

HELP PEOPLE YOU MEET ALONG THE WAY

Fourth in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Lessons for Life* from Luke 4:38-44
“*He arose and left the synagogue, and entered Simon’s home. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever; and they made request of Him on her behalf.*” Luke 4:38

Barb and I recently visited our son and daughter-in-law in Washington DC to celebrate the first birthday of our grandson, Jonathan. When we arrived at their home they answered the door looking a bit shell-shocked. I asked, “Are you OK?” Chris told us they had just gotten home from the hospital emergency room. In the middle of the afternoon Jonathan had suffered a severe allergic reaction to what was probably peanut butter. Laura noticed that huge red welts had formed all over his body. The next stage would be trouble breathing, so she packed him in the car and took off for the hospital, calling 911 on the way. The 911 operator told her to pull over and an ambulance would meet her. A minute or two later a fire truck pulled up behind her car, and even though he’d been crying, Jonathan got quite excited at the sight of the fire truck. The ambulance arrived shortly after that and the EMS personnel gave him a shot of Benadryl.

Jonathan is fine. He was asleep when we arrived and by morning he was back to normal. However—and here’s the point of my story--, as Laura was climbing into the ambulance with Jonathan, one of the firemen approached her. Glancing at the license plate holder on her car, he asked, “Would you like me to drive your car to the hospital for you?” She said, “Oh, that would be great! Thank you.” He said, “I don’t normally do this for people, but for a fellow Steelers fan I’m glad to help!” We’re everywhere!

Today we’re going to look at the fourth *Lesson for Life* that we draw from the teaching and example of Jesus. This one is, *help people you meet along the way*. Please turn with me to Luke 4:38-44. Jesus was in Capernaum, a sizable center of the fishing industry on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. We saw two weeks ago how Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and how he taught the people and confronted a demon-possessed man in the congregation. He cast the demon out and set the man free.

Now verse 38 tells us that after the morning service Simon (later known as Peter) invited Jesus to come to his home to relax and have lunch. Simon’s house was located near the harbor, about two or three blocks from the synagogue. It was a rather large house with a big inner room. Jesus made this house his headquarters during the weeks he lived in Capernaum, and for many years after, a Christian church met there on Sundays. We know that this house was the home of Simon because archeologists have found fish hooks and Christian symbols in the inner room. Today preservationists have erected a large shelter over the house to protect the foundations from the elements.

Verse 38 tells us that when Jesus and Simon arrived something was wrong. “*Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever.*” Simon and his wife probably knew when they left for the synagogue that her mother was not feeling well. But presumably she had stayed home, insisting she’d prepare the meal. So when they walked into the house and there was no mother-in-law who came bustling out to greet them, wiping her hands on her apron; and when there was no smell of food coming from the

kitchen, they knew they had a problem—no mother-in-law, no lunch! Simon and his wife didn't tell Jesus about all this right away—you don't do that when you have a guest. Instead, they slipped into the bedroom to see what had happened, and they found her lying, very ill indeed, on her bed. She'd come down with the flu or some other infection, and it had become serious. Her temperature was spiking. Plainly, they were worried. They'd heard that Jesus had healed people in other towns in Galilee, so verse 38 says, "*They made request of Him on her behalf.*" Jesus followed them into the room where the woman was lying. He probably asked about her symptoms, and then verse 39 says, "*Standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately arose and waited on them.*" So, lunch was saved. Jesus was fed. And they spent a delightful afternoon together!

From this, then, we may draw the lesson: *Help people you meet along the way.* That's what Jesus did. We ought to do the same thing. The world is a hard place, and we make it better when we help each other. I can think of a lot of churches where this would be the sum of what you'd get in the morning sermon—along with a couple of compelling illustrations, of course. But there is so much more to draw from this passage. I'd like for us to consider four questions. **1. What kinds of help should we give to others? 2. Why should helping others be a priority? 3. Who is responsible to help people? And, 4. How should we help those we meet along the way?**

1. What kinds of help should we give to others? In this passage we observe Jesus giving three kinds of help. The first is help for the body. We give physical help. That's the obvious one based on what we've seen already in verse 38. Peter's mother-in-law was ill. She could do nothing for herself or for anyone else. She was miserable. She might even be dying. So, Jesus healed her. When I was seriously ill a few years ago it felt so good when the EMS personnel loaded me onto a stretcher and gave me oxygen to breathe. I was grateful for their care. But helping the body is more than caring for the sick. It's meeting any physical need: providing someone with a meal, clothing the body, providing shelter. It's offering someone a job, giving a ride, repairing a widow's roof or arranging for a car repair. It's helping the moron who stands before you get his computer running when it's not working right. Parents should teach their kids to seek opportunities to help others without expecting to get paid. People with physical needs are everywhere.

The second way we see Jesus helping others is by meeting their spiritual needs. Verse 41 describes what Jesus was doing. "*Demons also were coming out of many.*" Demon possession is perhaps the severest kind of spiritual need. Those people are truly enslaved by spiritual powers, and often through their own behavior. All around us are people who are slaves to sin. We help them by telling how Jesus died on the cross to save sinners, and that through repentance and placing faith in him a person can be forgiven and granted eternal life. Some people are discouraged. We encourage them—sometimes with an uplifting word, sometimes by pointing them to the promises of God in the Bible. You can help people spiritually through our church ministries, by coaching a SOAR team or supporting our youth ministry, or by bringing your family to worship.

And then, third, Jesus helped people by addressing the needs of their minds. Verse 44 says Jesus “*kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*” He taught them. If people don’t know the truth of God, his commandments, or his principles for living, they will make one mistake after another. We set people free through education. People must know how to read so they can read the Bible. That’s where schools come into this. Parents ought to be greatly involved in their kids’ education. That’s why we have Sunday school. Parents, make sure your kids come to Sunday school. Train them to memorize Scripture. Support those who teach your kids each week here at church. And you yourselves, teach them at home through family devotions.

2. Why should helping others be a priority? Look again at Jesus. He gives us three reasons. The first reason to help others is out of compassion. Verse 39 says, “*Standing over her, [Jesus] rebuked the fever, and it left her.*” Certainly, Jesus was not unmoved when he saw Simon’s mother-in-law feeling so poorly. This comes out a little more clearly in the parallel accounts. Matthew says Jesus touched her hand. Mark says Jesus took her hand and helped her to get up. There is tenderness in Jesus’ act. This shows us that God does not delight in our suffering. And he is not unmoved by our sorrows. One of the reasons Jesus came into this world was because God cares about us. So if you are going through hard times right now, be assured that Jesus has compassion for you. We ought to be like Jesus. When you see other people suffering, do for them what God has done for you. As an act of grace, reach out and touch them in Jesus’ name.

Then second, we should help others because we may be the ones who receive the benefit. I’m not talking here about callous self interest. Verse 39 says that after Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law, “*she immediately arose and waited on them.*” Barb and I have a friend in Pittsburgh who has spent her life helping others in any way she could. Now she’s grown old and needs help herself, but she has a whole line of people waiting to do something for her. By contrast, I think of another person who always felt imposed upon when someone needed help. Now in his old age, he is alone and there is no one he can turn to. He’s become bitter and cynical. It’s not necessarily the same person you help who ends up helping you, but God has a way of bringing these things back around.

Third, we should help others to enable them to serve God. Once again, Jesus raised up Simon’s mother-in-law, and when she was well, she served him. God has honored for her help to Christ. The account of her service has been read by millions of people over the last two thousand years. When you and I assist other Christians we set them free to participate in ministry through the church, and God receives the glory from what they do. That’s the church in action. Help one and that person helps others.

3. Who is responsible to help people? First, do you notice in this passage one group that is missing when it comes to the work of helping people? It’s government. Today people routinely expect the government to help them with their daily needs. That wasn’t the case in America until 1936. In the election campaign that year President Roosevelt spent millions of dollars in government help and programs to make as many people as he could dependant on him. He knew they’d vote for him so they could keep getting the benefits they’d grown used to. Before 1936 people received help from the

church or charities or from private individuals. When the government took over the role of caregiver, churches withdrew from the task. God never intended government to be people's primary helper. Today when you listen to the politicians promising to help you, beware. They want something, and they don't have your best interests at heart.

So, who should do the helping? This passage shows us that family and friends help those in need. In verse 38, Simon and his wife came to Jesus and appealed to him to help the wife's mother. Look at verse 40. "*While the sun was setting, all who had any sick with various diseases brought them to Him.*" In other words, the people who knew of the needs took the initiative to bring their loved ones to the one who could help. If we're going to help each other, it means we need to know each other. This vision of helping others should not have any limits. In verse 43 Jesus says, "*I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also.*" Jesus said this because the people of Capernaum selfishly tried to keep him in their town so he could minister to them alone. But there were many who needed help, and Jesus intended his ministry to cover the whole country and ultimately the whole world. That teaches us another thing about who should help. You and I are responsible as much as possible to help ourselves. The people of Capernaum needed to organize their community and the church so that they met their own and one another's needs, and didn't become selfishly dependent on one man—Jesus—to become their nanny. We should not wait for somebody else to do things for us. As much as you can, take care of yourself. Then help others. And when you need help, others will be there for you.

4. How should we help those we meet along the way? To a certain extent, this repeats what we've been saying, but let's go a little farther. First, we help by a "hands on" approach. Look at verse 40. People from all over town were bringing their sick friends and relatives to Jesus to be healed. "*And laying His hands on every one of them, He was healing them.*" Why did Jesus touch people? He could have simply given a command and people would just as certainly have been healed. He did it that way when a government official from Capernaum tracked Jesus down at Cana and asked Jesus to heal his son. Jesus told the man to go home, that his son was healed. (John 4:46ff) He could have done a similar thing that night in Capernaum. He could have healed them all at once. It would have taken him thirty seconds! But instead he received each one separately and laid his hands on them all. Jesus was getting personally involved. And you and I may learn from this that God wants to be personally involved with us. He is not a God who keeps his distance, who is aloof and uncaring. God got his hands dirty when he came into our world. He will minister to you just as intimately as Jesus did. I had an uncle who was emotionally cold as ice. He looked stern and rarely smiled. His children and his wife suffered because he emitted no sense of love or affection. My uncle was a doctor! Can you imagine his bedside manner? That's not the way of Jesus, and it's not the way we should be. When we help someone, we should do it with a personal touch, showing the other person that we care.

Second, we should help in a way that sets people free. Again, watch Jesus. In verses 40-41 Luke tells us, "*He was healing them. And demons were also coming out of many.*" There is a way of helping people that brings them under the helper's control. In

such cases the helper makes the person he's helped feel obligated to him. He makes that person feel like he owes his benefactor something. I know a woman in another city who helps people because she has a need to be needed. Jesus wasn't like that. He truly set people free when he cast the demons out. That's real love. Real love doesn't own. It doesn't control. Real love, and the help that flows from it, sets people free. If a person you help chooses to love you and express gratitude for what you've done, that's wonderful. Thanksgiving is not coerced. This is how God loves you. He doesn't help you because you deserve it or because you've been extra religious. He gives out of grace.

Third, we help people when we pray for them. Verse 42 says, "*When day came, he departed and went to a lonely place.*" Mark, in his parallel account (Mark 1:35) tells us Jesus got up before dawn and in that lonely place he was praying. What was he praying about? One thing, based on the context, was what he should do next. He decided he must go away to preach in other cities. But also based on the context, I think Jesus was praying also for the people he had healed the evening before. He knew their hearts. He knew what was going on in their lives. I think he went over the list and prayed for them, that their healing might be more than just physical. You and I do the same thing when we pray for people. I had the opportunity of praying with several people yesterday. Each one had a unique problem or opportunity. And I prayed for others I didn't talk to yesterday. People have helped me when they have prayed for me. You know, we Christians say so often, "I'll pray for you," that it's become kind of a joke among people in the world. They know we say it and don't follow through. Or we pray once but make it sound like we have prayed many times. We need to get honest so that we don't mock the important work of prayer. The best way to be honest is actually to pray! Make no mistake, there is power in prayer. If you pray for others, you'll see God do many things.

There is one last thing I want to show you from this passage. In verse 43 Jesus said, "*I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.*" Jesus said his purpose was to preach, to tell people about God. And that is ultimately the greatest way to help the people of this world. Verse 44 says, "*And He kept on.*" That's how the gospel came to you. It's been handed down from one person to the next to the next for hundreds of years. Finally it came to you. It may have come from your parents. Perhaps you heard it from a pastor or a Sunday school teacher. Maybe a friend told you. But do you see? The purpose of Christ becomes our purpose too. We are to help by telling others about him, and doing whatever is necessary so that they are able to hear. They may need different kinds of help. It may be healing. It may be some act that sets them free. It may be some physical kindness that lifts a person up. It may be through education. It may be help that comes through friendship or a ministry of the church. But it is our purpose. God has called us to it. And like Jesus, we must keep on with it as long as we live. Help the people you meet along the way.

Preached by Dr. Rick Perrin on February 10 2008 at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, 5637 Bush River Road, Columbia SC 29212 and Northwest YMCA on Kennerly Road. Tel. 803-772-1000
www.DiscoverCornerstone.com Copyright 2008