

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE DEMISE OF COMPASSION:
A CASUALTY OF A CHANGING CULTURE

A Dissertation Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

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Lynchburg, Virginia

May 2010

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ABSTRACT

THE DEMISE OF COMPASSION: A CASUALTY OF A CHANGING CULTURE

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Liberty Theological Seminary, 2010

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There are numerous forces that influence and/or impact churches. The various effects of culture have become one of the greatest forces that churches and pastors are facing. Dealing with various cultures have always been a challenge for society and the church. Now, more than ever, the church needs to take a close look at the effects of cultural influence. Unfortunately, many churches are embracing cultures that are not consistent with the teachings of the Scripture. This project will address one such issue: The Demise of Compassion.

Abstract Length: 86 words.

DEDICATION

To my wife Frankie for her understanding and support throughout this writing and her patience for the hours I spent away

To Denise Greene who has helped in the research and working with me diligently to complete this project

To Dover Baptist Church for their support and faithfulness

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Care and compassion are trademarks of our nation and especially the church. Our nation has always been looked upon as being the most humane and caring nation in the world. Although some countries detest our Western culture, it is obvious that it is one that draws people from every corner of the earth. However, as people from other countries move to the United States they bring with them their own way of life. America has become a melting pot of cultures. The mixture of varying cultures presents a different or altered culture. The multiculturalism we are faced with today affects the activities of our daily lives. That is not to say that it is bad or good, just different.

Over the years, our nation's value system has been disrupted. During the rise of our present generation and the birthing of a new generation, our nation's caring and compassion appears to have diminished. People are more concerned with their own self-preservation and/or self-worth. Careers have become the focal point of men and women alike. People have become self-centered looking for the advancement of their cause and, unfortunately, it is at the expense of love and compassion. The days of *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It To Beaver* are long gone. The home has become a transit station rather than a place of love and compassion. Parents pass one another on the freeway

transporting their children from one place to another, from dance recitals to soccer games. The core of the family has been uprooted and with it compassion and caring.

The same principle has taken roots in the walls of the church. Programs and activities have taken the place of heartfelt worship and reaching out to a lost and dying world. The church has become absorbed with its own membership at the expense of the community. The focus is upon the betterment of the membership, rather than changing society. Many pastors have become CEOs and their studies have become offices. In his book, *Just a Preacher*, Vance Havner states,

The preacher's study has become an office. He may want to give himself to the ministry of the Word and prayer, but the times and the trustees have made him an ecclesiastical bellboy and clerical button-pusher. If he shows any signs of leaving the merry-go-round, he is told that times have changed and he must adjust himself. Adjust himself to what? To this Punch-and-Judy farce of modern church life, this St. Vitus dance of the saints, this meaningless marathon of breathless Christians, too exhausted to run and too scared to rest?¹

Many pastors and churches have lost touch with their fundamental purpose. In our modern society, we have forgotten what it is to be lost, hurting, or in need. Churches must reclaim their passion.

Statement of the Problem

Compassion or the lack thereof, is not something that is new; in fact, it has been around throughout antiquity. However, in the modern day society it appears to be more evident. Perhaps this is partially due to the availability of information, i.e. radio, television, Internet, and magazines. Or, perhaps it is because Americans have not been

¹ Vance Havner, *Vance Havner: Just a Preacher* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 101.

subjected in the past to differing cultures as they are today. But, it must be remembered that this is not an American problem only, but one that exists throughout the world. In addition, it may be well to note that one does not have to reach very far beyond the boundaries of their own private world to detect the loss or demise of love and compassion.

Questions that are often heard become the basis for examination. Questions such as “What is the world coming to?”; “How can people be so cold and heartless?”; “How could anyone do such a thing?”; “What has happened to our morals?”; “Where has all the love gone?”; “What has become of society?”; “What has happened to families?”; “What happened to the good old days?” Or simple statements such as “I remember when ...”; “There was a time when you could count on your neighbor or your fellowman.” On and on questions are being asked and although there are not many answers, there is certainly a sense of frustration with the path that the world and society as a whole seem to be walking.

This project will examine the biblical principles of compassion compared to the perspectives of a modern day society in which the younger generations seem to be losing their sense of caring and compassion. The family structure is breaking down as well as the church family structure. Jesus dealt with the issue of who is one’s neighbor and it is becoming increasingly obvious that society and the church are experiencing the same difficulty in identifying their neighbors. Ministry has taken a back seat to larger buildings, more elaborate programs, and taking care of their own at the expense of ministering to the widows, orphans, and changing the world. Often times, notoriety has become the catalyst for society to become involved and display compassion.

In the beginning, man was in perfect harmony with God and with each other, however, Satan entered into the picture and the unity and fellowship that man enjoyed was disrupted and sin became the norm. Satan did not force either Adam or Eve to take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but he did present it in such a manner to Eve that she desired to partake of it. Then she gave it to Adam and he chose to eat. It was not the exposure to the “tree of knowledge” that led to man’s fall—they were already exposed to it; in fact, they had dominion over the entire Garden of Eden. However, it was the influence of a different belief system that led to the fall. This is not to insinuate that culture is sinful nor is culture to be construed as evil or satanic, but it can be surmised that the influence of differing belief systems can be detrimental to one’s values and morals unless scrutinized by scriptural authority.

Culture or the influence of culture and compassion make up a considerable portion of this project; therefore, a clear understanding of the terms must be identified.

Culture has been defined in a number of different ways. In his book, *A New Kind of Church*, Aubrey Malphurs states,

Traditional definitions of *culture* usually include such elements as people’s thoughts, beliefs, values, speech, actions, and artifacts (manmade objects). These all fall under people’s beliefs and actions. Therefore, I define culture as *the sum total of what people believe and how they act on their beliefs*. Culture is the sum of a people’s way of life, and it is largely through their culture that people of varying ethnic, social, or religious groups create and make sense of the world they live in.²

² Aubrey Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 98.

Although Malphurs admits that his definition is broad, it is the intent of this study to focus on the beliefs and how people act on those beliefs in respect to love, compassion, and caring.

Compassion can also be viewed in a variety of ways. In the Koine Greek New Testament, there are five Greek words for compassion used in the verb form:

1. OIKTEIRŌ (οἰκτεῖρω), to have pity, a feeling of distress through the ills of others, is used of God's compassion, Rom. 9:15.
2. SPLANCHNIZOMAI (σπλαγχνίζομαι), to be moved as to one's inwards (*splanchna*), to be moved with compassion, to yearn with compassion, is frequently recorded of Christ towards the multitude and towards individual sufferers, Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22 (of the appeal of a father for a demon-possessed son); Luke 7:13; 10:33; of the father in the parable of the prodigal son, 15:20.
3. SUMPATHEŌ (συμπαθέω), to suffer with another (*sun*, with, *paschō*, to suffer), to be affected similarly (Eng., sympathy), to have compassion upon, Heb. 10:34, of compassionating those in prison, is translated "be touched with" in Heb. 4:15, of Christ as the High Priest.
4. ELEEŌ (ἐλέεω), to have mercy (*eleos*, mercy), to show kindness, by beneficence, or assistance, is translated "have compassion" in Matt. 18:33 (A.V.); Mark 5:19 and Jude 22.
5. METRIOPATHEŌ (μετριοπαθέω) is rendered "have compassion," in Heb. 5:2, A.V.³

These five verb forms of compassion will be the main focus of the project, although a noun form will be used on occasion. The idea of compassion will be the heart-felt reaction created or initiated due to sympathy, empathy, and/or a longing to help or relieve the situation, suffering or plight of others. Compassion also means to help relieve

³ W. E. Vine, "Compassion, Compassionate," in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Special Edition for the Christian Booksellers of the Word ed.

the burden of others, whether created or caused by one's own failures, circumstances, inabilities, or by means beyond their control.

It is not only necessary for the need of compassion to be realized and acted upon, but there is a great need to ascertain the urgency of the need and to react or respond as appropriate.

Statement of Limitations

It is not the intent of this project to examine every instance of compassion or lack thereof, but to identify the basic need of compassion and the necessity of responding when need arises. There are numerous organizations responding throughout the world and across the country to natural disasters or even man-made disasters, some of which will be identified and highlighted. However, the intent of the project is to look within the local communities, churches, and individuals and realize that, for the most part, compassion is all but a lost art. It may be well to remember the manner in which people rallied around the victims of the terrorist attack in New York, or those who responded to Hurricane Katrina, mine disasters, Tsunamis, Haiti earthquake, etc. Yet, they walk or drive past their neighbors down the street who are without heat or power without ever giving them a second glance. Or, families who are jobless and have used all of their savings to survive, but now due to the economic downturn wonder where their next meal will come from. Hundreds will pass by never concerning themselves with these in need. This is not to condemn global efforts because these are certainly worthy endeavors that need to be addressed. Yet, compassion needs to be identified and the response exhibited in one's own Jerusalem also.

This project will also address culture and its effect on society overall and in some areas in particular. It will not include all of the issues of culture that are facing the church and society today, but it will address those issues that are more prominent and pose the greatest threat.

There are many areas of cultural concern; it would be unwise to attempt to tackle each of them. It is the purpose of this study to expose those areas of concern that are becoming more and more prevalent in these early years of the twenty-first century.

The Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis of this project is the biblical mandate recorded throughout the Scriptures. Ever since the moment of conception, man has been dependent on others. Man is not a solitary individual but finds meaning in the interaction and the life of others. In Gen. 2:18⁴ we read, “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him.” God showed compassion by creating Eve for Adam. In his book, *The Search for Significance*, Robert McGee states, “To meet Adam’s needs for companionship and understanding, God created a woman and gave her to Adam as his wife.”⁵

Throughout the Old Testament there is continual evidence of God’s compassion to Israel. Ps. 78:37-39 says,

⁴ Unless otherwise noted or contained within a quoted source, all Scripture references are from the King James Version.

⁵ Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance* (Houston: Rapha Publishing, 1987), 26.

For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

Furthermore, the New Testament records numerous occasions when Jesus showed compassion on individuals, the crowds, and multitudes. We can readily evidence this fact by looking at the feeding of the five thousand or to His words on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...” (Lu. 23:34).

We can also find evidence of, not only God’s compassion, but the need for Christians to exhibit compassion. 1 John 3:17 states, “But whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Christians cannot sit idly by while others around them are in need and turn a deaf ear or bury their heads in the sand. Although compassion is often exhibited in material ways, the need may be of a spiritual nature. Compassion is more than attending to the needs of the body. Compassion is inclusive of the soul as well.

Just as compassion can be found throughout the pages of the Scripture, so can the ramifications and/or influence of culture. Israel was constantly influenced by the world or by those in the land which they dwelt. It was the influence of those who were not committed to the Lord that caused Moses the greatest difficulty in reaching the Promised Land and receiving of the Ten Commandments. The cultural influence is not limited to “outsiders,” it is inclusive of those within who are of a different belief system. Consider those who convinced Aaron to mold a Golden Calf while Moses was on the mountain communing with God and receiving His Commandments. Or, the cry of the Children of Israel when they said, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” (Ps. 137:4).

In his book, *Culture Shock*, O.S. Hawkins says,

The early church in the Book of Acts exploded when Paul and others stepped out of their comfort zones and engaged a culture that was different from their own. Our 21st century world is more like the 1st century than perhaps any other century. We're called upon to engage a culture that is not interested in our formulas nor our stained glass windows nor our organs. We're called to engage a culture that is not asking if the Bible is true. It is asking if it is relevant. Our culture wants to know if the Book of our faith written in an ancient Middle-Eastern world has any relevancy in our world where we're transplanting organs, experimenting with genetic engineering, and sending people to the moon and back.⁶

Culture is affecting every aspect of life within society and the church. Each generation appears to be searching for something new and different. Society and the church are experiencing the ramifications of the changing culture of the sixties. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, an atheist and founder of the organization of American Atheist, initiated the very movement⁷ that led to severing one of the very fibers that held the world and the church together, and afterwards, America experienced a snowball effect, even to this day.

This project will examine the influence of culture and the manner in which it has affected how the world and the church respond with compassion. Malphurs expresses the effect and influence of culture in the following manner:

Culture shapes and influences our life and all of our beliefs. Most people are not aware of the profound influence that culture has on us. But even if we don't realize, we use culture to order our lives, interpret our experiences, and evaluate behavior. It's our resources for understanding our experiences and make sense of our lives. Since this is largely a mental reflex—an unconscious process—we are hardly aware that it's taking place. It simply happens.⁸

⁶ O. S. Hawkins, *Culture Shock: Advice From Daniel for Addressing Today's Culture* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 2002), 14.

⁷ The 1963 United States Supreme Court decision to ban organized prayer in public schools.

⁸ Malphurs, 96.

Culture and compassion may well work hand in hand; however, they may also be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Statement of Methodology

Throughout this project, a careful examination of the issue of compassion and the influence and/or impact of culture will be considered. Society is constantly changing. The moral fiber of our nation has been uprooted and one of the major causes has been the changing culture within our nation. The world has infiltrated the ranks of the church and has brought about a culture that has bred a more liberal and compromised theology. It is a theology that is based many times on a feel good approach to worship rather than a heartfelt response to the Gospel. It has changed the premise of our beliefs and has led congregations to allow behavior that would have been abhorred years ago.

How are the churches to respond? How is the minister to respond? How is society to respond? What do the Scriptures say? How would our Lord respond? These are questions that this study will attempt to answer, or at least, offer viable options.

Summary

The times and the exposure of different cultures have produced many challenges for the church and society. This project will examine cultural implications and ramifications. It is my hope that this project will help identify and clarify these issues and help produce a more effective ministry in the twenty-first century. In addition, caring and compassion will be explored to determine how it has been affected by varying or changing cultures as well as how culture might impact compassion in the future.

Each chapter is designed to understand, expose, and deal with the effects or ramifications of culture and ascertain the effects on society and the church. Areas will be explored that have caused a deterioration of compassion and specific areas will be highlighted, i.e. court decisions that have illustrated a lack of compassion or desensitized society to the value of life.

This project will be developed in the following manner.

Chapter 1: "Introduction." The first chapter will be to introduce and provide ample understanding of the overall purpose of this writing. Different cultural categories of this project will be identified and expounded upon. An overall view of culture and compassion will be the focus.

Chapter 2: "The Cultural Phenomenon." This chapter will identify four aspects of culture.

The first section will look to the past and explore how culture has influenced today's society. Beliefs, understandings, and values will be considered while comparing them to the present. It will take into account how different areas have been affected in differing ways. The present culture will also be viewed with the potential influence it will bring in the future.

The second section will deal with the challenges that varying cultures bring. As people move into America, they bring their culture with them and with it challenges and changes; changes that may be for the better or possibly for the worse, but change nonetheless will take place based on cultural influence. Challenges are often the catalyst for improvement; however, they can also lead to a slippery slope of deterioration. Various challenges will be explored.

Section three will elaborate on cultural challenges, but with the church specifically in mind. Society and the church have experienced numerous cultural challenges throughout history and they certainly will in the future. However, the challenge the church has to evaluate and respond to is considerably different than that of a secular nature.

Section four will bring to light the ramification of a changing culture. Again, these changes may be for the betterment of society and the church, or they may bring the church and society at odds with each other. This section will also compare cultural changes of the past to the potential ramifications in the future.

Chapter 3: “The Essence of Compassion.” This chapter deals explicitly with compassion. It is divided into four segments.

Segment one will identify compassion as related to this project. It will establish a cohesive understanding of the meaning and application of compassion. Also, it will detail words or usage of words that will be used in order to establish an understanding of compassion.

Segment two will be used to define the perimeter or parameters of compassion, including, but not limited to, love, caring, and mercy. It will be the intent of this section to limit its meaning to a narrower view.

Segment three will identify the product of compassion when used in a spiritual or scriptural context. Compassion produces considerable fruit when administered from the heart and without any strings attached. The fruit of compassion is never measured from a materialistic perspective.

Segment four will establish the foundation of compassion. Compassion must draw its foundational strength from love. One can exhibit compassion to gain insight or favor only to discover that its foundation is faulty; however, when compassion is built upon the foundation of love and genuine caring, compassion will stand strong and withstand all the forces aligned against it.

Chapter 4: “The Challenge of Compassion.” Life is filled with challenges, some make people better and others make people bitter; it is a matter of the manner in which they react. This chapter is intended to focus on various characteristics of compassion. It is divided into four parts.

Part one will look at compassion and the church. What responsibilities does the church have? How can the church exhibit compassion while struggling to get along with each other? How does conflict diminish compassion? What forces deter the church from exercising scriptural mandates concerning compassion? These are only a few of the questions this section will explore. If the church is to be like Jesus, then compassion must be her clarion call.

Part two will deal with the infiltration of sin limiting compassion from producing its fruit. Sin disrupted Adam and Eve’s fellowship with God and eventually led to their removal from the Garden of Eden. Although God was compassionate and merciful, He expelled them from the Garden; however, it was God’s exercise of compassion that prevented them from returning to take also of the tree of life.

Part three will examine varying views of compassion. While one may view compassion as being an emotional outlet, others see it as being a call to action. Some view compassion as being passive while others view compassion as being active or as a

voluntary action. Therefore, is compassion to be proactive or reactive? These will be discussed to determine the manner in which compassion must be exercised.

Part four will determine the cost of compassion. Questions that readily come to mind: “How much does it cost?”; “Will it be cost effective?”; “How does one measure the cost?” These, along with other questions concerning cost will be discussed.

Chapter 5: “The Path to Demise.” Throughout time compassion has been an intrinsic part of society and especially the church. However, there has been a decline throughout history. Hawkins expresses it in this manner,

This principle of deterioration of civilization is obvious. We are not getting better. We’re getting worse. Before our very eyes we’re witnessing the demise of the Christian culture and a Christian civilization in the West. This deterioration is seen all around us. We’re witnessing the demise of a culture. We’re not getting better. Darwinian thought says we’re progressing upward. His philosophy tells us we rise from mud and clay to gold. God says just the opposite.⁹

This chapter is divided into four sections.

Section one identifies postmodernity as a major factor in the demise of compassion. This will entail a comprehensive look at postmodernity’s influence on compassion. Other views will also be examined. These views will include, but will not be limited to, humanism, secular humanism, New Age, and other secular entities.

Section two will focus on the change in ethics that culture has produced throughout the years. It will include moral values, abortion, tolerance, and others. Society’s departure from truth and absolutes will be examined as well.

⁹ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 60.

Section three will give examples and illustrations to produce evidence of a changing culture. These will include real life experiences as well as suppositions based upon past trends.

Section four will detail many of the ramifications caused by the failure to care or show compassion. When compassion fails, it leaves a lot of debris in its path. It is obvious, of course, that compassion itself does not fail, but those who are to exhibit compassion often do.

Chapter 6: “Reclaiming Compassion.” This chapter will examine means to recapture or reclaim compassion. It is essential for society and the church to identify the fact that far too many have lost their sensitivity and have become more concerned with their own plight than that of others. We have become complacent far too long, and it is essential that we find room for and seize the opportunity to exhibit compassion.

The four parts of this chapter are as follows:

- 1) The road to recovery deals with the means necessary to reestablish a ministry of compassion. The need for compassion is universal. The road that is presently being traveled is often filled with qualifying criteria that eliminates many, therefore, preventing needs from being met. This leads to hurt, anger, and disappointment. The focus will be on establishing a plan and a working model of becoming a more caring and compassionate people.

- 2) It is never enough to simply recognize compassion; it must be adopted as a part of one’s lifestyle. Although it should be a natural inbred desire for everyone, Christians should be especially mindful of its need. Compassion should not be something that has to be taught nor should it be legislated, it should be a natural aspect of one’s life.

3) Love and compassion are the essence of Christianity and although the world or society may not relate to compassion with the same fortitude, it is essential that the church embrace compassion. This section will deal with the necessity and the manner in which to embrace compassion. It will provide a working proposed model for integrating compassion in the local church.

4) Measuring compassion is not an easy task. However, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, the words of Jesus establish a good litmus test:

³⁵For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: ³⁶Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. ³⁷Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? ³⁸When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? ³⁹Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? ⁴⁰And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. ⁴¹Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴²For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁴³I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. ⁴⁴Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? ⁴⁵Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

It must be remembered that compassion is never based on the intellectual aspect of life, but it is based on the heart. It has been said, “Don’t give until it hurts, but give until it feels good.” However, a word of caution, compassion is not based on feeling alone; it is based on love and genuine caring.

Review of the Literature

Resources for this project have come from research obtained from books, magazines, Internet articles and other Web sites. There is a limited selection of research

material available for this project. Each section or category of this project has resources; however, some are more prevalent than others.

Some of the books that will be used to complete this include, but are not limited to the following: *A Nation Without a Conscience* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye; *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren; *11 Innovation in the Local Church* by Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird; *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird; *Right From Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices* by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler; *Where is Moses When We Need Him?* by Bill and Kathy Peel; *Life at Risk: The Crisis in Medical Ethics* edited by Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore; *Our Sufficiency in Christ* by John MacArthur Jr. Each of these books, as well as countless others and the Holy Bible, has contributed to the material covered in this project. These books have given a strong foundation and basis for each of the categories covered.

In addition to the books listed above, magazine articles and journals have been used to secure information: *On Mission: Pastors' Edition*, *American Family Association Journal*, and other magazines were used to collect data. These resources have been instrumental in identifying and addressing issues that the twenty-first century pastor will have to face, if he has not already faced them. Through the literature used, the basis of this project was authenticated and they provided helpful information and furnished alternative methods of handling the various issues.

CHAPTER 2

THE CULTURAL PHENOMENON

Throughout the years pastors have faced numerous challenges. Cultural challenges have always been an influencing agent in society and in the life of the church. Culture is never static or passive; it is always changing and impacting the lives of others. Every town, city, state, and nation consists of numerous cultures; in fact, it may well vary from town to town or from community to community. Culture often dictates our beliefs and the manner in which we live. Malphurs illustrates culture in the following manner:

Culture includes people's beliefs. Picture culture as an onion. Its beliefs are at the center of the onion and thus aren't seen. At the core of everyone's belief is a worldview. Your worldview consists of your answers to the basic questions of life: What is real? Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens to us at death? What is the basis for morality and ethics? Your answers to these questions inform the assumptions that influence your total belief system.¹

We are living in a multicultural world where change is happening so rapidly that it is almost impossible to keep up with. Every aspect of life is being affected by differing beliefs. One cannot look anywhere without seeing the evidence of a cultural shift. The

¹ Malphurs, 99.

long-term effect of this cultural shift is often overlooked due to the subtlety of the changes. In a recent magazine article, Phillip Connor states,

If your community is anything like mine, it's a much different place than it was a decade ago. You might remember a time when most people shopping in your supermarket spoke the same language as you, generally dressed the same way, and were born and raised in the general vicinity. Today, you pass by the curry sauce intended for Indian customers, your groceries are scanned by an elderly Chinese man, and then your food is packed by an immigrant from Mexico.²

It becomes obvious that culture affects every avenue of life, whether at home, school, work, the marketplace, or one's place of leisure.

The simplicity of life has changed over the years. The present culture swaps this simplicity with the idea of "living in the fast lane" or "living on the edge." All too often, we have moved from a needs oriented society to a self-centered society. Success, fame, and notoriety have often replaced honesty, integrity, and hard work. In their book, *Where is Moses When We Need Him*, Bill and Kathy Peel describe this shift as the "The Trinity of American Culture."³ They conclude,

The marketplace has imprinted three unmistakable gods on the psyche of American culture. They are the "must haves" if you call yourself successful, and many men and women will do anything to get them. The first is position. People must look up to and envy the station you have achieved. Even children begin to see the importance of position early in life. They want to be the most popular or the class president. When we ask them why these positions are so important, many times we find out it's so that other people will think well of them, which is not where they should get their self-worth. That can only come from God.

The second is possessions. We must own a bigger house, faster car, and more expensive clothes than everyone else. Even if we aren't really "into" possessions, our kids see the value our society places on them early in life. Certainly we can

² Phillip Connor, "Cross-Cultural Evangelism Made Easy," *On Mission Magazine: Pastors' Edition*, Volume 12, Number 3, 2009, 28.

³ Bill Peel and Kathy Peel, *Where Is Moses When We Need Him?: Teaching Your Kids The Ten Values That Matter Most* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 48.

discuss the value of possessions when a child wants something we're not sure is good for her, or if she wants it for the wrong reasons. But there are other times to talk about the place of possession in our lives. Buying a new car, for instance, can be a perfect time to talk to school-age children about our values. Why did we choose this particular car? Because it had features that would make our daily lives easier? Because it's related high on performance and gas mileage? Or because it's a status symbol?

Third, we must have power. We calculate our success by how many people say, "How high?" when we say, "Jump!" We teach our kids by our example that power is or is not a god in our life. Would our kids call us a loving leader or a power monger? It's important that we don't "lord" it over anybody—including our kids. "Because I said so" is probably the worst way to explain to an older child why he or she is expected to do something.⁴

We can readily observe this from the worldview perspective. According to Gordon MacDonald, "Unfortunately, our society abounds with Sauls, men and women caught in golden cages, driven to accumulate, to be recognized, or to achieve. Our churches, unfortunately, abound with these driven people as well."⁵

Not only does culture affect every avenue of life, but it also affects every age group. However, it appears as though culture tends to influence younger generations to a greater degree than older generations. It is not totally clear why older generations are less likely to be affected as much by culture. Perhaps, the older generations are satisfied with the status quo, more resistant to change, or they have learned lessons from past cultural changes, and, therefore are not as easily influenced.

Culture is having a tremendous impact on the younger generation. It is especially affecting their value system. In their book, *Right From Wrong*, Josh McDowell and Bob

⁴ Peel and Peel, 48-49.

⁵ Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 44-45.

Hostetler identify some of the contributing factors that have led to the decline of the moral and ethical values among the younger generations:

Generally speaking, the Baby Busters, that generation now approaching or embarking upon adulthood, is:

The first generation in history to be raised wholly under the influence of television in an electronic media-saturated society;

The first generation in history to be raised without the influence of a close extended family;

The first generation in history to be raised largely by parents who have never known deprivation or want;

The first generation in history to be raised by parents who assign the primary responsibility for their children's education to someone else.⁶

These have greatly impacted the younger generation and the authors refer to these as “the storm that threatens to swallow our kids.”⁷ They continue to identify the number one factor: “But ultimately, none of those factors ... have created the crisis of truth that plagues our youth today.... But I believe that the single most important factor in the loss of moral and ethical values among our children is the way their parents—you and I—have responded to the storm!”⁸

Cultural Influence

Culture has become one of the most influential factors in today's society. That influence will be highlighted throughout this section with an emphasis being placed upon the ramifications of culture, whether positive or negative. Many of the various origins of these influences will also be exposed and the impact they have made on society and the

⁶ Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Right From Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994), 41-42.

⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁸ Ibid.

church. In addition, the impact of society upon the church will be examined to see if the root cause for the shift in society was the product of culture.

The effects of culture cannot be minimized. The major issue is how is the church in the twenty-first century going to deal with the impact of the various cultures? It is not a new problem; in fact, it has been an issue from the earliest records. However, the changes have been somewhat more subdued than they presently are. The technological age in which we live has revolutionized travel, communications, and the pace of cultural change. These transformations have also brought about tremendous challenges.

Culture is not stationary; it keeps changing. It is dependent on varying factors that influence or determine its validity or lifespan. D. A. Carson says,

Every culture keeps changing. Changes can be brought about by an almost infinite array of factors: fresh immigration, international events, economic trends, educational trends, the popularity of various political and economic ideas, developments in the media, pop entertainment, whether the people of that culture live their lives in a time of peace or a time of war, and much more.⁹

The pace of the changes in culture has created one of the biggest concerns. In his book, *Culture Shift*, Albert Mohler states,

Moreover, the pace at which our culture is changing has accelerated over the past several decades. Transformations in the law, government, social morality, and education have accompanied the radical advances in technology and knowledge that mark our era. Like an earthquake that is caused when the tectonic plates on the earth's surface begin to shift, we are experiencing a seismic event in our culture.¹⁰

⁹ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 77.

¹⁰ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues With Timeless Truth* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2008), xi, xii.

In times past there seemed to be ample time to prepare and make the necessary adjustments, but today many churches are falling far behind in addressing and dealing with the changes that culture demands. However, all the changes are not productive and may even be detrimental to society and the church. Not all cultural changes should be accepted. Just because one culture accepts a belief or a way of life does not make it a viable option for everyone. While we must understand, to a degree, one culture does not fit all. Hawkins states, “We have taught a generation of young people that they have a right to develop their own personal values apart from their parental influences or authorities. We have convinced a generation that there is no right from wrong and that there are no moral absolutes nor moral truths. ‘Tolerance’ is the buzzword of this generation.”¹¹

If tolerance is the “buzzword of this generation,” then how does it influence our culture? Hawkins illustrates its affect by relating a phrase coined by Jack Evans, a former mayor in Dallas, Texas. He says, “Jack coined a saying that hangs on wall plaques on the offices of many business leaders of our city. His often-used quote says, ‘You have what you tolerate’.”¹²

“You have what you tolerate” is a pretty bold statement, yet the implications seem to be accurate, whether in society or the church. Perhaps the Apostle Paul thought along those lines when he said, “... for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

¹¹ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 30.

¹² Ibid., 75.

The influence of culture has drastically affected families. The present age is dealing with decisions that were made in the sixties and seventies. There is a pandemic effect brought about by the “sexual revolution” of the sixties. It is infiltrating every home in America. Parents who would never have allowed scenes and language to be broadcast in their living room just a few years ago find that it has become the norm today. Little by little the world has been allowed to creep in. In fact, the day almost demands it. Consider the Peel’s observation:

We live in a day when our minds are bombarded with sexual messages. Not only is our society relaxed about what the Bible brands sin, but advertisers have figured out that sex sells. Television, movies and literature have introduced us all to almost every possible human experience in a context that more often than not treats sin as simply a viable, alternative lifestyle. Everywhere we look a virtual exposition of sexual pathology confronts us. Today we laugh at homosexuality and promiscuity on sitcoms, and we celebrate adultery when it’s presented like it is in the moving tale of *The Bridges of Madison County*—all to our harm.¹³

Most families never intended for this shift in acceptance to take place, but the fast-paced lifestyle that most people live is contributing to the breakdown of values. Hawkins said, “Some of us with good intentions have leaned over looking into the culture and studying it so long we’ve actually fallen into it ourselves.”¹⁴ We ask ourselves, how could this happen? Yet, in all fairness, we know the answer. The following explains it quite well:

We no longer live in the midst of a culture that shares our convictions. We have lost the home court advantage. We, too, find ourselves living in a culture that’s speaking a different language, reading a different literature, and living a different lifestyle. Let’s face it, the Babylonian culture of the 21st century is the United States of America. Men and women in today’s market place are faced with

¹³ Peel and Peel, 168.

¹⁴ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 23.

increasing cultural difficulties as they seek to succeed in business and maintain their integrity at the same time.¹⁵

Parents are frantically trying to balance careers, attend civic events, PTA meetings, and sports activities while raising a family. Both parents are almost compelled to work in order to maintain their chosen lifestyle. Yet, we wonder what has happened to the typical family. The influence of the electronic media could partially be to blame:

... The mass media have affected the way families interact. “What’s on TV tonight?” has replaced, “Dad, can you help me with my homework?” in many families. Families used to linger for conversation at the dinner table; no, instead of exchanging news and views between parents and children, they consume the evening meal in front of the television, watching reruns of “family” shows in a room ironically called the “family room.”¹⁶

In addition, televisions, computers, iPods, and other electronic devices have become a widely used type of babysitter. This has contributed to the demise of “family time.”

There was a time when families were defined by their relationships; that is, the biblical understanding of marriage and family was a given. However, that has drastically changed, largely due to the influence of culture. Marriage was understood to mean between one man and one woman and they were “... to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ...” (Gen. 1:28), thus becoming a family. The definition of family has become skewed, and society is desperately attempting to reclassify its traditional meaning.

Although there are negative aspects of culture, it is also beneficial. We need culture and culture will always be a part of our existence. Malphurs explains why culture is important:

¹⁵ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 19.

¹⁶ McDowell and Hostetler, 35.

- It profoundly shapes and influences our life and all our beliefs.
- It affects the development of our theology and what we believe about the Bible.
- It affects the way we conduct our ministries in the church.
- It helps us understand better the different people we seek to reach for Christ.¹⁷

The exposure to different cultures has brought about changes that have helped develop our economy, open doors of opportunity, and expand our knowledge. Culture can be one of the most informative assets available to society and the church. However, culture must be weighed in the balances, thus determining its validity and usefulness along with its complexities.

Some of the advantages of culture can be seen by Rick Warren's description of the day in which we live. He says,

Today we have airplanes, ships, trains, buses, and automobiles. It's a small world after all, and it's shrinking daily. You can fly across the ocean in a matter of *hours* and be home the next day if you need to be. The opportunities for normal, everyday Christians to become involved in short-term international missions are now literally limitless. Every corner of the world is available to you—just the travel industry. We have no excuse not to spread the Good News.

Now, with the Internet, the world has gotten even smaller. In addition to phones and faxes, any believer with Internet access can personally communicate with people in virtually every country on earth. The whole world is at your fingertips!

Even many remote villages get email, so you can now carry on “*e-vangelistic*” conversations with people on the other side of the world, without even leaving your home! It has never been easier in history to fulfill your commission to the whole world. The great barriers are no longer distance, cost, or transportation. The only barrier is the way we *think*.¹⁸

We must also remember that we are living in the most exciting time in the world, even amidst the challenges that we face. Warren says,

¹⁷ Malphurs, 98.

¹⁸ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 298-299.

Compared with other centuries, life has never been easier for much of the Western world. We are constantly entertained, amused, and catered to. With all the fascinating attractions, mesmerizing media, and enjoyable experiences available today, it's easy to forget that the pursuit of happiness is not what life is about. Only as we remember that life is a test, a trust, and a temporary assignment will the appeal of these things lose their grip on our lives. We are preparing for something even better.¹⁹

We could well echo the opening words of Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

Cultural Challenge

Apart from the pace of the effects of culture, another problem is that many churches are embracing cultures that are detrimental to the ministry and character of the church. The church has an obligation and responsibility to maintain herself in the center of God's will, and she should not be deterred by cultural changes. O. S. Hawkins reminds us: "When we step out of God's will for our lives, we shouldn't be terribly surprised when we are confronted with obstacles."²⁰ This begs the question—How does one determine the cultural changes to accept and the ones to reject? To that, we may respond by placing the change under the microscope of the Scriptures. Any change adopted by the church must pass the litmus test of Scriptural integrity.

Scripture must be the baseline, but the challenge is that many in society do not recognize their authority. Scripture has taken a backseat to societal reasoning. John MacArthur describes it in this fashion:

¹⁹ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 49.

²⁰ O. S. Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults: Protecting Yourself From Minor Moral Lapses That Lead to Major Disaster* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1996), 26.

Scripture becomes the second essential foundation for morality, for ethics, for decision-making, no matter how complex or difficult those decisions might be, no matter how far from any direct or immediate suggestion by Scripture they might be. Yet Scripture has to be the foundation upon which the initial thoughts are founded, the point of departure into whatever musings are necessitated by whatever difficulty the problem may bring.²¹

MacArthur continues by saying, “The problem we face, however, is that our society has rejected general revelation.”²²

It must be understood that without a standard, there is no wonder that society struggles with morality, values, and virtues. They wander in a wilderness of their own searching for clues that will lead them to a fuller and more meaningful life. It becomes an exercise in futility.

Every aspect of life has its standards or norm. We know a foot is twelve inches because a standard has been established and measurements are calculated based on the original standard. By the same token, Scripture establishes an original standard.

McDowell and Hostetler illustrate this when dealing with youth. Their counsel is as follows:

The reason we think that there are such things as “fair” and “unfair” is because our Maker is a just God.

The reason love is a virtue and hatred a vice is because the God who formed us is a God of love.

The reason honesty is right and deceit is wrong is because God is true.

The reason chastity is moral and promiscuity is immoral is because God is pure.

And the reason so many of our youth can’t distinguish between the real and the counterfeit, between truth and error, between what’s moral and what’s immoral, is because many parents have stopped measuring against the original.

²¹ John MacArthur Jr., “The Sufficiency of Scripture,” in *Life At Risk: The Crises In Medical Ethics*, ed. Land, Richard D. and Louis A. Moore (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 227.

²² Ibid.

We all have been influenced by the cultural shift away from God as the center of all things. Our culture has rejected the Source of Truth and has tried to come up with its own ideas about right and wrong.²³

The underlying challenge is to reaffirm that God is the source of all truth. We are living in a day of postmodernity and secular humanism in which the validity of the Scriptures is called into question and the existence of God is even doubted. In addition, there is even the idea that there are no absolutes, that everything is based on the situation, which could be considered situational ethics. It has been well said, “Often the tendency of so many of us is to be overcome and overrun by the culture around us. For some it becomes easier to simply give up trying to hold on to biblical principles and go along with the culture.”²⁴

Pastors are discovering that it is more challenging to minister today than in years past. According to Rodger Thompson, “I believe that ministry is more difficult and pastors do have more problems today because of the changes in our culture and in the church. Many of these changes are occurring at such a high rate of speed that it is extremely difficult to keep abreast of them, especially for pastors in smaller churches.”²⁵ Although pastors have always faced the challenges of cultural changes, the twenty-first century pastor’s task is far more complex than ever before.

There was a time, in the not so distant past, when neighbors and communities relied on each other in times of difficulty and tragedy. The local church was the center of

²³ McDowell and Hostetler, 82.

²⁴ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 35.

²⁵ Rodger Thompson, “Pastoring Now And Then,” *Quiet Waters Ministries*, March 2, 2010, <http://www.qwatersor/articlelist.asp/> (accessed March 10).

activities and social events. The local church and the community worked in conjunction with each other. Revivals and church functions were scheduled around planting season and harvest time and worship was the highlight of a week of hard work. It was a time when school children began their day with a time set aside for God and their country.

Hawkins reminds us of those times:

I have vivid memories of prayers being heard on the public address system at D. McRae Elementary School in Forth Worth. I remember seeing the Ten Commandments on the wall of my classroom. I remember hearing daily Bible reading in the classroom. I remember the good and godly folks we called Gideons handing out New Testaments in our school. I remember when the church was the most respected and esteemed institution in the city. This is not the world we're called to reach today.²⁶

Unfortunately, those days are long gone and they will never return. Culture and the times have crowded out the things that made America great. In his book, *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen*, Ronald Johnson has stated, "Society has changed. There has been a paradigm shift in American culture away from the Bible belt value system toward a more agnostic, cynical, hostile, and violent system of values."²⁷ Perhaps McDowell and Hostetler have given us a good insight to the problem. They said, "If the culture has turned sour, it may be because the seasoning hasn't been doing its job! Jesus calls us to be salt; He calls us to counter the processes that would spoil and contaminate our society. We cannot expect a fallen world to light itself: we must be the light" (Matt. 5:13-15).²⁸

²⁶ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 14.

²⁷ Ronald W. Johnson, *How Will They Hear If We Don't Listen?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 13.

²⁸ McDowell and Hostetler, 243.

Challenge for the Church

The church has a rich history of surviving, even in the midst of the greatest hardships and forces of evil. However, the forces of Satan will never allow the church to continue without a struggle. Although culture is not evil, it is another means that Satan can use to bring about disruption and broken harmony in the midst of God's people.

Scriptures and biblical mandates are used to view and scrutinize the validity of each cultural change. Churches need to ask the hard questions and hopefully, some viable answers will be obtained.

Several questions that need to be asked:

Are the changes necessary?

Will the changes be a natural progression that benefits society as a whole?

Are the changes viable?

Will the changes enhance society or the church?

Will the changes diminish the ministry of the church?

Will the changes be detrimental to the church or society?

How will the church respond to these issues?

While examining areas of cultural concern facing the church, we must be extremely careful or we may find ourselves allowing those things that we rejected in the past. Hawkins reminds us that "We are living in a world culture where the church has tolerated things for so long that these words have come home to roost. We have today what we tolerated yesterday. Tolerance seems to be the law of our land, and today it has a different meaning than it did a few years ago."²⁹ He continues to explain, "Tolerance

²⁹ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 76.

used to mean that in America we recognized and respected others' beliefs without sharing them. Today tolerance means that everyone's values, everyone's belief systems, everyone's lifestyles, are accepted. Tolerance today says that all truth claims are equal."³⁰

Some of the areas of concern have already been dealt with by pastors and churches and many have been successful, while others have found that these subjects have been met with extreme resistance. Often times these issues have been the catalyst for the detriment of homes, relationships, businesses, and churches.

Many churches today are struggling to find their place in the world. They are caught in the crosshairs of culture and conviction, desiring to be true to their faith while assimilating into society. Consider the following observation by Nigel Cameron:

We find ourselves in a generation that is bridging two different societies, one which was essentially continuous with Christendom and the other which is radical and untried in its pluralist sense of identity and which promises to be open to anything except the Christian religion it has finally succeeded in sloughing off. It is ironic that in the United States the secularization of the media and of public life—and, of course, particularly of public education—should have proceeded further and faster than in Europe, despite church attendance rates ten times as high. At this unique point in history, Christian young people are stepping out into a situation of profound cultural hostility, in which at every level they are challenged to conform to the increasingly settled assumptions of a post-Christian society.³¹

One of the problems today is that many churches are trying to bridge the gap between society and the church. Yet, throughout history there has always been a distinct difference between the two. The task for churches and Christians is not to bridge the gap but to forge into society with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

³⁰ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 76.

³¹ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, "Bioethics in the Third Millennium," in *Life At Risk: The Crises in Medical Ethics*, ed. Land, Richard D. and Louis A. Moore (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 267.

Culture seems to dictate that the church compromise if they want to be part of the “Christian Society.” It has been said, “The majority of Americans are responding to the traditional church’s invitations to ‘come meet with us on our term’ with a polite (sometimes not so polite) ‘no thanks’.”³² We must also remember that “many scholars insist that we are living in a post-Christian era. In fact, when you meet the average person on the street in America today, you can no longer presuppose that he has a religious orientation to life, particularly a Judeo-Christian orientation. And you can no longer presuppose that he will understand what you are saying when you present the gospel.”³³

In the present age, churches must regain their perspective and solidify their convictions. Without the influence of the gospel, the hope for the world is all but lost. Hawkins said,

Part of the problem with our own pagan culture is that the church has retreated from it for years. Some of us have given in to it and given up on it. Then, very subtly in place of influencing it, the culture began to influence the church, so much so that we are hard pressed to see the biblical pattern of the church we find in Acts in many modern churches today.³⁴

We must conclude that many churches are failing to impact society to any great extent. In addition, it must be understood that unless this present generation steps up to the plate, so to speak, and assumes the responsibility of training the younger generations the crisis is only going to become worse. It must first start in the home, but the home receives its energy and encouragement from the church.

³² Malphurs, 31.

³³ Johnson, 48.

³⁴ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 32.

Many churches have been silent far too long, and they are losing their impact on the world. Churches must stand up and be counted or else culture will choke out their very source of strength. The only hope the church has today is Jesus' promise that "... the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18b).

The church, in general, has become so inundated with the culture that they have not only become more tolerant, but they have encompassed the philosophy of "political correctness" much to the demise of their grassroots. They have become more attentive to being politically correct than they have in confronting sin or to presenting the Gospel. John MacArthur phrases it in this manner, "The church has become lazy. It has moved away from careful biblical thinking and has tolerated far too much shoddy teaching."³⁵ We must ask ourselves the hard questions. What is our purpose and whom are we trying to please anyway? Society or the Lord? The Peels address this same issue:

Although we are commanded to be gracious, we are never called by God to compromise the truth to gain acceptance. Sin is sin, no matter how politically incorrect it is to identify it as such. Are problems overlooked or passed over because the price of confrontation is too high? The user will always serve his or her advantage first. If the word of God is offensive, it will be softened so as not to offend. The man or woman useful to God understands the need to call it as God sees it and speak the truth in love. Peter confronted Simon with the truth and called him to repent. Paul said it like this, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Colossians 1:28-29).³⁶

McGee deals with this from an individual's perspective; however, it has implications that certainly apply to the church. He states, "The world we live in is filled with people

³⁵ John MacArthur Jr., *Our Sufficiency In Christ: Three Deadly Influences That Undermine Your Spiritual Life* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 130.

³⁶ Peel and Peel, 94-95.

demanding that we please them in exchange for their approval and acceptance.”³⁷

Perhaps we should respond to them as succinctly as the Apostle Paul did to the church at Corinth: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18a).

Ramifications of a Changing Culture

Cultural challenges have always been instrumental in shaping people’s lives. The manner in which we conduct ourselves and the beliefs we maintain are often a direct result of the culture we are exposed to. Culture dictates much of what we do and helps to establish our lifestyle. One’s culture is often based on biblical mandates, while other facets of one’s culture are in direct opposition to the Scriptures.

Throughout history there have always been directives that man was to adhere to.

According to *The Bible Almanac*,

After God created man (Adam), He placed him in a garden called Eden. There, God decreed the first man and woman (Eve) to worship Him and rule the earth. (This is sometimes called our “cultural mandate.”) God commanded the man and woman not to eat any fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would know what it meant to participate in evil, and the happy life of Eden would be taken away from them!³⁸

Culture has always been an intrinsic part of the history of mankind. Man has been given a mandate or guidelines have been established. However, those guidelines have become blurred by man’s response. Man’s belief system has become skewed because of Adam’s

³⁷ McGee, 52.

³⁸ James I. Packer, Merrill Tenney, and William White, eds., *The Bible Almanac* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 26.

original disobedience; therefore, a different culture was established due to his response to the “cultural mandate.”

Culture is neither good nor evil in and of itself. However, culture is influenced by numerous agencies. It is influenced by the world in which we live, the traditions of the past, the era in which one lives, and religion, just to name a few. Malphurs states, “The most common misconception is that culture is inherently evil. I’ve noted that whenever Christian people, especially well-known teachers and ministry leaders on television and radio, mention culture, it’s often in a negative context.”³⁹ Scripturally, culture has never been alluded to as being evil or a device that Satan uses; however, Satan can use culture just as he uses other agencies.

Throughout the previous pages there have been numerous allusions to culture and its effect on society and the church. For the most part these have been general in nature; however, the emphasis here will be more specific.

Culture has played a considerable role in specific areas of society and the church. We have seen the acceptance of practices that were once totally foreign to our way of thinking. The actions taken by the United States Supreme Court on several occasions have prompted considerable outrage among conservatives and Christians alike. Among the top of the list are abortion, teen pregnancy, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage. These are clearly some of the ramifications of a changing culture.

On January 22, 1973, United States Supreme Court made the most controversial decision concerning the sanctity of life. The case known as *Roe v. Wade* was a landmark case with a majority vote of 7 to 2 in favor of Norma L. McCorvey (alias, Jane Roe). This

³⁹ Malphurs, 101.

decision gave a woman the right to end her pregnancy for any reason up to twenty-eight weeks.

The term abortion has been redefined or categorized as “choice” rather than the taking of a life. Society has become so desensitized that life has become cheap. The value system of our nation has changed dramatically over the years. Based upon varying newspapers and television broadcasts, it would seem that the preservation of turtle eggs located in the sand dunes of the Gulf Coast have become more important than the life of an unborn child. It is horrific to think that society has taken such a cold and inhumane approach to life, but what is more disturbing is that many within the realms of the church have embraced the same cultural attitude.

It should be noted that abortion is more than just a procedure to end a life; it is a very lucrative business as well. Carol N. Everett⁴⁰ says,

Abortion is the most commonly performed surgical procedure in the United States today (excluding circumcision). Abortion is the only surgical procedure performed without an informed consent except in those two states of Pennsylvania and Mississippi. Abortion is not about rights or choices, or even rape or incest. Abortion is about money. It is skillfully marketed product, sold to a frightened young woman at a crisis time in her life. She buys that product, finds it defective, but she can't return it for a refund. Her baby is dead.⁴¹

It is unfortunate that society has so readily adopted this culture and that it has spread within the walls of the church. There are clear biblical mandates concerning life and the preservation of life. Society and science can redefine life and the point of

⁴⁰ Carol N. Everett is a pro-life seminar speaker and author who heads Life Network based in Dallas.

⁴¹ Carol N. Everett, “Getting Rich Off A Woman's Right to Choose Life,” in *Life At Risk: The Crises in Medical Ethics*, ed. Land, Richard D. and Louis A. Moore (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 61-62.

viability as much as they desire, but they cannot change the fact that life begins from the moment of conception. The Scripture says in Jer. 1:4-5, “Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

Again, abortion is often referred to as “choice” but the sad part is that the one being aborted is not given a choice. He or she becomes the victim. In addition, those who support abortions refer to themselves as being “pro-choice,” however, the choice has already been made and the pregnancy is the result of that choice. Choices have always been a part of life and will continue to be. But, we must remember that choices have consequences and those consequences require accepting responsibility. Unfortunately, abortion has become the accepted alternative. Abortions are performed due to numerous reasons, but, according to Elaine Ham, “Regardless of the reasons, over 95 percent of abortions are performed as a matter of convenience—not rape, not incest, not life of the mother.”⁴² Although when the health or life of the mother is brought into question, it creates a moral dilemma for many. However, it is interesting to note that according to Bill Hybels, “Former Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, during 35-plus years of practicing medicine states, ‘Never once did a case come across my practice where abortion was necessary to save a mother’s life’.”⁴³

Abortion is not only a worldwide tragedy; it is performed at an almost epidemic rate. If we were considering any other procedure, disease, disorder, or malady performed

⁴² Elaine Ham, “Desperate Choices,” *On Mission: Pastors’ Edition*, Winter, 2008, 21.

⁴³ Bill Hybels, *One Church's Answer to Abortion* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 22-23.

at the rate that abortions are, there would be a world outcry. According to statistics, there have been 50,766,331 abortions from 1973–2008 in the United States and over 1.2 million per year. Time is of the essence—one baby is aborted every twenty-six seconds.⁴⁴

Although abortions have declined over the past decade or so, more needs to be done to prevent or eliminate them all together. Crisis pregnancy centers are helping tremendously. In a magazine article, Elaine Ham states,

While crisis pregnancy centers have certainly made a difference in the number of abortions performed annually, the numbers remain alarmingly high. Few people realize that in the United States, one out of three pregnancies ends in abortion, or that abortion is legal throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy. Even more disheartening is the fact that abortion statistics are the same for women inside the church as those outside.⁴⁵

The statistics are staggering, and it becomes obvious that a changing culture has played a large part in affecting society, the church, and most importantly, the unborn.

Abortion is not the only issue that is plaguing society and the church. There seems to be an epidemic of moral decay. “A few years ago one’s failures and perversion were occasions of shame, guilt or embarrassment. This is not true in our modern culture. For some today those same things are occasions to star on television talk shows. The culture that permeates our society in America today is chronically sick and without moorings.”⁴⁶ Unfortunately, due to this aspect of a changing culture, children are becoming mothers themselves. Teenagers are becoming adults far too early.

⁴⁴ Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, “United States Abortion Statistics,” *Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life*, <http://www.mccl.org/Page.aspx?pid=400/> (accessed March 6, 2010).

⁴⁵ Ham, 21.

⁴⁶ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 12.

Teen pregnancies have become more and more prevalent and acceptable in the past few years. In some areas it has almost become a fad. Society has promoted sex education to the point that it all but endorses sexual promiscuity. It is usually taught on the presumption that teenagers are going to be sexually active anyway, so why not teach them the proper way to best protect themselves. This all sounds good on the surface, but underneath it promotes a culture of irresponsibility. Abstinence is seen as a step back to the days of the caveman and is not taught, except on rare occasions, and/or in private or Christian school settings. It is an issue that has been culturally promoted verbally, and our silence has been interpreted as consent.

Unfortunately, the present culture would rather teach sex education than abstinence. Society today insists that teenagers won't hear the message of abstinence. This is not statistically accurate. According to Joe McIlhaney, a medical doctor specializing in obstetrical/gynecological care and noted author,

We have spent more than \$3 billion in the U.S. on sex education programs. The level of sexual activity, the number of teen pregnancies, and the abortion rate all have gone up almost with direct correlation to the increased amount of money spent on the traditional sex education programs we have been using. These sex education programs seem in some way to be causing young people to increase their sexual activity if the amount of money and its correlation to increased sexual activity can be used as an indicator.⁴⁷

It appears that the present programs are complete failures. In fact, a study conducted by Emory University Medical School showed that "low-income teens were taught the value of delaying sexual intercourse. The results of this study showed that students who had not been in the program were five times more likely to have started having sex than the ones

⁴⁷ Joe S. McIlhaney Jr., *Teens and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, in *Life At Risk: The Crises in Medical Ethics*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 263.

who had participated in the program.”⁴⁸ In addition, “Some would say it is naïve to believe that teenagers will hear that they should be abstinent until marriage and follow that guideline.”⁴⁹ Studies show that this is a message that teenagers will hear. McIlhaney continues,

It is quite obvious that if schools and parents and churches teach kids that they should be abstinent until they get married, they will hear this message. It is important that people who teach this message be enthusiastic about it. They should not be afraid to be directive. If they tell a student that as soon as they feel mature and responsible they can make a decision about sex, young people assume that it is okay for them to have sex and will frequently choose to do so because they feel they have the blessing of those people who are teaching them. It is important, therefore, that teachers and parents be directive to kids and tell them that they should not have sex until they get married, just as teachers and parents are now telling kids they should not smoke and should not use drugs.⁵⁰

Teenagers are experiencing some of the greatest moments in their lives as they move from childhood to adulthood; however, with this transition comes numerous challenges that many are not mature enough to grasp. They find themselves in a period of development in which they are no longer children, but they have not reached adulthood either. There are numerous emotional and hormonal changes that teenagers experience during this stage of their life that often leads to indecision, confusion, and doubt. According to Drs. Margaret Andrews and Joyceen Boyle, “Teenagers are in a process of evolving from childhood to adulthood, and they belong not only to the cultural groups that have formed the basis for their values, attitudes, and beliefs but also to the subculture

⁴⁸ McIlhaney, 264.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 264.

of adolescents.”⁵¹ They elaborate on this adolescent subculture: “The adolescent subculture has its own set of values, beliefs, and practices that may or may not be in harmony with those of the cultural group that previously guided the teenagers’ behaviors.... A subculture that is vaguely structured, without formal written laws or codes, in which conformity with the peer group is emphasized.”⁵²

The various influences that the present generation of teenagers faces are overwhelming and their effects are often devastating. Unfortunately, the problem does not stop just within society; teen pregnancies are becoming a rising issue in the realms of the church. One would think that among the Christian community there would be a level of safety or protection, but we must remember, the home must be the first place of accountability. Many parents have attempted to shift the sole responsibility of the spiritual well-being of their families to the church. In a magazine article, Mary Yerkes says, “It seems that in recent years parents have grown lax in taking responsibility for their teen’s spiritual growth, relegating it instead to the church or youth minister. A few hours at church a week will do little to reverse the pull of today’s culture. Biblically, parents hold the primary responsibility for their teenager’s spiritual formation.”⁵³

This brings up several questions: When fourteen, fifteen, sixteen year olds walk into their youth groups at church and announce they are pregnant, what is the youth leader to do? What is the response of the church? What is the pastor to do? To what

⁵¹ Margaret M. Andrews and Joyceen S. Boyle, *Transcultural Concepts in Nursing Care*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1995), 159.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Mary J. Yerkes, “Raising On Mission Teens,” *On Mission: Pastors' Edition*, Fall, 2007, 62.

extent does one minister? These are real and viable questions that must be answered. Even though there are and will be no easy answers for these questions, there is always the hope that the message of the cross presented by the church, taught in the home, and practiced in the world will bridge this chasm of sin.

As has been previously mentioned, society has also attacked the institution of marriage. If culture is one's belief and the manner in which we act upon our belief, as this study defines it, then we have seen another cultural shift or change involving the sanctity of marriage. Marriage, biblically speaking, has always been between one man and one woman. God never intended it to be otherwise.

It is obvious that society has disregarded the biblical foundations of marriage. The destruction of the traditional marriage had its origin when society deemed that homosexuality was no longer to be considered a perversion, but it was to be identified as an "alternative lifestyle." In reality they were attempting to declassify homosexuality as a sin and present it as a viable and acceptable lifestyle. Again, this is a shift in culture and one that some churches are even embracing.

Homosexuality can be traced back to the earliest pages of history and the Scriptures. It does not matter whether the name is changed to appear more appealing or less disturbing; it is still the same as it has always been and that is sin. It is also worth mentioning that neither society nor the church has the right to alter God's teaching. Society seems to have this desire or passion to renegotiate terminology, and they have the idea if the terminology is changed, then the perception will change and ultimately its acceptance will also change. Unfortunately, in many cases this has proven to be accurate. However, no matter if society and even the church accept this cultural shift, it still will

not stand up under the auspices of the Scriptures. Paul Powell says, “We live in a time of moral confusion. Young people are sleeping around, athletes are abusing drugs, men and women are living together out of wedlock. Drunkenness, pornography, and homosexuality are accepted practices. Celebrities are becoming criminals and public officials are on the take. It is a dark day in which we live.”⁵⁴

The homosexual agenda is stronger today than any time in history. It can be seen in every aspect of life. However, it is especially disturbing that it is being forced upon us through legislative means, and it is being promoted in our public schools. The following story illustrates their agenda:

Christian parents are increasingly aware that the public schools are prime battlegrounds for cultural conflict. Given the deep ideological chasm that separates the worldviews and expectations of many educators from those held by many parents, we should not be surprised by the vitriolic nature of this conflict.

That said, recent developments indicate that the public schools will soon be even more hostile to the convictions of many Christian families. Just ask Rob and Robin Wirthlin, parents of a seven-year-old student at Joseph Estabrook Elementary School in Lexington, Massachusetts. The Wirthlins’ son came home talking about a school lesson based on the book *King & King*—a parable about homosexual marriage. In the story, the young prince decides that he wants to marry the one he loves, who happens to be another prince.

“My son is only 7 years old,” this concerned mother remarked. “By presenting this kind of issue at such a young age, they’re trying to indoctrinate our children. They’re intentionally presenting this as a norm, and it’s not a value that our family supports.”

That same school district was roiled by controversy just months before when another parent, David Parker, complained that his son, a first-grader, had been taught about families with same-sex parents and sent home with a “diversity book bag.” The lesson? The children were taught that there are no normal families, and that all family structures are equally valid. Those who think otherwise are lacking in appreciation for—you guessed it—family diversity.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Paul W. Powell, *The Church Today* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1997), 103.

⁵⁵ Mohler, 65-66.

With the redefining of the term of homosexuality and the general acceptance of this lifestyle, the traditional marriage becomes the next casualty of a shifting culture. It is becoming more and more obvious as different states and Congress are constantly debating this issue and it is being brought to the forefront that traditional marriage will soon be an exiguous concept. That is, unless the church takes a stand to revitalize the biblical mandate she has been given. The church must return to her roots and allow God to direct her paths and refuse to allow society and the world to dictate her future.

There are those who would defend this lifestyle by declaring that God made them that way, to which we would reply, God made you, but sin defiled you. In addition, to those who would have us to believe that they are predisposed to homosexuality, the reply would simply be, man has been predisposed to sin ever since the Garden of Eden. In an article by Donald Wildmon published in the *American Family Association Journal*, he states, “And this is what the Bible teaches: Homosexuality is a sign of a person’s brokenness through the fall of man, a brokenness that all human beings share.... This is what Christians mean when they say that homosexuality is immoral. It is not that gays and lesbians are less human, it is that their humanness is broken like everyone else’s, and our celebration of that brokenness is an offense before God.”⁵⁶

There are numerous other ramifications of culture, but suffice it to say that volumes could be written and yet, volumes would remain to be written. Culture is woven in the very fabric of our existence, and it will always be an intrinsic part of society and

⁵⁶ Donald E. Wildmon, “Homosexual Agenda,” <http://www.afa.net>, July, 2007, <http://www.afajournal.org/2007/july/0707agenda.asp/> (accessed March 7, 2010).

the church. It is interesting to note that the present culture is filled with considerable anomalies. It can be illustrated in the following manner:

We have evolved into a schizophrenic society. Think about it. We listen to Billy Graham pray at presidential inaugurals and then punish schoolchildren who try to pray at graduations or football games. We watch our president and other elected leaders put their hands on the Bible to take the oath of office, but school administrators are fired for opening the same Bible to give counsel to wayward students. We cry out for law and order in our streets and at the same time some teach in the classroom that there are no moral absolutes. We cry out to stop so many illegitimate births and allow the government to subsidize the type of behavior that guarantees its rise. We're concerned about the high rate of teens involved in sex and instead of emphasizing abstinence, many of our administrators give them condoms in the schools. We say we have a dire need for the family to stay together and at the same time we liberalize divorce laws so that it becomes easier and easier simply to walk away. This is the culture we are called to engage and reach. This is the post-modern world around us. So many Christians hunker down behind the stained glass walls of their churches and shelter themselves from the world. They manifest an isolationism instead of an insulationism. Therefore, some of us live and think like we still are in a world that is governed by an ethic and a culture that is compatible and compassionate with the truth of the Bible. This is the only world some of us in the church know. And that would be all right if Christ had not given us a command to win our world to Himself. Unfortunately, the world around us does not share our values or our truth claims.⁵⁷

The cultural phenomenon will never be completely understood. Culture will always change, and there will be positive and negative results. Society and the church will most likely always be at odds. However, it is not the church's responsibility to be in tune with the world but to sound the trumpet loud and clear. Paul says, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor. 14:8). May the church always be prepared to engage the battle of the cultures!

⁵⁷ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 13.

CHAPTER 3

THE ESSENCE OF COMPASSION

The “good old days,” an often-used phrase of the previous generation, was not coined because they were longing for the days without modern day conveniences, appliances, better working conditions, more pay, or better transportation. It was most likely prompted due to the love, support, and compassion experienced by communities and society as a whole; reflecting back to a time when communities relied on each other, neighbors knew their neighbors and shared a social bond foreign to many today.

As previously discussed, culture has contributed greatly to the decline of our values, morals, and Christian principles. This has led to the demise of compassion and therefore, compassion has become a casualty of a changing culture.

From the earliest recordings of the Scripture, we have witnessed the evidence of compassion. Although man’s disobedience brought about God’s judgments, it also initiated man’s need for compassion. It was in the Garden, after man sinned, that God performed His first act of compassion. He provided the means for sustenance, clothing, and protection. It was also an act of compassion when He banished and then prevented them from returning to the Garden. We must remember that within the confines of the Garden was the tree of life and the Scripture says, “And the Lord God said, Behold, the

man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen. 3:22). For the man to take of the tree of life in his sins would have sentenced him to a life of condemnation. There would have been no hope of redemption. MacArthur explains Gen. 3:22-23 in the following manner:

God told man that he would surely die if he ate of the forbidden tree. But God’s concern may also have been that man not live forever in his pitifully cursed condition. Taken in the broader context of Scripture, driving the man and his wife out of the garden was an act of merciful grace to prevent them from being sustained forever by the tree of life.¹

Warren Wiersbe explains these verses in a similar manner:

Verses 22-24 show a strange action of the grace of God: He drove the man and woman out of the garden! They had forfeited their right to the tree of life by disobeying God. If they had eaten of that tree, they would have lived forever in their sinful state. This would mean that the Savior, the Second Adam, could not come to die to deliver humans from sin. Thus, in driving Adam and Eve out of paradise, God was showing His grace and mercy to the whole human race.²

It is important to note that God’s compassion is never based on merit or works; it is based solely on His goodness, thus He made provisions for all of mankind.

Man betrayed God by his disobedience, but in the midst of man’s sin the epitome of compassion is evidenced through God’s love. God demonstrated His love by showing man the epitome and essence of compassion. Even with this demonstration, man continues to struggle with compassion. The source of this struggle is selfishness, pride, and insecurity. These prohibit man from experiencing the fullness that God intended.

¹ John MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), 21.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament, 2nd Ed* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993), Gen. 3:22-24.

The essence of compassion demands that we move beyond the realms of self and invest in the lives of others. When we exhibit compassion to the fullest, we will realize that everyone is our neighbor.

Identifying Compassion

“Once upon a time ...,” a familiar beginning to children’s stories, could also be a fitting introduction for compassion. There was a time when communities, churches, and neighbors demonstrated compassion by helping others and relieving the hurt of the suffering. To some degree, compassion has become a lost art, especially in its application. One of the main contributing factors is the culture in which we live—a time when we have become self-serving rather than attending to the needs of others.

Compassion appears to be a very simplistic word. Its clarity, however, has become somewhat blurred over the years, or at least its application has become distorted and often times ignored. It has been called sympathy, empathy, pity, concern, care or in a spiritual context, mercy and grace. All of these are applicable and some are even interchangeable, but compassion consists of more than the definition of any of these words. Compassion, in its truest sense, initiates action.

We have attempted to confine compassion to the realms of the church and apply it selectively. The need for compassion is evident within the church as well as the world. There are many who have related it to feeling sorry for someone, but it is so much more than that. It is reaching beyond human reasoning and reaching into the hearts of others. In addition, it is identifying with the hurts and sorrows of mankind, which cannot be limited to man’s terminology. We must move beyond the realms of human understanding and allow God to move within our hearts.

We can also relate compassion to ministry. Christians are to be sensitive to the needs of others. Warren says, “If you aren’t serving, you’re just existing, because life is meant for ministry. God wants you to learn to love and serve others unselfishly.”³

Jesus was moved with compassion on numerous occasions. Throughout the New Testament, we see the evidence of compassion. Matthew records a prime example of Jesus showing compassion:

¹⁴And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. ¹⁵And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. ¹⁶But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. ¹⁷And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. ¹⁸He said, Bring them hither to me. ¹⁹And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. ²⁰And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. ²¹And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children (Matthew 14:14-21).

Jesus went about healing the sick, but He went beyond addressing their physical ailments and responded to their fundamental needs as well. We must never limit our response to only one aspect. Fulfilling the needs of the entire person must always be the aspiration.

Compassion is more than the typical definitions, it is responding. It is responding to, not only the physical aspects, but also to the spiritual and/or emotional aspects. Often times the Scripture may not refer to a particular event as compassion but the results usually identify it as such. Frequently it comes wrapped in different packages. For example, it is bearing one another’s burden and alleviating the suffering of others. Paul

³ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 232.

calls upon the church at Galatia to care for each other. He says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:1-2). The church must respond to the faults and sins of others with compassion, understanding that they are also capable of falling prey to the devices of Satan.

Learning to listen often times is one of the greatest aspects of compassion a person can give. The world is shouting all sorts of conflicting messages to society and the church. It becomes hard to distinguish which voices to listen to and which to ignore; however, compassion can help sort these messages out. MacDonald states,

In our pressurized society, people who are out of shape mentally usually fall victim to ideas and systems that are destructive to the human spirit and to human relationships. They are victimized because they have not taught themselves how to think; nor have they set themselves to the lifelong pursuit of the growth of the mind. Not having the facility of a strong mind, they grow dependent upon the thoughts and opinions of others. Rather than deal with ideas and issues, they reduce themselves to lives full of rules, regulations, and programs.⁴

In situations such as these, compassion must be shown. It is imperative that a clear and positive message be sent to alleviate the downward path that may well lead into a state of despair and despondency. Many times listening is the only avenue we have for recognizing the need for compassion. It can be found in every walk of life and among every age group. Although we do not have to look beyond the realms of our families, friends, and churches to locate the need, we must also look in the world. Love stirs compassion and compassion responds. Warren says, “Love leaves a legacy. How you

⁴ MacDonald, 105.

treated other people, not your wealth or accomplishments, is the most enduring impact you can leave on earth.”⁵ Compassion is the greatest method of expressing love.

Perimeters of Compassion

What are the boundaries of compassion? The boundaries are not set in stone nor are they limited by our own expectations. There are times when man establishes rigid guidelines or criteria that restrict the efforts of others. In Jesus’ day many would have never considered the needs of the woman at the well. They would have determined that she was beyond the realms of compassion. Judgment would have been the reaction of the disciples because of her heritage and moral status, but Jesus responded in love with compassion and she went about the city crying, “Come, see a man ...” (John 4:29).

The scope of compassion must be inclusive of everyone. Jesus described the heart of His ministry when He was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. He informed them that the Scripture He read from Isaiah was fulfilled that day. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). Compassion can easily be seen in these verses. Love and compassion were the catalyst of Jesus’ ministry.

There is no limit to the extent that compassion can or should be shown. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a prime example of the far-reaching effects of compassion. When the prodigal realized his condition, he made the decision to go to his father’s

⁵ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 125.

house. He began his long journey home not knowing the response of his father, but was willing to be made a hired servant. Although this son had behaved badly and had sinned greatly, the father never ceased to love him and anxiously awaited and looked to the horizon for his son. When his son appeared, the father looked beyond his son's sin and was moved with compassion: "But when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20b). This is compassion at its best.

The perimeters of compassion must also extend to the world. In his book, *The Fruit of Christ's Presence*, Harry Poe states:

Jesus never gave us the option of deciding who does and who does not deserve love and mercy. He came and died on the cross for the people of the world, none of whom deserve it, and He loves every creature on earth. God expects His children to have the same attitude He has. Love is not the warm feeling we have for the people close to us; it is what we do for the ones who do not deserve it.⁶

The church is commanded to reach out to the world; unfortunately, many churches want compassion to be limited within the realms of the church. In their book, *Comeback Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson say, "Most Christians don't like lost people. We wish it were not so, but it is. Lost people don't think like us; they often don't vote like us; they influence our kids; they don't know our inside references to Dobson, *Left Behind*, and Davie Ramsey. They are not 'our' people. Let's face it: people outside of Christ can be messy!"⁷ Compassion may well be the medium to reach the world.

⁶ Harry L. Poe, *The Fruit of Christ's Presence* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 33.

⁷ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 62.

Judgment is not a part of compassion. It does not judge. In their book, *Chain Reaction*, Darrell Scott and Steve Rabey said, “I can remember times when instead of condemning me, someone showed mercy to me. Instead of saying, ‘You are wrong and you will pay,’ someone said, ‘You know, I’ve made some big mistakes myself, and I’m just going to let this mistake of yours go’.”⁸ Although there are times when people and churches are taken advantage of, compassion forges ahead and accepts people “warts and all.” Like love, compassion does not keep a record of wrongs. We do not have to know the circumstances by which compassion is sought. MacDonald says,

In recent years it has become very clear that many people in our society are under constant and destructive stress as life for them operates at a pace that offers little time for any restorative rest and retreat. The costs related to stress are astronomical in the health-care industry as we discover its links to heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidental injuries, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.⁹

We must never forget that compassion is responding when people are hurting or in need and the reasons are inconsequential.

Compassion is not looking the other way and hoping that you will not have to deal with it or get involved. Involvement is exactly what compassion calls for. It is investing in the life of others, taking a chance, becoming a part of the other person’s problems. To look at others and casually say, “that is not my problem,” “they brought it on themselves,” or “let someone else help” is a callous manner in which to deal with human hurts. And, it shows a lack of compassion.

⁸ Darrell Scott and Steve Rabey, *Chain Reaction: A Call to Compassionate Revolution* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 131.

⁹ MacDonald, 30.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example of this callous attitude. Although there are underlying themes concerning this story, the theme here is one of compassion. No details are included in the identity or personal status of the man who fell among thieves, just the fact that he did. And that is all that is needed. The man was left for dead and a priest came by, who not only failed to respond, but passed by on the other side alleviating himself of any details that would bring about conviction and require a response. Then, a Levite, a worker in the temple, passed by and assessed the situation and chose not to become involved and he also passed by on the other side. A Samaritan came by as he was journeying and saw the man and had “compassion” on him. The Samaritan did not ask any questions as to what had happened, why it had happened, or who the man was. He saw a need and responded. He did not do a background check, ask for a financial statement, or even ask where he lived. He just responded, as compassion does. Not only did the Samaritan see the need and respond immediately by cleaning and bandaging his wounds, but he placed the man on his own beast and took him to a place of comfort and healing. Upon his departure he made provisions for the man’s further needs. In addition, he assured the provider of his care that he would be responsible for anything else left owing for the care of the man and that he would settle the debt upon his return.

This story illustrates the epitome of compassion. It also identifies our neighbor. Poe states, “The Samaritan responded from the deep-seated attitude that if someone needed his help, he was going to help the person. Love is more than a feeling. It is an attitude for living that can be willed.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Poe, 29.

Although the previous parable was initiated by a lawyer who was endeavoring to tempt Jesus, Jesus used it as an opportunity to teach love and compassion. It is interesting to note that in the beginning of the lawyer's verbal exchange with Jesus that Jesus seeks the lawyer's interpretation of the Scriptures. In fact, the lawyer had a thorough understanding of the law, and Jesus acknowledges that fact and says, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28). However, the lawyer proceeds to ask the question, "...who is my neighbor?" Upon completing the story of the Samaritan, Jesus instructs the lawyer, "Go, and do thou likewise." The point being, no matter how much knowledge and understanding we have, if it is not implemented, then, it is of little value. Dave Donaldson and Terry Glaspey say, "We are called to a lifestyle of becoming increasingly others-centered. It is a new way of thinking, of seeing, of believing. Then, when we meet people in pain, there is no question in our mind. We care. We serve. We love. We put their needs above our comfort or convenience."¹¹

It is imperative that we realize that life is filled with moments of tragedy, heartache, and disappointments, and there are always going to be those who are in need. Jesus said in Matt. 26:11, "For ye have the poor with you always; but me ye have not always." Powell says,

We are not to see ourselves as spectators in the arena of life, but as servants. We are the hands of Christ to reach out to the needy; we are the eyes of Christ to see the hurt of human hearts; we are the ears of Christ to hear the cries of the distressed; we are the feet of Christ to rush to the side of the oppressed; we are the voice of Christ to speak his message of salvation and hope.¹²

¹¹ Dave Donaldson and Terry Glaspey, *The Compassion Revolution: How God Can Use You to Meet the World's Greatest Needs* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2010), 198.

¹² Powell, *The Church Today*, 41.

No one is beyond the realms of the need for compassion. If we are to be the hands, eyes, ears, feet, and voice of Christ, then we must become involved. We must ask ourselves the question, “What would Jesus do?”

The Fruit of Compassion

It would be wonderful if we could just go out to the “compassion orchard” and pick a bushel of compassion and share it with our neighbors. However, the problem would be that our success-oriented society would want to market it because of its demand and lucrative opportunity. In addition, we would realize that not everyone is in need of the same species of compassion so we would need to grow numerous varieties of compassion. Of course, with each new species would come another valuable asset and it would need marketing also. Obviously, this is ridiculous, but do we not, in some manner, attempt to market compassion? Are there not times when we place a price tag on helping others? Or, do we expect or anticipate a favor in return or some reciprocal action?

The fruit of compassion can best be described as the value of compassion. We must never underestimate its value. One of the most important things to remember concerning compassion is its impact on the world. It has the ability to alter and change the lives of everyone it encounters. Consider the story of Rachel Joy Scott,¹³ one of the thirteen people killed at Columbine. She had a heart for God, and although she struggled

¹³ Rachel Joy Scott was a teenager who was killed in the shooting at Columbine High School, Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999. Although Rachel had been shot twice in the legs and once in the torso she attempted to crawl to safety. One of the shooters, Harris, grabbed her by her hair, held her head up, and asked her the question, “Do you believe in God?” She replied, “You know I do,” and Harris said, “Then go be with Him.” Harris then shot her in the head.

with her relationship to God, she was immensely compassionate. Her father, Darrell Scott, said, “Looking at Rachel’s writings takes one to the completely opposite end of the spectrum. Repeatedly in her journals, she chose love; she chose compassion; she chose to serve God with a passion.”¹⁴

Compassion breeds compassion. “You may not know it at the time, but when you reach out to others, you become the recipient of things that you cannot really put your finger on, such as true joy and true happiness.”¹⁵ It is difficult for many to understand the value of compassion until they personally encounter it themselves. Everyone, whether they realize it or not, will at one time or the other experience a set of circumstances where compassion is desperately needed.

Compassion leads to service or servanthood. We have a responsibility to look after and care for others. Jesus taught this explicitly. Donaldson and Glaspey say, “You were not created to live an ordinary existence. God has something more for you—a life of experiencing the joy and adventure of making a difference in other people’s lives.... Even if you only have limited resources and gifts—just some bread and fish—God can do something amazing with your life!”¹⁶ There is no greater method in which to love our neighbor than by showing compassion.

The greatest attributes of compassion are the fruits it produces. Warren says,

We serve God by serving others. The world defines greatness in terms of power, possessions, prestige, and position. If you can demand service from others, you’ve

¹⁴ Darrell Scott, Beth Nimmo, and Steve Rabey, *Rachel's Tears: 10 Years After Columbine. . . Rachel Scott's Faith Lives On* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 169.

¹⁵ Scott and Rabey, 111.

¹⁶ Donaldson and Glaspey, 198.

arrived. In our self-serving culture with its *me-first* mentality, acting like a servant is not a popular concept. Jesus, however, measured greatness in terms of service, not status. God determines your greatness by how many people you serve, not how many people serve you. This is so contrary to the world's idea of greatness that we have a hard time understanding it, much less practicing it.¹⁷

Serving and meeting the needs of others may not be very fashionable today, but it pleases the Lord. Servanthood has been described as being the full expression of compassion. In their book, *Compassion*, Donald McNeill, Douglas Morrison, and Henri Nouwen, describe it in this manner: "But, when we realized that Jesus' compassion was born of an intimate listening to the unconditional love of God, we can understand how servanthood can indeed be the full expression of compassion."¹⁸

When compassion is exhibited, it has far-reaching results. Its impact cannot be adequately measured. However, when it is not practiced, the results are often devastating. The story of the unforgiving servant recorded in Matthew 18 illustrates this contrast:

²¹Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²²Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. ²³Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. ²⁹And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the

¹⁷ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 257.

¹⁸ Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, and Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008), 36-37.

debt. ³¹So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³²Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? ³⁴And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Jesus was teaching the necessity of forgiveness without restrictions and in the process showed the results of compassion. Forgiveness is one of its greatest fruits.

In Matthew chapter 5, we find the Sermon on the Mount. The first eleven verses are called the “Beatitudes” in which Jesus identifies the source and recipients of blessings. We can easily recognize the fruit of compassion in these verses.

When compassion is exhibited, blessings usually follow. These blessings are rarely in a monetary fashion, but there are emotional and personal blessings, along with an enormous sense of satisfaction and self-worth. In the book, *Rachel’s Tears*, Scott said, “When we focus our eyes on ‘self,’ we’re looking at the dirt. When we focus on the seed growing in the dirt, we produce fruit! It is so important to understand that the Christian walk is not me becoming perfect; it’s Christ growing to perfection in me.”¹⁹

Much to the surprise of many, compassion benefits those showing compassion as much, if not more than the one receiving it. For some, it is difficult to be the recipient of compassion. However, God’s intention may have been to touch the life of more than one person, the benefactor and beneficiary. In his book, *Your Best Life Now*, Joel Osteen says, “Most of the time, when we reach out to other people, when we follow that flow of love, we think we’re doing it for their sakes, for their benefit. But I can tell you firsthand,

¹⁹ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, 51.

sometimes God puts that compassion in our hearts as much for our own benefit as for others.”²⁰ God is always moving in our midst, and we never know whether the purpose of the compassion we show is for us, others, or both.

Again, compassion produces its own fruit. The more compassion is exhibited, the more we become the recipients to it and the more blessings it brings. Every aspect of compassion, whether giving, forgiving, loving, caring, sharing, or any other aspect, it tends to positively affect the person who initiated it. According to John Swinton,

When engaged in regularly, Christian practices cease to become things that we simply do; instead, they become vital aspects of *who we are*. As we practice compassion, so we become compassionate people; as we practice forgiveness, we become forgiving people; as we practice lament, we become the type of people who know what it means to bring our sadness faithfully before God.²¹

God is constantly blessing those who touch the lives of others. Although this should never be the incentive to help others, it clearly shows the compassion of God.

Foundation of Compassion

As previously mentioned, compassion can be found in the earliest records of the Scripture. It was evidenced in the Garden of Eden and throughout the Old Testament.

Donaldson and Glaspey describe God’s compassion in the following manner:

God demonstrates His compassion toward us by entering into the human condition and feeling our pain and anguish, our spiritual and physical impoverishment, our hopelessness and fear. Jesus is called Immanuel for that very reason. Immanuel means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)...God, the Creator of the universe, entered our pain to bring help, healing, and hope. So we too, as His

²⁰ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Warner Faith, 2004), 249.

²¹ John Swinton, *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 84.

followers, should enter into other people's pain to bring them practical help and a connection to Him who is the source of all hope.²²

God is seen as being compassionate and that compassion flows through Jesus Christ. It was God's love for mankind that He sent His Son into the world and to adorn Himself in flesh and live among us. The Scripture says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15). Jesus was God incarnate and therefore endured all that we encounter. He walked with man, side by side, talked with them face to face, dwelled in their presence, touched their lives physically, spiritually, and emotionally. We must understand that as a man, he became tired, hungry, thirsty, and was subject to pain just as we are. He needed rest, relaxation, and quietness. He wept at the death of His friend, Lazarus, and over Jerusalem. In His flesh, He identified with every aspect of the flesh. He overcame the temptation in the wilderness through perfect obedience, and He was ministered unto by the angels, thus identifying with the need for compassion.

In the book, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, the authors give the definition and an overall view of compassion:

The word *compassion* is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean "to suffer with." Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human. When we look at compassion this way, it becomes clear that something more is involved than a general kindness or tenderheartedness.²³

²² Donaldson and Glaspey, 29.

²³ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 3-4.

Compassion is based solely on God; it is not an invention of man or a concept that man initiated. God is a compassionate God, and the very foundation on which we base compassion is His love, sacrifice, and being. It is moving beyond the realms of human understanding and submitting ourselves to Him and acting accordingly. It has been said, “His divine compassion makes it possible for us to face our sinful selves, because it transforms our broken human condition from a cause of despair into a source of hope.”²⁴ Compassion is responding. It is saying, “I want to help”; “I want to make a difference.” Above all else, it is being like Christ. Paul expresses it well to the Philippians,

¹If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ²Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³*Let* nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. ⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1-5).

The heart of compassion is love. God’s love for mankind was the foundation for His compassion. After man sinned in the Garden of Eden and Cain killed Abel, the wickedness of man rose up before God: “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Gen. 6:6). And, yet, considering the fact that God could have destroyed every living thing, He chose to be compassionate: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). This gives us yet another example of God’s compassion.

The foundation of compassion is God working through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it was with Jesus’ total commitment and obedience to the Father that He was able to identify with our pain and suffering. McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen state, “Because

²⁴ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 15.

through Jesus' complete obedience God compassionately entered into our broken, wounded, and painful human condition."²⁵

Looking at the works of Jesus, we have the perfect examples of compassion and its foundation. Compassion reaches within the heart of the individual. Responding without any preconceived ideas or expectations is the premise of compassion. Hurting with the hurting, weeping with the weeping, and encouraging the discouraged is the manner in which compassion flourishes. It has been said, "One of the best things you can do if you're having a problem is help solve somebody else's problem."²⁶

Jesus never walked away from need, even when a woman of Canaan came to Him with her daughter who was vexed with a devil. Although Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.... It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs" (Matt. 15:24, 26). However, she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matt. 15:27). Because of the mother's faith, her daughter was made whole. Donaldson and Glaspey have written: "When Jesus saw needs, He did not simply feel a nice tidy bit of pity. No, He felt an internal churning of deepest sympathy and compassion. He became sick with the sick, grief-stricken with the grieving, and hurt for the hurting."²⁷

The essence of compassion can be found in the lives of everyday, ordinary people. Throughout history we have seen its effects and the manner in which it has changed the lives of countless hundreds of thousands. No special training is required to

²⁵ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 33.

²⁶ Osteen, 222.

²⁷ Donaldson and Glaspey, 31.

implement it and anyone can share it or be the recipient. Scott said, "... I want you to see how all of us—no matter how torn and troubled we are—can be vehicles for God's supernatural love and compassion."²⁸

There was a time when compassion was demonstrated in a much more visible manner. When someone in the community suffered a loss such as a barn burning, the neighbors came together to rebuild the structure. More than that, they were moved with compassion and they responded in love. Compassion and love became a way of life and they were shown with no strings attached.

Compassion is an active characteristic of love that seeks to bring comfort, hope, encouragement, fortitude, and support. Rachel Scott was a typical teenager struggling with good and evil, her fellowship with the Lord, and the changing culture, yet she had grasped a pretty good understanding of compassion. Rachel wrote an essay called, "My Ethics, My Codes of Life," in which she described her definition of compassion. In her essay she states, "My definition of compassion is forgiving, loving, helping, leading, and showing mercy for others. I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go."²⁹ Perhaps Osteen has rightly said, "Somebody needs what you have to give."³⁰

In a time when the world and society seem to be marching to their own drumbeat and are persistently overlooking the needs of their fellowman, the question might well be:

²⁸ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, 78.

²⁹ Scott and Rabey, 55.

³⁰ Osteen, 230.

“Where do we go from here?” There is a lot of need for compassion throughout the world. Not only Christians, but everyone can make a difference in the lives of others. The needs can be seen in every city, town, and community. We usually look for them among the unfortunate: homeless shelters, garbage dumps, street corners, intersections holding signs, “Will work for food.” They are even closer than you realize. Who are they? A friend who is too embarrassed for you to see their condition; your neighbors who are struggling to pay their electric bill; members of your church who are afraid of rejection; your relative who is too ashamed to confide in you! In addition, they may be emotionally or spiritually struggling and feel that no one cares. Perhaps, they can relate to the words of the Psalmist, “I looked on *my* right hand, and beheld, but *there was* no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul” (Ps. 142:4). Many are not in need of financial or physical support, their greatest need is a friend, a friend who will meet them where they are and identify with their pain. Compassion will meet them there and help alleviate their hurts.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHALLENGE OF COMPASSION

“March Madness.” A fitting term for the competitive spirit exemplified during the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament. It is a time when every school from every conference in the United States sends their very best to compete for the coveted title, “NCAA Champions.” The competition is fierce as each team faces its greatest challenges of the year. They have worked hard throughout the year to receive an invitation to play in this prestigious tournament. One by one, teams are eliminated until eventually two teams face off for the final game. Only one will win and be crowned “Champion.” Every individual who participates will remember when ..., but it will only be a memory and will have no lasting effect. The competition, the challenge, and the excitement are all great, but at the end of the day, life will resume its normal routine and people will go their separate ways without having experienced any lasting or life-changing results.

The challenge before us today is not one of strength, power, prestige, talent, or ability; rather, it is one of compassion. It is by far more complex than those mentioned and it has the potential to impact the lives of people beyond measure. Compassion is the key that unlocks the door of the bereaved, the hurting, the discouraged, the lonely, the

brokenhearted, and the lost, just to mention a few. There is no shortage of need, just responders.

The world is reaching out for someone, anyone, to care and come where they are and respond to their needs. When their cries are heard, it will move us beyond the realms of complacency to the depths of compassion. The status quo will be but a distant memory as we meet the challenge and experience the fullness of His love.

Whether Jesus was walking the streets of Jerusalem, on the shore of Galilee, or in the Judean Wilderness, He always encountered those who were in need. It has been observed:

When Jesus saw the crowd harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd, he felt with them in the center of his being (Mt 9:36). When Jesus saw the blind, the paralyzed, and the deaf being brought to him from all directions, he trembled from within and experienced their pains in his own heart (Mt 14:14). When he noticed that the thousands who had followed him for days were tired and hungry, Jesus said, I am moved with compassion (Mk 8:2). And so it was with the two blind men who called after him (Mt 9:27), the leper who fell to his knees in front of him (Mk 1:41), and the widow of Nain who was burying her only son (Lk 7:13). They moved Jesus, they made him feel with all his intimate sensibilities the depth of their sorrow. He became lost with the lost, hungry with the hungry, and sick with the sick. In Jesus, all suffering was sensed with a perfect sensitivity. The great mystery revealed to us in this is that Jesus, who is the sinless son of God, chose in total freedom to suffer fully our pains and thus to let us discover the true nature of our own passions. In him, we see and experience the persons we truly are. Jesus who is divine lives our broken humanity not as a curse (Gn 3:14-19), but as a blessing. His divine compassion makes it possible for us to face our sinful selves, because it transforms our broken human condition from a cause of despair into a source of hope.¹

This is the challenge that is before us today. A hurting humanity is in need of people who care enough to make a difference. To hear their cries and turn a deaf ear or see their

¹ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 15.

needs and bury our heads in the sand is beyond comprehension, and yet, their cries go unheeded every day.

Challenges are a part of life and everyone will encounter their share of them. The question is not if, but when these challenges will come. The real questions are “Will we rise to the occasion?”; “Will we stand in the gap?”; “Will we make a difference?” These questions are not easily answered, but the answers are within each of us. Only “you” can make a difference.

The Church and Compassion

“Each day I’ll do ... a golden deed ... by helping those ... who are in need....”

These opening words of the old hymn, *A Beautiful Life*, could well describe the church’s call to compassion. Caring churches resonate with these words regularly when they reach within and beyond their walls with compassion. One would assume that if you were to talk of compassion, the ideal place to look would be the church. However, this has not always proven to be the case, especially over the past couple of decades. There has been a change in the manner in which many churches respond today. Unfortunately, it has not been an upward or positive shift and it is not isolated inside the Christian community; society as a whole has adopted this concept.

Churches today, for the most part, are no longer just community churches. They are made up of people from not only their community, but also surrounding communities. Therefore, the boundaries of the “local church” have expanded considerably. This fact has added to the culture of the church changing as well as their ability to minister as effectively.

Although the make-up of the church has changed dramatically, does this negate the church's responsibility of ministering to the needs of those in our communities, and, yes, those in the surrounding communities? Absolutely not! In fact, it may open opportunities for further ministry. There are no boundaries on ministry and meeting the needs of others. O. S. Hawkins said, "Sometimes we drive past a hundred mission opportunities to come to a church and talk about our love for great heroes of the faith...."² Many times we drive as though we have blinders on never looking for needs, or better yet, not wanting to notice them. When we see needs, it solicits a response and often times we would rather not be involved; plus we do not want it to interrupt our schedule or infringe on "our time." In his book, *Taking the Stew Out of Stewardship*, Paul Powell says, "There are lots of people who aren't doing anything and lots of others who are helping them."³

The sad truth is that a number of people do not want to intervene. They do not want the commitment that involvement means; therefore, they ignore or "pass by on the other side." We must realize that there is a portion of society and the church that would rather not render comfort or assistance. Our society today seems to be more focused inwardly than outwardly.

We are inundated with excuses for the lack of involvement. We constantly hear that they are just too busy and their time is just too limited. Time has not changed; the

² O. S. Hawkins, *Shields of Brass or Shields of Gold?: Reestablishing a Standard of Excellence in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1998), 29.

³ Paul W. Powell, *Taking the Stew Out of Stewardship* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1996), 81.

fact is, it is not used as wisely as in days past or as productively in the realms of meeting needs. Consider, “We probably have more time for leisure than we ever had before. The five-day workweek is, after all, a relatively new innovation in history; we have moved away from the farm, where there was always more work to do; we can leave work behind if we want and head for leisure.”⁴ In times past, farmers and workers would work from daylight to dark, but they always managed a time to care for their neighbor. It would seem as though the issue is not the amount of time but the fact that we use it for recreational purposes more than ministerial purposes.

We have become a nation of busyness, which has diminished our relationships, and compassion has become a casualty. Love and compassion builds and enhances relationships, in fact, Warren says,

Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase “one another” or “each other” is used. We are commanded to *love* each other, *pray* for each other, *encourage* each other, *admonish* each other, *greet* each other, *serve* each other, *teach* each other, *accept* each other, *honor* each other, *bear each other’s burdens*, *forgive* each other, *submit* to each other, be *devoted* to each other, and many other mutual tasks.⁵

Relationships enhance the work and ministry of the church. We cannot be sensitive to the needs of others without first investing in their lives, which facilitates a relationship.

Warren suggests, “Busyness is a great enemy of relationships. We become preoccupied with making a living, doing our work, paying bills, and accomplishing goals as if these tasks are the point of life. They are not. The point of life is learning to love—God and

⁴ MacDonald, 193.

⁵ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 134.

people. Life minus love equals zero.”⁶ Until we remember that church is not about programs and organizations, but it is about people, compassion will remain a casualty.

Churches must accept the responsibilities of reaching out to people around them and those they encounter. The church must never allow itself to become selective in their clientele, apart from the doctrinal requirements of membership. So often, churches want only those who are “like-minded,” “like-styled,” “like-politically” or those who will “fit in” to be their focus of outreach and ministry. Rick Warren states, “If your church is serious about reaching the unchurched, you must be willing to put up with people who have a lot of problems. Fishing is often messy and smelly. Many churches want the fish they catch to be already scaled, gutted, cleaned, and cooked.”⁷ At times, we have a tendency to limit our response based on trivial or unfounded reasons. Beth Nimmo, Rachel Scott’s mother, said, “Often, church people seem to put all kinds of barriers in people’s way before we will reach out to them. Sometimes we expect unchurched people to behave nicely, use pleasant language, and live sinless lives. But Jesus never put those kinds of barriers in people’s way. He reached out to them, no matter where they were.”⁸ True compassion will break down the barriers that divide.

The hope of the world is Jesus Christ and He uses the church as a channel by which the lost and unchurched are reached. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe have commented, “In the midst of the blackness of night of hopelessness, despair, and death, it

⁶ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 125.

⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 198.

⁸ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, 110.

is the Church that brings the hope of sunrise. Even in the most ancient of days, the Church was the morning star to give some hope of the coming morning to those who were lost in the darkness.”⁹

The church has a mandate to reach the lost. Matthew 28:19-20 gives the church and the Christian the commission to reach the world. These verses do not exclude or establish criteria of those to be included; it is inclusive of everyone.

The biblical mandate of the church is to reach the lost, but in order to be like Jesus, they must also meet more than their spiritual needs. In fact, Jesus usually dealt with their pains, hurts, and needs first; He went to the blind, the deaf, the lame, and even the dead to attend to their literal needs. Donaldson and Glaspey express it in this manner:

Sometimes we Christians become so focused on salvation—on getting souls into heaven—that we forget that people can hardly hear God’s words of hope when their stomachs are rumbling from hunger. We want to get them to the altar to commit themselves to Jesus, but we fall short of caring for them as whole people—people with very tangible needs. Would not our words, so often rejected out of hand, carry more weight if they were propped up by compassionate actions?¹⁰

It is difficult to attempt to address the lostness of humanity while ignoring their suffering. We must keep in mind that the drowning man cares not about the theory of flotation of the life ring thrown to him, he just knows that he is drowning and needs rescuing. When confronted with the hurt and brokenness of the world, does not the church have an obligation to address these needs? Or, will the response be, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” as Cain did when God confronted him about his brother Abel? Or,

⁹ D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail: The Attack on Christianity and What You Need to Know to Combat It* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 10.

¹⁰ Donaldson and Glaspey, 187.

better yet, will a committee be selected or someone appointed to determine exactly who our neighbor is?

Numerous churches also struggle with compassion because they struggle to get along with each other. The membership is often bogged down with directional issues, power struggles, personnel problems, and, unfortunately, dislike of each other. We do not like to think in that context; this is reality in many churches. Paul addresses a similar situation in the church at Corinth. He says, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:3). Carnality has plagued the church from its inception and no doubt will continue. It must be remembered that churches are made up of imperfect human beings with their own issues and idiosyncrasies.

Conflict or potential conflict hinders the ministry of the church and compassion diminishes to an almost nonexistent state. It is difficult for churches to see the needs of the world outside their walls when they are blind to the needs within the walls. Churches that struggle with conflict or bickering will lose their testimony in the community and their effectiveness will evaporate. No one wants to be a part of a grumbling church. The first church established in the book of Acts was quickly plagued with conflict. One group of widows was not receiving their daily portions and discontentment arose (Acts 6:1-6). No church is immune to conflict. It is a device that Satan uses to prevent the spread of the Gospel, changing lives, and meeting needs.

Often conflict or potential for conflict is the result of self-centeredness and the need for control or power. We must remember that usually self-centered people can be easy prey for Satan. In his book, *Satan’s Whispers*, Robert Don Hughes says, “What egos

we all have! How easy it is for Satan to convince us that we are the only really important person in the world, and that only what we want matters.”¹¹ If Satan can cause Christians to change their focus from ministry to themselves then he has, in effect, eliminated their capacity for compassion. Osteen has said, “Many people nowadays are blatantly and unashamedly living for themselves. They’re not interested in other people. They don’t have time to help others in need. They focus only on what they want, what they need, what they feel will most benefit themselves.”¹² Unfortunately, this attitude prevails more often than we would like to think, even in the church.

Power struggles can cause numerous problems within the realms of the church. In many cases those who seek control and power usually exploit the sensitivity and meekness of compassionate Christians to accomplish their goals. Marshall Shelley addresses this issue in his book, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*. He states,

The problem is that most church members imagine themselves as basically “nice,” willing to bend to keep the peace. This gives lots of leverage, sometimes complete control, to those hard-nosed people willing to make a public scene. The group usually gives them extra space, which translates into power—power to veto programs, to overrule pastors, to alter the direction of the church. Churches can thus be victimized by people who see being “right” as more important than being “nice.”¹³

Although damage is inflicted upon the churches in these situations, the greatest harm comes to those who are in need of ministry. The far-reaching implications can be devastating to a household or even a community.

¹¹ Robert Don Hughes, *Satan's Whispers: Breaking the Lies That Bind* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 111.

¹² Osteen, 221.

¹³ Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1985), 67.

Churches must realize that compassion is not an effortless act. In fact, many hindrances deter Christians from showing compassion. Sometimes people are overcome with their own problems or situations and feel as though they cannot offer the level of compassion that is warranted. It has been said, “Sometimes we excuse ourselves from reaching out to others because we have our own problems and challenges. But God isn’t looking for perfect people to do His work. He is looking for the wounded to become wounded healers.”¹⁴ Some of the best people in the world to demonstrate compassion are those who have experienced the need for compassion or those who deal with the struggles of life on a regular basis. Powell shares a wonderful story that illustrates this:

Gordon Cosby, who is pastor of the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., tells about a very poor widow in his congregation who could barely feed and clothe her six children. One day a church deacon came to Cosby to tell that each week the poor lady put money in the offering plate. The deacon suggested that the pastor should go to the widow and assure her that she could possibly put the money to better use and did not need to give to the church.

Cosby followed the deacon’s advice, to his regret. The widow was very saddened with his suggestion, and said, “You are trying to take away the last thing that gives me dignity and meaning.”¹⁵

Those who have genuinely been in need of compassion can relate to its impact. There is never a question as to who one’s neighbor is; it becomes obvious and real.

Unfortunately, there are times when people are unsure how they are to respond to the pressing needs of their fellowman. They may feel as though they are intruding into someone else’s affairs and that it is none of their concern. They may even rationalize this thought process by saying, “If they wanted help, they would ask for it” or, “If they need help, they should ask.” However, pride or some other reason may prevent them from

¹⁴ Donaldson and Glaspey, 173.

¹⁵ Powell, *Taking the Stew Out of Stewardship*, 58.

asking. For whatever reason, there will always be those who will never ask. And, there will always be an element that will never reach out. Scott and Rabey contend that the biggest obstacles why people don't reach out to help or for help are because of fear and self-protection, "People are afraid of what might happen when they reach out, so they focus on safety rather than compassion."¹⁶

Churches must always be sensitive to the needs of their communities. We are given clear instructions throughout the Scripture to love, care, and show compassion for our fellowman. A chapter in Donaldson and Glaspey's book entitled, "*Pro-Life for the Poor*," has commented concerning the unborn, "Jesus commanded us to care for 'the least of these,' but sadly, we must admit that sometimes many of our churches have cared the least."¹⁷ This is a sad commentary in reference to the church and may we strive to change that perception. And, may we never allow it to be said of the church's response regarding compassion!

Sin Versus Compassion

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:17a); a line was drawn in the sand, so to speak; a boundary line established by God. There was only one condition, "Do not cross the line." Crossing the line would bring death. There was no ambiguity; a definitive line had been established. However, Adam crossed the line and it launched man into a new era, a period when sin entered and opened the eyes of man to a new dimension. Once this happened, there was only one

¹⁶ Scott and Rabey, 113.

¹⁷ Donaldson and Glaspey, 59.

hope—God would intervene. Although God intervened, there was no turning back, the sentence had to be pronounced and judgment executed. However, God embraced Adam and Eve with love and compassion and unveiled a plan for the redemption and restoration of man.

This presents some searching questions: Where does the church draw the line? What is the dividing line between tolerance and compassion? Where is the line between compassion and condoning? There are no easy answers to these questions and often times varying circumstances will influence the church's response. There will not always be a clear, concise response to every situation. Many times, the issues will not be black or white; they may fall into that space between, which will have no clear boundary line. In their book, *Perimeters of Light*, Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer discuss the boundary between light and darkness. They describe this zone as a perimeter: "The perimeter is not a boundary where the traveler passes from total light to total darkness. A perimeter is a 'twilight zone,' where it's not completely light, nor is it completely black. Sometimes it's hard to see clearly at the edge of the zone—it's hard to see the edge itself."¹⁸ Often times the church may find itself struggling with issues that do not have a definitive boundary. Although there are numerous absolutes throughout the Scriptures and these must be adhered to, there are also areas in which we do not have clear distinctions.

Scriptural absolutes are not based on Western ideas, Bible Belt convictions, or cultural codes; they are based on the "truths" of the Scripture. *The Parable of the Two*

¹⁸ Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 22.

Missionaries,¹⁹ which Towns and Stetzer include in their book, may shed some light on this idea as we listen to their conversation:

The missionaries discussed their strategy. “First, we need to teach them modesty,” suggested Chris.

The older missionary just smiled. “Does someone have to dress a certain way to be a Christian?” he asked.

“OK, then we need to teach them not to dance,” Chris quickly added.

“Why teach them what not to do—why not teach them to know Christ and then let Him lead them?” Robert asked.

“Well, if they don’t start reading the Bible and they don’t stop dancing, how can we know if they are Christians? What will make them different?” asked Chris.

“The difference will not be in the outward things,” Robert answered.

“These are the things that they will change quickly and easily to please us as visitors. However, that is not really change. They need to have a heart change.

They need to have an old heart replaced with a new heart. Then, all that they do will be for a different reason—and their dress and their dance will come from a new heart.”

“That is the tricky part—we need to bring Jesus, not our Western culture, dress, and worship.”

The younger missionary looked puzzled and asked, “How can we tell the difference?”²⁰

Just as the two missionaries viewed the needs of the Nimo tribe differently and their approach was dissimilar, their goal was the same—to take them the Gospel and to effect a change in their lives.

Often times we tend to try to mold people into our belief system and our convictions based on our background and upbringing. However, these may not be in accordance to the Scripture. Identifying sin is not always as clear cut as we would like for it to be. Consider, would James 4:17, “... to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it*

¹⁹ Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer’s book, *The Perimeters of Light*, introduces each chapter with a parable of two missionaries, one older and wiser and the other one much younger and inexperienced, traveling in the heart of the jungle in New Guinea to share the Gospel with the Nimo Tribe.

²⁰ Towns and Stetzer, 38.

not, to him it is sin,” be applicable to a boy whose stomach is aching from hunger and steals food to survive when he has not been told not to steal? Or, would a person who kills another defending his family or country be guilty of breaking the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”? With that in mind, may we then surmise that the boundary or perimeter is not always crystal clear?

Before we can adequately address these issues, we must first determine the foundation of the problem. Ever since the fall of man, man has had a propensity to sin and become self-absorbed. This process has only exacerbated down through history; actually, it appears that this downward spiral is becoming more and more prevalent and at a much greater rate of speed. Fingers can be pointed in all directions, and we have a tendency to blame everyone else, but much of our dilemma can find its resting place at our own doorstep. Satan, society, and the church can share in much of the blame; there is certainly enough to go around. The root cause cannot be attributed to one single reason, apart from man’s disobedience in the Garden; but the fact remains, man today still makes the choice to sin.

Churches today are encountering issues that were few and far between, or even nonexistent, in years past. Hawkins has commented:

When many parents were teenagers, the moral climate was drastically different. They didn’t have to deal with intimidation and relativism—the Ten Commandments were on the wall of public school classrooms. There were moral absolutes. They didn’t have to deal with isolation. Everyone knew their neighbors. On my block we knew who lived next door to us. We knew almost everybody. In fact, if one kid did something wrong, the neighbors would take care of it, and dad would thank them for it later.²¹

²¹ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 232.

In the past, most churches were never involved in many of the issues that families and society deal with today. There was a connection between society, the church, and the home. In addition, the church was respected and Christians were valued citizens. However, that perception has long since changed. Today, many churches are at the center of controversy, denominations are battling within, and Christians are losing their testimonies. The reasons are numerous, but suffice it to say that much of the cause can be attributed to our sinful nature.

Society, culture, and sin have impeded the influence of the Christian community and to some degree has hindered their effectiveness. Johnson maintains,

Christianity's image has suffered at the hands of TV preachers, crusaders, stereotypes, and flim-flam artists. The unfortunate thing is that the power of the media to impact and influence public opinion has fallen into the hands of many who are hostile toward Christianity. Sitcoms, news programs, and commentaries have taken the negatives and built them into jokes, news stories, and sensationalism. This approach might sell air-time, but it sure hurts the local church's agenda. The image of Christians, the pastor, and those who are sincere witnesses has been dealt a knock-out punch in the last few years. We simply must recover, get back into the ring, and convince a secular world that we really are genuine.²²

Christianity has always played an important role in our nation. It is unfortunate that we have lost much of our influence on the world, and we must never allow our failure to reach the point of no return. Compassion can fill the void that exists. As Hawkins has said, "We need to realize that this lost generation did not leave the church. In many ways the church left them. So we need to go back and get them."²³

²² Johnson, 59.

²³ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 240.

In a society and a culture that advocates sin and promiscuity, how do we, as Christians, determine where the light of compassion begins and the darkness of evil intrudes? It is obvious that there is no clear identifiable edge, so how does the church respond without standing on the edge of compromise? Or, will compromise lead to tolerance and possibly conformity?

We must remember that we are living in a day when everyone is encountering troubles, trials, and heartaches. Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird have stated, “Everyone is broken, damaged, cracked, and imperfect. It is a common thread of all humanity—even for those who deny its reality in their life.”²⁴ The need for compassion has never been greater and it is increasing everyday. Our nation’s school yards are full of children and teens who have never known the full impact that compassion can make. They are searching, yearning, and crying out for someone to hear them. For the most part, the world has turned a deaf ear to them with the exception of diagnosing them with some imaginary illness and prescribing “real” drugs to control them. When, in reality, many times all they need is love, compassion, and self-worth.

As the old adage goes, “If you are not a part of the solution, then you are a part of the problem.” Churches must rise to the occasion and reach out to a hurting world. Our young people today are in desperate need of love and compassion. The church has the means of making a difference. Sadly, there are times when the church is so judgmental that they push away the very ones we are trying to reach. The following story in, *The Church Today*, illustrates this quite well:

²⁴ Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 114.

Kenneth Chafin, retired professor of evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, tells of a time when he taught 1 Corinthians to a group at Gulf Shore Baptist Assembly near Gulfport, Mississippi. As they discussed the fellowship of the church he asked, “If you really got into trouble, if your boy was in jail or your teenage daughter was pregnant, who would you most like to know about it?”

A sadness came over the room. Finally, one person spoke for all, and said, “I don’t know who I’d like to know first, but I know who I would like to know last. I’d like for the people of my church to be the last to find out.”²⁵

The author elaborates by saying, “Sometimes the most critical, caustic, judgmental people on earth are in the church. Instead of being like a family that accepts, supports, and cares for people in trouble, we add to their troubles. As someone has said, ‘The Christian army is the only army that shoots its own wounded’.”²⁶

It is a sad commentary when the very ones that should be opening their arms to embrace are the very ones who so often tend to condemn. Could it be that many have forgotten the story that Jesus told in the eighth chapter of John’s Gospel? The scribes and Pharisees had brought Him a woman who was caught in adultery, and they attempted to persuade Him to pronounce a death sentence upon her based on the law according to Moses. Rather than pronouncing a sentence on her, He wrote on the ground and then stood saying, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Slowly, her accusers began to leave until Jesus asked her, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?” Upon her response, “No man,” Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.” Although the scribes and Pharisees were legalistically correct, it was absent of love and compassion. However, Jesus brought it to a personal level when He began to write on the ground and they were

²⁵ Powell, *The Church Today*, 63.

²⁶ Ibid.

“... convicted by their own conscience.” Please note, we can be fundamentally correct and miss the very opportunity that Jesus unveils to us. Poe stated, “Kindness has its greatest opportunity for expression in difficult situations. At those times, people have the greatest temptation to be unkind; therefore, they have the greatest opportunity to show kindness.”²⁷

Sin is prevalent everywhere today, but the heart of the matter is based upon the church’s response. Will the church minister to the teenager who comes to a youth meeting and announces that she is pregnant or will they ostracize her and remove her name from the membership? Both responses are possible. How will the pastor, youth pastor, and the church respond? These questions can only be addressed through love and compassion, if we are to respond like Jesus. Jesus never condoned the sin, but He always loved the sinner and showed them compassion.

Many times in our efforts to make life easier on our children’s generation, we prevent them from experiencing the opportunities that come with struggles. Remember, it is the butterfly’s struggle getting out of the cocoon that gives it the strength and the ability to fly and helps create its beautiful colors. However, this generation is also faced with temptations and struggles that earlier generations rarely faced.

There has never been a more needful time in history than today for Christians and the church to become involved. Our reactions can be wrapped in legalistic jargon and justified by Pharisaic interpretations, but the end result will be a generation searching for someone to care. There are times when we tend to be judgmental rather than supportive, often isolating, embarrassing, parading them as an example of “what not to do.” We must

²⁷ Poe, 59.

remember “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Paul Powell speaks about how sin isolates and separates. He says, “What can we do about our sin? How can we deal with our wrong? We can’t unbreak a glass. We can’t unscramble an egg. We can’t unsay a word. And, we can’t undo a deed. Our only hope is that God shall intervene and forgive us of our sins.”²⁸ We know that God forgives, but sinners also need the reassurance that the church will give forgiveness as well. Simply put, they need “warm bodies” looking them in the eye with compassion assuring them they are loved.

This is illustrated in the following story:

God took on skin and flesh for us. Ronald Rolheiser powerfully illustrates why. There is a marvelous story told about a four-year-old girl who awoke one night frightened—convinced that in the darkness around her there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. Alone, she ran to her parents’ bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and taking her by the hand, led her back to her own room, where she put on a light and reassured the child with these words: “You needn’t be afraid, you are not alone here, God is in the room with you.” The child replied, “I know that God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin.”²⁹

Even though we know that God is with us, there are times when we need someone in the flesh to embrace us and assure us. The church must adopt this attitude.

Another probing question might be, “How will the church deal with the issue of abortion?” Whether we like it or not, abortion is an issue that is prevalent in many churches. Just because one does not agree with abortion does not mean it does not exist in their circle of friends or within the realms of their church. We cannot ignore it or pretend it does not exist, in fact, we learned in a previous chapter that “... abortion statistics are the same for women inside the church as those outside.” Although this is disheartening, it

²⁸ Paul W. Powell, *If The Dead Could Speak: 12 Hard-Hitting Evangelistic Sermons for Reaching the Lost* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1994), 26.

²⁹ Scazzero and Bird, 175.

reminds us that there is a ministry to be performed, love to be given, and compassion to be shown. We need to be reminded that the effects of abortion do not end when the woman walks out of the clinic, in fact, in many ways they are just beginning. Hawkins alludes to this pain and suffering. He says, "... it haunts millions of women with the plague of post-abortion syndrome."³⁰ The Christian community must rise to the occasion and minister to these. In his book, *A Matter of Conviction*, Dr. Jerry Sutton reminds us, "We must also preach the forgiveness and healing of God, which is available to all who have been afflicted by abortion, whether the mother who had one, the doctor who performed one, or the parent who counseled one."³¹ As you can see, there are numerous people who are affected by abortion and each one needs love and compassion. Showing love and compassion is not endorsing or even condoning abortion; it is just loving the hurting. Everett has commented, "When the church reaches out in love and forgiveness, we who have experienced abortion—both men and women—can confess, repent, and start to understand that the forgiving blood of Christ covers even an abortion. I am convinced that our nation is a mission field of pain from abortion and sexual activity outside of God's plan."³²

We must also be concerned with the issue of homosexuality within the realms of the church. In many ways, churches have tried to avoid dealing with it in the past and have passed it along to the next generation. However, that generation is now in leadership

³⁰ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 68.

³¹ Jerry Sutton, *A Matter of Conviction: A History of Southern Baptist Engagement with the Culture* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 447.

³² Everett, 64-65.

positions and they are struggling with the same issues. Too often, whether it is homosexuality or other issues, we respond cautiously or we focus on the individual, forgetting the effects of their behavior on others. Normally there is a family that is affected: parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and other relatives. In addition, friends, co-workers, and church members feel the effect of their actions. The question remains, should we avoid them, ostracize, or totally withdraw from them? Perhaps it would be well to remember that the acts and deeds of an individual may be despicable, as all sin is, however, God still desires to redeem all of mankind. The sad part is that many churches unconsciously determine what sin they are willing to forgive and which they are not. Is this biblical? Hardly! Jesus loved and still loves the sinner no matter what the sin. The church must respond in like manner. Compassion may well be the vessel that God uses to redeem the homosexual, or any other sinner. It is not our responsibility or right to make a list of the sinners that are acceptable and those who are unacceptable. Perhaps we need to hear the words of Paul, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

There are numerous other areas that we must be concerned about. In many cases, the church does not want to deal with these issues; it could be that we are reaping what we have sown. We must understand,

... We’ve raised a generation of young people, by and large, with no moral absolutes and no spiritual leadership at home or in the church. Almost everyone talks to them about sex—except moms and dads and pastors. Consequently, a generation of kids has learned about it from Madonna and the media, from public education and the Dr. Ruths of this world who fill their young minds with misinformation and half-truths.³³

³³ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 68-69.

These issues are not limited to the realms of the church by any means. There are a lot of well-meaning people who just do not know how to respond, or at least how to respond with compassion. It has been said, “When we know people are hurting or grieving, we may feel awkward because we don’t know what to say. We may doubt that we could really be of any help. We may even excuse ourselves by thinking, *They probably just want to be left alone.*”³⁴

The world is constantly bombarded with sin and other ethical issues. This is evidenced by the high divorce rate, the number of dysfunctional families, and abuses on every hand. Hawkins relates to the problem in this manner:

In our world today, beyond the walls of the church of Jesus Christ is an almost entire lost generation—lost to Christ and lost to His church. They have been raised in an unprecedented culture of moral ambiguity. They have been taught through their schools and in many of their homes that there are no ethical certainties, and, therefore, absolute truth doesn’t exist.³⁵

And, although many of these issues have penetrated the walls of the church, it does not relieve us of the responsibility of going into the world. Hawkins continues,

Yet we, the church of Jesus Christ, have a glorious commission from our Commander in Chief—a command from headquarters, a mandate from the Lord Jesus Himself. We are to reach out to that lost generation. Our commission is to go, make disciples, and teach them, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We have a heaven-sent commitment to reach the lost world.³⁶

Just as firm as the boundary line was in Eden, the clarion call to the church, “Go, ye ...,” is equally as firm. We cannot just sit on our comfortable pews and in our air conditioned

³⁴ Donaldson and Glaspey, 35.

³⁵ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 238-239.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

or heated buildings and expect the Lord to say to us, "... Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant ..." (Matt. 25:21a).

Views of Compassion

Is it not amazing how people perceive things differently? You can contact most any law enforcement agency and ask them about a crime, and you will find that witnesses have a tendency not to agree on every aspect of the crime. Their descriptions of the perpetrator will be different. One will describe him as short, brown hair, and brown eyes, while another portrays him as tall, black hair, and blue eyes. On and on the process goes, and although different descriptions are given, hopefully, enough correct information will be obtained to identify the individual.

The identity and recognition of compassion is often just as vague. But, hopefully, enough accurate information will be collected and compassion will be identified and a loving response will ensue.

Some have viewed compassion as a mere emotional experience that has no real validity to it. It is an expression of pity and feeling sorry for someone or for their situation they find themselves in. Although a worthy concept, but does it produce a viable response? Or, have many of us become so desensitized to the needs of others because of the number of homeless people we encounter on a daily basis? Maybe, we are made to feel uncomfortable when we pull to up an intersection and someone approaches brandishing a sign, "Will work for food." Do we not at times try to busy ourselves so we do not have to deal with him or look him in the eye or, perhaps we hurriedly crack the window and pass him a buck or two just to rid ourselves of the embarrassment? Is that

compassion or is it applying the old adage, “out of sight, out of mind”? It is a response, but again, does it qualify as a response based on compassion? Or, is it just feeling sorry?

Many churches are inundated with calls and visits from people in their communities and surrounding areas looking for food or financial help. Many feel as though the church is obligated to assist them. Although the church may not be able to respond with the type of help someone requests, the church is expected to be compassionate. When Peter and John were going into the temple and a lame man at the gate was asking alms they did not respond in kind, but Peter did respond nonetheless. He said, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted *him* up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (Acts 3:6-7). The church can and should always offer hope, encouragement, and the Gospel.

One can very easily become complacent and disregard the needs of those around them. We often see someone and prejudge them based on appearances, never really seeing their needs, and fail to respond. In their book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbala and Dean Merrill tell a story which illustrates this point:

At the end of the evening meeting I sat down on the edge of the platform, exhausted, as others continued to pray with those who had responded to Christ. The organist was playing quietly. I wanted to relax. I was just starting to unwind when I looked up to see this man, with shabby clothing and matted hair, standing in the center aisle about four rows back and waiting for permission to approach me.

I nodded and gave him a weak little wave of my hand. *Look at how this Easter Sunday is going to end*, I thought to myself. *He’s going to hit me up for money*. That happens often in this church. *I’m so tired...*

When he came close, I saw that his two front teeth were missing. But more striking was his odor—the mixture of alcohol, sweat, urine, and garbage took my breath away. I have been around many street people, but this was the strongest stench I have ever encountered. I instinctively had to turn my head sideways to inhale, then look back in his direction while breathing out.

I asked his name.
 “David,” he said softly.
 “How long have you been homeless, David?”
 “Six years.”
 “Where did you sleep last night?”
 “In an abandoned truck.”

I had heard enough and wanted to get this over quickly. I reached for the money clip in my back pocket.

At that moment David put his finger in front of my face and said, “No, you don’t understand—I don’t want your money. I’m going to die out there. I want the Jesus that red-haired girl³⁷ talked about.”³⁸

This is a prime example of showing pity or feeling sorry for someone without first connecting with them and assessing their needs. Sometimes we would prefer to send them on their way without any involvement or attachment. However, as Osteen has said, “Sometimes God will put you in an uncomfortable situation so you can help somebody else.”³⁹ We never know when or where God is going to open an opportunity for us to minister and show compassion. However, it is vitally important that we are prepared when the opportunity presents itself.

According to Warren Wiersbe, “Compassion has been defined as ‘your pain in my heart’.”⁴⁰ This expresses the depth that compassion reaches and it is this view that

³⁷ The red-haired girl that spoke that Easter morning at The Brooklyn Tabernacle was Roberta Langella. She was a part of a dysfunctional family and began using drugs and overdosed and was left on a rooftop without a heartbeat, but someone found her and called 911 and she was revived. Roberta was in an abusive relationship and continued using drugs, until one day she gave her life to the Lord. She shared her testimony that morning.

³⁸ Jim Cymbala and Dean Merrill. *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 141-142.

³⁹ Osteen, 281.

⁴⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: A Call to Be More Like the Saviour* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1988), 72.

Christians can most readily relate to. Jesus was referring to this experience when the Scripture says, “He was moved with compassion.” It must be remembered that compassion, like love, is more than a feeling or becoming teary-eyed with emotion; it is feeling the hurt of others, relating to their despair and despondency.

Unfortunately, compassion can also become a destructive device if administered without accountability. We are living in a time when many of this generation want something for nothing and a lot of people are giving it to them. Compassion is not a resource for those who are lazy, looking for a handout. Even the Scripture teaches that a man ought to work and be productive. Consider the observation of Donaldson and Glaspey,

Genuine compassion requires responsibility both in giving and receiving. As we have seen, God has a special place in His heart for the poor and a special blessing for those who show compassion toward them. But sometimes compassion, if not offered wisely, is actually counterproductive to the long-term good of its recipient. Irresponsible compassion can have a negative effect on how the poor estimate their personal value and their place in society.⁴¹

Compassion can be one of the most instrumental aspects at the church’s disposal, but when it becomes a means to, and encourages, irresponsibility, it must be discouraged and/or avoided. If the story of the prodigal son was told today from the view of some churches, they may well have taken up a love offering, gathered food from the pantry, and delivered them to the far country and left the prodigal there. Compassion is not an end in itself; it is a route to recovery and self-sufficiency.

Also, some organizations have turned compassion into a marketable commodity. Television commercials are filled with advertisements that tend to play on the sympathy

⁴¹ Donaldson and Glaspey, 152.

of the public. They use soothing music accompanied by video scenes that move us to sympathy and sometimes to tears. Their methods are quite moving and captivating and are designed to elicit the largest response. In reality, their purpose is to manipulate the viewer to contribute to their cause. While many organizations are worthwhile and are very beneficial, there are some whose main goal is for personal financial gains. Many of the organizations only supply a small percentage to the actual cause that is being presented. It is amazing that many of the advertisements will move people to support groups whom they have never seen or causes they have only heard of through a particular advertisement or program. And yet, they fail to recognize the needs within their own communities. To respond with global compassion is essential, however, it is often at the expense of many Jerusalems, Judaes, and Samarias. In his book, *Issues of the Heart*, Richard Lee observes,

I have also noticed over the years that some people will pray for the lost and starving children all over the world, and all the while will not help those in need in their own community. There is nothing wrong with being concerned about the needs of the world, but all too often those needs are intangible, whereas the needs of those in our own city are more real.⁴²

Over the years this has become more and more widespread. We can see the evidence on the streets of the average American city every day.

We are living in probably the busiest time in history. In many instances families rarely have time for each other much less time to oversee the care and welfare of some of our elderly or ailing. In many cases placing our elderly in nursing care facilities has become the norm rather than the exception. This is not to say that there is not a need for such facilities. Many times these facilities are the only option families have, and they

⁴² Richard Lee, *Issues of the Heart* (Dallas: World Publishing, 1990), 67.

must relinquish the care of the ailing and elderly to them. However, there are other times when families use these facilities as means of relieving themselves of the responsibility for the care and well-being of their loved one, under the guise of compassion. This is evidenced by the numbers who have been placed in these facilities who have little, if any, further contact with their families. Many may feel that this is an exaggeration, however, if you were to talk with a local pastor who regularly visits these facilities or some of the caregivers who work there, you would find it happens more than we would like to imagine. Unfortunately, in many of these cases compassion has been overruled by logic, careers, or just being too much trouble.

In many cases, busyness has become the thief of compassion. Families will make the decision to care for a loved one at home rather than placing them in some type of care facility, which is admirable. However, the family soon discovers that the amount of time and energy that must be invested is far greater than they envisioned. Although all the members of the family had good intentions in the onset, they soon realize that it becomes a rather large inconvenience. And, many times this show of compassion ceases to be filled with love and joy. Rather, it becomes a chore and if left unattended, can breed resentment. The most unfortunate part is that the care for the loved one often becomes the undertaking of one or the few.

Whatever view or opinion one has of compassion, it is essential that we accept that compassion is an integral part of our existence. It has been well said, "Compassion is not an individual character trait, a personal attitude, or a special talent, but a way of living

together.”⁴³ Love and compassion are not options, and we would do well to remember the words of Howard Butt, “We’re *never* responsible for whether other people love us. But we’re *always* responsible for whether we love them.”⁴⁴

Cost of Compassion

How Much is That Doggie in the Window?, a children’s song of yesteryear, is one that reminds us of the harsh reality that everything has a price. Although it may not be in a monetary fashion, nothing is free; it has some form of price tag with it. Compassion is no different; in fact, compassion can be very costly. We will not be able to create a profit and loss chart to show its effectiveness, it will not cause a stir on Wall Street, and stock prices will not fluctuate because of it, but it will drastically affect the benefactor and recipients of it.

When discussing compassion, one of the last things most people would consider is its cost. Seldom do we associate cost with something that is so closely related to feelings or emotions. However, the old adage, “Talk is cheap” would certainly be applicable here. We can talk compassion as much as we like, but when we apply action to our talk we will find that there is definitely a cost involved. The cost involved is usually not in a monetary fashion, although at times it is, but suffice it to say, compassion is not free.

⁴³ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 47.

⁴⁴ Howard E. Butt Jr., *Who Can You Trust? Overcoming Betrayal and Fear* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 102.

One of the main costs of compassion is investing in the lives of others. Robert Lupton has commented,

Living out the gospel means desiring the same thing for your neighbor and neighbor's family as that which you desire for yourself and your family. Living out the gospel means bettering the quality of other people's lives spiritually, physically, socially and emotionally as you better your own life. Living out the gospel means sharing in the suffering and pain of others.⁴⁵

When we show compassion we are in essence living out the gospel. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "To love thy neighbor as thyself."

When we invest in the lives of others we are, in reality, taking a risk. We are allowing them to get close to us and us to them. This is more challenging for some people than others. Individuals who have been hurt or traumatized in the past are afraid to allow anyone to get close enough to cause them hurt or pain again. This could apply to either party; the benefactor or recipient. The benefactor may have allowed himself to become personally involved and had trusted the other individual(s) only to discover that people took advantage of him. The pain of this betrayal caused him to become overcautious and he may even refuse to take a chance again. On the other hand, their recipient may have allowed someone to help him only to become the source of their entertainment or ridicule. Perhaps, he was viewed as a "charity case" or personal favors were expected in return. Needless to say, people in these situations find it very difficult to trust others and to be compassionate or receive compassion. However, taking a risk is a price we often pay to demonstrate or accept compassion.

Compassion cannot be a spectator sport, it means going where people are hurting.

⁴⁵ Robert D. Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 124-125.

It may mean reaching into the “gutters of life” and pulling people out. Compassion rarely can be a long distance adventure, but is usually a hand-to-hand contest. It has been said, “... compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.”⁴⁶ Donaldson and Glaspey express it in this manner: “He left the glory of heaven to live with us in the mud and pain and darkness of the human condition in order to cleanse us from our messiness and sin. And much of His ministry was focused on the muddiest people in the muddiest places. He was never afraid to go where the need was greatest, regardless of how much it cost.”⁴⁷ Jesus did not have a set of standards that He used as a litmus test to determine whether or not compassion was warranted. Compassion was an expression of His love without any strings attached. We, as Christians, must adopt this same policy. However, it will probably consist of getting out of our comfort zone and moving into the realms of the unknown or uncertain. The exercise of compassion is not always neat and clean, in fact, “If we choose to exercise compassion, we will undoubtedly get messy and muddy as we come alongside others and experience some of their pain and suffering.”⁴⁸ Few people are willing to make that level of commitment; however, true compassion knows no boundaries.

There will be times when we exhibit compassion that we will be misunderstood and will become the object of others’ ridicule. We may be viewed as an easy target, gullible, or naïve. However, as Osteen has commented, “Sometimes, you may have to risk appearing silly or superspiritual, or downright foolish, but it would be better to err on

⁴⁶ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 25.

⁴⁷ Donaldson and Glaspey, 30.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

the side of being too compassionate than to miss a person for whom you may be the last hope.”⁴⁹ We must always keep in mind that it is not important what others think about us, only that we bring glory and honor to Him and we accomplish this by loving our neighbor.

Compassion will also require us to break down the walls that separate us. Many times churches will hesitate to help those who are not “like them.” Of course, if they were like them, they would not need someone to intervene anyway. That being said though, some churches will restrict reaching out to people who are different. We must realize that “being compassionate would require giving up dividing lines and relinquishing differences and distinctions.”⁵⁰

Showing compassion is not always an easy task. Often times it requires being tough, yet understanding; thick-skinned, yet vulnerable; rational, yet sympathetic; firm, yet kind; authoritative, yet nice. Some people are easy to love while others are quite difficult. There will be times when people will be loving and kind, while at other times people will be rude, inhospitable, and even hostile. We must remember it is not our job to determine their worthiness or even like the individual; it is our task to be like Jesus and show compassion. Scott and Rabey believe:

One thing is for sure: if you want to love others, it will be hard work. You will have to think of others instead of always thinking only of yourself. And your image may suffer if you care for people who are labeled as “undesirables.” I guess you will just have to decide how important it is to love people, and whether or not your image and personal comfort are more important than showing love.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Osteen, 246.

⁵⁰ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 18.

⁵¹ Scott and Rabey, 101.

Although we may not even like the individual, as Christians we must love them. It is never enough to love to show compassion, we must love those to whom we show it.

There are times when we become complacent with the manner in which we show or express compassion. There may have been a time when you were passionate about helping others, but it has become mundane, uneventful, and unfulfilling. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). No doubt, there will be times when you will be inconvenienced, sleep will allude you, disappointment will occur, and feelings will be hurt, but be assured being compassionate will always be worth the investment.

This chapter has been comprised of various aspects of compassion. Compassion is more than a word; it is a way of life. It is inclusive of love and involvement in the lives of others. At times it is risky to become so deeply involved in the affairs of others, but it is without a doubt one of the most rewarding aspects of humanity and certainly Christianity. Throughout the Scripture we have seen Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, and calm the sea. It has rightly been said, “What is important here is not the cure of the sick, but the deep compassion that moved Jesus to these cures.”⁵² We must also be equally moved and reach out to a troubled world. Donaldson and Glaspey have commented, “In order to become more aware of others’ needs, we must allow our hearts to become more vulnerable, to let them break over human suffering and hopelessness. As we begin to feel something of God’s compassion toward the hurting, we will no longer be able to turn our eyes away and ignore the pain.”⁵³

⁵² McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 14.

⁵³ Donaldson and Glaspey, 187.

When we see and experience the pain and struggles of humanity, the question remains: Will it move us to compassion? Or, will we delegate it to someone else? These are questions that only each individual can answer. But, the ultimate question that begs an answer is "... Are we willing to allow our own hearts to be broken over the suffering of others, to be vulnerable enough to help them carry the weight of their pain as much as is possible for us?"⁵⁴

Compassion cannot be wrapped up nicely in a package with no wrinkles or torn sides. In fact, it may even look as though it has been through the proverbial ringer or passed over and through numerous difficulties. No doubt, it will have its share of flaws. However, the contents inside will produce unbelievable results for those who have the courage and tenacity to remove them and carry out the instructions to the fullest. It may not be neat and tidy, but it will be a challenge worth accepting. When in doubt we can always look to the perfect model in Jesus Christ. Powell has concluded:

When God desired to redeem the world he was faced with a great dilemma: How could he love the sinner and punish his sin at the same time? The cross was the answer. For on the cross God expressed his hatred for sin and simultaneously revealed his love for man. Calvary was a crucible in which God mixed law and love; there, what the justice of God demanded, the love of God provided.⁵⁵

Compassion should never be reactive, it should be proactive; "We should be on the lookout to share His mercy, kindness, and goodness with people."⁵⁶ We do not have to venture far from the steps of our homes or churches to locate the need for compassion.

⁵⁴ Donaldson and Glaspey, 187.

⁵⁵ Powell, *If the Dead Could Speak*, 93-94.

⁵⁶ Osteen, 231.

It is not hiding in the bushes or lurking in the shadows, it is in plain view. All we have to do is seize the moment, accept the challenge and allow God to bless the endeavor.

CHAPTER 5

THE PATH TO DEMISE

Over the past year or more, our nation has experienced the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Millions of jobs have been lost or moved overseas causing the highest unemployment rates in decades. Financial institutions have gone under and closed their doors while others have filed for bankruptcy. Fuel prices have soared while salaries have been cut or pay increases frozen. The national debt has climbed to new heights as Congress continues to squabble and the President promises billions of dollars for global disaster relief. The threat of terrorism still looms in the minds of most everyone, especially those who frequently fly and experience long lines and increased security measures at major airports. War continues to rage in Iraq and Afghanistan and although a promise of troop withdrawal from part of the region is scheduled, there remains much skepticism. The future does not look quite as bright as it did just a few years ago. There has been a hint of recovery and economic predictors indicate that an upturn has taken place; seemingly the worst is over. Hopefully, this is the case.

We can look back over the past decade or more and we can readily identify many of the causes for our economic calamity. The reason cannot be attributed to one area; it

has been a combination of things—greed, poor management, overzealous CEOs, exuberant bonuses, lack of accountability, and on and on the list could go. Although many can, and do, rationalize and justify their actions, most people find it appalling to say the least.

The state of our economy and the recklessness of many of the leaders in our government and the private sector have brought our nation to the depths of despair and close to an economic and social collapse. However, these are not the only areas of apprehension. The moral and ethical climate has also changed. Society and the church may well be on a collision course in the near future. We are quickly approaching a day when the church and the Christian community will be silenced unless we examine the path we have traveled and reclaim our voice in the affairs of men. We must look at the direction we have been traveling, which has led us to the point of moral and ethical collapse.

Over the years there has been a drastic change in our concept of success and the essentials of life. Powell says, “A generation ago the American ‘dream’ consisted of a comfortable home, a nice car, and a steady job. Today it has become guaranteed employment, retirement plans, a four-bedroom home, two cars, a summer cottage and college educations for all the kids.”¹ The same mentality has also permeated the church. It is no longer the goal of some churches to witness and win the lost in their communities; they must have the biggest buildings, the largest staff, the most updated programs, and the largest video screens in order to impress the membership and attract the contemporary crowd. All of these are good and viable mechanisms that the church has at its disposal,

¹ Powell, *Taking the Stew Out of Stewardship*, 116-117.

but it must never be at the expense of the mission of the church as defined by the Scriptures. Dennis Bickers has observed, “Many churches are in trouble today because they’ve abandoned their theological and doctrinal roots and displaced the teachings of Christ. No church that does this can be healthy regardless of how successful it appears to be.”² Churches must maintain their doctrinal and theological integrity in order for the church to reclaim their influence on the world. It has so often been stated, “Christians are in the world, but they are not of the world.” We must maintain that identity. Christians should never have an “identity crisis.” Bickers continues, “Churches can build beautiful structures and create exciting programs, but without a solid foundation, those structures will collapse and the programs will fail.”³

The path to demise has not been an overnight journey. It has been a journey that began centuries ago and continues to this day. However, we have become more and more progressive and with the invention of new technologies, the rate of descent has increased exponentially. In many ways we have become a society that has failed to learn the lessons of the past, or have chosen to ignore them. History testifies to the fact that the church has always dealt with issues that were foreign to the world and they have encountered considerable opposition to their advancement in the world. Saul of Tarsus was an enemy of the church who went to the high priest and asked for letters giving him permission to bring anyone who was a follower of Christ bound to Jerusalem. However, it was the influence of the church in the world that led to that “Damascus Road” experience.

² Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Small Church: Diagnosis and Treatment for the Big Issues* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 27.

³ Ibid.

We can look down through the pages of time and see that the path to demise has always been a slippery slope, filled with compromise, tolerance, promiscuity, and worldliness. Hawkins has addressed this issue:

It is obvious that we have also lost a sense of restraint. The correlation between moral decay and national decline is written throughout the pages of history with one nation after another. Carl Wilson in his book, *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*, chronicles the pattern of decline in both the Greek and Roman cultures. He says men ceased to lead their families in spiritual and moral development. They neglected their wives and children in pursuit of material wealth and power. Men became so preoccupied with business ventures they ignored their wives' intimate needs and began to be involved with other women. Marriage laws were changed to make divorce easier. Because male and female role models were not in the home, children developed identity problems. Many children were unwanted, aborted, abandoned, molested, left undisciplined. Does this sound a bit familiar to a culture about which we are much more familiar? And this speaks of the demise of a culture of almost 2,000 years ago. Things do not change that much, history simply repeats itself. Yes, the handwriting is on the wall. We seem to have lost our sense of remembrance, reality, and restraint.⁴

The times and the culture must never shape the church. The church has a strong foundation that can never be destroyed, but her ability to influence the world and show compassion can be shattered.

There are times when the path to demise seems to slow and it appears that recovery is on the verge of happening; however, this is usually short-lived. This normally happens after some form of natural disaster such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, draughts, floods, or snowstorms, to name a few. They also occur when we are in the midst of man-made crisis. Most often these occur in times of war when our young men and women are placed in harm's way. Or, as we have seen in the past, acts of terror may cause us to become more attentive to the things of God. Hawkins commented concerning this: "For a few days in the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy it seemed as though

⁴ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 152.

people were turning back to God. Churches were filled. Hearts were open and softened. But it only took a few weeks for the same old thought processes to take hold again.”⁵ We are a nation that has become preoccupied with a sense of self. We are so affluent that we have forgotten our true heroes, those who fought for the freedom we enjoy today. Veterans who fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Desert Shield are many times just numbers in the file cabinet of life. Even those fighting the present conflicts are struggling with conditions that are attributed to the combat arena; yet, they often become medical cases to study, rather than individuals who need love, compassion, and understanding. America’s affluence may well be her stone of stumbling.

The path to demise has become an all too often traveled highway with many thoroughfares intersecting it. The present generation is finding itself at a crossroads trying to determine the best way to return to the “old paths” without alienating those of their generation. Unfortunately, many have not recognized the path they are traveling is one that will lead to further demise. This path is filled with good intentions but it has potholes of inconsistency and numerous sinkholes with walls ready to collapse. The hope of this generation is to reestablish its doctrinal integrity, rebuild its moral structure, shore up its ethics, and defend its heritage. Hawkins reminds us how far we traveled down this path. He states, “America is in the midst of moral collapse and we’re asking, ‘What shall we do about it?’ Many say, ‘More education. Distribute condoms. Find a cure.’ However, what we really ought to be asking is *why*? Why are we standing idly by watching our culture fall into decay and disintegration?”⁶

⁵ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 147.

⁶ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 69.

Again, we must remember the path to demise was not an overnight journey. Could the root cause be consistent with the analogy that Adrian Rogers uses concerning sin? He says, “A worm hole in an apple does not mean that a worm has eaten its way into the apple. To the contrary, the worm has eaten its way out. How did the worm get inside? The egg was laid in the apple blossom. The worm was hatched in the heart of that apple.”⁷ We must conclude then that the path to demise is conceived in the heart of man. Or, it could be an echo of Jeremiah’s words, “The heart *is* deceitful above *all things*, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9a).

Postmodernity

One of the first steps on the path to demise is the road of postmodernity. The focus will not be on postmodernity only, but will include other modern day movements that are inundating our society. Many of these are leading us away from the precepts of the mission and ministry of the church. The effect of postmodernity can be felt in almost every avenue of life. There are a lot of people who are under the false impression that postmodernity is something new. Although its inception is far from being a recent event, its major impact has been more recent. According to Aubrey and Michael Malphurs, “Although elements of postmodernism have been around since 1919, it did not begin to exert itself fully until the second half of the twentieth century.”⁸ Although the influence of postmodernity was immense before the end of the cold war, it has had its greatest

⁷ Adrian Rogers, *Believe in Miracles But Trust in Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 179.

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs and Michael Malphurs, *Church Next: Using the Internet to Maximize Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 80.

impact since then. Culture, with the infusion of the technological age, has rapidly moved us into an explosive realm of postmodernity.

Postmodernity is not limited to one particular age group; however, its greatest influence is predominately in the younger generations. According to the Malphurses, "... postmodernism is more characteristic of the younger generations such as the busters and bridgers. However, we must be careful not to blanket these two generations with a postmodernist label. Not all busters and bridgers are postmodernists."⁹

Although the terms modernism and postmodernism may not be readily identifiable in the average church, churches need to be aware of their effects. Postmodernity basically means after modernity; therefore, a simple understanding of modernity needs to be addressed. Modernity has its roots in the period of the Industrial Revolution and is consistent with a cultural shift away from traditional values and a move toward modern-day concepts. Aubrey and Michael Malphurses compare the two—modernism and postmodernism:

The age of modernism corresponds historically with the Industrial Revolution, whereas postmodernism has accelerated through the Information Revolution with information technology leading the way. Under modernism, America experienced a deep sense of nationalism. Postmodernism and the Internet, however, have moved young Americans toward a greater sense of globalism. Modernism bought heavily into Descartes' concept of man's autonomous self, whereas postmodernism emphasizes community. Each view holds to a different authority. Modernism's authority is reason; postmodernism's authority is experience. Modernism has an optimistic view of life; postmodernism began with a pessimistic view that seems to be shifting back toward optimism.¹⁰

⁹ Malphurs and Malphurs, 80-81.

¹⁰ Ibid., 76-77.

The time span and the basic influence of both of these can readily be seen. However, there are numerous other differences as well. The Malphurs continue to detail many of the other differences between modernism and postmodernism:

Modernism assumes that man is basically good; postmodernism assumes that man is essentially bad. Modernism presupposes a natural world in which nothing exists outside of nature; postmodernism views the world supernaturally and believes in a world outside of nature. Modernists are skeptical about spiritual things; postmodernists believe in and are deeply interested in spiritual things, but not necessarily the spiritual things of the Bible. Modernists prefer a logical, didactic approach to literature such as the Bible; postmodernists love stories and therefore prefer biblical narrative. In fact, postmodernists view reality as a system of overlapping narratives, and they not only want to hear your story but also to tell you theirs. The modernists' heroes are the scientists and the educators; the postmodernists' heroes are the poets and the artists, those who communicate creatively. Modernists believe that truth is out there somewhere and that we can discover it through the scientific method; postmodernists believe that truth is within us (our truth is what is true to us), and thus we create our own truth. Modernists believe in noncontradiction (i.e., that ideas shouldn't contradict each other); postmodernists have no problems with contradictions (seeing them as simply overlapping narratives). Finally, modernists believe that there's one overarching metanarrative (a story or truth into which all truth fits); postmodernists believe in many metanarratives or many different "true truths."¹¹

We are presently experiencing the effects and/or influence of these in a manner that is uprooting our core belief and value systems. It is happening at an almost unprecedented rate. Andrew Careaga has commented: "Today, we face a situation similar to that of the ancient Israelites. In our world today, the King of Kings no longer rules. No more is He the center of our lives. The individual is now god. Right and wrong have vanished. We patch together our own beliefs from whatever is convenient."¹²

¹¹ Malphurs and Malphurs, 77-78.

¹² Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 70.

Postmodernity leads us to become entrenched with ourselves and, unfortunately, teaches the individual that everything revolves around him. It is leading people down the road of self-preservation; it becomes less and less about others and more and more about self. One can readily see how self-absorbed the present generation is. No longer is it about God, country, community, church, or even family, but the individual. Everywhere you look it is about people doing their own thing, going in their own direction. Our society has developed an infatuation with a doctrine of “me-ism.”

The view of postmodernism is that “truth” is subjective; it is no longer objective, therefore situations, circumstances, culture, or one’s own comfort zone can determine truth. Truth is based on the individual, there is no absolute truth. According to the Malphurs,

Postmodern advocates argue that no one universal story (metanarrative) or universal truth can hold for all time because truth isn’t objective, it’s subjective, depending on who is speaking and who is listening. Instead, many truths (metanarratives) exist because truth is relative to various individuals, their cultures, and their individual circumstances. Truth for one person isn’t automatically truth for another person, contrary to the modernist perspective.¹³

Although circumstances change from person to person, there must be a foundation of truth. To the Christian, that foundation is the Scriptures by which we are guided; however, the postmodernist insists that varying factors will determine truth and that truth is not universal. There are no absolutes. Consider the observation by Aubrey and Michael Malphurs, “... the view that there are no absolutes is itself an absolute statement that contradicts and disproves the postmodernists’ own premise. The problem, however, is that postmodernists reject the law of noncontradiction. Thus they have no problem

¹³ Malphurs and Malphurs, 79.

holding mutually contradictory positions.”¹⁴ If there are no absolutes, then what do we base truth, honesty, integrity, character, values, and so forth on? Postmodernists reject scriptural authority. They do not accept the teachings of the Bible nor the idea that Jesus is the Son of God. Careaga explains their concept:

At the postmodern inn, there is no room for the idea that Jesus Christ is God’s only Son, the only mediator between God and humanity. Yet postmodernism gladly welcomes all sorts of heresy—from atheism to gnosticism, paganism, and computer-assisted “techno-shamanism”—in the name of tolerance and respect for diversity. Religion—or, more often these days, “spirituality”—is not a bad thing, the postmodernists say, as long as one party does not impose its religious beliefs on others.¹⁵

Although this may sound ludicrous to the Christian community, it is widely embraced and endorsed by many in a secular society. We must never underestimate the influence of postmodernity. They believe that truth is relative, that is, its foundation or base is moveable dependent upon the situation, culture, family structure, to mention a few.

Another driving force to the path to demise is that of humanism and secular humanism. These have become more and more prominent throughout the later half of the twentieth century and these first years of the twenty-first century. The teachings of these have led to the downfall of our value system. They have led to the demise of morals, honesty, decency, and character as much, if not more than, any other force. It has been said, “Defining secular humanism is a challenging task because it goes by multiple names, and its essential components are often disguised by its proponents. In fact, humanists depend on deception to accomplish their ultimate objective: the undoing of

¹⁴ Malphurs and Malphurs, 81-82.

¹⁵ Careaga, 70.

Christianity.”¹⁶ Christianity has become a threat to the world. Of course, it has always posed a threat. When Jesus was born, He posed a threat to Herod. Later, Jesus told the disciples that the world hated Him, therefore, the world would hate them also. The church in the book of Acts posed a threat; therefore, it should be no surprise to the Christian community today that there is disdain for them.

Secular humanism, like modernity, is affecting all age groups and it is being taught and promoted in our institutions of higher learning. Our leaders of tomorrow are being trained by many who have bought into these concepts. America and the rest of the world will feel the effects of these teachings for years. Hawkins noted:

Our brightest young minds are being re-educated and retrained by humanistic philosophy right here in America. In 1933 the Humanist Manifesto set out its plain objectives and no one paid much attention. In 1973 the Humanist Manifesto II set out its goals. And what were the goals of this Humanist Manifesto? It set out to “bring young people to deny the deity of God and the biblical account of creation. It set out to re-educate young people to the fact that moral values should be self-determined and situational.” That is, there should be no absolute truth. They set out to remove distinctions between the roles of male and females. They set out to advocate a sexual freedom between consenting individuals regardless of their age or preferences. They set out to advocate the right to abortion and euthanasia. And they also argued for the equal distribution of American wealth to reduce poverty. They were intent on controlling the environment and creating a one-world government. Unfortunately, they have succeeded in so many of their endeavors. We are the Babylon of the modern world in many ways. Gloria Steinem, in a *Saturday Review* article in March of 1973, stated that by the year 2000 “we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential and not in God.”¹⁷

Our college campuses and classrooms are immersed in this environment. The idea being taught is that everything is based on human reasoning; it is based on logical conclusions

¹⁶ Tim LaHaye and Beverly LaHaye, *A Nation Without a Conscience: Where Have All the Values Gone?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1994), 134-135.

¹⁷ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 29-30.

without reference to scriptural or spiritual foundations. Unfortunately, many of our leaders today including those who hold judicial and/or congressional offices have bought into this way of thinking. We are witnessing the demise of many of the things that the Christian community has held sacred for centuries. We must remember that the very foundation of our existence is the belief that God is the center of our being and that all things are “made by Him and for Him.” However, “... secular humanism is a man-centered philosophy that teaches self-sufficient man can solve the problems of humanity without reference to a personal God.”¹⁸ This is contrary to all the Christian community believes, but it is based on the idea that life ends at death and there is nothing else. The belief is that man can solve all of his problems without outside intercession.

There is no wonder our society and even the church is experiencing so many moral and ethical dilemmas. We have lost our closeness with God and replaced it with humanist thinking and postmodern concepts. McDowell and Hostetler stated,

I believe that one of the prime reasons this generation is setting new records for dishonesty, disrespect, sexual promiscuity, violence, suicide, and other pathologies, is because they have lost their moral underpinnings; their foundational belief in morality and truth has been eroded. As journalist Rowland Nethaway said, they “don’t seem to know right from wrong.”¹⁹

The unfortunate scenario is that many of our present leaders are leading this generation and the next in a path that may well prove to be more destructive than the one currently being traveled. One of the problems we face is that many are looking at the present conditions and viewing them primarily as a political or social quandary that will run its course and dissipate. Many even believe that the course we are traveling will rise and fall

¹⁸ LaHaye and LaHaye, 135.

¹⁹ McDowell and Hostetler, 12.

with the tides of time. However, the course our society is taking is on a collision course with the course of the Christian community. Consider the following:

Even though we do not claim America was ever a truly “Christian nation,” she is not now as Christian in attitudes as she used to be. Notice the things America has abandoned: prayer in public schools and at the commencements of public educational institutions, posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools, and the recognition of Christian holidays and of Christian symbols in public places. At the same time American courts and political leaders have increased the restrictions on churches, mandated a reinterpretation of history in textbooks and media to eliminate references to the past influences of Christianity, permitted or promoted certain vices, including gambling, profanity, and alcohol use, endorsed the politically correct philosophy of ordaining homosexuals for church ministry, and promoted “gender correctness” that has caused the rewording of certain Bible translations.²⁰

Christians today are experiencing more of the negative effects of humanism and postmodernity than any other segment in society. Nothing would please the secular humanist any more than to silence the church and the entire Christian community.

Change in Ethics

The time was 19 April 1775, when a group of farmers known as colonial militiamen engaged the British Army. It was on Lexington Square that the “shot heard ‘round the world” was fired. These words originated in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Concord Hymn* and referenced the beginning of the Revolutionary War. Since then they have been used to signal the beginning of numerous events, including, but not limited to, races and other sporting events. In addition, it has been used to denote the start of dramatic changes or the onset of some special event. Of course, it is obvious that the shot was not literally heard around the world but its inference is quite vivid and resounding.

²⁰ Towns and Stetzer, 153-154.

Since that first shot “heard ‘round the world” was fired, there have been numerous other figurative shots that have also been heard around the world. Some of these have marked the beginning of different value systems, a different code of ethics, and the demise of compassion.

There have always been changes, and they have usually been met with a fair amount of skepticism and resistance. Some are necessary and are warranted; however, there are also changes that need to be avoided in order to maintain our integrity and character. It has been said that morality cannot be legislated, but it is legislated constantly. The very premise of our beliefs and our foundations are being destroyed. The Psalmist said, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3). We have witnessed the annihilation of our ethics from a secular society for years, and many times the Christian community has sat silently by and watched it happen. Hawkins addresses the issue of integrity in the following manner:

Where is our integrity rooted? Some think it is rooted in the public life, but it is not, it is only revealed there. Ultimately, it will be revealed whether we have it or not. Others think it is rooted in the professional world where on the anvil of personal experience we beat out the principles of integrity. However, it is not rooted there, it is only reinforced there if we truly have it. Others would be quick to say it is rooted in our personal life where we live in close intimate relationships with one another. But it is not rooted there, it is only reflected there. Integrity is rooted in the private life, that part of us that is alone with God and that part of us that will live as long as God lives. Therefore, once rooted in the private world it flows into the personal level. Here our family and close friends can see something in our interpersonal relationships that is good and godly; that issues out of a private life.²¹

We must realize that integrity is a personal issue and it is based on a relationship. This relationship forms the foundation of who we are.

²¹ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 168.

Those who argue that morality cannot be legislated needs to take a close look at the actions of our Congress and Judicial System. In addition, we are, in essence, legislating immorality by common consensus or approval by silence. Has this not been accomplished by legalizing the death of the unborn and masquerading it as an acceptable surgical procedure and in some cases funding it; condoning perversion while camouflaging it as an alternative lifestyle; redefining marriage from its biblical origin to include same-sex partners; removing prayer and Bible reading from our schools replacing them with sex education and the theory of evolution? Is it not obvious that we are legislating immorality by default? Hawkins has stated, “We are a schizophrenic society. We say one thing, we do another. We are a culture that is without moorings: that has lost its roots.”²² We have dressed up sin to make it appear more acceptable and even changed our terminology in order to be less offensive. The truth is, you can dress up a pig to appear nice and clean; you can even bathe and perfume it, but underneath the façade it is still a pig.

It appears that each generation faces new and different challenges from the previous generation. The hope is that each new generation will have learned from the past and move forward in a more moral and ethical fashion. However, history seems to prove just the opposite; in fact, it would appear in most cases that society and the church have never been so divided as they are today. In addition, morality has become the casualty of success. There was a time when climbing the corporate ladder meant you worked diligently, built a good reputation, character, and demonstrated integrity, but that is no longer applicable. It would seem that in today’s corporate world, the focus is on reaching

²² Hawkins, *Shields of Brass or Shields of Gold*, 177.

the top and the manner in which you arrive is inconsequential; today, it is about winning at all cost. This is permeated to some degree by the competitiveness within the sports arena. Professional athletes rarely consider the old adage, “It is not whether you win or lose that counts, but it is how you play the game.” Winning has become the object of the game, anything less is perceived as a failure. Today, the manner in which it is played is insignificant.

The young people of this generation are facing different challenges than previous generations. It is not the same as it was just a few years ago. Hawkins states,

The present generation faces an entirely different culture than the one in which their parents were raised. Our teenagers today are involved in a culture that is dragging them constantly down into a moral abyss. Young people beginning careers today are facing pressures they have never known before. It is a transition time for them. Others are leaving home for the first time, going off to college. They will be faced with increasing challenges: no one to check on them, living in coeducational dorms, no curfews, roommates—some with very different moral values—all sorts of things taking place in the halls of their dormitories.²³

Although this generation is facing a completely different culture, many of them have been raised under a totally different lifestyle than their parents were. They have been raised in a transitional period in our nation’s history that has taught them to be their own person. Hawkins continues, “Other teenagers are entering high school or junior high for the first time. They will be faced with increasing pressures of wanting to be accepted, wanting to find their place, and trying to fit in with a world that has gone mad.”²⁴

Although this present generation is being exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking, the

²³ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 228.

²⁴ Ibid.

previous generations are not devoid of some of the responsibility. James Draper has commented,

Today's society, notably in America and the Western world, has abandoned the Bible and the God of the Bible, bypassing the standards of the Word. Our world has forsaken these absolute principles. There is something called right and something called wrong. What we are reaping in America is the payment for our infatuation with sinful man's ideas and ideals, resulting in chaos.²⁵

In some ways we are products of our past, but we tend to protect or insulate our children from the very things that may help to mold and shape them. The sad part is that we really believe that we are doing them a favor when in reality we may well be doing them an injustice.

We can look back to those born during the sixties and seventies and easily identify some of the issues the generation of today is facing. That period was filled with unsettledness and in many ways cultural and societal chaos. It was a time of an unpopular war that produced protests, defiance, conscientious objectors, and draft dodgers. It gave rise to new styles of music: Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and Peter, Paul and Mary. A new era began that gave host to hippies, the "flower child," Woodstock, "love bug," sexual revolution, the influx of drugs, and, sadly, a moral collapse. In 1995, McIlhaney wrote concerning that period. He stated,

Until 1960 sex was primarily confined to marriage. Although some people did have sex outside of marriage, most people did not have sex until married and then had sex only in that marriage relationship. Starting about 1960 the sexual revolution changed all that. For the past 30 years we have seen a sexual mixing that had never occurred in the United States. It is common to see studies which show that sexually active teenagers have had five or ten sexual partners. Recently

²⁵ James T. Draper Jr., *Basic Bible Sermons on Psalms for Everyday Living* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 31.

I had a twenty-one-year-old girl tell me that she had twenty-seven sexual partners before she decided that was not the type of lifestyle she wanted.²⁶

Each generation influences the next generation and that influence can be either good or bad. A prime example of this can be found in the book, *11 Innovations in the Local Church*. The authors state, "... the Builder Generation that came out of the Great Depression was different from their parents. They survived financial disasters, they became success driven, they learned a thousand different ways to make money, they built families, businesses, and some even built industrial empires."²⁷ The Builder Generation experienced hardship firsthand and they used it as a motivational force to impact their generation and future generations. In fact, "Their culture drove them to overcome adversities to be survivors."²⁸ Culture and the environment that people are raised in greatly impact their future and how they respond and prepare the next generation. Unfortunately, the past fifty years have proven to be a time of multiple changes and many of them have been to the detriment of society and the Christian community.

During this period, we have seen the rise of sexual promiscuity, incest, pornography, gambling, and drug use, among many others. Rarely can we pick up a newspaper or listen to a news broadcast that we are not confronted with the reality that violence and crime dominate the news. It is not uncommon to hear of drive-by shootings, gang violence and innocent kids and adults being caught in the crossfire. Life has become

²⁶ McIlhaney, 256.

²⁷ Elmer L. Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern and Move into the Future* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 243.

²⁸ Ibid.

cheap to many and this is largely because we raised a generation that has little respect for life. If the innocent, the unborn, and the elderly are not protected and valued, how can we expect life in general to be valued?

Choices are made every day, in fact, choices have always been a part of life. It was a choice that Adam made that led to his downfall. And, although we do not make choices for others, we do have a certain responsibility to train them. The Scripture says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Hawkins suggests,

Life has unexpected twists, turns, and intersections as well. Though they come at different times for each of us, they are strikingly similar—each involves a moral decision we must make. At every intersection we must decide which way to go, and a wrong turn at a moral intersection of life can affect our journey for a lot of miles. Some people who make a wrong turn at a moral intersection spend years of their lives getting nowhere on side streets, cul-de-sacs, and dead ends. Others end up having wrecks that cause hurt and damage to others. At these moral intersections of life, the question isn’t whether to turn right or left; the question is whether to turn *right* or *wrong*.²⁹

It may be well to remember that the decisions we make affect other people. One can find numerous accounts of these recorded in the Scripture.

We are constantly being challenged to compromise and conform to the ideals of the world, but it can be surmised that this is precisely the philosophy that has brought us to the brink of collapse. Surely the Christian community has something to counteract the influence of society. Cannot the church sound her clarion call? The more we allow sin, abortion, homosexuality, or in whatever package it is wrapped, to be openly displayed without rebuke, the more likely it is to become tolerated and eventually accepted.

²⁹ Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 79.

The church must never fall prey to the world through their craftiness and deceitfulness. The church is “Marching to Zion” and although society and culture may change, it does not change our assignment. The church’s marching orders remain the same: “Go ye into all the world....”

Evidence of a Changing Culture

Bus drivers run their routes, bells ring, classrooms fill up, students find their seats, teachers take their places, and the school day begins across America. However, this is about as close as it comes to the “normal” school day of yesteryear. It only takes a few steps in the hallways of the average public school to realize that there has been a drastic change and a cultural shift in the manner in which we conduct school. The principal’s office is no longer used to reprimand a student for chewing gum, throwing spitballs, or excessive talking in class. No, today it is a place of mediation or sometimes negotiation. Today many of our schools are filled with violence, threats, cursing, swearing, drugs, and overall contempt for the system. Discipline is a word that is often found only on chalkboards, or a spelling quiz, rarely, is it used in the context of correction. Corporal punishment is almost unheard of today; it has been replaced with time outs, suspensions, detentions, and a host of other reproofs. Thirty states in the United States have banned corporal punishment in public schools; it is still legal in twenty states. It must be noted here that there is a vast distinction between discipline and abuse. Discipline is administered with love while abuse is exploitation and harmful.

The debate of whether or not to use corporal punishment will no doubt continue, but that is not the issue; the issue is accountability, which is, being accountable for one’s actions. Actions, whether good or bad, have consequences. In many ways, we have raised

a generation that is void of consequences. It has been stated, “We reap what we sow. If we sow license and godlessness, we will reap more of the same. Our nation is reaping a bitter harvest of drug addiction, violent crime, thievery, and rape because we have sown sensuality and irresponsibility in our schools, our media, and even our entertainment.”³⁰ It is no wonder that society finds itself in a maze trying to raise this generation in a responsible manner having exposed them to so many varying views and cultural changes. At times, it almost rises to the level of hypocrisy. Consider Johnson’s concern:

The baby buster generation has been raised up in schools devoid of prayer times that were commonplace for the baby boomer generation. They have watched groups like the A.C.L.U. help cast every vestige of religion out of the schools, civic arenas, football games, and graduation ceremonies. And they have watched Christians roll over and play dead. They have not seen Christians assert their rights to exercise their religion, as guaranteed by the Constitution.³¹

Are not society and the church equally responsible? Perhaps Rachel Scott’s father has rightly surmised: “We have stripped them of their true heritage by removing all spiritual influences from their schools and passing legislation that violates our country’s Constitution, history, and moral foundations.”³² The actions of future generations will be no different unless we confront the present culture. The evidence is overwhelming that, even though we are experiencing great affluence, we are witnessing a cultural shift away from our nation’s religious principles and toward a more scientific and secular approach.

³⁰ LaHaye and LaHaye, 224.

³¹ Johnson, 139.

³² Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, 178.

Johnson continues his observation by stating, “In the place of religion in the schools the baby-buster generation has watched science be raised to a god-like status.”³³

It is amazing that our nation’s highest leaders can open their sessions in prayer and yet it is not allowed on public school campuses. Columbine should have reminded us of the importance of God’s presence in our daily lives and in the public arena. Sutton alludes to this,

Much soul searching followed the massacre including debates over gun control, school cliques, and bullying, the influence of violent movies and video games, and the breakdown of the home. If nothing else, Columbine provided a glimpse into the alienation and spiritual vacuum that many of the day’s students experience with chilling implications for a culture that seems to make no place for God.³⁴

We constantly see and are reminded that prayer and Bible reading have been removed from our schools, and there have been many attempts to reverse this position. However, public prayer and Bible reading will probably never return to the classroom, and this is most likely for the best. Although many in the Christian community would welcome their reinstatement, it would bring utter chaos in the present cultural climate. There would be endless debates as to the object of our prayers and the book to be read. We have lost our opportunity to clearly and concisely define God in the public sector based on scriptural integrity. In essence, society has allowed culture to reshape their concept of God and the validity of the Scriptures.

The basic curricula in our schools have also changed considerably over the past few decades. We have seen the rise in sex-education, as if our children needed more

³³ Johnson, 139.

³⁴ Sutton, 351.

exposure to sex than they presently see on television and the Internet. Also, we have experienced the removal of creationism from the curriculum and watched as evolution became its replacement. As mentioned previously, homosexuality is being paraded as an “alternative lifestyle” with the connotation of being normal. Various other changes to the teachings of our public schools have become prominent. In some cases the significance of life has been degraded and a value system has been assigned. In their book, *Invasion of Other Gods*, David Jeremiah and Carole Carlson gave illustrations of the content of some courses of study in nearby communities. Two such illustrations follow:

A nearby school district has been teaching death education that helps an elementary or junior high age student plan his or her death. Students have been told to plan their tombstone statement and write letters to friends. (Family is often excluded from this assignment.) Suicide education at one middle school is so descriptive that students come away with three or four plans that are most often used.

A high school girl was exposed to games where children were forced to pick which parent is to be killed in stories involving both a sinking boat and a fallout shelter. In the sinking-boat exercises, the teacher told the students that old people should be selected to die first.³⁵

Teachings such as this not only lead us down the slippery slope of demise but send us into the depths of the abandonment of our principles and morals. Jeremiah and Carlson asserts, “We only get one chance to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is no time to sit on our hands while the enemy is making inroads into our schools and taking our children captive, kidnapping some of them before they are out of kindergarten.”³⁶

³⁵ David Jeremiah and Carole Carlson, *Invasion of Other Gods: The Seduction of New Age Spirituality* (Dallas: World Publishing, 1995), 96.

³⁶ Ibid., 99.

Unfortunately, the lack of discipline is not limited to our schools; in fact, the problem in our schools is probably a reflection of our homes. In many cases, the home has become a transient station for a little nourishment, entertainment, and rest. The home has often become the place where everyone goes on their way to somewhere else. It has become a revolving door of activity and demise.

The present generation have been exposed to such varying concepts of family, they are confused as to what constitutes family. According to McDowell and Hostetler,

Recent studies on adults by The Barna Research Group indicate a major shift in the ways American adults define “family.” In days past, people defined a family as a group of individuals related to each other by marriage, birth, or adoption. Today, however, a majority of adults define a family as “all of those people whom I deeply care about, and all of those people who deeply care about me.”³⁷

In addition, “In our mobile society, people have few roots. People are no longer surrounded by the extended family of aunts and uncles, grandparents, and brothers and sisters that provided a safety net for previous generations.”³⁸ Nowadays, a valid question could be asked: Is there a family in the house? And, if so, how do we locate them using such criteria? The generations of the past few decades continue in their endeavor to identify the family in light of the culture they are exposed to. The culture dictates that “... most of our kids possess a concept of the family that would define cohabitating couples and homosexual unions as a legitimate family; the study indicates that they do not fully realize the implications of their view, but it is there, nonetheless, to shape their reasoning—and their behavior—in the future.”³⁹ The answer lies in the biblical

³⁷ McDowell and Hostetler, 61.

³⁸ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 314.

³⁹ McDowell and Hostetler, 62.

foundation of the home and family. A home cannot house a family unless God builds the house.

The family is an essential part of society and the church. Considering the impact that the present culture has on the family, it is no wonder so many have been classified as dysfunctional. Families constantly struggle with separation, divorce, societal pressures, and family crisis. This has had a dramatic influence on our children. Draper has commented, “We’d better wise up. We’re raising a group of young people who’ve never seen integrity, and they will grow up without integrity—lying about their school work, cheating on tests, deceiving their parents. Most kids who are trying to misbehave lie to their parents and teachers about it.”⁴⁰ The main problem is that the present generation has few role models to choose from. Lying, cheating, and misrepresentation has all but become norm in our society. Political candidates are constantly being scrutinized only to find that they have been deceitful concerning their conduct or business affairs. And, it doesn’t end there; it has infiltrated the home. Draper alludes to the core of the problem with the conduct of our children. He states, “But then parents lie to their children, too. Parents often say, ‘We’ll do this if you’ll do that,’ and they don’t. Lying has become acceptable. Deceit is approved in our society, and it is a disaster.”⁴¹

The home is no longer a safe haven for many of our children and teens. Many times parents have lowered their standards for fear they will push them away and lose them to society. The sad truth is, many have already been lost and it is not because standards are too high, it is because parents have quit being parents and are trying to

⁴⁰ Draper, 107.

⁴¹ Ibid.

become their children's best friend. We must remember parents are to be parents. It is okay to tell their children they have to go to Sunday School and worship services; to require them to be home at a reasonable hour; to monitor the television shows they watch, the music they listen to, the movies they go to see, the crowd they hang around with, the Internet sites they visit, and the activities they participate in. It is appropriate to say NO! It will not scar them for life nor will it warp their personality. They are the parents. Again, it is appropriate!

In addition, the home is where our children's basic biblical and spiritual foundations should be established. As mentioned previously, prayer and Bible reading will probably never return to the public classroom. However, home is the place children ought to learn about God and the Christian life in the first place. We have tried to shift the responsibility to our churches and Christian Day Schools without ever practicing it in the home. We can be appalled that it has been removed from our schools as much as we desire, but it has to begin in the home!

Another area of concern is that many of our institutions of higher learning have fallen prey to the pressures of society and the changing culture. Hawkins relates a story that illustrates this quite well:

Young people and young adults are engaged in the most promiscuous culture known to the Western world, right here in America. Several factors come into play. The first is an element of intimidation. We have raised a generation in a public education system which has intimidated them intellectually into a belief in relativism – into accepting the absurd notion that everything is relative, that there are no moral absolutes. This intellectually indefensible position has given rise to all sorts of things, like coeducational dorms. For example, a preacher and his wife were sending their daughter to a school in the East. When they took her there to check into the dorm, they discovered it was coeducational. However, there was one floor that was reserved for only girls. Relieved, they were going to place her there until the dorm mother said, "Unless she's a lesbian, she doesn't want to be

on this floor, because this floor is made up of lesbians.” So she moved to a coeducational floor.⁴²

We constantly hear the cry of society for equality for their beliefs and their value system; however, it usually comes at the expense of the removal of Christian principles and values.

It appears that every aspect of life is being greatly affected by the changing culture, even the church. It is easy for churches to become stuck in their comfort zones and fail to confront society or the culture. O. S. Hawkins makes reference to this:

Many of us live in a culture not only out in the world, but within the church, that is asking, “What is in it for me?” When many young families are looking for churches today, their first question is, “What can you do for me?” In our contemporary culture, many look for a church home where they do not have to be inconvenienced. Very few people are ready to move out of their comfort zones, and consequently there is not enough rebuilding being done today.⁴³

So often the church tries to compete with the world. They attempt to use the same methods of the world when, in reality, the church needs to tell the world that Jesus is enough. Hughes reminds us:

Yes, God loves us. With this lie Satan asks us, “How *much* does God love you?” We simply cannot quantify God’s love in any way that will answer that question effectively. The only true answer to it is “Enough.” God loved me enough to send His Son to die for me. God loved me enough to find me and rescue me. God loves me enough to bless me with all I need each day, and God loved me enough to give me purpose in His kingdom. Yes, God loves me enough.⁴⁴

It is not the church’s responsibility to compete or match the world; it is her task to reach the world with the simple message of the Gospel.

⁴² Hawkins, *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults*, 229-230.

⁴³ O. S. Hawkins, *Rebuilding: It’s Never too Late for a New Beginning* (Dallas: Annuity Board, SBC, 1999), 26.

⁴⁴ Hughes, 88.

The cultural challenges before the church are quite intense. Society and culture will always provide alternatives to the influence of the Christian community. With the influx of various religions and cults: Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslim, Buddhism, and various others, it is not difficult to understand the perplexity of the religious community.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that the day and age we currently live in is a day of diversity and cultural change. Whether it is the church, home, college campus, public school, or any other facet of life, the cultural challenges will not disappear; they must be engaged. If a jury were to consider the evidence presented concerning the collapse of morality, the breakdown of the family, the disintegration of ethics, and the demise of compassion, they would certainly return a verdict of “Guilty.”

When Compassion Fails

The place was Gulfport, Mississippi, and Hurricane Katrina had cut a path of devastation along the Gulf Coast. Debris was everywhere and few buildings were left standing near the shoreline. People who remained were living in shelters or make-shift homes struggling to face each new day. Volunteers from all across the United States had responded in an effort to help clean up, remove debris, and repair or rebuild houses. In a gesture of gratitude, people had nailed signs on any vertical object to thank the volunteers for their efforts. One particular neighborhood had the following messages written on pieces of debris and nailed to a post:

“TO ALL VOLUNTEERS YOU ARE OUR HEROS & THE WIND BENEATH OUR WINGS”; “GOD BLESS AND THANKS”; “WE LOVE YOU!”; “TO OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS at WLOX-13 HEARTFELT THANKS FOR THE HEROIC DEEDS IN OUR DARKEST HOURS OF NEED 8-29-05”

Neighborhood after neighborhood had signs displaying their appreciation; it was a constant reminder of three things: 1) People were hurting and needed help, 2) people were moved with compassion and responded, and 3) those affected responded with love and appreciation. This is compassion at its best.

Unfortunately, needs and hurts are not always responded to and met with the same tenaciousness. Often times the church has the opportunity to respond to a hurting world only to be detoured by her own agenda. Pain, suffering, and loss do not recognize time nor distance. Already beaten and battered, people all too often discover that no one really cares, thus compassion has failed.

Compassion is an action, but it needs an object to act upon. Rather than responding in an appropriate manner, we often excuse our apathy by recommending people to local social agencies, the Red Cross, or other government-sponsored assistance programs. Consider the manner in which we have attempted to delegate our responsibility to others: “In days past, the church and strong social structures of communities did much to meet the needs of those in their vicinity. Today, however, having replaced a love of God with love of pleasure, we are substituting commitment to our fellowman with taxes to our government—relegating to government the duty of caring for our fellowman.”⁴⁵ The old adage says, “If the church had lived up to her responsibility, we would not have needed welfare programs.” Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that there is much for the church to do, and the work of the church is not contingent on society or culture or their approval.

⁴⁵ LaHaye and LaHaye, 48.

Compassion fails when people tend to look the other way. Compassion is often inconvenient and requires more time and effort than one anticipates. Society and the church are inundated with opportunities to express compassion. Secular social programs are notorious for being subjective, therefore, eliminating some who are in the greatest need. However, compassion does not have to fail. For example, there is a nonprofit organization in central North Carolina that helps families at Christmas to provide food and presents for children who are experiencing tough times. The organization completes a background check that, hopefully, insures that people are not taking advantage of them, but they also realize that the children are not responsible. Therefore, they maintain the policy that if they err, they err on the side of the child. This assures them that compassion does not fail. Even on the rare occasions that people do exploit them and their cause, compassion is worth the risk.

Even with our best efforts, compassion does fail. Consider the following scenario:

Take the case of Stacy, a young girl who became pregnant when she was just seventeen. Stacy gave her baby up for adoption, and only her family knew of the incident. Several years later, Stacy fell in love with and married a loving man named Ron. Fearing his reaction, she never told Ron about the baby. Over the years, Stacy concealed her guilt and grief until finally, the pressure became too overwhelming and she admitted the entire episode to Ron.

Surprisingly, Ron did not respond in anger. He understood the agony she had carried for so many years and loved her in spite of her past. However, it was Stacy who at this point could not cope. Unable to accept Ron's forgiveness and knowing she had failed according to society's standards, Stacy felt unworthy of Ron's love. She could not forgive herself and chose to leave her husband.⁴⁶

This is a prime example of compassion failing. Not because Stacy's husband would not forgive and accept her, but because of societal expectations and the demands of culture.

McGee prefaced Stacy's story by identifying the root cause of the failure of compassion:

⁴⁶ McGee, 24-25.

“Separated from God and His Word, people have only their abilities and the opinions of others on which to base their worth, and the circumstances around them will ultimately control the way they feel about themselves.”⁴⁷

Compassion requires the involvement of numerous people. It is not a one-man operation or limited to a few. There are many people who need to express compassion. It brings them spiritual satisfaction and meets their need of involvement and making a difference in the lives of others. It is essential that the church allows or finds places of ministry for these types of people. To them it becomes their channel of blessings. Lupton illustrates this quite well:

She looked to me to be in her late 50s, gray hair bushing out beneath her knit cap. She grasped a large shopping-bag-type purse with one hand and pounded persistently on the church door with the other. We could see her through the hazy Plexiglas window as the pastor and I walked down the hall, the lively discussion of our early morning meeting on homelessness still fresh on our minds.

“The clothes closet opens at 10. You can come back and get some clothes then,” the pastor informed her, with as much sensitivity as any busy urban leader who is running late for his next meeting. “No, no!” she interrupted before the sentence had barely escaped his lips, her countenance visibly fallen. “I’m here to help sort clothes.” But the damage was done. The spirit that had moved this little lady to get up early in the morning to help clothe others had been wounded. A simple error. Understandable. Unwittingly made. Irreversible.⁴⁸

We must always be sensitive to those who are giving of themselves to impact the lives of others. Compassion seeks to heal and never harm.

The church has an awesome responsibility and privilege of meeting the needs of hurting humanity. No other organization in the world has the power and the resources that are available to the church. Prayer is essential in order to prevent compassion from

⁴⁷ McGee, 24.

⁴⁸ Lupton, 21.

failing. It has been said, “Prayer gives the power, strength, and ability for bearing the fruit of love which people cannot muster from their own resources. The command to love involves doing something divine, which is impossible without divine involvement.”⁴⁹ It is through prayer that we are able to instill in others the power and presence of God in the midst of heartaches and turmoil. When people are hurting, they need to know that they are being lifted up to God, the source of all the strength they will ever need.

Throughout this chapter we have investigated the path to demise. It has exposed a culture that is detrimental to society and the church. One that every man, woman, boy, and girl will be exposed. It is a path of selfishness, hurt, anger, ambivalence, and destruction waits at the end. However, we must remember that we all will encounter this path throughout life. In fact, Hawkins says,

This week the people in our pews will live out there in a pagan culture during the week. Tomorrow our young people will go to many schools where they will be confronted with value systems that are foreign to what they hear on Sundays. We all find ourselves living in a world with standards and principles that are foreign to the Bible.⁵⁰

The influence of culture is real and it has impacted homes, schools, organizations, churches, and individuals. Devastation is evidenced in its wake.

We might even ask ourselves the question, “How did this happen?” Lupton has a response:

When our culture traded front-porch neighborhood life for private backyard patios, when we succumbed to the seduction of individualism and lost touch with our next-door neighbors, a void was created in the spirit of our people that chat rooms cannot fill. The commuting church, with its scattered members buzzing in and out of the neighborhood, is one more troubling reminder of what we have

⁴⁹ Poe, 33.

⁵⁰ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 18.

lost. A community-starved society, by its protests, is calling the Church back to its historic mandate: to be the exemplar within the community of both love of God and love of neighbor.⁵¹

When communities were made up of neighbors instead of the “people next door” there was a sense of caring and responsibility that each accepted by default. The times and the culture have changed and communities have eroded into houses with bolted doors, alarm systems equipped with surveillance cameras to protect the “things” that identify who they are. In the not too far distant past, neighbors looked after neighbors and “things” were incidental objects and had little relevance.

Once you travel down the path to demise you will come to an intersection, a crossroad. It is here that options will be considered, consequences will be weighed, and decisions will be made. There are no markers indicating the direction to take, no road signs, and no destinations listed. You see, it is really not the path that you are traveling; it is the character and the integrity of the one traveling it.

⁵¹ Lupton, 30.

CHAPTER 6

RECLAIMING COMPASSION

In the fourth chapter of Second Timothy, we find Paul in a Roman prison awaiting execution under the command of Nero. Paul instructs his young protégé that the times will become worse and worse and encourages him to continue to preach the gospel. He says, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season ...” (v. 2a), in other words, preach the Word when it is well received and when it is rejected. He tells him that there will come a time when they would not embrace the gospel, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (v. 3), but he reminds him to remain faithful. Paul also gives him an overview of his ministry and assures Timothy that his life in Christ has been well spent and he awaits a crown of righteousness.

However, it is at this point we witness a change in Paul’s demeanor. You can sense the loneliness and hurt in his letter as he looks back over his life. Listening closely to Paul’s words, we can readily hear a sense of despair, despondency, and loneliness. Paul says in verse nine, “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me” and then in verse twenty-one, he echoes those words with an emphasis on the time span. He says, “Do thy diligence to come before winter.” One can hear the sense of urgency in his voice as

winter is approaching and the depth of loneliness. Throughout these verses, Paul addresses several things that identify the need for compassion. He tells Timothy, “Only Luke is with me” signifying that he has a great need for others to be with him. Paul prefaces this by telling Timothy, that “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world” (v. 10a). His co-laborer, Demas, has left him alone and, although he had walked and ministered with Paul, now has hearkened unto the call of the world. Crescens and Titus have also departed, although their departure was to do the work of the ministry, but the fact remains that only Luke is with him. Paul also exhibits hurt, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me” (16a). When he needed his companions they were not there, he stood alone. However, notice the compassion Paul ends this verse with: “*I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge” (16b). Paul also warns Timothy to beware of Alexander the coppersmith because he had harmed him greatly. In fact, it has been suggested that he may have been instrumental in having Paul arrested. In the midst of Paul’s imminent death, Paul’s thoughts are on others. He needed his fellow laborers with him but he also needed for them to bring the “parchments” (the Scriptures) because of the comfort they would bring. In addition, he sends greetings to others of his fellowship and is concerned about his brother, Trophimus, who is sick in Miletus.

This letter is a stark reminder of the need for compassion. Is it not amazing how a person, such as Paul, can be facing certain death and, yet be willing to exhibit such compassion? His thoughts were on others more than self. Although Paul was in need of his cloak because winter was coming, he also needed his friends with him. However, apart from this, his main focus was preparing Timothy for the ministry. Paul is unconcerned about his own fate because he knew that the Lord would deliver him.

Paul is a perfect example of the manner in which compassion can be displayed and also be received. Paul had fundamental needs for companionship, clothing, and spiritual encouragement. However, he only asks for the basics and wanted others to know they were in his thoughts. This was Paul's last letter prior to his death and he ended it with compassion.

The expression of compassion needs to be expressed every day. One does not have to look far to find the need of compassion. The sad truth is that many of us are not looking for it. The need of compassion can be found in the hallways of our schools, the living rooms of our homes, the aisles of our churches, the checkout lines in our supermarkets, and the workplaces of our employers. The need for compassion is not hard to locate.

Often times, our churches fail to respond or react to the need for compassion due to budget constraints or oversights. However, it is essential that churches rekindle the fire of compassion. Compassion can be the greatest source of blessings within any congregation. Our communities, neighbors, churches, and our nation are in great need for people to step to the forefront and exhibit and reclaim compassion.

There are times when Christians and communities become tired and weary of confronting the changing culture. It is imperative that we remember that the church is a body of baptized believers and that we have been given the assurance "that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). Draper expresses it in this manner: "We need one another. None of us are superstars or supersaints. We must draw strength from

one another. Strength and substance are imparted when we lift our voices praising the Lord and when we gather around the Word of God.”¹

The Road to Recovery

The “Road to Recovery” requires confronting the culture, which is rarely an easy task. Culture is filled with so many nuances that it is difficult to determine the proper course to take. Sometimes the church and/or the community does not have a clear understanding of their destination when it comes to confronting the culture. Daniel Bagby gives a good analogy to illustrate this:

The challenge of the local community is to decide what it will be. Lewis Carroll in his popular book, *Alice in Wonderland*, has Alice at a crossroads out of a tunnel, asking the Cheshire Cat, “Where do I go from here?” To which he replied: “Well, that all depends on where you’re trying to get! Do you know where you want to go?” She answered: “I don’t guess I really care.” The cat then replied: “Well, if you don’t really care, it doesn’t really matter which way you go.”²

There are churches that are at the same crossroad. They really do not know where they are going. Their goal is “To meet next Sunday” and that is the extent of their vision. They become overwhelmed while trying to define their purpose and mission. They fail to recognize the needs within and without and forget their primary destination in the world. Bagby continues his observation, “Does the church know which way it wants to go? We have the power to go the way of helping, or hurting. I hope we care enough to choose the

¹ Draper, 52.

² Daniel G. Bagby, *The Church: The Power to Help and to Hurt* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), 150-151.

healing road.”³ The road to recovery will include those involved in determining where and the extent they are willing to travel. Most likely, it will not always be a joyous journey, but it will be a worthwhile journey.

One of the things that needs to be considered is the manner in which we are to confront society and culture. Hawkins poses a question and then supplies a couple of examples:

Can we really expect to change a crumbling culture around us? It is interesting to watch the church of Jesus Christ in the various ways it attempts to address the culture today. Some *compromise*—that is, they allow the permeating, pluralistic philosophy of the day to subtly take away the focus from the exclusivity of Christ. Others *condone* the culture. For some it is much easier to adapt to the culture and condone alternative lifestyles, not only in the pew but also in the pulpit. There are others who *condemn*. Some people respond to the culture by simply beating their Bibles a little harder and screaming a little louder as though that were going to win a lost generation. And thank God there are some who learn from Daniel to *confront* the culture and engage it by speaking the truth in love.⁴

Culture often changes so rapidly it is difficult to stay ahead of the changes and confront them in an effective manner. Culture is not a one-eyed monster that needs to be eliminated, it is a facet of our lives that must be encountered, confronted, and managed to the best possible conclusion. It is vital in helping to shape us, strengthen our resolve, and reaffirm our foundations. As Bickers has said, “When Christ began His ministry, He did not establish a church and invite people to come and learn a new language, a new way of worship, and a new worldview. He went out into that hostile world, embraced it, and met people where they were in their lives.”⁵ The church cannot expect the world to come

³ Bagby, 151.

⁴ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 12. The classic work in this field is, *Christ and Culture*, by H. Richard Niebuhr.

⁵ Bickers, 115.

knocking on her doors. In many cases, the people of the world have lost respect for the church and they want little, if any, to do with it.

Churches must reclaim their identity and respect by engaging the culture. Bickers continues his observation: “He rebuked the hypocrite while offering forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery. He touched the leper, the blind, and the other outcasts of society and brought healing to their lives. He allowed others to touch Him and receive the healing their bodies and souls needed.”⁶ Notice, that not only did Jesus go about touching the lives of others, He allowed them to touch Him. We must all learn that if we are going to impact society and culture, we must get close enough to people to touch and change them, but we must also allow them to get close enough that they can touch us. We cannot continue building up walls of resistance and separation. A relationship must be developed. This does not mean compromise or tolerance, it is meeting people’s needs where they are.

Reclaiming our values and rebuilding our family structure is imperative to the road to recovery. Our families are struggling and becoming more and more dysfunctional every day. Parents must reestablish their parental roles based on scriptural authority and not societal expectations. The responsibility of teaching moral values and ethics to our children and building character predominately rests upon the parents. Although the church and fellow Christians are valuable assets and indispensable allies, they can never replace the influence and support of the parents. Hawkins states,

Christian parents seeking to raise children to live in a 21st century Babylonian culture in America should not think they can leave it to the school nor the church to instill these values. We should dispense with the notion that “it takes a village”

⁶ Bickers, 115.

to raise a child. No, it takes a mom or a dad to train these precious lives in the way that they should go. When we leave it to the village they will pull our kids down every time!⁷

The path to recovery must include a new way of thinking and proclaiming the message of the gospel. Again, this does not mean compromise or tolerance; it is speaking to them in a language they understand. Past generations were more inclined to respond to audio messages or instructions; however, the present generation leans more to the visual aspect of learning. Many need to see rather than just hear. They are constantly multitasking; therefore, their focus is not limited to one particular sensory perception. Hawkins remarks, “We need to engage our culture. There are people who have not been in church in years. Our verbiage and all of our ecclesiology are a foreign language to them. We should not abandon or water down the message. We need the pure gold of the Gospel.”⁸ We often hear people say, “The message does not change, but the methods do.” This is very true, but we have a tendency to hold onto as much of the old methods as possible. We do this by labeling it as tradition, heritage, or even foundation, but the truth is, it is trying to hold on to the past. Hawkins says, “There are many ways in which church has been locked in a time warp.”⁹

Again, culture is not the plague. It is not something to be avoided; it is an avenue of opportunities. At times, we have to make adjustments in our positions, be more open-minded, and considerate of others and their culture. Malphurs says,

⁷ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 31.

⁸ Hawkins, *Shields of Brass or Shields of Gold*, 19-20.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

In addition to a theology of change, I contend that twenty-first-century churches must develop a practical, basic theology of culture. Since the church began on the Day of Pentecost, it has needed a theology of culture, and this need will continue as long as the church exists on earth As globalism increases, and we come into contact with more and different cultures as well as our own, and as new churches appear on the horizon, we will inevitably face practical issues and questions that only a basic, biblical theology of culture can address.¹⁰

Consider, Jesus "... wept over the condition of the people and continually offered them a message of hope. He did not spend time attacking the culture but worked to change the culture one person at a time."¹¹

When culture is allowed to infiltrate our homes, churches, and society and is left unchecked it tends to lead to uncertainty and sometimes chaos. This is one of the main reasons that the Christian community and the church cannot remain silent; they must engage the culture. Sutton says,

The remedy to halt our culture from moving any farther in this direction is multifaceted. First, Christians must reengage the culture. Many losses have been by default. Second, legislators and jurists who understand our heritage and embrace a strict constructionist constitutional philosophy are important. Some reading this may need to run for public office. Third, honest historians must challenge the revisionists who seemingly systematically have attempted to rewrite our nation's heritage to exclude Christian influence.¹²

In many ways we have lost our passion for a lost world and are contented for our congregations to live a half-hearted Christian life. At times, we have allowed our elected officials to run unabated and failed to challenge their decisions. It is time for the church and the Christian community to stand up and be counted. The Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6).

¹⁰ Malphurs, *A New Kind of Church*, 95.

¹¹ Bickers, 115.

¹² Sutton, 424.

Paul also wrote, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.... Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth ...” (Eph. 6:12, 14a).

We have gone down the path to demise long enough, and Christians need to be aware of how far we have traveled. The Christian community and the church can make the difference. It calls for a reengagement of the culture in every aspect: the home, community, church, society, government, and the political arena. The road to recovery is not a dead end street. It may be curvy and filled with detours, but it is a road that cuts right through the middle of culture.

Adoption of Compassion

When the “I do’s” have been said and the honeymoon is over, couples often begin thinking about and planning a family. This usually proves to be a very joyous occasion as they anticipate and anxiously await the arrival of their first child. However, for some couples this time of bliss eludes them and they discover that they, for whatever reason, are unable to have children. The reality is earth-shattering and the disappointment overwhelming. Not wanting to give up on the prospect of having children, they usually try every conceivable method to begin a family but, unfortunately, many find one disappointment after another. Then, as an alternative, they discuss, investigate, and eventually decide on adoption. Normally, there is a fair amount of hesitancy and uncertainty. The couple is unsure whether or not they will be able to love a child who is not their own; that is, until they hold that “bundle of joy” in their arms and in most cases

their fears and anxiety dissipate. They realize that “love never fails” and love knows no barriers or boundaries.

Although compassion is certainly different, there are similarities when it comes to being compassionate. Discovering and adopting compassion as a way of life is often frightening and is filled with uncertainties. We are unsure how people are going to respond and the unknown is usually a reason for apprehension. However, all the fears and anxieties usually disappear once we engage in and adopt compassion. It becomes a way of life. The compassionate way has been described as: “The compassionate way is the patient way. Patience is the discipline of compassion. This becomes obvious when we realize that the word *compassion* could be read as *com-patience*. The words *passion* and *patience* both find their roots in the Latin word *pati*, which means ‘suffering’.”¹³

We can recognize the need for compassion and even move in that direction but until we actually participate, we have not experienced compassion. When we adopt compassion it becomes a normal response to the needs that surround us. Often times there are needs and we just fail to see them; it is not that we are intentionally avoiding them we are just preoccupied with something else. The adoption of compassion refocuses our attention. We become more aware of the needs; in fact, it will often prompt us to intentionally search for the need.

Compassion can be learned and laws can even be established that attempt to legislate it, but it is only when an individual, group, church, or society adopts it, will it ever be viable and effective. Consider the story told by Tom Elliff in his book, *Unbreakable*:

¹³ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 89.

While in college I had the privilege of conducting a revival in a small town in southern Arkansas. Prior to the service one evening, the revival team was invited to eat in the home of a faithful church member. I have rarely met such a gracious and genuinely contented woman. Throughout the meal I was impressed with her joyful attitude and spiritual depth.

After the meal, this lady said, "I'd like to show you a living illustration of God's love." We had no idea anyone else was in this home, so we prepared to go outdoors. She indicated that this "living illustration" was in a bedroom in the back of the house, so we followed her there. Imagine our surprise when we were led into a room where a grown man was lying in something similar to a baby's bed. He could not communicate with us and, in fact, was unable to do the slightest thing for himself.

As we gazed, speechless, the lady said, "This is my son. He was born and has lived his entire life in this condition. I must tend to every need he has. As you can see, he doesn't have the ability to communicate, so he can never tell me what he needs, nor can he express gratitude to me."¹⁴

It is not difficult to see compassion in the manner in which this mother cared for her son.

There was a bond of love and an expression of compassion that words could not adequately express. This mother was willing to care for his every need without any hint of gratitude or recognition. Compassion is not contingent upon someone asking for help or an expression of appreciation.

So often, people have the mistaken idea that if they are compassionate it will require too much time or effort. They are afraid that it will become more like work or a job, which will rob them of their joy and gratification. However, happiness and satisfaction are found in the midst of the mission; joy is in the doing. Compassion does not deprive one of joy, rather it instills joy; it does not produce embarrassment or uneasiness, but provides a sense of fulfillment and peace.

The previous story is a wonderful example of compassion, but there is more. As the famous radio broadcaster, Paul Harvey, would say, here is "The rest of the story":

¹⁴ Tom Elliff, *Unbreakable: The Seven Pillars of a Kingdom Family* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003), 39.

As her words and the child's plight began to sink in, she continued, "Many people encouraged me to place him in a state home for children like him. I don't feel bad toward those who do. I have met some of those parents and feel that they made the best decision for them. But as I prayed, God showed me that He wanted me to keep my son here in my home. Have I questioned God about this? Certainly! Especially after my husband died. But I must tell you that tending to his needs has been the greatest joy of my life. It has taught me to depend on God as never before. The doctors say that soon my son may die. I'll have no regrets, not even for one minute of the time I've spent with him. And one day in heaven, we will walk and talk together about all we *both* experienced during these many wonderful days together."¹⁵

This is a wonderful example of the adoption of compassion. This woman's son was always going to be in a condition of constant need and her resolve was that she was going to be there to meet his needs. In addition, compassion is not based on someone else's expectations. She respected those who advised her to respond differently and she understood that for them that was not their compassionate way. However, for her, it was her adoption of compassion.

The Church Embracing Compassion

It is interesting to go to a shopping mall, find a discreet place to sit and watch people as they go about from place to place. You may see some of the most amazing sights your eyes have ever beheld. There will be the normal shoppers laughing, talking, holding hands, pushing strollers, frantically trying to keep up with their children, and wrestling with packages. Then, there will probably be moments of humor, someone who does something silly and they instinctively look around hoping no one saw them. There may be those priceless moments as you watch the children and they touch your heart with their smiles, their antics, milkshake mustaches, or perhaps their faces smudged with

¹⁵ Elliff, 39.

candy or ice cream. Or, perhaps an elderly couple walking arm in arm as though they were newlyweds. However, some of the most precious moments will be when you catch a glimpse of a couple embracing each other, caught up in their own little world, oblivious to everything else around them. You can just sense the presence of love as they hold ever so tightly to each other. For, at that moment they become one. Nothing else matters.

This is pretty descriptive of the church when she embraces compassion. The similarities are striking. When the church embraces compassion she forgets about petty differences, the color of the carpet, whether or not the nursery needs painting, or a thousand other things. Her focus is on ministry; touching and changing the lives of others. Ministry and compassion should be synonymous. They should be inclusive of every aspect of the church as the church invests in the lives of others. In the book, *Let's Roll*, Lisa Beamer said,

... I came to realize that true Christians follow Jesus' example of compassion all the time, whether in full-time Christian service, working in a department store, waiting tables in a restaurant, or cranking out multimillion-dollar deals on Wall Street. Whether you're helping to pull starving, homeless people out of the ditches of Calcutta, visiting the elderly at a nursing home, or teaching inner-city kids to read, if you are doing what Jesus would do, acting the way Jesus would act, and showing his love to others, you are doing "ministry."¹⁶

Compassion is an essential element in the life of the church. It is unfortunate that some churches have become so enamored with themselves, their programs, and agendas that they have failed to embrace compassion. In his book, *Life Wide Open*, David Jeremiah said:

We are making an impact to some degree; I would hate to imagine what America would look and act like if the church were not here. But are we having

¹⁶ Lisa Beamer and Ken Abraham, *Let's Roll: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2002), 78.

the level of impact we could? Are we turning our society upside down the way Jesus and the apostles did theirs? I don't think so. And in my view, it's because we are more in love with the church than with the Lord of the church. We have moved from faith to formalism. We have lost our first love.

Losing our first love is another way of saying we have lost our passion.¹⁷

There is no greater blessing to a community than for a local church to embrace compassion. Churches, with all their faults, continue to be the best hope for the world in responding to their needs. The arms of the local churches reach near and far. They can touch the lives of those in their own community and yet move the hearts of people across the oceans. Bagby said, "The local church is the 'warehouse of love' from which God's people deliver God's love globally. Again, each fellowship must decide how to distribute its resources and strength. Christ's love is meant to be shared, and the local church can find ways to transmit Christ's love in such a way that it is multiplied internationally."¹⁸ When a church reaches beyond her doors and touches the lives of her communities, the surrounding communities, and across the globe, she is fulfilling the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the church.

Although compassion is identifying and attending to the needs of the hurting, discouraged, brokenhearted, and the suffering, it is also addressing spiritual conditions as well. Compassion is not a welfare program, it is an attitude based on the spiritual premise that God loves the world and He sent His Son to die for the world. Draper reminds us, "God does not love you because you're important. You're important because God loves

¹⁷ David Jeremiah, *Life Wide Open: Unleashing the Power of a Passionate Life* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2003), 85.

¹⁸ Bagby, 127.

you!”¹⁹ So often it is easy to become caught up in meeting the physical needs of others that spiritual needs are disregarded, although unintentionally. It is of utmost importance that churches remember the awesome responsibility of reaching the world with the Gospel. Stetzer and Dodson pose the following: “Do we really take the time to grasp what it means for people to be lost, separated from God, spiritually condemned, bound to sin, and without hope? Maybe the first thing we need to pray about is for God to help us *see* the huge field of people waiting to be harvested and to give us an incredible love for those people.”²⁰ Perhaps it would be well for us to remember the words of Jesus, “... The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the laborers *are* few” (Matt. 9:37).

So often, churches limit their ministry boundaries to be inclusive of only the basic types of ministries: Nursing home ministry, jail ministry, food banks, clothing closets, community visitation, and scores of other local ministries. The sad irony is, they often miss the greatest potential for compassion. There are many avenues in which the church can become involved that will automatically move them to be a compassionate people. The possibilities are unlimited. Keep in mind when Jesus said, “For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not” (Matt. 25:42-43). He was addressing their lack of compassion. Looking at each category He addressed, we can readily see ministry opportunities. Wiersbe relates it in this

¹⁹ Draper, 124.

²⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, 41.

manner: "... We are the Lord's ambassadors, sent to represent Him in this world ... We are also *neighbors*, looking for opportunities to show mercy in the name of Christ ..."²¹

Embracing compassion reaches beyond the walls of the church, it penetrates into the heart of society. Mohler says,

Love of neighbor for the sake of loving God is a profound political philosophy that strikes a balance between the disobedience of political disengagement and the idolatry of politics as our main priority. As evangelical Christians, we must engage in political action, not because we believe the conceit that politics is ultimate, but because we must obey our Redeemer when He commands us to love our neighbor. On the other hand, we are concerned for the culture, not because we believe that the culture is ultimate, but because we know that our neighbors must hear the gospel, even as we hope and strive for their good, peace, security, and well-being.²²

The hope of the world is for the church to love her neighbor enough to present them the gospel. When a church embraces compassion, her ministry and mission will not be relegated to walls of the church but will be inclusive of society. McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen comment on God's compassion and relate it personally:

God's compassion is not something abstract or indefinite, but a concrete, specific gesture in which God reaches out to us. In Jesus Christ we see the fullness of God's compassion. To us, who cry out from the depth of our brokenness for a hand that will touch us, and arm that can embrace us, lips that will kiss us, a word that speaks to us here and now, and a heart that is not afraid of our fears and tremblings; to us, who feel our own pain as no other human being feels it, has felt it, or ever will feel it and who are always waiting for someone who dares to come close—to us a person has come who could truly say, "I am with you."²³

Compassion is exhibiting God's love and mimicking the Lord Jesus Christ. It is reaching into the depth of hurting humanity and saying, "I am with you."

²¹ Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 110.

²² Mohler, 4.

²³ McNeill, Morrison, and Nouwen, 21.

In their book, *An Urban Church*, Larry Rose and Kirk Hadaway said, “The same compassion that splashed tears over Jerusalem motivates us as we look at the cities of our day. May we marshal all our spiritual, intellectual, and material resources. May we be instruments in the hand of Jesus to bring the cities of the world into that Eternal City.”²⁴ This is the same type of compassion that churches need to adopt and embrace. When the church embraces compassion to this degree, she will become as the couple mentioned earlier. Church and compassion will become one in purpose and in deed; they will hold each other tightly and become one! Nothing else will matter.

Measuring Compassion

It would be great if we had a “compassion meter” and we were able to gauge compassion and adjust it accordingly. Of course, the main concern would be how we would determine how much to add or take away. To establish a standard would be extremely difficult considering the vast differences in people. It would be much like medicine; the dosage is dependent on numerous factors. Therefore, the dosage would have to be adjusted per individual and most likely monitored on a regular basis. The truth is that some things cannot be adequately measured. Consider: How can you measure the wag of a puppy’s tail, the purr of a kitten, or, the smile of a child? Likewise, we cannot measure compassion. However, in Matthew 25, Jesus gave us an excellent example to model compassion after.

²⁴ Larry L. Rose and C. Kirk Hadaway, *An Urban World: Churches Face the Future* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 11.

Being compassionate is not difficult and it is not based on quantity but the manner in which it is expressed. It may be the touch of a caring hand to wipe away a tear, an embrace to share the burden, a word to soothe the sorrow, or a hundred other expressions of love and compassion. Sometimes it is the expression of the little things that make a difference. Warren alludes to this when he says, “Small ministries often make the greatest difference. The most important light in my home is not the large chandelier in our dining room but the little nightlight that keeps me from stubbing my toe when I get up to use the bathroom at night.”²⁵ Perhaps we should remember the song, *Little Is Much When God Is In It*. The song reminds us that it is not about wealth or fame; it is going in Jesus name.

Compassion is focusing on people and their needs. It is reaching hearts and being a blessing to them. Jerry Falwell stated:

Many Christians have it wrong; they think the blessing of God is measured by the size of buildings, the amount of money in the budgets, or other quantifiable items. But God is not impressed with the amount of money a ministry has or with the size of its buildings. God’s emphasis is on people—winning them to Christ, building their faith, delivering them from harmful addictions or false worship, and leading them to be worshippers of Him. I believe God has blessed Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University® because our emphasis has always been on reaching and building up people.²⁶

Compassion, like blessings, is not based on superficial aspects of ministry and the church. It is based on God’s abundant grace and mercy. Compassion is one of the greatest avenues for His blessings.

During Jesus’ ministry, He touched the lives of people from all walks of life. He even chose some of the most unlikely men to serve as His disciples. Some were educated,

²⁵ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 369.

²⁶ Jerry Falwell, *Building Dynamic Faith* (Nashville: World Publishing, Inc, 2005), 156.

while others were simple fisherman. Their place in society was of little consequence to Him. Bruce Wilkinson and David Kopp said, “Our God specializes in working through normal people who believe in a supernatural God who will do His work through them. What He’s waiting for is the invitation.”²⁷ Everywhere Jesus went He changed lives and many of those He changed went forward to change the lives of others. Many people are timid today and try to excuse their non-involvement by saying, “Yes, but that was Jesus.” Max Lucado writes: “Don’t be too quick to attribute Jesus’ compassion to his divinity. Remember both sides. For each time Jesus healed, he had to overlook the future and the past.”²⁸ It is important to remember that Jesus healed already knowing their hearts and He did not allow that to deter Him. We have evidence of this in Luke 17 where Jesus healed ten lepers but only one returned to give thanks.

There is no excuse for failing to show compassion. Compassion is not based on whether or not the individual(s) deserve it or not. Osteen has said,

Everywhere you go these days people are hurting. People are discouraged; many have broken dreams. They’ve made mistakes, and now their lives are in a mess. They need to feel God’s compassion and His unconditional love. They don’t need somebody to judge and criticize them, or to tell them what they’re doing wrong. (In most cases, they already know that!) They need somebody to bring hope, somebody to bring healing, somebody to show God’s mercy.²⁹

²⁷ Bruce H. Wilkinson and David Kopp, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2000), 41.

²⁸ Max Lucado, *In the Eye of the Storm: A Day in the Life of Jesus* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 45.

²⁹ Osteen, 240.

This is a good example of the reason that we cannot adequately measure compassion. It is not based on merit, goodness, or any other attribute; it is based on His love and the obedience of His people to love their neighbor.

Children are often the ones who are touched the greatest by compassion. This is primarily because of their innocence and inability to take care of themselves. It is amazing what little it takes to touch and change a child's life. In Nairobi, Kenya, there is a organization called the Mathare Children's Development Center, which cares for poor children. One of their stories illustrates the measure of compassion:

Our vision to provide shoes for poor children was born when my brother Hal visited the Mathare Children's Development Center (MCDC) in Nairobi, Kenya....

The children lined up, from the youngest to the oldest, and received their shoes. One little boy who came forward was dressed in ragged clothes that spoke of the depth of his need. As he sat down in the chair opposite me, I knelt down in front of him and opened a box. That was when I noticed the shoes that he had on—a pair of discolored yellow flip-flops that were probably twice the size of his feet. I took them off and placed them on the ground before slipping on the new socks and shoes. His eyes sparkled with glee.

When I stood to receive the next child in line, I felt a gentle tug at my shirt. The little boy was looking up at me and stretching his worn flip-flops toward my hands. "Sir," he said, "please take these shoes to children who have none."³⁰

Although the excitement and joy of receiving new socks and shoes were no doubt overwhelming, this young boy's heart was filled with compassion. Rather than accepting his shoes and going on his way, he wanted to assure that his old shoes would be used to help some other child who had none.

Compassion does not end when we are the recipients of it, in fact, it should prompt us to be even more compassionate. When the givers and the recipients are motivated to action, the full measure of compassion is experienced. The full measure of compassion

³⁰ Donaldson and Glaspey, 71-72.

involves both, the givers loving their neighbor and the recipients loving their neighbor as well. Jesus told the scribes that the second greatest commandment was, "... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:31). However, when we focus on the programs rather than addressing the needs of the total person, that is, their personal and spiritual needs, and we fail to inspire compassion in them, then, compassion has missed its mark.

Lupton expresses it in this manner:

But good can sometimes become the enemy of best. When our one-way giving becomes comfortable and our spirits are no longer stirred to find the deeper, more costly solutions, good has become the enemy of best. When our feeding programs value order and efficiency over the messiness of personal involvement, good has become the enemy of best. When recipients remain recipients and givers are content to remain givers, good has become the enemy of best.³¹

Lucado described Jesus' compassion in the following manner: "He was so touched by their needs that he forgot his own needs. He was so moved by the people's hurts that he put his hurts on the back burner."³² Jesus constantly identified with the hurts of the world and willingly suffered the pains of death in our place.

Compassion is not measured on scoreboards, recorded in the Register of Deeds, noted in the minutes of business meetings, debated in Congress, signed by the President, or enforced by the Supreme Court. No, it cannot be measured or acted upon in the fashion of man; it can only be measured when people care enough to love their neighbor.

Throughout these pages of reclaiming compassion, we have taken a journey. It has been a journey that has been filled with uncertainty and complacency. A journey that led us into the limits of culture and the outskirts of society, but it eventually led us to a

³¹ Lupton, 55.

³² Lucado, 54.

road of renewal and hope. It brought us into the front yards of families and delivered the message of parental responsibilities. The road led us to front doors of our churches and reminded us that within its walls were the resources for the building of character, integrity, honesty, righteousness, and compassion. In some ways it was a long and difficult journey, but in another way it was the journey of a lifetime.

Reclaiming compassion did not end at the church; in fact, it found new life there. It is here that compassion found its family. Compassion clung to ministry and missions, which is the heart of any church. When it was adopted into the family it became an active member and continued to move within and without. It ventured out into the community and detoured into society. There were many sad stories encountered and it saw numerous needs that were not being met, but compassion did not pass by on the other side. No, it moved in the midst of the hurt, pain, and suffering reassuring those in its path that they did not stand alone, for their neighbor was with them.

Once compassion had journeyed into the community and into society, it returned to the church and there it was embraced. It brought back stories of excitement and joy and moved the hearts of the people. Then, they too wanted to be a part of this wondrous journey. Ministries were established, missions planned, and a new life was breathed into its nostrils. Afterwards, compassion no longer worked alone, the church accompanied it and together they marched into the world presenting the gospel far and wide. Hearts were changed and lives were enriched. Compassion and the local church became one.

The final stop on this journey was to evaluate compassion. It was determined that it could not be measured by any known standards or gauges; therefore, evidence would have to be produced to effectively evaluate it. Once the evidence was presented, it was

obvious that reclaiming compassion was a worthwhile endeavor, in fact, it was concluded that just as compassion performed in Jesus' day, it could work today. Jesus himself said, "... He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do ..."

 (John 14:12).

As we journey down the road of life, there will be times when our paths will cross with compassion. You may nod, wave, or spend a moment or two with him, but eventually there will come a time when compassion will need to drop by your house and spend a day or so. It might be today, tomorrow, or next week, the time is not important, just be willing to open your door and invite him in. And, when it is time for him to depart pack a bag or two and journey with him to your neighbor's house.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Throughout this endeavor, the purpose has been to examine the status of our nation based on cultural influences and their effects. Culture has always been an avid part of our nation and it has produced various changes and challenges.

Our nation has a rich history in which Christianity has played a major role. For the most part, our “Founding Fathers” anticipated that God would always be an integral part of our culture and society; however, over the years this has proven not to be the case. During the past couple of centuries, our nation has viewed Christianity and the Bible as foundational aspects of our nation. Benjamin Franklin believed that schools should teach the “Excellency of the Christian religion above all others, ancient or modern.”¹

Hawkins explains the key ingredients that have delineated our nation from the other nations that border us. His assessment is:

What made America great? What distinguished us from our neighbors to the north and south? Canada was settled by French explorers who were looking for gold. Mexico was settled by Spanish explorers who were also looking for gold. America was settled by men and women who were looking for God. The charters of our original 13 colonies remind us of this. The Rhode Island charter of 1683

¹ *Eads Home Ministries*, February 19, 2007, “Quotes of the Founding Fathers,” <http://www.eadshome.com/QuotesoftheFounders.htm>. (accessed April 17, 2010).

says, “We submit our persons, our lives, and our estates to the Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords and to all those most perfect and most absolute laws given to us in His Holy Word.” Maryland’s charter reminds its citizens that it was “formed by a pious zeal to extend the Christian Gospel.” Delaware’s charter states that it was “formed for the further propagation of the Gospel, of the Lord Jesus Christ.” And Connecticut was established, in the words of its charter, “to preserve the purity of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” How have we come so far to now allow our court system to rule against something as simple as placing the Ten Commandments in a courtroom or on a school wall? There’s a striking parallel between Babylon and America. Have we lost all sense of remembrance?²

America has always been open to any people who sought a better way of life. However, the varying cultures that have inundated our nation have brought about the demise of many of our beliefs and values that we have always held dear.

Looking back over the pages of history, we can locate the periods of greatest cultural influence. However, it would appear that during the past half century we have experienced its effects exponentially. The advancement of the information age has been largely to blame for this. Just imagine, in a matter of seconds we can be transported from the streets of our local towns and cities, to Times Square, the rubble of the earthquake in Haiti, or the front lines of the war in Afghanistan. We can keep up to the minute on all the current events happening throughout the world. Unfortunately, it often desensitizes us because it creates a sense of commonplace. We are not shocked anymore. We view the horrors of war on our television sets and it angers us, and yet, we are not moved by laws enacted by Congress and upheld by our Supreme Court that a “fetus” is not a person, even though he or she has a heartbeat, brain functions, and formation. Often, our response to this atrocity is simply, “It is what it is.” Perhaps we should listen as Mohler speaks:

² Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 150-151.

The kingdom of God is never up for a vote in any election, and there are no polling places in the city of God. Nevertheless, it is by God's sovereignty that we are now confronted with these times, our current crucial issues of debate, and the decisions that are made in the political process. This is no time for silence or for shirking our responsibilities as Christian citizens. Ominous signs of moral collapse and cultural decay now appear on our contemporary horizon. A society ready to put the institution of marriage up for demolition and transformation is a society losing its most basic moral sense. A culture ready to treat human embryos as material for medical experimentation is a society turning its back on human dignity and the sacredness of human life.³

In many ways we have become a nation in which we have allowed culture to mold and shape us rather than us shaping it. Sometimes we appear to be a nation without a conscience.

We can look within our communities and see the evidence of a changing culture. Although culture has its benefits, it can also lead to the deterioration of morals and values, which we have experienced throughout the years. There needs to be a balance between the benefits of culture and the demise that it often initiates. We have experienced both aspects of culture. The good news is that we are living in probably the most innovative, informative, and technological age in history. The bad news is that we are probably living in the most innovative, informative, and technological age in history. This may sound redundant, or appear to be an oxymoron, but the truth is that the effects of both aspects are causing astronomical consequences.

The conditions of our communities testify to the adverse effect of a changing culture. Drug problems, teen pregnancies, abortions, lack of discipline in our schools, the sleazy nature of politics in today's governments, the breakdown of families, and many, many other similar problems are evidence of moral decay. Our conversations, reading the

³ Mohler, 4-5.

editorial pages of our local newspapers, and listening to news broadcasts suggest that we are aware of the problems. In addition, poll after poll identifies the drastic need for change. Yet, society defiantly refuses to acknowledge that the removal of Christian principles has been the catalyst for much of this demise. Society's determination to accept a large portion of these cultural challenges places them in opposition to the church's resolve to maintain her morals and values.

Our nation has always been strong; however, much of that strength came from our homes and our churches. When the homes were strong, the churches were strong and when the churches were strong, our nation was strong. With the collapse of our moral and ethical values it is becoming increasingly obvious that our churches and homes are weakening, thus producing a weakened nation. Johnson has said,

America is losing its affluence, even though we are still rich beyond compare to most any other nation. The striving for affluence, however, will often cause people to turn a deaf ear to matters of religion. Career has become the god of many boomers. Cutting through the fog of upward mobility, keeping up with the Jones, and striving for a level of affluence equal to their parents will take time and attention away from many who would otherwise be open to explore matters of faith.⁴

In many ways we have allowed society and the culture to discourage churches from becoming involved in the affairs of politics and government. This has led to their influences being ineffective in those matters. Hawkins explains:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could have said, "I'm bowing down on the outside but I'm standing up on the inside." Had some of us in the church today been out there on the plain of Dura that day we might have been prone to say, "We can't fight the system. We might as well go along. After all, God knows how we really feel. We do not want to offend Nebuchadnezzar because we would like to win him to our faith. We will be of no use to God if we're dead in a fiery furnace so let's go ahead and bow down just this one time for now." This happens

⁴ Johnson, 141.

on the plain of Dura every day with men and women who are called by the name of Christ. Compromise has taken the place of conviction in the vocabularies of many followers of Christ. In fact, the very word “conviction” seems to be a lost word in the Christian vocabulary.⁵

The Christian community cannot allow society or culture to ever silence her. She is the hope of the world through Jesus Christ. We must never bow our knees to culture or society.

Although there are numerous cultural challenges that directly affect the church, compassion has become one of its noted casualties. Compassion reaches to every corner of the world and when it is exhibited wisely, it can melt the coldest heart and cause a tear in a grown man’s eye. The presence of compassion cannot be measured by any known instruments, but its absence can shake the foundation of a person’s existence.

Christians have been mandated to act on Christ’s behalf. The first task is to love the Lord and the second is to love our neighbor. Jesus made this plain when a Pharisee, who was a lawyer, came to Him and asked Him what the greatest commandment was. Jesus answered, “... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38). This answered the Pharisee’s question and Jesus could have stopped at this point. However, Jesus chose to continue, “And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39).

Compassion begins in our hearts because God first loved us and showed us compassion. It is His love for us and our love for Him that guides us in the midst of our struggles and pain. Consider the entry in Rachel Joy Scott’s journal:

⁵ Hawkins, *Culture Shock*, 87.

April 15, 1998

Dear God,

I promise that I will not drink this Friday when I go out with ----. This is so tempting. I want to go so bad. Well, I thought about it (as you know) and I thought that since you would forgive me anyways I may as well do it. Then I realized that you will always, always forgive, but you may not let it go unpunished. Then I decided not to do it strictly out of fear. Then I thought about it more, and thought that if I did it out of fear it would not be done because I loved you, I obeyed you, and I followed you. That is my reason for not going now I know that I will always be faced with temptation, but because I love you, I obey you, and I follow you, I will not fall into the core of it. Thank you, Father.

♥Always your child, Rachel Joy.⁶

Just as Rachel knew that God did not want her to go drinking, she also knew her decision should not be based on God's willingness to forgive her if she succumbed or her fear of punishment. It needed to be based solely on her love for Him. Likewise, our show of compassion must never be based on those issues either; it should be based solely on the fact that we love the Lord and we love our neighbor, nothing more, nothing less.

Unfortunately, we are often hesitant in responding to the needs around us due primarily to cultural or societal reasons. If we are to be obedient and pleasing to the Lord, we must respond whenever and wherever the need arises. We would do well in asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" It would most likely be safe to say that He would respond in love and compassion. The Spirit of God is one of love, compassion, and concern. Cymbala and Merrill said,

Yet Christians often hesitate to reach out to those who are different. They want God to clean the fish before they catch them. If someone's gold ring is attached to an unusual body part, if the person doesn't smell the best, or if the skin color is not the same, Christians tend to hesitate. But think for a moment about *God* reaching out to *us*. If ever there was a "reach," that was it: the holy, pure Deity extending himself to us who were soiled, evil-hearted, unholy. God could have

⁶ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, 49-50.

said, “You’re so different from me, so distasteful, I would really rather not get too close to you.” But he didn’t say that. It was our very differentness that drew his hand of love.⁷

The good news is that “... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God did not wait for us to clean up our lives or straighten them out. He loved us in the midst of our sins and failures and sent His Son to die and settle our account.

There are many churches that struggle constantly with budgets, programs, and the organizations in general. Most of these also struggle with their missions and outreach ministries as well. Their focus is more inward than outward and their thinking and attitudes become more and more like the world, and that is, “me first.” Unfortunately, compassion becomes an ancient or faded memory. Their vision becomes narrowed and they are unable to see the needs in front of them, never realizing that seeing and responding to those needs may be the remedy for their struggles.

Over the years our nation has witnessed the influx of various cultures. We have experienced numerous changes; some have prompted the greatest advances in our history, while others have led us down the path to demise. However, it is not culture or society that determines the final outcome; the results are determined by the choices we make. Culture is always going to influence us in ways that will be beneficial and detrimental, but ultimately, it is the decisions we make that will affect us the most. We can sit idly by, bury our heads in the sand, turn a deaf ear, and pretend culture will not affect us, but eventually we will realize it has, it is, and it will. We must remember, we cannot change the past, but we can impact the future.

⁷ Cymbala and Merrill, 141.

Culture has no more influence on us than we allow. As mentioned earlier in chapter two, “You have what you tolerate.” Society, culture, or even Satan cannot make us do anything; all they can do is tempt us with it, but the decision whether or not to partake of it, that is our choice. The church cannot afford to be silent, we do have a say in the affairs of man. Joshua said it best, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15).

Compassion has been lost somewhere in the fog of culture and the haze of society. There is no doubt that it is still there, it has just been obscured from view. The good news is that it can be located and reclaimed. We must travel down the path to recovery in order to find compassion; you will find it nearby pain and suffering. Perhaps we need to walk a little slower down the road of life and be more attentive to the sights and sounds around us. We might be amazed at the needs that await us along the path. They are not hiding; they are in plain view and sometimes we even stumble over them on our way somewhere else. Once we realize the need, compassion will come into view; it is then we need to embrace it and adopt it as a part of our lifestyle.

Churches must become active in the affairs of men. We have been blessed to live in the greatest country in the entire world with freedom to worship without fear and to go into the world without restraints. However, we cannot be silent and uninvolved, we must show the world who Jesus is and how He can make a difference in their lives. They must see Jesus in us; otherwise, they will never know Him. Powell gives an illustration how compassion manifests Christ:

Dr. W. R. Pettigrew, longtime pastor in Louisville, Kentucky, told of a little crippled boy whose only means of making a living was selling notions in the lobby of a train station. He sat all day on a high stool with a large tray, and sold to the travelers who came by. One day a man rushed to catch a train, whirled around the corner, and crashed into the little boy before he saw him. The stool went one way, the boy another, and the trinkets scattered all over the floor. Instead of apologizing, the irate man gave the boy a dirty stare, muttered under his breath, and stalked over to catch the train.

Another traveler was rushing to catch the same train, but saw what had happened, set down his bag, put the stool back on its feet, helped the little boy back upon it, and stooped down and gathered up the trinkets off of the floor. Then he reached in his pocket, pulled out ten dollars, and gave it to the boy saying, "Here, this will pay for the notions that got lost and broken."

The man then picked up his bag and turned to leave, but he was stopped dead in his tracks by the sound of the little boy's voice. He called out, "Wait, Mister, wait, wait, Mister, are you Jesus?" The man turned around and said, "No, son. I'm not Jesus; but I am one of his followers who is trying to do what he would do if he were here."

I submit to you that this is the church in action—the church as it ought to be—acting and serving in ways that make people see Jesus in what is done. The Bible says we are the body of Christ. That means that we are to do on earth what Jesus would do if he were here physically.⁸

The demise of compassion may sound like a novel concept, but we have been experiencing it for generations. We have hearkened unto the whims of culture and society and it has led us down this path. It is a path that reaches far and wide—from the streets of New York City to the San Francisco Bay and from the wheat fields of Minnesota to the bayous of Louisiana. Every place has been affected by it. However, compassion does not have to lay dormant; it can and must be revived. The power and strength of compassion cannot be underestimated; it can reach where nothing else can. It can move obstacles that stand in our paths; it offers hope to the hopeless, comfort for the comfortless, and grace for the guilty. But more than anything else it can help mold and shape a person to be like Jesus.

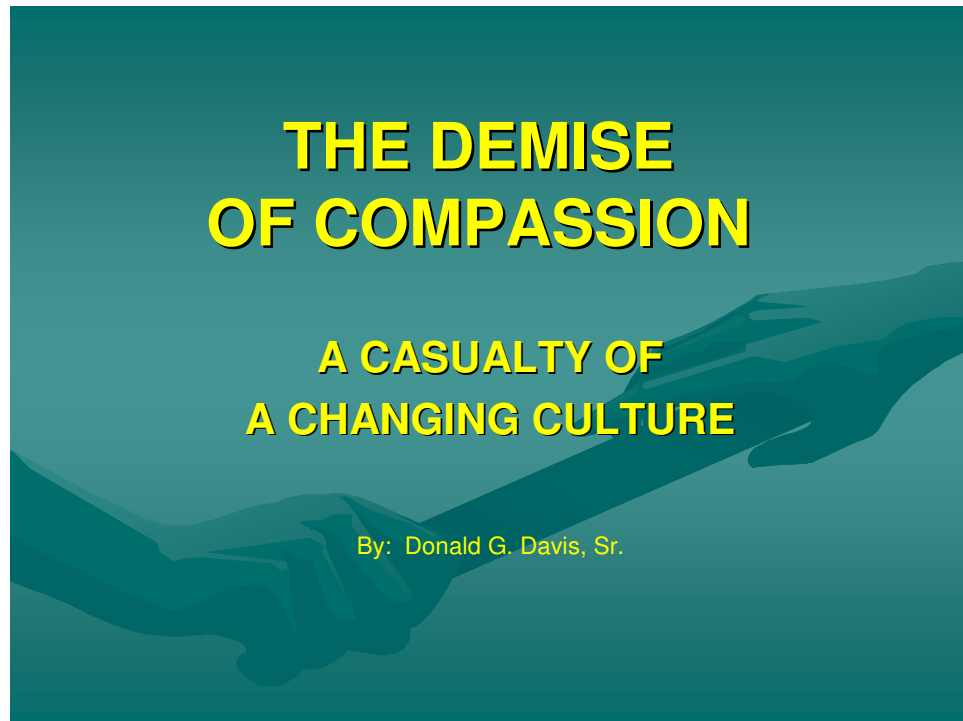
⁸ Powell, *The Church Today*, 39-40.

We can look back over the years and see the changes that culture has brought us and we can submit to those changes. Or, we can allow them to rally the church to sound her clarion call. It is not a matter of whether or not culture will affect us; it is just a matter of how we deal with its effects.

In the past 50 years, we have come a long way from the quiet streets of “Mayberry,” the loving arms of “Aunt Bee,” and a town where the people knew their neighbor. We will never be able to return to those days of Mayberry, but maybe, just maybe, we will be able to reclaim compassion and never again have to ask, “Who is my Neighbor?”

APPENDIX A

POWERPOINT SLIDE PRESENTATION



Preface

- ♦ **Purpose:** Examine culture and the manner in which it has led to the demise of compassion.
- ♦ **Culture**
 - America has become a melting pot of cultures.
 - Culture has affected every aspect of our lives.
 - Society, homes, schools, and churches
 - Moral and ethical values
 - **Compassion**
 - Care and compassion are trademarks of our nation.
 - We have become desensitized.
 - Response to needs
 - Response to hurts and pains

2

Introduction

- ♦ **Statement of the Problem**
 - Nation's value system has been disrupted.
 - Society has become self-centered.
 - The home has become a transit station.
 - The church is absorbed with its membership.
 - Society and the church are struggling with the age old question: "Who is my neighbor?"
 - Culture is people's beliefs and how they act on those beliefs.
 - Compassion is the heartfelt reaction created or initiated due to sympathy, empathy, or desire to help.

3

Introduction

♦ Statement of Limitations

- Many areas are in need of support and compassion.
 - Global needs
 - National needs
 - Local needs
- The intent of this project is to look within the local communities, churches, and individuals.
 - To identify the most prominent needs
 - To identify how culture has affected our response
- Compassion is all but a lost art.
 - Response to national and global disasters
 - Response to everyday local needs, often limited

4

Introduction

♦ Theoretical Basis

- Biblical evidence of compassion
 - God's act of compassion with man-
 - Genesis 2:18 "...It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him."
 - God's act of compassion with His people-
 - Psalms 78:37-39 "For their heart was not right with him ... But he, *being* full of compassion, forgave their iniquity ... For he remembered that they *were but* flesh...."
 - God's act of compassion with the world-
 - Luke 23:34 "...Father, forgive them...."
 - God's act of compassion through Christians-
 - 1 John 3:17 "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of *compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

5

Introduction

♦ Theoretical Basis (continued)

– Biblical evidence of the influence of culture

- Differing belief system
 - Genesis 3:5 “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
- Deficiency of leadership
 - Exodus 32:1 “... the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods....”
- Desperation of captivity
 - Psalms 137:2 “We hanged our harps upon the willows....”
- Demands of crowd
 - Mark 15:15 “And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus... to be crucified.

6

Introduction

♦ Statement of Methodology

– Culture has affected society.

- Moral fiber of our nation uprooted
- Society is always changing

– Culture has infiltrate the church.

- Brought about a more liberal theology
- Accept behavior that would have been appalling

– Questions that culture presents:

- How are churches to respond?
- How is society to respond?
- What does the Scripture say?

7

Cultural Phenomenon

- ♦ **Culture often dictates our beliefs**
 - **Culture is never static or passive.**
 - Moved from a needs oriented to self-centered society
 - Success, fame, and notoriety have replaced honesty, integrity, and hard work
 - **Three unmistakable gods of the psyche of American culture according to Bill and Kathy Peel (pp. 19-20).**
 - Position: People must look up and envy your station in life
 - Possessions: Bigger house, faster car, and more expensive clothes
 - Power: Calculate success by those we manage
 - **Culture affects all ages.**
 - Younger generation tend to be influenced to a greater degree.
 - Older generation: Satisfied with status quo; more resistant to change; not as easily influenced due to lessons previously learned.

8

Cultural Phenomenon

- ♦ **Cultural Influence**
 - **One of the most influential factors today**
 - Effects cannot be minimized
 - Pace of cultural change increasing
 - Many churches falling behind in addressing changes
 - **Effects of culture**
 - Negative or detrimental effects
 - Tolerance- “You have what you tolerate” (p. 23)
 - Sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies
 - Breakdown of families
 - Families were defined by their relationships
 - Definition of family has become skewed
 - Supreme Court decision of the past

9

Cultural Phenomenon

♦ Cultural Influence (continued)

– Effects of culture

• Positive effects

– We need culture because:

- It profoundly shapes and influences our life and all our beliefs.
- It affects the development of our theology and what we believe about the Bible.
- It affects the way we conduct our ministries in the church.
- It helps us understand better the different people we seek to reach for Christ.

– Helps develop economy, open doors of opportunity, and expands our knowledge.

- “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....”

10

Cultural Phenomenon

♦ Cultural Challenge

– Determining acceptable cultural changes

- Baseline established
- Viewed under the microscope of Scripture

– Postmodernity and secular humanism

- Validity of Scriptures are called into question
- Belief that there are no absolutes
- Truth is based upon situation or circumstance

– Underlying challenge

- Reaffirm that God is the source of all truth
- Reestablish relations between church and community

11

Cultural Phenomenon

♦ Challenge for the Church

– Church in the crosshairs of culture and conviction

- Desire to be accepted by society
- Desire to maintain their convictions
- Many churches encompassed philosophy of “political correctness”
- Trying to bridge the gap between the church and the world

– Reestablish distinction between the church and world

- Many churches have been silent too long
- Regain their perspectives and solidify their convictions
- Accept responsibility of training younger generation
- Carry the Gospel into the world

12

Cultural Phenomenon

♦ Ramifications of a Changing Culture

– Culture is an intrinsic part of history.

- Culture is neither good nor evil in and of itself.
- Culture dictates much of what we do.

– Culture has played a role in specific areas of society and the church.

- Abortions
- Teen Pregnancies
- Homosexuality
- Same-sex marriages

13

Essence of Compassion

♦ Identifying Compassion

- Compassion has become somewhat blurred.
 - Communities, churches, and neighbors demonstrated compassion in years past.
 - Culture has led to becoming self-serving rather than attending to the needs of others.
- Compassion is referred to as,
 - Sympathy, empathy, pity, concern, and care
 - Mercy and grace
 - Truest sense it initiates action
 - Identifying with the hurts and sorrows of humanity

14

Essence of Compassion

♦ Identifying Compassion (continued)

- Compassion is:
 - Ministry- Jesus was moved with compassion and met needs
 - Responding- to physical, spiritual, and emotional needs
 - Bearing burdens- help alleviate suffering
 - Listening- hard to distinguish voices to listen to or ignore
 - Taking a chance
- The need for compassion can be found:
 - Families
 - Friends
 - Churches
- Love stirs compassion and compassion responds.

15

Essence of Compassion

♦ Perimeters of Compassion

– Boundaries of compassion

- Rigid guidelines or criteria are often established
- Compassion is not judgmental
- Inclusive of everyone
- Story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15)

– Personification of compassion

- Story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10)
- Implementation of Compassion
- Opportunity to teach love and compassion
- Hands, eyes, ears, feet, and voice of Christ

16

Essence of Compassion

♦ The Fruit of Compassion

– The value of compassion

- Difficult to understand until needed
- Produces joy and satisfaction

– Compassion breeds compassion

- Produces its own fruit
- The more compassion is exhibited the more we become recipients

– Compassion leads to service or servanthood

- Responsibility to care for others
- Greatest method to love our neighbor
- Compassion leads to forgiveness
- Forgiveness is one of its greatest fruits

17

Essence of Compassion

♦ The Foundation of Compassion

- **Founded on God's love**
 - God working through Jesus (His love, sacrifice, and being)
 - Jesus identifying with the hurts and pains of humanity
 - Compassion is based solely on God
- **Evidence of compassion**
 - "It repented the Lord that he had made man...." (Gen. 6:6)
 - "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8)
 - The works of Jesus
 - Found in the lives of everyday, ordinary people
- **Compassion is an active ingredient of love**
 - Seeks to bring hope, comfort, encouragement, support
 - Seeks to find people where they are

18

Challenge of Compassion

♦ The Church and Compassion

- **Normal place for compassion to be found**
 - Through ministry of the church
 - Unfortunately, many do not want the commitment
- **Church's response to the needs**
 - Reach out to people
 - The hope of the world is Christ
 - The church has a mandate to reach the lost
- **Hindrances to compassion**
 - Become a nation of busyness—no time for involvement
 - Diminished relationships
 - Churches often want only people like themselves

19

Challenge of Compassion

♦ The Church and Compassion (continued)

– Hindrances to compassion

- Churches bogged down with their own problems
 - Directional issues
 - Power struggles
 - Personnel problems
 - Dislike of each other
- Conflict or potential conflict hurts ministry
- Focus of ministry changes- inward instead of outward

– Church's primary responsibility

- Recognize their neighbors
- Sensitive to the needs of their communities

20

Challenge of Compassion

♦ Sin Versus Compassion

– God's boundary line

- Established in the Garden
- No ambiguity, a definitive line established
- Line was crossed, sin entered

– Boundary line of sin

- Boundary line is not always clear
 - Line between tolerance and compassion
 - Line between compassion and condoning

– Boundary line by the church

- Not based on our belief system
- Scriptural absolutes- not Western or Bible Belt conviction

21

Challenge of Compassion

♦ Sin Versus Compassion (continued)

– The challenge for the church

- Society, culture, and sin have impeded church's influence.
- How does the church determine where the light of compassion begins and the darkness of evil intrudes?

– Reaching beyond the sin

- Often churches are judgmental- push away the ones they are trying to reach.
- Sinners need to know people cares
- Showing compassion is not endorsing or condoning; it its just loving the hurting.
- Churches cannot determine which sin to forgive and which not to forgive.

22

Challenge of Compassion

♦ Views of Compassion

– Mere emotional experience

- Expression of pity and feeling sorry
- Desensitized to the needs of others

– Churches are obligated to help

- Churches inundated with community requests
- Churches must be compassionate

– Route to recovery and self-sufficiency

– Opportunity for ministry

– Marketable commodity

23

Challenge of Compassion

♦ Cost of Compassion

- Compassion is not free
 - Can be very expensive
 - Not usually in monetary terms
- Cost the price of involvement
 - Living out the Gospel
 - Taking a risk
 - Moving out of comfort zone
 - Must love those to whom we show compassion
- Compassion is more than a word; it is a way of life
- Compassion must be proactive, not reactive only

24

Path to Demise

♦ Postmodernity

- Everything revolves around self
- Promotes a doctrine of “me-ism”
- Truth is subjective; no longer objective
- There are no absolutes

♦ Humanism and secular humanism

- Demise of morals, honesty, decency, and character
- College classrooms immersed in this environment
- Everything based on
 - Human reasoning
 - Logical conclusions
- Christians today influenced more than any other time

25

Path to Demise

♦ Change in Ethics

- Marked by different value system and code of ethics
- Premise of beliefs and foundations being destroyed
- Morality being legislated by common consensus or silence
 - Legalizing death of the unborn
 - Condoning perversion
 - Redefining marriage
 - Removing prayer and Bible from classrooms
- Sin made to appear less offensive
- Morality has become a casualty of success
- Winning at all cost permeates society
- Challenged to compromise and conform to ideals of the world
- Sin is openly displayed, often without rebuke

26

Path to Demise

♦ Evidence of a Changing Culture

- Cultural shift away from nation's religious principles
- Significance of life degraded and value system assigned
- Few role models for present generation
- Lack of discipline in homes and schools
- Shift in the role of the home
 - Parent/child relations- parents want to be best friends
 - Transient station- place of nourishment, entertainment, and rest
- Churches attempt to compete or match the world
 - Task is to reach the world with simple message of the Gospel
 - Cultural challenge will not disappear, they must be engaged

27

Path to Demise

♦ When Compassion Fails

- **Primarily caused by**
 - Churches often detoured by own agenda
 - Societal expectations and demands of culture
 - Lack of involvement
 - Ignoring needs- looking the other way
 - Lack of commitment
- **Primarily changed by**
 - Compassion is an action; it needs an object to act upon
 - Church's response is not contingent upon society
 - Compassion seeks to heal not harm
 - Realize it is a responsibility and privilege to meet needs

28

Reclaiming Compassion

♦ The Road to Recovery

- **Evaluate the road traveled**
 - Have needs been identified and responded to?
 - What have the detours been?
- **Locate the needs**
 - Look within communities, schools, homes, and churches
 - Church needs compassion as much as she needs to exhibit
- **Plan the road ahead**
 - Determine where the road is going
 - Establish the means to reach the end
 - Look for opportunities to express compassion
 - Budget for the road ahead

29

Reclaiming Compassion

♦ The Road to Recovery (continued)

- Travel the road
 - Rekindle the fire of compassion
 - Confront society and culture; do not by-pass them
 - Churches must reclaim their identity and respect
 - Impact society
 - Touch people's lives
 - Allow people to touch us
 - Reclaim values and rebuild family structure
 - Remember it is a road of opportunity
 - Challenge anything which hinders our progress

30

Reclaiming Compassion

♦ Adoption of Compassion

- Discovering the need for compassion
 - Often filled with uncertainties and is frightening
 - Adopting compassion refocuses our attention
 - Often prompts us to intentionally search for needs
- Engagement of compassion
 - Fears and anxieties often disappear
 - Engagement will lead to the adoption of compassion
 - Once adopted it will become effective and viable
 - Compassion not contingent upon asking for help or an expression of appreciation
 - Instills responsibility, yet joy and love

31

Reclaiming Compassion

♦ The Church Embracing Compassion

- Petty differences eliminated
 - Focus will be on ministry
 - Be inclusive of every aspect of the church
- Essential element in the church
 - No greater blessing to a community
 - Fulfills the Great Commission
- Identifies and attends to needs
 - Addresses spiritual and physical conditions
 - Mission and ministry will not be relegated to the church
- The final result
 - God's love exhibited and mimicking of the Lord Jesus
 - Compassion and the church becomes one

32

Reclaiming Compassion

♦ Measuring Compassion

- Demonstration of compassion
 - Touch of a caring hand to wipe away a tear
 - Embrace to share a burden
 - Word to soothe a sorrow
 - Hundred other expressions
- Compassion is not superficial
 - God's abundant grace and mercy
 - Not based on merit, goodness, or any other attribute
- Evaluation of compassion
 - No known instruments to measure
 - Worthwhile endeavor
 - Needs to be carried to neighbor's house

33

Conclusion

♦ Effects of culture

- Affected our nation in positive and negative ways
 - The most advanced age in history
 - The demise of morality, values, and compassion
- Influences of culture
 - Influx of various cultures
 - No more influence than we allow
- Results of culture
 - Society and the church have hearkened unto its whims
 - Culture will always influence

34

Conclusion

♦ Effects of compassion

- The purpose of compassion
 - To identify our neighbor
 - To touch the lives of hurting humanity
- The influence of compassion
 - Identifies us with Christ
 - Offers hope to the hopeless
 - Comfort to the comfortless
 - Grace for the guilty
- Results of compassion

“WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?” is answered!

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