

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Connecting with God by loving others.*

**SERIES:** *Pathways*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Matthew 22:34-40; Matthew 25:31-46*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to Bible Gateway; Gary Thomas*

Well good morning it is so good to worship with all of you in this room and also those joining us online.

We started the New Year, with a series called Pathways (**SERMON SERIES GRAPHIC**). We've taken a 3 week break from the series, but this morning we come back to the Pathways. So far we've studied 6 of the pathways. And they are listed on the screen behind me.

**Nature**

**Senses**

**Rituals/Traditions**

**Solitude/Simplicity**

**Confronting Injustice**

**Soaking in God's love/goodness**

There are three more that we want to explore over the next three weeks.

The idea behind the series, starts with this recognition that we are all different, in this room. Different likes and dislikes, different personalities, different gifts and interests and different life experiences. And what that means, is that the way in which we connect with God and grow in fuller maturity in Christ will look different for

all of us. There are different pathways to connecting with God. Though, as many of you have said, there are elements of each of these that resonate with you on some level, even if it's not a primary pathway.

So today, we pick up with pathway #7.

### **I. The Caregivers pathway to maturity.**

Simply put, the caregiver pathway means **connecting with God by caring for others.**

*There is a joke I remember reading about a man, who finally went to the doctor after weeks of symptoms. The doctor examined him carefully, then stepped out of the room to talk to the man's wife.*

*"Ma'am I'm not sure how to tell you this, but your husband is suffering from a very rare form of anemia. Without treatment, he won't survive more than few weeks. The good news is, he can be treated with proper care.*

*"Here's what you're gonna need to do. You will need to get up early every morning and fix your husband a hot breakfast – pancakes, bacon and eggs. He'll need a big home-cooked lunch every day and then an old fashioned meat-and-potatoes dinner every evening. It would be especially helpful if you could bake frequently – cakes, pies, homemade bread...One more thing. His immune system is weak, so it's important that your home be kept absolutely spotless at all times. Do you have any questions?"*

*The wife had none.*

*"Do you want to break the news to him or shall I?" asked the Doctor.*

*"I will," the wife replied.*

*She walked into the examination room. The husband, sensing the seriousness of his illness, asked her, "It's bad, isn't it?"*

*She nodded, tears welling up in her eyes. "Tell me, what is it?" he asked her.*

*With a sob, the wife blurted out, "The doctor says you're not gonna make it!"*

Some people connect best with God by caring for others. That when I'm helping someone else, a family, a child, an elderly parent, a co-worker, a stranger...in those moments I feel and sense God's presence with me.

The Caregiver reminds us that **to love God means to love other people**. To wish for and seek for, strive for the good of those around us.

Let's begin by taking a look at

### **A. The caregiver pathway in Scripture**

I want to take a look at a passage, you're probably familiar with, because we reference it often. We reference it so often because it is the central Scripture of the Old Testament and is quoted by Jesus on multiple occasions. But I want to give a little bit more of an explanation about this passage this time. Turn with me in your Bible to **Matthew 22:34-40**.

So, just some background as we go to this passage. Jesus, is a Jewish rabbi or teacher. And he has been moving around his local community teaching and gathering a following. And at the same time, he's a different kind of rabbi and is always challenging many of the practices of the religious establishment. The other Jewish rabbi's do not care for Jesus and his teachings.

And so the religious leaders are looking for a way to trap Jesus, catch him messing up. They're always asking him these questions to try and stump him. And so on this occasion the Jewish leaders come with a theology question. And it's a basic theology

question that all good Jews should know the answer to. They grow up learning this stuff. If Jesus, messes this up...he's done.

**34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.**

**35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**

Jesus has now been “put on the spot.” There is a correct answer for all Jews, to that question that comes right out of Jewish Law in the OT. Central passage of Scripture.

**37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[c] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.**

Did Jesus give the correct answer? Yes. Jesus gives the correct Jewish answer. All good Jews every day quote this passage of Scripture, known as the “Shema” found in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**...it says, “ **4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.[a] 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

When the Pharisees ask Jesus, “what is the greatest commandment” they are asking him to quote the Shema. And Jesus does...but...but...as many of you know, Jesus then does something most Jews don't. He adds to the greatest command. Watch...

**37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[c] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment...**

**39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[d] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

Any good Jew, who was sitting listening to this conversation immediately knew, Jesus had just added something to their sacred “greatest command”.

What does Jesus add? Love God...and Love others as yourself. Instead of a love-God Shema, it is a love-God-and-others Shema. We may not be able to fully grasp the magnitude of what Jesus is doing.

**“We cannot overemphasize the importance of the Shema for Jewish spiritual formation. So, when Jesus amended the Shema, we need to take note...It takes real “chutzpah” to add to the sacred Shema...Making the love of others part of his own version of the Shema shows that Jesus sees love of others (caregivers pathway) as central to spiritual formation.”** (McKnight 9)

For Jesus, to love God IS to love others and to love others is to love God.

I'll give you another example of this...turn to Matthew 25. Jesus is teaching again and he says the following...

**<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...<sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.**

**<sup>34</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance...<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’**

**<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**

**40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’**

Are you following what Jesus is saying? Caring for others is like caring for God.

**41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed...<sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’**

**44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’**

**45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’**

To care for the needs of others, is to care for God. This is why caring for others can play a crucial role in connecting your life to God’s. This is the heart behind the caregivers pathway.

Gary Thomas tells this incredible story, about a couple Gail Kelley and her husband who adopted a severely brain-damaged baby. His name was **Manuel**, which was short for **Emmanuel**. Manuel came into this world as the result of an incestuous relationship and his brain was further damaged in utero by a poorly prescribed drug. One night in particular, Gail remembers being up late, middle of the night, with Manuel as he suffered repeated seizures. Each seizure, she knew, was destroying more of his brain cells, and Gail’s tear’s wet Manuel’s black hair as she held him in her arms.

Every few mins, exaggerated spastic movements took control over Manuel's little body. At first, his legs were stiff and rigid and then they began to shake. Manuel's head flinched and jerked out of control. At times, Manuel would choke, or saliva would drip from the corner of his mouth. Then as the seizure came to an end, Manuel's tongue would gently quiver.

Exhausted, frightened and depleted, Gail began crying uncontrollably. She was afraid that Manuel would soon die in her arms, so she pleaded with God, *"I haven't had enough time with him. Please, God don't take him from me now."*

And Gail, says it was almost audible, she heard what she believed to be God's response. "Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me. Whatever you do for this little child, you do for me. Hold him. Care for him. God is with you. Emmanuel. God is with you."

Gail goes on to say, that with what felt like electricity pouring through her body, she slowly lifted her head and opened her eyes. *"I fully expected to have the child Jesus in my arms instead of Manuel. But as I held him and cared for him, kissed him, somehow I knew God was with me."* Finally, the seizures ended and Gail and Manuel were both fast asleep.

Gail and her husband are caring for a child that many would say has no right to live. Manuel will never walk or talk and there is little indication that he has awareness of the world around him. But Gail and her husband know, that caring for this little boy has given them a deeper sense of God's presence in their lives than just about any other experience.

**For caregivers, serving and caring for others isn't a chore it's an act of worship...**it's a mode of connecting their lives to God's. "Whatever you do for the least, you do for me..."

So let me highlight three...

## **B. Key aspects of the caregiver pathway**

### **1. When caregivers look at others, they see God's image.**

The idea of God's image comes from the very first chapter in your Bible.

**Genesis 1 - 26** Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..."

God has marked every person with his image. Every human you see is in some way, a reflection of God. **(COLLAGE of human diversity)** This is why Jesus says in Matthew 25 whatever you do for other people you do for me.

Jesus was an expert at seeing inherent value in other people...you read the Gospels and Jesus just notices everyone with eyes of compassion...

**He saw her...**

**He saw the crowds...**

**He noticed them...**

You know, I think it is so easy for us to begin categorizing people in our world. At times judging and looking down on other people for all kinds of reasons. And thinking, they don't deserve my help. But caregivers, like Jesus just have this knack for seeing the image of God in everyone. When many are becoming judgmental caregivers see someone I can help. I can help this person. I can help this person.

Mother Theresa is kind of like the epitome of the caregiver mindset. Many of Mother Theresa's admirers would ask her, "How can you keep serving the poor, the sick, and the dying with such vigor? What's the secret? How do you do it?"



Mother's answer was surprising and profound. "Whenever I meet someone in need," she said, **"it's really Jesus in his most distressing disguise."**

Jesus in the child abandoned by the road.

Jesus in the beggar hoping for a meal.

Jesus in the leper whose limbs have turned to dust.

**"It's him I help—him alone."**

When pushed further, she referenced [Matthew 25](#) where Jesus says, "whatever you do for the least of these...you do for me."

Those with caregiver pathway have a knack for seeing the image of God in everyone they meet.

I guess one of the ways to begin evaluating your maturity in Christ is to think about **"how do you see other people?"**

Second,

## **2. Caregiving often means meeting physical needs.**

This is really important to understand. I think sometimes without realizing it, churches can draw this distinction between spiritual needs and physical needs and overemphasize the spiritual at the expense of the physical.

A few weeks ago, I made reference to the parable Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man is beat up, robbed and left for dead. The religious folks pass by. They have places to go and people to see, agenda's to keep. Perhaps they are on their way to the temple or to visit family and friends. The situation is an inconvenience and they can find ways to justify not caring for his man. Perhaps they even said a nice prayer while they walked by.

But it's the Good Samaritan, who is held up as the example of a true neighbor. And it's not because he prayed for the beat up Jew. Everything in the story related to his neighborliness is about caring for physical needs.

**Luke 10 - <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii<sup>[e]</sup> and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'**

One of the key aspects that the caregivers pathway reminds us, is that while spiritual needs are crucial, physical needs are vital as well.

Helping out at food pantry or clothing distribution location.

So, moms and dads out there...changing diapers, make meals...that's caregiving and an opportunity to connect with God.

Folding clothes and mowing lawns.

Visiting someone in prison or the hospital.

Calling someone who is lonely or recently had a hospital stay.

Babysitting for a couple to get away on a date.

If someone is hungry feed them. If thirsty give a drink. If naked give clothes. If in prison go and visit.

**James 2 - <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?**

**1 John 3:17 - If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"**

So many different ways you can care for the physical needs of others, but I just want to take a moment and mention one opportunity we'd like you to consider in caregiving for people right here in this church. **(MEAL GRAPHIC)** Occasionally, we have people within our congregation going to the hospital for all different kinds of things. Surgeries, treatments etc. And often when this happens, meals can become a burdensome task. And we do have a small meal ministry that occasionally is able to help out with some of these needs. But we were thinking we could do better. And so we've brainstorming ideas for ways to do this. And here's one idea we'd like to try...

Over the next 2-3 weeks if you would make a meal for your family that is conducive to being frozen...and double the recipe. Make extra. Buy a disposable container of some sort. Place the extra in the disposable container and drop it off here at the church. We have some freezer space where we will keep these meals. When someone in our congregation needs meals, we'll have some on hand and easily accessible to give out, as a way of caring for the physical needs of our church family for the pastors or others to deliver.

And then third key concept is...

### **3. Caregiving often requires sacrifice.**

So, often I think we want a spiritual maturity that is comfortable and convenient. Caregivers understand that sacrifice is often involved in the journey of faith and particularly in caring for others.

Jesus told his followers, **John 15 - <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**

Mother Theresa used to say, **"Real love is always painful and hurts: then it is real and pure."**

I love this story that author Ann Lamott tells of an 8 year old boy who had a younger sister diagnosed with leukemia. He was told that without a blood transfusion she would likely die. His parents asked if they could test his blood to see if it was compatible with hers. He said sure. They tested, and it was a match. Then they asked if he would give his sister a pint of his own blood. That it could be her only chance of living. He said he would have to think about it overnight.

The next day he told his parents he was willing to donate the blood. They took him to the hospital. He was put on a gurney beside his six-year old sister. Both were hooked up to IV's. A nurse took a pint of blood from the boy, which was given to his sister. The boy lay in silence as the blood that would save his sister dripped from the IV, until the doctor came over to see how he was doing. Then the little boy opened his eyes and asked the doctor, "How soon until I start to die?"

Of course, we know that taking a pint of his blood was not going to kill this little 8 year old boy. What's so amazing about this story is that, in childlike innocence, the boy didn't know that. He had made his decision about saving his sister, thinking it would cost him his own life. But he was willing to make that sacrifice. I think he had the caregivers heart. He knew that in order to truly help someone else it was going to cost him something...the good Samaritan knew this...this little 8 year old boy knew this. **Caregivers understand the heart of sacrifice necessary to serve and care for other people.**

Care for others will take some of your time. Maybe some of your money. Some of your talent/ability. It may require you giving up bits and pieces of your dreams for life.

I've seen this sacrifice mentality within many people in our church. I often think of those who serve in our moving ministry or work projects ministry or food pantry and clothes closet or our children and student ministries. This requires giving up

personal time and often resources. But I think these volunteers realize that that's what it costs to be a caregiver.

The greatest example of caregiving is the cross Jesus. He models this for us. Knowing we could not save our selves from sin, he was willing to give some of his blood, not just a pint, in fact but all of it...to sacrifice his own life on our behalf. That's the caregivers pathway.

Of course, as with all of the pathways, there is an element within the caregiver that is essential for all of us. Loving others is not optional, it is at the core of our faith. That said, we are all made differently.

Paul says in **Romans 12:6-8** - **"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."**

The degree to which the caregiver pathway shows up in our lives and connects us to God will look different and that's ok.

**"It is not for us to judge the validity of someone else's worship."** (Thomas 157).

Some of us are meal-makers and for some us, you don't want the meal I would make. Some Christians will have a particular gift for caregiving. And will connect to God best through these acts of service and compassion.

Let me just mention...

### **C. One caution for the caregiver.**

**"Work-a-holism"**

Sometimes caregivers can be so sold out to helping others, they never have time to **rest or to care for those closest to them.**

Obviously rest is crucial to our spiritual formation. When God created the world, he designated one day of seven to be a day of rest. When caregiving turns into workaholism and you no longer take time to practice sabbath rest then you've gone too far.

And then...we need to make sure we aren't neglecting those closest to us.

Paul wrote to young Timothy in [1 Timothy 5:8](#) - **Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

It's also interesting to note that Jesus when he came as a human, recognized that his time was limited. And so while Jesus loved everyone, he gave a greater percentage of his time and focus to his 12 disciples.

Caregivers, you are not unlimited and your time is not unlimited. It's important that you set boundaries and make sure that you give the best of your time to your closest group.

Ok, so this week the invitation is to practice caregiving.

#### **D. Invitation to caregiving**

Caring compassionately for the needs of others...

Once again, I have created a take-home flyer for you. On the inside cover, is a self-evaluation form related to caregiving. And will help you to compare this pathway with the other pathways we've been studying.

And then on the second side, I have my suggestions for practical ways you can practice caregiving this week.

People matter to God. Caregivers understand that. And find caring, helping out to be one of the primary ways that they connect with God.