

Caring Through Correspondence and Calls

(REVISED 10/05)

Intro. Sometimes in our ministry of caring for others we cannot be “up close and personal”. Geographical distance may be a problem or we cannot spare enough time to make a quality visit. Perhaps we just don’t feel comfortable or confident enough to make a personal visit or to invest considerable effort in developing a relationship – at least not just yet.

It is exciting to realize that we can still have an incredibly powerful and positive impact on people’s lives – even on many more people than we could ever imagine. Our personal touch to people may go deeper and last longer than other people’s ministry might. And, our brief involvement may indeed motivate others to do the same, thus multiplying our efforts of care through others.

What is this lower level but higher impact ministry to others? It is simply that of sending out cards and notes of encouragement to people and of making timely phone calls to them. Let’s examine this incredible ministry together.

I. The Scriptural Precedent - the Apostles’ Epistles

A. We know that there was much more going on in the writing of the epistles than the sending of notes to friends. God’s Word to man was being inspired by the Holy Spirit and inscripturated. But a number of the men, while being guided by the Spirit of God included in their writings personal notes and greetings to specific people. Geography did indeed separate them from those they cared about so they continued such care through correspondence.

B. What did these writers say in those letters? Let’s choose Paul’s letter to the Philippians as an example.

1. Expressions of love were conveyed (1:3-8).
2. Prayer support and specific requests were mentioned (1:9-11),
3. Updates of news and personal blessings were shared (1:12-18).
4. Testimonies, instructions, admonitions were given (1:19-30 & whole letter).
5. Future plans and desires were communicated (2:19-30).
6. Sincere gratitude was expressed (4:10-20), perhaps for a care package!
7. Personal greetings and comments were given (4:21-23; Romans 16).

C. The apostles wrote long letters and short letters; they wrote letters to churches and letters to individuals. They wrote once or several times. Even in the book of Revelation we see God through the angel asking John to “take a letter”, actually 7 different ones, and send them to 7 different churches.

II. The Specific Practices – Cards and Calls

A. Ministry through Cards, Notes, and even Emails

1. WHY should I send out notes of care to others?

- a. Often, people who find it difficult to express their feelings and thoughts verbally or spontaneously can express them better in writing and over time (using their own words or those of others – like in printed cards).
- b. Cards and notes can be kept, reread, and treasured by the recipient, thus multiplying the initial blessing repeatedly, while some gifts and spoken words can be consumed or fade from one's memory.
- c. The written word is still powerful and can be used to reach deeply into hearts and minds of people in need. Also, the time and care taken to choose and write our words can prevent some hurts felt by careless, thoughtless, spoken words.

2. WHAT should I say in my notes to others?

(Send cards and notes that you would like to receive if you were in a similar situation – or even identical ones that have brought you blessing.)

- a. Acknowledge that there is loss or pain.
- b. Offer love and support and assurance of your prayers
- c. Remind people of the love and promises of God.
- d. Share plans for getting together, for helping them specifically.
- e. Share whatever has helped you in the past.
- f. Include appropriate Scriptures or devotional thoughts.
- g. Quote decent and appropriate poetry (not trite or overly sentimental).
- h. Share from your heart honest, sincere thoughts of love, gratitude, cheer, etc.

3. WHEN should I send notes to others?

- a. At the time when everyone else is sending them – at the time of the crisis, need, or opportunity
- b. One to two weeks thereafter, then perhaps monthly for awhile
- c. On anniversary of loss or difficulty
- d. Whenever you have been blessed by them or reminded of their special\ place in your life (“Thank-yous” are a BIG DEAL. Don’t neglect them!)
- e. For birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

Remember that, as time passes for one who has been through a hard time, so also do people's expressions of love and care. However, the deep hurts usually linger long and then can be compounded by the seeming loss of support and care from others. A timely note or card can often alleviate much of this.

4. TO WHOM should I be sending cards and notes?
 - a. Not just those who are directly going through a hard time, but also their family members or other caregivers who have invested and lost much.
 - b. To your own family members – leave note of love and encouragement in lunchboxes, on mirrors, write special letters of blessing, thanks, etc.
 - c. To ANYONE who has blessed you or encouraged you – cheerful clerk at a store, pianist or soloist at church, custodian, friend, employer, etc.

B. Ministry through Phone Calls

1. WHY should I make ministry phone calls?
 - a. It may communicate more personally than cards and notes might.
 - b. It might eliminate the often stated criticism, “No one even called me!”
 - c. It provides for personal two way communication – very important.
 - d. It enables caller to listen to the heart of the person and then to respond more appropriately and sensitively.
 - e. It can prevent the scourge of total loneliness, depression and despair, etc. (“The phone never rings – except by people who want to sell something.”)
2. WHEN should I make such phone calls?
 - a. Whenever you think of them, miss them, hear of a need, etc.
(Please discipline yourself to call the person FIRST, then call a pastor...)
 - b. For some people, arrange to call them regularly – set up a routine, sometimes even daily for awhile.
 - c. Call at specific times when you know that a need or temptation is critical.
(get up times, go to bed times, lonely times, etc.)
 - d. Contact people during special times of celebration and blessing.
3. WHAT should I say during these caring calls?
 - a. Express your love, care, and compassion if the person is hurting. Don’t add to their sadness by detailing your troubles. Give to them, don’t take from them.
 - b. Ask about their needs and make plans to help them.
 - c. Do some good, patient listening.
 - d. Share specific Scripture or devotional thought, without being preachy.
 - e. Have a brief word of prayer over the phone with them.
 - f. Rejoice with them as they rejoice over special blessings and joys.