



the SAMARITAN Spirit

Written by Samaritan Staff



Are We Cultivating Compassion?

*The Rev. Dr. Graham Standish,
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You may think you have a pretty good idea what compassion is, but do you really?

What is compassion? Is it simply being nice to others? Or being sympathetic and maybe empathetic? Or being willing to help others in need? My guess is that these definitions are pretty close to yours. They're good definitions, but they only capture *part* of what it means to be compassionate. Compassion is deeper than these definitions.

So what is compassion? Whenever I try to more deeply understand an idea, I often start by looking at the root of the word. I've found that ancient people, when creating a word, often do so with a deep wisdom. The word "compassion" literally means to "suffer with" another person. The core word, "passion" literally means "to suffer." Whenever we have passion for something, we suffer inside until we're able to do it, or get it, or accomplish it. Compassion's prefix, "com," gives the word breadth to match its depth. "Com" means "with, which means that when we have compassion, we suffer *with* another.

The idea of willingly suffering with another is scary, especially if our compassion level is kind of low. Most 21st century people want to fix other people's problems, but fixing doesn't heal. People aren't problems to be fixed. They're souls who need to be cared about. It's really hard to sit idly by and do nothing but share their pain. We want to find solutions to their dilemmas. So, we give them advice on how to find a better doctor, counselor, or treatment. We try to tell them what to do or how to find answers. While these things can be, and often are, helpful, **true compassion still means being willing to stay with another in his or her suffering, even if we can't do anything to relieve that suffering.**

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For example, do you know how, when visiting a family in a funeral home or a person in a hospital, you'll think, "I don't know what to say"? In fact, there really is nothing you can say to make things better (although there are insensitive things you can say that might make things worse). What's important when visiting is simply being there and letting the person know you are "suffering with" her or him. **Your compassion in being there is healing.**

has allowed them to suffer with another without taking that person's suffering onto themselves.

Part of becoming healthier mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually means developing a greater sense of compassion with others so that we can become more compassionate towards ourselves. The more we care about someone else's plight, the more we're able to acknowledge our own plight and work on our own pain. If you look

"A secret most people don't know is that the best therapists are often the ones with deepest stories of suffering and healing."

To be truly compassionate does render us helpless. We won't necessarily know what to do. Often all we can do is to listen patiently to the struggles of another, even if we don't know how to alleviate it. We do small acts of love and kindness, even if we know it's inadequate to help them. Our hearts break when their hearts break, we struggle as they struggle, and we sit in life's darkness with them, hoping that somehow our mere presence might shed a bit of God's light upon them.

We cannot be compassionate with others, we cannot "suffer" with others, unless we're also willing to tap into our own suffering.

I've learned this in my work as a pastor and therapist. Generally, the ones who are best at helping others heal are those who have needed healing themselves. A secret most people don't know is that the best therapists are often the ones with deepest stories of suffering and healing. It allows them to be compassionate with others because they're able to intuitively understand the pain others are going through, but their training

around in life, you'll notice that the most destructive people are those who have little or no compassion, but those who bless life the most are those with the most compassion.

We are rooted in the Good Samaritan story. He was compassionate to a stranger who was clearly wounded, yet he was willing to be compassionate. His compassion allowed God's grace and healing power to flow through him. Our compassion allows God's grace to flow into the world through us.

God works through our compassion. **True compassion simply creates the conditions for God's grace to enter a person's life as it flows in and through us.** We do what we can and *patiently* (which also means "to suffer" wait for God to work through us and others.

It's this kind of compassionate, healing care that our therapists, coaches, and spiritual directors offer because we are Samaritans grounded in compassion.

Compassion

by Jennifer Edmonds,
Licensed Professional Counselor



“One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned in counseling for over 25 years is that people are people, and they deserve compassion in their healing journey.”

Compassion by definition is the ability to show empathy, love and concern to people who are in difficulty. I was first drawn to the world of counseling for this reason. I wanted to help others who felt hopeless with a strong sense of compassion and care. Those who have mental health challenges are still judged harshly with social stigmas. Most of my clients have dual diagnoses and often tell me that they fear being honest about their struggles because of this judgment. Their families, friends, and even some service providers treat them differently when substance use is included in treatment.

One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned in counseling for over 25 years is that people are people and they deserve compassion in their healing journey. **They come to us so they can be respected and cared for in a safe, therapeutic environment.**

I was taught in graduate school that empathy cannot be learned. I has questioned this through the years. **A wise client informed me that one can easily tell if a therapist is truly compassionate or if it is being faked.** I think that we counselors have the natural gift of “feeling” for others and connecting with ease.

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to direct empathy, love, and concern within oneself, especially when facing failures in life. It’s often harder to show self-compassion (we’re our own worst critics); it

can be viewed as being self-indulging or having self-pity. Kristin Neff, a self-compassion researcher, stated that self-compassion is comprised of three elements: self-kindness, recognizing one’s own humanity, and mindfulness. **Self-compassion is an emotional goal that each client should achieve in treatment.** It’s a form of self-acceptance and recognition that we’re all deserving of love and acceptance.

In our Christian walk, God shows compassion towards us every day in our lives. It is my hope that I allow God to guide me in helping others. **I describe myself to clients as a “guide” not a “problem solver.”** At Samaritan, I pray that we continue to have great compassion for our clients in their healing journeys. ■

What’s New?



SAVE the DATE!

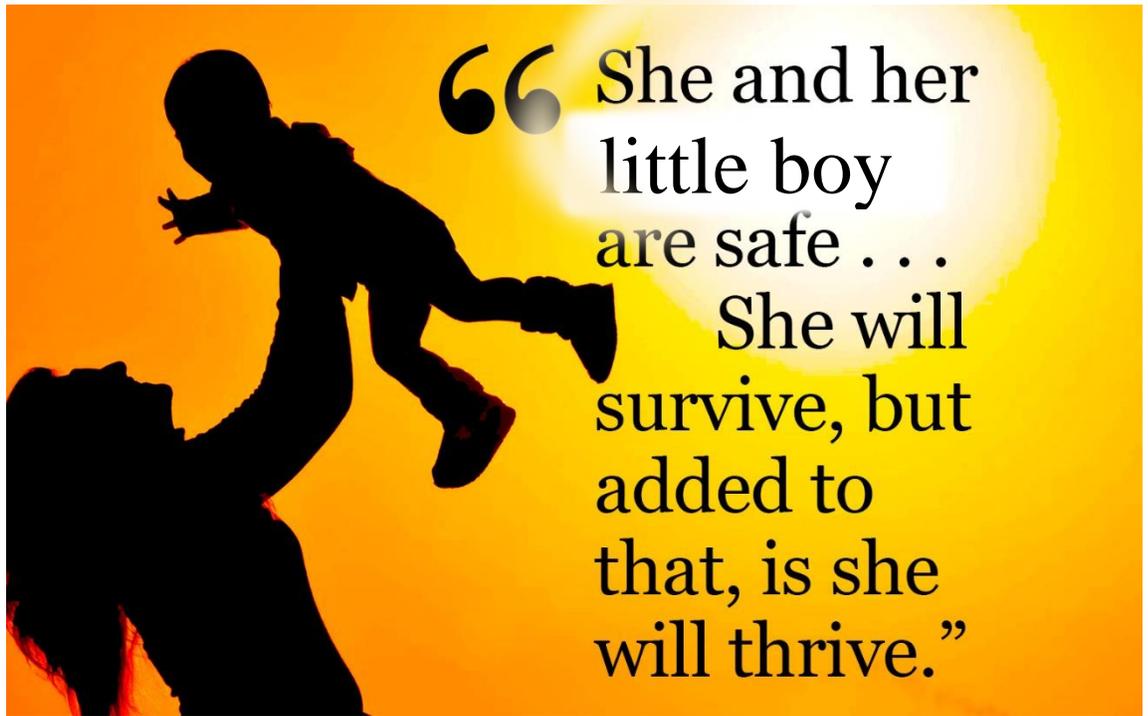
COOK! DINE! COOK AND DINE!

Samaritan’s annual **50 Fabulous Cooks** event will take place on **Saturday, September 19, 2020** at the **Sewickley Heights Golf Club**. For more details, or to sign up as a cook, please call Beth: **412-741-7430, x1001**

Learn all about this delicious event by visiting us online at:

samaritancounseling.net/50-fabulous-cooks-1





1 John 3:18

*“Dear children,
let us not love with
words or tongue
but with actions
and truth.”*

“Maria” is an amazing survivor. She has a baby boy who is the love of her life. She survived sexual abuse as a child. She survived domestic violence. She is like so many others who come to Samaritan seeking hope, healing, and restoration. Maria is one of the reasons I am a therapist.

*Article by
Lynda Bradley,
Licensed
Professional
Counselor*

She allowed me to provide compassion as presented by a bible verse that for me defines compassion. “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth.” –1 John 3:18

Maria had found herself in dire circumstances. Her boyfriend had played on her most precious character trait: caring for others. This resulted in disastrous consequences for her and her son—yet, she had the courage to reach out to me.

I trusted in my professional knowledge, and in the aforementioned bible verse. My words were comprised of encouragement, direction, assurance, and confidence. I reminded her of her strength. Instead of holding her hand, I gave her resources to assist in handling her situation. Instead of empty words, I gave her words reminding her of her past victories—victories being both the products of her actions and the directions drawn by her faith. I accompanied her each step of the way as she discovered solutions that flowed into a fountain of renewed strength.”

The Latin root for the word compassion is “pati,” which means “to suffer.” The prefix “com” means “with.” This strong young lady was suffering. My purpose was to walk along with her, providing direction, encouragement, and strengthening words of faith.

Maria and her son are now safe. Finally, she realizes that again, she will survive—but added to that, is she will thrive.