

# **GOD'S LOVE IN ACTION**

## **PASTORAL CARE FOR EVERYONE**

**written and compiled by Jill McGilvray**



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## Introduction

Jesus said, ‘A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another as I have loved you’ (see Jn 13:34). He could hardly have put it more plainly. Caring is not an optional extra for Christians.

God is love. When we show love to one another, we begin to resemble the God who loves us. John wrote in his first epistle ‘We love because he first loved us’ (1 Jn 4:19). We want people to say of us, as Tertullian wrote in about AD 200, ‘See how these Christians love one another.’ However, we do not do it alone. The Bible teaches us that each of us has spiritual gifts from God, to be used ‘for the common good’ (1 Cor 12:7). God equips us for the work he wants us to do.

We can do our own part too, by becoming skilled at ways of caring. This book is designed to help in that process.

In the early 1990s, the minister and congregation of the church I attended in the northwest of Sydney wanted to improve the way we showed God’s love to one another. St Matthew’s Anglican Church, West Pennant Hills already had a good network of small Bible studies and other groups where a lot of pastoral care naturally took place. We were aware, though, that there were some people who were likely to fall between the cracks. For example, some people are frail, or shy, or just not comfortable in groups.

We were inspired by Melvin Steinbron’s book, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*,<sup>1</sup> to consider a new model for pastoral care. Over time, the model has been adapted to suit the needs of our church, and has proven to be a very effective tool.

*‘Mommy I’m afraid, I’m afraid!’ cried the little girl who was awakened in the middle of the night by the storm. The rain beating against the window frightened her; the lightning and thunder terrified her. ‘Mommy, where are you! Where are you?’*

*Her mother hurried into the room. She sat on the side of the bed and held her daughter tightly to comfort her. Wanting to take advantage of this teachable moment, she said ‘Honey, when you are frightened like this you can know that God is with you and loves you.’*

*‘Yes Mommy, I know that,’ she sobbed. ‘But I need love with skin on.’<sup>2</sup>*

**At St Matthew’s we have often talked about being ‘God’s love with skin on’ for one another.**

*God’s Love in Action* is based on the training sessions for Lay Pastors we have held in the years since we adopted this model. We hope that it will be helpful for all those considering improving their own caring ministry.

This book contains the combined wisdom of a number of people with a wealth of practical and professional experience in both giving and receiving care who

<sup>1</sup> Melvin Steinbron, *Can The Pastor Do It Alone?*, Regal Books, Ventura CA, 1987. Sadly, this book is now out of print, but quite readily available second-hand.

<sup>2</sup> Steinbron, p. 25.

have contributed to the St Matthew's program over the years. These people include Revd Peter Taylor, Marilyn Young, Sylvia Hiller, Robyn Thompson, Canon David Hewetson, Revd Geoff Broughton, Pauline Kelly, Bishop Stephen Pickard, Peter and Colleen Lloyd, Fiona Li, Jane Mills, Dr Linda Beeney, Pattie Mutton, Judy Ogden and Revd Dr Steve Abbott.

With his kind permission, I have included some helpful hints about caring for those suffering depression by Professor Philip Mitchell of the University of New South Wales. I am grateful to Julie Blyth, Jenni Woodhouse, Alison Beeston, and Revd Graeme Gardiner who read and commented on sections of this book. I also benefitted from lengthy conversations with the late Lyn Sarah, Pastoral Minister at Holy Trinity Adelaide, whose adaptations of the Steinbron model nearly mirrored our own. Her wisdom and experience was invaluable.

There are other people who have taught me a great deal about caring for others – they include Jan Corbett-Jones, Revd Jackie Stoneman, Mal and Dianne McKissock from the National Centre for Childhood Grief, Revd Morris Key, Revd Neil Millar, Dr Judith Murray and Trish Wilson from the University of Queensland, and of course all those with whom I have worked and worshipped, especially at St Matthew's.

I also want to say thank you to Acorn Press for deciding to publish this book, and especially to Kristin Argall, who with gentleness and skill, asked the clarifying questions and suggested many improvements. It is a much better book because of Kristin's involvement.

To Ian McGilvray, illustrator and love of my life, thank you for the pictures and for everything else as well.

### **A sad story about a church<sup>3</sup>**

*Once upon a time there was a church where there were four members called Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. The church needed help with its pastoral care and Everybody was asked to help. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it. But do you know who did it? Nobody. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. When a church member was sick at home and needed a visit, Somebody was asked to go. But Somebody resented being called upon because Anybody could have done it just as well. After all, it was really Everybody's job. In the end the visit was given to Nobody to make and Nobody got it done. This went on and on. Whatever the caring task was, Nobody could be counted on to do it. Nobody visited the sick, Nobody took meals to the hungry, Nobody told others about God's love for them. Nobody was a very faithful member of the church. Finally the day came when Somebody left the church and took Anybody and Everybody with him. And who did that leave? Nobody.*

**Ouch.**

<sup>3</sup> Anon.

## How To Use This Book

This book is designed for use by all those who want to hone their skills in caring for others in a church context, although its principles have far wider applications.

It can be used by individuals, in a small group setting, or as part of a training course. Much of the material it contains has been taught in a weekly training course over four weeks, although it can also be used over a weekend, or even some parts of it as a one-off seminar. Rather than produce separate leaders' and participants' manuals, we hope that this volume will be useful for both.

If this book is used for training, it would be important for all participants to have a copy so that they can fill in the questions for themselves.

If the material is to be taught over four weeks, a suggested outline for each week would be:

### ***Week 1: Why do we love?***

- Why care? The biblical basis for caring – you may decide to focus on just one section of this chapter.
- Caring is for everyone – different ways of caring, and the qualities of a good carer.

### ***Week 2: One model of church-based caring – PEACE and the Lay Pastor***

- What kind of caring is right for me? – spiritual gifts and ecomapping.
- Spiritual maturity.
- Keeping your personal resources topped up.

### ***Week 3: Skills for caring***

- Listening.
- The 'ministry of helplessness'.
- The importance of confidentiality.

### ***Week 4: A pastoral visit – how is it different from a social call?***

- Spiritual encouragement – praying together and reading from the Bible in pastoral situations
- Practical issues of visiting – restating PEACE and the importance of listening.
- Plenty of time for questions.

The 'Principles of Caring in Particular Situations' material would also be useful for ongoing training of carers. At St Matthew's, this is the sort of material that would be used at Encouragement Nights for Lay Pastors, which are held two or three times a year.

# 1. Why Care? The Biblical Basis for Caring

## Caring for one another: reflecting God's love

**As Christians, we love one another because God first loved us.**

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God ... God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ... Beloved, since God so loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:7, 9, 11)*

**We love one another because Jesus told us to.**

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn 13:34, 35)*

**The love that we have for one another overflows from the love that God has shown to us.**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Cor 1:3,4 – NIV)*

**When we love, we are following Jesus' example.**

Throughout the gospels, there are stories of Jesus showing love and compassion for those he met – in his miracles, his encounters with marginalised or stigmatised people, and in his care for his friends. For example, read John 11:1–44, where Jesus shows his love for Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

**When we show love for others, we show we love Jesus as well.**

*... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me ... just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. (Mt 25:35–36, 40)*

## The shepherd<sup>4</sup>

In many places in the Bible we read about the concept of God as our shepherd, and people appointed by God as shepherds of one another.

In the Old Testament, God appoints shepherds for his people Israel – his 'sheep'. Good shepherds are encouraged, and the harmful actions of bad shepherds are denounced, especially by the prophets.

<sup>4</sup> This section is an edited version of Lyn Sarah's article, 'A Passion For Ministry', presented as a paper at the 2006 Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) Conference. The paper can be found at [www.efac.org.au](http://www.efac.org.au) and is used by permission.



In the New Testament Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd, outlining the characteristics of the relationship between the good shepherd and his sheep (Jn 10:1–20). In Acts, the apostle Paul urges the Ephesian elders to be shepherds of God’s flock (Acts 20:28); Peter (1 Pet 5:2–4) and the writer to the Hebrews (Heb 13:20) identify Jesus as the great and chief shepherd, the overseer of our souls (1 Pet 2:25). And then in Revelation 7, John’s vision of the great multitude before God’s throne culminates with this statement:

*For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd.  
He will lead them to springs of living water.  
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev 7:17 – NIV)*

Jesus as the great shepherd and we as under-shepherds is a long-standing, traditional and significant model for pastoral care in Christian community. Leading, feeding, caring for, protecting – these are all shepherd-like activities which we identify with eldership, whether that’s as the pastor of a parish community, as a small group leader, a ministry team member, a Sunday School teacher, youth group leader or whatever. Pastoral responsibility is both implicit and explicit in the shepherding model.

### ***A personal Bible study about the shepherd***

#### **God the shepherd**

Read Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:11 and Jeremiah 31:10.

1. In what ways is God like a shepherd?

2. What is the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep?

### **God's shepherds**

Read Exodus 18, especially noting verse 18 and Jethro's words to Moses: 'You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.'

3. Are you in danger of trying to do too much on your own?

4. What are the characteristics to be found in those who do God's work (v. 21)?

Read Numbers 11. Moses is close to burnout, dealing with complaints of the Israelites. In verse 17 God tells him to appoint seventy elders 'to bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself'.

5. How were those who God appointed to help Moses in this chapter equipped to do their work? Whose work was it really?

### **The shepherd's role**

Read Ezekiel 34:1–24: Bad shepherds and good shepherds.

6. What were the shepherds of Israel doing that was not in the best interests of the sheep? What was the result – for the sheep, and for the shepherds?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What would God do instead as their good shepherd?

### **Jesus the model shepherd**

Read John 10:1–21. The shepherd's close relationship with the sheep mirrors Jesus' relationship with us.

8. What are the comparisons in this passage?

### **An example to follow**

Read 1 Peter 5:1–4, 10. God is the chief shepherd, and at the end he will reward our shepherding.

9. What is the heart of the pastor to be like? What is the outcome?

## One-anothering: what does the Bible say?

According to the New Testament, a hallmark of Christian community is the way we treat one another. It is shown in many ways:

- outdo one another in showing honour (Rom 12:10)
- live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
- welcome one another (Rom 15:7)
- greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16)
- wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33)
- have the same care for one another (1 Cor 12:25)
- be servants of one another (Gal 5:13)
- bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another (Eph 4:32)
- be subject to one another (Eph 5:21)
- forgive one another (Col 3:13)
- encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- build up one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- do good to one another (1 Thess 5:15)
- provoke one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)
- confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16)
- pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
- love one another from the heart (1 Pet 1:22)
- be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- meet one another with humility (1 Pet 5:5)
- have fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7)

## The God of all comfort

### ***A reflection on 2 Corinthians 1:1–11 and 7:5–7***

*<sup>1:1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*

*To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia: <sup>2</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us*

*in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. <sup>6</sup>If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*

*<sup>8</sup>We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup>He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, <sup>11</sup>as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many ...*

*<sup>7:5</sup>For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within. <sup>6</sup>But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup>and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. (NIV)*

Paul emphasises God’s compassion and comfort in times of suffering, and God’s surpassing power in rescuing him from a near-death situation. He stresses that we can comfort others because the comfort God shows us overflows to them as well. This always reminds me of the aircraft safety instruction ‘Place the oxygen mask over your own face before attempting to help others’. God does not ask us to take care of others while we ourselves go without comfort. It is his comforting of us that equips us to care in turn.



1. What kinds of suffering might a twenty-first-century Australian Christian encounter as a disciple of Jesus?

