

COMPASSIONATE LIVING

Part 2 of Confident Living

1 Thessalonians 5:14. The Cornerstone Church, May 16, 2021

INTRODUCTION: SWEATPANTS

In January this year, I tried to order a pair of sweatpants online only to find that the style and the size I wanted were sold out. I tried brand after brand. The only sweats still in stock were nasty looking.

What was going on?

I'll share my answer in a moment, but first, **let's pray.**

Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth, and strength to apply it to our lives; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

SERIES: CONFIDENT LIVING

This is week 2 of our new teaching series called CONFIDENT LIVING**.

We're focused on ten spiritual practices that help us prevail under pressure.

Today's spiritual practice is **COMPASSIONATE LIVING.**

Compassion is empathy plus action. It's feeling someone else's pain and doing something about it.

Jesus healed the sick because he was driven by compassion for them.

(Matthew 14:14) When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

COMPASSION IS GOOD FOR OUR HEALTH

Hibernation vs. Helping

When we're going through a hard time, helping someone else feels counter-intuitive. Personally, when life is overwhelming my first instinct is to curl up in a ball, to run and hide, to close the blinds and change into my sweats.

That's why I couldn't find the sweat pants I wanted. People are hibernating through the COVID crisis.

BUT ... research shows that showing compassion helps us get through the hard times. Helping others improves our own mental and physical health.

Research on the Benefits of Compassion

Allan Luks was the director of Big Brothers Big Sisters charity for 18 years. His mental health survey revealed that people who volunteered to serve once a week were ten times more likely to rate themselves as healthier than other people their age than those who volunteered only once a year.

Allan Luks and Peggy Payne. *The Healing Power of Doing Good*. 2001. pp. 105-106.

A 2016 study of teenage drug and alcohol addicts, revealed the positive impact of serving others. When they participated in the Alcoholics Anonymous 12th step, which is all about helping other addicts, their own lives got better.

- They stayed sober.
- They stayed out of jail.
- They showed greater humility.
- They showed stronger capacity to lead.

Matthew T. Lee, Maria E. Pagano, Byron R. Johnson & Stephen G. Post (2016) *Love and Service in Adolescent Addiction Recovery*. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 34:2, 197-222,

THE LOGIC OF COMPASSION

The biblical logic behind compassionate living is this:

Helping you also helps me.

Because Jesus humbled himself and was obedient to the death on the cross, God raised him from the dead and gave him the Name that is above every other name (Philippians 2:8-9).

In the same way, when we serve those in need, God lifts us up.

Isaiah 58:10-11 (NIV) “If you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

We stand firm through the storms of life by helping others get through the storms.

COMPASSION IN THESSALONICA

The first century church in Thessalonica was under huge pressure. The city government, their families, their neighbors, all harassed and hassled them for following Jesus as God and Savior.

The church members coped with their stress by arguing with each other. Their relationships were fraying. The Bible's solution to their stress was to urge them to serve each other. Paul wrote to them about compassionate living.

(1 Thessalonians 5:14-15) And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

In this passage, there are three keys to compassionate living.

THREE KEYS TO COMPASSIONATE LIVING

KEY ONE: KEEP COMPASSION ON YOUR RADAR

Even when we're facing hardships, we should always be ready to help someone else because that's going to make us strong.

That's why Paul wrote,

"I urge you, brothers and sisters."

In the New Testament, the word "urge" is almost always used in connection with our new life in Jesus Christ. So, urge here means urgent. We might say it this way, *"Listen up, folks. This is really important."*

Keep compassion on your radar even when you're dealing with your own stuff.

(2 Corinthians 12:9-10) God said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Serving others makes us better rather than bitter. It takes our eyes off our own problems. It makes us humble and God gives grace to the humble.

KEY TWO: PLAN COMPASSION TO MEET NEEDS

Compassion is based on needs. Not everyone has the same needs. Some people need food and some people need medical attention. This led the apostle Paul to write about four ways to custom design compassion:

If they need insight: "*Warn those who are idle and disruptive.*" These people misunderstood the return of Christ and had quit working to be ready. Now they were asking the church members for handouts which caused stress. Compassion in this case looks like teaching the Bible. They needed details about the second coming of Christ and to live as they waited.

If they need support: "*encourage the disheartened.*" Some folks were beaten down by persecution. They felt like quitting. Compassion in this case looks like someone who comes alongside to listen, to pray, and to cheer them on.

If they need stronger faith: "*help the weak.*" Some people had doubts about following Jesus. Was he really the Savior? Were their sins really forgiven. Was God really taking care of them? Compassion in this case looks like someone to answer their questions with information and inspiration.

If they need extra grace: "*be patient with everyone.*" All of us are fumbling and stumbling our way to being spiritual giants, but some of us take one step forward and five steps back. Compassion in this case looks like NOT crushing their feeble hearts, giving them time and space to develop.

Jesus is our model of compassionate living. He had empathy; he wept when his friend Lazarus died. And Jesus added action to his empathy; he met needs. He raised Lazarus. He fed hungry people. He healed sick people. He delivered demon-oppressed people. He taught discouraged people. And, because our greatest needs are for spiritual life and forgiveness of sins, he went to the cross.

Being active in a **small group** is one way to practice compassion. That's a great way to meet needs by provide meals to the sick, or offering prayer, or speaking encouragement, and so many other ways to help.

KEY THREE: SHOW COMPASSION TO OUTSIDERS

Compassion begins with doing good to our families, then the church family, then outsiders. Paul wrote:

*always strive to do what is good for each other
and for everyone else (literally, all).*

"*Everyone else*" is the term for people outside the church family. Think how radical that was for the Thessalonian believers. The outsiders were persecuting them. We follow the example of Jesus:

(Romans 12:14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

(Luke 6:27-28) Jesus said, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

Who are OUR outsiders?

- The neighbor who voted for a different candidate.
- The coworker who disrespects our faith.
- The immigrant who doesn't look or sound like us.
- The people from a different social circle.

We're to do good to them all.

At the Cornerstone, we're always looking for ways to do good to outsiders.

Some examples are the free food giveaways, and our INSPIRE community outreach (in May, INSPIRE members are praying for and taking baskets of snacks to EMTs and dispatchers. I received a grateful letter from the Sheriff of St. Clair County in response.). Our local and global outreach partners help to extend our reach.

A TSUNAMI OF GRIEF AND LOSS

A couple of weeks ago, I watched an interview with Pastor Rick Warren. He said something very important for everyone who wants to practice compassionate living. He said that world is about to experience **a tsunami of grief and loss**.

Think over the last 18 months or so. Family and friends who have passed away. Good byes that could not be said. No visits with loved ones in hospitals and nursing homes. Weddings we couldn't attend. Trips we could not go on. Job losses. Isolation as we worked from home. Proms and graduations cancelled.

This will all result in a worldwide season of grief.

It is so sad to think about.

But it is also an opportunity for all of us to practice compassionate living. People will be open to prayer, to talk, to help, to church, and to Jesus.

And while we're helping everyone else, we'll be helped.

- Our faith will grow deeper as we lean on God for his resources.
- Our prayer life will come alive as we pray for the people we're helping.
- Our hearts will be softened by knowing people in need.
- Our reputation will improve - people will see that followers of Jesus are kind.

And so many more positive benefits.

Most of all, we'll become more like Jesus.

Make a decision. Practice compassionate living. At home. In the church. In your neighborhood.

Take a step. Join a small group.

Access today's teaching notes = FamousGod.com//teaching-notes

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the truth you have revealed in the Bible. Holy Spirit, help us to apply today's teaching in our lives. Amen.

The Blessing

The God of love and peace will be with you all.

** I got the idea for this teaching series from David Jeremiah and his book and DVD series called Living with Confidence in a Chaotic World.