

CLOSE ENOUGH TO FEEL PAIN

Matthew 8:1–34 or 8:1–4

John Ortberg

The miracle of the touch is that Jesus was willing to share another person's suffering in order to bring about healing. This is a foreshadowing of the cross: Jesus taking on our sin so that we could take on his life. By his stripes we are healed.

In a contagious world, we learn to keep our distance. If we get too close to those who are suffering, we might get infected by their pain. It may not be convenient or comfortable. But only when you get close enough to catch their hurt will they be close enough to catch your love.

Jesus did not call his followers to live in quarantine. He called them to be a kind of hospital. Imagine a hospital where the doctors say, "This has been a successful day. I wasn't infected. My patients were loaded with filthy germs, but I kept them all outside. They may be dying, but at least I didn't touch any of them. I didn't get infected."

LACTANTIUS {ca. AD 240–320}

Compassion is closely connected to harmlessness. For although the latter doesn't hurt anyone, the former works good. The latter begins justice, the former completes it. He has given us the affection of compassion so that we can protect lives by helping one another. If we are created by one God, descended from one man, and, therefore, are thus connected by the law of kinship, we should love everyone. As a result we are bound not only to abstain from hurting others, but to not even take revenge when we are hurt. Then we will be completely harmless. Regarding this, God commands us to always pray for our enemies. We should be animals fitted for companionship and society, so that we will protect ourselves by giving and receiving assistance. For our frailty is prone to many accidents and inconveniences. Expect that what you see happening to someone else may also happen to you. You will be excited to help someone if you shall assume the mind of those who, being placed in danger, beg for your help.

reflection

1. When do you find extending compassion difficult?
2. What are you willing to give to show compassion?
3. What are the limits to your compassion?

For your next devotional reading, go to page 1089.