

EDWARD T. WELCH

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BY

WALKING
WITH OTHERS
— IN —
WISDOM AND
LOVE

“The task of counseling is the task of loving others well. This book will help you to know what the love of Christ looks like, how to extend it to others, and how to accept it from others as you live in relationship together.”

Heath Lambert, Executive Director, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors; Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams*

“There are two things that Welch’s book does very well. It demonstrates that no one gives grace better than a person who is convinced he needs it himself and that God makes his invisible grace visible by sending ordinary people to give extraordinary grace to people who need it. Welch not only reminds us all of our call to friendship ministry but also unpacks for us what it looks like. Every Christian should read this book!”

Paul David Tripp, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; author, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*

“Welch builds a vision of a Christian community that moves beyond platitudes and empty promises to deep, scriptural, Christlike relationships. You will find this book to be a helpful primer on how to ask for and provide help in the midst of an age of separation.”

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, counselor; speaker; author, *Found in Him*

“Finally! I’ve been wanting a book that helps normal, everyday Christians know how to help friends who are struggling. Ed Welch has given us this in his short, well-written, biblically sound, and Christ-exalting book. I’m planning to buy a bunch of copies and give it out to our church members.”

Deepak Reju, Pastor of Biblical Counseling and Family Ministry, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; author, *The Pastor and Counseling*

“Ed Welch calls us back to the biblical model of one-another care with user-friendly wisdom that neither overcomplicates nor oversimplifies what it means to be a biblical encourager. I highly recommend *Side by Side* for every believer, every small group, and every church committed to being equipped to encourage one another in Christ.”

Robert W. Kellemen, Vice President, Institutional Development; Chair, Biblical Counseling Department, Crossroads Bible College; author, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*

“Side by Side is a simple, insightful, and practical guide to walking with people through times of trouble. This book will help churches to become communities of honesty and healing. You should read it—others will benefit, and so will you.”

Ian Smith, Principal, Christ College, Sydney

“Side by Side is a very practical and thoroughly biblical guide meant as much for the average church member as for pastors and caregivers. Ed demolishes the myth that counseling can be done only by the professionally qualified. I wish this book had been written long ago.”

John K. John, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Trust of India

“This book of practical spirituality will produce many more helpless Christians, but also many more helpful Christians. It made me feel both more needy and more needed. A rare double blessing!”

David P. Murray, Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Side by Side is an expertly executed physical-therapy treatment for the disabled body of Christ. With biblical precision and practical compassion, Welch assists the attentive and teachable to work spiritual muscles left unused by many. Finally, someone has offered the people of God a ministry tool for mutual burden bearing and spiritual body building.

Joseph V. Novenson, Pastor, Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church,
Lookout Mountain, Tennessee

“Ed Welch skillfully provokes and counsels Christians on how to relate better with others by recognizing they are needy and needed. He puts his arms around church members who want to be more than spectators, around friends who want to grow in wise love for one another, and around parents who want to be more effective with their children. I wish I could have read this book as a young person—life would have been much richer both for others and for me.”

Bruce K. Waltke, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Regent College

“Side by Side simply made my ministry approach and the necessary in-reach method more pertinent to successful personal outreach and up-close-and-personal discipleship.”

Dallas H. Wilson Jr., Vicar, St. John’s Chapel, Charleston, South
Carolina

“We are needy people who share the same nature with many others in need of help. God’s grace does not make us self-sufficient but enables us to help others. Welch develops this principle beautifully in this book. *Side by Side* is not only a book for individual profit but one to be used as an instrument for the growth of the church and the equipping of God’s people.”

Valdeci Santos, Vice-President and Professor of Biblical Counseling and Missions, Andrew Jumper Graduate Center, Brazil

“*Side by Side* is a practical book about us needing others and others needing us. It pushes us to go further in our relationships and offers concrete ways to do that. It is a book about being companions and allies in Christian living. It is a book, finally, about being good Christian friends. I’d love every member of our church to read it—we would be a stronger community as a result.”

Steve Midgley, Executive Director, Biblical Counselling UK; Senior Minister, Christ Church, Cambridge

Side by Side

Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love

Edward T. Welch

Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love

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To
Sharon

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Introduction

Side by Side: Needy and Needed

This book identifies the skills we need to help one another.

It is for everyone—friends, parents, even neighbors.

Along the way we will find that God is pleased to use ordinary people, ordinary conversations, and extraordinary and wise love to do most of the heavy lifting in his kingdom.

The basic idea is that those who help best are the ones who both need help and give help. A healthy community is dependent on all of us being both. So the book is divided into two parts. The first part guides you in sharing your burdens; the second part guides you in bearing the burdens of others.

We all need help—that’s simply part of being human.

The help we need goes beyond things like getting our house painted or finding a good mechanic. It’s deeper than that. We need help for our *souls*, especially when we are going through hardships. Help can be as simple as connecting with someone who understands or with someone who genuinely says, “I’m so sorry.” We were not designed to go through hard things alone.

But it’s not easy to ask for help. We spend a lot of time hiding our neediness because we are afraid of what people will think. Speaking personally, on most days I am happy to give help and reluctant to ask for it. For me, being needy is a sign

of weakness, and, given a choice, I prefer to appear strong or at least competent.

Yet weakness—or neediness—is a valuable asset in God’s community. Jesus introduced a new era in which weakness is the new strength. Anything that reminds us that we are dependent on God and other people is a good thing. Otherwise, we trick ourselves into thinking that we are self-sufficient, and arrogance is sure to follow. We need help, and God has given us his Spirit and each other to provide it.

We are all helpers—this too is part of being human. A young child is most satisfied when helping parents cook or clean. They delight in contributing to the household. In this, they illustrate how God has given all people gifts “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7), and all gifts are needed. There is no such thing as an unnecessary person.

Actually, we offer help so often that we might not even be aware of it. We listen to a roommate or a spouse about struggles at work, we commiserate with a friend who is full of fears, we give advice to the member of our small group who is going through a bumpy relationship, we ask how we can pray.

We were meant to live that way. We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people. God is pleased to grow and change us through the help of people who have been re-created in Christ and empowered by the Spirit. That is how life in the church works.

And yet fear enters in. We are afraid to jump into the complexities of someone’s life. Who are we to help someone else? We have troubles galore. Our past makes a mess of the present. Sin always threatens to overtake us. And who doesn’t have a psychological disorder? We feel broken ourselves and fear we will only make things worse for others. We feel unqualified.

In our era we consult experts, professionals, and special-

ists, but when you look at your own history of having been helped, it's likely that you'll notice very few experts among those who have helped you. Who were your helpers? Were they professional counselors or specialists? Probably not. Most often, they were friends—the regular, everyday people in your life. Friends are the best helpers. They come prepackaged with compassion and love. All they need is wisdom, and that is available to everyone.

It's the perfect system. If God used only experts and people of renown, some could boast in their own wisdom, but God's way of doing things is not the same as our way. We ordinary people have been given power and wisdom through the Holy Spirit and are called to love others (John 13:34). From this beginning, we are compelled to move toward others rather than stay away.

So I am writing for people like me, who are willing to move toward other struggling people but are not confident that they can say or do anything very helpful. If you feel quite weak and ordinary—if you feel like a mess but have the Spirit—you have the right credentials. You are one of the ordinary people God uses to help others.

As we get the knack of this rhythm—being needy and needed—Jesus will be in it and over it. He was weak before we were; he was dependent on his Father and dependent even on mere human beings. He also came to serve rather than to be served, and he did it side by side. As far as we are able, we do this with one another.

Part 1

We Are Needy

Your neediness qualifies you to help others. Your neediness, offered well to someone else, can even be one of the great gifts you give to your church. You will inspire others to ask for help.

Think of a time when you were in a group and someone spoke openly about a struggle in daily life. What happened next? In most instances, the group suddenly became more like a family. Other people opened up about their lives, and the prayers of the group sounded more and more like the Psalms. When something like this happens, the myth that we all have life figured out is exposed, and we begin to share one another's burdens, which is the way God intended it to be.

We spend too much time concealing our neediness. We need to stop hiding. Being needy is our basic condition. There is no shame in it—it's just the way it is. Understanding this, accepting it, and practicing it will make you a better helper.

This part of the book begins with a simple sketch of who we are. From there, it will help you understand, admit, and practice your own neediness.

We Are Needy

Life Is Hard

Our Hearts Are Busy

Hard Circumstances Meet Busy Hearts

Sin Weighs a Lot

Say "Help" to the Lord

Say "Help" to Other People

Life Is Hard

Life is too hard to manage single-handedly. That's why we are needy. Life is also good, but it is hard. There is never a day when we have immunity from difficult circumstances.

To admit that is not complaining. It is simply true. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33), and, if we stop to think about those tribulations, we realize they are unending:

- Our health
- Job and financial unknowns
- Local violence
- Broken promises
- Too much to do
- Our family's health
- Discrimination and injustice
- International terrorism
- Conflict with friends
- Mechanical breakdowns

Why do we bother identifying such hardships? We do it because human beings do best when they take their hardships public to God and at least one other person. When we survey the Psalms, we discover that this is God's desire for us.

To you, O LORD, I cry,
and to the Lord I plead for mercy. (Ps. 30:8)

We Are Needy

Through psalms like that one, the Lord essentially says to us, “Come to me with your hardships. That’s what children do with their Father.” The hard things of life are important to God, and if they are important to God, they are important to us, and we will labor to put them into speech.

Life Organized

Where do we start? Since there is so much, it might help to organize the circumstances of our lives. Figure 1, below, is a way to do that. It organizes those circumstances, both good and hard, in a series of concentric circles. Think of it as an X-ray of ourselves and the world around us. The heart and the first circle (our body) represent us; the additional concentric circles are circumstances that surround us. They are the world in which we live.

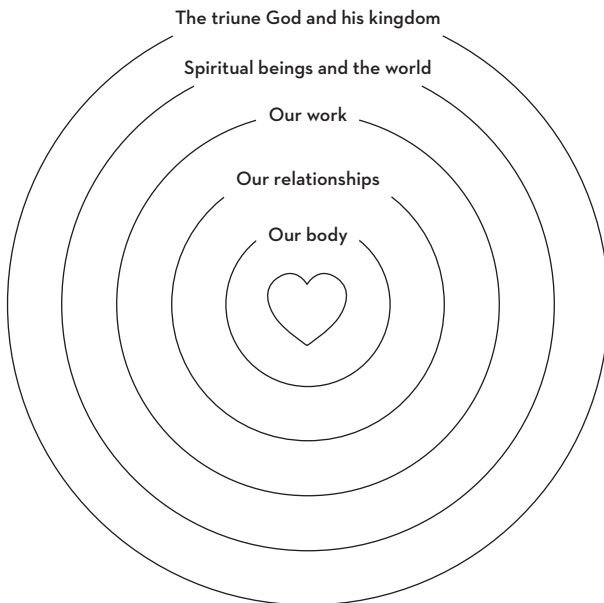


Figure 1. A biblical X-ray of a person and the surrounding world

Consider first a few of those circumstances that shape our lives. (We will deal with the heart in the next chapter.)

Our Body

Our body is an integral part of us, but it is also a kind of circumstance that affects us. It blesses us with health, and it brings hardships such as daily aches and pains, sleep loss, headaches, and the gamut of medical diagnoses. The body, including the brain, contributes to psychiatric diagnoses. If you're experiencing mania, certain features of depression, or attention deficits—the list can be long—there might be elusive yet physical problems coming at you.

Our Relationships

Relationships are where we find the best and worst of life. Here is the pleasure of growing and peaceful relationships, and here is where hopes are dashed and love is lost. Here is where we experience aloneness, victimization, and rejection. Whether or not we like it, we need people, but they can make life difficult.

Our Work

Work includes the job we have or would like to have, the futility of some work, and the money we earn. Money, in particular, can have a significant influence on our lives. Both poverty and riches leave us vulnerable. Poverty suggests that God is not with us, so we trust in ourselves, and riches suggest that we have what we need, so we trust in our money. Work and money shape our lives more than we know.

Spiritual Beings and the World

Spiritual beings are behind the scenes, but they pack a punch. Angels protect us, while spiritual beings in cahoots with Satan

We Are Needy

oppose us. These spiritual beings have power to afflict us physically, as we see with Job. But their primary weapons are lies, half-truths, and temptations, tactics that are much more powerful than any physical affliction.

The world is included among these influences. Scripture uses *world* in two different ways. Sometimes *world* means the inhabited creation, in other words, the earth. Other times, and the way I am using it here, it refers to Satan and those who stand hand in hand with his against-God ways. Together they create a chorus of voices that quietly yet powerfully speak against the character of God and announce that sin is just fine. You can hear the world especially in our culture's chorus about sexual license. This means that we are, indeed, vulnerable people who need God's power and protection (e.g., Eph. 6:10–12).

The Triune God and His Kingdom

The circle that envelops everything is God himself. We live, in all ways and at all times, before God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and in his world (Acts 17:28). God is over all things and surrounds all our circumstances. He is sovereign and active, never asleep. God is in the details of daily life; he is in the broad strokes of history as he moves all things to a final climax, and we need him in order to “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). He is by no means a bystander, off on the side, silently observing our troubles—though we could easily think such things. Instead, he created all things, so he owns all things.

We could add more circles. Ethnic and religious heritage is *the* circumstance of life for many people. We could also add our geographical and political environment, but those listed above can get us started. Life includes so many influences and hardships, and God is up to something in all of them.

Think about what you would jot down in those circles. What comes to mind? What is good, and, especially, what is hard?

Our task for now is to acknowledge some specifics of the fragility and uncertainty of our lives and the difficult circumstances we face and then to speak about them to God. Just speak. That is his desire—for us to speak honestly from our heart. We don't have to add requests. Just speak.

Discussion and Response

- 1) There are a lot of hard things coming at you. What are the top three? You could also take one from each of the categories that surround each one of us.
- 2) Take time to speak your hard things to the Lord-who-hears.

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Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder and CEO, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

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PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR LOVING OTHERS WELL

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John K. John, *Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Trust of India*

EDWARD T. WELCH (PhD, University of Utah) is a counselor and faculty member at the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation. He has been counseling for more than 35 years and has written extensively on the topics of depression, fear, and addictions. His books include *When People Are Big and God Is Small*; *Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away From Addiction*; *Running Scared: Fear, Worry and the God of Rest*; and *Shame Interrupted*. He blogs regularly at CCEF.org.

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