

Abundant Living Ministries

Encouraging Christian Living since 1978



January 2018

I invited him into my counseling room. He seemed pretty relaxed as I pointed him toward the swivel rocker and handed him a cup of coffee. We small-talked a few minutes and I completed the brief Intake Form. I asked if I could pray to start the session and then asked him what we needed to talk about. He explained that he had come to see me because his girlfriend had given him an ultimatum... either he would go for counseling to learn how to treat her better, or else she would leave him and go back to her husband. As his story unfolded, I learned that the girlfriend's husband was a Christian who, along with his family and friends, were praying for her to return home. The man in my office, meanwhile, seemed to have almost zero knowledge of, or experience with God or the church.

One thing seemed clear: he did not want to lose his girlfriend so he was hopeful that I would help him... that I would coach him in how to treat his girlfriend more kindly.

I gave him eye contact and nodded my head at appropriate times while listening to more details of his life, but a complaining conversation stirred in the back of my mind, disrupting my focus. "What? He came here to Abundant Living Ministries thinking that I'm going to help him in his affair, that I'm going to teach him how to love his married girlfriend better??? I don't think so! I have better things to do with my time than to get involved in such sticky messes!!!"

As I silently griped, he continued, "I may have been abused as a child but, actually, I'm not sure what really qualifies as abuse." I asked him to tell me more. He very matter-of-factly told me of sexual mistreatment at the hands of both parents, so vile I would not even consider writing it into this letter. He was calm and seemed so "untouched" by it all... as though he truly did not realize how damaging this would have been to him.

The voice in the back of my head changed its tune instantly and dramatically! Just like that, COMPASSION rose up within me. What a self-righteous man I was being. I was sitting in judgement on this man's sin when I did not have a single clue about his background, the ways he had been mistreated, or his understanding of life. This man needed to learn about Jesus' love, which was so much more important right now than him being preached to about his affair with a married woman.

It's as though I went, in a moment, from feeling harshly critical to feeling loving and kind, concerned and tender, merciful and empathetic, while wanting to do something... *anything* that would help him!

COMPASSION – something I ask the Lord for repeatedly. The Merriam Webster dictionary explains *compassion* to be a *sympathetic consciousness of the other's distress, together with a desire to alleviate it*. I like Sharon's (my wife's) explanation that COMPASSION means, literally, "to suffer together." What a tremendous help it is when a dear friend comes alongside us, in our darkest days, encouraging and supporting and praying with us!

COMPASSION – is one of the most significant traits of effective counseling! And, interestingly, it's something that every one of us Christians can experience and model. We don't have to be professional counselors or professional anything... we can "suffer together," offering tenderness, mercy, scriptural guidance... as we do *something* that will help. It's called COMPASSION!

May we experience a COMPASSIONATE 2018!

John Charles (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)



Love Like He Does

Written by Sharon Charles

The Christmas merchandise was barely off the store shelves when red hearts took over. With Valentine's Day only a few weeks away, it is a good time to do a "love check-up." What is the state of your love... between husband and wife, parents and children, friend with friend? Following are some ways God shows love to His children... we would do well to follow His example, not just in February, but all year long!

Let go of resentment, hurts, disappointment and anger.
Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgressions of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

If God is willing to forgive us over and over and over again, for our many sins, how can we not choose to forgive those who have wronged us? **Love lets go of grudges!**

Offer expressions of love every day.
John 3:16 God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Psalms 103:2-6 Praise the Lord, O my soul and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

God's love for us is not just a feeling. It is an action. He demonstrates His love with practical and sacrificial giving. His love causes Him to communicate with us through His Word and prayer and His amazing creation. His love causes Him to watch over us, protect us, listen to us, encourage us and help us. If He does all these things for us every day, how can we not choose to give our love to those in our lives via practical action. **Love reaches out in kindness!**

View your loved one from God's perspective.
Psalms 103:13-14 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

II Thessalonians 2:16 & 17 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

God's love causes Him to focus more on our potential than failure. He understands that we are imperfect, prone to messing up, and often weak. In spite of that, he is patient with us, helping us to learn and grow, not rejecting us because of our mistakes. **Love gives lots of grace and encouragement!**

Enter each other's world.
Romans 12:15 & 16 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

God expressed love to His children by identifying with them in their joys, sorrows, good times and difficult times. He was not too proud to connect with people on their level. It is easy to become so engrossed in our own interests, that we neglect the people we love the most. If God loved enough to enter our world, how can we not make the time to learn about those we rub shoulders with every day. **Love shows genuine interest in the interests of others!**

May our love grow stronger every day as we follow the example of Him who loves perfectly... our wonderful Father!

Open Arms Childbirth Class

April 5-May 3, 2018
Five Consecutive Thursdays at 7:00pm

Taught by an experienced childbirth educator, this class covers the same information offered in a hospital course, but includes a distinctively Christian perspective. You will meet and connect with other expectant couples and gain many practical helps as you prepare for a great labor and delivery. There is no cost for this course. Please register by contacting the ALM office (see contact information below).



Contact Information

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