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When is Compassion Wrong?

Matthew 9:36: (NASB) *Seeing the people, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.*

Guest: Joy Thompson



When you think of compassion, what do you picture? Perhaps you see Jesus healing the multitudes or volunteers caring for victims of some natural disaster. Perhaps you see an individual patiently working with a disabled person or a soldier protecting children in a war-torn region. Perhaps compassion makes you think of Doctors Without Borders or food drives for the hungry. Whatever it is, thinking about compassion probably makes you think about the best of humanity - it probably makes you think about that glimmer of hope that says we can get along. Now, when you think about compassion do you ever see yourself in the role of the compassionate? Wouldn't you like to be in that role? Just what does it take to become a truly compassionate person and most importantly, what are the limits of compassion? Are there times when compassion is NOT appropriate?

Rick's sister, Joy, joins us on this program. Her comments in purple are edited for clarity and brevity. I am part of a family business I married into over 30 years ago... (For Joy's background, see FULL EDITION CQ REWIND.) I recently was emotionally involved in a situation where my compassion went into overdrive.

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary: **Compassion**

Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it

There are several words translated *compassion* in the New Testament. One of these words really focuses on Jesus and his compassion:

Compassion: Strongs #4697 to have the bowels yearn, i.e. (figuratively) feel sympathy, to pity Greek English Lexicon - to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)

We say compassion is felt "deep down," that hurt in the pit of your stomach. The human body is wired to have a physiological reaction to someone else's hurt or pain.

What can we observe about Jesus and his compassion? Matthew 15:32: He entered into the experience of these people, who had traveled a long way on dusty roads. Jesus' compassion caused him to feed the people, satisfying their immediate needs with a miracle.

Mark 6:34: Jesus' compassion caused him to teach, filling the pressing void in the people's lives. He identified with the people and fed them spiritually.

Matthew 14:14: Jesus' compassion caused him to heal many who were sick. He lifted away their immediate trial.

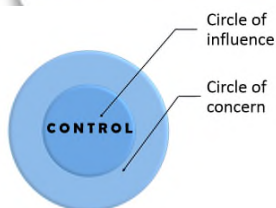
Luke 7:13: Jesus' compassion caused him to raise this widow's only son back to life. While they were marching him down the street in a funeral procession, Jesus interrupted the procession and restored life to the young man. Jesus replaced her grief with joy.

Jesus' compassion ALWAYS led him to the decisive action of lifting people out of their immediate lack, trial or grief. His compassion ALWAYS produced a beneficial result.

That is what I want to do! Jesus was able to zero in on what the need was and immediately alleviate the problem. He literally took the problem away in all of these examples. That is the result of that deep, gut-wrenching movement on his part. This is where his kingdom will eventually bring the entire world of mankind.

We had an experience with a possible new hire. I will call him "Gary." (For Joy's story about Gary, please see the FULL EDITION CQ REWIND.) ...Soon thereafter, I talked to Rick because I was feeling so bad. I was so upset that I could not sleep and even though I was praying, I did not know what to do. Rick observed that I needed to watch my "circle of compassion," because it could be a "circle of destruction." What?!? I had always considered compassion to be a good thing, no matter what.

The word used to describe the compassion Jesus displayed is *never* applied to his followers. That depth of compassion is "above our pay grade" for now. He had an ability we do not - he could read the heart.



Our compassion has limited influence,
and we need to understand those limits for it to be effective!

Let's review a key point from our [January 2, 2017](#) podcast, "What Should I Be Doing Differently?" to begin to reassign our compassion to its most effective level.

To better invest my time and maximize my experiences, I need to understand how to focus on my circle of influence and NOT my circle of concern. - Weldon Long, "The Power of Consistency" book

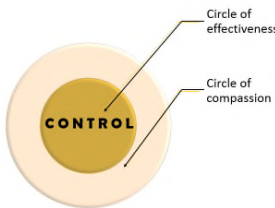
Let's look at the Apostle Paul's conversion as an example of how this works. Saul (Paul's original name when he was a Pharisee) was forcibly shown the error of his ways and repented.

Ananias, the Christian brother who would be sent to Saul, did not need force; he simply needed faith: [Acts 9:10-15](#)

Observations: Jesus' answer allays his concern and helps Ananias to focus on that which he could influence. Ananias walks in faith, applies his influence and does his job. THIS WAS A DEFINING MOMENT for both individuals leading to the "canceling" of his circle of concern regarding Saul. Applying ourselves to that which we *can* influence works!

Our time is only well-invested when we are focusing on our circle of influence. Our time is wasted, never to be retrieved, when spent focusing on our circle of concern.

Back to Joy's story: I was face-to-face with Gary's deep disappointment and I could not take that away from him. I tried to encourage him, but I took on those feelings and did not know what to do with them. [1 Peter 5:7](#): (KJV) *Casting all your care (circle of concern) upon him; for he careth for you.* That is part of the process and what Ananias had to do in facing Saul. He had to cast his circle of concern upon the Lord knowing the Lord cared for him, and everything fell into place eventually. It is a challenge in those moments! I imagine Ananias as being afraid - he had reason to be. In my situation, I saw how it was affecting this young man and it was difficult.



He was not able to do what the job would have required of him. We see the power of Jesus' compassion and want to do what he did, but we are not able - more on this soon!

When our **circle of compassion** is larger than our **circle of effectiveness** (and it often is), we need to be wary of that circle of compassion becoming a circle of distraction and destruction. It means we are focusing on something bigger than us that we cannot change or influence, and it can be a heartbreaking experience. Compassion has to be clearly understood. Joy had to do some rethinking.

I prayed about it and started to realize that I had similar patterns of response from other experiences and I never thought my compassion might be an issue. Part of my pattern is I get caught up in the disappointment and struggles of other people and it has a great effect on me. We get consumed by other people's lives and it is a dead end because we can't change it. There was another experience recently with a very fine person, Raymond, who was really down on himself for not making wiser decisions, because these decisions prevented us from hiring him. He was so upset with himself. I had the same reaction of intense feeling for him, but I now had this insight of our circle of influence and knew I had to deal with him in a different way.

Christian compassion needs to be learned. **Defining Christian compassion: [Hebrews 10:32-34](#):** When we commiserate with somebody, we enter into the feelings of their difficulties and feel along with them, desiring to help them. [1 Peter 3:8](#) [1 John 3:17](#): This is the gut reaction that says, "I am hurting with you. I want to help you. I want to walk with you through this." For Joy, her compassion in its raw state was bringing her to a place where she could not help anyone. **Praying about her discussion about the circle of influence led her to this: [Hebrews 12:1-3](#):** This has some red flags for dealing with feelings that come up. *...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us* - If we are running a race with weights, burdens and obstacles surrounding our feet, it is a hindrance to our race and therefore our spiritual life.

If your depth of feeling is taking away from your ability to 'run the race,' if it is getting in the way, distracting you from your faith in God and Christ to overrule the outcome, if it is causing you undue stress or lost sleep over the issue, this is a strong sign that your circle of compassion



needs an adjustment somehow. We don't want to “shut off our bowels of compassion,” but any distraction in our life is a sign there is a weight or a sin encircling us or burdening us.

In other words: I realize my compassion, as it exists naturally in me, can be something that tangles my feet up and trips me as I try to run this race. Our compassion, if it brings us to anxiety and stress, is not allowing us to run our Christian race. The compassion Joy had was causing an extra level of stress. When dealing with Gary, Joy's reaction to him was one of real disappointment. He knew I was disappointed, as I shared my feelings with him. I empathized with him thinking it would help him a little. I do not think anything helped him at the time because he was so disappointed.

It is okay to be expressive. We are suggesting that according to the way Jesus' compassion is described to us, it was a deep gut reaction and connection because he had the ability to fix, lift and alleviate circumstances. We can have compassion but cannot alleviate other people's circumstances. We can identify, sympathize and walk beside them. The power of Jesus' compassion could lift them out. The power of our compassion brings us into their lives and it can lock us in with them, but our compassion cannot bring them out. Unless we are applying compassion with scriptural principles in mind, our compassion can be destructive.

Our compassion is deep and real sympathy with a powerful desire to be helpful, but it is not (yet) in a position of being able to lift others out of their immediate lack, trial or grief.

For Joy's new approach to handling this kind of stress, please see the FULL EDITION CQ REWIND.

Your adjustment was internal. You change the manner in which you process the emotions that surround your compassion. This is an important way to put a stop to the circle of distraction and destruction. You have to rewire your internal reaction. We have an incredible capacity for compassion to flow out of us, but that does not mean our compassion has the power to make things different. Our circle of influence can house many opportunities for proactive compassion with our kids, spouse, family and close friends. Within this small circle, we can sometimes lift others by the power of our compassion. But sometimes their issues are outside of our circle of influence, and often people outside our circle of influence need our compassion. How do we deliver it when we cannot change things?

Rework and manage the emotions attached to our compassion - we need perspective.

What about when you have a friend or family member who can be constantly taking advantage of you and others that you love? They can be verbally abusive due to their personality, and there could be possible mental illness or addiction problems. They constantly expect you to give them what they need (financially, emotionally and verbally). They cause stress to all those around them. Is it more compassionate to withhold supporting them in the ways mentioned? Is it adding to their destructive pattern OR is it compassionate to be a doormat?

We are supposed to be *persecuted for righteousness sake* and are to forgive others *70 times 7*, but should we keep this cycle of abuse going?

We do not believe that is the compassionate thing to do. Properly placed, compassion is a principled and powerful tool for righteousness. What about compassion when someone is not acting in a godly manner? Do we not hold someone accountable? Do we accept bad behavior? No, that is not compassion; that is cowardice. If we are not powerfully placed in the principles of righteousness and godliness, we are not helping but instead are hurting.

For example, if I would have hired Gary, I would have hired him to do a job that would have ended up hurting him. He would have been happy for a moment, but I had to look at the bigger picture for his own good.

Let's begin building a foundation of compassion. We start with God, of course...**God's compassion is always on and always effective because His plan is eternal and cannot fail:** Lamentations 3:21-26: His compassions never fail - even though we do not always see the immediate results of that compassion, His plan put Jesus in place as the ransom sacrifice, a plan of enormous compassion.

While we cannot deliver eternal results with our compassion, we know who can!



God can and God will. Therefore, we should be in contact with the Eternal Deliverer of Compassion about our own experiences with compassion.

The compassion Jesus displayed in his earthly mission always delivered, though its results (aside from his teaching) were a *temporary* relief of earthly pain and suffering. It was a sneak preview of the permanent kingdom miracles.

The temporary results of Jesus' compassion served as a witness to the unending power of God's love and plan: Matthew 9:35-38: He taught, proclaimed and used the miracle of healing to draw attention to what it will be like in his future kingdom.

Jesus had compassion at every turn. His very life was a statement of compassion. He is described as *a man of sorrows* in Isaiah 53:3, not because he had anything about himself to be sorrowful for, but because he took upon himself the sorrows of those around him.

Our compassion - rather than being a **circle of distraction and destruction** - should be a **circle of sympathetic compassion and prayer**. In this circle we observe the hurt, do what we can and deliver what we cannot do to the God of compassion through Jesus, the messenger of compassion in prayer.

The way Joy began to rewire the emotions around her own compassion was through prayer asking, "What is in my power to do? What is *outside* my power to do? How can I best affect this situation?" Hebrews 4:13-16

The problem we have with our compassion is we tend to act solely on feelings and emotions. We present six principles about compassion to try to help. While we cannot do what Jesus did, we *can* abide by the principles he followed.

Please see the FULL EDITION CQ REWIND for the discussions on each of these Principles:

Principle 1: Spiritually based compassion can be offered without being accepted

Principle 2: The choices to receive or reject spiritual compassion always have results or consequences

Principle 3: Whether accepted or rejected, spiritual compassion always brings a valuable learning experience

Principle 4: Spiritual compassion requires maturity and prayer

Principle 5: Spiritual compassion doesn't fix people it opens doors of opportunity for them

Principle 6: Spiritual compassion is driven by a higher and more powerful cause than our emotions

Principle 7: Christlike spiritual compassion empowers others and does not enable them!

*So, when is compassion wrong?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*