

Words of Inspiration from Pastor Sarah

What Would Christian Compassion and Help Look Like If You Didn't Place Yourself at the Center?

I have a deck of cards that my friend Jade Wolf, an artist and life-coach, put together. The cards include questions that help me either get “unstuck” or think about a situation in a new way. Today, I flipped over this one (see image attached). What an important question for us as Christians! “How can you help without putting yourself at the center?” Even in our “selflessness,” it’s easy to fall into self-centered traps. I struggle sometimes caring for others without acting from the assumption that I know what would be best for them. This way of “helping” is counter to the biblical as well as the UCC’s understanding of mission. Instead of going into others’ lives and saying, “Let me help you,” we are instead challenged to ask, “What would be helpful?” or “Would _____ feel helpful to you right now?”

If we’re honest with ourselves, we also have to acknowledge that sometimes, we also “help” to make ourselves feel better, to distract ourselves from our suffering, to show others how gracious we are, or to earn favor with friends (or even with God). When we put ourselves at the center, we also tend to fall into the trap of feeling put-upon, leading us to play the victim or martyr. Are you finding yourself saying things like “I’ve done so much for this person, and they’ve never said thank you once.” or “I’ve put so much time and energy into this person, and it’s taken a toll on ME.”

Ironically, never saying “no” and forgetting to care for ourselves is one way we make it all about us—even though we are giving everything to help others, we are also operating under the assumption that only WE have what it takes to solve the problem.

How can we “help” selflessly and still take care of ourselves, not making ourselves the central “hero” who becomes exhausted to the point of illness or resentment? How can we help without putting ourselves at the center?

With Love,
Sarah