

# ***Unexplainable***

## ***3. Compassion***

January 16-17, 2021

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A pastor, a doctor, and an engineer were playing golf one morning. (I've always wondered what would happen if I started with a joke like this...). So they were on the course, and there was a group of super slow golfers ahead of them. The engineer asks "What's with these guys? We've been waiting here for 15 minutes!" The doctor says, "I've never seen such slow golfers." The pastor notices the groundskeeper passing by and asks him, "Hey, what's with the group ahead of us?" The groundskeeper says, "That's a group of blind firefighters. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire a couple years ago, so we always let them play for free anytime."

The group was silent for a minute. The pastor sympathized, "That's sad; I'm going to pray for them right now." The doctor added, "That's a good idea. I'm going to contact my ophthalmologist buddy and see if we can do anything for these guys." Then the engineer spoke up, "Well that's great, but in the meantime, why can't these guys play at night?"

Some people are naturally more compassionate than others! If your instinct is to want to help the blind golfers, you may have the gift of mercy, and you are going to love this message. You're wired for it! That's because today we're talking about God's call to compassion.

We're in a message series through the book of Acts called *Unexplainable* – because God wants our lives to be unexplainable apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Please turn to Acts 3 in your Bible or app. I'm going to be working straight through this passage.

**Acts 3:1** starts out, *One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.* Peter and John had a habit of going to the temple each day to pray when they were in Jerusalem. Prayer was part of their daily rhythm and routine. Devout Jews prayed three times a day: first, at sunrise; next, at 3pm during the evening sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem (3pm); and finally, at nightfall. This connected them with God each day and made them aware of the constant presence of God. This was the pattern of prayer that Jesus was raised with.

The early church was a praying church, not a talking church. The Early Church prayed when they gathered, when they made decisions, when they faced persecution, when they rejoiced over victories. The unexplainable events in the book of Acts flow out of the connection with the Holy Spirit the people had through prayer.

Our lives become unexplainable when we stay connected to the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer. That's why we start the year with 21 days of prayer and

fasting as a church. We're praying each day, and many of us are fasting, for the Lord to work in our lives, in our church, community, and nation. We need the power, guidance and love of God more than ever these days. If you haven't already, I encourage you to sign up on the Crossroads app or website so you can receive the daily prayer prompts and information about fasting.

Peter and John often went to the temple to pray, but we don't need to come to the church building to pray three times per day. The lesson for us is that they had a particular time and place to pray and they stayed in connection with God throughout their days. Because they were men of prayer, they were ready for God to use them to do a miraculous healing.

***Acts 3:2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.***

It was while Peter and John were *on the way* to prayer that they came across the opportunity for a miracle. If they had decided they were too busy for prayer that day, they wouldn't have been part of the miraculous healing of that beggar.

***Acts 3:3-4 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. <sup>4</sup> Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup> So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.***

Homeless people say that very few people look at them when they pass by. Yet, "Peter looked straight at him" and didn't close his eyes to the need. Sometimes I wonder how many needs I miss by not noticing them. When we ask God in prayer, "Show me the needs around me," he often will. Peter made contact with beggar when he said, "Look at us!"

***Acts 3:6-8 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." <sup>7</sup> Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. <sup>8</sup> He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.***

This beggar had never walked in his life and now he was not only walking, he was jumping! It was a flat-out miracle! Not only were the guy's feet and ankles healed, his entire future was transformed. He would no longer have to beg. He wouldn't be known as the lame beggar. From now on he would be known as the guy who was healed by God! Peter and John healed the man "in the name of Jesus." That means by his authority and power, Jesus was working through them. They had seen Jesus heal lame people, and since the Holy Spirit filled them, they had the power to do the same thing. When they saw the man they were motivated by the compassion of Jesus to do what they could to help him.

We at Crossroads equip in healing and prophetic ministry because it is a powerful way of responding with compassion to people's needs. The main point is to **notice needs and do what I can to meet them.**

Peter said, "I don't have any money, but what I do have I give you..." And that was a lot better than money! Peter could have said, "This guy wants money, someone else with money should help him, and then walk by. But he was in tune with the Holy Spirit, so instead, he said, "I will respond to this need in the way that I can." So when we see a need, let's ask, "What can I do, Lord?" Sometimes it doesn't seem like we can do much.

In 1985, Steve Reynolds was working in Ethiopia during the worst famine of a generation. Steve was an eyewitness to the horrors of massive starvation and death. He gathered information that he hoped would provoke people to notice and respond. One day he got a call from headquarters asking if he would host a young European couple, Ali and Paul Hewson. They wanted to visit and learn firsthand what was happening. Steve was willing to help. Ali and Paul stayed almost a month, rolling up their sleeves to help and showing tireless compassion. Paul was a musician, so he entertained the kids by writing little songs. Paul and Ali finally went home but not before they had committed to do whatever they could to help.

After that trip in 1985, Paul went on to hit it big in the music business. You may know Paul better by his stage name, Bono, the lead singer of the legendary band U2. Bono never forgot the need he saw in Africa. He used his influence to fight hunger, poverty and disease, especially in Africa. He has traveled the globe advocating for the poorest of the poor. He has met with kings and queens, presidents, prime ministers, and the pope. He has lobbied members of parliaments and congresses. He has persuaded governments to appropriate billions of dollars of aid to the poor. In a later interview, Bono said, "All of this started for me in Ethiopia in the mid-'80s, when my wife and I went out there as children, really, to see and to work in Africa."<sup>1</sup>

We don't need to have the influence of Bono to meet needs around us in the name of Jesus. In our Making Disciples 1 (MD1) class, we teach a very simple process for this, called B.L.E.S.S. Anyone can do it wherever they live, work, and play. And small groups can do the BLESS process, too.

As I said last week, we want to help each small group find a mission beyond themselves that will demonstrate the love of Jesus in some way. Having a mission will transform a small group; it's like a new experience. In fact, we're thinking we might need to change the name of small groups to reflect that sense of mission.

Look at the results that come from compassion: **Acts 3:9** *When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who*

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<sup>1</sup> Preaching Today From Richard Sterns' *Unfinished*

*used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.* People notice what the apostles did, and it was Unexplainable!

Notice the order: first Peter healed the man, then he talked about Jesus. As we meet needs in Jesus' name, we can share about the God of power that motivated it. When we have compassion on people, we will offer both practical help and the Gospel; the good works and the good news of Jesus. The B.L.E.S.S. approach we teach in MD1 helps us offer both in natural ways.

**Our compassion is a witness to the world.** Showing compassion paves the way for our witness to the love of Jesus. Professor Rodney Stark wrote a book called *The Rise of Christianity - How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Here's a hint: it wasn't by grabbing for power or taking control of government; it was by caring for the needs of both Christians and non-Christians. It was by taking up the towel of a servant. For example, during epidemics, the Christians cared for the sick, and it made a profound impact on those they cared for. In short, Christianity overcame persecution of the Roman Empire by showing compassion, then telling people about Jesus.

After Peter healed the lame man, he pointed to Jesus and people listened.

***Acts 3:11-19** While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.*

*"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. **19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,***

Boy, we need times of refreshing right now, don't we? Turning to God is the only way. Our acts of compassion help people hear the Gospel. Compassion creates an openness to the message of Jesus and toward us as his messengers. They can sense we are for them, we are not judging them. They can believe God loves them if they have experienced God's people showing love. Compassion reduces resistance because any

false ideas they have about God will fade away. And that can lead to times of refreshing both for the ones who are served and those who serve.

Several years ago Jon Potter was filling up his car at a Pittsburgh gas station when a woman approached and asked for a ride to a battered-women's shelter. He said no. She walked away, and he quickly felt a wave of regret. He got out of his car to look for her, but she was gone. Feeling terrible, he vowed to be kinder next time a stranger needed help.

A few weeks later, in the spring of 2015, he saw his opportunity when someone on a Pittsburgh Reddit group needed help installing a television antenna. Potter did it for no charge and felt great about it. Then someone on the same Reddit group asked for a cat sitter, and he jumped at the chance.

It snowballed from there. Potter decided that for the next year, if anyone asked him for help, as long as it was legal and as long as it wouldn't harm anyone else, he would do it. And he did.

It wasn't long before he was doing acts of kindness almost every day all over Pittsburgh: helping someone repair vinyl siding, moving furniture, fixing a leaky roof, changing a grandmother's tire on the side of the road. All for free. He even raised \$700 for a teen in his community who was injured while stopping a hate crime.

After the year passed, he decided to do it again the next year. Then the next, and the next. For years now, he has been saying "yes" to random requests from strangers. There are all these legends of the cool things he's done, and they're true.

On Reddit, person after person gushes about how Potter offered to help when it was most needed. Then in 2019, Potter stepped up to a new level: he donated a kidney to a stranger. He saw online that a Pittsburgh father of two was in need of a transplant. Michael Moore was 57, and his daughter put out a plea for him. She held a sign at a Penguins game that said "Hey Pittsburgh, can you help another Pens fan (my dad) find a kidney?"

Potter saw the sign and decided that he was open to giving a kidney to a stranger. He got tested and learned that he was a perfect match for the man in need. He went through the surgery and both men did great, and they became good friends.

This lifestyle of serving has had a profound effect on Potter. He has struggled with depression and anxiety since he was 8 years old. Last year, he was diagnosed with high-functioning autism. He said that pushing himself to interact with people by helping them has given him a new appreciation for others.

Times of refreshing have come to Jon Potter as he has helped others to be refreshed. Let's take a moment of silent prayer right now and listen to what the Spirit is telling us.

