

Christian Reflections on Family, Health, Care Work, and Economic Justice

The Bible has much to say about honoring the family and God's community through just relationships. Jesus teaches that what is important to one's own kin is also a responsibility towards the full community, that individual acts of compassion are important and we must address systems that harm God's family.

We are told to love God above all else, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). Jesus responds to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" with the story of the Samaritan who cared for and healed a stranger beaten and left to die on the side of the road to Jericho, after others passed him by. As Jesus taught, this Samaritan is the one who understood what it means to be a neighbor (Luke 10:30-37).

Andrew Young recalls Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s comments about the Samaritan:

*"... Andy, I think the Good Samaritan is a great individual. I, of course, like and respect the Good Samaritan ... but I don't want to be a Good Samaritan," Dr. King said. "... You see, Andy, I am tired of picking up people along the Jericho Road. I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody, injured and jumped on, along the Jericho Roads of life. This road is dangerous. I don't want to pick up anyone else, along this Jericho Road; I want to fix ... the Jericho Road. I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road, make the Jericho Road safe (for passage) by everybody ..."*¹

Dr. King identified both the moral mandate to help the injured person and the justice call to change the systems that got that person injured. As we reflect on *Zero Weeks*, we consider both the way faith communities in the film responded to individual personal crises and how they advocate for paid family and medical leave for all.

Family and Community

As we explore the moral and practical case for supporting family caregivers, two fundamental Christian principles frame our discussion: first, *flourishing* as God's intent for humankind, and second, *honoring elders* as a familial and communal responsibility that contributes to human flourishing in all seasons of life.

*"The capacity for flourishing for people in all seasons of life, including old age, finds roots in the stories of creation, where we read that God created humanity in God's own image (Genesis 1:27). All people, of all ages and of all abilities, are made in God's image and are called to love God and love their neighbors. Elders especially are looked to for wisdom, leadership, and mentorship."*²

Jeremiah (29:5-7) calls on families to nurture and support each other while also "seeking the welfare of the city." It is a dual mandate to care for family and to care for the larger community. "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters ... But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile ... for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Caregiving

"The commandment 'Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you' (Exodus 20:12) establishes the family as the incubator for translating loving God to loving the neighbor ... Honor is expressed in moments of crisis during the rollercoaster of care, in the deep end of care until the time of death, or in countless day-to-day moments in the long marathon of care. The responsibility to honor one's parents builds upon an understanding of mutuality and interdependence that is fundamental to healthy family care. ... The book of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible brings to life the beauty and mutuality of family care espoused in the commandment to honor."

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests but each of you to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4). Matthew 25 states that "what you did for the least of these, you did for me."

¹<https://rhettsmith.com/2008/01/martin-luther-king-jr-and-fixing-the-road-to-gericho/>

²"Called to Care: Honoring Elders and the Family Care Journey," Amy Zietlow, The Center for Public Justice (June 2019), p. 21.

Health and Well-being

A central part of Jesus' ministry was healing the sick. Jesus responded to people's faith by making them whole, often after years of affliction. In doing so he ran up against official rules, such as "no healing on the Sabbath" to act on God's higher law for health and wholeness. He challenged taboos of gender and ethnicity to heal women. Having time to heal and care for others is an important biblical value grounded in faith in God's power to heal.

"A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and barely touched his clothes. She had said to herself, 'If I can just touch his clothes, I will get well.' Jesus turned. He saw the woman and said, 'Don't worry! You are now well because of your faith.' At that moment, she was healed" (Matthew 9:20-22 [CEV]). "Jesus went to every town and village. He taught in their meeting places and preached the good news about God's kingdom. Jesus also healed every kind of disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35 [CEV]).

Justice for the community—God's Kin-dom

Lack of paid family and medical leave is not only a personal and family crisis, it is a societal crisis. Too few workers have paid leave through their jobs, while many others, disproportionately women and people of color, do not. When workers must choose between care for loved ones and themselves or going to work, they risk losing their jobs, livelihoods and future economic stability. This is a justice issue.

When Jesus announced his ministry, he quoted Isaiah (61:1, 2) in depicting the Kin-dom of God, echoing the first testament call for a Jubilee where prisoners and the oppressed were freed and land restored. *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:16-19).

The prophets called for justice for workers. *"How terrible ... working his countrymen for nothing, refusing to give them their wages" (Jeremiah 22:13). "On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers ... Is that what you call ... a day acceptable to the Lord?" (Isaiah 58:3, 5).*

"What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" (Isaiah 3:14-15). Jesus, in proclaiming the Kingdom, said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly!" (John 10:10).

1. How does the Bible speak to you about the need for paid time off to heal and care for others?
2. What are the repairs needed on the Jericho road of caregiving and labor rights?



³Ibid, pp. 22-23