

Showing Compassion

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Day One

For many businesses, the end of the year can be one of the busiest seasons. Coupled with the holidays quickly approaching, we are managing the balance of work and family with extra care during this time. As a leader, or manager you are likely deep into planning for the next fiscal year and facing the results of the current year. As an employee, you may be thinking about the company's results as well, and what this means for your job. Without a doubt, this season is filled with uncertainty.

What does this have to do with compassion? When we face pressures at work, especially those that are financial in nature, it is easy to feel stress, and to focus on ourselves. First, if you are in a position to help set forth the financial plans in your company, a compassionate approach to budget formation might look different. Let's think about Jesus feeding the 4000.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way" (Matthew 15:32).

You know the story, his disciples fret and wonder how they will feed the crowds. They have seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

Let's think of a worldview response. You are the person with enough. You hold the bread and fish, but you keep them all for yourself instead of trying to compassionately share the little you have.

As a leadership team, are you focused on your bonuses to the point of cutting other positions? Or are you thinking of ways to retain employees? Maybe you are considering cutting benefits programs that your employees rely on.

Now, while I realize sometimes you are called to make hard choices. I would challenge you to pray and consider how Jesus would see your workforce. He sees them like the 4000. How are you seeing them?

If you absolutely cannot influence your company and need to make cuts, what are things you can do for your employees? First, clear and compassionate communication is critical. If you do face a layoff, maybe it is a wonderful reference letter or an offer to make an introduction. Can you serve as a mentor in their search?

As an employee, these seasons can be stressful as you hear the office buzz about budgets and cuts or a rumor about merit increases—maybe there will be none. The pressure mounts—especially as you try to plan holidays with family.

You can have compassion too. I could tell you about the many women I pray with in leadership roles who have true broken hearts over decisions they have tried to compassionately influence but cannot. They are faced with making cuts and even having to often deliver bad news of a layoff. Being impacted feels so personal, but many of the Christian leaders I know are truly grieved at the impact they know job loss will have on their employees. I know many of our listeners don't always work for a Christian leader.

Consider the impact you might have on the person who delivers bad news to you. Your reaction just may change their life for the kingdom. Can you leave them asking why you are so hopeful? After all, God is compassionate for all of us. He loves us lavishly.

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

God is in control.

Day Two

During these weeks, we see many spikes in feelings. Especially those of sadness and loneliness. Holidays are often steeped in traditions. We think of meals, being at someone's house, maybe even the last conversation we had with a loved one. But maybe this year is different. It could be someone who moved far from home for a new job or maybe family who is grieving the loss of a loved one. Perhaps someone is facing illness. Whatever is causing this, the feelings are deep.

Romans 12:15 calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We need to show compassion as these feelings come up, and we need to consider how to address them at work. Perhaps you are the one with these feelings, and if you are, know you are not alone. If you are not filled with these feelings and instead, are filled with excitement and joy for the season, consider the command of Romans 12:15.

In either position, this verse makes one thing clear—we should not face these feelings alone or allow others around us to feel alone. A 2023 survey found 61% of Americans expect to feel lonely or sad during the holidays. Wow, that is over half our population!

What could compassion look like during this season? As a manager or even as a colleague, I would suggest being a good listener and an even better question asker! Maybe you are already aware of someone's hardship, but often, people keep to themselves because of embarrassment or for fear of burdening others.

Ensuring those around you have the proper resources is important. Depending on how complex or deep their feelings are could orient how you should best respond. When someone shares a burden with you, here are some ways to respond with compassion.

Offer to pray! Perhaps they are sad because they aren't celebrating the same way they are used to, or maybe there is a struggle in their family. Offering to pray can help!

Is there someone on your team spending the holiday alone? Perhaps extend an invitation to join your family for the holiday!

Is a team member facing an illness or another hardship? If they can't come spend the holiday with you, perhaps offering to help with their meal would go a long way.

If you sense the person's loneliness or sadness is very deep and they express anything that suggests self-harm or a lack of desire for living, this can be very troubling. Have your company's information about employee assistance programs handy—especially during the holidays. Even suggesting they reach out to speak to someone may be the nudge they need to ask for help. Part of showing compassion is being ready!

Day Three

I don't know about you, but I started preparing Thanksgiving dinner yesterday! In between revising my budget and squeezing in some conference calls, I am preparing to host in our home. I know I am not alone! You know I love my statistics: 62% of respondents to a Harvard Medical School study reported stress levels were somewhat or very elevated during the holidays. You see where I am headed. Yesterday we talked about how over half of Americans are lonely or sad during the holidays, and now we are adding stress!

Sometimes I can balance all this excitement for gathering and a good meal, but often I find myself exhausted and frankly lacking patience for those around me at work and at home. And my reflection of Christ, well...it is not very good. Being able to show compassion during the holiday truly depends on how I lean on the compassion Jesus Christ has for me!

When I am feeling very stressed and overburdened, I am reminded of something Jesus said:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

He calls me to come to him. He offers me rest. He offers to bare my burden by being yoked with me. If you don't know what being yoked means, picture two animals that are bound together by a bar or "yoke" that rests on their shoulders. With this yoke, they must walk together in unison to get the job done. Anytime they aren't in step, they cannot get the job done properly.

We can never expect to get our job done properly without Jesus. When we forget he offers to be yoked with us, stress rises, and we forget that our most important job is to be his light in this world—especially in our homes during the holidays.

It can be very tempting to make your lists and start your day early without spending time in God's Word. For me, this is nonnegotiable time. When I don't start my day in the word, it feels "off". I find during the holiday, I need to set a few timers during my day to pause. During these quick two minutes mini-breaks, I focus on a small prayer or a bible verse I select. Maybe, for ease, use the one from Matthew 11:28-30 to remind you to let Jesus help you work! And when I am less than patient, I try to remember to apologize.

Day Four

Today is traditionally a time for gathering with family and friends. We often find ourselves kicking off the day with a turkey trot run and watching a parade followed by eating too much food and rooting for our favorite football teams. Some of us find time to serve in our community, bringing food to the less fortunate or serving a meal. One thing I bet all of us are doing is having conversations at the table we probably shouldn't have.

We can all list the taboo topics of the table: politics, religion, money, marriage, friendly gossip. I mean, what better time to raise an issue than when we are all together! Cue the sarcasm. The aforementioned list is what NOT to talk about during your gathering. It has become too cultural to talk about what we talk about during the holidays.

Maybe your family has gotten smart and placed some boundaries around what to talk about. With religion on the taboo list, you may think this doesn't help those of us trying to share the gospel with a family member we hope will want to know more about Jesus. Perhaps you have had your faith attacked during the holidays. You feel hopeless when it comes to sharing your love of Jesus with those around you.

Exodus 14:14 is one of my favorite bible verses:

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still (Exodus 14:14).

In these tense moments, your silence can show compassion. It is a choice not to allow yourself to engage in a discussion that doesn't bring glory to God. Having the power in silence to know the Lord is fighting for you can compel even more compassion.

Instead of speaking, show great love to those around you by being present. Take interest in a conversation or maybe serve someone who has attacked your faith in the past. You are covered in the strength and mercy of the Lord.

Day Five

The race is on! You are now officially on the countdown to Christmas. Are you shopping the black Friday deals right now? Trying to finish all your shopping in advance of your next holiday celebration? Sales on this one day are expected to reach \$10 billion dollars. Yes, billion. The rush of endorphins that come from this touted day of deals can be fun, but how can you show compassion this season as you prepare to give to others? Rather than a quick rush, can you turn this feeling into a long-lasting seasonal glow?

Let's take a moment and orient ourselves to a biblical view on giving.

First, it is the Lord who gives us power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). We are called to steward what God gives us in God's way, not our own. Even Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:24 that we cannot serve God and money. What would happen to these \$10 billion dollars if even 10%—a tithe—went to things that God cares about? That would be \$1 billion dollars! References about tithing can be found in Numbers 18:26, Malachi 3:10, and Deuteronomy 14:22.

God gives us wealth; he reminds us we cannot serve him and money and tells us to bring our first fruits to him.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Now, let's think of who God asks us to show compassion to. Jesus is our greatest example of showing compassion.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:35-36).

God is good to give us a list of suggestions.

As you shop on black Friday, are there deals that could help you buy gifts for children in need? Local giving trees make it easy to know what to buy. Many communities also have ways you can sponsor food for those in need or give toward a coat drive for those of our listeners in colder climates.