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Compassion in Christianity

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, compassion is the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. This is something that has been lacking very much in our modern world. Looking at the world now, the wars, murders, hunger, child malnutrition, and other issues that give a very sad and concerning the state of the world, one is left to wonder, is there any compassion in the world? Is there enough compassion in the world? And is compassion the answer? In "Compassion: Reflections on the Christian Life," the authors look at compassion from a Christian perspective and try to show how compassion as a Christian way of life can help us as Christians do our part in making the world a little better. The authors advocate for The Compassionate Way, achieved through patience, discipline, and prayer for the realization of a more loving and caring world. The authors also talk about how activism can be used to achieve this. Looking at the life of Jesus Christ, we can draw lessons on how we can live a compassionate life and create meaningful change in the world.

Reading through the book, I got to understand how the problems in the world have been caused by humanity forgetting the greatest law, Love. The competition in the world today is the cause of the misery. Many people do not care or love one another as Christ had commanded. Love for God and love for one's neighbor are the answer to this. My grandmother tells me that this is the only law that, if put in practice by all human beings, would be world safe and happy place for everyone; when you love God, you listen to and follow his word, when you love your neighbor, you do not do anything that may bring them harm or pain. The competition for status, wealth and power in today's world has brought a lot of pain and suffering among many. "Compassion: Reflection on the Christian Life" advocates for compassion as an answer to this.

Being compassionate means being kind and gentle to those who have been hurt by competition (McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). The competition in the world has caused many to be downtrodden. Kindness to the downtrodden is a quality that every human should aspire to attain and live by. Compassion is however not easy to achieve as it does not come naturally. Human beings are imperfect, and that is why God, in His wisdom, left us with a tool through which we can learn and practice compassion towards others. The bible teaches us that we do not govern ourselves rather, we look up to God to help us attain a level of spirituality that allows us to see the suffering of others and want to help. God's wisdom and guidance direct who and how we are. My Christian background has influenced me greatly in my approach to helping and fighting for the downtrodden. The teaching of Jesus on love for one another is why I joined social work. The recognition that my growth in the Christian faith is not just up to me but, with my willingness, is also assisted by my relationship with God. The fact that we can take our spiritual problems to God and pray to Him to help us understand His will has motivated me to always seek God when I am looking to expand my faith.

One of my favorite verses in the bible is Psalms 139: 23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." The verse admits human imperfection and shows that we look up to God to shape us. "God's own compassion constitutes the basis and source of our compassion." (McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). Our achieving of this compassion requires that we seek God to guide us in his ways and lead us to a path of seeing the suffering of the

downtrodden and assisting them. Through the disciplines of prayer and action that the compassion of God can manifest itself.(McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). The life of Christ teaches us about compassion. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." describes the kind of compassion that Christians should seek to emulate. According to the book, this kind of compassion can be achieved by prayer, patience, and discipline.

Prayer is our way of communicating with God. Through prayer, we can maintain and strengthen a close relationship with God. Only through prayer may we learn and appreciate God's compassion. However, prayer and action must go hand in hand in our communication with God. Both prayer and action are necessary for living a compassionate life. "Prayer without action grows into powerless pietism, and action without prayer degenerates into questionable manipulation."(McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). Action with prayer shows that we truly care and are genuine about our pursuit of a compassionate life. Christ taught about praying for our enemies (Matthew 5:44–45), and this is the best measure and practice for learning compassion through prayer. Being able to pray for people regardless of our views about them or relationship with them strengthens our faith and makes us more compassionate. However, prayer and action alone are not enough. Breaking bread together in remembrance of the life, sacrifice and love of Christ also positions us for compassion. Eating together can be a celebration of the last supper, sacred sacrament of Christianity. "Our praying together becomes working together."(McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). Eating together, whether as a family, community, or just a group of people, we are unified in Christ's love and move together towards a compassionate action. Establishing a prayerful listening of the word of God, however, requires us to have patience and discipline. Through this patience, we can successfully use prayer to realize the compassionate way.

"Discipline is the effort to avoid deafness and to become sensitive to the sound of the voice that calls us by a new name and invites us to a new life in discipleship." (McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982) Discipline is required in the journey to living a compassionate life. The world is filled with distractions that may take us away from the path to compassion. The ability to listen to God's unique calls to our individual lives requires a lot of discipline. Discipline enables God to reveal His divine Spirit in us.(McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen, 1982). Patience requires from us the capacity to wait, endure and apply self-restraint in our endeavors. In the journey to living a compassionate life, patience is an important quality to have. Human nature is not inclined to patience. This can be seen all over the world today, with almost every innovation aiming to reduce the time taken for a service to be completed. Therefore, patience is something that must be built within us.

"Patience means to enter actively into the thick of life and to fully bear the suffering within and around us" (McNeil, Morrison, and Nouwen, 1982). Developing patience in the modern world is not an easy task. This, in my view, is one of the biggest problems Christians face in their spiritual life. Spirituality does not go hand in hand with the rushed world we live in today. The increased individualism has made people always be in competition with each other. It requires patience. Patience means we allow God's will on our lives to happen in due time. Patience means that we can stop in the middle of all the chaos in the world and allow compassion to be nurtured in us through prayer. The discipline of patience plays a key role in our path to living a compassionate life. Because compassion cannot be learned in a day or two or as a crash course, it requires patience and discipline in prayer. Consistency in prayer indicates the

discipline of patience. A lot of patience and discipline characterized the life of Christ. Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane teaches Christians about patience and discipline (Matthew 26:39). Jesus prays to God to take the cup away from him, but only on God's will and not his (Jesus). This showed great patience and discipline in prayer, as it was not rushed, it was not demanding, and it displays the kind of approach we should take in praying for a compassionate life.

I like to think of social work as a form of activism to create meaningful change in the world. Social work is a form of activism that best embodies the compassionate way of life. Social work seeks to help those who have been hurt and are downtrodden because of the way the world has been set up. However, like any other form of activism, social work requires spiritual discipline. Social work can expose one to some of the darkest sides of humanity. Without some form of spiritual discipline, one may fall into the trap of anger and act out in ways that go against the tenets of the compassionate way. Therefore, spiritual discipline allows a person to endure and be patient with the kind of suffering they have sought to alleviate. Knowing that this spiritual discipline can be achieved by communicating with God is great comfort. I have come to appreciate the value of prayer and discipline in patience as tools to live in the compassionate way successfully.

Social work requires compassion. Compassion, not just for those we love, but everyone who has been hurt and victimized in whatever way by the competition in this world. This way, compassion can be a tool for fighting the world's injustice. My new understanding of social work is from a Christian perspective of compassionate giving and caring. Social work is a form of activism that uses compassion to create meaningful change. Accepting that everything is accomplished in Christ and walking in His footsteps is the first step towards compassionate activism. Prayer expresses discipline of patience to learning the compassionate way of life.

Work Cited

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