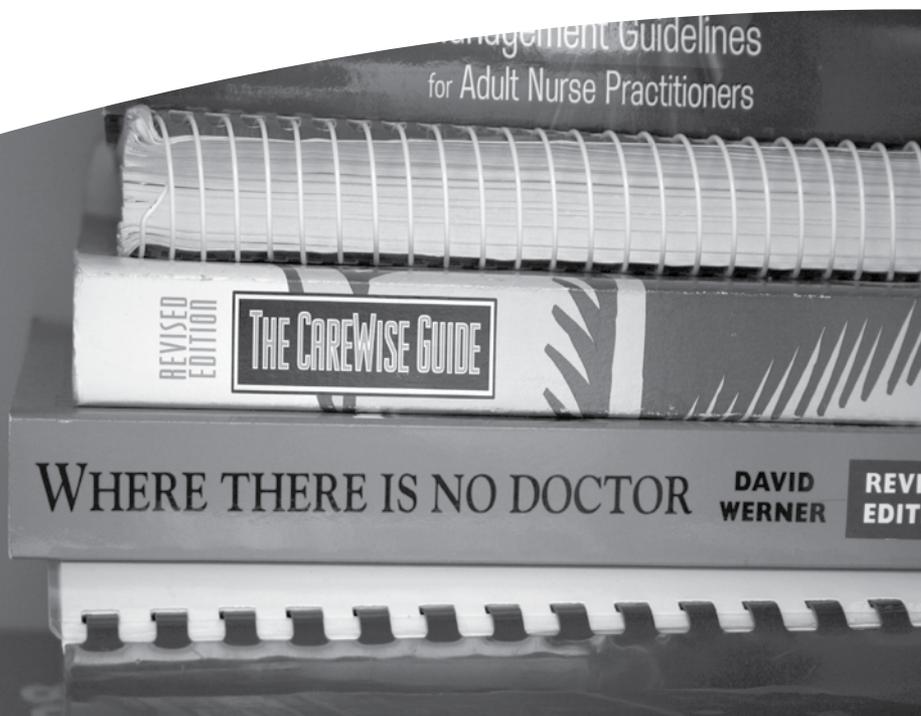


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Authentic, hands-on gospel ministry

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Where are you, Adam?" God asked in Genesis 3. We are constantly being pursued by God, wanting us to show up, to enter into relationship, to love. My religious background was one of evangelical conservatism. Growing up in the fifties on a dairy farm disclosed comparatively few social ills as compared to our world from this point in my life.

As a young boy, I developed a healthy fear of drinking, dancing, smoking, movies and most religions other than my own. I adopted a belief that were two tracks of Christian service; personal evangelism and the pursuit of piety, or more accurately, not becoming a stumbling block on someone's path to Christianity. This prospective was later challenged as I began to see a wider view of the world and Christian service.

It is very difficult to escape a growing awareness of the pain and suffering which surrounds us. Few can now experience insulation from social and spiritual ills as we once may have. Broken social and governmental systems and broken lives serve as constant reminders that our times are in need of extraordinary intervention. Apathy and individualism among Christians is growing more difficult to sustain in the face of God asking "Where are you..."

Yet many still hide from caring too deeply, shielding their eyes from seeing. Although others may rely on stereotypes or profiles for determining those who are worthy of our love, attention or help – ways of determining those who are salvageable and who might be written off as lost or too difficult to reach.

Differing views on how to express one's Christianity have long been debated and mark denominational boundaries. However, most contemporary Christian denominations hold some balance between their beliefs and a call to social ministry. One of the most controversial questions today relates to whether evangelism and social ministry are simultaneously compatible.

Might someone feel coerced into accepting the gospel message for fear of not receiving social assistance? Or, could Christians get so involved in social issues that they neglect evangelism? Certainly, the answer to these questions is yes. But when Jesus sent out the 12 in Mathew 12, he told them to do it all – evangelize and take care of social needs. As the fear of failure is overpowered by the power of love, we will find a growing harmony in ministry that cannot be calculated.

Being a follower of Christ requires much more than strategy, planning and risk management. Christ calls us to be radical in our love for people. To do this, we must pray for the strength to come out from behind our fears, defense mechanisms and tool boxes of inaction. When available, the church – the body of Christ – will be concerned and involved in the same types of issues and concerns as Christ.

In Luke 4, Jesus could not have been more clear about being focused on the social injustices of the day. In Mathew 28 we are instructed to preach the gospel to all nations, and in Mathew 25 Jesus shares his expectation for us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, offer hospitality to strangers, provide clothing to the naked, offer care for the sick and imprisoned and to do so as you would do it for Christ.

I have had the opportunity to be involved with a health-related social ministry for the past six years. During that time, I have been cheerfully impressed with the

numbers of volunteers serving in social ministry organizations for personal spiritual reasons; but have also been surprised that few churches corporately identify with these same organizations as an extension of their mission outreach to the local community. Many faith-based social ministries responding to growing need turn to governmental funding for resources to sustain activities.

However, an unintended consequence of this funding can be a weakening of the interdependence and mission cooperation originally intended between the church and the social ministry organization.

The emergent church seems to be bringing new energy to discover renewed relevance in our times. The desire to be authentic hands-on ministers of the gospel message is drawing people to ministries of body, mind and spirit. In so doing, I am hopeful that a revitalization of relationship between the church and para-church also

will take place.

As we seek for clarity of role in continuing the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, let us say, "We are here, Lord, willing to always take a fresh look at how we express the life within us."

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FIND OUT MORE ...

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