

## **20 Characteristics of the Compassionate Person (Mercy-Showing and Shepherd)**

Of all the gifts, compassion is by far the most frequently bestowed. How wonderful that this is so! What this world needs now is “love, sweet love”; as the song tells us. Maybe it's because so many people are hurting that God has created such a vast number of compassionate people.

"To have mercy" in Greek is *e/leo*. Strong's Concordance defines it as "to be compassionate (by word or deed, specifically by divine grace); have compassion, (pity on); have (obtain, receive, show) mercy (on)." (We have elected to use the word "compassion" rather than "mercy" because the latter can carry a negative connotation of weakness.)

The compassion person is to show his or her compassion with cheerfulness, *hilarotes* in the Greek, according to Vine, signifying “that readiness of mind, that joyousness, which is prompt to do anything; hence, cheerful.” Our word hilarity comes from this Greek word. Vincent defines it as “the joyfulness, the amiable grace, the affability going the length of gaiety, which make the visitor a sunbeam penetrating into the sick-chamber, and to the heart of the afflicted.” The Amplified Bible states that our acts of mercy or compassion are to be done “with genuine cheerfulness and joyful eagerness” (Romans 12:8).

### **1. Has tremendous capacity to show love**

Of all the motivational gifts, this is the one with the greatest capacity and ability to show love to others. Reflecting the nature of their heavenly Father, compassion people seem to be an unending source of *agape* love. The more opportunities they have to give love, the more joyful and fulfilled they are.

### **2. Always looks for good in people**

Compassion people are noncritical. It's almost as if they have built-in blinders that keep them from seeing bad things in others. Their focus remains on the good, both realized and potential. Neither do they want to hear others talk about the negatives in people.

### **3. Senses the spiritual and emotional condition of a group or Individual**

One can almost visualize invisible feelers or antennae on the heads of those with the motivational gift of compassion. They are incredibly sensitive to the emotional

status of others. They know if people are up or down, elated or blue, confident or fearful.

Compassion people are also good at reading body language. Some experts in communication have proposed that 75 to 85 percent of human communication is nonverbal. The way we stand, sit or even hold our arms can say, "I'm open to you" or, "I won't receive a thing you say" or, "I'm hanging loose today." On top of this, our facial expressions are often a dead giveaway of feelings even when we don't say a thing. Or if we do, the tone of our voice can reveal far more than the words we use.

All of us can "read" this type of communication to some degree, but compassion people are the experts. And since they function in this area constantly, they are often more or less in tune with the deepest feelings of others.

#### **4. Is attracted to people who are hurting or in distress**

This is an always-present, ready-to-function characteristic of compassion people. It starts in early childhood and continues all through their lives.

They are the ones as children who brought home the lost dogs and the stray cats. They also brought home the lonely kids no one else cared for.

#### **5. Takes action to remove hurts and relieve distress in others**

Compassion people are not only drawn to the hurting, they also do something about it.

A woman with this gift gave us a capsule definition of the difference between sympathy, empathy and compassion:

Sympathy says: "I'm sorry you hurt!"

Empathy says: "I'm sorry you hurt, and I hurt with you!"

Compassion says: "I'm sorry you hurt, and I hurt with you, and I'm going to stay right here with you until the hurt is gone."

#### **6. Is more concerned for mental and emotional distress than physical distress**

Suppose you have to go to the hospital. Guess who's going to be the first to come and visit you? The compassion person will inquire about your comfort and the medical prognosis. But he or she will then move on to find out how you are *feeling*

about being in the hospital. Are you worried about things getting taken care of at home? Are you battling fear? Do you sense the Lord's presence in this time of need? Do you need prayer? He or she may just sit by your bed and hold your hand or will literally weep with those who weep.

#### **7. Is motivated to help people have right relationships with one another**

Compassion people grieve over broken relationships. They are builders of bridges and menders of breaches. They are the peacemakers. They want to see the Body of Christ united and functioning in love. They love Jesus' prayer in John 17, and work to that end.

#### **8. Loves opportunities to give preference or place to others**

These are the people who will open the door for you, let you step in line in front of them, give you the best chair.

#### **9. Is careful with words and actions to avoid hurting others**

The last thing a compassion person wants is to be the cause of hurt to another person. Therefore, they are careful of their own actions and speech. We've seen them stop in the middle of a sentence in order to choose just the right word, lest they say something that might offend.

#### **10. Easily detects insincerity or wrong motives**

The compassion people's "built-in radar system" helps them to detect ulterior motives or insincerity of any kind. They will back off from a person or a group when they sense this.

#### **11. Is drawn to others with the gift of compassion**

Those with the motivational gift of compassion are naturally drawn to each other. They enjoy sharing with each other, praying together and just being together. It isn't so much that they think alike, but that they *feel* alike. They have the same emotional reactions to people and situations. They share the same concerns.

#### **12. Loves to do thoughtful things for others**

These are the people who remember birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's and

Father's Day and Valentine's Day- and find a host of other occasions on which to send cards or notes just to say they care.

### **13. Is trusting and tries to be trustworthy**

It's because they are trustworthy that compassion people expect others to be so, too. They assume that everyone is honest and reliable until absolutely proven otherwise. They can be so trusting, in fact, that they can be in danger of becoming gullible.

They are greatly disappointed when someone proves not to be reliable. But you know what? They will continue to expect the best from that person anyway. They believe in people's capacity to change for the better. Often this very expectation brings out the best in those around them. But it can also work to the compassion person's harm.

### **14. Avoids conflicts and confrontations**

Even small children with the compassion gift find it very difficult to cope with conflict. They long for peace and harmony in the home, and when parents quarrel or split up, the compassionate youngster assumes it is their fault: "If I had just been a better child my mom and dad would still be together."

Compassion people are not confronters. They may hint that they are unhappy about something, but will seldom, unlike the perceiver or exhorter, address a problem straight on.

### **15. Doesn't like to be rushed in a job or activity**

Compassion people have one speed, and it's slow forward. As children, these were the kids who had to be pushed out the door, so they'd get to school on time. They just didn't pay much attention to clocks. Somehow time just isn't that important to them. They are now people. They live for the moment. They figure the future will take care of itself, as long as they are doing all they can in the present.

### **16. Typically cheerful and joyful**

Compassion people are positive people. The Amplified Bible says they are to show mercy and compassion "with genuine cheerfulness and joyful eagerness" (Romans 12:8). They love showing love. It gives them joy to do so.

One person said, "I love being around compassion people. Their cheerfulness

buoys me up.”

Since they yearn to relieve hurts and encourage relationships, they are constantly working to bring the level of happiness in others up to their own and beyond. How often we all need that kind of help!

### **17. Is ruled by the heart rather than the head**

The heart plays the major role in the compassion person's life. The heart is the channel through which he or she shares God's wonderful love with others. Compassion people are not normally tagged thinkers, intellectuals or analyzers. Rather, they are the feelers. They rely on emotions rather than mental processes to guide their lives. They're the ones who could say, “Don't confuse me with the facts; my feelings are already made up.” This is not to say that they do not use their minds. They do-but always in relationship to what they feel.

Unfortunately, it is more difficult for a man to have this gift than for a woman. Society allows a woman to be led by her heart and easily moved to tears. Not so a man. The social expectations of most cultures tend to pressure a man into a macho mold, but the compassion gift is just not going to fit. Our hope is that wider understanding of the motivational gifts will allow compassion people of both sexes to be the beautiful, tenderhearted people they were created to be.

### **18. Rejoices to see others blessed and grieves to see others hurt**

The person with the compassion gift has an immense capacity to identify with what others are going through. He or she will literally rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. There are times in all our lives when we need someone to do just that with us.

Have you ever shared some great happiness with someone only to have him or her reply indifferently, “Oh, that's happened to me many times; it's no big deal.” It bursts your bubble. You wish you'd never brought it up. But share the good news with a compassion person and he or she is apt to jump for joy, saying, “I'm so happy for you.” or, “Praise God! I'm so glad you told me.”

There are times in our lives when we need someone to empathize with our sorrow or hurt. We don't need advice, exhortation or evaluation, but just someone who can sit and feel for and with us. We need someone who cares.

### **19. Is a crusader for good causes**

In the eyes of the compassion person, right needs to prevail. If there is evil at work

in society, he or she strives to overcome it, usually in "silent witness" fashion such as sit-ins, picketing, peace marches, emails or mail-outs. Those who have more extroverted personalities or a strong secondary "speaking gift " may also address political rallies or appear on TV. But all work to bring about change. They tend to be altruistic, not wanting any special benefit for themselves, but for others.

## **20. Intercedes for the hurts and problems of others**

This is the third of the seven motivational gifts that is called to and anointed for intercessory prayer. They intercede primarily for the hurts and problems they have become aware of in other people's lives. Theirs are deep, heartfelt prayers. If you've heard a compassion gift in action at a prayer meeting, you may have thought, Oh, how beautiful. I wish I could pray like that.

They are so expressive because they feel what they are praying so deeply. It is not unusual for them to be moved to tears as they intercede. They pray with abandonment, almost forgetting there are others present, unashamed of their tears or other expressions of emotion.

Those who are drawn to become regular members of an intercessory prayer group are the perceiver, the giver and the compassion person. Each will bring his or her own special approach to the gathering.

The perceiver will pray for the will of God to be done in nations, in churches, in other groups and in individual lives.

The giver will pray for the salvation of lost souls, specifically and generally. The compassion person will pray for the problems and hurts of people and for unity in the Body of Christ.

It is a beautiful thing to behold such a group in action. We believe it is the actualization of Jesus' declaration:

***Again, I tell you, if two of you on earth agree (harmonize together, make a symphony together) about whatever [anything and everything] they may ask, it will come to pass and be done for them by My Father in heaven. For wherever two or three are gathered (drawn together as My followers) in My name, there I AM in the midst of them.***

Matthew 18:19- 20

Notice that "agree" (the Greek word is *sumphoneo*) means to "harmonize together or make a symphony" a beautiful picture of what happens when these three gifts pray together. Just as a chord is richer and lovelier than a single note, so when each gifted person prays wholeheartedly from his unique perspective, the resulting

harmony is exquisite. It touches the heart of God and produces results.

## **Problems of the Compassionate Person**

The motivational gift of compassion is potentially both the most beautiful gift of all and the most emotionally destructive. It all depends upon the degree to which the compassion person has overcome his or her own emotional wounds.

Compassionate people are the most vulnerable to hurts because their hearts are most open to others. When they are hurt or betrayed there is virtually no protection, no shell, no tough hide or callousness to deflect the attack.

Of all the recipients of gifts, the compassion child needs the most love, tenderness and adult protection. Those who receive this nurturing emerge into adulthood reasonably whole emotionally and are able to cope with life's challenges. Those who don't often require much encouragement, counseling, deliverance and healing in order to come into their rightful inheritance of a life free of encumbrances.

We've found that the compassion person is more apt to become an alcoholic or a drug abuser or to need psychiatric care than any other. Compassion people are also idealists who are prone to live in a fantasy world if the real world becomes intolerable.

Unfortunately, many compassion people grow up in homes where strife and unkindness even abuse and molestation prevail. But the good news is that Jesus can heal all those hurts. Our experience with ministering to the emotionally hurt has verified this.

So, if you find you are hurting, let Jesus heal you and set you free. Often that happens even as you ask. Or, let someone else assist you – a variety of professionals, your pastor or a mature Christian who ministers inner healing. Then you will be able to function in all the beauty and fullness of your gift.

### **1. Tends to be indecisive**

It is difficult for the compassion person to make decisions. He or she will ponder the possible consequences, delay as long as possible or transfer the responsibility to others if possible.

### **2. Is often prone to take on another person's offense**

Because a compassion person cannot stand to see another person hurt or offended, he or she is quick to take up the offended person's cause.

Here's how it goes. Person A says something hurtful to person B. The compassion person observes this and joins person B in being upset with person A. Meanwhile A and B make up and restore their relationship. But the compassion person is still holding a grudge against person A.

They need to learn, first, that these matters are none of their business - except as they pray for those involved. We are not accountable for the actions of others unless we are in a position of authority with them, like a parent, pastor, teacher or group leader.

And second, they need to learn that prayer will move mountains. Just as prayer can defuse the perceiver's critical attitude, so prayer can defuse the compassion person's tendency to take up offenses. He or she needs to give the offense to the Lord, let Him deal with the situation and then let go of it.

Sometimes taking up an offense gets in the way of God's dealing with the other person. The compassion person also has a tendency to be easily offended. He or she reads meaning into other people's words or actions that are not there at all. A good prayer for the compassion person is, "Lord, help me to be slow to be offended, on my own behalf or another's."

### **3. Is easily hurt by others**

This is the big one! No one gets hurt as easily as the compassion person. They are the most vulnerable. It usually starts in childhood, even in infancy.

Unfortunately compassion children often assume the blame for strife between parents. They tend to take everything so personally.

It's ironic, but the very people who are the best at relieving the hurts of others are the ones who are most easily hurt themselves. Or . . . is it that God doesn't waste anything that we go through - if we let Him use it?

### **4. Can empathize too much with the suffering of others**

This is another danger area for those with the gift of compassion. If they empathize too completely with the suffering of others, it can weigh them down and render them ineffective in ministry.

Dinah wrote to us about this problem in her life. "I always want to help someone who is hurting because I hurt for them. But I have a tendency to take their worries on myself and go through it all with them. Then I'm not objective enough to really be of help."



Dinah's answer was to remember that Jesus has already borne our sorrow and grief. He's the only One with a heart large enough to carry them. We need to commit the suffering of the world to Him, rather than trying to take it upon ourselves.

#### **5. Has an affectionate nature that is often misinterpreted by others**

Because compassion people have such ability to show love, and because so many people need to feel loved, it is easy for their affection to be misconstrued as sexual attraction.

We recommend that a compassion person never, counsel someone of the opposite sex alone. (In fact, this is a good rule for everyone).