

Taking Care and Kindness Home

Judy Gustum: My topic now is taking care and kindness home. We have had a wonderful experience here haven't we? We have been exposed to situations and given tools to more effectively emulate Jesus. We've had our eyes opened to many and varied opportunities all around us. Our session leaders have shared with us ideas for what works, and we have been challenged to show that we are Christians by our love. But these past two and a half days will only be pleasant memories of meeting new people, making friends, sharing ideas over coffee, perhaps just a nice vacation from our normal routines. Only memories if . . . we don't channel our gifts and intentionally *carpe diem*—seize the day. I learned this Latin phrase from the movie **Dead Poet's Society**. *Carpe Diem*, a Latin phrase, means to grab an opportunity when it presents itself. That's what we have to do, or opportunities will be lost and good deeds will never happen. I challenge you to look for opportunities to turn your good intentions into deeds.

Remember we all have gifts and we're all called to use them. It would be too easy to take home our notes, folders, and memories of this time we've had together and, literally, as well as figuratively, put them in a box and put the box away. We cannot let this happen. *Carpe Diem*. It's my prayer that when you go home, you will first finish reading the **Miracle of Kindness**. And second, you will consider this conference experience to be a turning point in your life—a point in time when each of us resolves to actively observe and respond to the critical needs of people around us.

Let me help by summarizing a few practical steps so that when you get home, you'll find it easier to seize the day and just do it. First, pray about your talents, and then make a commitment, a commitment to God and to yourself that you will live your life differently, starting now. Your behavior will cause you to be a light in another person's life. Write this commitment down on a piece of paper so you can see it. There's something about seeing your plan on paper that makes it real. If you have a special friend, share your new commitment, your plan with them; talking about it will help you to keep your promise, and you'll have someone to share your successes with, as well as your efforts that did not come off quite as you had hoped.

Your commitment should have three parts to it. **Observe, Respond, and Pay It Forward**. Let's focus first on what it means to **observe**. Basically it means to get your head up out of the sand, look around and really see what is happening around you. Practice being a people watcher. Improve your eye contact. Look for need in people's eyes. Look for people who need a compliment, a hug. People who want someone to talk to, or someone who will listen. Notice those who seem to be hanging back.

Be alert to the difference between what someone says and how they say it. Observe body language, and listen to the tone of voice when they speak. Sometimes spoken words do not tell the whole story. Careful observation will reveal to you people who are alone and needing someone else's strength to get them through the day. These are some of your opportunities to share the love of God.

After you've gotten better at observing push yourself to **respond**, the second step you'll use to put your conference experiences into practice. When you observe and see a need, then you leap into action and do something about it. The need might be big or small, and if you are uncertain or afraid, as we all are, pray first, get professional help when needed, and then get to it . . . making an appropriate response. There are many ways to respond. Our problem is that as Christians, we are neglecting the response. We simply are not intentional, or we're too preoccupied, or we've forgotten what a boost our behavior can be for others. So I offer these reminders of behavior required by Christians.

- Smile, because not enough people do. They frown, and they maybe don't realize the frown. Think at this moment about expression, right now. If someone looked at you, what would they read in your face?

If you looked in a mirror, would you see a pleasant person, or an unpleasant one? Someone who appears happy or sad, stern, angry, easy going? Sometimes I have a set to my jaw that other people view with alarm or concern, and then I may clench my teeth. And when people see that, they think that something's wrong in my world. Sometimes when I'm thinking, people assume I'm upset because of furrow goes across my brow. Friends may ask me how I am, but strangers make assumption based on what they see. So I try consciously to create a more pleasant look on my face. I try to keep the corners of my mouth slightly turned up. Think Mona Lisa—you're not smiling, but more importantly, you're not frowning. I particularly pay attention to my facial appearance when I am driving. I do not wish to invite misinterpretation on the highway. So I put on my more pleasant look.

- Next, practice common courtesy, because it's not common. Thank strangers, as well as friends when they do something nice. Speak to people. Say Hello. Use eye contact in order to connect, and to observe more about people and their feelings. Use complements liberally. Rejoice with another who has done well at something big or small, and don't forget about courtesy on the road. Practice the same good manners behind the wheel as you would on the sidewalk. Here's another reminder I thought of . . . build up, not tear down. Last fall I asked my five-year-old granddaughter, Hannah, what she learned on her first day of kindergarten. She thought for a moment, then with big saucer eyes, she told me, “no put downs”. To her, no put downs meant to be respectful and courteous to her fellow classmates. Wow!

On the very first day of school, they were we being taught a crucial life lesson— no put downs. This reminded me of the essay by Robert Fulghum entitled, **All I ever really needed to know. I learned in kindergarten**. Remember that? I refreshed my memory of this literary gem and pulled from it these three memorable phrases: Share everything, Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody, and Hold hands and stick together. What wonderful phrasing for living a Christian life. Hold hands and stick together.

- Next, share. Share whatever you have—a joke, yourself, your time, your tears, your support, and share your joy, because it is infectious. Your joy may build someone up when he or she is short on joy, and you will be a light for them in dark places.
- And don't forget to pray. Pray for opportunities to share care and kindness, and pray for those in need. I have learned there's a big difference in the response I get when I tell someone I will pray for them, rather than the saying, I will be thinking of you. For example, Karen, a woman who worked for me, but with whom I had only a workplace friendship, had serious problems, and some new tests were to be done. She was frightened. When I told her I would pray for her, she looked at me differently. She thanked me, and immediately there was a closer bond between us. Saying I would pray for her made her comfortable enough to share more. But when you promise to pray, you must.

My next idea of a response tool is communication—my favorite topic. People are starved for real communication—a process which has to be done with others. Communication is a two-way process, not one-way. It's a take-turns game. You speak, I speak. We share ideas, feelings and stories, back and forth.

We do too many things alone. The simple act of writing a letter is a lost art. Even when we email friends, were having a one sided conversation, unless we ask questions, inquiring about them and inviting more. If emailing is a primary source of contact for you, remember there is need for a reply. My brother thinks I ask too many questions, but it works, because he responds. He responds to my email questions and we continue to stay connected between California and Indiana. My point here is that we need to invite communication— invite it, whether it is face to face, in a card or letter, or on a computer, and then make the reply. We will succeed at communicating if we engage the other person, but we have to have an interest in them and their lives, and then create for them the environment in which they can be comfortable enough to respond and want to share more of themselves.

I have one last tip about which I am passionate. Use the written word whenever you cannot be face to face. Write thank you notes and send cards. A good practice is to always have sympathy and get well cards on hand, because you must be timely when an illness, accident, surgery or death occurs. If you don't have cards, it's too easy to put off, or worse, not to respond at all. And this is one of those care and kindness opportunities that you prayed for. Also, I recommend that you buy blank cards. Why blank cards? So you're ready for any occasion, and because you can put your thoughts and feelings into words far better and more sincerely than the Hallmark card makers.

But when you do use a purchased card, I urge you to always add a personal note. Think about this. The themes of sympathy cards are pretty much the same—that is, cherished memories will live on. You can say that in your own words. There is nothing more poignant than a hand-written memory from someone who knew your loved one. A note from someone who cared enough to tell you by writing it down and sharing that unique memory. These written words will be cherished and can be saved to be re-read again and again. If you practice writing these notes, you will become accomplished at it. Again, just do it. The responses you will receive will warm your heart for a long time and soon the art of the handwritten note will be second nature to you.

Finally, we must **pay it forward**. You must be familiar with the phrase, pay it forward. The concept is that when a person does something nice for three people, and then they each do something nice for three more people, good things will happen exponentially, and the world will be a better place and that's what it's all about. Right? So how will you pay it forward when you go home?

We have participated in this ninth annual Care Conference, and we know people to home who need to hear the story and learn the process. We need to teach our family members, our children, our grandchildren, neighbors and friends, how to pass on good Christian behavior. We need to model this behavior, ever mindful that we are somebody's role model, whether we know it or not.

Because we influence somebody's life every day, our goal should be that our influence will be positive, not negative. If we pay it forward, modeling positive behaviors, and emulating Jesus, we are evangelizing and showing the world that we are Christians by our love.

Jim Kok: Wow. Thank you Judy. That's a *Care Capsule* article.

I have to add one more suggestion that Judy didn't have on her list Care and Kindness. And I often remind my wife, Linda, to do this on Sunday morning when she's coming to my class that I teach. It is: **fake interest**—pretend to be fascinated. So that's your assignment; and, if you're tired, pretend. I don't care if you really are, but make me think you are.

I went through a whole pile of notes from the last nine conferences, and actually I came up with 57 items that I think gotta be preserved, and I picked out 10. I'll share some of them with you. because they get at the essence of what this is all about.

The first one is from Jesus' prayer: **'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'** I probably have said this already five times just this week, but this is what our lives are about. It's not sitting here with our bags packed, waiting to go to heaven. It's making heaven on earth, making life a little better on this great, green planet. And every one of us can do it by adding our part, whether it's kindness, or beauty, or efficiency, or honesty, or integrity. But do something. Be aware that your life has that much purpose and meaning, that you're really helping Jesus fulfill his prayer.

The second one, **It's Sunday, but Monday is coming.** If you read the book, you'll remember where this came from, this great sermon on: 'It's Friday, but Sunday's coming'. This is the sequel. This is why we go to church: to be refreshed, refocused, renewed, reminded, redirected. For what? That we're going to go to heaven? No! We have something to do tomorrow. And we can do it. And it's easy and it's hard; endless opportunities, because we really believe . . . and that's how this whole campaign got started . . . we discovered, we heard, research has proven that although the Christian Church has made the world better in many wonderful ways through hospitals and missions and programs, individually, Christians are about the same as everybody else. They don't seem remarkably more effective or capable or confident in giving care and kindness. They're just like other people. And that's a very strange paradox for people who go to church every Sunday and get reminded that God is love and Christ died for us and that our lives have meaning and purpose and responsibility, and that God is love and that God's love comes out of us. We are God's instruments.

Number three, **90% of caring is just showing up.** If you go up to the bookstore to buy the book, just take the cover, because that says the most important thing. You don't have to be a genius or educated, gorgeous, beautiful, extroverted or anything for a great deal of the caring. It's just daring to go knock on a door, make that call, do these things that Judy is talking about and God takes care of it. One of the best stories in the book is the first one with Maryland Duff, where she . . . well, you read it.

Number four, **God wasn't there until you showed up.** I didn't know that the song was going to be here, but, Bev made it. God was there when you showed up. That is such a powerful reality. We got this from a man we talked to, and he'd been a bone marrow transplant patient at City of Hope. Some of my CPE students and I talked to him, and interviewed him, and one of the students said to him, "*Where was God in all this for you?*" He'd gone through weeks of isolation, with all the masks and gowns, and people couldn't just come and go. And he actually said that. He said. "*God wasn't there.*" He paused, "*until somebody showed up.*" He said it didn't matter if they came in with a mask on their face, or I didn't even know who they were. But when somebody came to see me, and said 'hello', then God was there. Powerful, powerful. So important.

Number five, **amateurs are the best.** Some of you are old enough to have taken Latin and you love words like I do. And remember **amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amanti.** Well, amateur comes from that word. Amateurs are those who do it for the love of it. People need amateurs. I think we need professionals desperately, too, but, if amateurs are doing their job, if amateurs are being the friends, lot of professionals will have less work, because God's first choice for being the light of the world is you and me, the amateurs in this world—people who do it for the love of it.

Smiles and touch, number six. Two simple, natural expressions anyone can offer; both brighten people's lives. Judy said a lot about them. Somebody asked me, "*What is something I can say to somebody that I*

meet and just want to make them, you know . . . Say some straight-faced clerk in the store. What's something I can always say to them and it's always true, because, you know, I can't always say to him, 'I appreciate you, or you do great work', when they don't."

So I said, "*You can always say, I love your smile.*" Even if they aren't smiling. It's true. I'm going to love your smile; and it always makes them smile. And that is true. You can always say, "*I love your smile.*"

Number seven, **dying for others**. I think this is such a profound concept, that we are called to complete the sufferings of Jesus, and we are his children, and his heirs, if . . . if . . . if . . . if we suffer with him and he calls us to die for others, and we die for others. I am absolutely convinced of this. Whenever we inconvenience ourselves, break a little new ground, do something that we don't really think we're good at on behalf of somebody else, you are participating in dying for others. You are dying for that person, and that is so good for people, because it brings them back to life. It's a profound reality. You are giving them love, which is life-giving, and the wonderful other thing is that it gives you life. It is so rewarding to carry this agenda, and activate it in your life; that you're not just walking outside anymore. You're walking outside and noticing people, and thinking, and wondering, and planning to wave a little more, if nothing else. And those people belong to you. They're part of your, your responsibility.

You know, in the last *Care Capsule* . . . (if you didn't get it, you should), **Don't do too much**. We don't want people to burn up, but do . . . do take this agenda into your heart. We pray that this is transformational, not just informational. God heals. God is compassionate. This is so important. All the grief we talked about all week, really, we talked a lot about it, but it's probably one of the biggest topics, because it's always there for everybody. It's going to be there for everybody, and there's endless opportunities to help and to heal and to be there for others.

And it's so important to realize God will heal them. You don't have to! And stop trying. Stop trying in the direct sense, but you are participating in the healing by being there, by any of the forms of reaching out and walking with people and listening to them. You are participating in God's healing, but don't think that God can't do it. God will do it. And being in ministry so many years, that continues to astound me. I think a couple of the most astounding losses that I've been part of are children. One of the funerals I led was two little children murdered by their father. That's about as bad as it gets. But then, several years later, I'm helping with the baptisms in the Sunday morning service, and kind of looking at the names, you know, because I didn't kind of notice the parents, because I was just doing the baptism, and the mother of one of the babies I was baptizing, she pulled on me and said, "*You remember me?*" And it was the mother of those two little children! Big smile, new baby. And God had healed her. Certainly she lives with a couple of knives in her heart forever, but she was going on with life. God . . . God did that. And so God heals. God is compassionate, and we walk alongside, as best we can.

Number nine, **give people tastes of God**. I believe this so, so wholeheartedly. Every time you give anybody any form of kindness, you are giving them a taste of God. You are giving them God, because God is love. You are giving them a taste of God, and that builds hope in people's hearts. In our cynical, mean, high-tech world, people need to know there is goodness, there is kindness, there's consideration. There are people who notice me, and when they experienced that, even in the smallest way, it builds hope in their hearts and people need hope, and that a taste of God is giving them vitamins for their hope, without which we cannot live.

And number 10, **you cannot tell by appearances who are hurt, hurting, and anguish**. You can't get your antenna up and say, "*Ah, she does. He doesn't. Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah.*" We had a, we had a suicide a couple of months ago of the most vibrant, handsome, attractive guy in our singles ministry. He was a participating in singles. I mean, nobody would have picked him, thought he was carrying death in his

heart, depression in his soul. You can't tell. We are all the walking wounded. Everybody is and so we're all candidates for all of this good stuff.

Okay, Judy's gonna finish this.

Judy Gustum: I have brought a gift for each of you. It's a heart-shaped magnet that my friend, Wilma first created for the retreat I spoke at, on the Care and Kindness topic last August in Indiana. Wilma, who was 85 years old on Thursday, my friend, is my mentor and role model. She listens, she encourages me. Her door is always open and the coffee is ever ready. She is the one who taught me how to use a computer and to email my family, even before I owned a computer myself. She used to call me at work and say, "*You've got mail.*"

Wilma designed these heart magnets and then printed them on her own computer, and from my friends back in Indiana, who helped cut these out, this magnet is our gift to each of you. The words on the colored heart are **They will know we are Christians by our love.** I want you to take it home and put it on your refrigerator so you can see it daily and be reminded of our time together here, and the commitment we have made to live our lives differently, starting now. To change our priorities from self to others, to be a light for someone in darkness and to use our gifts in service. Thanks be to God.