

Passing On Compassion To Children

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Compassion = A form of love that is aroused within us when we are confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable. Compassion often produces action to alleviate the suffering, or to show pity, mercy, kindness, or concern.

Today's society doesn't naturally foster compassion. Today's children grow up in a society that tells them "Stand up for yourself!" "Don't let others stop you from your goals." "Take charge of your own life." Although, there are parts of these statements that are somewhat good, the "big picture" is that children today are not being challenged to have compassion on others and to be ready to sacrifice for the needs of others.

The concept of "tolerance" is being taught in schools today. To be "tolerant" of someone doesn't necessarily mean that you are compassionate toward them. To be tolerant simply means that you tolerate them and don't belittle or judge them. Jesus didn't just teach a kind of "tolerance." He taught about love and compassion.



Here are two stories about Jesus showing compassion to those around Him, even when He was physically, or emotionally, exhausted.

- **In Matthew 12**, there are two verses that paint a vivid picture of who Jesus is. He had just finished several back-to-back days of teaching and healing. He was exhausted. At the tail end of chapter 12, He makes a statement that causes a significant tear between His manly nature and His Heavenly nature. While He is teaching, His family comes to see Him. You have to remember that, at this time, His brothers and sisters didn't believe that He was the Son of God. His mother, Mary, may have brought the family to hear Jesus. Maybe she was hoping that, if they just heard Jesus preach, they would believe that He was the Son of God. So, here's Jesus teaching to the multitudes, and somebody says, "Jesus, your mother and brothers are here. They want to talk to you!" Jesus realizes His disciples are all watching to see what He would do. Jesus says, while pointing to His disciples, "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*" Jesus then has to deal with the implications of it all while being physically exhausted. Did His mother and brothers go away offended? Right after that, the exhausted Jesus goes and sits by the lake alone. What is He doing? Coasting, restoring, tossing rocks in the water, etc. Then, in verse 2 of chapter 13, He demonstrates what compassion is! Exhausted and dealing with His statement about His family, He is surrounded by people who are shouting His name and wanting Him to teach or heal them. Instead of "losing it," He steps into a boat and begins teaching them again. Compassion goes beyond feelings or attitudes.



- In Matthew 14**, Jesus had just heard about John the Baptist, His cousin, being beheaded. He, once again, was filled with His humanity. He, being God, knew that this event would happen, but His human side needed to react to the pain and loss. It says, in verse 13, "...He withdrew from there in a boat, to a lonely place by Himself..." What was He doing there? Praying, restoring, letting His emotions adjust, and focusing on His purpose. Now, picture yourself in this setting. You are always surrounded with people. No matter where you go, there are crowds of people wanting something from you. Can you imagine what that's like? Remember, when Princess Diana died, we all learned about the pressure that the "Paparazzi" puts on famous people. This is exactly the life that Jesus lived! So, here He is, alone. He's worked pretty hard to get here. He's rowing out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, alone. Quiet. Praying. Maybe even crying. Trying to balance His human and Spiritual sides. He spots a quiet beach. He heads for the beach, thinking that, maybe, just maybe, He'll be able to sit on the shoreline, alone for a while. As He reaches the shore, He hears them....the multitude...hundreds of them! All waving their hands and yelling His name. All wanting something from Him...again. Now, if this were you, and you had worked this hard to get away. What would you do? This is the deeply significant part of the story. It says, "He saw the great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick..." Later on, as it was getting dark, they stayed with Him. In another Gospel, it says, "He felt compassion for them for they were like sheep without a shepherd." Then, he performed a wonderful miracle meal with only a few fish and loaves of bread that a little boy gave Him. Once again, He modeled compassion. He cared for the needs of others in spite of His own feelings of pain or exhaustion.



Is Compassion Inherited, or Learned From Others?

If compassion is "inherited," how does that explain those people who are very compassionate and yet their parents weren't? Compassion may have some connection with genetics, but it is most likely learned from others or developed as a result of personal choices. Compassion is enhanced or thwarted by the environment around us and by the influence of other people.



Children who are not "naturally" compassionate can be influenced by parents and significant others in their lives. But, ultimately, being compassionate is a personal choice. The presence of the Holy Spirit in a child's life can help that child become a "new person" (2Cor. 5:17). If a child is completely submitted to Jesus, then he/she will be open to the work of the Holy Spirit within his/her character to "put to death" the "old" life that may have been self-centered and not compassionate. As the child grows spiritually, he/she will become more compassionate. But there is still a critical need for godly mentors to show him/her how to be compassionate and let him/her "taste" the delicious "flavor" of caring for others.

The word "compassion" is loaded with other great words that express how to pass a compassionate spirit on to the next generation:

Co = With, beside, together, jointly, associated with the action of another person.
Kids today need you to come alongside them and SHOW them compassion.

Pass = To transfer or transmit from one to another, to relay to another
Compassion is passed on from you to another child through direct contact!

Compass = A device for determining direct North

Just as keeping our eyes on “true North” will help us navigate, keeping our eyes on God, as our spiritual “true North” will produce a new compassionate person inside us. We need to help the children find God and connect with “true North.”

Passion = An intense, driving, overwhelming feeling of conviction

When children see that you are passionate about loving others sacrificially, they will be inspired to be more compassionate themselves.

Specific Ways To Pass On Compassion To Children

- **Model it!**

Let them see you act compassionately toward others, especially to them!

- **When mistakes are made, confess them and ask for forgiveness and prayer.**

Don't try to “cover up” your mistakes. Admit them, talk about your bad choice, ask them for forgiveness and pray for strength to make better choices next time.

- **Verbalize thought processes, identify selfish temptations.**

Pause dramatically while you verbalize your thoughts. Talk about your observations of the need and your tempting thoughts to avoid being compassionate. Make mental choices verbally for them to hear and then act. Talk about the process with them. Let them ask questions or give thoughts.

- **Share satisfying results of showing compassion.**

Tell the children about your acts of compassion and let them know how good you feel. This is not to “puff” yourself up, but to inspire them to do the same. They will want that same good feeling that you share.

- **Pray for strength.**

Pray with and for your children. Pray that God's Holy Spirit will help them be compassionate to others. Pray that they will enjoy the good feeling so much that they will want to do it again. Pray for yourself that you would be a good example of compassion to them. Make sure to plan time to hear their stories of success and joy the next time you see them!



“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Colossians 3:12-14