

## Discipleship Skills

# COMPASSION: ENGAGING THE HEART IN HELPING OTHERS

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. This work, though, is not a task that should be done mechanically (without emotion/care), as a box that gets checked in your attempt to serve God. Rather, it can only best be accomplished through the genuine care and concern that you attach to the spiritual well-being of others and the desire to see God be glorified. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you learn to show compassion in your gospel work.

### **MATTHEW 9:35-38**

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To have compassion is to be moved/stirred with pity and sympathy for the suffering others experience, to the point of doing whatever you can to help alleviate it. Jesus's compassion was demonstrated toward both the physical and, especially, spiritual suffering others experienced. Jesus would demonstrate the following pattern: See a need, be moved with compassion, and do what He could to alleviate the need (Mark 1:39-42; Luke 7:11-17; Mark 9:14-27; Matthew 20:29-34). Here, whenever Jesus saw a crowd, He felt compassion because He saw their lostness as though they were weary and burdened sheep without a shepherd. As Jesus saw this, He told His disciples to pray for workers to be sent into the harvest. Therefore, Jesus wants people like you to help those who are weary and burdened by sin, worldly cares, oppressive human religious systems, etc., by pointing them to Christ, who is the Good Shepherd (John 10), relieves these burdens, and gives rest to the soul (Matthew 11:28-30)!

### **COLOSSIANS 3:12-13**

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Part of being transformed into the image of Christ and seeking things above is to put on compassion (vv. 1-17). In particular, as a gospel worker, you must see the condition of people who are spiritually lost (e.g., living in immorality, deceived by false teaching, etc.) for what it truly is and have a heart of compassion for them rather than just seeing the external appearances

of their lives. Then, you must do what you can to help those you can come to the Good Shepherd, while diligently praying that God would send more laborers into the harvest of lost souls throughout this world (Matthew 9:35-38). Ultimately, you should not be able to think of the condition of this world and not be moved with compassion to recognize the great amount of gospel work that needs to be done. Then, you must determine to do your part in it!

### **LUKE 15:1-7**

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Jesus's compassion caused Him to seek lost people, even those whom others rejected. He saw every lost person as a sheep who is worth finding (although certainly not everyone is willing to follow the Good Shepherd). In this, you must challenge yourself to evaluate how much compassion you demonstrate to seek lost people. Are you more like the Pharisees (who complained about and looked down on lost people) or Jesus (who valued and spent time with lost people so they could be saved)? Although compassion for lost people does not mean you engage in sinful activities or situations that would undermine your faith, it does mean spending time, energy, and effort to invest in others who need to learn and obey the gospel of Christ, and doing what you can to help them in that journey!

### **ACTS 17:16-17**

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The apostle Paul was deeply devoted to Christ and accomplishing gospel work (Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2). When he arrived in Athens and saw the lost condition of the city (lost to idolatry), he could not sit idly by without doing or saying anything to help them. Notice that he was stirred within his spirit over the reality of the city being full of idols. Therefore, he did not just see the city's beautiful architecture and all the interesting things from a physical perspective. He looked around and saw all kinds of evidence that the people of the city were lost and did not know how to be saved. So, he began trying to reason with both the Jews and Gentiles wherever he could find people willing to listen (vv. 18-34). Similarly, as you observe the world around you, there are many markers to identify modern idolatry and lostness (e.g., materialism, distraction, immorality, religious institutions not teaching truth). These should cause you to be stirred in your spirit so that you respond with compassionate zeal to help others escape their lostness by engaging with them about Jesus and His truth (John 14:6)!

### **ACTS 20:18-20, 31, 36-38**

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Paul's gospel work involved emotion, indicating he was fully invested in the cause of Christ and other people. As he met with the elders from the Ephesian congregation, he referenced the tears he shed while he was with them twice in this text (in addition to crying as he departed from them). Clearly, Paul was concerned about the spiritual well-being of other people. In fact, of all the things Paul experienced in gospel work, the concern for all the churches was heavy on his mind and heart (2 Corinthians 11:28). As a gospel worker, you should be compassionate toward the spiritual condition and well-being of others and be willing to emotionally invest in trying to help them (though not driven by emotion). For, if you are mechanical and emotionless toward the situations others are in and/or uncaring toward the outcome they experience in their lives, it will reflect in what you invest to help them.

### **1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12, 17-18; 3:5-10**

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Paul's work in Thessalonica was shortened due to difficult circumstances outside of his control (Acts 17:1-9). This passage helps to see the motivation in Paul's work among them and his deep concern for their spiritual well-being. Rather than being selfishly motivated (seeking to manipulate them for his benefit or glory), he cared deeply for them and invested in them as a parent does for a child. So, their spiritual well-being deeply mattered to Paul. Similarly, gospel workers should be so invested in the spiritual well-being of others that it is impossible to be unconcerned about them (just as a godly parent could never be unconcerned about the wellbeing of their children). This concern should motivate you to give and sacrifice to help others to whatever extent you can (Jude 1:22-23).

### **CONCLUSION**

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Being compassionate toward the spiritual well-being of people is critical to helping others follow Jesus. For, we have seen that it was a critical characteristic Jesus and Paul possessed in their gospel work. This compassion will show in whatever efforts are made to lead others to become followers of Christ, as it will come from a heart that genuinely cares rather than one that is just trying to fulfill an obligation. Then, it will cause you to go deeper in the ways that you serve and try to impact others for Christ, including how much you are willing to give of yourself to help another be a disciple of Jesus!

## **DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS**

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What is involved in showing compassion?

How should you see those who are spiritually lost?

How should seeing those who are spiritually lost move you?

What are specific things compassion will lead you to invest in lost people?

What are some markers of modern-day idolatry and lostness?

How should seeing these things impact you?

How should emotions be involved in gospel work?

How is gospel work comparable with the relationship between a parent and child?

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