

# 'Consider How to Stir Up One Another to Love'

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of mutual care in the church, and how it is a biblical foundation for the church's care for its members.*

**Duration:** 46:41

**Scripture:** Hebrews 3:12

**Topics:** "Church Community", "Sacrificial Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of mutual care within the church community. The sermon is based on Dimension 4 of the treasuring Christ together vision, which focuses on sacrificial faith and sustaining care for one another. The speaker emphasizes the need for loving relationships at every level of the church, and encourages the congregation to welcome one another as Christ welcomed them. The sermon also references biblical passages, such as 1 Corinthians 12:25 and 1 Peter 4:10, which highlight the importance of using spiritual gifts to serve one another and to build a connected Christian community.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Tonight's message is from the book of Hebrews, chapter 3, verses 12 to 14, and then chapter 10, verses 23 to 25. Hebrews 3, 12 to 14.

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

And then from chapter 10, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. For he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Let's pray together. All the more, Lord, all the more stirring each other up, exhorting one another, helping each other fight the fight of faith, all the more as the day of Christ, the day of the Lord, approaches. What a seriousness there is about this one another ministry.

As the days become hard, and as the tribulations increase, and as the stress gathers, and as the signs of the end approach, Christian togetherness, exhorting, stirring, is more urgent. Oh God, help us to see that in this service, in this word, in this message. Help us to feel this.

Forbid that any would leave a lone ranger Christian, rather than a connected Christian. Help us to feel the burden of giving exhortation and receiving exhortation. Giving stirring words, and receiving stirring words, as the day draws near.

Lord, this is not a light thing, and I pray that you would give it its appropriate weightiness now, in this service, in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to come back to those two passages at the end, rather than do an extended exposition of them.

So here's the way it's going to go. I would like to give some historical background in our history as a church, as to what this message is about, and then do a broad New Testament sweep of the importance of what these two verses say, these two passages, and then we'll close by looking at them and what they add to that sweep. If you're newer at the church, I would like you to know that not only do we have a mission statement, we exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ, but we have a vision, an overarching vision of how that gets applied, called treasuring Christ together.

So the way to say it, as a whole, would be, as a church, we exist to spread, to as many people as we can, a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, capital A, no exceptions, for the joy of all peoples, all people groups in the world, all unreached ones and reached ones, through Jesus Christ, by multiplying campuses, planting churches, and a global diaconate. Those are the three pieces of the treasuring Christ together vision. It's about two years old in its full church-approved articulation, and what an amazing two years it has been.

The North Campus is fully functional, purchased, built out, not paid for yet. The South Campus, Lord willing, is in the serious planning stages for the fall of 2006, somewhere that way and that way. Help us pray that one into reality.

For those of you watching at the North Campus, I was just pointing south from here. TCT Church planting, the first resident, as you met him last Sunday, Jordan, is here on site and within a year will be sent out to plant a church. Another church plant is in the final stages of planning and preparation to be spun off next March.

You'll hear more about that. The global diaconate is responding to crises and planning more extensive on the ground. Bethlehem involvement with ongoing poorest of the poor, suffering people.

That's the vision under the mission for the foreseeable future, and we are thrilled to have that kind of direction with the mandate of the church. Now, here's what we thought. The North Campus had a kind of grand opening last Sunday, and it seemed to us that as the Wednesday connection begins for the first time in the history of this church on two campuses for the last couple of years, we've had two campuses, and we've done it all together down here.

And now North folks have their Wednesday night connection, and the downtown folks have this Wednesday night connection. It seemed to us good that we would teach during the 630 time on those Wednesday sessions called connection on the ten dimensions of a treasuring Christ together church. If

you want to read the whole booklet on the treasuring Christ together, you can go to the [bbcmls.org](http://bbcmls.org) website and read it.

And what you'll find on page four, I believe, is ten dimensions that we hope will characterize every one of the church plants that goes out from this church over the next ten years or so. We have divvied up among the staff who teaches which of these ten dimensions. I was assigned to start number four, which is about mutual care, to teach last Wednesday north and this coming Wednesday down here.

And it struck me as I was pondering how to do this that today is the small group focus, which is all about mutual care and how the elders try to do pastoral care in this church. And I decided and Kenny and Sam thought it was OK that instead of using my Wednesday nights to do that, I would do this Sunday on. Dimension for related to this, the small group ministry, and then use happily the Wednesday last time and this coming time to have a freer open discussion concerning a related topic, namely the elders recommendation concerning baptism and church membership.

So if you're wondering, are there ongoing discussions, are there opportunities to ask questions concerning the star article that you may have just read? We did one Wednesday last that was taped. It'll be available on a CD or on the website. And we'll do another one this coming Wednesday down here.

So today, this sermon, the background of this sermon is every fall we have a focus on small groups. And this fall I happen to be assigned dimension for which is mutual care. And so it's time now for me to read that to you.

Let me read. Dimension for of the treasuring Christ together vision for each of these churches, we hope to be and plant. Goes like this.

Every church will be marked by, quote, mutual care, corporate commitment to pursue a life together in sacrificial faith, sustaining care for each other in loving relationships at every level of youth and age, joy and sorrow, comfort and crisis, health and brokenness. Close quote. So that's dimension for called mutual care.

It has four pieces to it. The aim, the means, the context and the extent of mutual care. The aim faith sustaining.

All of the mutual care in this church, whatever form it takes, should be a faith sustaining faith, enlarging faith, deepening faith, rising ministry. Faith should get stronger because of our togetherness and our care for one another. The means in this is said to be sacrificial care for each other.

We'll unpack that more in a moment. Not just preaching, not just corporate large group worship, not just TBI classes. I believe in all of those with all my heart.

Give my life to them. But I say to our small group leaders, when I meet with them monthly on a Sunday night, you are the hands and feet of the sermons. And if you don't do your calling and gather your flock, the sermon goes handless and feetless.

We'll see how important this is in a few moments. The context is in loving relationships. And the extent is at every level of youth and age, joy and sorrow, comfort and crisis, health and brokenness.

So that's dimension for which we hope will mark all the churches that are planted over the next decade out of this church. May God do it. The primary means by which mutual care is equipped and facilitated by the elders of this church.

And that is one of our main responsibilities is found in this booklet. It's not the only way that pastoral care happens. It is the center and the meat and potatoes of how covenant members of this church get cared for.

We train small group leaders, elders and I, the staff meet with them monthly and we talk about the ministry they have. So there's kind of a filter down effect. God, Christ, elders, small group leaders, flock care flowing.

We pray through these groups. That's what we have put in place. And my goal in this message is to put Bible foundation underneath.

Dimension for mutual care and the small group ministry of Bethlehem Baptist Church, that's what I aim to do. The biblical foundation of small groups or mutual one another care not coming from the pastoral staff, but coming from you to you. The biblical foundation of that is most ultimately God cares for you.

And has ordained that first his son be sent into the world to purchase the liberty and the freedom and the omnipotent energy of his care for sinners rather than his judgment upon sinners. He has sent Christ into the world as the care purchaser and then caregiver. So God cares.

He sends Christ to purchase the care. And then through Christ, he uses elders, families, church members. That's the flow of the biblical structure of care.

So let me show you that from the Bible. First, Peter, five, seven, we'll start at the top and work our way down through that, that flow. First, Peter, five, seven, cast all your anxieties on him, on God, because he cares for you.

My, oh, my, what a burden lifting word that should be for you. Cast all your anxieties on God because cares for you. Can you imagine anything better than to hear that the omnipotent sustainer, creator, upholder, guider, ruler of the universe cares for me? The church of Jesus Christ is the blood bought bride of his son.

And oh, how he is jealous to care for the bride of his son. You second. He sends his son into the world to become a care purchaser and a caregiver.

John 10. Shepherd, in this case, means this. Listen to how he says it.

Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. This is John 10, 11. I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hireling flees. Because he's a hired hand when the wolf comes and he cares nothing for the sheep.

So you see the contrast that's being set up. I'm the good shepherd or you might have a hireling pastor. Shepherd.

The hireling is not doing this because he cares for you. Therefore, when the wolf comes, he runs away. I stay and kill the wolf.

I love you. I care. I care for your wool, your pasture, your still waters.

I lead. I protect. So under this massive creator God who cares for us, he has sent his son into the world.

His son says, I will lay down my life for you. And in laying down my life for you, I purchase all my free care for you. And you are mine.

Third, the elders. They're way down underneath. The son and the father.

But they're there. First Timothy 3, 5 describes the qualification for elders in the church of Jesus Christ. And one of the qualifications is very interesting.

In this verse, it says, if someone does not know how to manage his own household. And you might have words of you might have thoughts of, you know, kind of heartless management in your mind. But you can get those out of your mind as the sentence concludes.

If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? The whole reason when we've got about eight elders, we're seriously looking at eight elder candidates right now. One of the things the elders do is send, we dispatch two elders to their house. And they sit down for a couple of hours with wife and potential elder.

And they talk about life. Talk about marriage. And they talk about doctrine.

And they talk about how they handle conflict. And they talk about whether that's true. If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care? You watch a man.

How does he care for his wife? How does he care for his children, grown children and little children? And if he doesn't know how to care for them, manage them, he shouldn't be an elder in the church. Why? Because that's what eldering is about. God Almighty cares for his church.

The son cares for his flock. Under them, elders care for the people for. Families, God has put families in place to partner with the church in caring for the members of the church and the family.

Let me read you a very helpful pointer in this direction from First Timothy 5, 16. Kind of a surprising verse to me because of the focus it puts on the women in the church. It says, speaking of the care of widows.

Now, you're talking about a culture in which there's zero welfare, okay? If the family and the church don't do it, it doesn't happen. And widows, their breadwinner is gone and what are they going to do? Well, today the government picks it up. It doesn't have to be that way and probably won't always be that way.

Maybe not even in this country. The church ought to step in. Well, here's what it says.

First Timothy 5, 16. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Not an unusual charge to the women.

I mean, I kind of would have expected him to say men there. But he says women. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them.

Let the church not be burdened so that it may care, care, care, care for widows who are really widows. What that means is a widow who has no family members. In other words, Paul is saying families are the first responsibility to give care.

And if the family, for any reason, can't manage it, the church steps in. Not the government. First.

And so, number four in the flow, God, Christ, elders. And I'm putting these beside each other now. From the son, I'm going to elders.

Now I'm going to family. You've got family partnering with the church as best they can so that people are cared for. Five.

This is the one I want to spend most of our time on. Namely, the members of the church caring for each other. God cares for you.

Sends Christ who purchases all that omnipotent care so that it can come to sinners who don't deserve it. And he himself becomes an embodiment of it as the shepherd of the flock. And he calls elders to take leadership to see that this happens.

This care. He ordains families so that in their children and widows and mothers and fathers and everybody are caring for each other. And then he ordains what? What's this third piece? And it's what we do in small groups.

It's this. It's the warrant for this ministry. We have a huge department in this church called family discipleship.

Because of how utterly crucial that second piece is in the way God has set up his kingdom. And then we have this piece. We have an eldership.

So we have an eldership, family life department. And then we got this prong over here called small groups or mutual care. Where is that in the Bible? Like where is sand on the shore? We'll come back to Hebrews 3 and 10 in just a few moments.

What I want to do to lead to Hebrews 3 and 10 is to give you the sweep. As I do this, I almost never do what I'm about to do. I'm going to give you 20 passages of the Bible and comment on about three-fourths of them.

So this is like topical sermon big time. And as I read these 20 passages of Scripture, would you be praying, just quietly in your heart, be praying, Lord, this fall, is there a new step you want me to take in mutual care? How am I doing in giving it to other believers? And how am I doing in receiving it from other believers? Are there some steps I should take so that I am more in line with what these texts are saying? That's what I think would benefit you the most right now is for you to listen. Don't look them up.

I'm going to go too fast. Listen and pray. How about that one, Lord? How am I doing there? How about that one? Number one.

First John 4:11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. So the big overarching care commandment is love one another.

We spent a lot of time on that in Romans 13. Second, Romans 15:7. Welcome one another. Or you could translate it, accept or receive one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

Christians should be very welcoming people. When somebody approaches you or draws near to your little three-person group over in the corner of the commons, there shouldn't be a cold shoulder to that. As

somebody gets near, there should be a kind of, whoa.

Don't be cliquish. Be open-hearted and open-minded. Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you.

Christ walked across the commons on glass. Number three. First Corinthians 12:25.

That the members, the word members is in the text, that the members, and it means hands and legs and ears, that the members may have the same care for one another. Oh, let us know the beautiful imagery of the body of Christ. Number four.

First Peter 4:10. As each has received a gift, you have a gift. Did you know that you have a spiritual gift? Every believer has at least one, probably a bunch of spiritual gifts as each has received a gift.

Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Oh, what a wonderful picture of what should happen in small groups. God's got grace.

And it is as varied as personalities are varied in its manifestation. And our job in a small gathering, one-on-one or one-on-ten, is that through our peculiar personality, warts and all, we let grace flow. And that becomes service.

Your spiritual gift is what happens when the real you simply lets grace flow from God through you to another person. You don't need to find it on a list. It may not be on a list anywhere.

Just you be you, loving people and bestowing grace, and the way it comes out of you will be very distinctive. And guess what? Very needed by somebody else. If you don't do that, you're withholding something very needed in the church.

Number five, Ephesians 5:2. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. So submitting is an essential piece of that serving component, and there should be, and this works for elders who are leaders also, there is a way in which we should be submitting to all rather than lording it over the flock. Serving, submitting, leadership should be servant leadership.

Six, 1 Thessalonians 5:15. Always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Do good to one another. Number seven, Ephesians 4:32. Be kind to one another, tender hearted.

Number eight, Hebrews 10:25. Now I'm picking up one of our texts that was read. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. And all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Being in each other's lives for mutual encouragement is an end time necessity. Ponder why that might be. Ponder the kinds of words Jesus uses to describe the stresses and the trials and the tribulations and the dangers and the persecutions of the end times.

And then let it land on you as the day draws near. Don't neglect to meet for mutual encouragement. You know, when I was growing up, I heard that verse quoted a dozen times, no a hundred times, for Sunday morning worship.

Scolding us for not being regular in our attendance. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. And they never finished the verse.

That you might encourage each other. Now I do believe that happens in worship services. But there's a horizontal one another thing going on there that's not happening in this room right now.

Except from me to you. And it's all about you doing that for each other. Therefore, some kind of setting like this is going to be very important.

Small groups. Number nine. Hebrews 10 24.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. I would love to talk for a long time here about my own life. Which is brimming with gratitude for the number of people that have come into my life and stirred me up for Christ.

I'd talk about Noel and being stirred up to love like I ought to love for our children and our aging parents. I talk about Ray Ortland. I am talking about it.

I'd talk about Ray Ortland. Who was the first pastor who caused me to fall in love with the church of Jesus Christ. 1968.

Walking around the streets of Pasadena as an engaged guy. Just wanted to be together with Noel. She's back in Wheaton.

I'm in Los Angeles. And I'm wondering if there's a future for the local church. Isn't that the most stupid thing you ever heard? Like an aunt wondering is there an earth? And then I, with Noel, married December.

Walk into Lake Avenue Church. And Sunday after Sunday this man's radiant love for his people totally changed my view of the body of Christ. Changed my whole view about my future.

And what a good thing it is to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ with all her imperfections. I would talk about Tom Steller and how 25 years of partnership has shaped me so deeply. Because of his unique way of caring for people that's so unlike mine.

I'd talk about David Michael and how he stirs me up to love kids. And I'd talk about David Livingston and how he stirs me up to love the lost. I'd talk about Brad and John and how they stir me up to love teenagers.

I'd talk about biographies that I read and how they stir me up to love the nations. And Eric who gets me all fired up every time he prays. That's what the body of Christ, little group and big group, is supposed to do.

God has ordained that we get stirred up not just by getting along with our Bibles. But by getting along with each other and our Bibles. Number 10.

Hebrews 3.13 Exhort one another every day as long as it is called today. That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. So exhort one another every day.

Because sin is always threatening. Always threatening to make you hard and blind. Number 11.

Colossians 3.16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach. And admonish one another with all wisdom. Now the word admonish has a little bit of an edge to it.

A little bit of an edge to it, right? I don't think I care to be admonished. Exhort. Fine.

Admonish. And there are times when this pastor better get admonished. Somebody better have the courage to get in my face and say, Don't say it that way.

You shouldn't have written that. I got taken to task for one star article I wrote about 20 years ago that almost got me fired. But I won't even tell you the title because the title almost got me fired.

But two of our deacons sat down with me in my office and said, You blew it. So that's important for all of us. Admonition, not just comfortable exhortation.

Ephesians 5.19. Number 12. This is an amazing one. Kind of threatening.

Address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. Address one another in hymns and songs and spiritual songs.

How does that happen? It happens two ways. Many songs, most of the ones we sang tonight. Maybe all of them were directed straight to God or Jesus.

But guess what? We heard each other doing it. We heard each other with heart and mind and soul saying, You are great. And when another believer sees you and hears you say to God, You are great.

With song, something happens that's very good. Or it can be in a family. I'll be real honest.

We're not really great singers in the Piper family. We interviewed a guy for the South Worship Guide that we're still looking at. And I asked him.

Just pushing on his personal life. And he said, Well, my kids and my wife, they're not called to sing. But we sing.

We sing when we have devotions. And the Pipers have. But we're not as regular as we should.

And it's good. I'll even give you an absolutely radical challenge. Noelle and I have done this a few times.

Anniversary, 37 coming up. Somebody gives us or we just go to some bed and breakfast in Stillwater. And when we get up in the morning and they bring you the breakfast, Would you guys ever say, Let's sing? Just the two of us.

Would you ever do that? We've done it. It's really weird and wonderful. Absolutely wonderful.

She can sing and I can sing a little bit. Meditate on Ephesians 5.19 for your family. You don't have to be a very good singer.

It might change your life. Number 13, Romans 15, 5. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another. Live in harmony with one another.

Number 14, 2 Corinthians 13, 11. Comfort one another. Oh, the beauty of a pastor.

Did I say that right? Oh, how wonderful it is when a pastor watches something beautiful like a small group responding to a crisis or a loss. Oh, when it works the way it's supposed to work and these small groups rally around somebody whose husband is in the hospital or child is sick and they're buying meals and they're cleaning house and they're buying stuff for them and they're doing all kinds of things and people are just brimming with gratitude to God. That's beautiful.

That's Jesus all over us. And so comfort one another in crisis. Number 15, Romans 15, 14.

You yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct one another. This is a really heady church in some ways. Classes running out our ears.

A lot of exposition going on. People like to think. That ought to be flowing this way, not just this way.

As knowledge rises, if you learn anything, anything about God, tell somebody about it. Bend it outward when it comes to you. Romans 12, 10, number 16.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Number 17, Colossians 3, 13. Bear with one another.

If anyone has a complaint, another. You can't survive as a church or a marriage without what the old word describes as forbearance. In other words, you don't like it, you'll never change it.

Deal with it. Endure it. Isn't that an amazing thing that love includes forbearance? Forbearance.

Just bear it. So there's a lot of stuff in this church you don't like, right? Bear it. There's a lot I don't like.

Bear it. Not with grudging, grumbling, murmuring. Just bear it.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Number 18, Colossians 3, 13. Beyond bearing, forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you.

So you also must forgive. So we don't just bear only when there are real offenses, real offenses. We let them go.

Bearing is stuff that may or may not be sin. You think it's sin, they don't think it's sin. And so you bear it.

But if a real offense happens, a real sin against you, you forgive it. This is the way one another works. James 5, 16, number 19.

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. There are few things that are more humbling and more healing than to say to someone, I'm sorry, I was wrong. Do it to your children, dads.

Do it to your teenagers. Nothing is more bonding than a dad who knocks on the door after overreacting, sits down on the bed and says, I shouldn't have said what I said. Would you forgive me to a 15 year old kid or a 9 year old kid? And in a small group, few things will bond you than confession of sin.

Finally, number 20. 1 Peter 4, 9. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. And the reason I end with that one is because it is so closely related to small groups because most of our small groups happen in homes.

Not all of them, but most of them happen in your homes. Would you be freed? Would you be liberated right now? Could I just say, do not be ashamed of your simple efficiency apartment. And do not be arrogant, proud, or puffed up about your very nice home.

What God cares about is not the size or cleanliness of your apartment or your home. He cares about, is it open and full of love? That's all He cares about. My wife loves the plaque.

Boring people live in immaculate houses. And that's probably true. I draw to a close by looking at the texts that were read to you.

Hebrews 13, 13 describes the negative effect that exhorting should have. And Hebrews 10, 25 describes the positive effect that exhorting should have. And I'll just read these and we'll be done.

Exhort one another every day. This is Hebrews 3, 13. Exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That's a negative avoidance. We look at each other and we know that Satan and the world and the flesh are trying to harden and dull and blind and deafen the soul. And we're in each other's lives with word-saturated exhortation to keep the soul alive and sensitive and supple and touchable by the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

And then verse 24, I said 25. 24 of Hebrews 10, the positive side. Let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.

We all tend to drift into selfishness and we need to be stirred up to love again over and over. So, I appeal to all of Bethlehem. I appeal to all of Bethlehem as one of your under-shepherds who will have to give an account someday of whether we've done what we can do to care for your souls.

I appeal to you, would you help us by taking seriously our plan to make these small groups available? And would you simply pray towards joining one or creating one? We need lots more than are here in order for 1,700 covenant members to be included. I'm talking to teenagers and octogenarians. I'm talking to singles and married.

I'm talking to men who think they don't need this sort of thing. And women. I'm talking to babies in Christ who are brand new and know they need it.

And I'm talking to 50-year-old veteran Christians who think they've outgrown it. All of us need to be in context relationships where verse 25 happens. Do not neglect to meet together, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Please, get this booklet. This little back panel here. Tears, like that.

And you can put on there the one that you would love to be considered for. Or you can be in touch with them. Pray with me about this.

North campus and downtown. Let's pray. Father in heaven, there are so many, many reasons why you have called us to be in each other's lives.

What I owe to other believers by way of stirring up for you and for love is incalculable. And I thank you for that. Don't let any, I pray, miss out on this blessing.

I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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