

“*Care*, by Dr. Dwayne Bond, is a gift to the body of Christ! With wisdom as warm as it is wise, Dr. Bond takes us on a journey deep into the heart of what it truly means to care for one another as the family of God. He’s crafted a masterful guide, both practical and profound, to build a church culture where loving relationships fuel spiritual formation and where hearts mature in Christ-like love. Read it, teach it, share it. Use it in small groups, and let this book bless everyone in your congregation.”

DR. DOUG LOGAN, JR., President of Grimké Seminary and College; Author, *On the Block*; Coauthor, *The Soul-Winning Church* and *The Least, the Last and the Lost*

“Churches are meant to be visible communities of love, support, encouragement, and care—because we know the Savior who ‘cares for you’ (1 Peter 5:7). Dwayne Bond is one of the most caring men you could ever meet. He lives the biblical principles and practical examples that fill his excellent and needed book *Care*. Take this Christ-centered, edifying, and authentic book to heart because someone will need you soon.”

J.A. MEDDERS, General Editor, NewChurches.com; Author, *The Risen King: 40 Devotions for Easter with C.H. Spurgeon*; *Humble Calvinism*; Coauthor, *The Soul-Winning Church*

“The local church is God’s chosen place for care. Our ability to care for others is rooted in and fueled by our understanding of the love Christ has for us. In this book, Dwayne Bond explains how to experience unity through genuine love and by caring like Jesus. Throughout the pages you will find yourself saying, ‘Yes and Amen!’ I highly recommend that your entire church read this book, as together you seek to cultivate authentic community and foster a culture of grace.”

SHAUNA VAN DYKE, Executive Director, The Association of Biblical Counselors (ABC); Care and Leadership Development Minister, The Mount Church, Keller, TX

“This book is a must-read for church leaders and small groups! Dwayne Bond brilliantly unpacks why loving the church truly matters and how we can overcome the barriers that often keep us from caring for one another. Each chapter gives hopeful direction on how the church, with all its diversity, can become a loving family. This is a book rich with practical insights that will deepen our love for Christ and one another in powerful ways.”

ELIZA HUIE, Director of Counseling, McLean Bible Church;
Author, *Trauma Aware: A Christian’s Guide to Help and Care*
and *I’m Stressed: A Path from Pressure to Peace*

“Dr. Dwayne Bond has provided an accessible and insightful guide on how to care for the people in our churches. More than just principles, here you will find practical guidance for how to minister the love of Christ to his people—no matter your context.”

KYLE WORLEY, Author, *Home with God: Our Union with Christ*

“Dr. Bond is a master at combining care and counseling within the church community in his latest work, *Care: Loving Your Church by Walking Through Life Together*. This literary gem encourages and equips churches on how to love each other as God has instructed while living on mission together. The Scripture, reflections at the end of chapters and social and counseling references make this book all-encompassing as it relates to creating a counseling culture within the church.”

JEROME GAY JR., Pastor; Author, *Church Hurt: Holding the Church Accountable and Helping Hurt People Heal*

“Pastor Dwayne Bond has crafted a beautiful blend of rich theological truth and practical church-based living. That blending in no way surprises me because for three decades I’ve watched Pastor Bond live out truth-in-love in the context of Christian community. I highly recommend *Care* for all those who care about living life together in the church.”

BOB KELLEMAN, Author, 25 books including *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives*

“One of the blessings of being a child of the living God is that we are not saved to be alone but saved to be part of a people who have all received the gracious, merciful, loving care of our Father in Christ Jesus. And one of the joys is that we get to be part of showing and experiencing that care through and to each other. In this wonderful addition to the ‘Love Your Church’ series, Dwayne encourages us to see what it looks like to truly be a church that cares, loves, and carries each other’s burdens like Jesus in a culture that is divided, fractured, and in desperate need of gospel hope. Stimulating, challenging, and wonderfully encouraging!”

STEVE ROBINSON, Senior Pastor, Cornerstone Church, Liverpool, UK; Dean, Grimké Europe; Author, *Serve: Loving Your Church with Your Heart, Time and Gifts*

“Dr. Bond has created a work of profound and practical significance by teaching us how the church has been divinely designed to care for one another. I am grateful to have a resource written for the church that so thoroughly addresses the ongoing needs that only the church can provide!”

RONNIE MARTIN, Director, Leader Care and Renewal for Harbor Network; Pastor-in-Residence, Redeemer Community Church, Bloomington, IN; Coauthor, *The Unhurried Pastor*

“Dwayne expertly weaves together practical strategies with profound biblical truths, encouraging us to be vessels of hope and healing in a world that desperately needs it. His emphasis on hospitality, service, and love resonates deeply, reminding us that our faith is most vividly expressed through our actions. This book is a clarion call for believers to rise up and demonstrate the love of Christ in tangible ways, making him visible to those around us. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of Christian community and the vital role we play in reflecting God’s love.”

RACHAEL ROSSER-SCHULTE, Director,
Restore Christian Counseling



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DWAYNE BOND

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Care:

Loving Your Church by Walking through Life Together
© Dwayne Bond, 2025

Published by:

The Good Book Company

thegoodbook.com | thegoodbook.co.uk

thegoodbook.com.au | thegoodbook.co.nz | thegoodbook.co.in

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Original series cover design by Faceout Studio | Art direction and design by André Parker

ISBN: 9781784988722 | JOB-008116 | Printed in India

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FOREWORD

BY JONATHAN D. HOLMES

The longer I am in counseling ministry, the more and more committed I find myself to realizing the beauty of and opportunities for care in the local church. Every week I hear stories of individuals, couples, and families struggling to think through the hardships and brokenness of life. Stories of grief and loss, of betrayal and heartache: stories where the unending pressures and troubles of life seem to press in as we seek to press on.

It's at times like these that I find myself needing to be reminded of simple truths from God's word. We all need a good reminder from time to time, don't we? The apostle Peter says as much in 2 Peter 1:13: he wants to "stir [us] up by way of reminder." It's an apt point. Sometimes we can get complacent about the reality that God saved us and placed us in the body of Christ. At other times we can get cynical about the body of Christ, focusing more on how our church has let us down or hurt us than the beauty of broken individuals coming together to declare the glory of the Lord.

My friend Dwayne follows in the footsteps of Peter and many others as he seeks to remind us of familiar truths but ones that we are quick to forget in the busyness and bustle of life. With a pastor's heart and a counselor's touch, Dwayne calls the church to its most organic mission—living out the one-anothers of the New Testament. How we live and care for one another in the body of Christ is one of the most distinctive ways in which believers testify to the gospel.

Jesus says in John 13:35, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The New Testament ethic of love is like a diamond. It shines and is beautiful in all its many facets, from service and prayer to greeting and bearing with one another's burdens.

Dwayne has given us a gift in this brief but potent work. He calls everyday people to be on the frontlines of caring for one another and, in turn, caring for the local communities they find themselves in. I, for one, am eager to see this ordinary vision of caring and compassionate living transform local churches across the country and across the globe. Isn't that what we all long and hope for, after all?

Jonathan D. Holmes
Founder and Executive Director,
Fieldstone Counseling

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a church that really, truly cares for one another. What would that look like?

A church where every person—with all their flaws, idiosyncrasies, and fragilities—is not just tolerated but embraced.

A church where no one feels invisible or excluded, but each person is a cherished part of the whole.

Picture a church saturated with empathy, where members share the burdens of one another, and the joys of each become the joys of all.

Imagine a church where love is not just talked about but is a tangible reality, weaving its way through every interaction, every gesture, and every prayer so that each individual feels valued and included.

A church where Christ's teaching resounds, and Christ's kindness reigns, and all are welcomed into the warm embrace of community without prejudice.

That would be a truly caring church.

That's the kind of church we all want to belong to.

But if we're honest, we know that our churches often fall short of that ideal. When we look at our own hearts, we know that *we* often fall short.

Don't get me wrong: your church likely does many things well. Yet I know from my own experience that too often, the harsh realities of human frailty and sin cast shadows upon the light of love. Hearts once eager for fellowship grow cold in the face of unmet expectations and longings. It's easy for people to fall through the cracks, despite our best efforts; or for us to become so busy with rosters and programs that we lose sight of the needs around us. Or maybe you find yourself drifting along at the edge of church life, feeling lonely and disillusioned.

In the frenzy of local-church life, it is easy to overlook the simple yet profound command that Jesus gave to his disciples in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." The way we care for one another in the local church should be of utmost importance to us because it's of utmost importance to Jesus.

So, how do we become more like the caring church I just described? What does it look like to love one another as Jesus commands? Where will we find the focus and power to live up to his calling? That's what this book will address.

As we embark on this journey together, we'll be reminded of the radical nature of Christ's love and the transformative power it holds for our relationships with other believers. I will challenge us to move beyond mere surface-level interactions and instead cultivate an authentic culture of understanding, kindness, and generosity within our church community. That's what I've been trying to do for the last 30+ years as a church planter and pastor. And that's what I hope to help you do, through practical examples and biblical principles.

As we delve deeper into the pages of this book, we'll be challenged to emulate the example set by Jesus himself, who demonstrated the ultimate act of love through his sacrificial death on the cross. Just as he laid down his life for us, so too are we called to lay down our lives for one another, showing kindness, patience, and forgiveness to all in need. Not only are we called; we are equipped. By his Spirit, Jesus empowers us to love one another.

May this book catalyze deeper relationships, stronger communities, and a more vibrant expression of God's love within our midst. Together, let us strive to fulfill the command of Jesus to love one another as he has loved us.

1. WHY LOVING THE CHURCH MATTERS

The first Christian who taught me to how to care for others was my grandmother.

From the ages of nine to sixteen, I spent summers in the small city of Roanoke, Virginia, with my grandparents. It felt like a world away from the suburbs of Maryland, just outside of Washington, D.C., where I lived for the rest of the year.

My friends couldn't understand why I'd disappear to the country to be with old people.

The thing is, as a latch-key kid, outside of playing kickball, tackle football, and hide-and-go-seek, there wasn't much to do at home during the summer. So, instead, I spent the summer months enjoying my grandparents' company, eating delicious meals and hearing countless stories about family history. I could be with both of my grandparents and have their undivided time, attention, and love—particularly from my grandmother.

My parents' home was fun-loving yet tempestuous—tensions over money, communication, and other disagreements were a frequent part of the relational flow of the home. Both of my parents worked for the federal government. My mother worked the normal nine-to-five for 30 years. My father worked the night shift and drove a taxicab during the day and on the weekends for extra money. Neither of them were Christian, but they instilled within me a sense of morality and a strong work ethic.

Yet my grandmother's home was so different. She loved Jesus—and that love exuded from her towards others. Care and compassion flowed from her. You knew you were loved by her. People from church and the community would unexpectedly stop by the house at any time, and I'd see her pour forth hospitality towards them. She was thoughtful, kind, considerate, and patient. She served the elderly, sick, blind, poor, disabled, and mentally ill. She was devoted to her church family. She was like my very own Mother Theresa. I didn't understand why she would do what she did for people. At the time, I assumed that all grandmothers must be like this. But what I grew to learn was that she was actively living out her faith in, and love for, Jesus Christ.

My grandmother gave me my first view of Christ. Years later, when I got on my knees on my dorm room floor at the University of Maryland after a close friend shared

the gospel with me, it finally clicked. My grandmother's life suddenly made sense. Everything that I saw her do flashed across the eyes of my heart. I needed the Jesus that she knew and loved.

MAKING CHRIST VISIBLE

This book is about how church communities can better care for and love one another. Why does this matter? It matters because, as my grandmother's example showed, the life and love of Christ are made visible by those who love like him.

On the night before he died, Jesus told his disciples:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

(John 13:34-35)

Jesus says, *Love as I have loved you. Give your life, energy, time, and attention away for the good of other people, as I've given to you.*

That last part is crucial. It's interesting that when Jesus said these words, he had just finished washing the disciples' feet, graciously loving and serving each one of them—including Judas, who was about to betray him. What he asked of his disciples was something that he himself modeled and demonstrated—all through his life, but supremely in his death.

To love like Jesus starts with being keenly aware of how he has loved us.

And how did he love us? He sacrificed himself for those who didn't deserve his sacrifice. He didn't set his love on those who deserved it but on those who didn't—including you and including me. Rather than shrinking from our sin-stained state, he came close, taking the form of a servant to walk among us, and stopping at nothing—not even the cross—to make us clean.

So, as recipients of the love of God, we are to love one another. 1 John 4:7-11 says:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

John goes on:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (v 20)

A profession of love for God can't coexist with hatred of someone whom God loves. Christians should be the most

loving people on the planet. We love because he first loved us (v 19). Experiencing the love and grace of God compels us to love our brothers and sisters within the church family, and our neighbors outside of it (Matthew 22:39).

I find this so challenging: as a believer, I can't say that I love God and not love his people. This requires that we assess our relationships honestly and what they reflect about how we really think about God. This isn't just about warm, fuzzy feelings: the word encourages us to love not in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). If I profess to know Jesus and have been saved by him, then it will show up tangibly in how I treat those around me.

It's a church loving like Jesus that will get the world noticing Jesus. My grandmother's life was one of obedience to Jesus' command in John 13:35. As I grew up, because of her love, I did indeed come to understand that she was Jesus' disciple, just as he had promised.

When God's people love one another, the world witnesses God at work. Loving one another matters because it showcases who we really are.

HOW LOVE LOOKS

So far, so good. But talking about love can sometimes start to feel pretty abstract. What does love look like exactly? When the world looks at the church, what kind of love should they see?

That's what we'll explore in the chapters that follow. But to start us off, consider Romans 12:9-10:

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

This passage tells us several things about what love looks like.

First, it tells us that our love for one another should be “genuine” (v 9). That is, not situational, conditional, seasonal, or partial but sincere and honest. If you love someone, you demonstrate it in how you treat them. Too often we can be all smiles and flattery to someone's face, and moments later be grumbling about them in our hearts or gossiping about them behind their backs. A love that isn't genuine isn't really love.

Second, Paul says that genuine love hates evil and holds to good. When we love someone, we want what's best for them—and it's God who shows us what that is. We're to look to his word to tell us what is for our good (and cling to it) and what will ultimately destroy us (and run from it). And we're to help our brothers and sisters to do the same. What is good for someone won't always be the same as that which seems to make them happy in the moment, or which keeps a superficial peace. Relationships of real love involve heartfelt encouragements and hard conversations.

Third, when the world looks at us, they should see that we are devoted to one another. As fellow members in

the church, we are encouraged to “love one another with brotherly affection” (v 10). Jesus wants us to love one another as brothers and sisters: to stick by one another as we would our biological family.

Fourth, our aim should be to “outdo one another in showing honor”. God calls Christians to lead the way in honoring one another with eagerness. An honor culture should burst forth from the church.

The word “honor” means respect, esteem, and reverence. We aren’t called only to love one another but also to demonstrate the highest amount of respect possible for one another. The Scripture says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Put other peoples’ interests above your own. Love one another in the way that Jesus loved us.

Genuine love—love that is devoted, committed, respectful, and true to God’s word—is to be the hallmark of our relationships within the church. And when Christians love one another like that, strangers who come into our midst can’t help but notice. Our churches increasingly become places where everyone can receive love and care in the name of the Lord Jesus.

THE WITNESS TO CULTURE

Several years ago, my church moved into a new building. As soon as we could, we planned an event that would allow us to introduce ourselves to the surrounding community.

We were eager to demonstrate to our neighbors that we are God's church, planted in the community to serve them. As the date approached, church members got excited about it, and a host of people made themselves available to serve.

The event was called Community Day. We invited neighbors and businesses in the community, friends, co-workers, and family to enjoy a time of free food, games, music, and conversation.

To help spread the word about the event, a small group from our church gathered on two Saturdays prior to the event to walk around the neighborhood, passing out flyers to people and business owners. Our hope was that we would have hundreds of people attend. Burgers, hotdogs, and sodas were purchased. Games were selected. Volunteers were assigned tasks. We were pumped!

Finally, Community Day arrived. Although, in the end, we didn't see hundreds from the community attend, there were a few visitors who unexpectedly showed up and gifted us with their unique presence.

In particular, two women pulled into the parking lot and got out of their car. As they opened the door, it was quickly apparent that something was different about them. As I glanced at them, I noticed that the car was packed with clutter. I thought that this was odd, but I didn't know what to think. I warmly greeted them and told them that we were glad to have them. In a matter

of minutes, they made themselves a plate and were enjoying some of the burgers and hotdogs that we were cooking on the grill. As our people began getting to know them, it sadly became evident that they were homeless and living out of their car. It all began to make sense.

It didn't matter that these women were wearing tattered clothes, living out of their car, and clearly in need; our church members sought to draw them into their conversations and make them feel welcome. God's people were showing Christ's love to them, serving them, and offering them sincere kindness. It reminded me of the love and hospitality of my godly grandmother. I thought to myself, *Wow, this is our church!* I was so encouraged to know that these women felt at home! What a blessing. We didn't need hundreds to be present. We had the opportunity to demonstrate love and care for the people God had brought to us.

As the day continued, I saw Ms. Diana, a godly 65-year-old woman, talking to another guest who sat sheepishly in a chair beside her. It was clear that her confidence in herself was very low. But Ms. Diana was patiently talking to her like she was her best friend. Ms. Diana is a sweet, kind, and tender-hearted woman who would give the shirt off her back for anyone. As she sat next to this woman, I honestly wondered what they were talking about.

Quickly, the word spread among our church community that Ms. Diana was sharing the gospel with this woman, who was unfortunately homeless as well. The woman was

listening to Ms. Diana's every word. After a few minutes, I noticed that she was happily eating a burger and a hotdog while intently listening. More than 25 minutes passed... As they continued talking, I was praying and asking God to please save her soul and use Ms. Diana's words and witness to bring her into the kingdom. Privately, our people began to pray for this woman's soul. *God, please save her! Please, Lord!* As people served her more food and made sure that she had all that she desired to eat, I saw Christian hospitality at work. What a joy to behold!

Well, God saved her! Hallelujah! Shortly afterward, I was asked to come to meet her. When I approached her, I told her that I was so glad that she was here, and she smiled and said, "Thank you for having me." Caring for this homeless woman as the event ended became the immediate priority of our church community. Where was she going to go from here? How could we make sure that she had what she needed and even a place to stay? Calls were made to find her housing resources. People prepared her a bag of food. Love was being poured out on our tattered yet beautiful neighbor!

Before I left to go home, I told her that she was more than welcome to come to our worship service the next day. She said, "I'll be there."

Honestly, I didn't know if she would come. I've engaged with homeless people before and was skeptical. But on Sunday, as I was greeting guests at the door after the service, she came up to me smiling and said, "Thank you

for having me; I enjoyed myself, and I'm coming next week." My heart was so full. I felt tears welling up in my eyes... The love of God had moved through his people and was on display. By God's grace, a soul was saved. The church family loved this woman who didn't fit in, who wasn't middle-class or dressed like everyone else. She started out as our unexpected guest but is now our sister in Christ. The unconditional love from Ms. Diana and our church family created a pathway for this woman to meet Jesus.

Please don't think for one minute that our church is perfect. Or that things like that happen for us every week! But when a church loves and cares for one another, and then invites outsiders in, the world can experience something of Jesus' love through his people.

ACTION STEPS

- Reflect on Romans 12:9-10. Which of these commands do you most want to grow in as you continue to read this book?
- Identify one church member who is an example to you in caring for God's people, in a way that my grandmother or Ms. Diana was to me. Reach out to tell them how much they encourage you.
- Before you leave for church this Sunday, ask the Spirit to give you eyes to see who might especially need your kindness and care.

