

MOVE MY FEET

GROUP STUDY 3



God's love compels and empowers us to love others holistically by doing something about the needs around us.

Objectives

1. To understand that actively loving others is a lifelong response to God's love for us.
2. To see people as image-bearers with physical, emotional and spiritual needs.
3. To know that God empowers us to step out and serve others.

Introduction

We've all heard of the *Titanic*, the unsinkable cruise ship that struck an iceberg and sank into the sea in 1912, but have you heard of the *RMS Carpathia*? The *Carpathia* was an ordinary ship that picked up the *Titanic's* distress signal that night. Immediately her captain, Arthur H. Rostron, sent extra men to the boiler room and cut the steam-heating from the passengers' cabins in order to push the steam-powered ship as fast as it could possibly go. As it navigated through 58 miles of ice fields in the middle of the night, the captain ordered coffee, tea and soup to be prepared, the deck to be rigged with lights, and lifeboats and nets to be prepared for a rescue. He set up first-aid stations in the dining areas, complete with doctors, and made coffee for his crew in consideration of the long night ahead. He gathered blankets and converted miscellaneous rooms into sleeping areas. When the *Carpathia* finally reached the area, the *Titanic* was nowhere in sight, only lifeboats in the water. Seven hundred and five people were rescued and suffered no illness or long-term effects.

Capt. Rostron said later, "When day broke, I saw the ice I had steamed through during the night, I shuddered, and could only think that some other Hand than mine was on that helm during the night."

Often, when we become aware of a need, our tendency is to analyze and critique. Not to say that we shouldn't think about how we care for and serve those who are in distress. We need to be thoughtful in our compassion so we don't end up doing more harm to them and ourselves. However, even our gatherings here run the risk of becoming nothing more than talking about God's heart and caring for people in need rather than getting out there and serving them.

But can you imagine what would have happened if Capt. Rostron heard the distress signals from the *Titanic* and said, “Really? The *Titanic*? That ship is supposed to be unsinkable! They must have made a major mistake in their navigation. They are so proud. They are getting what they deserved.”

What if he had decided to let the *Titanic* sort out her own problems? Even if he decided to come to their rescue but carefully and at a normal pace, making no extra sacrifices, we can only wonder if the *Carpathia* would have reached the survivors in time, much less bring all 705 aboard safe. Capt. Rostron prepared the necessary arrangements at great sacrifice and risk to him and his ship, but most important, he responded, and he responded immediately and decisively. He moved his feet [or his ship in this case].

It’s not enough just to talk about a problem or a need. In fact, Christ calls us to love others by responding to their needs rather than ignoring them [what if Rostron had decided, “It’s not my problem?”] or criticizing from afar?

Lesson

The heart of the gospel is love: God has loved us and calls us to love Him and others.

[Read 1 John 3:16-18; 4:11-12]

We see that love comes from God — in fact, we know what love is by the example Jesus set [1 John 3:16; 4:7,10]. To love like Jesus did, we must begin with an awareness of the needs around us. For instance, while we routinely throw away uneaten food, we must realize that more than 16,000 kids created by God in His image die of hunger per day [equal to one child dying every five seconds].

We talked about how important it is to care for the spiritual needs of others by leading people to Jesus, but to just care for spiritual needs is not enough. First John tells us that we are to love — in deeds and in truth [3:18], not merely words. James points out how ridiculous it is to tell someone to be warmed and filled [James 2:15-16], but not to give them food and clothes. It’s even more unthinkable if that person is in a position to be able to provide for their needs!

By caring well for others, God’s love is perfected in us [1 John 4:12]. We show others God’s love — and while no one has seen Him, we can paint a picture of Him by the compassionate way we live our lives and care for other image-bearers.

As we discussed in the first two sessions, we recognize that God made us in His image; He made us for a purpose, and He made us with dignity. We realize that we have sinned and turned away from God, but He loved us enough to become poor so that we might become rich at His expense. As a result, our posture toward Him is one of incredible gratitude, and our posture toward others is one of humility and servanthood. Author and former priest Brennan Manning described it as one grateful beggar sharing what he has received with another beggar, and telling him ultimately where to find real food.

So let’s talk about how to love others the way God loves us.

To love others the way God loved us, we must see people holistically. God created people with bodies, minds, souls and emotions. The whole person sinned, is fallen, and lives in a world that is fallen. Now, God is redeeming and will eventually restore the whole person. In His ministry here, Jesus did not just point the way to eternal life by explaining to people how to get there spiritually – He showed them God’s love and healing power by giving sight to blind men, hearing to the deaf, and life to the sick and dead. He challenged systems of oppression, reached out to the marginalized, and defended the weak. In Luke, Jesus sums up His ministry by quoting Isaiah 61.

[Read Luke 4:18-19]

God cares about the lonely, the hungry, the crippled, the homeless, anyone who is vulnerable. In fact, Jesus so identifies with them that He goes so far as to say that whenever we serve them, we are serving Him!

[Read Matthew 25:34-40]

Notice that Jesus doesn’t say that when we serve the least of these, it’s as *if or like* we did it unto Him. No, He says we did it to Him. *Have you ever been stopped at a traffic light and seen a homeless person at the intersection with a sign? Have you ever stopped to ask yourself, “Is this person Jesus?”* It’s a crazy thought, isn’t it?

Responding to the needs of the vulnerable is an enormous task — there are many needs in the world, and it can be overwhelming. However, we don’t have to do it alone — in fact, we are not supposed to! It’s on God’s heart to care for vulnerable image-bearers, and He will assist us in two key ways:

1. His Spirit empowers us, enabling us to do the tasks God has given us.
2. We have His Body of believers around us, the Church.

Let’s talk about the first key way. God has power! He knows the needs of those around us better than we do. He loves them more than we could ever, and the truth of the matter is, when you and I show up in someone’s lives to care for a need, God has already been at work in that person. God is already present in the poor community you go into. We must ask what God is doing, where is He at work, and then join Him. His Spirit will show us the needs around us and enable us to act. (Luke 4:18 again — “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”)

Sometimes we just need to:

- Stop what we’re doing; pause in the busyness of our own lives and be present with others — not thinking about the next thing, but recognizing the people who God might bring across our paths each day.
- Take a look around us. You and I likely pass by areas of need every day!
- Ask questions. Don’t assume the need. Take the time to listen and ask questions about where someone is.
- Keep being reminded of what God says in Scripture about His heart for others.

We’ve been talking about His heart for His image-bearers these last two sessions so that we won’t forget, and also so that we might have confidence that He will respond to us when we respond to others. He cares about them and us deeply!

Let's try and think of some ways to serve others, especially the poorest of the poor. What are some needs you see in the world? In your community? In your church?

[Brainstorm a list with group members. Ideas might include hunger, poverty, AIDS, slavery/human trafficking, illiteracy, homelessness, loneliness, depression, etc.]

Ask: Have you ever wondered why these needs stand out to you? Could it be that God has given you eyes to see? Given you a mouth to speak about them and invite others to join the cause? Given you feet to go and do something about it?

There will always be something we can do, someone to love, and always a need. As we get in the habit of responding to the needs we see in faith and in God's power, God will begin to establish in us a lifestyle of love in action in the name of Jesus.

Closing

[Feel free to use your own illustration of an instance in which God's power was demonstrated as someone responded to a need, or use the following example.]

George Müller was a man who responded to the needs of children in Bristol, England, during the mid-1800s by founding orphanages to educate and care for the children who would have otherwise been left to fend for themselves on the streets. There are countless accounts of his reliance on God and God's faithfulness to him. For instance, one morning he brought the children into the empty dining room for breakfast.

The plates and cups or bowls were on the table. But nothing was on the table but empty dishes. No food was in the larder, and there was no money to supply the need. The children were standing, waiting for breakfast. "Children, you know we must be in time for school," said Mr. Müller. Then lifting his hand he prayed, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat."

Just then a knock was heard. The baker stood there. "Mr. Müller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast, and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at two o'clock and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it."

George thanked the baker and praised God for His care. "Children," he said, "we not only have bread, but the rare treat of fresh bread." Almost immediately there came a second knock at the door. This time it was the milkman who announced that his milk cart had broken down outside the orphanage, and that he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so that he could empty his wagon and repair it.

God provided for George Müller in incredible ways throughout his life. When you think about it, God has provided for all of us in incredible ways, hasn't He? And when we think about the powerful ways that Jesus moved His feet — leaving heaven to come and live among us in order to provide for our greatest

need, separation from God. If God is able and willing to care for us in our greatest need, how much more can He provide for our needs and the needs of those we see around us?

Small Group Questions

1. Imagine yourself lost outside in winter. It's 10 degrees below zero, and all you're wearing is a long-sleeved shirt, jeans and gym shoes. You haven't eaten in a week. Now imagine someone approaches you in a fur coat, a hat and gloves, the works. He's trying to tell you someone named Jesus loves you and died to save you if you'll only believe in Him. Then he says, "Think about it, OK? Now have a good night and stay warm!" And he hops in a car and drives away. What would you be thinking and feeling? What would you think of the man's faith? Would you think his Jesus really cared about you at all?
[Read James 2:14-16] What is God's response to this kind of faith?
2. Can you think of a time when Jesus cared for you as a whole person?
3. Can you think of anyone you know who might need to be loved? What might it look like?
4. Are there any needs in the community or the world that tug at your heart or especially interest you? How could we meet those?
5. Jesus sacrificed His life for us; Capt. Rostron made sacrifices to save the *Titanic*, and the baker certainly lost a profit by donating fresh bread to George Müller's hungry orphans. What might you have to sacrifice by responding to needs around you?