

Compassion Killer
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Day One

We are examining five things that can squash our compassion for others. Let's call them, "compassion killers." I know, not exactly the most compelling title, but you get the point. We know compassion is a character of Jesus you and I are called to emulate, yet it can sometimes be difficult to communicate.

Let's start out by getting a baseline understanding of compassion. Compassion is being so moved emotionally and internally when we see someone experiencing pain or suffering, that we are compelled to act outwardly in a way that comes alongside and shows care. Compassion is accompanied by a desire to help alleviate a person's distress in some way.

What can stifle the beautiful gift of compassion in our hearts? The fact that we at times can have a hard time grasping and receiving the compassion that has been shown to us by Jesus.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him (Psalm 103:13).

Growing up, many of us may not have experienced a compassionate earthly father, so trying to grasp and take in the fact that God your heavenly Father longs to show you compassion can be hard.

The Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion (Isaiah 30:18).

As a follower of Jesus, the Lord has compassion on you. If you find it difficult to receive and experience the compassion of God, it will be very difficult for you to genuinely overflow it to others.

Think about how many times you have belittled yourself, been self-critical, or berated yourself for a shortcoming or a mistake. Or I wonder how many times you have gone through a difficult time and rather than receiving the merciful voice of compassion from God, you find your self-talk saying, "just get over it."

When we have a "suck it up" attitude rather than settling into the loving and grace-filled heart of Jesus, our hearts can grow numb and calloused and lack the capacity for compassion.

If you are struggling to feel the compassion of Jesus towards you, ask him to help you. Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight any faulty thinking about God, yourself, or false beliefs about your worth and identity in him. Wherever it is, the Lord will surely show you because he longs to be gracious to you. And when you experience compassion to greater degrees, you will be compelled to have compassion toward others.

Day Two

We're examining five compassion killers—things that can hinder our compassion toward others. Let's tackle another compassion killer, and that's busyness.

In our fast-paced world, it's easy to become so preoccupied with our own lives that we are not in tune with what others around us are going through. When we're consumed by our schedules, juggling work, family, and countless responsibilities, rushing from one task or activity to another, we may miss ways to see and step into the pain and needs of others. In his ministry, Jesus modeled a different approach. He often paused amid the chaos, offering kindness and attention and engaging with those in need, and he calls us to slow down and look around—to look for opportunities to do the same.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

We have been comforted so we can be conduits of compassion to others. Maybe a coworker is experiencing a personal loss, disappointment in being passed over for a promotion, or another challenging life event.

A way we can show compassion is by listening empathically. When we listen empathically, we are not trying to fix someone, give them advice, or share our “that happened to me too” stories.

Rather we listen with the intent to deeply understand another person in a way they feel heard and valued. Think of the last time someone truly listened to you. In difficult times, genuine listening can help people pull through. What distractions might be blinding you to the suffering of others?

Take time this week to spend a moment in silence, reflect and ask yourself, “What in your life pulls you away from being present with others? How can you carve out time to be more aware of those around you? What would it require of you to step into the needs of others? Maybe it's courage or sacrificing your time or comfort.

Before the start of your workday, make it a habit to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit, “Who can I demonstrate compassion toward today?”

When we slow down long enough to be present to those around us, Jesus shows us many opportunities for his compassion to flow through us.

Day Three

Let's examine a total hindrance to showing the tenderness of Jesus, and that's unforgiveness.

Jesus addressed forgiveness directly in Matthew 18:21-22 when Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him. Jesus responds, *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times*. This radical call to forgive is rooted in the holy understanding that holding onto grudges only harms us and hinders our ability to love others.

When I think of forgiveness, I am always struck by the story of Joseph and his brothers. I highly recommend reading the full story in Genesis but here is the gist. Out of animosity and anger, Joseph's older brothers plotted to kill him. While their hatred did not end in murder, they sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, which set off a slew of circumstances, not all of them favorable for Joseph. While he initially found favor with Pharaoh and became a trusted leader in his household, in a turn of events, Joseph came under false accusation and endured jail time.

Things eventually ended up in Joseph's favor because God's favor was on him, but his brother's actions set off a firestorm of hardship for Joseph. Years later when Joseph was confronted with his brothers, instead of holding a grudge and exacting punishment, he chose to forgive them.

Not many of us will experience someone trying to take our life, but we may experience someone trying to ruin our reputation, a coworker or boss who acts rudely or in ways that cause us to feel belittled, a roommate who violates a living agreement or maybe a friend who betrays a confidence. I am not saying any of those things are excusable behaviors, but as followers of Jesus, we are commanded to forgive.

Unforgiveness will impact every area of your life. It quenches the work of the Holy Spirit and causes depression, anxiety, and anger. Unforgiveness leaks into other areas of our lives, and it hardens our hearts.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

When we cling to unforgiveness, we shut ourselves off from the very compassion we are called to extend. Who in your life may God be calling you to forgive? Can I encourage you to surrender your bitterness to Jesus? Let his compassion for your hurt transform your heart so you can overflow with compassion for others.

Day Four

Let's examine another compassion killer, jealousy.

Jealousy most often arises from comparison—comparing our finances to others, our careers, our titles at work, the amount of credit or time in the spotlight we get compared to a coworker on our team. Our relationship status, our house, kids, car, spouse, our looks, the list goes on and on. When we compare our lives to others it can lead to a feeling of lack, which can ultimately lead to resentment that poisons our relationships. When we compare ourselves to others, our hearts can go cold and be driven to apathy, insensitivity, and animosity.

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:16).

Jealousy creates a barrier that prevents us from expressing genuine care for others and celebrating their good fortune.

Jesus embodied compassion and taught us to do the same.

In Luke 15, Jesus shares an example of compassion (and lack of it) through the parable of the prodigal son.

In this story, we learn a man had two sons. We see the younger one demanding his inheritance and leaving his father's household only to live recklessly, squander everything he had, and drive his life into the ground.

When he runs out of money and finds himself destitute, he decides to return home. Instead of acting in anger and disowning him, his father responds with compassion and joy and welcomes him with open arms. When his father sees him approaching, he feels compassion and runs and embraces him and kisses him (Luke 15:20).

His older brother on the other hand is filled with anger and jealousy rather than compassion for his brother's poor choices. He says,

Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him! (Luke 15:29-30).

In his eyes, his younger brother did not deserve the warm and joyous homecoming.

The bottom line is jealousy kills compassion and can cause us to act in ways that are not becoming of a follower of Jesus. When we focus on our own blessings and practice gratitude, rather than comparing them to the good fortune of others we can free ourselves from the grip of jealousy, trust in God's provision, and allow compassion to thrive.

Day Five

Today let's examine community.

Are you a part of a Christian community? Specifically, do you regularly attend a local church? If not, you could be missing out on growing in compassion.

The writer of Hebrews encourages community when he says,

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Community is vital to your spiritual journey. It provides the support, accountability, and encouragement to live out your faith wholistically.

When we isolate ourselves, we miss the opportunity to learn from each other, share our burdens, and lift one another up. Compassion flourishes in connection. Compassion thrives in the context of relationships.

When we engage with one another, we become aware of each other's struggles and needs. Without community, we become disconnected from the realities of people's lives. We may miss the chance to support a friend in crisis or comfort someone who's grieving. Compassion requires intimacy, and intimacy can only flourish when we are present and engaged.

In 1 Corinthians 12:26, Paul describes the church as a body, emphasizing that if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. When we isolate ourselves, we can easily become indifferent and insensitive to the pain of others. But when we are part of a community, we share in each other's joys and sorrows. This shared experience fosters empathy and compassion, reminding us that we are all interconnected in the body of Christ.

In community, we can confront our biases and fears that hinder our compassion.

The early church exemplified what it meant to live in community. They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. Their love for one another was evident, and it drew others to Christ (Acts 2:42-47).

If you are not part of a local Christian community, can I encourage you to find a church near you that is committed to the truth of God's word and growing in the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

Lack of community can hinder compassion but when we intentionally engage with one another, we grow in love and empathy, allowing us to better reflect Christ's heart to the world.