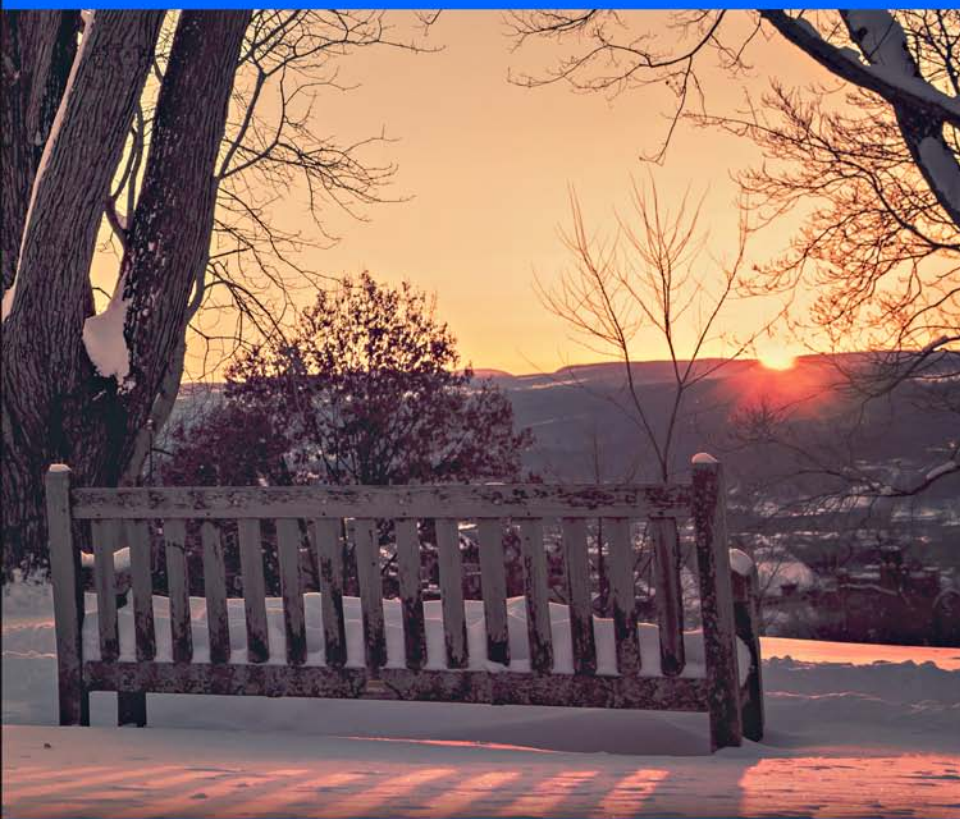


What's Compassion Have To Do With It?



Lisa Marie Chirico

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By

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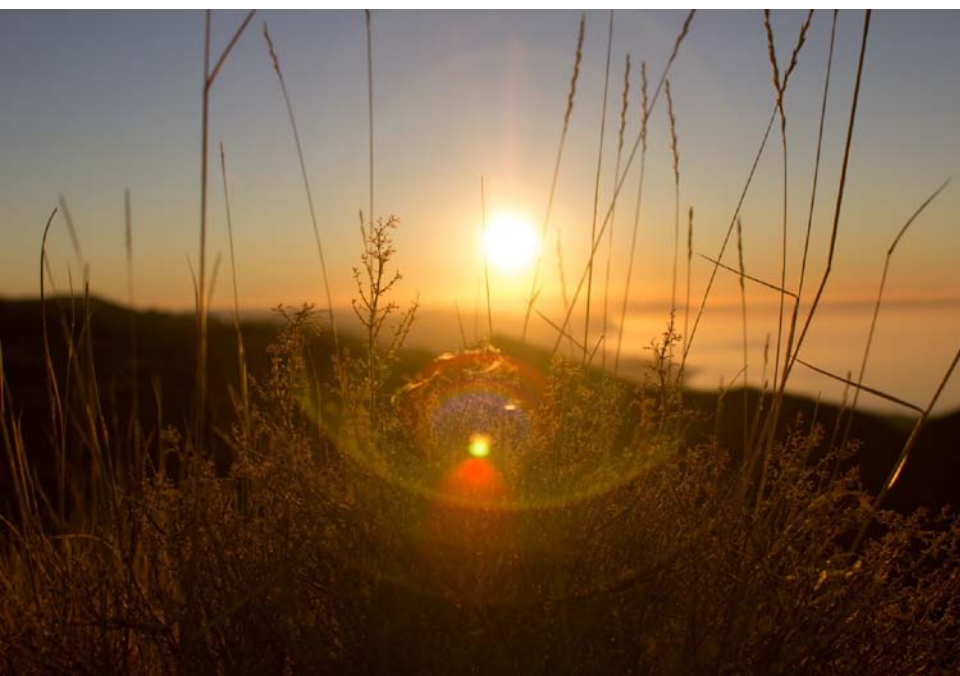
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This book is dedicated with all
my love and gratitude to my
Mom and Dad, who taught me
how to be a compassionate
person.

*“Compassion is God’s
whisper.”*



I never imagined that I would write a book about compassion. Yet, I have. I feel that I was compelled to do so for various reasons. Primarily, it is because compassion is very important in my life. The subject of compassion seems to continually come up during conversations I have with friends and family. I think about compassion too, so much so that at times the word seems to be spelled out in front of my eyes. I have come to realize that compassion is not merely something that is an important component in our lives. Rather, it is indispensable. Compassion is like oxygen: we all need it.

Throughout my life, I always believed that compassion was merely a behavioral choice: either you chose to be a compassionate person, or you did not. When my Dad's Alzheimer's disease progressed, our family was forced to make the heart-wrenching decision about nursing home care. Suddenly, compassion became more important than ever to me.

When Dad became a nursing home resident, I assumed that everyone at his new home would show him nonstop compassion. After all, I thought to myself, these individuals work in the healthcare industry, so they really and truly care about people. Right? I was wrong about that assumption. Thankfully though, a large share of the nursing home staff genuinely cared about each resident, including my Dad.

His time at the nursing home filled my memory bank with some beautiful and compassionate moments. There is also a space in my memory bank filled with heartbreaking, angry, and frustrating moments that were created by individuals who showed no compassion toward my Dad — absolutely none.

To me, these individuals felt as if they took up a bigger space, as though they used up more energy. Perhaps because of them, inside this nursing home, compassion became larger than life. It emerged behind each corner waving its arms and begging to be acknowledged. My new association with compassion helped to inspire me to write this book. I realized that there is a bigger picture that extends far beyond my Dad, that nursing home, and me. I discovered that the need for greater compassion in our lives is crucial for us today, and all our tomorrows.

This concept we call compassion is indisputably something wonderful. I think most of us can also agree that we need more of it in our lives. Yet, are we expecting too much when we want everyone we come in contact with to show us compassion? In the moments that make up our daily lives, shouldn't compassion be our first order of business? If someone needs help, don't we have an obligation to lend a hand any way we can? The answer to all these questions should be: "Yes." Instead, the answer tends to be: "No, that's not my problem."

Some think compassion is something that

can be taught to those who lack it. I agree that is possible, but I also believe that expressing compassion is something that we are all actually born to do. Furthermore, when we convey compassion, we are expressing our humanity in all its shining glory.

So, what does compassion have to do with our daily existence? From where I stand, stepping up our level of compassion is one of the most important things we can do right now. Let me explain.

Our world is changing. Do you see and feel these changes around you? Yet, contrary to popular belief, I don't think everything is "going to hell in a hand basket." No. I think we are waking up from a very long slumber, and we are making a shift. It is an uncomfortable and awkward shift, but it is definitely a shift. I do not see this as a passing trend. Rather, I see this transformation as a shift towards a more enlightened way of living for all of us.

You may ask, dear reader, why it is that I believe our world is merely going through a shift, and not a negative spiral. Especially, since there is so much evidence to support the latter. Yes, I agree: there is certainly a lot to lament. Yet, the building of a society with greater compassion is taking place right now. Additionally, although you may not hear a lot about them, many people are working diligently toward the greater good. To help create a better world for everyone, what do we really need? I am convinced the most

important component of this work is compassion.



I often hear people say: “How did things get so bad?” As a collective human race, we have taken many different roads to get to this point in our existence. What can we do now?

How can we change our course in order to chart a brighter future?

We can only directly control our own life journeys, but each of us can also have a deep and lasting impact on others around us based on what we do and say. Pessimists will keep to themselves, seeing folly in the belief that one person can make a difference. Optimists know they have the power to change the world. As the Dalai Lama said: “If you think you’re too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito in the room.”

Compassion is the essential element — the secret sauce if you will — that empowers us. After all, it is compassion and love that makes our world go around. It is not greed, jealousy, anger, revenge, or hatred that binds us. So, what about the groups that converge based upon their shared contempt and mistrust of others? Since humans have free will, it appears that there will always be a percentage, however small, of people who simply choose evil over good. I cannot make a case for them; I can make a case for the rest of us.

From the time I began writing this book, to the present moment, the state of global affairs appears to have gone from bad to worse. Interestingly, if we searched for songs with lyrics that reflected our times, many that were written more than four decades ago are particularly relevant today.

I think we all know at least one person who

declares that they never read the newspaper or listen to the news because it is just too depressing. Then, there are others who cannot get enough of bad news, and seem to feed off of it. Fingers continuously point to who, or what, we should blame. Others believe we live in the end times, so we must act accordingly.

Today, it is just not easy to be an inhabitant of planet Earth. In fact, this day and age may be one of the most difficult that we have ever experienced, for a variety of reasons. No matter where you turn, there is plenty of suffering and pain, and truckloads of negativity.

In the United States, while drones fly overhead and we marvel at the newest tech start-up to join the billion-dollar club, we face our fair share of difficulties.

We are divided, angry, outraged, and very stressed. Greed appears to be the order of the day. Injustice, inequality, and intolerance persist. Racism continues to extend its long arm, refusing to loosen its tight grip on society. Riots stemming from police brutality escalate, and anger spills into the streets. Children are neglected, abused, and exploited. Drug and alcohol addiction is found in every age group and walk of life, and continues its expansion into small-town America.

Suicide steals our soldiers when they return home, and many veterans live haunted by depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The fight for a living wage continues

for people who just barely make their ends meet. Women are still paid less than men for doing the same job, while the rise of CEOs' pay far outpaces the average workers' pay. Unemployment clings, like a stray dog following us through the streets. Bullying jumps from the playground to social media, triggering teens to take their own lives. Hazing continues in high school locker rooms and across college campuses. As the national debate over gun control continues, gun violence escalates, and shocking and senseless murders increase in number.

Our friends and family members continue to die from devastating diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer's, and untreatable superbugs also take lives. Overseas, outbreaks of deadly viruses such as Ebola pose a looming danger to our shores. As innovations in technology advance and speed up the pace of our lives, modern warfare is carried out through cyber attacks. These attacks impact both individuals and businesses, and pose an ongoing threat for the entire nation. Brownfields dot our landscape — grim reminders that contaminated soil and groundwater replaced once pristine land.

On the world stage, war takes a heavy toll, and innocent lives. From country to country, human trafficking and modern-day slavery rages on. From rape to mutilation, reports from the United Nations reveal that violence against women continues to be a way of life for many of

them. In conflicts they know nothing about, countless children lose their lives, or suffer hardships such as malnutrition in refugee camps. Others are forced to become armed soldiers. In some regions of the world, girls are denied an education, and for youth of certain faiths, education is actually a crime.

Animals are cruelly abused and treated inhumanely, as we disagree over what, if any, rights they deserve. Wildlife trafficking permits poachers to cash in on animal parts for profit, as they drive some species to extinction. Millions of people have no access to clean drinking water. Preventable accidents cause crude oil to spill into the oceans, poisoning everything in their wake. As we batter our land and sea with pollution, our planet continues to grow warmer. Arctic ice continues to melt. Nothing is left untouched by climate change. It affects vegetation, every living creature inhabiting the land and sea, along with our very existence.

Weather extremes become the new normal. Storms the likes of which we have never experienced in our lifetime leave devastating damage in their path, yet global warming denial persists. Drought descends on regions of the U.S. and around the world, causing far-reaching harm. Deforestation erases our landscape and continues to decimate delicate ecosystems such as tropical rain forests. Big agriculture grows genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that transform the food

lining our grocery store shelves. Hydrofracking does irreparable damage to our land and water. Earthquakes and other natural disasters destroy entire villages and end lives, often with little to no warning.

Nations around the globe yearning for democracy suffer the consequences, from the chaos of civil war to genocide. Conflicts between countries seem never-ending. From every corner of the world, terror groups and their lone wolf soldiers continue to carry out evil plots. Fear is peddled like a commodity.

What should we do? Should we laugh? Should we cry? Should we even bother to care? Everything seems to be so far removed from what the world was like just a generation ago. Are we capable of getting off our merry-go-round of bad times? The short answer is: yes. I believe that current conditions have caused the planet that we live on to become smaller in a way. It seems that people everywhere are beginning to realize that an unseen thread joins us all.

Compassion is a component of this thread. No longer reserved exclusively for a pastor's sermon, we are just as likely to hear about compassion in a newspaper or magazine article. Businesses utilize the word compassion in their taglines. Compassion also appears to be one of this decade's buzzwords.

I wonder why it is so popular right now?

Perhaps, it is showing up more and more in our collective consciousness for a reason. Is it possible that compassion alone is the answer to our biggest, most pressing problems in the world today? I say, maybe it is!

It seems that as our problems become more complex and challenging, we are also evolving into a more compassionate and caring society. To meet these challenges, there are countless people and corporations alike that are reaching out to help humanity and our planet in ways big and small. Glance at any social media platform, and it is easy to recognize them, including those who post photos or articles simply for the objective of spreading a positive message. People are clearly tired of what is wrong in our world today, and are actively pursuing ways to make it right.

Old ways of thinking and doing things are being replaced by new and more enlightened approaches in every segment of our society. Sharing and caring are gaining ground on greed and neglect, and altruism is on the rise. Underserved populations such as low-income and homeless people are no longer living in the shadows. Eco-conscious and sustainable practices in everyday living and working are becoming more popular. There seems to be a genuine understanding and appreciation for just how precious our planet is.

Many have embraced solopreneurship, walking away from their nine-to-five jobs to follow their true passions. Unlike generations before them, Millennials are motivated by more than high salaries, and are choosing careers that impact the world around them after graduation. Our new sharing economy is another bright sign for the future. These positive shifts make it easier for us to trust that change for the better is right around the corner. Yet, we clearly still have a long road to travel. To make our journey easier, I believe we must continue to pour more compassion into everything that we do.

So, what is compassion anyway? Is it a pretty-sounding word, a convenient emotion, or a lovely virtue? The [dictionary](#) says the noun compassion is: sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. Much has been written about compassion being more action and less emotion. Zen Buddhist monk, author, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh succinctly summarized this belief when he stated: "Compassion is a verb." The Dalai Lama says that compassion plays a critical role in our lives: "Compassion is not religious business, it is human business, it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability, it is essential for human survival."

According to the Greater Good Science Center, based at the University of California at Berkeley, compassion literally means to suffer

together. In addition, they state that among emotion researchers, compassion is defined as “the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another’s suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.” Compassion takes on a new meaning, and becomes more of a verb than a noun, when you think about it as acquiring the suffering of someone else. Now, it is transformed into pure action, instead of just a feeling or an emotion.

Next, there is what I think of as the kindred spirits of compassion: empathy and kindness. I am drawn to psychiatrist and philosopher Alfred Adler’s commentary on what empathy meant to him: “seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of another.” Kindness, which is considered a virtue, can be defined as a spontaneous act of [goodwill](#) towards another. My favorite frame of reference for kindness is from author Mark Twain: “Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”

If emotions had a rating system, then empathy, kindness, and compassion would presumably earn five out of five stars. Dr. Dacher Keltner, Faculty Director of the Greater Good Science Center, keyed in on the essence of [compassion](#) in one of his lectures while discussing its evolutionary roots. He stated: “When one of his daughters died at age 10, Darwin started to have these deep insights about the place of suffering and compassion in

human experience. That led him to argue, in *The Descent of Man* that sympathy is our strongest instinct, sometimes stronger than self-interest”

Whether or not you agree with Darwin, or the current research regarding the [evolutionary purpose](#) of compassion, it is likely you will find the studies compelling. To me, it is fascinating to think about how our world would look, sound, and operate if compassion, instead of greed, anger, and all the other negative emotions, were the primary motivating factor in our daily lives. It is hard to imagine that anything other than peace would prevail. Wow — what a thought that is!

So, are humans hard-wired with a compassion gene that society somehow deactivates over time? Existing research validates this theory. Yet, the topic continues to be a debate among neuroscientists, psychologists, and anthropologists. One way to answer this question is to look at the evidence of how people react in various situations.

When bad things happen, do we come together or pull apart? There are countless examples of individuals who place their personal health and safety concerns aside, and come to the assistance of others when disasters strike. Additionally, have you noticed the people who do not turn away from life when they are struck by tragedy? Instead, they turn towards it. Some raise funds that advance research to find a cure for the disease that their

child suffers from. Others decide to create a foundation to advance the causes their loved one cared about while they were alive. By refusing to be buried by their grief, these people help those around them in ways they never imagined they would.

Compassion should not be reserved exclusively for a time of crisis. There are a myriad of ways we can be more compassionate in our daily lives. Big gestures are not required. Actually, the smallest expression often has the biggest impact. Perhaps the easiest way for us to be more compassionate is to simply put ourselves in someone else's shoes, and truly consider how they are feeling. When you choose not to ignore something that someone else is experiencing, you are easing that person's hurt and pain, and making their burden lighter.

Within the vast storage of memories that comprise our individual lives, each of us has at least one recollection of witnessing the school bully teasing a classmate, or of being the bully's target ourselves. That incident was likely the first time we came in contact with someone showing a lack of compassion, or intolerance, for another person.

Fast-forward to adulthood, and it is undoubtedly easy for you to recall the first time you witnessed absence of compassion in the workplace. Maybe it was a supervisor who demanded that you continuously work overtime, or gave you an impossible-to-accomplish-in-a-

forty-hour-week workload. Then, there is the time that a boyfriend, girlfriend, or best friend did something to hurt you, and you felt blindsided. Again and again, you asked yourself: “How could they be so insensitive to my feelings?”

The mental exercise of putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes is a difficult thing to do, and it is not necessarily because people simply do not care about others. Many of us are just too wrapped up in our own lives to stop and think about the issues that people we know, not to mention complete strangers, are dealing with.

You may have noticed that some people have a tendency to disappear when hard times hit. Everyone wants to hear good news, so sharing that is easy. For example, think about the last time you posted a photo on social media from a special event or a vacation, and everyone in that photo is smiling and enjoying themselves. What follows is always a big, positive response from the people in your circles.

Yet, bad news is a totally different story. No one wants to hear it, let alone share it, although people turn to social media now more than ever to do so and seek support there too. While we may stop and listen to our friends and family members who are having a hard time and even offer some advice, if given a choice, many of us would probably opt out of that conversation. Let’s face it, no one really wants to hear how depressing your first

holiday without your loved one was, or how lost you feel since your breakup.

Our approach to people in crisis needs to change. Do not keep your distance when someone is grieving, ends a relationship, or loses their job. You may imagine that you are bothering a person in pain when you reach out to him or her. Yet, this is not the case. I assure you that they will be grateful for your thoughtfulness. And, you will feel wonderful afterward knowing that you made a difference in their life.

Since our natural state is joy, not sorrow, we sometimes try to escape bad news any way we can. However, when you shield yourself from life because you believe that everything is bad, you prevent yourself from experiencing all the wonderful things that the world, and everything right in front of you, has to offer.

Instead, step outside your door every day and turn your face towards the sun, even if you do not see it behind the clouds. Plug in and choose not to ignore what is happening all around you because you think you just cannot stand it anymore. Realize that your individual vibration always matters! Whether you are doing laundry, making dinner, watching television, engaged on your computer, or talking on the phone: what you say and do really does make a difference to everyone. Even if you feel isolated at times, remember that none of us live on an island; we are all truly

connected. Now is the time, and inside your heart is the place.

This brings me to a harrowing scene in one of my favorite films: “It’s a Wonderful Life” at the moment when George Bailey is brought to his brother Harry’s gravestone. He simply does not believe what he is seeing. George insists to Clarence, his guardian angel, that it is impossible that Harry is dead since: “Harry Bailey went to war. He got the Congressional Medal of Honor; he saved the lives of every man on that transport!” Clarence reminds George: “Every man on that transport died. Harry wasn’t there to save them because you weren’t there to save Harry.”

I have always believed that one of the overriding themes of this film is how linked we all are, and that each person’s life has such an enormous impact on everyone else. When Clarence showcases this point to George, he gives him a truly wonderful gift: to actually see what the world would be like without him.

Today, there seems to be a persistent effort to convince us that we are very different and disconnected from one another. Doesn’t our shared geography on this planet unite us? There are no borders, but we made them. Different languages, traditions, food, art, and cultures emerged over time. Yet, we continue to share the same human beingness. What we have done to ourselves over the centuries is tragic. It is as if our humanity just went to

sleep, and we forgot everything that made sense. We forgot all about love.

So, what can fix the brokenness of our world? Is it compassion? In my opinion — yes! We can help shut down everything that is awful by simply showing compassion, and being more compassionate at home, at work, and everywhere else. I hear you, dear reader. You are saying: “How can one emotion be a remedy for everything we want to change in the world right now?” Well, compassion is up to that enormous task. Consider it one of our present-day disrupters.

Our planet will continue to spin, no matter what. Surely, it will rotate with more light and love when compassion is spread from one end of it to the other. I encourage you to reach out today, and all your tomorrows, and show compassion. Who should you have the most compassion for? Everyone. When you do, we all benefit.

The love that we have for one other is there. I have seen it, and you have seen it too, especially in our darkest of times. During those days, we gathered together like angels, and all our so-called barriers disappeared. We held hands, and became one again. This gives me great trust in a brighter tomorrow.

Although it lingers, there is no room in our world anymore for hate, ignorance, intolerance, or greed. Our collective cup is running over with negativity, creating a giant,

toxic drink. We are ready for a new age to dawn. Technological advances will only take us so far. Everything must always come back around to our shared humanity, and to our higher, more conscious selves.

It is my hope, that after you read my brief overview about compassion, you will mention it to someone. Then, that person will talk about it with someone else. After that, there will be a few more people discussing the significance of compassion. We are all yearning to have our faith in humanity restored. Compassion is a bridge that connects us to that realization.

So, what's compassion have to do with it? That's simple — everything! Compassion is God's whisper. To us, maybe giving and receiving compassion originates from a desire for a companion to share our journey through life with. Deep inside, we all remember that our pain, as well as our joy, is something to experience together.

As time passes, and all who dwell on planet Earth breathe a collective sigh and shift once again, what will happen? Will we turn the corner and adopt a more enlightened, positive, and peaceful existence? I trust that eventually, we will.

So, I choose to remain hopeful, always an optimist, in spite of what the news headlines may say today, or tomorrow. I leave you with the wise words of the indomitable Anne Frank:

“Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart.”

I wish you joy, peace, and many blessings!

