2. Compassion

- A few years ago, in the wake of what we affectionately refer to as "Armageddon", Pastor Bill sent Bobbi and I to a retreat for pastor's called Sonscape during which we were put through a fairly intensive assessment to include a Meyer's Briggs Personality test.
- What we learned was truly revealing. I learned that I am an ENTJ…

Portrait of an ENTJ - Extraverted iNtuitive Thinking Judging "The Executive"

ENTJs

- Natural born leaders
- Thrive on surmounting challenges.
- Quickness to grasp complexities
- Quick and decisive judgments.
- They are "take charge" people.
- Make decisions based on the task at hand.

- Couple that with the results of a Spiritual Gift assessment and you get a pretty clear understanding of who God created me to be:

My top 5 Spiritual Gifts:

1. Teaching
2. Word of Knowledge
3. Pastor
4. Administration
5. Discernment

My Bottom 5 Spiritual Gifts:

1. Miracles
2. Mercy
3. Helps
4. Interpretation of Tongues
5. Celibacy

- Now, let's compare and contrast this information with Pastor Bill…

Portrait of an ENFP - Extraverted iNtuitive Feeling Perceiving "The Inspirer"

ENFPs

- Warm, enthusiastic people
- Very bright and full of potential.
- Can become very passionate and excited about things.
- Ability to inspire and motivate others
- Can talk their way in or out of anything.
- Love life, seeing it as a special gift, and strive to make the most out of it.
- Make decisions based on how people feel about it.

Pastor Bill's Top 5 Spiritual Gifts:

1. Exhortation
2. Leadership
3. Teaching
4. Prophecy
5. Mercy

- Based on this information, it makes all the sense in the world on why Pastor Bill would have been tasked *me* to preach on the subject of compassion!

CONFESSION OF FAITH

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need.

- Notice it says all Christians. Not just the ones who are wired to be merciful and compassionate. It comes naturally for some, it comes through obedience for others.

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

- Compassion is an inherently biblical characteristic.
- The word compassion or compassionate is found nearly 100 times in the Bible.

    - (Heb) *rāḥam* - to fondle; by implication to love, especially to show mercy to have pity.
    - (Gk) *splanchnizomai* - to feel deep sympathy, to pity.
    - (Eng) compassion - a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

- We learn in this week's chapter of the Believe book that compassion literally means "**to suffer with**". "**I feel your pain**".

WHY IS COMPASSION IMPORTANT?

- The reason it is important to teach and preach on the subject of compassion is it often, *even for biggest feelers in the world*, goes against our default sinful nature (dust). As we journey through life, there are things that will cause us to become insensitive to others:

    a. We all have a gravitational pull toward **self-centeredness**.
        - No one had to teach our kids to be selfish. It is in our nature and left unchecked, we go to that place time and time again.
    b. People in need can make us **uncomfortable**.
        - Particularly for Americans. The American way is self-reliance; independence! Have you ever caught yourself thinking about someone who is struggling over the loss of a loved one or some other traumatic event, "Get over it, already!" It is in part because *we* don't want to feel their pain anymore.
    c. Scam artists and low-character people make us **jaded**.

VIDEO - http://ktla.com/2014/11/12/pregnant-panhandler-in-socal-caught-driving-off-in-mercedes-benz/

- But the Bible tells us to, above all things, guard our heart, for it is the wellspring of life[1].

[1] Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- So, here we are, checking our heart. Asking God to search us, show us and change us.
- We are desirous to be a compassionate people because our God is compassionate and as Christians, our aim should be to be *like him*.

GOD IS COMPASSIONATE

- Throughout the Scriptures we find that compassion is a character trait of God himself.

  - We read that when God heard the cry of his people when they were enslaved by the Egyptians and that he became "concerned about their suffering."[2]
  - We read that even when the people of Israel were suffering because of the consequences of their sin that in his compassion God "delivered them time and time again."[3]
  - In the NT, we read that God incarnate, Jesus Christ repeatedly was filled with compassion for the people he ministered to.

Matthew 14:14 (ESV) When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

- And, of course, the greatest act of compassion the world has ever known is when God sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place for our sin thereby becoming our atoning sacrifice.

Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

- So then, as God's people, we must strive to be more and more like Christ; which means that we must be people of compassion.

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[2] Exodus 3:7 (NIV) The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

[3] Nehemiah 9:28 (NIV) "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

Colossians 3:12 (ESV) Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

- Okay, so how do we do show compassion? How do we obey this directive to put on compassionate hearts? To answer this question, let's look to our memory verse for this week.

Psalm 82:3-4 (NIV) Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

- There are four words; four verbs in this verse which reveal what we can do as believers to put on hearts of compassion. They are defend, uphold, rescue and deliver.
- Let's look at these verbs more closely…

1. Defend

- The Bible repeatedly describes God as the defender of the fatherless and the widow[4] (which would have been among the most powerless people in that day).
- When we have the ability to do so, we must defend the people who are most vulnerable.
- I have a friend who was our youth pastor for a time and is now pastoring the church at which we served. His name is Dereck and he is a big dude! When Dereck was in High School, he was a star football player. He told me of a time while he was in High School that there was a kid who made it a habit to pick on and bully another kid in the school who had Downs Syndrome. This went on for some time and apparently he school was not doing much to stop it. So, Dereck and some of the other football players confronted the bully one night. They stripped him, mopped him the *Nair* and tied him to a telephone pole in the town square. To quote Dereck, "Ol' boy got a little taste of that helpless feeling when you are weak and the opposition is not! I bet he never forgot that lesson."
- That is a fairly extreme example of the principle defending the weak. The truth is, as Christians, we must have the courage to defend the weak and vulnerable in our culture. If we won't who will?

[4] Deut. 10:18; Psa. 68:5; Prov. 23:10-11; Jer. 22:16

Psalm 72:3-4 (ESV) Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!

2. Uphold

- Has anyone here ever heard of "No Shave November"? Is anyone here participating? Hopefully, none of the ladies!
- I used to think that "No Shave November" was an excuse for lazy college kids to look scruffy and sloppy. Turns out it is actually a charitable event to raise awareness for prostate cancer. Who knew?
- Awareness-raising has become a popular idea in today's culture. There are campaigns to raise awareness for every conceivable cause to include, breast cancer, AIDS, gay rights, animal rights, climate change, eating disorders; the list goes on and on.
- The reason is, of course, that if an issue is ignored or forgotten, little will be done to change the situation.
- What God is telling us is that one way to show compassion is to become activists; raising awareness by upholding the cause of the poor and oppressed.
- This is the antidote to our selfish nature. When we keep the cause of the poor and the oppressed in front of us, it challenges our selfish nature. It confronts us. It is difficult to wallow in your own problems when you are thinking about and showing compassion for others.
- And what is the antithesis of raising awareness? Neglect. Ignoring the problem.
- You see, it's easy to get so wrapped up in our own world that we neglect the most weak and vulnerable among us. But as God's people we should work to uphold the cause of people in need. After all, it is always possible that someday we may find ourselves in their place.

Proverbs 21:13 (ESV) Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

3. Rescue and Deliver

- In Luke 10, we read that, in response to the question, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus told a story about a man who was stripped, beaten and left for dead on the road by robbers. A priest came down the road and passed on the other side. A Levite came by and passed on the other side. They both neglected the man in need. But then a third man passed by…

Luke 10:33-35 (ESV) But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

- When we think about and consider the plight of the poor, it can be overwhelming. The truth is there is nothing we could ever do to eradicate poverty. Jesus told us that we will always have the poor among us. [5]

EVERYTHING, NOTHING OR SOMETHING

- So our response is often in one of two extremes: try to do *everything* or do *nothing*. Neither of which God is calling us to. Rather he is calling us to do *something*.
- In this parable, we find an example of how we can be used by God to rescue and deliver people in need:

  a. Make the **effort**

  - It can be argued that both the priest and the Levite were justified in passing to the other side as they would have been rendered ceremonially unclean meaning that they would have not been able to do their jobs and it would have been significant time away from their families. So, you can see that in all actuality the men had good reason to pass the victim up. However, the law of compassion takes precedent.

[5] John 12:8 (ESV) For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

- You know, it's not always convenient for us to show love to other people. Sometimes it might get in the way of important things in our lives.

b. **Bandage** the wounds.

- There is nothing in this world that can wound more than words. Sometimes there is nothing in this world that can heal more than words.

c. Give the **money**.

- Again, God is not asking us to do *everything*. Rather, he is asking us to do *something*.

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

Commitment

- How are we to respond to this? Here are some ideas on how we can defend, uphold, deliver and rescue:

  - Ask God to give you a heart of compassion.
  - Refuse to ignore someone who is being oppressed or abused; especially orphans and widows.
  - Give to charitable organizations like Feed One
  - Help with the food ministry at NLC
  - Give in the benevolence offering
  - Keep some "mad money" in your wallet ear-marked for occasions in which you become aware of someone in need.