

LOVE that never runs out

Ron Ballard

When an emergency happens, people are often quick to respond. Their hearts naturally go out to those in need, and they begin to think of how they can help. Some emergencies are dealt with quickly, but others, by their very nature, require persistent, ongoing effort. National or worldwide disasters, epidemics, entrenched hunger and poverty, prolonged conflict, even chronic illness, may demand continuous and patient attention in order to achieve resolution. So how can one keep from wearing down and experiencing what some have called "compassion fatigue"?

A good place to start is to elevate one's sense of compassion. Compassion actually has a spiritual source and is something more than the mixed human passion of love and sorrow. Another term for compassion is *mercy*, and true mercy is actually a divine attribute. The Psalmist spoke of this kind of mercy in the well-known and well-loved 23rd Psalm, where God is compared to the dedicated shepherd. That psalm ends with the assurance, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. ..." The verb mildly translated as *follow* in that stanza can be translated to the more demanding verb *pursue*. Realizing that a divine animus is "pursuing" each of us with goodness and mercy has strengthened my compassionate efforts. The way I see it, divine Love actually pursues us with mercy; Love never lets up or wears out or gives up in its efforts. Seeing compassion as a relentless, caring attribute of God reveals that there is much more behind our desires than mere human effort.

Compassion is a healing response, and as with all healing, it is much more effective when it's seen as divine grace, rather than a factor of the human mind. Divine grace, or the divine influence in the heart and mind, is what lifts us up, preventing us from wearing down. Grace is actually God working through us. This is the message of the Christ, or the divine manifestation of God that appears on the human scene, and that Jesus so fully lived and embodied. Jesus was the most humble, yet strong, character the world has ever known. He realized that the healing works he performed were not merely a response of human compassion, but the manifestation of divine grace. He could say, "The Son can do nothing of himself," while at the same time realizing that through the divine influence, he could do whatever the Father does.'

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So how do you respond to demanding situations? It might seem that you should focus on the particular need. But zeroing in on something more profound can uncover what the real need actually is. Mary Baker Eddy, who founded Christian Science and was one of the most prolific healers of modern times, studied and practiced the art of primitive Christian healing and made this observation: "To live so as to keep human consciousness in

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constant relation with the divine, the spiritual, and the eternal, is to individualize infinite power; and this is Christian Science." ¹ It is this ability to individualize infinite power, the power of divine compassion, that is the real need. And to accomplish that requires keeping one's thoughts, motives, and desires in relation with the Divine. Centered on God. But even this focus should not be seen as one of solely personal effort. One's ability to keep consciousness in relation to the Divine comes from the pursuit of grace, divine Love. It is, as the Apostle Paul once observed about the demands of working out one's own salvation, "God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." ³

God working in you to do His/Her own will is the power behind compassion. And just what is that will? What is God demanding each of us to do? God is not asking His children to make things right again. God is asking each of us to stand firm in the conviction of His presence, mercy, and goodness. Doing God's will is actually exercising a perception-perceiving what God knows about any situation. Amid the angst of wondering, "Why did God allow this to happen?" is the divine demand to see what God sees. It's not God that causes disaster and discord; it's the material theories about life and existence that inevitably bring their disheartening implications. If one sees life through the lens of mortal reasoning, then everything inevitably portends this mortal nature-destruction and decay. But this doesn't have to be one's view of life. Through the grace, or influence, of God, who is Life divine, life can be perceived spiritually. And looking at life more for the spiritual qualities and attributes that it actually must express-because God is its source-reveals countless examples of progress, harmony, and success.

It may be difficult to accept that people experience what they perceive as their definition of life, because one of the implications of human existence is the belief that

no one is ever quite in charge of his or her life, that factors "out there" can always determine one's safety, happiness, and well-being. Yet one of the threads running through history is the fact that spiritual perception always trumps mortal reasoning.

One example that stands out to me involves a family I knew who had to face an apparently permanent health challenge. Their daughter was born with a physical defect. It was something they had to look at every day. But at one point, the parents decided they could choose how they were going to see their daughter. They could continue to look at the defect every day, or they could begin to perceive their daughter in a different manner-spiritually, instead of materially. These parents chose to see in her God's likeness, that is, the qualities and characteristics of God that truly made up her nature. Her true face, they decided, was something more than physical appearance; it was her spiritual character. Sometime after making this decision and practicing it daily, they were sitting at the dinner table when the husband motioned to his wife to look at their daughter. There was no longer any evidence of the birth defect.

Whether it's an individual experience or a worldwide demand, compassion needs to be based on a spiritual premise-that of the activity of God. No matter what the situation is, a determination to see the presence of the face of God is sustained by God's grace, Her pursuing care. And you can individualize this infinite power. Knowing that God is working with you, you can expect to see inspired resolution.

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¹ See John 5:19. ² *The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 160. ³ *Phil 2:13*.