that she not spend so long there – maybe a couple of long weekends during the summer, instead of six weeks. Well, when her dad heard this, he got angry with me. And I asked him if he'd like to come in with her, and they thought it would be a good idea, so he did. Once he understood what I was saying, his attitude changed instantly and he got all excited about what was going to happen. And he sat up on the edge of his chair, and he was slapping the palm of one hand with the back of the other, like this, to make his points. He was so enthused about it. He looked over at his daughter, and he saw a tear roll down her cheek. This

guy, by the way, is an electronics engineer, so he's trying to fix the problem. Right? Get in, fix it, get out – that's what they do. He said, "What's wrong?" He was all upset and shocked that she was upset. "What's wrong? I'm not mad. I'm just trying to figure out how to do this." And she said, "Dad, it's always the same thing. You never listen and you just try to fix me." And, to his everlasting credit, he immediately said, "What can I do? What can I do to help?" I think that was really the beginning of a change in her attitude about him, and him about her. He realized she was growing up. She said, "Dad, you can't fix this. It's between me and Mom."

So, no fixing. Right? No trying to control or manipulate people into doing what you want, but listening. How do we listen? What do we do after we listen? Well, we reflect. That's the third part of the structure.

I worked once with a couple. He had some traumatic brain injury. He lost some of his ability to be organized. He would get low-paying jobs and the kind of jobs that he could pull off because of his lack of ability to organize himself. And this frustrated his wife, who, before the accident, was used to him making a decent living. She had two disabled children and was starting a business. She told me once that it was like having three kids, now that he had had his accident. So she was stressed beyond measure. And day he came in and told me that his wife told him that she didn't love him anymore. All her efforts to get him to help her had failed and she was done. So I told him that I believed that his wife still loved him. And he went home, of course, and told her what I said. And when it was her turn to come, she came in and strongly disagreed with me, and why would I say such a thing? What would *you* say, if you were in that situation? Would you defend yourself? Would you apologize? Would you tell her, "There, there, it'll be all right?" What would you do? Well, here's what I did. I reflected. I said, "It infuriates you that after all you've told me, I would still think that you love him." And here's what she said. She got a shocked look on her face, and she said, "No, I *want* to still love him, but it terrifies me that you might be wrong. I have ruined every relationship in my life and I'm afraid I am broken beyond hope." So she was afraid that she was going to cut and run again. So now we're really getting down to it, aren't we? One simple reflection. Actually, it was an incorrect reflection, wasn't it? See how that works? They straighten you out by telling you a deeper thing. Right?

Another example of how this works, since this is probably the hardest part of this. I walked out of my classroom one day, when I was an elementary school counselor, and it happened to be the last day of school before Christmas break, and all the kids are having their parties in their classrooms. There's not a person in the hallway – dead silent – but I looked down the way, and there leaning against the wall by his front door is the biggest teacher in the school. He used to be a Lobo linebacker. He's got his head on his forearm, and he's leaning against the wall. So get down there and I see that he's crying. I said, "What's going on?" And he said, "Oh, there's a kid in my class, and she found a picture of her dad under her mother's bed this morning, and he's in jail, and she's missing him, and she's all upset – picture triggered it all." "When is your party going to be over?" He said, "Oh, probably an hour." "Why don't you send her down? I'll talk to her." So about an hour later, sure enough, here's this little red-eyed third-grader that comes in

and sits down. I said, “I understand from your teacher that you found a picture of your dad under the bed and it was upsetting.” And she said, “Yes.” “And...” “It’s Christmas time and I really miss seeing him. And my mom won’t let me talk to him on the phone.” I said, “And that makes you feel even more lonely and more sad, and it makes you angry because it feels like it’s not fair.” And she said, “Yes.” And it went deeper. And I reflected that. And it went deeper. And we did that for forty-five minutes, and finally she said, “You know, I think I feel better. I’m going to go back to class.” So I didn’t fix anything. I didn’t call her mother. I didn’t try to intervene in any way, except to help her express herself. And you can’t really miss with that, because, if you get it right, they feel understood. And if you get it wrong, then they explain it to you. So you’re helping them express their true feelings and process the event, so that it’s not as bad.

Okay, so what’s the fourth and final element here? We call it reframing. There are lots of other tools that therapists use, but these are things that I find particularly beneficial. What is reframing? Well, after the young woman, who said, “I’ve ruined all my relationships,” I asked her to process that fear with EMDR. And after five minutes, her husband came up, and what a terrible support he was, and how much trouble her kids were, and how much work she had to do. And this just kept kind of cycling around and it seemed to me that she was somewhat stuck. She needed more information to go forward. So I said, “Here’s what I want you to think about.” No, I *didn’t* say that. *That* is advice and direction. I just said, “I’m wondering if this fear comes from somewhere earlier in your life.” And on the next pass – this is really amazing – a young Ferrell kitten came to her mind. It was in the corner of their kitchen. She could see it. And after a pass or two more, it became a little girl. It morphed into a child. And then she saw that the child was her. She was that little wild thing. And from there, the feelings of neglect and abandonment from her childhood came into view. She cried for quite a while. And finally she said, “I guess that was a pretty big secret I’ve been keeping on myself.” I said, “All the feelings you feel toward your husband are really from your Ferrell self.” She said, “I know.” She’d connected with that. So I was just putting into words, before she said it, what was the issue – not helped, not cared for, not loved. She said, “So what are we going to do about that?” And I could have said, “Well, we’re going to heal and civilize that Ferrell child,” but instead, I said, “What do you think?” And she said, “Heal the wounds,” which is essentially the same thing. And I said, “Let’s go!” And it just proceeded down a more normal path to where she was a lot more tolerant of her husband’s disability, and realized that he couldn’t help that, and that it wasn’t fair of her to be angry with him for things that he couldn’t do any longer. Her whole attitude started to change.

Okay, another example of reframing. I’ve been helping a teenager learn to deal with her father more effectively. He really wasn’t a very good dad. It kind of wasn’t his fault, because he grew up in a family without a father and all sisters. So he really didn’t know much about being a man. He certainly didn’t know how to deal with teenage girls. He had three of them and they were all very upset with him. But this girl would come in and she would usually be livid – angry about something he’d done – and she would spout off all these terrible things she was thinking about saying and doing to him. And the things she came up with weren’t good ideas. I’d tell her a story about something familiar that happened to me when I was her age, or about another client I’d had

that did this or that and how it turned out in the end. So that, in a way, is a reframe, because it's adding more information to her list of possible resources to use or stands to take. And most of the time, she would reject that out of hand. But then she'd come in the next week with a new idea about how to talk to her father, which was essentially the same thing as what I had mentioned the week before. The reason that happened was not just because of the reframe. It's because of the listening. It's funny how when you listen to people, they become interested in what you think, too. And I had been seeing her for a long time and we had a really good relationship, so I was using the relationship to feed things into her possible solutions log, so to speak.

So there they are – the four things: respecting the autonomy of others, listening, reflecting, then reframing, if it's needed. No advice. No judgment. No fixing. No preaching. Right?

So let's think about these examples. Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to give opinions, slow to give advice, slow to give instruction, slow to anger, slow to be defensive of self, slow to judge people and think down about them when they have terrible problems and are most vulnerable. When people need help and ask advice, we help them *think through* to their own solution with listening and reframing, rather than telling them what to do.

Something else I mentioned here that I didn't put a lot of weight on was: Know what you can help with. I took a crisis intervention course one time, and the instructor put a picture of the Lone Ranger up on the wall. Nobody commented about it, and neither did he for several weeks. Finally, somebody asked him, and he said, "When you're doing crisis counseling, there's no such thing as the Lone Ranger. Every counselor needs help when there's a crisis." So, if you think somebody is suicidal, you get other people involved to help you. I mean, I've sent, probably, dozens of kids to UNM psyche or to Caseman Hospital to be evaluated, because they've made suicidal threats or talked about it. Why do I do that? Because there are people there that have listened to *thousands* of people talk about suicidal things. And they're going to know a lot better than I will whether that's the real deal or not. And so, even though I might suspect it's not real, I don't want to take that chance, because a child is an important thing. We want to protect them. Most of the time, their problems are temporary, and so we don't want that permanent solution.

So, know what you can help with. Know who to call if you can't help. One of the things I learned, too, is, a pastor doesn't have time to help people with these kinds of serious mental health issues. They need to be seen by somebody that has the time. And that's a professional most of the time. So know who to call if you can't help. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Instead, listen, reflect, reframe. Be mild. Have respect for the autonomy of others.

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Also, if you have questions or comments or suggestions, please contact us through our Website. Often excellent topics arise from your interactions with us. So we very much appreciate your involvement with our efforts.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs, serving children, families and the Church of God.