

Inside Out

Compassion Through Giving

November 16-17

Introduction

Hey everyone! I'm Mark, and it's so good to have you here with us. Today, we're diving back into our series, *Inside Out*, where we've been exploring how God's transforming love within us overflows to impact the world around us.

Week 1

We kicked off the series with Pastor Earl, who reminded us that compassion doesn't start with us—it begins with God. He showed us that, like the Good Samaritan, Jesus didn't just look at our brokenness and pass us by. He saw our helplessness, stopped, and met us where we were. That same compassionate love that changed many of our lives is what we're called to extend to others.

Week 2

Then, in Week 2, Pastor Lori helped us look deeper at what God's compassion looks like. She reminded us that when Jesus looked at people, He didn't just see their needs; He felt them deeply. It wasn't just a sentiment—it was something that stirred Him at His core. We prayed that God would help us see people the way Jesus did, with eyes of empathy and a deep urge to respond.

Week 3

Last week, Pastor Theresa showed us that, for Jesus, compassion wasn't a one-time act but a way of life, rooted in rhythms of grace. Jesus didn't act from endless compulsion or obligation; instead, His compassion came from His closeness with the Father, who continually filled Him up so He could pour out to others. Pastor Theresa challenged us to adopt that same rhythm of rest and renewal, so we're giving out of overflow, not exhaustion. [Promote 'The Room']

This has been an amazing series so far. We've been learning so many amazing truths about compassion and how to love those around us so today we're going to do a personal heart check to gauge where we are when it comes to living generously and loving compassionately. The Bible says we can give all we possess to the poor and even suffer bodily harm for God but if we do not have love — if our heart isn't right, it will be for nothing. Thankfully God has given us a proven method for testing the condition of our heart. How can we know if we carry God's heart of compassion? Is there a way to test the condition of our heart?

Lylah's Gifts

The other day I was sitting at the dining table, laptop open, busy at work when I sensed a small presence by my side. I looked to my left and there was my three-year-old Lylah holding a plate of leaves, sticks and rocks from the yard. "For you Daddy" she said sheepishly. I gratefully accepted the plate as she watched me intently. Picking up on her cue I began to pantomime eating the food with great delight. Her face beamed as I told her how yummy everything was. She took the plate and disappeared momentarily before reappearing some time later with a similar assortment of things from the yard. Each time I "ate" the food she would giggle in delight and I could see that it excited her to bring me another creation. As any parent knows, it's not the contents of the gifts that matter. I wasn't particularly thrilled about having items from the yard brought into the house but it was my daughter's delight that kept the exchange going.

In the same way, our gifts to God are like twigs and rocks to Him. He really has no use for them but He desires the intimacy it generates as we keep returning to Him to see the look of delight on His face as we bring Him our humble offerings.

Our gifts reveal what is in our heart. Our heart and our gifts are connected. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” (Matthew 6:21). Today we’re going to do a baseline test on our hearts to see how strong our compassion muscle is.

Holter Monitor

Not long ago I went to my Doctor for a routine checkup. After checking in I was greeted by a friendly nurse, “Hi Mr. Palompo,” she said, “My name is Celine as in *Titanic*. Follow me right this way.” Everything was going well until Celine checked my heart with a stethoscope. She said, “Hmm, your heartbeat sounds irregular. Do you have an irregular heartbeat?” “Not that I know of,” I responded. When the Doctor came in she confirmed that my heartbeat sounded irregular. They did an EKG and sure enough there appeared to be an irregularity in my heart beat. Every third time it would skip a beat. The Doctor then recommended that I wear a Holter Monitor for a period of time to get a baseline read on my heart. If you’re not familiar with a Holter Monitor it’s like a strap that you have to wear over your chest for 24-48 hours. This was all happening within the extent of one visit, so after everything was discussed and the Doctor left, Celine pulled me aside and said, “Are you ok? I know that this can be a lot to take in.” And I looked her dead in the eyes and said, “Celine, I believe that my heart will go on.” It turns out, there was nothing wrong with my heart. Celine just made my heart skip a beat, (which I was strictly forbade by my wife from telling her even though it was comedy gold).

Today we are going to get a baseline read on the condition of our heart. We’re going to look for any irregularities that could be indicative of deeper spiritual heart conditions. The goal of this time is ultimately to strengthen our hearts, build our faith muscle, and align our hearts with God. We also want to weaken the hold of anything that would pull our hearts away from God.

But we’re not going to strap a monitor to your chest, hook you up to an EKG or make you run on a treadmill. Instead, we’re going to test our hearts the way Jesus did — through stories. Jesus often told stories to test the hearts of His listeners. Stories reveal hidden truths, expose deeper motives, and invite us to see what’s really going on inside. *Because what is on the inside will eventually come out.* So don’t be alarmed, because I believe your heart will go on.

Through this vignette of short stories we’re going to look at the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to compassion and generous living. Jesus uses these stories to reveal the condition of our hearts as well as God’s heart on the matter.

Our first story takes us to the darkest depths of humanity. This is the ugly. We’re introduced to a nameless rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Jesus says,

¹⁹ *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.
²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores,” (Luke 16:19-21).*

The story opens with a wealthy man living in luxury. Right outside of his door is a poor beggar named Lazarus. Lazarus isn’t asking for a seat at the rich man’s table, he isn’t asking to be let into his home. He just lays there begging for the crumbs, the scraps, whatever was going to be thrown away. The are dogs licking Lazarus’ sores. What does it say about a community when it cares more for their dogs and pets than their poor? But the thing that caught my attention was that Lazarus was laid there. Lazarus didn’t seek the rich man out, he was placed there. I wonder how many of God’s children He places around us hoping that we will be the means through which they are blessed. The thing that sets this story apart from others is that in other stories Jesus uses pictures and images from our world to illustrate spiritual realities. (The Kingdom is like a kernel of wheat, etc.) But in this story, Jesus pulls back the curtain and shows us exactly what happens in the afterlife.

²² *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire,’ (Luke 16:22-24).*

Once again, Jesus is trying to help His listeners understand the radical upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God. As Michael Scott in *The Office* once said, “Well, well, well, how the turn tables...” Both Lazarus and the rich man die. Death is the great equalizer. Rich or poor, we’re all going to die. In this life, the rich man received a proper burial — he was honored. But in the afterlife we’re told that, after his years of suffering, it is Lazarus who is given the heavenly escort into heaven. And now the roles are reversed. It is the rich man who is in agony looking up at Lazarus in His heavenly glory begging for relief from his torment. Abraham confirms this,

²⁵ *“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony,’”*
(Luke 16:25).

If we did a spiritual heart check on the rich man in our story I think we would find that the hardness of his heart was linked to a deeper underlying symptom — spiritual blindness. The rich man did not look at the world through the eyes of God. Walking past the needs of others with indifference reveals that we do not value the things of God or see the world through His eyes. It reveals that perhaps we have become too concerned and preoccupied with the comforts and pleasures of this world.

¹⁷ *“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth,” (1 John 3:17-18).*

I was looking for a specific lego piece this past week as I played with my son Judah. He briefly rummaged through a little pile he had accumulated and then produced the exact piece. “You mean, this one?” He said. “Yes! Can I have that?” I asked. “Sure.” He said, tossing it over to my side. “Wow, thank you Judah. You are a great share-er.” I praised him. “Yea,” He said. “If you have enough to spare, you have enough to share.” I sat there stunned. “Where did you learn that?” I asked. “Veggie Tales.” He said with a shrug.

Growing up, I used to think the rich man in Jesus’ story was a true villain — a monster of a man. But the older I get, the more I realize that spiritual blindness and the hardening of one’s heart is more common than I thought.

One morning I awoke while it was still dark. I went downstairs to make coffee and noticed that the trash in the kitchen was full so I went outside to throw it out. On my way to the trash bin I saw a strange shape that startled me. In the darkness of the morning I could barely make out what looked like a luggage between my car and my fence. I quietly peered over the luggage and saw a sleeping figure on my driveway. I quickly ran back into my house and grabbed my car keys. From inside the house I began to arm my alarm making a series of honking sounds. When that didn’t work I opened the garage door right next to their sleeping head. Nothing. What should I do? My kids would be waking up soon and heading out to go to school. We decided to call the police but not before snapping a picture of the unsuspecting trespasser. By the time police arrived, the individual had packed their bags and disappeared.

We hoped that maybe this would be a one-time occurrence but not long after the person reappeared on our driveway. Other neighbors would come by to tell us of our sleeping intruder. We discovered that the person on our driveway was actually an elderly woman who roams the streets of our community. For whatever reason, she's drawn to our house and lays right at my gate. No, the irony is not lost on me. I've had to pray for God to change my heart. We now pray blessing over her when we see her around. As I leave the street to take my kids to school she smiles at us and we wave goodbye to her. We're praying for more ways to share the love of Jesus with her because as a wise person once told me, "If you have enough to spare, you have enough to share." I want to see the people God has laid at my gate through His eyes.

From our first story we move up the scale to another example of how not steward our treasure.

Barney the Barn-builder

¹⁶ And He told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God," (Luke 12:16-21).

In this story we're introduced to another rich man, we'll call him Barney (For he was a barn-builder). Barney was blessed with an unexpected windfall. Think getting a raise or winning the lottery. But instead of praising God and asking what the purpose of this blessing might be, Barney assumes that the purpose of this money is *his* comfort and security. We're not told that Barney suffers from the same spiritual blindness as the rich man from the first story but he certainly suffers from a different myopia. More specifically, Barney suffers from a commonly known symptom known as Eternal Amnesia. He's forgotten that life is so much more than the fleeting time we have now. If our life in eternity is depicted as a rope that stretches all the way around the world, and our life here on earth is depicted as the first inch of that rope, Barney is living for the tiny sliver at the end of the inch while neglecting the rest of eternity.

How about us? Do we suffer from spiritual blindness? Do we struggle to see the world through God's eyes? Or maybe we suffer from Eternal Amnesia. Have we forgotten that this life is but a vapor compared to eternity. Are we living for the sliver at the cost what comes next? Let's not live like Barney the barn-builder. Don't view your resources as a way to store up comfort and security for yourself, see it as a way to connect people to the love of the Father. In other words, "Don't build barns, build bridges." Let's use our resources to bridge people to God.

The Good

As we close I want to leave you with examples of giving that Jesus applauds. These stories not only serve as examples of individuals who have caught the heart of God but as remedies to spiritual blindness and eternal amnesia.

Zacchaeus

The first remedy is found in the story of another rich man who not only suffered from spiritual blindness and eternal amnesia but also vertical deficiency. Because he was height challenged, when Jesus came to his town he needed to climb into a tree to see over the crowds to get a look at him. Let's read what happened next,

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost," (Luke 19:5-10).

The greatest remedy to all of our spiritual ailments is time spent with Jesus. Prior to meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus suffered from spiritual blindness and eternal amnesia. But after encountering the radical love of Jesus he was transformed from the inside out. This is why Pastor Theresa's message last weekend was so important. Because it is only in developing rhythms of grace that we continually encounter the love of Jesus. He is the one who fills us with the deep yearning compassion that Pastor Lori talked about. It is in our times with the Jesus that we are reminded of how much the Father has loved us like Pastor Earl talked about. If we find ourselves in a season of spiritual blindness or eternal amnesia perhaps it is because we have not been living in rhythms of grace. So remember to make time to get away with Jesus to be renewed by His love.

Radical Gifts

¹ "As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on," (Luke 21:1-4).

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹ "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her," (Matthew 26:6-13).

Conclusion

As we encounter Jesus through our rhythms of grace He will transform our hearts and fill us from the inside out. He will give us His eyes to see. The second remedy is to give often and generously. Giving frees us from the stranglehold that worry and greed have over our lives. Giving aligns our hearts with God's heart for the world. Giving helps us to live for the eternal instead of the temporal. And although God does not need our rocks and sticks, He delights in our joy as our gifts bring us back to Him over and over again.

Group Discussion Questions:

1. What people or needs has God laid at your gate? In what ways can you respond with compassion and generosity?
2. In what ways does Jesus' parable of the barn-builder speak to you? How is God asking you to use your resources to build bridges for people to know Him better?
3. In what ways are the stories of Zacchaeus, the Widow, and the Woman with the Alabaster Box counter to the values of this world? Why do you think Jesus applauds such radical acts of generosity?