

Developing and Imitating the Compassion of Christ

Compassion is one of the most appealing and compelling characteristics of pastoral ministry and of the Christian life. This session will establish the Biblical basis for compassion. We will also explore the neurological basis of cognitive and affective empathy. After examining the relational and evangelistic benefits of compassion, we will explore specific strategies for developing empathy and compassion, both in adults and in children.

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1. Why is compassion so important? (*Stepmom* video clip)
2. A lack of compassion inevitably weakens relationships
3. Three Related Concepts
 - **Empathy** is generally defined as the ability to discern and vicariously experience the thoughts and feelings of another person, or more simply, *to feel what others feel*.
 - **Compassion**, which builds on empathy and literally means “to suffer together,” is a deep concern for another person who is suffering, accompanied by *a strong desire to alleviate that suffering*.
 - **Consolation**, which is an outworking of compassion and literally means “to be with the lonely one,” involves *action to alleviate or lessen grief, sorrow, or disappointment*.
4. The Biblical Basis for Compassion
 - God himself, manifested as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the ultimate **model for compassion**: “With everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer” (Isa. 54:8; see also Matt. 14:14; John 11:33-36; Acts 9:31; 2 Cor. 1:3-4).
 - The **motive for compassion** is to imitate God and to obey his repeated commands to show empathy toward one another: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12; see also John 13:34-35; Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:8).

- The *method of compassion* is to discern sufferings or needs and to act quickly, personally and deliberately to alleviate or meet them: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15; see also Luke 10:33-34; Luke 15:20; 1 Cor. 12:26; Heb. 10:34).

5. The Neurology of Empathy and Compassion

6. Two Types of Empathy

- *Cognitive empathy*, sometimes called “perspective-taking,” is a deliberate and conscious intellectual process whereby we observe others and use our imagination and logic to discern what they must be thinking and feeling.
- *Affective empathy*, sometimes called “emotional empathy,” is a more spontaneous process that causes us to actually feel what others are feeling, as though their emotions were contagious.

7. Seven Ways to Exercise Empathy

- **E**nlist all of your faculties and resources
- **M**ove in physically, verbally, and emotionally
- **P**ray for discernment
- **A**sk caring questions
- **T**hink deliberately
- **H**elp in meaningful ways
- **Y**ield your convenience, pride, and resources

8. Our enemy wants to convince us otherwise, but you and I really can change!

9. Discussion (*Schindler's List* video clip)

- What emotions did you observe in Oskar? Why did he feel that way? How did he fail to live out the key elements of EMPATHY prior to this scene?
- How did he begin to live out these elements toward the end of the war?
- What emotions did you observe in the Jewish workers? Why did they feel that way? How did the Jewish workers live out the seven elements of EMPATHY? What can you learn from their example?

To Grow in Empathy and Compassion:

- See detailed discussion of these concepts at www.rw360.org/empathy
- Subscribe to *RW Blog* at www.rw360.org/blog
- Study *Discovering Relational Wisdom 2.0* online at www.rw360.org/online-training