

## COMPASSION SUNDAY: IT BEGINS WITH A CHILD...



### SERMON: **THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY**

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What is the essence of Christianity? So many different things compete for our attention and our time. Do we give ourselves to that which is most essential? Christians will suggest all sorts of different answers to what matters most. “Evangelism, sharing Jesus with people, this is what’s most important ...” “No, no, discipleship, bringing people up in the faith, that’s where it’s at ...” “No, no, no, worship, giving ourselves to God in praise ...” And on and on and on.

What is the essence of Christianity? What is the core? Jesus is asked this question in Mark 12:28 and, fortunately for us, He gives an answer. He tells us, He gives us His own perspective on what the essence, the core, the essentials of Christianity are. A lawyer asks Him, “What is the greatest commandment?” And Jesus says, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” He doesn’t come up with anything new here. He is just citing Deuteronomy 6:4. And then Jesus does something odd. He’s only asked for one commandment but he gives two: “The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourselves.” Again, nothing new. He’s citing Leviticus 19:18. And in doing so, Jesus provides us with what He considers to be the essence of Christianity — Love. Love for God and love for our neighbor.

Incidentally, two things that often compete for love are morality and theology. Some people think that being a Christian is all about having the correct theology, the right doctrine. Believing the right things, that’s where it’s at. If that is true then, as Tony Campolo notes, Satan is the ideal Christian. Because according to the book of James, the devil believes all the right things. Not only that, but he also shudders. In Paul’s great chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13, that’s read at almost every wedding, which also happens to be the chapter that helps convert Robert De Niro’s character Mendoza in the movie *The Mission*, Paul says something quite fascinating: “These three remain: faith, hope and

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love; and the greatest of these is love.” Many Christians would not agree with Paul here. Many Christians would say, “No, faith is more important.” And then there’s morality, which often in our culture is understood narrowly as sexual purity. Of course the people during Jesus’ time who were the most “pure” morally were the Pharisees. And they were the people of Jesus’ day that He criticized, that He castigated, that He had harsh words for. Christianity is not about the right doctrine. It’s not about being moral. Christianity is all about love. Bart Campolo says it best: “Love God. Love people. Nothing else matters.”

Loving God with one’s whole heart, mind, soul and strength — this is describing a passionate kind of love relationship with God. Vitezslav Gardovsky, a Czechoslovakian philosopher, was once asked, “What do you see as the most terrible threat in our world today?” Gardovsky replies, “The terrible threat is that we might die earlier than we really do die, before death has become a natural necessity. The real horror lies in just such a premature death, a death after which we go on living for many years.” We know people like this. My own grandfather passed away two and a half years ago. But something inside him died years and years ago. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher is well-known for his statement: “God is dead.” Someone once said that after Nietzsche died, one of his students wrote on his chalkboard: “Nietzsche is dead. Signed, God.” Nietzsche’s father was a Lutheran pastor. One Sunday morning when Nietzsche was 11 years old, he was sitting in church, next to his younger sister. His father was preaching and, in the middle of the sermon, Friedrich stood up, grabbed his sister by the hand and started walking out the back of the church. His father was not extremely overjoyed and he called out to young Friederich, “Where do you think you are going?” Nietzsche turned around, pointed up to Jesus who was hanging on the cross at the front of the church building and he said, “Doesn’t that thing up there ever laugh or cry?” In Nietzsche’s later writings, he frequently expresses his disdain for Christianity and one of his primary reasons is that he was turned off by the passionless Christianity that was presented to him. A mundane, rationalist Christianity failed to attract Nietzsche. We often offer people a passionless Christianity and then wonder why they’re not interested. And we say, “Oh they’re closed to the Holy Spirit.” “Ah, their hearts are just hardened.” Well, maybe not. Maybe what we’re offering them is something that is not alluring or enticing and what is tragic is that it should be. Jesus certainly was. Soren Kierkegaard says, “This

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age is in bondage to the law of indifference.” And that’s sad when we see it in society. It is a sin when we see it in the church.

Passion. What does it look like to be passionate? How does one develop a passion for God? Again, people offer a variety of responses. Some say, “Well it’s about getting these WWJD bracelets, right? Or my Christian t-shirt, or getting my fish on my car; and that’s how I express my passion for God.”

How do you develop passion? There are two things I want to touch on this morning. First, passion emerges from time spent alone with God in such a way where we are still and quiet and silent so that we can hear Him. Most of my “quiet” times growing up in the church were activities in which I was learning something, reading the Bible, writing down notes. But there is a relationship to be experienced. One of the primary differences between us and the people in the Scriptures is that we talk about God quite a bit while people in Scripture encounter God; they experience Him. Exodus 33:11 says, “Moses would talk to God face to face as a man talks to his friend.” Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” I wonder if there is a certain “knowing” that can only be experienced or found in the stillness. Henry Nouwen would say, “Solitude is the furnace of transformation, because it was the place and time where in my stillness I could allow God to speak to me about those places in my life, those ugly areas that God wanted to change and remove.” In 1 Kings when the Lord tells Elijah He wants to meet with him and Elijah goes to the mountain, there is a great fire but God was not in the fire. A great wind comes but God is not in the wind. There is an earthquake, but no God. And then comes a still small whisper, and that’s how God comes and meets Elijah. Last night was the first night in quite some time when I actually took time to be still, to be quiet. Most of our activity in life is merely that — activity, a rushing from here to there. Stillness involves listening to God and most of us listen as well to God as we do to one another, which is not good news. The act of someone really listening to you, being completely present with you, engaged with you, actually listening to what you are saying — this type of listening actually makes us uncomfortable because it is so rare.

We’re so used to the other type of listening: “Hi, how ya doing?” followed by the immediate: “Good, good.” I would annoy people in college because I would say, “How are you doing?” and they would say, “Good.”

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Then I would say, “Why?” And they would say, “Wwwwwwwhat do you mean?” And I would say, “Why are you doing good?” So you can understand why I didn’t make a whole lot of friends. But the ones I did make I gave time to. Do we give God this kind of time?

Time in which we are still, alone and quiet before God so He can invade us, transform us, have His way with us?

The second area, which both describes a person who is passionate for God as well as being a vehicle by which we can become more passionate for God, is our expression of love and care for the poor. When I share this with groups, it usually seems as though it is coming from left field. “Well, I understand time alone with God, I get that — but why the poor?” And I say that loving the poor has nothing to do with any compassion or love I feel personally for the poor. For me it simply has to do with one thing — with scripture and with the enormity of passages in scripture that deal with the poor. If you have no life, like me, you do things that other people consider boring, such as counting things in scripture. And it may not seem like the most exciting thing in the world, but it is interesting. Oh, it’s interesting. Did you know, for instance, that in all of scripture, there are 67 verses on the topic of adultery? Not encouraging it as a lifestyle, but discouraging it. 67 verses. In all of scripture there is one verse, one verse that says that all of scripture is inspired by God. There are two verses, in all of scripture, that say Jesus is the only way to God the Father. Homosexuality is mentioned four or five times. There are over 560 verses in which God commands His children to love the poor. 560! Now, I am not saying we should discount the one verse about scripture being inspired, the two verses about Jesus being the only way to the Father . . . but if we are going to lift these verses up as the hallmark of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what do we do with the 560 verses about the poor? How do we deal with them?

It is quite interesting to see what these verses actually say about the poor. In Deuteronomy 15:7-8, as the Israelites are preparing to move into the land that’s been promised to them, God says, “If there be among you, in any of the towns the Lord, your God has given you, who is in need, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor, but open your hand willingly lending enough to meet the need whatever it may be.” This is the word of God.

Proverbs 19:17 says: “He who lends to the poor is kind to God and will be

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repaid.” A relationship is established between how we treat the poor and our treatment of God. Sodom and Gomorrah is often touted as the great epitome of God’s treatment of homosexuals. But Ezekiel 16:49 tells us why God destroyed Sodom. The prophet declares: “This was the sin of your sister Sodom, she and her sisters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous means yet she did not aid the poor and needy.” Sound familiar? Jeremiah 22:16 is fabulous. The prophet, speaking to the son of a former king about what his father was like as a king, remarks: “He judged the cause of the poor and needy and all went well, is this not what it means to know me declares the Lord.” God says that “knowing me” consists of defending the cause of the poor and the needy. Isaiah 58 is a classic because the Israelites are fasting and they’re humbling themselves and they are delighting to draw near to God and they’re worshipping God. All things which we would regard as positive. And yet God says to them, “The day of fasting, of humbling yourselves is not the fast I have chosen. Is this not the fast I have chosen: to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to clothe the naked?” So many Christians in America say they want revival and so the thing to do is to get the Ten Commandments back in the classroom, to get prayer back in schools. Well according to Isaiah 58, the Israelites were doing all those things and it was not doing them any good. They were missing out on God’s heart, which was a heart that cared for the poor.

When we get to Jesus in the New Testament, we come to the harshest, more severe sayings about wealth and the poor. Which is odd because we usually think of Jesus as a nice Mister Rogers kind of person, right? And so being a Christian is like being a kind of Mister Rogers, which means being really nice. We’ve reduced Christianity to being nice. The primary difference is that, while one has no need to get rid of a Mister Rogers, one does have a need to get rid of Jesus because He’s dangerous. We’re all familiar with the passage in Luke 19 where Jesus encounters a rich individual and the person wants to follow Jesus and Jesus says, “One thing you lack, sell all that you have, give to the poor, then come follow me.” And because we are so sophisticated, we know that we can’t take Jesus’ statement on face value. That’s obviously not what Jesus means for us. Jesus was obviously getting at the willingness of the man to let go of his treasure. And if the man was willing to let go he still could have kept his money and followed Jesus, right? And yet I wonder if we would interpret Jesus’ saying in the same manner if the man’s issue was adultery. What if Jesus said, “One thing you lack, stop fooling around with other women and

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then come follow me”? Would we really say, “Well, no the man doesn’t actually have to stop committing adultery, he only needs to be willing to stop; he can still fool around, just as long as his heart is in the right place and he doesn’t allow his adultery to interfere with his relationship with God.” None of us would understand Jesus’ comment in this way because it would sound absurd.

Now, why doesn’t our common interpretation of Jesus’ comment to the rich man seem absurd? One, because we have heard this interpretation so much that it has become common. And what is common becomes accepted. Secondly, Jesus’ comment actually speaks to us. It speaks to us because we have money. It touches us where we are. Why is it that churches preach about homosexuality? Well, I’m not gay and it doesn’t bother me because I don’t need to change in that area. So we will say: “Well, homosexuality is wrong.” “OK. But why is it wrong? “Because the Bible says.” “But doesn’t the Bible say that you have to give up all your wealth?” “Yes, but that’s not what it means.” We have become experts at distorting the Word of God. The clincher, of course, is Luke 14:33 where Jesus is speaking, not to an individual, but to the crowds. He says, “If anyone does not sell all their possessions, they cannot be my disciple.” We’re all familiar, of course, with the last sermon Jesus gives in Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus says that in the end, all peoples, all nations, will be separated into two groups — the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. And Jesus will say to the sheep: “Come with me into the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.” Why? “Because when I was hungry you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me drink. When I was a foreigner you invited me in. When I was in prison you came and visited me. When I was sick you took care of me. When I was naked you covered me.” And they are confused. They raise their hands and they say, “When Lord, when did we see you hungry?” And Jesus says to them: “I tell you the truth, what you did for the least of my brothers you did it to me.” How we treat these six groups of people is how we treat Jesus. We don’t like this truth very much. We want to create a large divide between our relationship with God and our relationship with people. And we say, “My relationship with God is more important. ... Relationships with people, oh yes, they’re important, but not as important.” So I can be rude to my mother and then go to church and worship God and pray and, oh I just love God so much and I treat this person discourteously and I can be mean and impolite but it’s okay because I really love God. Jesus won’t have that. He says to the goats: “Depart from me into



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everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels because” and then He repeats Himself, “when I was hungry you didn’t give me any food. I was thirsty, you gave me no water. I was in prison, you didn’t come. I was naked, you didn’t cover me. I was sick . . . I was a foreigner . . .” And the goats have the same question as the sheep, they’re just as confused: “When, Lord, when did we see You”? The implication being that if they had seen Jesus they would have cared for Him. They would have cared for Him because the goats really do love Jesus. In the story they recognize Him, they know Him, they call Him “Lord.” “When, Lord, when did we see you?” And Jesus repeats Himself again: “What you did not do to the least of these my brothers you didn’t do to me.”

How do we respond to scriptures like these? In a general way, there tend to be three responses one can have to scripture. We can encounter scripture and come away unchanged. No change occurs. The second possibility is that we encounter scripture and actually come away changed, somehow transformed. And then there is the third possibility, with which we are all very familiar. We encounter scripture and we change the scripture to adapt to us.

We’ve all experienced this “wonderful ability” to so distort God’s Word to meet our needs. It has become so common, yet hopefully there is still something in us that cringes when we hear someone treating the Word of God like that. We take the Word of God and we actually become its Lord. We tell the Word of God what it is going to mean. Dorothy Sayers would say, “It is not the business of the church to adapt Jesus Christ to men and women. The business of the church, rather, is adapting men and women into the image of Jesus Christ.” C. S. Lewis, I think he pointed it out very well when he noted, “The problem with Christianity is that people are attracted by bits of it and so they take the bits they like and they leave the rest behind.” There are over 560 verses that most of us and most of our churches have left behind. We’re satisfied with the tiny crumbs we have taken. George Bernard Shaw said that God created us in His image and we decided to return the favor. Look at any church, any church in any country and the Jesus or God they worship is always somehow remarkably like the people in that particular church. So if you go to a black church, you will not find a picture of a white Jesus. And if you go to a white church, you will not find a picture of a black Jesus. You can go into a Chinese church and find a picture of a Chinese Jesus. People want a Jesus that is like them. Tony Campolo rightly notes that the God of most churches in America is predominately middle class, He’s very white and above all He’s very American. God supports us in

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anything we want to do in the world, right? I mean, we can bomb any country and whose side will God be on? God blesses who? America. I don't think I have ever once seen a sign saying, "God bless" any other country. He doesn't bless Afghanistan. He doesn't bless Iraq. He blesses America. He's on our side. He's one of us.

Looking at these 560 scriptures is important because caring for the poor is often wrongly perceived as some individual's own agenda. "Oh that's so nice, that's so wonderful that you have a heart for the poor. How truly nice of you." Caring for the poor is not something we do because we're nice. We do it because it is what God Himself cares about. And it's really a question of whether Jesus, in relating to me, will be my Lord or not. Will Jesus be Lord of me or will I be Lord of Jesus? And in too many churches it has become the dominant pattern for the church to be Lord over Jesus. But being Lord is the way Jesus wants to relate to us. Now for many of us, if we are honest, Jesus or God is much more like a Santa Claus to us. He is there to help me. To help me get the job, to help me do well in school, to help things go well with me. He's there to help and to help me. Do we ever think about how we can be of help to God? How we can help Him in the things He wants to accomplish in this world? How can I be of help to You, Father? How can I be used by You to further Your kingdom?

Most of us are familiar with the statistics on poverty. They're grisly. It used to be 40,000 kids dying every day. The numbers have improved only slightly. It's about 36,000. About 60 percent of those who die every day die of hunger. About 40 percent die from preventable diseases such as diarrhea, measles, the flu. You will only find this kind of poverty in Africa, Southeast Asia and certain countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe. You will not find it in America. And I never experienced this kind of poverty until I went to Southeast Asia a year ago. I went to slum areas in Manila, the Philippines and Bangkok, Thailand. In the Philippines, if you've

been there, you know they have this gigantic mountain. It's called Smokey Mountain. It's a mountain of nothing but trash. A gigantic mountain of trash on which families live. And the kids in these families spend their days scavenging through the trash looking for things they can recycle. Glass, aluminum. And kids sometimes get killed because these enormous garbage trucks come to dump trash onto this pile and they don't have the time to be concerned with kids running around or being in the trash.



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Yet Mother Teresa may be right when she said that the most damaging effects of poverty may not be the physical suffering. I am hesitant to say this because I don't know physical suffering. I have not experienced it. But she says that the worst part about poverty is the emotional experience of the person as a result of the message they receive. And the message they receive, day in and day out, is "I don't matter, I do not matter, I do not matter, I am of no value. I am worth nothing." If you have worked with any women who have experienced date rape or abuse, you can have a woman who has grown up in a wonderful loving home environment, have wonderful friends and it can take one experience of being raped that will change that woman's life forever. She can spend years and years in therapy and counseling. It can take a lifetime to work through that one incident of abuse and the pain and grief that result are immense. With horrific poverty we are dealing with people who experience intense messages of rejection on a daily basis — "you are worth nothing, you are worth absolutely nothing." So if I am hearing, "Jesus loves me, God loves me," these messages will not compute because they do not match my experience. When Moses tells the Israelites in Exodus 5 that God is going to deliver them, the text says that they did not believe him. Why? Because of their cruel slavery. Their experience prevented them from hearing good news about what God wanted to do. Poverty is an experience that hinders people from believing in the news that seems too good to be true — that they are loved, that they are worth something.

News of poverty can be dismal, depressing, paralyzing. With a world in need, the last thing we want is to become paralyzed. The good news is that there are a number of people who have allowed Jesus to be Lord and who have responded to God's heart for the poor. Rich Mullins was a Christian songwriter who wrote, "Our God is an Awesome God" and "Step by Step," worship songs that are still being sung by many Christians. Mullins made quite a bit of money from the sale of his albums. But he never knew how much he made. He told his record company to send his checks to the elders at his church. He told the elders at his church that he wanted them to cut him, from this amount, a check for \$25,000.00. He figured that was what the average American worker made in a year. So he would make 25 grand a year. And he would direct the elders to give all of the rest of the money to orphanages in Mexico, to organizations working with Native Americans in the Southwest United States. What a great example. Rich Mullins left us too soon.

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John Wesley was a student at Oxford University. As a student he had a fixed level of income and a fixed level of expenses. His income that exceeded his expenses was given away to the poor. After graduating from Oxford, he became an extremely popular preacher/writer and went on to make a sizeable amount of money through the sales of his books. His income gradually rose and rose. But he kept the level of his expenses the same as when he had been a student and he continued to give away the excess income to the poor. Very different from our American philosophy: The more I make, the more I can what? Spend! That's the whole point of making money, right? Wesley didn't see money as an evil. Money was a good thing to Wesley because it was a vehicle through which God's love could be expressed to the poor.

And then there is Compassion, this particular organization. And what really gets people is the \$32 a month. I'd be willing to bet that if sponsoring children was free, getting sponsors would not be all that difficult. But it's the money, it's the cost, \$32 a month. Love does cost. It is interesting to consider whether love exists in relationships that involve no cost. Love cost Jesus a great deal. I emphasize this because most of our reasons for not loving have to do with costs. We say, "I would like to, I really would love to help but it just costs too much."

I was a student at UC Santa Barbara, and walking across campus I saw a person who didn't fit in at all. He was in his mid-forties, very overweight and the closer I got to him the more I could smell something leaning more on the unpleasant side of the scent spectrum, his hair was very greasy and I couldn't just walk past him because of a book that I'd been reading. *Les Miserables*, which I think is the most Christian book ever written, aside from possibly the Bible. And then there is this annoying phrase running through my mind: What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do? This was before the bracelets became popular, but it's from a book written by Charles Sheldon called *In His Steps*. And so, okay fine, I walked up to him, introduced myself. His name is Gary. We start to talk and I can tell that Gary is working up to asking me for something and I am assuming he is going to want some money from me. But I'm preparing myself to give to him. "What would Jesus do? He would give money, okay, okay." So I am psyching myself up to give him some money and Gary says "Can I ask you a favor?" Okay, yes. "I don't have a place to stay tonight, would it be okay if I stayed at your place?" Ohhh. God, why didn't he ask for the money? So I take

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Gary to my dormitory room. This is somewhat awkward, not the typical thing, having a homeless person stay over in the dorm rooms. And he stays the night. My roommate was more comfortable with it than I was, Steve, a friend I knew in InterVarsity. We ordered pizza. We talked quite a bit, we got to know each other. I prayed that night before I went to bed: “God, please love Gary, reveal Yourself to him, show him how much compassion You have for him. Soften his heart. Father, I also ask that when I wake up tomorrow morning I am still a virgin.” Only because Gary was pretty big, a pretty strong guy. And I didn’t want to have to tell my future wife that I wasn’t a virgin. And I certainly didn’t want the story to begin with, “Well, his name was Gary . . .” Anyway, it turned out OK. The next day my roommate buys him a \$120 ticket to go to Florida so he can go see his family with whom he was estranged and had not seen in several years. But it did cost something. I mean, if we are going to love people it is going to cost. But we don’t want anyone intruding around our personal space, that is the worst thing that can happen; but to love, we somehow need to let people intrude.

Compassion. The name actually means “to suffer with or to feel with.” The opposite of compassion is apathy: no suffering, no feeling. And the heart of God in scripture is one that longs to suffer with His people. It’s very interesting, God’s attitude toward suffering, because He doesn’t always remove it. In some cases He does. But what He does do consistently is enter into the suffering of His people. That is the beautiful thing about the incarnation of Jesus on the cross, He doesn’t take away evil, He doesn’t take away suffering, but He is willing to share our pain.

I used to work at Lake Avenue Congregational Church in southern California. We would have these immense programs throughout the summers. In one week of day camp we would take the kids to the beach on Wednesday, and to a place like Magic Mountain, Disneyland or Knott’s Berry Farm on Friday. In between was filled with crafts, games, basic fun. But some kids would complain. “We hate these camps, they are so boring, why can’t we do anything fun?” You think that’s bad, just wait until junior high.

So my supervisor, Dee Engel, who was the children’s pastor (though they couldn’t call her a children’s pastor since she was a woman so they called her children’s director, though she did everything and more that a pastor would do) said, “Why don’t we start having camps for kids in our neighborhood who

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cannot afford to experience the gospel simply because they lack the money it takes to come to our camps? We'll do camps in parks and they'll be free, one week at a time, three hours a day. The kids will come and we'll have a Bible study time, we'll have a craft time, we'll have a game, sports time, we'll have snacks, we'll let the kids basically have a chance to be kids." A lot of kids now-a-days, they really don't get to be kids.

So there was a nine-year-old girl, Cassandra, who came to camp. I still keep in touch with Cassandra; she is about to graduate from high school. On Friday, the last day of this camp, we're sitting in a circle and I am talking about God as a Father and what it means for God to be our Father, and in the middle of my brilliant talk, Cassandra, like young Nietzsche, she stands up and she walks away. Later on in the day I approach Cassandra and tell her: "I noticed you got up and I was wondering if you wanted to talk about why." And I can tell by her body language that she's not sure if she wants to talk about it. She eventually says, "Well, when I was one year old our dad left and I haven't seen him since and I don't even really remember him at all. So when you talked about God as a Father . . . it was just kind of hard to hear." And I say to her, "Cassandra, God wants to be your dad, God wants to be your father." And she looks up at me and she says, "Matt, I know that, but it's still not the same." Well, what am I going to say? "No Cassandra, actually you're wrong, it is exactly the same, and here are 18 theological reasons why." Because she is right, it is not the same. Her poor excuse of a father left and that is not what she needed. She needed the physical presence of a man in her life. And with Compassion, in some small way, I think, we are somewhat able to be a presence in the life of another person. And if we're honest, we'll say the benefit is mostly on our part, in being able to share in someone else's life, a life very different from ours, and to experience in some small, minor way, the pain or suffering that people go through.

One of the beautiful things about Compassion is that it's not simply a ministry that is about giving a handout to someone. Rather, it's about trying to remove, to release people from this vicious cycle of poverty that it is almost impossible to escape from in the developing world. Tony Campolo was in Haiti and he encountered three young girls on a street corner. The eldest of them, who is about 15 says, "Sir, you can have me tonight for \$10." He asks the next youngest one, "What about you, can I have you tonight for that same price?" She nods

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in agreement. He asks the youngest one who he says looks like she's 11, "And I can have you for the same price?" She nods. He says "Okay, this is my address, this is where I am staying, my hotel, meet me here in two hours, don't be late." He goes to the hotel, up to his room, calls down to the concierge, and says he wants every Disney video they have and he also wants banana splits — ice cream, bananas, sauce, everything, bring them up to the room. The girls arrive, they eat, and they fall asleep on the bed, one by one, watching these Disney videos. Tony is sitting in a chair and he says that two thoughts strike him. One is, "God I thank you, I thank you that for one night these kids can be girls again." And then the other thought hits him: "I am leaving tomorrow and tomorrow they will go back to the same activity of being abused and molested by men. All I have given them is one night." And that is really one of the beautiful things about Compassion, they're not just in there for a day, they're not in there for the week, they're committed to the long haul. And they're committed to bringing these kids out of hurtful environments, whether it is providing food, or medicine, and meeting educational, spiritual, social and physical needs. We see that a lot of these kids, after they have received a college education, they will return to their communities and invest so that there is indigenous leadership modeling for the kids, showing them it is possible to escape the cycle of poverty. They see one of their own who has come from where they have come from but have made it. That is what gives hope.

There was a pastor in L.A. who painted a mural over some graffiti. The mural read, "We somehow think the Church is here for us. We forget that we are the Church and we are here for the world."