

What I'm learning about compassion.....

I recently attended a banquet complete with an international speaker and phenomenal band. It was a wonderful evening. The speaker delivered an amazing message full of power and hope. She inspired her audience to change the world for Christ and, when her presentation was complete, she sat down with the rest of us to listen to the band's closing song.

I watched this woman take her seat, and then I saw the tears come. Just a few at first, but as the song poured out over the room, tears poured out of that mighty woman of God.

It's what happened next that surprised me. No one comforted her. She was surrounded by people, yet not one of them reached out a hand or even offered a tissue. She had just given an incredible call to compassion, and those sitting closest to her responded with discomfort.

It was a scene that gets played out far too many times. We hear of another's crisis and see a need but often just don't know how to handle it. Not because we're heartless but because we know there's no easy fix. What can we offer someone who's experienced a miscarriage, divorce, death of a loved one, death of a dream? When a baby is born with birth defects or suicide steals another life, what can *we* do to alleviate the pain that's left behind?

At first glance it may seem like we have nothing to offer. We can't eliminate disappointments or resurrect the dead. Sure we can bake a casserole but there are some times the tragedy is so overwhelming that shepherd's pie just seems silly, so the oven stays cold, the phone stays silent, and the mailbox stays empty. We shrug, sigh, and go back to life as usual while those who are suffering suffer on.

What *are* we supposed to do when we witness suffering? We're supposed to suffer *with*. This is the true definition of compassion. Compassion literally means "to suffer with". It's certainly easier to avoid another's pain, but biblical compassion calls us out into the deeper waters of the suffering soul. It's active, risky and radical. The bold compassion Jesus modeled is messy.

Compassion hurts. Over and over again we find in the gospels Jesus demonstrating true compassion, His heart broken over the suffering He saw. While the religious leaders around Him walked away from those who were hurting, Jesus allowed Himself to be deeply moved. He reached out and touched the untouchables. He wept; familiar with sorrow, familiar with suffering. Filled with compassion, Jesus suffered *with*.

He's asking us to follow His lead today. We might not be able to heal others the way we see Jesus healing in the Bible, but we can point people to the Healer. By choosing to share in the suffering of those around us, we can be used by God – the Father of compassion – to bring those who are lost and alone into the arms of Christ. Engaging our hearts, souls, minds and strength by having Christ-like compassion for others illustrates the heart of God and reminds us all that Jesus not only suffers with, He suffered *for*.

Christ suffered for us – all of us – and we all need to know that He continues to suffer with us throughout our times of pain. Turning our backs on others encourages isolation and implies the lie that God has turned His back on those that suffer. Offering to share the love of Christ – even when it's uncomfortable – makes a value statement to everyone watching that says, "You're not invisible. You're important to me, and you're important to God."

Isn't this what we want to hear; what we need to know? When the pain pierces our hearts don't we long for someone to come alongside and hold us while we weep? We don't expect that person to erase the pain. We just want to know that someone cares enough to help carry our load. We want to know that we matter.

Our God is full of compassion. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from Him (2Corinthians 1:4). He's always available to help lighten our load, and He's asking us to clothe ourselves with compassion and make ourselves available to those around us. When we do our compassion becomes a light shining into other people's darkness. Indeed, it becomes a powerful weapon in the mighty hands of our all-powerful God.

Rather than run from suffering, Jesus asks us to embrace it. With this in mind I approached that international speaker and asked if she needed prayer. With tears in her eyes and a smile on her face she threw her arms around me and said simply, "*Always.*"

Shauna Amick, M.Ed.
Watermark Ministries