Thanksgiving and Compassion

Third in the series “Christian Thanksgiving”

# Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

# Key Thought: Thanksgiving and compassion go together.

# Intro:

Today at Copper Hill Church is Compassion Sunday. All the recent natural disasters in our country have made it very easy for all of us to resonate with the theme of compassion Sunday. Yet I think we all would agree that compassion is a trait that should characterize our lives every day.

Franklin Graham recently put it this way;

I just believe as a Christian, we are to show love; we are to show compassion to people, not to point the finger, not to do this, but to do this - to love them, to welcome them, to embrace them. Franklin Graham

Read more at: <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/franklin_graham_610574?src=t_compassion>

It is my contention that Thanksgiving and compassion go together. When we are truly thankful to God for all his good gifts to us, it helps us to be more compassionate toward those who are going through difficult times in their lives. I would like us to examine this morning the relationship between Thanksgiving and compassion and talk about why I think that they go so well together. My hope is that in doing so, we will be encouraged in both.

# Thanksgiving and Compassion are fruits of God’s life in us.

Both are Christ-like characteristics enlarged in us by the Holy Spirit. In our text from Col. 3, thanksgiving and compassion are both in the composite of godly characteristics that the Holy Spirit develops in Christ followers.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Col 3:12-15 NIV

Thanksgiving and the idea of compassion are both also are in Paul’s admonitions in 1 Thessalonians. In that passage, instead of just saying, “Be compassionate,” Paul gives two specific ways we can show compassion – by encouraging others and helping those who are struggling. We won’t do either unless we have compassion.

“We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone…. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”
1 Thess. 5:14, 16-18 NIV

## I also think about the fact that both these two characteristics were part of Jesus’ example for us.

In the passage we read from the gospels this morning, Jesus had compassion on the crowds-- especially on those in need (Matt. 9:36)

Jesus gave thanks regularly. His prayers of thanksgiving are usually noted for us in Scripture when he gave thanks in prayers before meals (for examples: Matt. 14:19; 15:36; 26:26, 27).

"The Christian who walks with the Lord and keeps constant [communion](https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-lord-s-supper-from-1-corinthians.html) with Him will see many reason for rejoicing and thanksgiving all day long." - Warren W. Wiersbe

And they will continually find themselves filled with compassion for situations which God brings to their attention where fellow human beings are in need.

# Thanksgiving and Compassion fuel each other.

When we find a situation that arouses our compassion, it reminds us our own blessings. This increases our sense of thanksgiving to God.

The more thankful we are, the more our hearts go out to other people who are struggling in basic ways—some economically, some due to circumstances beyond their control like those affected by natural disasters for whom we are giving offerings today. Others to whom our hearts go out in compassion may have needs that we are particularly in tune with. For example, if you have lost a loved one recently, you likely tend to be more compassionate toward those who grieve. If you have had a business failure, you empathize with those going through a similar situation. If you have been out of work for an extended time, you can sympathize with those who are in the job market for a long time. God does not waste our pain! He uses it to help us minister to others in need.

Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the 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.” ― **Henri J.M. Nouwen** From <<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/compassion?page=3>

Our heart is tender toward that need and we are thankful for the comfort God has given us, so we are able to encourage others.

"Of all the characteristics needed for both a happy and morally decent life, none surpasses gratitude. Grateful people are happier, and grateful people are more morally decent." - Dennis Prager

# Thanksgiving and Compassion are healthy attitudes for service to others.

Another way that thanksgiving and compassion come together is this. They are both part of a healthy attitude for service to others. Often in our work, or in our church work, or in our volunteer work somewhere else, we need to serve others. The question is, “What will be our motivating attitude as we serve?” Will we serve out of a boring and dreaded sense of duty? Or will we find better and more positive motives.

## Duty Vs. Thanks and compassion

Consider the difference between going about our service to God in a church position or in a community service simply out of a sense of duty as opposed to performing the same acts of service with a sense of thanksgiving and compassion. While we will probably do the job either way, if our motivation is only duty, we will look for a way out as soon as possible. But if our motivation is thanksgiving and compassion, we may even choose to continue without being asked. If our motive is only duty, it will be hard to do the job with a smile too, but if our attitude springs from thanksgiving and compassion, they will lead to a sweeter spirit in our outlook as we serve. And those we serve will sense the difference in attitude.

## Compassion and thanksgiving drive involvement

When people are interested in their own agendas, they are not really interested in helping others. Daniel Goleman wrote the NY Times Best-seller Emotional Intelligence and another book called Social Intelligence in which he says,

“Self-absorption in all its forms kills empathy, let alone compassion. When we focus on ourselves, our world contracts as our problems and preoccupations loom large. But when we focus on others, our world expands. Our own problems drift to the periphery of the mind and so seem smaller, and we increase our capacity for connection - or compassionate action.” ― **Daniel Goleman,**[**Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1386563) From <<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/compassion?page=2>>

When we have compassion and thanksgiving as motivators, it pushes us to act on behalf of others in many ways. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King saw this too. He spoke of how compassion helps motivate us to work for justice in society.

“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. ” ― Martin Luther King, Jr From <<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/compassion?page=3>>

# Thanksgiving and Compassion are catalysts for financial giving.

Of course, one action that both compassion and thanksgiving motivate in us is generosity. In one of my previous messages I mentioned Paul’s key line in II Cor 9:15.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! 2 Cor 9:15 NIV

The context of that statement is Paul’s encouragement of the Corinthians to participate in a collection for the church at Jerusalem. He knew that if they felt thankful for all that God had done for them, they would also feel generous. The two go together.

And of course, when we are truly compassionate towards those who have needs, we open both our hearts and our wallets. As you did today in your offering for UMCOR. Mother Teresa put it this way,

“Love is not PATRONIZING, and charity isn't about pity, it is about love. Charity and love are the same -- with charity you give love, so don't just give money but reach out your hand instead.”― Mother Teresa From <<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/compassion?page=3>>

Bill Gold gave a short testimonial in the Washington Post that illustrates my point.

"I think that one of the things I'm most grateful for on Thanksgiving Day is that, when the Lord was deciding who would need help at this season and who would be in a position to give help, He permitted me to be among the givers." (SP-TH)

Thankfulness and compassion make us glad to be able to help others.