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Social Work & Christianity
Compassion Reflection Paper

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Compassion is a term that we often see being used as a way to express our feelings with one another, especially when negative emotions or situations are present. The true nature of compassion might not fully be reflected when one expresses their compassion for one another, compassion is deeply rooted and is more of a heart posture for those around us. Henri Nouwen in his book *Compassion*, challenges the reader in their view of compassion, and uses the christian faith as a big component to the true meaning of compassion.

The authors begin by stating that God is a compassionate God. “This means, first of all, that God has chosen to be God-with-us.” How do they explain what this means?

Being a christian a lot of our values and attributes are based out of biblical ideas, especially many of us look to Jesus as a role model on how we should conduct ourselves as believers and with our community. One characteristic of God is compassionate, Nowen states that God is a compassionate God, by being ‘God-with-us. Growing up I always knew that God is Immanuel, a God that is always with us, but I never really saw it as a compassionate component of God’s characteristics. Compassion simply looks like being present for one another, and oftentimes just simply being present with the other is more compassionate than giving advice, or physically helping them. I think oftentimes we struggle with true compassion, because we feel that we are not qualified to give compassion, or be able to give the ‘right amount,’ however we see that compassion isn’t just about the physical needs being met, but it begins with simply being present and available.

Discuss the authors' statement, "The truly good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle." How does this God differ from other perceptions of God? How is this God to be viewed in light of archaic religion and contemporary understanding of religion?

God's way of showing compassion is by sharing the pain that we as his children experience, one expression of his compassion is through healing. We see that God cared enough for our pain and diseases, that we see that Jesus continued to pursue healing because the very idea of his children being in pain was something that hurt him at his core. The fact that Jesus himself came down in human form, so that he can live the life of a normal human being, shows compassion on a new level. Compassion is to meet someone where they are at, and be moved to action in the midst of their own pain. Many times the religious God comes off as this mean, old, grumpy God, that is always looking to punish. The beautiful thing about Jesus is that is not the truth at all, in fact Jesus was moved by compassion in a lot of his ministry, which gives us an accurate representation of compassion for today.

Jesus took on the conditions of a slave/servant. What significance does that have for people who seek status, security, and special favor?

Jesus shows compassion as a way of humbling himself, compassion requires to leave our own world of privilege for the sake of compassion. I find that this is a deep form of compassion that begins at the heart. Taking on the role of a slave or servanthood is not really praised, and often times people would rather seek a place of status, a place of bliss, a place of security in this life. Jesus did quite the opposite, the ultimate way he showcased compassion was through his death on the cross, where he chose to leave his place of holiness, his place of being divine, to take human form and die on the cross for the sake of OUR sins. Jesus decided to take on our pain

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for the sake of love and for the sake of our freedom. When I think of compassion at this level, I am ever so grateful to have a God that is so compassionate and met me where I am.

Where does God's compassion end?

Compassion is seen in play when misery is present, but another attribute to compassion is finding joy and gratitude in the midst of pain. God's compassion doesn't end in our sufferings, but is continued on in his glory, in eternity.

What is intimate listening? How is it expressed?

Intimate listening is simply a form of obedience, hearing the voice of God and responding to it. Intimate listening isn't associated with fear, but is associated with relationship with God. When you are in communion with God this form of expression comes naturally, as you desire to hear his voice, and be obedient to what he shares or commands.

How does listening to God and discerning God's voice help us?

Listening to God erases all fear, because our obedience and our desire to discern his voice creates a space to experience his presence and his love. When we get to a place where we are intentional about listening to God's voice and discerning what he is saying in the moment, it will allow us to shift our perspective and attitude. In the midst of our sufferings, hearing God's voice gives us strength for ourselves and for others.

Discuss the authors' statement that "wherever a true Christian community is formed, compassion happens in the world". How is this possible? What are the community characteristics?

When the community comes together under the basis of Christ, we are moved to be as Christ was. In community we have the space to carry each other's burden, that one cannot do in solitude. In community a big characteristic is servanthood, we see that Jesus embodied

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servanthood very well, as he always served the disciples and the crowd he was in. Community moves us to compassion, as we do life with one another, we experience people from various walks of life and experiences.

“How can we build community?” ask the authors. What is the better question they offer, and how do we answer?

The better question to ask in forming a community is - “Where do we see community occurring.” Community isn’t something to force to happen, but building community is recognizing the reality of it. When we are aware of where growth and development is occurring, we are able to be intentional with seeing community happen.

What do we discover in voluntary displacement? Why is displacement so important?

Voluntary displacement brings us into reality, and allows us to get uncomfortable and upfront about our brokenness. Displacement allows for a healthy community, it gives room for the community to recognize the same they have to share in one another's joys and sorrows.

How can recognition help us to move from involuntary to voluntary displacement and find ourselves being converted through the process?

When we become more aware of our displacement the more we have power over what we choose to live a compassionate life. Voluntary displacement allows for us to be able to recognize the reality of the circumstances, and when we see it clearly is when we experience growth and begin to live in community and pursue true compassion.

What is the basis for a “new togetherness”?

The basis of this new togetherness is living in community, where it’s not based out of competition, but a space to celebrate and recognize one another’s unique talents. This new

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togetherness creates a space to be vulnerable with one another, and aim for life to be done together.

Life in community is a response to a “call”. How might God be calling you into the community? Share thoughts and reflections.

I find that God has been calling me into the community as someone who connects others. Being a safe place for my community is important to me, as I found that when there is space for vulnerability you can create and build a healthy community. Personally I desire to be around a community that is willing to work through conflict, that is willing to also hold each other accountable for our personal goals and to be willing to cover one another in prayer and support through good times and bad.

What role does patience play as a discipline of compassion?

Patience and compassion go hand in hand with one another. Without patience there is no compassion. The term patience is often seen as being passive, or this act of waiting, however it's much more than that. It is the act of slowing down in the process, and being willing to be present to the situation. It allows us to face certain fears, in order to fully be compassionate and overcome them together.

Share your thoughts on how patience opens us to God, the world, and others.

Patience allows for us to be fully surrendered or yielded to God and his presence. It gives us the opportunity to slow down and to not just focus on ourselves, but invites us to live in communion with others, the world around us and with God. Patience draws us naturally to being compassionate, which is what we are ultimately called to be when living life with others.

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Why is it impossible to speak about prayer without speaking about the Holy Spirit?

Prayer and the Holy Spirit go hand in hand with one another, our prayer life is a spiritual life, where it's a place to discover and encounter the holy spirit in the presence of God. In prayer is the place to not only bring requests and commune with the spirit, but to also listen to the promptings of the holy spirit.

Share your thoughts about prayer as entering "into a deep, inner solidarity with all human beings so that in and through us they can be touched by the healing power of God's spirit."

Prayer invites us into unity with one another, through the midst of sufferings, and joy, prayer creates a space in community to support one another. When we are united in prayer, you are interceding for others, to also experience the healing power of God's spirit.

Compassion does not exclude confrontation but often calls for it. What is the key to compassionate confrontation and patient action? How do folks make sure the confrontation is not tinged with revenge?

An important aspect of compassion is confrontation, confrontation leads to action and seeing change occur. We often think that compassion can be seen as meek or passive, but it really is more about being an advocate in the time of struggle. For example, if we find ourselves compassionate towards oppression, but being passive towards systemic racism, you really are just playing it safe and not tapping into true compassion. If your main goal is to please others, through compassion, then you are only doing it for selfish gain, rather than being selfless. Confrontation will force you to get into places where not everyone will be pleased with you, but it allows you to step into authentic compassion and see true change occur. In order to ensure confrontation doesn't end up leading to revenge, is to be self-aware and move with humility when dealing with situations.

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Disciplined actions are always characterized by gratitude. How is the compassionate life a grateful life?

Compassion motivated by gratitude, comes from a place of freedom and healing.

Anything motivated with the attitude of gratefulness, gives space for healing and true compassion. We see throughout the text that there are many aspects that make up compassion, one that was heavily mentioned was the aspect of patience, and with true patience comes gratitude that allows for us to really walk in authentic compassion.

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Sources:

McNeill, D. P., Morrison, D. A., M., N. H. J., & Filártiga Joel. (2005). *Compassion: A reflection on the christian life*. Image Books/Doubleday.