



*Leadership Care Team*

# HOW DOES “LEADER-CARE” WORK IN GCC?

by Dave Harvey



GREAT  
COMMISSION  
COLLECTIVE

# HOW DOES “LEADER-CARE” WORK IN GCC?

by Dave Harvey

*Planting churches. Strengthening leaders.* For Great Commission Collective (GCC), the gospel has animated our imagination with what might happen—both in us and through us—as we ardently pursue those two great ends. Planting churches is inspired and guided by our passion and plan for multiplication.<sup>1</sup> But that’s not the burden behind this paper. The intent here is to expand upon Strengthening Leaders by connecting the dots between our mandate to strengthen and how our Collective actually defines and experiences our commitment to care.

Care is a precious, fruit-bearing value implanted by God in our Collective genetics. Treasured by the Collective leaders and cultivated diligently through the labors of Garrett Higbee, Lee Lewis and our Leadership Care Team<sup>2</sup>, *intentional-care* became a cultural value that describes how our biblical counseling commitments are expressed and experienced within our camaraderie, counseling, and organized efforts to provide care. In short, care is keeping souls healthy so leaders last.<sup>3</sup> To prioritize this, we’ve made intentional-care a signature strategy. Such a claim is not a declaration of self-satisfaction nor a grab to attract leaders by using warm, bucolic self-descriptions. No, it’s our attempt to convey an unalterable conviction. For a group of churches to produce sustainable leaders, care must happen.

When it comes to leader-care in GCC, God installed it. We need it. And our leaders cherish it.

But “care” is complicated. It’s a word freighted with expectation. Like an empty vessel, people fill the concept with their own hopes. Care is porous, too, meaning the cup of care drains easily and can refill with new assumptions. Care is also delicate. Collective leaders must set the table recognizing that care is a service that supplements, but never replaces, local church care.

Lastly, care is expensive. On the menu of possible Collective services, care tends to be the item with an unlisted price. The value is assumed, making the cost far harder to quantify.

This paper is—to extend the metaphor—our attempt to describe and define the costs of offering care on the menu of Collective services. Specifically, we want to answer questions about how leader care actually works in Great Commission Collective. May God use it to deepen our experience of intentional care and then rise on the wings of community and fellowship, fueled with faith for the mission before us.

---

<sup>1</sup> If our passion and plan for church planting incites your curiosity, more information can be found here.

<sup>2</sup> The GCC Leader Care Team exists to support GCC senior/lead pastors and wives through crisis-care, fervent prayer, supplemental counseling, and plurality training towards producing eldership care.

<sup>3</sup> Our primary target audience in GCC is *Lead Pastors and wives and Planters (who are soon-to-be-lead pastors) and wives*. Our secondary audience (think of these as “1” & “1a”) are the elder teams and elder-chairmen. In other words, we need to plant churches and strengthen leaders *for* LP’s and elders, *with* LP’s and elders, *through* LP’s and elders, and thereby strengthen and multiply LP’s and elders. We recognize and program for additional audiences, including church leaders and church members, as we are effectively and fruitfully delivering on our target audience priorities.

## CARE FLOWS FIRST FROM GOD

There is a temptation to immediately move our discussion on care outward; to see it first as a service we supply or a need we seek to have satisfied. This idea is grounded in the assumption that meaningful care is a horizontal exchange we have with others. Yes, soul-care is horizontal, but not before it's vertical. True soul-care springs from our relationship with God and flows first and primarily from our fellowship with Him. J.I. Packer says, "Fellowship with God, then, is the source from which fellowship among Christians springs; and fellowship with God is the end to which Christian fellowship is a means."<sup>4</sup>

Care for the soul is something that comes first from God. If we want to enjoy care from others, or effectively provide it to others, we must learn to receive it from God.

Recognizing this will help our Collective understand why our emphasis on soul care includes vertical disciplines: personal devotions, Bible meditation, Sabbath, the ordering of our loves, and more. We're not closet contemplatives or money-renouncing monastics; we're just convinced that the care of the soul is directly connected to our passion for Jesus and the devotional rhythms of life. We believe that by tending these things, we are cultivating a Collective-culture that begins with God as the Author, Source, and Hope behind all care.

## CARE MATTERS TO MISSION

We've all seen it. Churches are led by shepherds who focus more on maturing and less on mission. When not braced by a robust commitment to multiplication, the care thing grows teeth and devours ministry momentum. The result is a cozy sterility; a group that is ecstatic over their care and camaraderie but unable to reproduce churches.

The tendency is real. We must discern it, but not overcorrect it. Paul did not reduce his ministry to mission alone. He was not a serial entrepreneur, launching the project and then hitting the exit. No, he often returned to new church plants to invest in their spiritual formation, nourish his relationship with them, and bring reports about the gospel's work through them to other connected churches.<sup>5</sup> Paul's mission was broad, and it involved more than church planting and frontier mission initiatives. P.T. O'Brien explains, "Proclaiming the gospel meant for Paul not simply an initial preaching or with it the reaping of converts; it included also a whole range of nurturing and strengthening activities which led to the firm establishment of congregations."<sup>6</sup>

Our extra-local work today must also be applied in a manner that fosters local church health, soul-enriching relationships, the presence of fruitful ministries, and the support necessary to sustain mission effectiveness over the long haul. This reality has shaped our identity at Great Commission Collective. In other words, our purpose is not simply missional; it's developmental and relational.

---

<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, *God's Words* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1981), p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne A. Meeks says, "The local groups of Christians not only enjoyed a high level of cohesion and group identity, they also were made aware that they belonged to a larger movement." Meeks later observes, "It is evident, too, that Paul and the other leaders of the mission worked actively to inculcate the notion of a universal brotherhood of the believers in Jesus. The letters themselves, the messengers who brought them, and the repeated visits to the local assemblies by Paul and his associates all emphasized this interrelatedness." *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 107, 109.

<sup>6</sup> P.T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), 43.

Our goal is not simply a strong start. Our goal is to build with resilience, so that we may transfer this gospel work over to the next generation. We're talking durable, multi-generational sustainable leaders (2 Tim. 2: 2).

But let's not be naïve about the sacrifices or trade-offs required to satisfy these goals.

### **CARE ORDERS THE MISSION PACE**

When mission includes care, there are natural implications that must be understood and communicated to the entire organization. While the addition of care in a network makes for a superior planting experience, it also slows the speed of your growth. Here the metaphor of an engine governor may be helpful.

A governor is a device that regulates speed. For example, when NASCAR realized that their cars were getting faster and the accidents were becoming more serious, they required engine modifications that regulated the top-end speed of the cars. These modifications governed how fast stock cars could go.

To install a governor is to say that speed is not the only value we treasure. A governor means that we are willing to cap the speed to achieve other goals or uphold other values that ultimately make our organization better. For NASCAR, going faster was sacrificed so that other values (safety, protection of drivers, competition) could be promoted.

The result? NASCAR became even more successful.

Care is one of those glorious governors that caps the speed of our short-term growth to secure the health for our long-term growth. There is leadership, time, and money that must be spent to properly maintain this governor. To provide care, even the kind of carefully confined care we will advocate below, we need an infrastructure sufficient not only to launch planters but also to help pastors persevere. Through our care, we are saying that we will do everything we can to make sure a church plant not only survives, but thrives as a faithful expression of the gospel.

For planters or churches outside of GCC this can be attractive. They are drawn to the idea of joining a group where individuals or marriages matter. For leaders already in GCC, we must come to terms with why we ask for a little more than the customary 2% that guides some groups. After all, we are building a collective where relationships, strengthening, and care matter. It would be naïve to think we can achieve those goals but spend no more than groups that do not carry those goals. Care costs money.

It takes longer to remain stronger. We get that. That's why one of the best things we can do for our collective is to define how leader-care actually works.

## **HOW DOES GCC CARE FIND TRACTION?**

### **TRACTION THROUGH TEAM**

To make care a greater reality in Great Commission Collective we have developed a Leader Care Team presently under the leadership of Jon Mollohan. The GCC Leader Care Team exists to support GCC senior/lead pastors and wives through crisis-care, fervent prayer, supplemental counseling, and plurality training towards facilitating elder-care. The LCT has become the primary, though not exclusive, mechanism for providing care to our target audience.

## TRACTION THROUGH “THE CARE SQUARE”

A square becomes a helpful metaphor to illustrate our care commitments. The square provides a visual to understand the four corners of GCC care.



### **THE PLURALITY CORNER**

Our mission of *planting churches and strengthening leaders’* springs from the biblical conviction that God works principally and powerfully through local churches. Our strategy for helping pastors can neither displace nor circumvent the local church. For pastors to grow healthy churches, there must be care. For care to be truly effective and durable, it must first be local and church-based.

As a Collective, we believe that the best way to supply long-term, soul-satisfying, sin-exposing, grace-saturated care for our planters, pastors, and elders is to help elders build pluralities that become strong teams. True care starts with those who know us best—those closest to us, who know us well enough to track our joys and temptations. That’s why another cultural value we share is “healthy pluralities.” But in introducing the idea of plurality, an important distinction must be drawn.

An eldership is a collection of men called by God to shepherd and lead a church. A plurality is the shared leadership culture they cultivate together. Plurality becomes a way of describing their ecosystem of sharing ministry. Plurality forms their experience of community, helps them embody the biblical values important to fruitfulness and faithfulness in ministry, and trains them on how to serve the church effectively as shepherds. To say it another way, eldership is the hardware of a biblical role that hosts and runs the software of plurality. If an elders meeting is a gathering of elders, a plurality is the culture that gives expression to the community, character, mutual love, and honesty in that meeting.

As you can tell from those definitions, the mere presence of elders is not enough. We need healthy pluralities! Elders with healthy pluralities are in the best position to provide primary care for a lead pastor. And a lead pastor in a healthy plurality is in the best position to ensure each elder receives effective care. The Collective, then, dedicates programming, counseling, and coaching to helping elders build effective pluralities that become competent teams delivering effective care. To adapt the old fishing adage: Care for an elder or pastor and he’ll find relief for a day. Help him build a plurality and he’ll enjoy care for a lifetime.

One important tool GCC provides to assist elders in becoming healthy is the Plurality Health Assessment (PHA). The PHA is an online evaluation-tool inviting feedback and interaction from an entire eldership. After delivering the score, the PHA offers training pathways for targeted growth based upon the assessment results. The elders complete the training together discussing how to improve from the training content and creating a list of remaining questions unanswered by the training. This approach provides specific, self-directed study among elderships while also sharpening the focus on remaining needs. The elders can then request a training with a Leadership Care Team member to address their specific unanswered questions.

For pastors, local church care is primary and collective care remains supplemental. This simple reminder helps to clearly see the angle in the plurality corner.

### **THE CRISIS CORNER**

Crisis is inevitable. In a broken world where pastors lead fallen people—where pastors are fallen people—it's unavoidable. When crisis hits, the responsibility to wisely navigate the church through the shoals of danger rests upon the elders. But most elders are accustomed to dealing with routine care, not irregular calamity, significant unresolved conflict, or church crisis.

Where does a local church pastor go for help when they need urgent counsel and care?

For a Great Commission Collective leader, membership in the network means that you have qualified help at your disposal. The Collective stands ready to serve elderships when, for example, the Lead Pastor's marriage needs help, or an eldership needs counseling, or leaders are locked down in the complexities of a problem. By God's grace, we have the expertise of our Leadership Care Team and GCC staff who can be of assistance. At other times, the network may serve by connecting the local church leadership with one of our care partners or other outside expertise.

One area where we typically move towards referral more immediately is conflict resolution. With conflict resolution, the credibility of individual elders and Collective members can often come under question. History and affiliation can be seen as a liability to progress. Here we will often recommend the elders secure the services of trained conciliators who remain independent of our care structure.<sup>7</sup>

To help guide expectations for how the Collective cares in crisis, some important clarifications must be made. First, the Collective seeks to serve elders in crisis, not displace them. Secondly, it should be assumed that Collective representative will typically be involved on the front end of a crisis, not in the ongoing management of it. They should be expected to help create a plan and pathway, not manage it. Lastly, in some circumstances the Collective representative may need to dialogue with members of the eldership or the entire eldership. This point reinforces GCC's involvement as supplementing the local church and not working apart from local church authority. A common practice today is for unrepentant pastors/elders to manage outside expertise in a way that shields them from eldership or local church accountability. GCC care exists as a path for accountable progress, not a shelter for unaccountable flight.

Where the Collective's involvement is effective, the local church leaders should experience a compassionate, faith-filled presence that conveys hope, stirs courage, and helps create a wise plan for progress.

---

<sup>7</sup> GCC leaders can provide coaching and low-level mediation for the early stages of eldership or church conflict. This may include identifying some areas of disagreement and dissent that needs to be better understood and more thoroughly discussed. But where certified conciliation, mediation or arbitration becomes necessary, we would provide assistance in recommending trained and trusted conciliators from credible ministries who we have come to respect including [Peacemaker Ministries](#), [Ambassadors of Reconciliation](#) and [Crossroads Resolution Group](#).

## **THE RELATIONSHIP CORNER**

This is the one-another point—a truth which may sound familiar but is profoundly consequential. *Relational* is the terrain where words like community, friendship, fellowship, and admonition get traction between Collective pastors. The locus where pastors drop their guards and become true partners in ministry. The place of personal ministry where most care actually happens.<sup>8</sup>

When speaking to the Philippians, Paul uses the word *κοινωνία* for *partnership* (Phil. 1: 5). This New Testament Greek word sparkles with rich relational hues. Paul later adds, “Making (his) prayer with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel” (Phil. 1:4–5). He then speaks of his affection and heart-connection to his friends, “It is right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart; I yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:5–8).

These are Paul’s friends, his mates, the guys he loves, his *partners*. Their *κοινωνία*—or shared fellowship—was bound up with knowing each other and being known by each other. As *κοινωνία* grows rich, friendships grow deep and mutual care breaks the surface on its way to bearing fruit. When care and comfort flow, leaders are strengthened.<sup>9</sup>

The Collective exists to create contexts and structures for relationships to happen. In this way, the Collective operates like the local church. Care flourishes in both entities, not through top-down organized structures, but through catalytic, horizontal relationships. Some of the most meaningful care in the Collective is relational care—the kind that springs from trusted, compassion-filled friendships and flows from one pastor to the other.<sup>10</sup> This is why, as a condition of partnership, we ask pastors and elders to agree to attend certain Collective events. This is why we urge pastors to gather for prayer. What works for the church applies in a Collective: The more invested you are through attendance, service, relationship, prayer and training, the more you flourish through the partnership.

When our Collective embraces the value of supplemental care, friendship-building, and relational deepening becomes an aim of network spending and an important goal for each gathering. This is, in part, why we do annual conferences and micro-conference events. This value has also shaped the objectives of our coaching cohorts, where we provide a growing number of Collective leaders an opportunity for training in the context of relationships.

---

<sup>8</sup> “The genius of personal ministry is that it is *personal*. It can take the grand themes of the Great Story and apply them with utter specificity to the particulars of an individual’s life. Personal ministry is not preaching to very small congregations. It is the careful ministry of Christ and his Word to the struggles of the heart that have been uncovered by good questions from a committed friend. This means that effective, God-honoring, heart-changing personal ministry is dependent on a rich base of personal information. You cannot minister well to someone you do not know.” Paul David Tripp and Tim Lane, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 165.

<sup>9</sup> “To *comfort* is to *strengthen*. When we would give comfort to others, we are not merely to let them know that we are their friends and are sorry for them. We are not just to try in some way to alleviate their pain. It is not enough that we in some measure relieve their distress. We are to seek to have them *grow strong*—so that they can endure the trouble and rejoice in it. This should be our aim in our ministry of comfort to others. We have not finished our work with them, therefore, until we have brought them some divine truth which will cast light on their sorrows, which will inspire them with hope and courage!” J.R. Miller, *The Book of Comfort* (Made in USA, Coppell, TX, Oct. 2021), 6.

<sup>10</sup> “Really the whole problem of giving personal care to every believer is only resolved in a thorough understanding of the nature and mission of the church. It is well here to observe that the emergence of the church principle around Jesus, whereby one believer was brought into fellowship with all others, was the practice in a larger dimension of the same thing that He was doing with the twelve. Actually, it was the church that was the means of following up all those who followed Him. That is, the group of believers became the body of Christ, and as such ministered to each other individually and collectively.” Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Feb. 1987 reprint, Old Tappan, NJ:Fleming H. Revell Co., 1964), 46.

Each year we gather the senior pastors, along with their wives, for a few days of training and rest. While together, we worship, pray, hear some teaching, share meals, and enjoy open blocks of time to unwind, reflect, and rest. We also provide trained counselors for any couple desiring advice or care. The counselors, the hotel expenses, the registration, the resources, and a few other costs are all enthusiastically covered by Great Commission Collective. It's a way to care.

Lastly, certain GCC leaders travel to serve Collective churches. Think of it as a form of preventative care. They will conduct seminars, gather with elders, coach leaders, troubleshoot problems, and connect with the lead pastor. In some situations, many of the expenses incurred for this trip will be covered by the Collective; a benefit made available to Collective churches as a privilege of membership. If the GCC leader has done a decent job, the Collective pastor and his church will experience the care of the Collective through this visit.

It's not an exhaustive list, but the examples above illustrate just some of the ways that the Collective is seeking to supply supplemental care through physical presence and relationships. In other words, while we believe care is first local, and GCC's supplemental care flows best through the connected leaders, we still look for additional ways to marshal Collective resources for our Collective pastors; that they might know, experience, and be served by our care.

## **THE TRAINING CORNER**

Care is so important to flourishing and multiplication that we must effectively transfer the value to others through training. We long to be found faithful to Paul's exhortation, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28). For care to contribute towards "presenting everyone mature in Christ" there must training.

For our Collective, this means training church planters to create effective care structures in the church they are starting. Training extends to equipping them with the skills to build a healthy plurality through which they can supply and receive care. Establishing care in the foundation of the church helps build a community where people feel loved and connected.

But care-training does not end with church planters. It also includes helping pastors and elders build cultures of care within the local church. This equipping happens through our Learning Center, coaching cohorts, online training, website content, and through live GCC events. Assisting elders and pastors with best practices and solid resources also contributes to the goal of wisely defining care and building models of care within the local church.

Great Commission Collective also enjoys a historical and fruitful relationship with [SoulCare Consulting](#) where GCC has assisted with Intensives costs for lead pastors and wives. Garrett Higbee remains on the GCC team as a Care Specialist available to consult or counsel with team members or GCC pastors. Additionally, we affirm the work of [GospelCare](#) for intensives and reconciliation, and heartily endorse [CCEF](#) for counseling and counseling training. Other names and recommendations can be provided by contacting [Garrett Higbee](#) or [Jon Mollohan](#).



## **SQUARING OUR CONFIDENCE**

Growing up in the 60's and 70s, *square* was a way to say "uncool," that is, before the concept of cool was invented. To convert care into a square may have been construed as multiplying its irrelevance. Truth to tell, care has enough obstacles gaining traction in the world of networks. It's not sexy or cool. The mere whisper of the word can incite fears of structural bloat and undisciplined spending. And yes, care often eclipses mission. So, there's that.

We know there are easier and more expedient ways to build a Collective. But we remain determined to only plant as quickly as our "care-square" allows. We long to invest lovingly, carefully and supplementally in the care and sustainability of the pastors we serve.

It's an exciting time to partner with men who share a burning desire to see the name of Jesus exalted through church planting. Our confidence for this mission comes not from our model, our experience, or our strength, but it knowing that Christ has promised he will build his church (Matt. 16:18). Our confidence is grounded in the knowledge that the one who loves us and redeemed us is now sending us.

May we go, confident in His grace, aware of His presence, and treasuring the knowledge that as we respond to His call, we are stronger together!