

Treating others according to their future in Christ rather than their present isn't always easy. We all have many rough edges that make us difficult to deal with at times, and it is easier to talk about forgiving and loving one another than it is to live out daily with one another. Our commitment to live out the faith of our salvation in community must eventually be put into action, and we must live in ways that not only recognize the truth of our future glory, but help each other to reach that future glory. Let's look at some practical ways we can make that happen.

Day 1

Pursue Glory

The first step in helping anyone is to become the kind of person who has help to offer. We pursue sanctification and participation in the glory of Christ not for ourselves, but to glorify Christ in imaging Him, as well as to help others come to glory. C.S. Lewis once said that he did not write about sins he had never struggled with, finding that the process of facing his sins and finding redemption from them was important in gaining the wisdom to write about them so that others could be helped by his first-hand experience. When his wife died, Lewis went through a profound grief that nearly destroyed his faith, but he eventually overcame that grief with his faith strengthened. From this experience Lewis wrote a book about his grief, helping untold numbers to face their own suffering in loss. If Lewis had not had the problem to overcome, and the resoluteness to overcome it, he would have been no help to those facing their own loss. If he had remained mired in his grief, he would have nothing to offer the world in terms of facing it and overcoming it. In the same way, one of the greatest things we can do to help others is to pursue our own sanctification with energy and enthusiasm, for every step we take toward reflecting the glory of Christ is a step on a path that we can illuminate for others.

Verses: John 17:20-26, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Matthew 5:16

Prayer Topics: Progress, Developing Skills, Wisdom, Maturity

Day 2

Avoid Traps

There are many traps to avoid in helping our brothers and sisters in Christ on their pathway to sanctification. One thing to be careful to avoid is meaningless gestures like telling someone you will help or pray for them without actually intending to do so. Sometimes when people share their problems, we do not know what to say, and so this becomes the standard response we default to, instead of just expressing genuine concern or regret. If you do not know how to help, or if helping would be inappropriate for you for any reason, do not say you will help. We need to make sure we are people of our word. Another trap we can fall into is to help too much. We can be pulled into people's lives in unhealthy ways if we are not careful. One time I was visited by a man asking me to help someone who the man's wife had forbidden him to keep helping. His wife recognized that the person requesting the help was long past the point of actually needing the help, and so he was asking me to take his place in providing the help that was known to be unhelpful, which I declined. We must exercise great wisdom as well as great love when we help each other. Finally, we must be wise as to when the request for help is not genuine, but is a pretext for ulterior motives. The bible tells us we must be as wise as serpents, as well as innocent as doves. When you avoid these traps, you will find that you have more resources available to help others, and that the help will be fruitful.

Verses: James 1:5, James 3:17, Ephesians 5:15-17, Proverbs 3:13-18

Prayer Topics: Discernment, Foresight, Understanding

Day 3

Have Patience

In providing help and service to others as they pursue the glory of Christlikeness, we must learn to be patient. When I became a father, I really didn't understand why people talked about it being so hard. Since I became a teenager, I knew all the things my parents had gotten wrong in the parenting department, and I was sure that I would not make the same mistakes, because parenting really wasn't that difficult. What could be hard about telling a child what they need to do? What I wasn't prepared for in my ignorance and naivety was the very obvious problem that telling someone something was not the same as having them change their life. We often know what we should do, yet we find it difficult to muster the enthusiasm and energy required to overcome our habits and natural inclinations. In fact, the older and more set in our ways we get, the harder it is. Compound that by the difficulty in actually seeing the problems in our own lives, and you get a recipe for frustration. If you have ever tried to help someone, you know this frustration intimately. You may, because of this frustration, decide to stop helping this person, or to stop trying to help anyone. If we are being honest, however, we know that there are many sins in our own life that we are blind to, as well as many that we know are there, and yet are struggling with for many years unsuccessfully. There are times when it is time to stop helping someone, and much wisdom is required in coming to that decision, but there are more times when our patience simply runs out. Pray for and practice patience, because impatience is probably one of those sins that you are struggling with, and helping someone just might help you.

Verses: Galatians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Philippians 4:6

Prayer Topics: Humility, Perseverance, Moderation, Self-Control

Day 4

Be Dependable

Truly helping someone in their Christian journey requires a certain amount of commitment and sacrifice. The call for help will rarely come when you have just heard an inspirational message and are full of energy and desire to serve God by helping your Christian neighbor. Instead, the call for help will come when you are tired, feeling defeated, or have a number of other commitments to juggle. The reality of helping others is very similar to the reality of helping yourself, namely that you can make little progress if you are not consistent. A person who needs your help needs it when it is helpful, and that will almost always be inconvenient. And because, as we discussed in yesterday's devotional, people have difficulty changing, that inconvenience will most likely be repeated numerous times. When I was a youth pastor, I had an occasion to be asked to meet with a teen who I was told had a pressing issue. This teen did not attend our church, but was associated with someone who did attend. This was one of those moments where the kid needed to speak to someone now, not later. In speaking to this kid, I found out that his girlfriend was about to abort his son, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. He had found out he was going to be a father, and lose his son at the same moment. He needed help when it was inconvenient, and would continue to need help into the future. When these opportunities arise, it is important that we be dependable, and building that dependability is a noble endeavor.

Verses: 1 Peter 3:15, Matthew 24:44, Proverbs 20:4

Prayer Topics: Steadiness, Consistency, Willingness, Generosity

Day 5

Live in Community

Many times, we are not the best person to help another, but often we know someone who is. Instead of trying to be the lone ranger, take advantage of the community you live in. God has many tools at his disposal, and you are one of them. If you are a hammer, and it is hammer time (see what I did there?), then be the best hammer you can be. But if the drill is required, don't try to be the drill. When I was a teen, and someone came to me for help, I would try so hard to help that I would do things I was not qualified for, and it would often turn out poorly. This taught me a valuable lesson, albeit slowly. If you are not qualified to help, don't be afraid to say it. The other person is much better off having you be there for prayer and moral support, than for you to try to help when you are not qualified. God has made us with skills, talents, and limits, and all are given to us for our blessing. Be realistic and clear eyed about all of them, and you will be a blessing to those around you.

Verses: Hebrews 10:24-25, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Galatians 6:2

Prayer Topics: Reliance, Trust, Confidence, Rest