

Chapter 4

Seeing People as Needing Both God and Others: Our Foundation of Anthropology, Part 1

Almost two decades ago, as I was sitting in the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, God challenged the very foundations upon which my ministry had been built. Having arranged ahead of time for an ancient Old Testament manuscript to be made available for research, I carefully studied the biblical perspective on human nature. On this particular day, God drew my attention to the first declaration of His displeasure, and His Spirit began to bring revolutionary relational insights through the powerful simplicity of this passage.

DISPLEASURE IN PARADISE

In Genesis 2:18, God uttered for the very first time this sobering phrase: “It is not good.” He declared that something was missing in the Garden. Up to this point, everything in creation had been pronounced “good.” Eden was a perfect paradise.

Now if you or I were to declare that something was “not good,” it might not make much of an impact. But when God declares something to be “not good,” we must sit up and take notice, because we have a serious problem. So what could have been “not good” about the Garden of Eden?

When God shows up and declares something to be “not good,” we must sit up and take notice, because we have a serious problem.

At this time, Adam lived in a perfect world. There was no crime, no traffic, no pollution, no disease, and no war. It was a totally problem-free environment. Most notably, the Fall had not yet occurred, so Adam was sinless, innocent in heart and mind. There was only good within the Garden.

Adam also possessed everything he could possibly need or want. The Garden and everything in it (with the exception of one unique tree) was his to use and enjoy. Adam had it all. He never suffered from a low bank balance, an empty pantry, or an investment loss. Adam was living a dream existence. He was in a perfect world, and almost everything in it was available for his use, enjoyment, and stewardship. What could have possibly been “not good?”

We also know that Adam had an exalted position. He had an excellent job with no competition for advancement. He was CEO over the “fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1:26). He had no problems with job security, jealousy from co-workers, or pressure to perform. Career-wise, he was at the top of the ladder. At this point, he was the only

person on the ladder, but at least he was at the top! So where was the crisis? What could have been missing?

Adam even enjoyed an intimate relationship with God. Above all the earthly benefits and blessings in the Garden, Adam walked and talked in perfect, uninterrupted fellowship with his Creator because sin had not yet come between them. Can you imagine the thrill of communing with God face-to-face? You and I might talk about our daily “quiet time” with God, but Adam was blessed to be with God every day. Yet something was still “not good.” What could have possibly been wrong in such an ideal setting?

There was just one thing missing, but apparently this one thing troubled God’s heart. In Genesis 2:18, God declared what was not good—Adam was alone. Adam needed a human relationship. A sovereign God, free to create Adam any way He desired, chose to fashion him in such a way that Adam needed to relate intimately not only with his Creator, but also with others.

Adam was designed as a relational being. God had created Adam not only with physical and spiritual needs, but also with relational needs, which Adam could not meet on his own. These needs could only be met through meaningful relationships with both God and other human beings.

In Genesis 2:18, God also declared that He would solve Adam’s dilemma, and He did so by creating another human, someone with whom Adam could be intimate. God said, “I will make a helper suitable for him.”

God ministered to Adam’s aloneness by giving him a human partner, Eve, thus establishing the core human relationship of marriage. God would later ordain family relationships (Genesis 4:1, Psalm 127:3) and fellowship within the body of Christ (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 12:25) as other avenues by which He ministers to the aloneness of the human heart.

God ministered to Adam’s aloneness by giving him a human partner, Eve.

Evidence of Our Need for Others

Several years ago I met a woman named Sandy who was a patient in a psychiatric hospital. She had been admitted to the hospital after attempting suicide. During several visits with her, I learned this woman’s tragic story.

A year earlier, Sandy’s husband had been killed in a head-on collision with a drunk driver, leaving her with three children under the age of six. Sandy was understandably devastated by the loss. But over a period of months she determinedly worked through her denial, her anger at God, and her bitterness toward the drunk driver. She finally began dealing with the enormity of her grief. When depressed or angry, Sandy was able to admit her feelings and deal with them. She came through the first nine months of her pain very well, all the while dealing with the ebb and flow of life-altering grief.

Finally, Sandy found the courage to get involved in the singles ministry of her church. Her church family had ministered to her often after the tragic accident, and well-intentioned people within the church continued to ask occasionally how she was doing. In the past, she had often answered, “I’m just numb” or “I’m getting by.” But after processing much of her pain, she began to answer the question differently. Sandy would very honestly respond to church member’s inquiries with, “I just feel very lonely.”

But the responses she often received were less than comforting:

“You should not feel lonely. After all, God is with you.”

“Lonely? That’s not good. Maybe the pastor could get together with you this week.”

“As Christians, we don’t need to feel lonely. Just the other day I was feeling a bit sad, and I just thought to myself. . . .”

Self-doubt quickly set in for Sandy. “I still feel lonely,” she admitted to herself. “Why doesn’t God take away my loneliness? There must be something wrong with me.”

Within three months, these feelings of condemnation, coupled with the pain of her devastating loss, prompted Sandy to try to take her own life. In the wake of her husband’s death, Sandy had needed both the comfort of our Heavenly Father and loving care demonstrated through His people. Tragically, her glaring need and deep pain had been met by something less than compassionate care from those around her, and we almost lost her as a result.

What a difference it would have made in Sandy’s life if those within her church had grasped the significance of her need for Christ in them. Imagine the impact that might have been made if Sandy could have heard these comforting words: “Sandy, I cannot even imagine the depth of pain you have experienced, but I want you to know that God has saddened my heart for you on several occasions. I am so sorry for your loneliness, and I just want you to know that I care.”

God’s Design, Our Acceptance

Two very significant implications for life and ministry derive from the truth that God created us to need both Him and each other. First, none of us can rightfully say, “All I need is God.” To do so is to reject other people as a channel of God’s loving provision. Adam lived in a perfect, sin-free world, and had a deeply personal knowledge of God. If anyone had grounds to think that an intimate relationship with the Creator was all he needed, Adam sure did. “It’s you and me, God,” he could have said. “You created the world, and I take care of it. Our relationship could not be any better. Together we can handle anything, right?”

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But God disagreed. “Adam, our relationship is primary,” He might have said, “and I will be your most intimate friend. But I also desire to bless you through human relationships, persons with whom you will experience the joy of giving and receiving to meet relational

needs. For you and many of your descendants, a spouse and other family member will meet your relational needs. For those who do not marry, I will provide close friendships. And one day, I will establish my church, where loving relationships will abound.”

Meeting some of our relational needs through others was God’s original plan in the Garden of Eden, and it remains His plan today. Claiming that we only need God discounts His purpose for human relationships.

Some people point to Philippians 4:13: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” They contend that if God was all Paul needed, He is all we need. They equate a holy sense of self-reliance with spiritual maturity. “As long as I walk in constant fellowship with God, as long as I love God completely and exercise enough faith, I do not need anyone else.”

But that is not what Paul conveyed to the Philippians. The apostle’s expectations and faith were clearly and rightly focused upon Christ, but he follows with verse 14: “Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.” His message is clear: “I can do everything through Christ, and He has chosen to involve you!” Paul, the spiritual giant of the early church, recognized and accepted the fact that God often lovingly worked through others to meet his material, relational, and emotional needs.

The second implication is closely related to the first. Just as we cannot claim, “All *I* need is God,” we must not convey the message, “*You* only need God.”

To do so is to communicate a message of condemnation: “You should be able to take care of yourself without needing other people. If you still have needs, you do not have enough of Christ. If you were more consistent in your quiet time, if you had more faith, if you loved God with more of your heart, soul, and mind, you would not be needy.” As important and necessary as faith and quiet times and loving God are, God has chosen to involve people in meeting the needs of other people.

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The “you only need God” message is crippling ministry after ministry today. This message is irrelevant to the real needs of people because it represents only half of the Great Commandment. We may have the “love God” part right, but love for God is incomplete without love for our neighbors. Dismissing our need for one another is the equivalent of saying to a starving beggar, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” (James 2:16). To the single adult, it may sound like this: “You should not be lonely, because Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” We might communicate to a faithful ministry worker, “Your need to be appreciated is nothing more than pride. God sees your labors, and His reward should be enough.” Or we might say to people who have been abused or abandoned, “You just need to forgive and forget and move on with your life.”

By God’s design, we need Him and other people. Therefore, our complete message to a hurting world must be: “I need you, and it is all right for you to need me. And we both need an intimate, loving relationship with our Lord.”

My Personal Journey

I can still clearly recall God's work in my heart concerning my need for other people. After an early morning breakfast with my discipleship group, staff meetings, counseling appointments, and a typically busy day on our church staff, my energy was gone. I was exhausted. As I prepared for the evening's sermon and looked ahead to another late night committee meeting, there was a knock at my door. It felt like just one more interruption in an already hectic day.

"Brother David, have you heard anything more about my residency application?" Gabriel, my Nigerian friend, stood in the doorway, inquiring about the status of his citizenship. My wife and I had rejoiced in seeing Gabriel and his wife come to follow Jesus, and hoped to help in their quest for residency in the United States. This interruption, however, produced a strange response in me.

I stared at my Bible laying on the desk, opened to the passage in which Jesus asks His disciples, "Can you come and pray with me?" God broke my self-reliance. As a believer for more than ten years, and now in pastoral ministry, I had no memory of ever vulnerably asking for prayer. My prideful self-sufficiency was broken that evening as I heard myself say to Gabe, "I have not had the opportunity to check this week. Gabe, this may sound strange to you, but I am not sure I have what it takes to make it through the rest of the evening. Would you come pray for me?" It seemed like years of pain from my self-reliance were washed away through my tears. With a humble heart, I cried as Gabriel stood over me and prayed for me.

That was the night that my restoration began. God moved my heart with this reflection: If Christ in His humanity needed others, then it was all right for me to need people as well.

Our complete message to a hurting world must be: I need you and it is OK for you to need me. And we both need an intimate, loving relationship with our Lord!

An Experience with God's Word

"Forget none of His benefits" (Psalm 103:2 NASB).

Reflect on an occasion when God met a need in your life through another person. Consider a time when God blessed you by involving a family member, friend, or acquaintance in your life. It might have been a time of tragedy or loss, discouragement or disappointment, weariness or loneliness.

I recall a time when God met a need in my life, and He involved another person by . . .

Share your reflections with a partner or small group as directed by your facilitator. Pause to sense the Lord's pleasure as you actually experience His Word by "forgetting none of His benefits."

The Savior's Need

Come with me now into the New Testament for a more intimate picture of Christ's need for other people. Let us follow our Lord and the eleven into the Garden of Gethsemane. Picture yourself walking among the trees with the disciples, following the Master you love. His steps are agonizingly slow and deliberate as the weight of His impending death descends on Him. His breath comes in short, labored gasps. The mounting stress bows His back and forces from Him a low moan, then another, as if the heavy wooden cross were already on His shoulder. Meanwhile, you notice that the disciples are puzzled at His behavior, perhaps thinking Him suddenly ill.

Reaching your destination, the Master turns to you. His countenance is clouded with gloom. Perspiration streams from his brow and drips from his hair and beard. In a quavering voice, He says, "I must . . . I must go . . . just a little farther." He looks past you to Peter, James, and John, His closest and dearest friends on Earth. Imagine His imploring words: "Come with me, my friends. I need you now. I really need you."

I wonder what some people might have said to Jesus if they had been with Him that evening. He was agonizing under the weight of "becoming our sin" and the impending crucifixion. The Savior was overwhelmed with sorrow and vulnerably shared His need with His friends. I am concerned that He might hear some of us today respond with, "Why do you need us, Jesus? Do you not know that you have the Father?"

Did Jesus have the Father? Of course He did. He and His Father were one! But at that moment, this man of sorrows asked His closest friends on earth to be there for Him, to support Him, to pray with Him. Apparently, in His humanity, the Son needed others, just as you and I do. If the divine Son of God needed both the Father and human relationships, how much more do we, and the people around us, need both the Father and one another?

An Experience with God's Son

"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8 NASB).

Let us return to the Garden scene. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your heart with compassion for this One acquainted with sorrow and grief. As your heart is touched by His need, you will grow more sensitive to the needs of others.

Leaving the others behind, Jesus and the inner circle of three continue trudging up the darkened garden hillside. You follow them. The Master's body convulses from the mounting grief. His low moans turn into strained cries of deep pain. Jesus can hardly get His next

words out. His voice is strained with emotion. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:38).

He leaves you behind and staggers farther up the knoll, bracing himself on tree stumps and boulders. Loud cries of travail roll from him. There he writhes and sobs and prays.

The Son of God faces the darkest hour in the history of creation. The One who knew no sin will soon become sin for His disciples—for you and me. He has vulnerably sought the prayerful support of Peter, James, and John. These men love the Master dearly. They have left their careers to follow Him. They have walked with Him, sat at His feet, and leaned on His breast. But now they seem oblivious to the Master’s need.

Jesus returns to the place where you are watching the heartrending drama. He looks down at His dearest friends, who are asleep. Tears, soil, and blood streak His face and stain His cloak. He moves past you and wakes the men. Let yourself sense the pain-filled loneliness and grief of the Savior’s heart as He asks, “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” (Matthew 26:40). See the disappointment in His eyes as He returns to His place of agonizing prayer.

Amazingly, the scene plays out again and again. Three times the Master shares His pain and need with His closest friends, and three times they let Him down.

Can you care for Him in His sorrow? Can you hurt with Him? Can you feel compassion for the He felt when, at His time of greatest need, He was left alone? Ask the Spirit to prompt empathy for Christ within you as you reflect on His expressed need for other people and the disciples’ failure to meet that need. Allow the Spirit to confirm and reinforce the validity of needing both God and others.

Meditate on Christ’s words, “Could you not pray with me for just one hour?”

What does it do to your heart to meditate on the saddened Savior? How does it make you feel to hear the words, “Could you not pray with me?”

Lord Jesus, my heart is touched with _____ as Your Spirit leads me to encounter You in Your Word.

Share your responses with your partner or small group as directed by your facilitator. Allow the Holy Spirit to sensitize your heart to the needs of the Savior and the needs of others around you. Close in prayer for one another.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT REINFORCES OUR NEED FOR OTHERS

Come with me now to another scene in the life of Jesus—the day when Jesus gave the Great Commandment. The Pharisees and Sadducees are gathered around Jesus and His disciples. A

lawyer has just posed the question, “Which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses” (Matthew 22:36 NLT)?

I can imagine the disciples’ expectations as they hear the question. Peter elbows John and says, “Hey, this is important. The Master is about to tell us the greatest commandment.” I can see John waving the other disciples into a huddle. “All right fellows, listen up,” he begins. “We are about to get our marching orders. We are about to hear the commandment that must become our top preaching, teaching, and ministry priority.” They all turn to their Master and listen intently as Jesus replies, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (vv. 37, 38 NLT).

Imagine what might have happened if Jesus had stopped there. I can see Peter turning back to the other disciples and saying something like, “That is it! Our job is to preach a full and complete sellout to God. We are to love Him and Him alone. So let us go out and tell the world, ‘You only need God.’”

Of course, Jesus did **not** stop after the command to love God. He went on to say, “A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (vv. 39, 40 NLT).

Imagine Peter turning to the other disciples now. “Did you hear that? The greatest commandment is actually two commandments in one. We are to love God with everything we have, and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. So we have to teach, preach, and live a message that demonstrates the importance of loving intimacy with God *and* others.”

The greatest commandment is actually two commandments in one. We are to love God with everything we have, and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

It is true that a relationship with God is to be primary in each of our lives. We are to trust Christ as Savior, yield to His Spirit, and obey His words. But we must also recognize that, in Jesus’ eyes, our relationships with our neighbors (literally our “near ones”) are just as significant as our relationship with God.

It is clear throughout Scripture that God, for reasons known only to Him, has opted to fill our longings for oneness through love relationships with both Himself and other human beings. The God of all comfort chooses to share His love and comfort with us through others, and with others through us (2 Corinthians 2:1-4). But how do we go about living out this Great Commandment on a daily basis? What does it look like to genuinely love both God and others?

How to Live Out the Great Commandment

Great Commandment love is relevant in human lives because it seeks to meet both spiritual needs and relational needs, thus removing the aloneness that God calls “not good.” But what do we need in our relationships with one another? How do we identify valid relational

needs? In short, by identifying passages of Scripture that tell us how God has demonstrated His love toward us, and that tell us how we are to love others in return. Throughout His Word, we find God demonstrating His love for human creation, and as we look deeper, we will also recognize relational needs that He desires to meet, at least in part, through us.

Identifying Biblical Relational Needs

In 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, God is described as “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.” This passage establishes that human beings have a need for comfort in times of trouble, because God would not comfort us unless we needed it. But He does not stop there. We are to “comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (v.4). Notice the pattern. The passage establishes our need for comfort in troubled times, declares that God is the ultimate source of the comfort we need, and calls us to lovingly share his comfort with those who need it.

Another example is found in Romans 15:7: “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.” This passage establishes our need for acceptance, declares that God is the ultimate source of the acceptance we need, and calls us to meet the need for acceptance in others.

In Romans 15:5, Paul describes “the God who gives . . . encouragement,” and in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 adds, “Therefore encourage one another.” These verses establish our need for encouragement, reveal God as the source of encouragement, and command us to lovingly share encouragement with others.

These passages show us that a biblical relational need is one that God has met in our lives and admonishes us to meet in the lives of others through the expression of Great Commandment love. Scripture urges believers to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10 NASB). One aspect of His multi-faceted grace is His comfort, another is His acceptance, and another is His encouragement. He has “graced” us by meeting these needs, and calls us to express His grace to others. As we live in loving intimacy with the One True God, freely receiving His abundant, manifold grace, we are to freely give to others (Matthew 10:8). This is what it takes to remove the aloneness that God calls “not good.” It requires meeting valid relational needs from the resources God freely supplies.

Removing the aloneness that God calls “not good” requires meeting valid relational needs from the resources God freely supplies.

This view of needs is affirmed by the words of the Apostle Paul, who assured the Philippian church of God’s provision—“God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19)— and gave testimony of the ways in which God had used them to supply his needs: “It was good of you to share in my troubles. . . .you sent me aid again and again when I was in need” (vv. 14, 16). God is Jehovah Jireh, our provider. He has promised to meet all our needs, and He has chosen to do so through our families, friends, and church communities as we love Him and allow Him to share His life through us.

Ten Biblical Relational Needs

Dozens of passages in Scripture establish valid relational needs from God's perspective, and call us to join Him in the ministry of meeting those needs. Consider the "one another's" of the New Testament: accept one another, encourage one another, be affectionate to one another, bear one another's burdens. Each reveals an area of human relational need where Great Commandment love may be applied in practical, caring ways.

In the following section, we will explore ten relational needs that appear to be among the most significant in Scripture. This list of ten needs is by no means exhaustive, but it will provide an excellent starting point for meeting the needs of others out of an abundance of God's love for us. When we become sensitive to the needs of others and give sacrificially to meet these needs, our lives and ministries will become increasingly relevant.

Below you will find a brief explanation of each of these ten needs, reflections on the ways in which Christ met each need in the lives of others, and practical examples that demonstrate ways in which churches and Christian leaders might meet each need as they live out a call to relational ministry. As you read these ten needs, make a quick personal and ministry assessment. How well are you doing at meeting these needs personally and corporately? (You may also wish to refer to the Relational Needs Questionnaire in the Appendix in order to make a more detailed assessment).

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| <p>1. Acceptance – The need for acceptance is met by receiving another person willingly and unconditionally, especially when the other person's behavior is imperfect or even offensive. It requires being willing to love others regardless of offenses and ways in which they are different from you (Romans 15:7).</p> |
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Jesus met our ultimate need for acceptance in that "while we were still sinners," He died for us (Romans 5:8). He looked beyond our faults and met our needs. During His earthly ministry, Jesus accepted people regardless of background, race, or condition: the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), the Gentile centurion (Luke 7:1-10), and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). He helped people overcome failures, loved all people unconditionally, and forgave freely, even from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

During any given week, you will find care teams from Hope in the City Church providing hot meals and blankets at a local homeless shelter. They lead support groups for recovering addicts in the community center and provide career counseling and tutoring at a women's shelter. The care teams are committed to reaching out with Christ's unconditional love to others, even if they seem different or have failed morally. Each member of the care team embraces and seeks to embody the mandate of Romans 15:7: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you."

2. Affection - The need for affection is met by expressing care and closeness through physical touch and by verbally saying “I love you” (Romans 16:16, Mark 10:16).

Jesus frequently ministered to others through physical touch. He used touch to accompany several of His miraculous healings (Matthew 8:3, 15; 9:29; Mark 7:33-35), His consolation of the disciples (Matthew 17:7), and His ministry to children (Mark 10:16, Matthew 19:13).

During months containing five Sundays, the Marietta Church has dedicated the evening service on the fifth Sunday to intergenerational ministry. Families gather together in small groups. Those members without families present are “adopted” for the evening.

During one particular evening session, the families focused their sharing around this sentence: “I feel your love when. . . .” Four-year-old Aaron moved to sit next to his dad, and we heard him say, “Daddy, I feel your love when you come into my room and wrestle with me. I really like it when you give me back rubs at night too. Thanks, Daddy!” As Aaron and his dad gave one another a hug, the Spirit touched Aaron’s father with the imperative of loving his son well by meeting his need for affection.

3. Appreciation – The need for appreciation is met through expressing thanks, praise, or commendation. This involves specifically and intentionally recognizing someone’s accomplishments or efforts (Colossians 3:15).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus frequently voiced appreciation to individuals, including the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28), a centurion (Luke 7:9), and John the Baptist (Luke 7:28). God has also promised to express appreciation to those who are faithful (2 Timothy 4:8, Luke 6:35, Ephesians 6:8).

For many years, Pastor Rick has spent his Friday morning commute to church focusing upon just one question: “Who am I grateful for today?” As he prayerfully considers this question, the Holy Spirit brings names and faces to Rick’s mind. Recently, Rick has expressed gratitude for each of these: George, a faithful member of the church body who serves as “greeter” for each worship service; Margaret, the saint of all children’s workers; Millie, a friendly hospital nurse who, in spite of not being a “church-goer”, is always helpful when Rick makes his weekly hospital visits; and Andrew, a young pastor of a new church that was recently established in their community.

When Pastor Rick arrives at the church each Friday, he spends an hour making phone calls and sending e-mails to each person the Lord has brought to his mind. His messages often contain thoughts such as, “As I drove to the office today, I was reminded of how grateful I am for you. I just called to let you know I was thinking about you and what a blessing you have been to my life.” Rick also shares a few specifics about their faithfulness, friendliness, or helpfulness. The recipients of these Friday morning messages are often startled by such thoughtfulness, encouraged in their work or ministry, and in a small way are reminded that they have been cared for by the Lord.

4. Approval – The need for approval is met by building up and affirming other people, as well as by acknowledging the importance of your relationship with them.

Approval also involves noticing and affirming positive character qualities— praising people for who they are, not just for what they do (Ephesians 4:29).

Jesus frequently expressed approval to various people. He affirmed a generous widow (Mark 12:41-44), Peter (Matthew 16:13-19), Mary of Bethany, who anointed Him with perfume for burial (John 12:2-8), and a grateful leper (Luke 17:11-19).

After highlighting several positive character qualities from the Book of Proverbs, youth leaders at Calvary Church led high school students in a meaningful exercise in approval. Leaders described character traits such as diligence, truthfulness, humility, loyalty, generosity, and boldness. They then encouraged students to find a positive trait that they could see in one another. A time of group sharing followed where each student received two or more affirmations from the group: “I am impressed by your boldness. I see that character trait when you talk in class about your faith.” “Our group benefits from your sensitivity. You are careful to include others and notice how people are feeling.” The group was then challenged to live out this example in all their relationships, and reminded that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

5. Attention – The need for attention is met by conveying appropriate interest, concern, and care for other people. We meet people’s need for attention when we take thought of them, particularly when we enter into their “world” (1 Corinthians 12:25 NASB).

Jesus did not spend all His time with the masses. He gave individual attention to people such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), and the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26). Jesus met our need for attention by leaving His world and entering ours. He became like us so that we could know Him and have a personal relationship with Him.

Each member at Trinity Church can count on several friends “taking thought” of them on their birthday. Each Friday, a community e-mail is sent out to the church family (except for members who have a birthday that week) reminding them of next week’s birthdays and giving contact information for each person who has a birthday coming up. Members are then surprised by phone calls, voice mails, e-mails, and personal contacts from Pastor Lewis and other members of the Trinity family.

6. Comfort – The need for comfort is met by responding to a hurting person with appropriate words, feelings, and physical touch. Comfort involves hurting with another person and expressing care and sadness for his or her grief and pain (Romans 12:15; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4).

Jesus comforted people throughout His earthly ministry, often identifying with others’ hurt so much that He wept with them (John 11:35, Luke 19:41). Even on the eve of His death, He comforted His disciples as He sensed their sorrow and anxiety (John 14:1, 18; 16:33).

Care teams from Good Shepherd Church make regular visits to the emergency waiting rooms of local hospitals. Tragedies, accidents, and violence fill the waiting rooms with family members and friends as they wait anxiously for news about their loved one. Care team

members are careful not to give advice or exhortation, but simply comfort those they meet. After brief introductions and conversation, team members share gentle, empathetic words from their heart. They might pray with a family member or simply sit, listen, and hold a hand. Hospital attendants have come to trust the care teams and see them as an extension of the hospital's desire to provide care and healing.

7. Encouragement – The need for encouragement is met by urging other people to persist and persevere toward their goals, and by stimulating them toward love and good deeds (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus continually encouraged His disciples and those who were downcast and discouraged. The Pharisees even criticized Jesus because He regularly met with those who were struggling spiritually and emotionally (Matthew 9:10-13).

A recent worship service at Freedom Fellowship focused on “Our words that minister grace.” The texts were 1 Thessalonians 5:11: “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,” and Ephesians 4:29: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.” The contrast between edifying and unwholesome words was clearly articulated, and the pastor led members to see the wonder of our ability to minister divine grace through our words. Then church leaders led the congregation in a time of experiencing the text.

The congregation stood and was challenged in each of the following areas: Who around you might be discouraged and need a word of encouragement? Who has been a good friend and might benefit from a word that stimulates them toward more good deeds? Who has inspired you? Impressed you? Blessed you by their persistence or perseverance?

The praise team began to sing and church members were challenged to move around and talk with one another. They were challenged to encourage one another right there in the auditorium, immediately experiencing 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

8. Respect – The need for respect is met by communicating value or giving honor to other people. It also involves regarding others highly and treating them as important (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 2:17).

Jesus ignored all the social prejudices of His society by showing respect to tax collectors, Samaritans, the poor, lepers, and women. He treated all people as having infinite value, regardless of their status.

The pastoral team and church council of Grace Church meet together twice a year for a special time of “Leadership Listening.” After a brief time of worship, the members who are present spend time in personal prayer and reflection in the spirit of 1 Samuel 3:9: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

First, they listen to the Lord concerning this statement: “I believe the Lord is especially pleased with our. . . .” Participants pray and discern how they might finish the sentence.

Following this time of personal prayer, each person gives their response to the sentence completion. Then the pastor leads everyone in a time of praise-filled rejoicing.

A second period of personal prayer focuses on this statement: “I believe the Lord may want us to consider. . . .” The participants share their impressions from the Lord concerning this second sentence, then close in worship. Decisions and actions are addressed at other times; this meeting is dedicated solely to hearing from the Lord and respectfully listening to what God has birthed in the hearts of those around them.

9. Security – The need for security is met when we establish and maintain harmony in relationships. We also meet the need for security by providing freedom from fear or threat of harm (Romans 12:16, 18).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus offered security to those who were close to Him by unconditionally meeting their needs. Christ provided for the disciples’ physical, relational, and spiritual needs without condition or demand. At times, He even performed miracles to meet people’s physical needs, such as the need for food (Mark 6:30-45, 8:1-9).

The Moms and Mentors Ministry at Westlake Community Church provides the perfect environment for single moms to become connected with other women and their families. These moms come to feel less alone as they are paired with another Westlake family which provides the security of fellowship, counsel, discipleship, and practical support. The women meet together weekly for “girls’ night,” where they find mutual encouragement and polish practical skills in parenting, budgeting, and goal setting. Experts from the community are always present in order to give help with housing decisions, car repairs, insurance challenges, and career options. On regularly-scheduled “Family Fun Days,” single-parent families come together with mentor families to enjoy fun activities. These times provide the opportunity for friendships to be formed among the kids, and allow for the positive influence of male role models from the mentor families.

10. Support – The need for support is met by coming alongside someone who is struggling or has a problem and providing appropriate assistance (Galatians 6:2).

Jesus invited the multitudes to “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He consistently provided physical, emotional, and spiritual support for people who were struggling.

Grace Fellowship sponsors a monthly “Parents’ Night Out” as a ministry to their own members as well as an outreach opportunity. One specific night was dedicated to supporting parents in two neighborhood housing projects. An Adult Bible Fellowship and the youth department teamed up to welcome forty children and teens to a local park for a night of games, contests, food, and activities. Fliers were posted in the neighborhood, and an announcement was printed in the community paper. This event was designed to support and serve those couples in the neighborhood who needed a “date night” without the expense of childcare and single parents who could benefit from a night of “personal time.”

NEW METHODS ARE NEEDED FOR THIS FRESH MESSAGE.

In order for us to live out a message of relevant love in the coming decades, our ministries may need to look significantly different from the way they look now. It is crucial that any necessary restructuring or altering of methods be dictated by ministry objectives driven by both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

A growing network of churches around the world has begun to undertake such changes, thereby forging a relevant and fruitful approach to Christian ministry. They have moved beyond merely hosting meetings and conducting services where people come together, take good notes and walk away saying, “Wasn’t that a fine sermon?” or “Wasn’t that a great lesson?” The fresh message these church leaders proclaim is affecting the traditional structure of ministry, and it demands fresh methodologies.

New Birth Church provides a good example of this relevant and relational approach. The church became concerned about the rising crime rate among the youth in the area. As church leaders considered the problem, they acknowledged that the young people were not just delinquents; they were kids with deep, unmet relational needs. They had not experienced Great Commandment love. New Birth decided to help at the level of deepest need.

In order for us to live out a message of relevant love in the coming decades, our ministries may need to look significantly different.

The church worked out an arrangement with law enforcement authorities to assign youth offenders to church families. These families, trained to identify the relational needs of the young people, began to minister to their aloneness by loving them as their special “neighbors.” Classes were offered to equip neighborhood parents to remove the aloneness and meet the relational needs of their own children. Together, the church and families provided an abundance of loving attention, comfort, and care for these love-starved youth. To date, the families of New Birth have ministered to hundreds of juvenile delinquents and their parents. Many have made personal commitments to Christ, and an astounding ninety percent of the kids cared for in this way have not been arrested again!

Several new ministry objectives may be needed to create this type of relevant relational ministry within your own congregation.

Meet people at their point of need.

The church must be more than just the defender and propagator of truth. It must be a place where biblical relational needs are met—not just talked about. We all have relational needs, such as acceptance, attention, respect, approval, and comfort, and there is no better place to experience the mutual addressing of these needs than at church. As Christ’s body, we freely receive of His acceptance, love, and comfort, and we have a responsibility to freely give these things to others in turn. The church should not only positively impact our mind by thoroughly grounding believers in the absolute truth of God’s Word, but should also equip and lead us to express God’s Great Commandment love in our own relationships.

This prioritizing of relational needs should also affect our approach to evangelism. Instead of merely trying to get people to believe what we believe, we must lovingly represent to them a God who cares for them and wants to meet their needs, including their need for the forgiveness of sin, which makes a meaningful relationship with Him possible.

Prioritize relationships.

We can often get so wrapped up in the busyness of the Christian life that we neglect to prioritize knowing God personally and intimately. We read the Bible in order to prepare for Sunday's lesson, but how often do we meditate on Scripture solely to know God's heart? We focus on facts about God and the programs of the church, but how much time is spent hearing His heart? As church leaders, we must reprioritize our own commitment to know Him—not just learn about Him.

The church should not only positively impact our mind by thoroughly grounding believers in the absolute truth of God's Word, but should also equip and lead us to express God's Great Commandment love in our own relationships.

For ministry to be relevant and authentic, we must also encourage healthy relationships in the home. The church must prioritize family relationships and provide the tools necessary to strengthen them. The concentric circles of ministry as presented in Acts 1:8—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth—must be applied not only to our evangelism, but also to our witness of love, beginning with those nearest to us: our spouse if we are married, or closest family members if we are single (Jerusalem), our children if we have them, or other close family members (Judea), our close friends (Samaria), and then everyone else (the ends of the earth).

Churches must offer ongoing relational ministries for singles, couples, parents, and families that equip individuals to meet relational needs and foster growing intimacy. Such relationship-centered ministry is proving to be invaluable in reaching postmodern culture, in which relationships are valued above rational arguments. It is the sharing of God's love with one another that removes aloneness and challenges us to live out that which we claim to know and believe. It is this authenticity that the Spirit builds upon to draw others unto the Son.

Create an atmosphere of vulnerability.

People are more likely to be affected by relational ministry when church leaders foster an atmosphere of openness and vulnerability. Vulnerable self-disclosure communicates, "We all need God, and we all need one another." This encourages people to humbly acknowledge their own needs and allow God to meet those needs directly and through others.

We must resist the common misconception that people in ministry are to be self-reliant and guarded, carefully concealing imperfections and needs. Church leaders who hold to this false notion contend that the flock will not follow a shepherd who struggles, fails, and hurts as

they do. In reality, people are inspired when they see God’s strength made perfect in the weakness of their leaders (2 Corinthians 12:9). Honest, humble sharing of our struggles and needs as leaders is powerfully effective and refreshing. One layman commented, “When my pastor shared that he was struggling to be more patient when things get out of control, it not only helped me see my need for help in that area, but it raised my respect for him.” Genuine accountability and encouragement can flourish in an environment where leaders are appropriately open about their needs.

The primary model for vulnerability in leadership comes from Christ Himself. God became vulnerable, approachable, and knowable as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the Great Shepherd, modeled vulnerability by humbling Himself and leaving heaven.

He then not only became a man, but a servant. Though sinless, he experienced the pain of rejection, loss, disappointment, and loneliness so he could empathize with our struggles.

People are more likely to be affected by relational ministry when church leaders foster an atmosphere of openness and vulnerability.

What is God presently at work to change in your life? Do you have a ready answer for that question? If you and your message are to be relevant to the needs of people, vulnerable self-disclosure of your needs is vital. What better way to open yourselves to others than to verbalize how God is at work in your life to bring you into conformity with His likeness?

Take a moment to experience this principle of relevant ministry. Take advantage of this opportunity to become vulnerable with your own imperfections.

An Experience with God’s Word

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9).

Spend a few minutes in quiet prayer before the Lord. Ask God to speak to you, assuring Him of your willingness to hear His words and yield to His will. Ask Him to show you how He might want to change you so that you might more effectively meet the needs of other people, including your family, friends, church members, and those who do not know Christ. Ask Him to reveal how He might want you to change your approach to ministry.

Review this list of ten needs as you pray. Does God want you to become . . .

- more accepting?
- more affectionate?
- more appreciative?
- more approving?
- more attentive?

(continued on next page)

more comforting?
more encouraging?
more respectful?
more committed to the security of others?
more supportive?

I might need to become more . . .

An Experience with God's People

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14).

Now pray with a partner or small group. Ask God to make these changes in you, knowing that it is His will. Thank Him in advance for doing what you have asked. Your prayer might sound like the following:

Heavenly Father, do in my heart and life whatever You need to do. Help me to accept and address the changes that need to be made. Thank You for bearing my prayer and accomplishing Your will in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Our world needs relevant, vibrant bodies of believers who will serve as shelters in the storm, places of refuge from the pressures of life, sanctuaries of hope where hurts can be healed and spiritual needs can be met. Christ is the answer—we sincerely believe it. But this needy world has every reason to question the relevance of the answer if our lives and ministries fail to convey the necessity of both a relationship with Him and relationships with other people. Let us hold fast to this relational foundation and commit to experiencing renewed relevance as we live out God's command to love Him and one another.

For Further Study

NEEDING BOTH GOD AND OTHERS

“He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:37, 38).

Relational relevance is lost when we misunderstand man’s need by claiming he only needs God. When we deny our need for meaningful relationships with one another, we begin to exalt self-reliance as if it were maturity. When we proclaim the incomplete message that “You need God” rather than the good news that “We need God and one another,” the church becomes irrelevant in a world that is already plagued by disconnectedness and isolation.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He expressed His need for Peter, James, and John to keep watch with Him. If we had been present, we might have argued, “Jesus, do you not know that you already have God? You do not need anyone else!” Of course, Jesus did know that He had His Father’s presence and provision, but in His humanity, He also expressed His need for others. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed both His Father and others, why should we think that we do not need both?

Consider these passages of Scripture:

- In Luke 2:52, Jesus grew in favor with_____.
- In Philippians 4:19, the Apostle Paul says that “God will supply all your needs,” and in verse 18, he acknowledges that God met some of His needs through _____.
- In 2 Corinthians 1:3, Paul exalts the God of all comfort, but in verse 4 he reminds us that we are often comforted so that we can _____.
- In 1 Corinthians 12:21, Paul says that every believer is a member of Christ’s Body and that we need each other. It would be absurd to say, “I do not _____.”
- In Revelation 3:16, the Apostle John rebukes the Church of Laodicea because they have become “lukewarm” (irrelevant), and in verse 17, specifically confronts the exalted self-reliance of those who declare, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and _____.”

Why Did God Create Us With Needs?

The Father could have created us so that we did not need food to eat, air to breathe, or comfort when we are hurt. But He chose to do otherwise. Let us consider the manifold wisdom of God making us as He did.

Needs remind us of our dependency and call us to humility.

Jesus revealed His total dependence on the Father when He said, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (John 5:19). Jesus also taught us how dependent we are on Him when He said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Since God created us to be needy, humility is prompted within us. In this state of humility, we may receive His abundant grace (James 4:6). Furthermore, our journey toward being conformed to His image must include the pursuit of humility, because Jesus Himself was humble (Matthew 11:29).

Needs remind us of the Father’s loving care and call us to exercise faith.

Our needs also stimulate our faith. If we did not have needs, there would be no opportunity for us to exercise faith. Scripture tells us that we were created for God’s pleasure (Revelation 4:11), but without faith, God cannot be pleased (Hebrews 11:6). It thus becomes clear that the interaction between our neediness and our faith is an essential component in fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.

If and when we admit that we have needs, we will be faced with a critical decision: Will we selfishly “take” in order to have our needs met, or will we exercise faith that we will receive from the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17)? If we are fearful of not receiving, we will be tempted to selfishly take from God and others. In attempting to take eternal life and a relationship with God, man exalts religious ritual and good works, thus missing the simplicity of receiving these gifts through childlike faith (Titus 3:5).

When man was created, everything he needed to survive—air, food, water—already existed. Before man needed redemption, the Savior was available in the Creator’s eternal plan. Jehovah Jireh, God the provider, can be trusted with our needs. He alone is worthy of our faith.

Needs remind us of our worth to the Father and call us to gratitude.

As we exercise faith at the point of our need, we experience the caring involvement of the One who knows everything about us yet still loves us. It was God who declared us worthy of the gift of His Son, even while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8); but even in the face of God’s overwhelming unmerited favor, some of us are self-condemning, rejecting the available righteousness of Christ. We would do well to remember that, because of His lavish grace, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Jesus reassures us of our worth in His discourse on the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-34). Just as God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, He is ever

attentive to our needs. Reflecting upon the certainty of God’s provision moves us to respond with sacrifices of praise to Him (Hebrews 13:15).

Reflect on these three dimensions of the Spirit’s deepened work – humility, faith, and gratitude. Could you benefit from a deepened expression . . .

- of humility in your walk with Him?
- of faith in His provision?
- of gratitude toward Him?

Pause now and ask the Lord to bring about any needed changes in you.

HOW TO GIVE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

In this section of further study, we are going to focus on meeting other people’s needs within our congregations. We will be exploring ways in which we can experience these verses:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3, 4).

“Share with God’s people who are in need” (Romans 12:13).

“If anyone . . . sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him” (1 John 3:17)?

Listed below are the ten biblical relational needs we examined earlier. Often, we might approach such a list by asking, “Which of these needs are most important to me, and how are they being met?”— a legitimate question (and one which you can explore by using the Relational Needs Questionnaire in the Appendix). But understanding these needs also presents us with the opportunity to be blessed (and be a blessing) by giving to meet the needs of others (Acts 20:35).

Jesus had needs which He vulnerably expressed to others: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26:38). But it is significant that He also said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (20:28). How well do we express this attitude of Christ?

Listed below are some practical ways we can give to others to meet each relational need. After reading each group of statements, use the scale below to assign the score that you think best reflects your church or ministry team’s consistency in giving to meet each need.

Indicate a score for each sentence, then add up the total score for each relational need and write it on the appropriate line.

Not at All	Very Little	Neutral	Some	A Lot
-2	-1	0	+1	+2

Acceptance

- _____ We go out of our way to welcome people who may not look, believe, or act like we do.
- _____ When we are with a group of people, we try to spot anyone who may feel uneasy or alone and initiate conversation in order to make him or her feel welcome.
- _____ We look beyond people's faults and minister to their needs.
- _____ We accept people, not just when they are "up," but also when they are "down."
- _____ When someone "blows it," "messes up," or offends us, we are quick to forgive.

Total score for Acceptance _____

Affection

- _____ We generously offer appropriate physical gestures of love and tenderness.
- _____ We often tell people, "I love you" or "I care for you."
- _____ We welcome people into our church by initiating warm greetings and demonstrating caring concern.
- _____ We are vulnerable in sharing our heart with others, expressing at times that they are "very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8).
- _____ We strive to be mindful of how others may or may not wish to receive affection.

Total score for Affection _____

Appreciation

- _____ We commend others for doing well or putting forth effort.
- _____ We write notes thanking others for what they do for us.
- _____ We notice special times in people's lives when they should be commended (ball games, recitals, big projects completed, graduations, and other similar occasions).
- _____ We focus on what people do that is right more than on what they do that is wrong.
- _____ We have learned how others prefer to receive appreciation: public vs. private, written vs. verbal, and so on.

Total score for Appreciation _____

Approval

- _____ We are able to view people through God’s eyes—to separate who they *are* (valuable, important, and significant) from what they *do* (sometimes good, sometimes bad).
- _____ We look beyond a person’s activity and performance and caringly affirm their character, heart, and spiritual maturity.
- _____ We are quick to commend people when they have displayed Christlike character and attitudes.
- _____ We are particularly careful to affirm those for whom we have particular responsibility (children, employees, co-laborers) when they have done well, and give specific focus to the character qualities (diligence, sensitivity, honesty) that contributed to them doing well.
- _____ We go out of our way to tell others how blessed we are to be in relationship with them.

Total score for Approval _____

Attention

- _____ We spend time with individuals, finding out about their struggles, joys, and dreams.
- _____ We strive to initiate care for one another, letting others know that we have been thinking of them.
- _____ We try to enter into other people’s emotional world by seeking to discern their emotional state, striving to gain understanding, and empathizing with them.
- _____ We demonstrate good listening skills by giving good eye contact, offering appropriate feedback, and seeking to hear fully before we respond.
- _____ We spend time with people, doing what *they* enjoy doing.

Total score for Attention _____

Comfort

- _____ We notice when people are hurting, anxious, frustrated, or emotionally “down.”
- _____ We have moved beyond spiritual platitudes and developed an appropriate “comforting vocabulary” in order to communicate our care and concern for hurting people.
- _____ We have learned how to sense God’s compassion for others and enter into their emotional pain.
- _____ We know how to respond to hurting people with a gentle touch and affirming words.

_____ When people are hurting, we first express feelings of sadness and hurt for them rather than giving them advice or exhortation.

Total score for Comfort _____

Encouragement

_____ We try to anticipate times and situations in which people may be discouraged so that we can encourage them.

_____ We often go out of our way to call, write, or visit someone who is discouraged, disappointed, or struggling.

_____ We encourage others towards positive vision and realistic goals and then help support them in their journey.

_____ We faithfully pray for people, both privately and with them.

_____ We encourage others by expressing sincere confidence and belief in God's work in and through them.

Total score for Encouragement _____

Respect

_____ Before making a decision, we solicit input from those whose lives will be impacted by the decision.

_____ We have a high regard for others people's ideas, opinions, and perspectives, even though they may differ from our own.

_____ We initiate times of listening to the hearts and needs of those we are seeking to serve.

_____ We treat everyone with dignity and courtesy regardless of their race, lifestyle, or socio-economic status.

_____ We are careful to be on time to appointments and meetings.

Total score for Respect _____

Security

_____ Those whom we are closest to never have to wonder about where our relationship stands. We are open and transparent in sharing our heart, care, and concern.

_____ We pro-actively attempt to maintain health in all our relationships. If a relationship is strained, we attempt reconciliation quickly.

_____ We are even-tempered and not prone to moodiness or outbursts of anger; we are consistent in the way we relate to people.

_____ We make decisions based on the well-being of those we love and care for, not just our own well-being.

- _____ We are self-controlled. Others around us do not fear outbursts of temper or impulsive decisions from us.
- _____ We can be counted upon to think and speak the best of others.

Total score for Security _____

Support

- _____ We are known for our availability and our desire to help people in times of need.
- _____ We often attend weddings, funerals, recitals, sports activities, and other events, just to show our love for someone.
- _____ We often use personal resources to help support others.
- _____ We willingly defer our plans, agenda, and schedule in order to be available for others.
- _____ We do not stand at a distance and give advice, but willingly help others bear their burdens.

Total score for Support _____

For Reflection and Discussion:

In which areas were your ministry's point totals highest?

Which were lowest?

Others might be blessed as we work on being more sensitive to meeting needs such as:

What practical steps could your church or ministry take to become more sensitive to people's needs?
