

COMPASSION

from the Judeo-Christian perspective

Definition

- A *quality* of care and sympathy, characteristic of the Lord, usually shown in **acts** of kindness and consideration towards those in any kind of difficulty or crisis.
- An *attitude* of care and concern, grounded in pity and sympathy towards others. Christian compassion towards others should reflect the compassion of the Lord for His people.

What is compassion?

To be compassionate thus goes well *beyond*:

1. The secular ethical system called Utilitarianism which recognizes that we have a fundamental moral obligation to do good in the world and to ensure that the good outweighs the harm.
2. The ***Golden Rule***: do unto to others as you would have do unto you.

There are two extra aspects

1. Being moved **by** the pain of the other person, suffering **with** the other person, and entering **into** the pain of the other person.
2. Attending to the suffering of the other person, making an effort to alleviate their suffering, or removing or preventing the harm.

It is an impulsive emotional response to the plight of the other person. It is not just learning about or knowing intellectually about their pain and suffering.

Biblical References from the Good News of Jesus (the) Christ

- Compassion is a vital requirement in Christian character:
 - Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 3:8
- Compassion needs to be shown in actions:
 - 1 John 3:17; Matthew 10:42; Mark : 25:35-36; Acts 20:35

Biblical References for Specific Areas of Compassion

- To the bereaved: Genesis 37:35; Ruth 2:1-20; 2 Samuel 10:1-2; ! Chronicles 7:22; John 11:19
- To the sick: Job 2: 11-13; Psalms 106:46
- To the solitary: Ecclesiastes 4:10-11
- To widows and orphans: Zechariah 7:9-10; James 1:27
- To the oppressed and needy: Job 29:12-17 & 30:25; Proverbs 14:31; Luke 10:33-35; Acts 28:2

Metaphors (Images)

- Within the N.T. Greek the word “splangchna” is translated as compassion
 - This Greek word is a term used to describe the “noble viscera” (heart, lungs, spleen, and liver).
 - By using this term N.T. Greek conveys the idea that our inner organs are “moved” when we have compassion. In other words compassion is a natural “gut” reaction to what the other person is experiencing.

Metaphors (continued)

- In Biblical Hebrew the word “rachamim” or movement of the womb is translated as compassion. God’s love for Israel is often seen as gynecological or overcoming barrenness. See Isaiah 54:10.
- By using this term, Hebrew has three related ideas at play:
 - The womb “receives” the other
 - The womb forms and nurtures
 - The womb expels new life in the birth spasms

Suffering

- Suffering is not just physical pain because it is caused by a fundamental threat or injury to the personhood of the sufferer.
- There are modes or moments of suffering:
 - Mute (when the person is unable to express the experience of suffering)
 - Lament (when the person finds the language to express their suffering)
 - Interpretation (when the person not only tells the story of the suffering but finds an interpretation of it)

Pastoral Care

- When you are offering pastoral care to another you have three “movements of compassion” that correspond to the three modes or moments of the other’s suffering:
 - Silent empathy (while you “receive” the other, are “moved” by their plight, and “hear” them into speech).
 - Expressive response (when you offer language, images, metaphors to help the other to name their loss and grief, explore their options, & recognise the need to be reconciled to someone or something).
 - Nurturing Spiritual Growth (when ***you and the other*** move to a new level of understanding of the significance of God’s place in our lives)

Reflection

“..as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, ***clothe*** yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

Colossians 2:23

How to appear to others?

Cover up ?

Protection?

Uniform?

Not natural? Have to be formed?

metaphors we can use in *our* pastoral care

- Vine and grafted-in branch
- Fishing out in the deep water
- Trees on the fence-line
- Natural “gut” reaction to another’s plight
- A womb that receives, nurtures, and expels