

Volunteer Training Session 3

Chapter 3/Releasing

Releasing

Faith trusts God - even when it doesn't make sense. So many times, we feel inadequate for what God has called us to do as helpers. While we may be ready to obey, we still struggle with questions and feelings of not being enough to really make a difference. Like Abel, Enoch and a whole Bible full of people, we can still have those questions - those feelings - and still please God. There is a strong relationship between obedience to God and caring for others because God is about people. And He mostly uses people when He cares for them. **It takes a great amount of faith to obey God in caring for someone and then leave the outcome to Him.**

Hebrews 11:1-6 (MSG) Faith in What We Don't See

1 *The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.*

3 *By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see.*

4 *By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain. It was what he believed, not what he brought, that made the difference. That's what God noticed and approved as righteous. After all these centuries, that belief continues to catch our notice.*

5 *By an act of faith, Enoch skipped death completely. "They looked all over and couldn't find him because God had taken him." We know on the basis of reliable testimony that before he was taken "he pleased God." It's impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.*

It may seem unusual to discuss releasing people (this usually happens at the end of the caring process) as a caring skill. But, keeping an eye on just Who is doing the caring helps us order and organize the caring process and approach. What we believe about God using us as His heart and hands is really more important than anything we do for people simply because He is God and we are not. He is the only one that knows what people really need and when it needs to be given. We are simply the vessels He has chosen to interact with them.

We need to remember:

- Not everyone really wants help.
- Some people will make bad choices no matter what you do to help them.
- Part of helping people includes knowing how and when to let people go.
- Part of helping people is to remember that it is God that brings the growth as we faithfully plant seeds and water them.

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Caring for people means allowing them to make choices and respecting their free will, even when we disagree with their decisions. We must respect free will just as God does. Lecturing, cajoling and pressuring people should not be a part of the caring relationship. Respectfully disagreeing with someone's choice is an honest approach in any relationship. Even in disagreement, we must make sure that our position is respectful and keeps us connected, not alienating or pronouncing doom. Along with free will, God also gives us all the right to manage our lives.

Re·spon·si·ble:

- Answerable or accountable for something within one's power, control or management.
- Chargeable with being the author, cause or occasion of something.
- Capable of making moral decisions and therefor accountable; capable of rational thought or action.
- Able to discharge obligations or debts.

It is always good to make sure we understand the following:

- What is God responsible for in this helping relationship?
- What is the Client responsible for?
- What am I responsible for?

Because we care so deeply, it can be hard for us to let people make decisions that we do not agree with nor condone. Yet, we are called to do just that. We must meet our responsibilities, but we do not want to take on inappropriate responsibility which may be harmful to us and our Client. A good saying to remember when we are confronted with this challenge is "God is God - and we are not."

Self-Reflection

Take a minute to read the story of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 22:1-19. As we read through the story, we come to understand God is about teaching Abraham that He is truly a provider...THE Provider!

Pastor John Ortberg reminds us :

"Others may offer empathy or support (our role as helpers) but no one can walk the road to Moriah in our place (the Client's role)."

Just as the servants could only walk so far with Abraham and Isaac, we can only walk so far with our Clients. A key to caring well is to build our faith muscles. This faith knows that God will meet the need - and our Client - in way we cannot imagine. Faith that "the Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:12).

Remembering and believing in God's character and His unfailing love for His children can help us release someone into His care and have an expectant faith that God will do something totally wonderful. Below are some wonderful verses to memorize to help us lean into this role as helper:

Joshua 1:5 NIV "No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

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Psalm 34:18 NLT "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed."

Matthew 28:20 NLT "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Caring and Hope

The Bible very clearly tells us that Jesus Christ is our only hope and reason for living. In Him we find all things and we can confidently look at our present, troubles and all, while having a hope in a joy-filled future. In the middle of our hopeless times, He is our hope!

Colossians 1 is a beautiful letter in which we are reminded of the pattern of caring and it's impact in lives when someone cares enough to share the truth of Jesus Christ. - why He came, why He died and the hope we have because He rose again. Take a moment and read through this passage. You will see that it also goes on explain the Sovereignty of our Lord, our source of truth. We first find hope in Him, then we become a source of living hope to those around us. When we get discouraged or feel that our world is falling apart, we can rely on the declaration found in verse 17:

Colossians 1:17 NLT "He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together."

The truth found in this passage can totally change the way we look at life struggles. The Apostle Paul, who wrote this letter to the people of Colossi, was full of hope - there is a good chance that this letter was written to them from a Roman jail cell! Paul knew this hope and it sustained him through some very difficult times in his life. He has shared it with us and now, from this hope certain in us, we look to share it with our others.

Colossians 1:26 - 29 NLT "This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

28 So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me."

This hope carries us through the difficult times in our relationships with those we are wanting to reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It buffers against discouragement, brings courage when we fear, establishes the basis for all that we do in His Name.

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We will speak more about sharing the Gospel verbally in a later session. But we must always remember that it is our actions that speak the loudest. Remember - even the Apostles themselves did not all arrive at following Christ in the same way. We must be careful to always give room for Jesus to reach hearts in all that we “do” as we “be” in Him. The words will come in His timing.

Expecting Resistance

Part of caring well is understanding that we will experience resistance from those we want to help. People helpers are motivated by a desire to help; however, it is just as true that those seeking help sometimes refuse it or even refuse to help themselves. This resistance can be open and direct or subtle and quiet. It is usually seen when people refuse to make healthy choices, refuse to make positive changes, refuse to accept responsibility for their part in a situation or refuse to seek loving relationships. Generally, this is because the required change does not fit their expectations of what should happen or be done.

When resistance is part of the helping relationship, discouragement can set in. The person being helped may feel discouraged because their expectations aren't being met or because the process is hard. The person caring for them may feel discouraged because of the lack of perceived progress or negative responses and inactivity.

It helps us when we understand that resistance will be part of trying to help someone, even those who sought help from us specifically. Discouragement does not have to be a permanent part of the relationship. Remember:

- Resistance is part of the sinful nature.
- Resistance is natural when there is a call to change.
- A good helper will anticipate and be patient through resistance.
- A good helper doesn't take resistance too personally.

How can we prepare and anticipate resistance in our helping relationship?

- When helping others, don't take resistance too personally. Do ask the Holy Spirit for help in seeing just where and why it is happening before you label anyone as “resisting”. Is there a new problem that has stopped them from taking healthy steps? Is there more healing that needs to happen before healthy steps that require risk can be taken? While we are not psychologists or psychiatrists (and we are careful to not be amateurs or present ourselves as either) we can pray about the resistance with our Client and see how God helps.
- Know the symptoms. These include avoidance, agreeing to do something and taking no action, becoming ‘stuck’ on one specific solution, and denying or minimizing reality. A classic response to suggestions is “Yeah, but...” and then a reason is given as to how that suggestion will not work. Don't we do the same thing when we are asked to change? Understanding our own resistance actions helps us cope with the responses we see in others.

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- Understand that change is hard. Think about the last time you tried to kick a bad habit. What did you experience? Denial? Excuses? Avoidance? Messing up and trying again? It is often easier for us to stay in patterns of behavior or thinking because changing takes so much time and energy...and it means that we might fail. And failure can feel final. These are all very real feelings and expectations. It is always good as a helper to take time and ask some good questions:

Are the changes that are being made realistic or unrealistic?

Are the steps to the change, or goal, too big?

Do smaller, more subtle steps need to be taken first for confidence to do it's work?

- Is the change a goal or a dream? There is a big difference. While a goal can take you to a dream coming true, dreams usually have an element of fantasy. Dreams are not bad - they are needed to help build a healthy future! We just need to make sure that we are not living in fantasy now and establish good goals that lead to a healthy outcome.
- Learn to empathize while speaking the truth in love. Often people are experiencing fear, depression, anxiety, or stress. Empathizing communicates care and concern. Gently speaking truth in love also communicates that a person also has responsibilities to meet. For example, you might say "This change is really hard but going to your classes will help you meet the goals that bring you to the change you want to make." When people seem 'stuck', it can help talking about it in a loving and honest manner. It can help them move on. This is always a good place to share a short, relevant testimony of how God helped you when you were afraid and needed to take a risk to get to a better place. He is our Helper and prayer together, asking for His help, is a great place to start.
- Evaluate your role in the helping relationship. Understand your reactions to the resistance:
 - Are you more concerned about results that glorify you or God?
 - Are you handling well the disappointment you feel?
 - Are you evaluating your effectiveness (or lack thereof) on short term results?
- Make the commitment to get support from your Supervisor and other Volunteers (maintaining confidentiality) if you do not know how to proceed or this relationship is getting the better of you. We are a Team and God's Word teaches us to work together!

Self-Reflection

Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal times you have resisted His ways. How did He respond to you? He will respond to the Client just as He responded to you.

Remember you have help - from Him, from your supervisor, from other Volunteers. You are not in this alone. You can release the responsibility for change where it belongs and choose to keep on caring well.

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Take advice given to you. We are often the last ones to see things in ourselves that God is asking us to change. And, we all have limits. Good people around you can help make the steps easier and hope-filled as you take advice as well as share it.

Seeds can lie dormant for years before they sprout, grow and bear fruit. What you do does matter in God's timeline. He is big on faithfulness and big on endurance. Choose to keep on sowing and endure!