

Missionary Qualities for Every Christian

Compassionately Prayerful

Passages: Ephesians 6:10-20
Matthew 9:35– 10:1

We've been working our way through Matthew's Gospel since the beginning of the year. If you cast your mind back to February, you'll remember how we started the year with a *12-week series* on the early life and ministry of Jesus which culminated in the Sermon on the Mount. Then, after Easter (and some time away in America), we launched into an *8-week study* on the parables of Kingdom, found in Matthew 13. In August, we began our latest *8-week series* in Matthew's Gospel entitled, "*Come, Follow Me!*", which looked at the emotional struggles faced by the disciples as Jesus turned His face towards Jerusalem and foretold of His upcoming death.

In total, we've covered nearly 20 out of the 28 chapters of Matthew's Gospel! Not bad!

Today, we're going to start a new 4-week series in Matthew's Gospel designed to align with our *Missions Month*. This will involve exploring a small selection of readings taken from the end of Matthew 9 through to the end of chapter 10. This passage describes the time when Jesus called His 12 disciples and sent them out on their first mission. What we will see over these next four weeks is *the basic, most fundamental, missionary qualities* that Jesus expected to see in His disciples as he sent them out on mission; qualities that, I believe, are meant to be seen **today** in every follower of Christ.

The missionary quality that we find in today's passage is best described as one of being "*compassionately prayerful*".

Let's pray.

We are often confronted with circumstances *in the lives of others* which produce a deep resonance *within us*. For example, someone's house burns down, or someone's child goes missing. In these instances, something we call '*compassion*' seems to rise up inside of us. *Compassion* can basically be defined as "*a deep, heart-felt desire (a 'passion') to help someone else*".

Somehow, our heart is touched and our spirits are engaged. As a result, we move towards the hurting person, perhaps by offering a comforting word, or offering to help in a particular way. At the heart of true *compassion* is the literal movement of *me* towards *you*. As the Latin prefix “com”, implies, I walk “*with*” you in your pain and loss!

Sometimes, however, **compassion** gets confused with **pity**...and that’s very different! Rather than moving alongside another person, **pity** basically involves “looking down” on that person. Pity flows from fear, not love. We offer our help *from a distance*, saying things like, “*Thank God that’s not me!*”, or “*I couldn’t imagine living like that!*” Rather than considering how we might *climb down* into their situation to help them get out, we tend to *throw down welfare* **at** them. Indeed, **pity** keeps us at arm’s length and preserves our position of power. Once our money has been given, **pity** says, “*That should take care of it-- it’s no longer my problem!*”

What we notice in today’s passage is that Jesus operated out of *compassion*, not *pity*! Indeed, when you think of it, this is one of the most remarkable aspects of the Gospel! After all, Jesus was the Son of God and the Creator of the universe! One would think that the Almighty God would want to keep His distance from this fallen world. One would think that, if God did anything at all, it would be out of **pity** for us, His weak and sinful creatures! But, instead, God became a man in Jesus Christ and came *alongside* the people of Israel, ministering to them out of *compassion*, not *pity*.

What’s equally important (as we see all throughout the Gospels) is that Jesus’ *compassion* was deeply connected to His life of *prayer*. **As He walked this earth, He constantly talked to the Father about what He was seeing.** Indeed, it was His prayers to the Father that kept Him compassionately engaged with the people He met each day. It was the Father’s voice that encouraged Him to persevere. It was also His Father’s voice that instructed Jesus in the best way to *come alongside* to the weak, the sinful and the hurting. In other words, **Jesus’ prayer life informed His compassion... and His compassion informed His prayer life.**

You could even say that compassion and prayer have to go together, in a sort of dynamic dance. (We could just have easily have named this particular missionary quality “*Prayerfully compassionate*” instead of “*Compassionately prayerful*”!) Through *compassionate prayer (or prayerful compassion)*, Jesus discerned where the real problems were. As we see in today’s passage, prayer helped Him to recognise that the real problem in Israel was that the people “... **were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.**” (v. 36) Similarly, out of *prayer*, Jesus discerned that the only solution would be to minister to the people of Israel in a personal way-- *teaching* them the truth about God, *preaching* the good news of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and sickness! (v. 35)

But there’s something else Jesus was able to discern! Out of His *compassionately prayerful* life, Jesus also discerned that it was imperative for Him to raise up more Kingdom workers who could operate in the same way He did; people who would engage this world in a prayerfully compassionate way!

Isn’t this the reason why He chose 12 disciples? And isn’t this the reason why, even before He commissioned these 12 men, He made it clear that He wanted them to engage in *compassionate prayer*... so that they, like Him, might be able to discern who they might raise up to become Kingdom workers... and who, in turn, they might send out into the world to operate with this same missionary quality of *compassionate prayerfulness*? (verses 37-38)

Let me introduce you to a friend of mine named Dudley Weiner. Together with his wife, Janet, they now work in the southeast of France with a missionary group called YWAM! (We met them back in 1988, at a French language school in the Alps.) There’s one thing that I’ve always admired about Dudley: Like Jesus, Dudley’s deep *compassion* for others is fuelled by a deep, ongoing life of *prayer*. He is *compassionately prayerful*! We get their quarterly prayer letters, and in those letters there is inevitably another amazing story about how Dudley was supernaturally directed by the Father, in **compassionate prayerfulness**, to somehow reach out to a certain person in need.

Listen to Dudley’s latest story:

Yesterday morning, while worshipping at the Catholic Church, the Father told me to go to the back of the Church. So I went to the back and waited by the door. *It was wonderful to watch the worship going on and behold the beauty of the moment.* Thirty of us were worshipping in the church. People were coming and going from the market outside. It was a beautiful, late summer morning.

As I stood next to the entrance door, a man in his mid-60's came and stood right next me. Barrel-chested, with hair exposed from his low buttoned shirt, he leaned over to me and in a low voice started asking me questions. "Hey, are these all Americans?" And I told him, "No, they are from many different nations". I pointed up to the front of the church where Janet was translating for someone. I pointed to her and told him, "That cute woman up there, she is my wife. And we are leaders of this community."

I introduced myself and then asked him, *"What is your name?"* And he replied, *"Michel"*. Then he looked at me and said, *"I know you. You live at the Chateau de Planque. I saw you last February when you came and watched the memorial service for the anniversary of the young men killed by the Nazis on February 28th, 1944."* Then he told me, *"I was with the French Foreign Legion for 30 years"*.

He looked around again at the church and all our young people worshipping and declared, *"I am an atheist. I do not believe that there is anything out there. It is all up to us. I have seen far too much evil and death. It is all so meaningless. There is NO point to it at all!"*

I listened for about 10 minutes as Michel recounted some of the brutal chapters of his life. He was a soldier. He was a survivor. He had seen more than most should in a life time.

He then paused and reflected. *"I remember a few times when I was in battle and I was sure that I was going to die. I cried out to God, "If you are there, please let me live". And I survived. "Do you think that it was luck or do you think that it was more?" I said, "Michel, it was not your time. The Father is not yet done with you. Your story is not yet finished"*.

I smiled and understood exactly why I was sent to the back of the church. *By the way, if you are ever in a church and someone declares that they are an atheist, that is a really good thing!* It means that their atheism is not working. It means that they are hungry and thirsty for something more. It means that the Living God has heard the cry of their heart and He is leading them to life...His Life...

I then noticed a woman, about the same age, a few meters away behind Michel looking very apologetic about his manner and speech. *She then came up and introduced herself as Yveline.* She was Michel's wife. She told Michel to stop bothering me. I interjected, *"Michel is not bothering me. In fact, it is exactly WHY I was here."*

Michel continued his story...

He came right up to me, right in my face and said, *"I had 3 different cancers all at the same time...my liver, my pancreas and my intestines. And I am still alive. Why is that?"* I simply said, *"Michel, your time has not come. The Father has more for you. Your destiny has not yet been fulfilled."* He then continued, *"But I had a son, and at the age of 43 he contracted cancer and he died. It should have been me not him. I should have gone home, not him. He should still be here to love his wife and help his children grow up. But no, it is me who is still alive."*

His heart was heavy and filled with pain and grief. I simply said, *"Michel, I do not know why, but I know someone who does. Can I do something for you?"* He said, *"Sure, what?" "Can I pray for you?"* His face lit up and he said, *"Yes, please"*. **So there, in the back of the Catholic Church, in the doorway between the market place and the holy place, I put my hand on his chest.... and I invited the Living God to come and reveal Himself to my brother Michel.**

Then Michel did something that I did not expect. He put his hand on my hand as I covered his heart... *Rather, he took hold of my hand as a soldier would take hold of another soldier's hand and he prayed with me.* **His eyes closed, and he opened his heart...** Then the heavens opened and something changed.

As I continued, Yveline looked on with wonder. The young people worshipped with all their hearts. The market place continued as normal.

Friday morning an atheist wandered into church. I was just standing by the door. He came in curious, perhaps even reluctantly, but then he remembered...He remembered the many days of futility in his life. The brokenness of our world. And the ways that the Living God had actually saved him in his story. He remembered his love for his son. He remembered that his story is not yet over. *Michel remembered that he is not as much of an atheist as he thought.*

I believe Michel will never again be the same. I know this, because I, also, was changed in the moment!

Compassionately prayerful! This is the missionary quality that flows from the heart of Jesus into our friend, Dudley Weiner. But he's not the only one. Over the course of 21 centuries, Jesus has raised up many missionaries to be just like this...to operate out of *compassionate prayerfulness*.

And now it's our turn! I say that because, in simple, Biblical terms, **we are all "missionaries"**. We have all been *sent out* to be God's people in this world, , to repeat the same process in our day and age by being *compassionately prayerful* to those we meet and by raising up others who will learn it from us and go forth to do likewise, regardless of where that may be.

So, with that in mind, ask yourself; "Am I compassionately prayerful?" One of the best ways to find that out is by taking an honest look at your prayer life. Who do you pray for? What do you pray about? Do you simply pray about your own needs and problems, or do you feel *compassion* for all the "*sheep without a shepherd*" around you? Do you go to the Father in *prayer*, asking for avenues to connect with them and ways to reach out to them? Furthermore, do you pray about ways to raise up others to join you in the task at hand?

Of course, I wouldn't be surprised if many of you told me that you rarely ever pray! I say that because I personally know how all the everyday stresses of life and the all the bad experiences we've had trying to reach others can make us complacent ...even quite cynical... when it comes to prayer and to feeling any compassion for those who doesn't know Jesus. (I mean, at times, I hear myself saying, "*They're probably not interested anyway!*") But, the funny thing is, I would have said that about me as well— "*Bart's probably not interested anyway!!*")

So, if you feel as if you've lost your *compassionate prayerfulness* for the people around you, don't worry! **It is something that can be rebuilt.** Indeed, as I see it, there are three steps needed to rebuild this God-given missionary quality:

1. **Slow down that you might walk more prayerfully.** Unlike **pity**, which is quick to judge and to determine the solution, **compassionate prayer** is a long-term process of quietly walking alongside people, prayerfully asking the Christ who lives in you to communicate his Gospel of love to them. This requires that we slow down, reserve judgment and allow for disagreements. As we patiently move towards our friends and relatives, our workmates and housemates, we will find ourselves doing a lot more *listening than speaking!* This **prayerfully compassionate** listening opens up opportunities for us to make new discoveries, about our own assumptions as well as the ways that other people think.
2. **Ask for Jesus to open your eyes to see how He is already at work.** To become more **compassionately prayerful** requires that we recognise that all people (including yourself) are hurting! So start by praying for the people you know: Pray for their hurts and disappointments, seen and unseen. Pray knowing that, despite their happy outward appearances, everyone is, at one time or another, *"harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"*.

In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about consciously putting on the armour of God. Paul says, ***"the battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms."*** It isn't the person in front of you who is the enemy, but Satan and his deceptions! By engaging in **compassionate prayer**, we are asking the Spirit of God to help us see into the heavenly realms, to see the real battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness! Pray until you can see God opening up opportunities to minister God's Word to them in a **compassionately prayerful** way.

3. **Be willing to learn and be changed.** One of the most wonderful consequences of *compassionate prayer* is the opportunity it provides for

us to grow, even as we engage with others. *Compassionate prayer* demands patience, love, perseverance and faithfulness...qualities that are listed as *Fruit of the Spirit*, but which we so often lack!

Compassionate prayer actually allows the Spirit to develop the reflection of Jesus in us! After all, if Jesus is the Lord of the harvest, then surely He is the one who must do the work of bringing people to faith in Him. All He really asks me to do is to become ***compassionately prayerful***, allowing His grace and love to be revealed through me!

Compassionately prayerful! This is the missionary quality that Jesus was looking for in His first disciples. And He looks for it in us as well!

Indeed, just imagine what it would mean for world evangelism if God's church was filled with people like Dudley Weiner! How many more wonderful stories would we have to tell?