



Biblical Member Care

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2 Tim 3:16-17

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God (Member) may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”

For all of us working as caregivers, we are continually confronted with the need to contextualize our secular skillsets with a Biblical understanding of purpose. Often, even the best of Christian counseling training strays in the direction of reductionist thinking. Our health care systems are based on a knowledge of biochemistry, but other realities such as morals, ethics, values, spiritual life or God’s purpose for people, are pushed aside or left out completely.

A Biblical approach to care will consider first the purpose of our being here on earth. Who are we doing it for and why? Then, what kind of member care is specifically needed in order to fulfill who we are in God and what we are purposed to do in Christ’s name? With a Biblical understanding of our world, ourselves and our role in this world as stewards of the Creator, we may have a different set of priorities than someone who does not hold these values. For example, in a hostage situation or other complex humanitarian crisis, the secular world’s highest principle or overriding value is the “preservation of human life.” But Paul offers a sharp contrast to this value: “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”¹

Biblical member care is not about making everyone “feel” good.

Of course, we do hold a high value on human life. At the same time, we may decide like Paul to go into very dangerous humanitarian situations for the sake of the gospel. We may decide to stay and not evacuate. We may choose a different approach when accused in human courts and not flee nor defend (like in Nero’s days – or in Communist days in Russia or China – or in extremist Islamic days). We were created to consistently live out what we really believe in.² Do we really believe like Paul that to live is Christ and to die is gain?

Biblical member care is not about making everyone “feel” good. It is about helping people to be fruitful, strong, resilient, purposeful, loving and Christ-centered as they seek to fulfill His call upon their lives. That calling may be in extremely difficult circumstances! Good Biblical member care should enable them to serve healthily and fruitfully, no matter where they are—so they “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”³

¹ Philippians 1:21

² Prov. 23:7a (KJV)

³ 2 Tim 3:17

Who is a “member”?

Before we can begin to understand how “member care” should look Biblically, we need to define “member”. The WEA has defined “member care” as “the ongoing preparation, equipping and empowering of missionaries for effective and sustainable life, ministry and work”.⁴ Missionaries are defined in their local context, and may be local workers, ex-pats or others doing church planting, missions through business, community development or health care workers, etc. While I agree with that understanding, I would like to broaden the definition to say that a “member” is any man or woman of God, belonging to a Christian community and/or organization involved in a Biblical Christian mission encounter. In this day and age, a mission encounter is most likely of a multi-disciplinary, cross-cultural scope, whether it is local or international.

The Big Picture

Western science and technology have helped tremendously to advance our understanding of how material structures operate. We now have detailed knowledge of mechanics, engineering, bio-chemistry, agriculture, water and sanitation, medicine and pathology, and physics (both micro and macro). But all these advances can only tell us what happens on a cellular or macroscopic level. They do not explain life and what life is for. By analysis and

As member care providers. . . we enable them to fulfill their calling with the wholeness of being that God intends.

observation of the smallest components of a structure, they can shed more and more light on technical questions like what is wrong on that level and how to fix it. But questions like WHY we were created in the first place are not answered. These scientific advances do not explain the purpose of life, nor do they help us understand the spiritual,

ethical and moral issues of life. As member care providers, we need to have a solid Biblical understanding of the big picture. *Without that base in the forefront of our minds, we can easily fall into reductionist thinking that would help people in the short-term to “fix” their felt needs, but not necessarily enable them to fulfill their calling with the wholeness of being that God intends.*

The Biblical view is that people were created in the image of God (imago Dei), male and female, and that was good, actually very good.⁵ We were created body, soul and spirit, inseparable and that inseparable creation of the human being was good. We were first of all created to live and to be in a loving relationship with our Creator and out of that relationship, live in loving harmonious relationships with one another. Further, we were created for a purpose: to be fruitful and increase in numbers; fill the earth and subdue (develop) it and rule over creation. This was a stewardship mandate given to human beings operating under God’s love and normative values. This stewardship mandate concerns every area of life, nature and societal structures such as governance, economy, the arts, education and science. God in His wisdom and love is the absolute Creator and He mandated human

⁴ See <http://www.globalmembercare.com/index.php?id=34>, 2012

⁵ Gen. 1:31

beings to develop and rule the earth. It was through human beings, the image bearers of the Creator, Himself, that God continues to express Himself to and in creation. We are to represent the image of God to all of creation. God has not abdicated after speaking everything into being that has come into being. God continues to speak by empowering human beings in His love and wisdom to express God's love and wisdom, to bear His image, in and to this earth. He is the owner of creation and we are the stewards of His creation.⁶ We were created to love and worship the Creator and rule over and develop His creation as His stewards bearing His image.

He is on the throne and we are not! He is absolute and we are not. We are only the created creators, living and functioning in obedience to our ultimate Creator God. It is because of our disobedience and rebellion against the Creator of the universe that we fulfill Rom 1:18-32. Verse 23 of that chapter tells us "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised. Amen." If our allegiance is not to God we have no reason to keep His standards. Human culture always distorts truth, the truth of the Creator and the created. Therefore we are in need of constant renewal of our minds as well as having repentance as a life style.⁷ It is out of this disobedience that we as individuals, communities and nations usurp God's throne and our purpose in this world to be stewards. We usurp God's throne by placing ourselves on the throne. We stop being stewards of creation and start behaving as if we are the owners. In our Western civilization we have made man the absolute authority. By elevating ourselves to God's position we sin against the Creator and the very structure of creation. Now we not only deal with the problem of sin and disobedience in our actions, but we also have a sinful nature: a heart and mindset (attitude) that keeps motivating human beings to sin.⁸ (Both conditions Jesus came to resolve!)

We can respond to God's norms by obedience or by disobedience, with consequences either way. God ultimately is the Creator and Ruler of the universe and we are the created stewards to rule and develop the earth under His rule of love. There can only be one person on the throne and that is God. We as created beings were to *receive* this love, *stand* in this love (1 Cor 13) and let this love *transform* us in such a way that this love would *penetrate* in all aspects of our individual, communal and societal life. We were to hold to the same norms and values in both our private and public lives.

This Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven is implicitly spoken of all through the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament)⁹. There also is a prediction of a final Kingdom that was to come at the end of time. This Kingdom is of the greatest dimensions and will be supervised by a descendant of David.¹⁰ Jewish teaching said that all Jews who faithfully kept the law would

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we do alongside our ordinary
human life.*

⁶ Luke 20:9-20

⁷ Rom. 12:1-2

⁸ Rom: 7:24-25

⁹ For example: Psalm 103.

¹⁰ Isaiah 9:1-7; Zech 9:9-17; Zech. 10; Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-26.)

be admitted to this Kingdom freely. Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are explicitly mentioned in the synoptic teachings of Jesus and appear 90 times in separate accounts.

There is no separation of sacred and secular in this Kingdom. Everything is under God’s rule. Without dualism in this Kingdom, we see that disobedience/sin has affected human beings in totality—their spirit, soul, body, mind and volition which has, in turn, affected their community and society. Salvation, healing and reconciliation are not only for the human spirit, soul and body, but also for all societal structures created and stewarded by human beings. The apostle Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:23-24: *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”* The word of God does not give room for dichotomy: Our service to God is not something we do alongside our ordinary human life! It is fully one and integrated.¹¹

Dualism does exist, however, in the sense that one is either in this Kingdom or outside it. Disobedience goes completely against the very grain of creation itself. Sin (disobedience) is

Biblical member care enables people to stay “salty”

rebellion against both the structure of creation and the Creator of reality. Rom 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. This is the only result possible when we disobey the word of life. In our sinful state

we cannot stand in God’s presence. Sin places us under God’s wrath. But God does not want us to suffer His wrath and takes it upon Himself to reconcile us to Him. In this light we could say that sin is a unilateral declaration of independence from the Creator by the created. Human beings assume godly attributes by declaring themselves the ultimate standard of value and authority. We are no longer seeing ourselves as stewards of the earth but as owners.

Because man’s disobedience touched and influenced all spheres of life, the Biblical mission encounter needs to affect every sphere of life and human structures from agriculture and economics to science and the arts, to private and corporate worship. The Biblical encounter is to be the salt of life in human structures. Biblical member care will need to serve those involved in multi-disciplinary encounters in such a way that each one stays “salty” from a Biblical perspective. Hence, multi-disciplinary member care that protects the Christological center. A Biblical basis establishes purpose of being and stewardship of our planet and our society. The “salt” in each domain of life and society will hold the authorities in power accountable for value and purpose of life. That is a Biblical mission encounter.

Wherever we serve geographically and in whatever system of governance or state, these spheres of life and of human structures have diverted from God’s design and purpose. Redemption is the Biblical mission encounter to see this restored. The Biblical concept of Redemption is here at work. The Biblical mission encounter will always focus on bringing life and human structures under accountability to God’s love and authority. Biblical member care will serve those involved in this mission encounter in their called role and sphere to be

¹¹ Walsh, Brian J. & Middleton, J. Richard “The Transforming Vision, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship,” 1984, p. 67

fruitful, strong, resilient, purposeful, loving and Christ centered—whether serving as counselors, coaches, psychologists, medical personnel, pastors, agriculturist, musicians artists or theologians! God wants to express His love and care in all aspects of life through all His servants to bring all people back into relationship with Himself.¹²

It is obvious that Biblical member care will look quite different from place to place as the members are doing various works in radically different cultures. But the big picture remains the same: we are all called to be God’s stewards here on earth, to be “salt” in our communities and see God’s will done here on earth as it is in heaven. When people get focused too tightly on their own issues, they may very well need a member care provider who can help them refocus on the big picture.

Over the years we at Le Rucher Ministries have been learning how to approach member care by integrating different disciplines. We began with a team of counselors, broadened our focus to include community development trainers and then found ourselves involved in ethnic reconciliation in Rwanda. We were faced with questions about what had gone wrong in a nation that supposedly was Christianized and how could it be avoided in future situations. Having to wrestle with these issues, brought us to a place of offering cross-centered member care that included preparation, nurturing and prevention with curative, corrective and evaluative care.

Lessons from Rwanda

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 in which about one million people were brutally killed over a period of just several weeks, it became embarrassingly clear that major institutions had failed to intervene and/or protect multitudes that fell victim to the killing frenzy. Largely a “Christian” nation, the majority of Rwandese people were church goers, and the church, in some instances, became an instrument in the killings. As an institution this should give rise to questions why the church and missions in general had failed the Rwandese people. Secular institutions like the UN stood and watched, did not interfere, and also failed the Rwandese people dramatically. As I write, the UN is actually failing Syria. Doing something different from what we confess on Sunday in church is something we all face and is not unique to Rwanda. The Rwanda story is demonstrative for what an escalation can look like: plain evil.

Missions . . . failed to instill a deeper normalizing Biblical view for all spheres of life and human structures.

After the genocide was contained to a level that rebuilding of the nation could start taking place (killings still continued at smaller scale) a senior spiritual leader in the nation remarked when the world rushed in to help reconstruct the nation: “Yes, we need help with rebuilding the country: houses, schools, hospitals, roads etc. etc. but we actually had all these things before the genocide happened. If we are now given back all these things and still have the same heart, if our hearts do not change, we can have the same outbreak again, it could happen again” (paraphrased quote). Having the right things does not mean also having right hearts at the same time!

¹² 1 Thess. 5:11

Observed from the outside, Rwandan people had had many material things that accompany “a developed state”. Yet, their hearts had not been touched at deeper levels that would have served to help them grow beyond animism, tribalism, selfishness, hatred and greed. Having things like the many products of technology and consumer driven economic development, had not reached the negative human heart condition. Missions and Church talked about salvation but had failed to instill a deeper normalizing Biblical view for all spheres of life and human structures. There were several denominational structures but it looked to me almost like faith had been added to technical and economic development rather than expressing the Biblical values through transformed human hearts, community, church, politics, education, technology and economic development and other societal structures.

Le Rucher Ministries got involved with healing and reconciliation workshops (HWEC: Healing the Wounds of Ethnic Conflict)¹³ in the church to attempt to strengthen the church to be an agent of healing and reconciliation soon after the genocide. These HWEC workshops are now also followed up by engaging in community transformation and member care, in a humble attempt to engage a “complex humanitarian disaster” through a Christian witness encounter. We do this through walking alongside people in the community as they discover how to transform themselves and their community into a healthy place spiritually, physically, and socially. (We have also incorporated some of the principles taught in the HWEC into our model of debriefing at Le Rucher.¹⁴)

I say “humble attempt” because we were not sure what questions to ask in such an overwhelming complex humanitarian disaster. What Western civilization had brought to that part of the world had not brought a normative guiding value for governance, community, church, technology and economy that was different from the Western self-centered, self-driven, individualistic normative values we see daily expressed in our western countries. Giving people “things” had not automatically developed people into loving, caring, responsible, productive, accountable and God-centered people, communities or societal structures.

¹³ http://www.lerucher.org/Content/Reconciliation/Our_Approach.html

¹⁴ Erik Spruyt, “The Place of the Cross in Missionary Care”, <http://www.lerucher.org/Content/Member%20Care/Resources.html>, 1999.

A case study

A missionary shares with a member care provider his struggle with the leader of his team. The leader is insecure in his leadership, so he is too authoritarian, taking decisions without process and doesn't listen to others on the team. It seems apparent he is the wrong person in the wrong role. The missionary feels stifled and unable to fulfill what God has called him to do because the leader is keeping him busy with other tasks. When he tries to talk it out, he is attacked verbally by the leader and accused of being divisive and a trouble maker.

What we may use to resolve the problem:

- Mediation
- Conflict resolution
- Teaching communication skills/styles and leadership styles
- Forgiveness, repentance between the parties
- Healing of the pain of disappointments by going to the Cross

But what happens when all of that does not take care of the issue?

Possible Reductionist Answer: The most important thing is for you to protect yourself and avoid further abuse. You should leave the field and find the fulfillment that God desires for you.

Possible “Big Picture” Answer: God is interested in your character development and your growth. Perhaps this person has been put into your life because God wants to do something inside you that will make you even more effective for His Kingdom in this country. Let's see if we can discover that together.

Like the church structures in Rwanda in the nineties and Judaism's structures in Jesus' day, we all are at risk of institutionalizing life with God into empty shells of religion. This danger is not isolated to Rwanda or Judea. Indeed, Swiss-German theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) warned the Swiss and German (European) church structures (before the Holocaust) by putting it this way in his 1919 famous commentary on Romans¹⁵:

"A people live in the wilderness alongside a canal. The canal was there to bring them water and life and it was with great effort and cost that this project was built for their place in time. Great sacrifices were made, and many died as the canal was cut through mountain and desert. But the great irony is that the canal has become dry, and while its walls still convey evidence of the coursing of water, there is nothing there that can give life to anyone. Nevertheless the people continue to service it, to defend it, to name their children after its architects and engineers, but it is only an historic thing. A canal meant to convey something – water and life – now has become static, an end instead of a means. Something for the museum. People tell stories about it instead of drink from it. The older ones treasure the stories most, the younger ones have to be initiated deliberately, but each generation seems to lose a fraction of the true vision of the canal as time goes on. And no one has a memory of what water in the canal really looks like."

Whether we live in Africa, The Middle East or Europe or indeed anywhere else in the world we are exposed to similar risk. The religious structures still exist and will be maintained but the normative life (living water) that changes hearts is no longer in it. Biblical member care needs to be one of the guardians of this living water in earthen vessels so that the "man of God" stays relevant from a Biblical perspective in a mission encounter.

What can we expect in a Christian mission encounter?

What can we expect when we come and follow Jesus, "be with Him"¹⁶ and are sent out by him? What can we expect once we are born again by water and spirit and let His love and truth penetrate our hearts? Only when we begin standing in this truth and love can we inspire others to drink from this "water" too.

"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" ... so we may agree on a different theory of risk.

The New Testament shows us that we can expect many to put their faith in Him. Jesus drew large intercultural and interethnic crowds and many were delivered from evil spirits, many were healed, fed, restored to their communities. People from all walks of life, all cultures and ethnic backgrounds heard the gospel, responded to the gospel and were changed by the gospel. To use Karl Barth's analogy, the water flowed generously and people drank their fill. Religious structures were confronted, empty philosophies challenged and unjust and perverse leaders were confronted. After the resurrection, Jesus empowered the apostles and Christians spread through the then "known" Roman and Greek world.

¹⁵ Burge, Gary W., "NIV Application Commentary on John", Zondervan, 2000, p. 136 quoting "The Epistle to the Romans" by Karl Barth, first published in English by Oxford University Press, 1933

¹⁶ Mark 3:14

At the same time, though, many negative things were happening. The Gospel of Mark records that as Jesus' popularity spread, so also did *resistance* by religious authorities and civil authorities. In fact the authorities get together to plot to kill Jesus already very early in His ministry.¹⁷ His family is *embarrassed* and decides he is *out of his mind* and should be taken home.¹⁸ Jesus could not openly enter a town anymore and had to *stay outside* in lonely places.¹⁹ In effect, He was dealing with safety issues, having to be careful where he went. Jesus is accused of being *demon possessed*.²⁰ He is *rejected* in his home town.²¹ John the Baptist is *taken hostage* by a perverse authority and *executed*.²² Later Jesus also is *arrested and executed* by the authorities. Towards the end, every one *deserts* him except a handful of faithful women who watch at a distance.²³ Stephen gets *stoned* while Saul watched and approved.²⁴ Peter is *imprisoned* and has a supernatural escape, but at the same time, John's brother, James, is *executed* by Herod.²⁵ Paul endures many *hardships* and miraculous escapes and provisions. Eventually, Paul is *beheaded* and Peter is *crucified upside down* under Nero. Most likely only the Apostle John lived a long life and died a natural death, but even he was *exiled* to live out the last years of his life away from the church. Jews and Christians (first seen as a Jewish sect by the Romans) were persecuted under Claudius and even worse under Nero and under later emperors.

Jesus warns us that we can expect to receive similar treatment: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."²⁶ We need to know what we believe in and why; Paul puts it this way "to live is Christ and to die is gain."²⁷ Do we really believe this with Paul or do we add faith to a basically self-centered life? These thoughts and beliefs need careful thinking through in order to formulate a solid Biblical basis for member care. I am not advocating suicide squads! But we may agree on a different theory of risk, like our Master Jesus, like John the Baptist, like Peter and Paul, like so many others did under Nero and many of the martyrs (witnesses) in church history.

Since the first century much has changed. Civilizations have come and gone. There are today more known ethnic groupings, more religious structures (Islam did not exist in the first century) more political and civil structures. There are new and fantastic opportunities for spreading the Gospel in word and deed. The needs of people groupings are deeper than ever. Much help is needed in the world today. Through modern technology the world has become a global

Care givers need to develop support that equips and builds resilience so members can stay on the field under adverse circumstances.

¹⁷ Mark 3:6

¹⁸ Mark 3:21

¹⁹ Mark 1:45

²⁰ Mark 3:22

²¹ Mark 6:1-6

²² Mark 6:14-29

²³ Luke 23:49, John 19:25

²⁴ Acts 7:59

²⁵ Acts 12

²⁶ John 15:18, 20

²⁷ Phil. 1:21

village. There are wars and rumors of war, famines, natural disasters, etc. Jesus predicted all this to happen.²⁸ The Christian mission encounter in our world is more diverse and multidisciplinary than during the first century. Resistance to the Gospel and to the person of Jesus and his unique and absolute claims is rising and so are resistance, hatred and persecution directed at his followers.

This is a complex world we live in and member care providers must be ready to help people

Best Biblical debriefing practices also restore the Christological center in Christian workers.

walk through a maze of confusing multi-faceted situations. On one side they may be very well received by some members of society, while they are dealing with resistance, hatred and even persecution from another aspect of the same society. Care givers need to develop support that

equips and builds resilience in members so they can continue to work in our world, even when they decide to stay on the field under adverse circumstances. Indeed, Biblical member care providers should be thoroughly equipped, themselves, in order to protect and nurture a Christological focus at all times, no matter which area of the member care field they work (pastoral, psychological, training, equipping, professional and technical, medical, advocacy, etc.).

Member care practices in the first century

The New Testament is rich in examples of member care practices. In looking at Mark 6, we find Jesus sending out the disciples, two by two for mutual support and for accountability. (Although, His instructions on what they should or should not take with them, would raise some questions from a member care perspective in our day and age!) Mark deliberately uses a literary style called “sandwiching” to make a point here as he then next tells the story of John the Baptist being arrested and executed, followed immediately by the disciples returning and being “debriefed” by Jesus. These 2 stories should be understood as mirror images—they are purposely told together. There is a risk in being sent out which must be considered by each person and member care workers should be ready to prepare people for those risks.

Immediately after the resurrection, Luke reports that Jesus debriefed Cleopas and his friend²⁹ by asking classic debriefing questions. This is a good model for Biblical debriefing, but, note, that in this debrief by Jesus he restores and protects the Christological center of the mission. He ministers to devastated disciples who have lost all they believed in and in the debrief Jesus gives clear direction and restores the purpose of who he is and why he has come. This is the Christological center. Best Biblical debriefing practices also restore the Christological center in Christian workers. In member care we need to keep the focus right. Yes, we do minister to Christian workers, but ultimately it is all for the sake of the name of the Lord!³⁰ *“It is the Lord Christ you are serving” Col 3: 23-24*

²⁸ Mark 13:7-8

²⁹ Luke 24:13-35

³⁰ Is. 61:3b

The human body has a very high value in the Bible. As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are under obligation to look after the whole person well. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and so have a high value on proper self-care. In the “body narratives” Paul³¹ emphasizes that we are all members of each other and Christ is the head. In looking after each other we offer Christ a healthy body. We are Christ’s body and when his body is healthy and well looked after it is easy for Christ to express himself, move around without pain in his body and reach out to this world through His body. Different member care disciplines can work well from this Biblical basis.

All of Paul’s epistles have strong corrective member care and educational components. Much of this is on an ethical, moral and spiritual level. Ephesians, alone, is not corrective and often has been called the Switzerland of the New Testament. This is because this letter does not address wrongs or defilements and is very pure and edifying in its teachings and instructions for individuals, teams, families and communities. Ephesians is well worth exploring as a member care resource.

After he has initiated a local fellowship, the Apostle Paul often goes back to strengthen the brothers. Member care is practiced even by Paul! Paul’s “helpers” are important to equip and help him make it to the end. Paul even asks Timothy to bring him John-Mark for “he is useful to me in ministry.”³² This John-Mark was the reason earlier for the split between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas was John-Mark’s uncle. Peter calls John-Mark his son so we can conclude that John-Mark is re-equipped and strengthened under both Barnabas and Peter. This was so effective and changed John-Mark to such a level that restoration with Paul took place, he even wanted John-Mark to come back and help. John-Mark went on to become the first Bishop of Alexandria and is considered the founder of the North African church. One of the lasting results we see today is that Mark wrote the first gospel! Both Luke and Matthew used Mark’s gospel as a basis for writing their own gospels.

In Acts 18 we meet Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth who had recently been expelled from Rome by Claudius. This member care “couple team” is powerful as helpers and co-workers with Paul. Interesting is that 5 out of the 7 times they are mentioned, Priscilla is named first. Mentioning a woman first is highly unusual in Roman tradition. Women did not have such a profile and were not usually valued in this way. Paul is telling us that Priscilla leads in member care issues and even Apollos, a learned man from Alexandria is equipped by Priscilla (and Aquila) accurately. Priscilla (and Aquila) explained the word of God more adequately to Apollos. Apollos was humble enough to receive instruction in the form of theological correction from a woman care giver.

In Acts 12 we see an act of member care offered by the “mother of John-Mark”. This chapter often is quoted for its miraculous escape of Peter from prison in answer to fervent prayer. But we so often forget that in the first two verses James, brother of John (son of Zebedee), is murdered by Herod. This is all happening the same day. John-Mark’s mother offers her home and hospitality as a place of safety to Peter’s friends after an extremely

³¹ Eph. 4

³² 2 Tim. 4:11

difficult, painful and stressful day with miraculous release and with painful loss of life. Strong conflicting emotions and thoughts come out of this narrative and John-Mark's mother ministers to Peter and his friends.

Examples of evaluative member care can be found in Acts 11 and 15. In both cases the circumcised believers were upset that Gentiles were being ministered to. First, Peter was criticized and questioned, and then, later Paul and Barnabas were attacked for the same issue. In both cases, they brought the issue to the council in Jerusalem where they were listened to, evaluated and a decision was made. In both cases, it ended with God being praised, and in the case of Paul and Barnabas, they were strengthened with more people to join their team (Judas and Silas), encouraged to go on with the work and sent out with blessings.

Conclusion

As Biblical member care workers, there are countless different ways we can serve our brothers and sisters around the world as they seek to fulfill God's call on their lives and see His kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven. What if Mark had been told:

A ministry of healing and binding up in the name of Jesus and for the sake and honor God's name is true Biblical member care.

"That's OK, Mark. Paul is totally unreasonable and you tried your very best. You can go home and be satisfied you tried. God understands."

If we are able to keep the big picture in our own minds, we can be like Peter and Barnabas, turning a failure like Mark into not only a man of God who was valued in a new way in his own lifetime, but who did a work for God that has lasted down through the ages to today.

We need to identify any secular, reductionist thinking that would lead us to believe that with our skillsets (whatever they might be), we can help people in our own strength, not needing the Holy Spirit. Usurping God's place on the throne will never bring true healing and help people to remain "salty." But leading people to Jesus and His healing power for their situation, coupled with our skillsets to identify specific issues can be life changing, not only for the individuals, but also God's purposes for this world.

Let us keep Rwanda's example in the forefront of our minds as we see that superficial changes or solutions that bring only one aspect are not sufficient. As member care providers, we need to help people to see that concentrating on surface issues does not bring true life to a situation. Instead, we can use our skills to dig deeper and see God's true healing and life brought to bear on the true issues—not only in individuals, but in the whole community.

When we follow Jesus' example, we can expect resistance, embarrassment, accusations of being out of our minds or being demon possessed, isolation, loneliness, rejection, even arrest and death. Not a nice list! We may even need to agree on a different theory of risk

than the world would advocate.³³ Biblical care givers that can develop support that equips and builds resilience so members can stay on the field under adverse circumstances are invaluable to God's Kingdom.

Finally, this world we live in may have rejected Biblical principles, but we see in Isaiah 61 (and Luke 4) that Jesus came to this earth to bind up the broken hearted, to specifically focus on those who grieve, who suffer loss and injustice. He exchanges their loss, grief and mourning for a crown of beauty, the oil of gladness and a garment of praise. Jesus sets the scene for Biblical member care. But it is only when we, ourselves, have experienced this healing touch from Jesus that we can, in turn, comfort others with the comfort we have been comforted.³⁴ This is not an introspective journey or navel staring. This is all about displaying "his splendor." This healing and binding up ministry is Biblical member care as it is done for the sake and honor of God's name.

³³ Rom. 8:36

³⁴ 2 Cor. 1:4