



SUN OCT 22  
9AM & 11AM

Put Your  
Mask  
on First

Building  
Blocks  
making the church better

Sunday, October 22, 2023

“Put Your Mask On First: Caregiving 101”

Charlie Berthoud | Matthew 9:35-10:1

### **Matthew 9:35-10:1**

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

In case you are just joining us now, our new Associate Pastor Megan Berry was scheduled to preach today, but she got word late yesterday of a death in the family. Providentially, the theme for today is caregiving, serving others. So, we can think about caring for Megan, caring for others, and caring for ourselves.

We are in week three of a four-week series, looking at the Ministry of Members, according to our constitution, the Book of Order. There is a list of 12 ministries, which we’ve been calling building blocks for a healthy church and a healthy Christian life.

Today, the emphasis is on lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support.

We’re also called to respond to God’s love with service to others.

Caregiving is in our job description.

As Christians, as people who follow Jesus, he is our teacher and our example. In Matthew we read about Jesus proclaiming the Kingdom, AND caring for the people, the people like sheep without a shepherd.

He then says to his disciples: the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, reminding us that the world is hurting and we are called to be caregivers. He proceeds to send his followers out to continue what he began.

We are called, by Scripture and by common decency, to care for each other, to be kind to each other, to help each other out on the journey of life.

The list from our Book of Order calls for “Mutual concern and active support.”

How do we do this?

How can we help each other?

Given the circumstances of today, let’s think specifically about how we can help each other when someone is grieving, or when there is a sudden death.

People often say “I don’t know what to say, I don’t know what to do.”

In the spirit of mutual encouragement, let me offer a few thoughts, some “do’s and don’ts” when a friend or colleague has experienced is grieving the death of a loved one. I like Top Ten lists, but this is only a top five.

**1. Say something, but not too much.**

Keep it simple. Saying “I’m sorry” or “I will pray for you” is enough. Don’t try to theologize a tragedy. I suggest avoiding the phrases “Everything happens for a reason” or “It must be God’s will.”

**2. Don’t talk about yourself.**

When we hear about a friend dealing with a sudden death, it’s natural to start thinking about our own experience with death. That doesn’t mean we should say anything about it.

As I was talking to Megan last night, I realize that I found my mind remembering when I got the phone calls about the sudden death of my brother and my dad, and the expected-but-dreaded call about my mom. Last night was not the time for me to share my grief experiences.

When someone shares their grief or their hurt, you need to listen and ask gentle questions. Let them share.

### **3. Offer to help—tangibly but gently.**

Saying “if there is anything I can do, let me know” is nice, but that puts the burden on the grieving person to ask. If you know they like pizza or salad or whatever, offer to bring that. Maybe offer to walk their dog, or take care of their yard, or clean their house.

That said, don’t be a pest and force yourself on someone. It depends on your relationship and your social graces. Offer something specific, and then back off.

### **4. Pray, and remember.**

When we say “I will pray for you” we should actually pray. And simple prayer is good: “Dear God we pray for Megan and her family.”

Prayer can be as simple as reading names. Sometimes I do that with our prayer list, just remembering the people before God.

Speaking of remembering, as we continue to pray for those who are mourning, we know that the first year is hard, with holidays, birthdays, etc. If you have a friend who is grieving, maybe reach out during December, with an email or note: thinking about you, hope you’re ok.

Grief takes time. Thank goodness for the people who recognize that grief takes time. I have a friend who sent me a text message for years on September 27, the day my brother died in 2007. He and others often mention my brother. I’m sad he’s gone, but I’m glad he is remembered.

## 5. Take care of yourself

Megan shared her sermon notes with me, and she was going to emphasize that if we are going to be effective in caring, we need to take care of ourselves. On airplanes, in the safety announcements, they always say in the event of an emergency, put your mask on first, then help your neighbor. You can help your neighbor if you can't breathe.

You need to be healthy to help others. As Megan wrote in her notes: "You can't pour water from an empty cup."

We read in Genesis that even God rested after creating the world.

We read in the gospels that Jesus prayed regularly.

So, we also need to rest and pray.

When we rest and pray we reconnect with the source of love. We could pray:

*Thank you for your love for me God, help me love others.*

*Thank you for the strength you give me God, Give me strength.*

*Thank you for the compassion you show me and the world in Jesus, help me be compassionate to others.*

Megan was going to close with a blessing written by Kate Bowler, so I'm sharing that with you today.

Kate Bowler is a Professor at Duke Divinity School. She has had a long journey with cancer. She is author of *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*. Here is Kate's blessing:

*Blessed are we  
for whom the call to loving action is still strong,  
whose every urge is to keep going, keep working,  
and not to count the cost.  
And yet blessed are we,*

*beginning to notice that we are slowing down, inexplicably,  
or just pausing, staring for no reason,  
or starting something,  
but then quickly turning to another demand.*

*Blessed are we,  
realizing that we are beginning to lose the thread.*

*Blessed are we who say  
I really can't keep going like this,  
at this pace, under this weight,  
and also, the momentum is so strong, I can't stop.*

*God, come and be the hands that sit me down  
and keep me there long enough  
for me to really feel what I feel,  
and know what I know.*

*Come and be the wisdom  
to find the support system that is broad enough,  
kind enough, effective enough to meet the needs that are here  
– both mine and theirs.*

*Come and be the peace that frees me  
to let my hands lie gently open awhile,  
the grace to just receive.*

*Seek the rest you need, and a little bit more.  
it is a sacred space.*

AMEN.

<https://katebowler.com/blessings/a-blessing-for-caregivers/>