

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

October 11, 2026 ***"What Can I Do? Grow Compassion"***

I Intro.

We're flying through the first part of fall, and we're in a new series. There's a lot going on at NCC and you'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

We're in the second Sunday of our series: ***"What can I do?"*** I want it to connect with what you may be feeling and thinking about our world and just life in general. I know when you see and hear everything that's going on around you, it's so easy to lose heart and just give up. Feels like the world's problems are too big, there are so many, and there seems to be new and different problems and issues everyday. We watch the news, hear stuff, read stuff, and ask the question; ***"What can I do?"*** This question isn't always only the vastness of the problems. It often is how tiny, powerless we feel against everything going on in the world. Not only do we feel small and insignificant, and overwhelmed. We don't have any leverage, control, power, or authority to even make a dent in all of the problems we see around us. **Do you often feel like this?**

So, the title of this series: ***"What can I do?"*** is for when you feel powerless. Like you can't make any difference in your little world, let alone the whole world. You want to have hope. You believe in the power of action. But you don't know what those things you can do are. And even if you have a few ideas, you don't know where to begin. Let us help you discover a few things you can do. Last week, we talked about; ***"Being willing to get dirty"***. Meeting people where they are. Today it's: ***"Grow compassion."***

III Sunday.

Here is one of the toughest questions I come across. And I want you to dig inside of you and wrestle with this question on a deep level. **How do you grow the ability to care?**

Is there something we can do specifically that can grow, increase, our ability to care for others...all others? Let me offer our suggestion for today. By practicing compassion. And we define compassion as expanding our empathy into the suffering of other people. And being moved to help ease their discomfort or specific struggle. We move from judgment to working to understand. To help them carry their load of suffering. The ability to grow large-heartedness. I used the word *"practice"*. It's something we dedicate ourselves to habitually getting better at. To be more compassionate.

Is it possible to make yourself care more? If so, what would that look like?

Out of all of the elements of this; ***“What Can I Do?”*** series, this particular one will be one of the most difficult. You can force yourself to be willing to get dirty. Just go places where others are. And the next two parts of this series. ***“Taking care of your soul”***, and ***“Multiplying yourself”*** are just doing some specific work. But this particular one: ***“Growing Compassion”***, you just can’t force yourself to do. You can’t just will yourself, grind it out, to grow compassion. If you do, then others won’t experience you as compassionate. They’ll just feel like they’re an obligation.

And we’ve experienced that from others haven’t we?

So, what can you specifically do to make yourself more compassionate?

There’s a couple of things you can do. We’ll hit those after the scripture.

This is a short, and powerful account in the ministry of Jesus.

Matthew 9:35-38. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Two primary points that are essential to growing compassion. If you can learn, grow the ability, to gain some level of mastery over these two things. Your ability to show compassion will grow. And it will be real.

1. Fight against “attribution error”. A common habit we’re all guilty of, because there’s a deep inner desire to see ourselves in a good light. Your ability to grow compassion, to enter into other people’s suffering, is to see where you may have some built in prejudices in how you view other people’s situations. The ability to reframe other people’s situations, so you can be compassionate towards them, depends on your ability to see this thing called, ‘attribution error’ in your personal perspective. **Attribution error is a cognitive (that means it’s a way of thinking you’ve learned to do) bias in which you judge another person’s actions as their personality, while excusing your own similar behavior by outside circumstances.**

This means when we see people doing things we don’t think they should be doing, we say it’s because they’re bad people. We assign both motive, and personal character flaws, to someone else’s behavior we don’t like or agree with. And make no attempt to understand their situation.

I want to share a moment of real honesty. If someone cuts in front of me while driving, and I go to pass them and see who’s driving I almost always say; *“Oh it figures.”* I don’t care if you’re old, young, white, non-white, male female, whatever. I can place you in some bad driving category based on who you are. I equally discriminate against EVERYONE. And assign personal attributes to you also. I say that person is an irresponsible driver because they are a...whatever. This tendency to do this, to fall victim to the ‘attribution error’, to judge without understanding, is due to our upbringing, history, background, experiences, we hold beliefs about others.

I want you to know this— it’s not always our fault we have these prejudices. We’ve collected them through life experiences and things that have happened to us. Our family of origin. The church we were raised in. Friends we grew up with, or even hang around now. But it’s our fault if we continue to operate, see others through those prejudices. Imagine if Jesus had felt this when he saw the crowds.

When he saw the crowds, he only had contempt and disgust for them, because they were stupid and foolish, like sheeple. And it was all their fault.

I had to keep the sheep reference in there.

We have to be aware of this tendency within us to assign value, or attributes, to others based on our life history, not their life story. This is what Jesus was dealing with because of the Pharisees twisting scripture to suit their own prejudicial agenda. We have to be honest enough to do the work of calling 'attribution error' out IN US, and working on rooting that corrupt thinking out of us.

In order to **“Grow compassion”**. To make a real difference in the world. To tap into something you can actually do to have an impact. We have to realize that attribution error keeps us from seeing others in a more compassionate light, because it keeps us from seeing our own issues honestly.

When you see others in situations that you don't agree with, or have strong opinions about, what is inside of you feeding that opinion?

We are to do intentional inner work to see where we suffer from 'attribution error'. And let me give you a heads up. You do suffer from it.

2. Being with...just to do good. This is a two-part truth.

-**One** is just learning how to *'be with'* others...all others.

-**Two**, but the second part is that we are *'with'* them to do good.

So both of these beg an important question. **How do you enter into a group of people?**

...that you like? ...that you know? ...that you don't know? ...that you know you don't like?

And a final question. **Have you ever had a first impression of someone that later proved to be wrong?** And it can go either way. Because they looked, talked, dressed, a certain way you automatically put them into some pre-defined category. **What are some of those categories?** And we can be honest here. Spoiled. Opinionated. Snob. Jock. Redneck. Dangerous. Threat. Elite. When we want to make a difference, have an impact, wondering what it is we can do to make a difference in our world. We have to learn to set aside, or at least push through prejudices we have, so we can just be with someone else. So, we can just 'be with' others, with no judgment, to do good in their lives. When I was a youth minister I used to do a hunger Lock-In for the teens. We would go 40 hours without eating, and then brought and served food in homeless shelters in Knoxville. After we prepared the food and served it, I told the youth to split up and go sit with them. Start conversations with people who found themselves homeless and ask them about their stories. The teens were blown away that these were normal people who had just had some unfortunate things happen to them. And the people eating there were touched that people actually would sit with them, and ask about them.

Being with, experiencing compassion, means “suffering together”. Compassion is a Latin word combining *“com”*- with, and *“pati”* which means suffer. Noticing, paying attention to where others are. Going to where they are. Support them in any way you're able. There is a scene in the most recent season of **“Ted Lasso”**, where one of the other coaches, Alice, had just gone through a tough experience and sat down and began crying. Ted Lasso, not knowing what to do, just sat next to her and said and did nothing. It was both awkward and beautiful. And the perfect thing to do.

In order to grow your compassion. To be able to make a difference. You grow the ability to enter into another person's world, no judgment, just be with them, looking for ways to do good. And it may be just being with them.

You ask: “What can I do?” You can grow your ability to do these two things.

1. To grow your ability to just ‘be with’ others.

2. When you are with them. You’re with them just to do good.

You need to grow the ability to be compassionate, you need a kind of strategy of what ‘doing good’ looks like in their life.

IV Challenge.

The overall question we’re answering in this series is: ***“What can I do?”*** After we talked about ***“Being willing to get dirty”*** from last week. This is an essential next step. Being willing, and doing the things YOU need to practice to “Grow compassion” within you. No matter how compassionate you believe you are. There is always room for growth. You can always become more compassionate. (I added that to my dictionary). So...we have to do some serious inner inventory.

Do I have some life experiences, beliefs, values, that cause me to look at certain types of people differently?

Who are those certain types of people, and how do I view them?

If you have a difficult time scraping up some amount of compassion with some people. In this work of ***“Growing compassion”*** is the work of discovering how you may default to ‘attribution error. And in this work of ***“Growing compassion”*** is the power of ‘being with’...to do good.

These next two questions will force you to make a decision to be able to grow compassion in your dealings with other people.

Do you want to make a point? To be right. To let others know they’re wrong. How they are responsible for messing up their life. You’ll be right. You’ll prove them wrong. You’ll make your point.

But in landing on making a point, will they feel your judgment more than they feel your compassion? And our world, especially online, lives in this place of judgment over compassion.

The better question is. **Or do you want to make a difference?** To be ‘with’ others in such a way that your ‘witness’, your compassion, your kindness inspires them to want to change. If your goal is life change, to have an impact, to bring hope, and life. Then it can only come from YOU doing the work of growing compassion first.

And the final command in this passage. “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Ask God for people who care, have compassion, to be with you. To help you ‘be with’ others in a way that helps them. Because there’s not much that will grow compassion in you than by being around other people who are good at showing compassion.

“Growing compassion” is something you can do...and being compassionate will make a huge difference.