

Jesus' Health Care Plan

✖ You can't turn on the TV, listen to radio or read a newspaper without confronting some information about the raging debate on health care. Surveys continue to show that Americans are not well-informed on the issue and are struggling to figure out who is telling the truth about existing needs, the financial implications of the policies under consideration, and how they will personally be affected.

Because so much of the debate relates to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, Americans are playing this one a bit more cautiously than usual. Most adults define themselves as living a middle-class life, and believe their levels of comfort are a direct result of their own hard work and diligence. As politicians plead their case regarding health care provisions, citizens are conflicted, vacillating between a hard-line stance that expects others to work as hard as they have to get good health care and showing some compassion toward those who are less fortunate.

Views of Poverty

Our surveys underscore the fact that about three-quarters of all adults believe poverty is one of the most serious issues facing the nation. Even more significantly, most Americans also contend that when it comes to alleviating poverty, that's mainly the government's responsibility. Two-thirds of adults look to the government to solve issues related to poverty – including health care deficiencies. Just one out of every five adults believes that solving poverty is an individual duty, and a mere one out of 25 people assigns that task to non-profit organizations, and another one in 25 assigns it to churches.

As we assess how individuals deal with poverty on a personal level, we find that Americans do get involved, but in a kind of arms-length manner. For instance, the most common responses

are for people to give money, food, and clothing to someone else to get the job done. In contrast, the most personal responses are the least common. Relatively few Americans talk directly with the needy, tutor them, build homes for them, visit them, befriend them, or engage in other types of personal activities to address the issue.

One might say, then, that we mean well but we're too busy, too disinterested, or feel too inadequate to actually address poverty personally, head-on. Given that mind set, it's no wonder that the current health care debate centers not on what every American can personally do to help alleviate human suffering, but on how we can get the government to provide a more efficient alternative that will neither break the bank nor hinder our lifestyle.

In essence, what Americans seem to want is increased government services, more efficient delivery of services, no increase in taxes, and no personal involvement in the process. In a nutshell, our argument is: it's not my fault and it's not my job, so let the paid professionals deal with it.

Jesus the Healer

Given the fact that devout Christians mirror these attitudes, it raises the question of what a Christian's obligation to the poor is in the matter of health care. Should Christians feel comfortable accepting the "let the government handle it" philosophy?

If a Christian were to turn to the Bible for guidance in these matters, a simple read through the gospel according to Luke would provide some answers. Luke, the author of the third gospel account in the New Testament, was a physician and would have been especially sensitive to how Jesus dealt with people's medical needs.

In fact, Luke's narrative contains 26 different passages describing how Jesus responded to people's physical and

medical needs. The book shows that Jesus healed hundreds of people. But it also gives us some consistent patterns from Jesus' ministry to the poor and suffering people He encountered that we might use as principles to guide our personal responses to today's health care challenges.

There were at least seven noteworthy perspectives that underlie Jesus' health care strategy.

Jesus healed people because He believed that good health matters. People with serious medical challenges lack hope – and people without hope have no reason to keep living. Since life is a precious gift from God, and He wants people to enjoy and celebrate life, as well as the God who gave it to them, restoring health was a viable means to an end. Whenever He had the opportunity to do so, He healed people and sent them on their way.

Jesus invested Himself in their healing because He loved and cared for people. In Luke 7:13 we read that “His heart overflowed with compassion” for those people. He did not heal them because it showed His power or grabbed attention as much as He healed them because He felt their pain and knew their desolation. Healing was a practical demonstration that God was not wrathful but graceful.

Jesus healed everyone who presented a medical need because He saw no reason to screen some out as unqualified. Whether He knew them or not, He helped them. Whether they supported Him or not, He helped them. Whether they were adherents of His faith or not, He helped them. He did not set up conditions and hoops in order for people to qualify. He just healed them because He could.

Jesus healed every kind of illness He encountered. No malady was too simple (such as a fever) or too complex (including paralysis, leprosy, and demonization). He even took on the impossible – death – and raised people from the dead on three

separate occasions!

Jesus pursued them because He saw Himself as a servant. A servant does what he can to address the needs of those being served, whether the needy one comes to the servant or the servant must go to the needy. Jesus did not get caught up in the ego games of who should pursue who; when He saw a need He went out of His way to address it.

Jesus allowed them to disrupt His schedule because He realized that people's pain and suffering was their top focus in life. Because the main value in His life was giving love, things like remaining on schedule, following His pre-determined agenda, maintaining orderliness and predictability all took a back seat to the chance to affect other people's lives with genuine love.

Jesus expected His closest followers to heal others. The needs of the people were substantial and providing a healing touch grabbed people's attention so they could see Him for who He was and what His message to them was. Consequently, Jesus included healing in the marching orders He gave to not only the 12 apostles, but to another group of 72 disciples that He had been mentoring in the ways of grace. (Luke 9:1; 10: 1, 9, 17)

Jesus Health Care Strategy

In short, Jesus Christ showed us that anyone who follows Him is expected to address the most pressing needs of others. You can describe Jesus' health care strategy in four words: whoever, whatever, whenever, wherever. Whoever needed to be healed received His healing touch. Whatever affliction they suffered from, He addressed it. Whenever the opportunity to heal arose, He seized it. Wherever they happened to be, He took care of it.

Contrast the Jesus model with the preferred American model. The latter might be described as deciding to throw some money

at the problem – but not too much – so that somebody else can do what needs to be done, for those who qualify, in a manner that does not inconvenience us. The former approach was the whoever, whatever, whenever, wherever strategy.

It's quite a contrast, isn't it?

The Underlying Foundation

Don't overlook the fact that Jesus called on His followers to personally attend to the health care needs of the poor and disenfranchised. Not only did Jesus model healing for His followers, but He supported such outreach with ample philosophical underpinnings. You see Him teaching His followers before, during and after instances of healing. We are familiar with the principles, but perhaps not their application to health needs.

Do to others what you would like them to do to you (Luke 7:31). Jesus asked His followers to see themselves in the people who yearned for a healing touch and to respond accordingly. Although He was mocked and opposed for His efforts to heal, such opposition never stopped Him from treating others as we would want to be treated.

Produce results (or, in biblical language, bear fruit) (Luke 6:43-45). These days, we might think of His teaching as admonishing His followers to not pass the buck. He reminded them they had been given gifts and resources so that they could affect reality. He warned them against simply discussing solutions and instructed them to conceive and implement solutions.

Do whatever it takes to love God and all people with your heart, mind, strength and soul (Luke 4:8, 6:27-36). Jesus used love as a verb, not an adjective. He exhorted His followers to prove their love by doing compassionate things for those in need. Jesus showed them what was important by focusing on the act of giving, rather than receiving. Often, those whom He

healed did not thank Him, and He was never paid for his medical care – but He healed them regardless, because it enabled Him to love those who lacked hope.

Always try to do the will of God (Luke 12:29-31). Your life is not about what you want; to be a follower of Jesus your desires should match God's. The way we demonstrate that we understand this principle is by allowing God to change your heart, and by following His plan.

A Personal Challenge

So, if Jesus went to such lengths to put feet on His health care strategy, what is yours? He did not seem inclined to wait for the government to provide for the poor. His strategy called for people to help people, through the power and ability that He entrusted to His followers. One must wonder if the American preference for government programs is the best solution to the existing needs – and if a nation where 83 percent of adults label themselves “Christian” can blend that religious connection with a desire for state-based solutions.

Government clearly has a role in people's lives; the Bible supports its existence and circumscribed functions. It is unfortunate that when God's people, collectively known as the Church, fail to exhibit the compassion and service that He has called us to provide, we are comfortable with the government acting as a national safety net. In a society that has become increasingly self-centered and self-indulgent, we simply expand our reliance upon the government to provide solutions and services that are the responsibility of Christ followers. Some Christians have heeded the call, as evidenced by the medical clinics, pregnancy centers and even hospitals across the nation that were initiated and funded by small numbers of dedicated believers who grasped this responsibility. Imagine what an impact the Church would have on society if it truly reflected the model Jesus gave us of how to care for one another!

As we think about the elements embedded in the national debate, perhaps each of us should be asking ourselves a few simple questions. What kinds of people within your realm of influence need health care assistance – and how do you respond? How do you figure out who to help – and who to serve them in partnership with? How do you decide when and how often to invest yourself in helping poor people who have health needs? What limitations do you place on the kind of health care assistance you offer to the needy? What gifts, talents, and resources can you be more aggressive at applying to the health care needs of the poor?

I don't know what God is asking or preparing you to do in relation to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. All I know is that we have been told to imitate Christ, and His health care strategy is whoever, whatever, whenever, wherever.