

# What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do # 3: Who will you call?

Sermon for Sunday, February 14, 2010  
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**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Galatians 6:1-2

## 1) Who are you going to call?

Perhaps this hasn't happened to you, but it has certainly happened to others. At work your boss calls you into the office and tells you to call home. It's an emergency.

Your throat is dry as your fingers fumble with the phone. When your spouse answers after a single ring, the hello seems scared, torn, empty from crying.

Two minutes later you hang up the phone. Your hand is trembling. Your throat feels swollen. All you can do is stare at the wall. You've just learned that your son, age 17, has been killed in a car crash. He drove the car directly into the concrete pillars of a highway underpass. He left a note on the kitchen table. It was suicide.

You sit down, disbelieving, as it slowly sinks in. Your son didn't just die; he *decided* to die. It is the ultimate rejection: for some reason he felt it was better not to live at all than to live with you.

Finally the tears come. You sob with guilt for allowing your son's death to happen, even though you don't know how you could have prevented it. But you also feel bitterness and anger: "How could he have done this to us?" Then you also feel shame, as you wonder how you will explain this to relatives, friends, coworkers, people at church. And finally, you begin to feel lonely, a loneliness so intense you doubt anyone can understand it.

Of course, the first thing you do is go home, to be with your spouse. Then you feel that you need someone else: someone to shout at, someone to cry with, someone who won't try to give pat answers, someone who will just listen to your hurt. Who will you call?

That's the title for today's message: *Who will you call?* Do you have someone that you can call, at any time of the day or night, say "I need you," and know that that person will drop whatever they're doing and come over immediately?

We all have lots of acquaintances. Do you have any real, true friends that you can count on like that?

## 2) The value of a friend

There are many places in the Bible where we hear how valuable friends are. Here are just a few:

**Proverbs 17:17**

A friend is always a friend, and family are there in times of need.

**Proverbs 18:24**

Some "friends" play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than family.

Get the picture? Friends are great fun when things are going well. But a true friend will still be there when things go wrong. A friend is like family, but even closer and deeper.

Here's another passage:

**Proverbs 27:17**

Just as iron sharpens iron, friends sharpen the minds of each other.

Friends can be honest with each other, even to the point of saying things that might hurt. They can do this because both understood that the words are spoken in love.

This next passage describes how poor life would be without any friends:

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble. If you sleep alone, you won't have anyone to keep you warm on a cold night. Someone might be able to beat up one of you, but not both of you together. As the saying goes, "A rope made from three strands of cord is hard to break."

Even Jesus, when he was facing death, asked his three closest friends to be with him:

**Mark 14:34**

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him, and he began to be filled with horror and deep distress. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me."

## 3) What if I've done something wrong?

Someone once said that the Church and cowboys are the only ones who shoot their wounded! If a cowboy's horse breaks its leg out in the middle of the wilderness where it cannot be helped, the cowboy shoots it, to put it out of its misery.

If a person has been doing a great work on behalf of the church, but then falls into some deep sin, the common pattern of churches has been to dump that person. Of course, people aren't so crude as to tell the person to get lost. It's more subtle:

- People avoid that person. To be fair, for many people that's probably because they feel awkward and don't know what to say. The reason doesn't matter — the message received by that person is still the same: "I'm not wanted."
- No one calls on the phone to say, "We've missed you at church."

End result: churches shoot their wounded. Then we leave them to die in the wilderness.

Contrast that with how God's Word tells us to treat someone who has got into trouble:

#### Galatians 6:1-2

**Dear friends, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share one another's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ.**

According to the Bible, the Church is to be a place where troubled people can come and find help — and this goes both for those who are the victims of the trouble, and those who caused the trouble.

The Vineyard Church is one of the fastest growing denominations in North America. Their motto is very simple: "Come as you are; you'll be loved." It works!

#### 4) The Gospel of "— one another"

The passage that I quoted just above says to "share one another's troubles and problems." This is just one of literally *dozens* of passages in the New Testament that tell us to care for one another! Here are just a few:

**Honor one another above yourselves.** [Romans 12:10]

**Serve one another in love.** [Galatians 5:13]

**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** [Ephesians 5:21]

**Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are already doing.** [1 Thessalonians 5:11]

**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.** [James 5:16].

**My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.** [John 15:12]

Do you see a pattern here? We need others in our lives; we're not designed to "go it alone." God created us with the capacity and the need for true fellowship — friendships that make a difference, friends in Christ.

#### 5) Application: The *real* business of the Church

Part of the mission of the church of Jesus Christ is to take this love into the world. That's absolutely crucial; but that's not what I am focussing on today. Today we are working on ourselves, as members of the Body of Christ.

Hundreds of times every week people from this church see one another. Obviously Sunday morning is the major occasion. These occasions happen throughout the week as well: it may be at the regularly scheduled choir practice; it may be at the grocery store; it may even be under circumstances where one or both of you may feel embarrassed.

Are you using that opportunity to encourage one another? To pray for one another? To love one another?

What if the person in the seat in front of you, or behind you, needs help this week? He or she is asking that question, "Who will I call?" Are you someone they can call? Are you willing to drop whatever it is you are doing — even go see your boss and say you need to take the rest of the afternoon off without pay — and go to be with that person? If your answer is "yes," then God bless you.

But I have one more question: *How will that person know that you care?* Have you told them? Have you shown it in your words and actions?

Here's how a counsellor at an elementary school does it. Cheri, a first grader, was having trouble adjusting to school. I called her into my office for a chat, confident that my many years of training as a guidance counselor had more than prepared me to handle the situation. "Cheri," I said, "I want to be your friend. I will never tell your mommy or your daddy or your teacher anything we talk about if you don't want me to. I want you to know that you can always trust me." With tearful eyes, she looked up and replied, "Gee, Mrs. Edwards, you're just like my dog."

The point is: if you care, tell that person that you care.

*Choir members:* when you meet for choir practice, you are doing something far more important than practicing a song — and you know how much I love music! You are part of a group where personal caring and sharing can be part of your regular routine.

*Members of Bible Study, UCW, Boards and Committees, and all the other groups that are part of this church's life:* the same is true for you. The business that you conduct in your meetings is important, and so is the social chit-chat. But do others in your group know that you care about them? Do you build time into your meetings to make this a reality?

### 6) Sounds good in theory... how do I do it?

One thing I don't want is for you to leave here today thinking to yourself, "I can't love all those people! That's impossible."

If that's what you're thinking right now, I totally agree with you. I don't want to turn you right off. Nor do I want to burden you with yet another guilt trip, because you think you don't love enough.

Look again at Jesus:

- He ministered to thousands
- He was personal instructor to a dozen
- He was intimately close to only three: Peter, James and John.

Can you name two or three people in this congregation whom you deeply care for? If they called you, would you go immediately?

Do they know that you love them? How can they know, unless you've told them? That's the **first thing** you can do: **tell someone that you would like to be their friend in Christ.**

Do you pray for them regularly? If not, why not? Why wait until trouble comes? Why wait until you are asked? That's the **second thing** you can do: **pray regularly for that person.** Again, tell the person you're doing that. Then do it.

Can you name two or three people in this congregation who deeply care for you? If you need help, do you know right now who you will call?

Do they know that you trust them? That's the **third thing** you can do: **tell them that you are thankful for their friendship in Christ.**

Finally, one last thing: all of what I've said so far is done in isolation. If you're going to be praying for someone, and that someone is going to be praying for you — perhaps you could get together and be prayer partners. There is tremendous power in the partnership of prayer. Here's what Jesus said about that power:

#### Matthew 18:19-20

**Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.**

We have the power of God when we ask, the presence of Christ when we pray. Along the journey, may God give us faithful friends, and may we be that kind of friend to others.

Indeed, friends are precious, especially when Jesus is part of the friendship.

*Theme for today:* A violent thunderstorm was underway, and little Timmy cried in fear. His Mom and Dad said to him, "You don't need to be afraid. God is right here with you." He said, "OK, I won't be afraid."

A minute later a terrific clap of thunder shook the house, and the parents were startled when Timmy jumped into their bed. "Honey, we thought we told you, you don't need to be afraid," Dad said. "God is right here with you."

Clinging tightly to him, Timmy replied, "I know God is with me, but I need someone with skin on."

Grownups are no different. We all need someone with skin on, to help us cope with the challenges of life.