



Compassion!

by Mark Brunner

Catching The Spirit! (Hebrews 4:14-16)

People rub off on each other. If you stay in contact with someone long enough you're just bound to catch some of their spirit. Holly and I have been together for over 30 years. When we first met our spirits were dissimilar. But today, after years of sharing and doing things together, those dissimilarities have become less apparent. The thing about it is this: to catch the spirit you need to tune in, reach out and become a part of someone in order to find spiritual harmony. This is what I tell young people when they come to me for marriage counseling. Give it time and the oneness will happen.

But, how do you know when you finally get there?

Here's a story: On May 24, 1962, Commander Scott Carpenter roared into space in a Mercury space capsule. He piloted his Aurora 7 spacecraft through three revolutions of the earth, reaching a maximum altitude of 164 miles. The spacecraft landed in the Atlantic Ocean about 1000 miles southeast of Cape Canaveral after 4 hours and 54 minutes of flight time. Following his return, NASA Administrator Webb presented him with astronaut wings in a ceremony at the Cape. Then on June 5, New York City celebrated his flight with a ticker tape parade and President Kennedy honored him at the White House. In the middle of the White House ceremonies, his five-year-old daughter, Candace, tugged at his sleeve. She wanted to show her daddy the scratch on her right

elbow that happened while he was gone. What did he do? Yes, he turned away from the honors, away from the acclaim of a proud nation to give his attention to the concerns of his little daughter. A scratch on the elbow was important to her, and so it was important to him. He and his little daughter were on the same page and it was the most important page to Carpenter over and above all the acclaim and honors. (Ron Clarke)

The Apostle Paul wrote: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). When I read that story about Scott Carpenter, this is the picture that comes to me: Jesus taking His time away from all concerns in His Kingdom, to tend to our problems, big and small. He draws us to Him and guess what? His compassion rubs off on us. I can’t think of anything better to do with that than spread it around. Reach out to someone today who needs some of Jesus’ love. Give it time and don’t be surprised how thoroughly His love will rub off.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

Stepping Out In Faith! (Mark 2:3)

Working with little dogs can be a tedious and, sometimes, unrewarding job. Holly and I certainly don’t claim to be experts. One of the things Holly does that has always impressed me is followthrough, so important in dog training. If she wants little Sammy, our three-year-old Dachshund, to sit she follows this two-step process with an added 3rd step. First she gets Sammy’s attention with a word and a hand signal. Once Sammy’s eyes meet hers Holly give the command to “sit” again with another hand signal. Sometimes Sammy complies and sometimes she doesn’t. That’s when Holly adds that 3rd, vital and sometimes forgotten step of touching Sammy’s backside softly to push it into a

sitting position. It's so tempting, at least for me, to skip that step. However, that third step is often vital if you are looking to achieve results.

Likewise, when people are hurting we need to go beyond words and feelings; we need to act.

Here's a story: A salesman was returning home when he stopped for a break at a coffee shop. As he sat there he heard a girl quietly crying in the next booth. He asked if he could help. The 17-year old girl, Lisa, told him that she was from a broken home and had gotten into drugs and had turned to prostitution. Moved as he was, he just bought the girl a meal and continued home. When he there his family suggested he return and find Lisa and offer to help. He did and was so moved by her plight that he took her home to his family, and that started a ministry to get those girls off the streets. He acted like a good Samaritan. He could have met with his church friends and said, "we need to pray for these girls." If that was all he had done nothing would have happened. We need to pray, but we need to act. We need to pray, not for the situation itself but for the courage to step out in faith and do something according to the gifts that God has given us. (Ron Clarke)

One of the more moving Bible stories is the story of the men who were so concerned for their paralyzed friend that they cut a hole in the roof of the building Jesus was preaching and healing in and lowered him down to the Savior. They obviously loved their friend and had reached out to him with their encouragement. But, seeing the crowds and no way to get him to Jesus' healing hands, they took that third, important step: they took their relationship to the next level. They put faith and encouragement into action. When you and I reach out to those in need compassion grows in our hearts. It's natural. But that growth requires nourishment; and that's adding to the relationship that 3rd important step: joining our lives to theirs and getting through life's problems together. When others are hurting don't be tempted to stop short of joining their hurt to your heart. A gentle touch on their lives may be all they need to make it through another day.

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Like Floating On Air! (James 2:15-16)

A number of years ago Holly and I converted one of our bedrooms into an exercise room. We moved in a weight bench, skier and stationary bike, put exercise charts up on the walls and installed a small TV so that we could watch exercise DVD's. I'm pretty proud of that room. It's the first room that you see when you come into our home here at Beech Springs. In fact, when I get home at night, put my briefcase down and hang up my coat, a glance into that room gets me kind of proud. I'm 59 and still able to push weights and do a Nordic Trac. The fact of the matter however is that just looking at the exercise equipment is one thing. All neatly arranged; of course it's something to be proud of. However, using it is what gets you pumped. Just showing it off does nothing more that get you a bit puffed up.

The same might also be said of how we show compassion. We can stop at words or let the words lead us into action.

Here's a story: Bill Hybels writes: "Recently one of my friends was buying groceries and was frustrated when she discovered she had ended up in a slow-moving line. She looked to the front and saw a woman frantically rummaging through her purse; then the checker shouted, 'You don't have any money?' My friend's first thought was, 'Why do I always pick the wrong line? I'm in a hurry?' Everyone else in line began complaining. But then my friend felt God tugging at her heart suggesting that SHE pay the woman's bill! 'But, God,' she said. 'You know I hate giving up my money. Besides, I ...' Then she looked at the woman, at her frazzled demeanor and her shabby clothes, and she imagined the children who might be waiting for the woman at home. Then she thought about all that God had done for her. Smiling, she leaned over to the checker and said, 'Add my groceries to hers, and I'll pay.' My friend said she felt like she was floating as she drove home. In an unplanned, unpretentious way, she had opened her eyes and extended her hand, and God had blessed her with joy." (Hybels, Making Life Work)

The Bible tells us that if we see someone hurting or in need and do nothing, it is like we have done nothing for our Savior Jesus Christ. Who among us would be willing to admit to that? When I look into that exercise room on a daily basis I have 1 of 2 decisions to make; I can look in and admire the equipment, embracing the look of staying fit, or I can put on my sweats and take 10 minutes daily on each one of those machines. I may feel good about what I can do but I will never improve physically unless I do the work. Are you compassionate for others? Saying so is good. Finding a way to turn those words into deeds is better. Words are one thing; but they're kind of puffy. Actions really prime the pump.

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Burned Blankies Are Better Fixed! (Proverbs 31:20)

Recently Holly got an early morning phone call from our oldest Grandson, James. He dialed Nana's number to tell her that something bad had happened. His favorite blankie had a big burn hole in it. James, being the curious, little six-year-old that he is, was sitting near the living room wood stove. Suddenly thoughts ran through his head. "I wonder what would happen if I touched my blankie to the glass panels on the front of the stove?" He reached over the barricade Rachel and Andy had around the fireplace to keep little boys away. Instantly he burned a hole into his beloved blankie. I think he was looking for some sympathy from Nana. Instead she told him that she would fix it for him. She did and went one step further. Where once there was a hole there was now a Green Bay Packer, logo patch.

Compassion is a good beginning; but touching those we feel love and compassion for with works of service is better.

Here's a story: Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the Great Depression. He was known for his good humor and compassion. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, he turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. After dismissing the judge for the evening, he took over the bench himself. A tattered old woman was brought before him, charged

with stealing a loaf of bread. She explained that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper refused to drop the charges. LaGuardia turned to the woman and said, "Ten dollars or ten days in jail." He then reached into his pocket, extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the fine which I now remit; and I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat." The following day, newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered woman. (Sermon.com)

Someone beautifully said, "Sympathy sees and says, 'I'm sorry.' Compassion sees and says, 'I'll help.'" When we learn the difference, we can make a difference. In a way when we open our eyes, hearts and ears to those who are suffering, a small seed of compassion is planted. As Holly listened to little James on the phone tell her his sad story or as LaGuardia studied the tearful countenance of that desperate woman, that seed pushed hard to be watered and nurtured. Fixing that blankie and paying that fine was the watering that was needed. A seed of compassion swelled and burst into a healthy, growing plant of compassionate service. God is calling you and I to, yes, open our eyes to the plight of others. But He doesn't stop there. He's calling us to action. Blankies need to be fixed not mourned.

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Loans That Will Be Repaid! (Proverbs 28:27)

There's a ministry advertisement on several of the cable channels with a very specific and extremely graphic message. When the commercial comes on you see pictures of little children around the world in poverty stricken nations suffering from severely cleft palates. The images are gruesome. I've seen the commercial a number of times and, out of habit, I hit the mute button as I so often do with commercials. I also avert my eyes. I guess that I have an aversion to cleft palates. There's something about that particular malady that repulses

me and I'm immediately moved to remove the image from view. Recently, however, the commercial came on and, although poised to press the mute button, I hesitated. Ten seconds led to 20 and soon the entire 60-second spot penetrated me. Amazingly, the repulsion receded with every passing second. By the end of the commercial my aversion had been totally replaced with a feeling of compassion.

First images can be compelling. But when we fail to take in the entire message, they can also be deceiving.

Here's a story: Years after the death of President Calvin Coolidge, this story came to light. In the early days of his presidency, Coolidge awoke one morning in his hotel room to find a cat burglar going through his pockets. Coolidge spoke up, asking the burglar not to take his watch chain because it contained an engraved charm he wanted to keep. Coolidge then engaged the thief in quiet conversation and discovered he was a college student who had no money to pay his hotel bill or buy a ticket back to campus. Coolidge counted \$32 out of his wallet – which he had also persuaded the dazed young man to give back; – declared it to be a loan, and advised the young man to leave the way he had come so as to avoid the Secret Service! And, yes, the loan was paid back.

(Sermon.com)

Proverbs reminds us: “he who closes his eyes to (the poor) receives many curses” (Proverbs 28:27). God wants us to identify with the poor and not ignore or avert their image from our lives. I personally believe that this is the first step in developing a compassionate, Christian character. As with all things spiritual, God starts us out with the easy—simply opening our eyes. Most of us live in a safe, comfortable environment surrounded by many blessings. When we see those who live otherwise, it threatens our safe zones. You and I need to climb out of the safe zone and discover that first impressions are just that, impressions. If Coolidge hadn't opened his eyes to the young intruder in his room, he would have forever remained a burglar and not someone who faithfully repaid a loan. The next time your eyes meet up with someone outside of your safe zone, don't avert them. You may find that a quick glance may lead to a lifetime of compassionate focus.

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