

The motivation and limits of compassion

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What motivates people to serve others? Why do we help those in need, the poor, the sick, the lonely, orphans and widows? Is compassion for humans a natural instinct or is it a learnt response? In the biblical tradition, it is a clear imperative to show one's faith in God in one's behaviour by reaching out to others. Luke 10:25–37 seems to be a key passage in the Bible that teaches and exhorts Christians to be compassionate. Psychology teaches us that compassion is a natural instinct in humans although choice is involved too, and it turns out that religion plays a role in reinforcing compassion. This article is an attempt to understand the motivation and limits of compassion as reinforced by the Christian religion by (1) interpreting Luke 10:25–37 in the New Testament and by (2) using modern psychological insights. It often happens that people reach out to others for self-interested reasons, as serving others psychologically gives them a sense of meaning and fulfilment as well as a positive public image. Compassion, however, is also motivated by a love for God and a love and concern for people in general. As caring for others also affects one emotionally and might cause burnout, it is important to set some limits and boundaries on compassion. As God's love for us leads us to reach out to others, we need to be sure about how and when we should fulfil people's needs, help them to cope with their own needs, help them to understand the reason for their needs, guide them to fulfilling their own needs or help them to find a place where help is available.

Introduction

Why do we help and serve others? What motivates us to reach out to those in need? *What* do we gain by helping someone in need? How do we help others? How do we determine what should be done and when enough has been done? How do we know when our role in the helping process is done? What is the relationship between faith and service to others? Is compassion natural? Is it a learnt response? Does it have anything to do with a fear of God? This article aims to investigate these questions to uncover the motivation and limits of compassion.

Psychologically it seems logical that helping another person makes one feel better about oneself. The helper experiences a sense of personal value whilst caring for the person in need. For Christians, however, it is more about doing things in order to serve God than to feel good about oneself. The question is: Do Christians get involved in charity because they are instructed to do so in the Bible? The imperative, given in Leviticus 19:18, is to love your neighbour as you love yourself, and this is quoted many times in other books of the Bible (e.g. Mt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk 12:31, 33; Rm 13:9; 15:2; Gl 5:14; Ja 2:8). Is our goodwill towards others an automatic outcome of our faith in God?

Jeavons (1994) writes that congregational volunteers are frequently motivated to become involved in community-ministry activities because they feel compelled to address the needs of others as an act and expression of their faith. Hugen, Wolfer and Renkema (2006:410) are of the opinion that community participation must have an impact on the values, attitudes, behaviour and lifestyle of volunteers. It has to deepen and mature the faith of congregational volunteers. They refer to a study that proved that serving people in need facilitates strong faith that is brought about by an increased recognition of their dependence on God and an increased awareness of God's powerful presence in the world. Not to participate in providing hospitality and care to strangers, in praying, in activities that promote social justice in society or in any other practices of faith is to deny oneself the opportunity to participate in God's redemptive activities in the world (Hugen *et al.* 2006:413). Hugen *et al.* (2006:410) further remark that faith gives direction and motivation for ministry. In fact, strong faith is perceived as a precondition to serving those in need.

The relationship between faith and social ministry does, however, seem to be a reciprocal one. Nelson (1990:226, 227) explains that faith provides the motivation, impetus, direction and goal to social ministry. For its part, social ministry gives expression to faith and is the embodiment and nourishment thereof. Caring for others is a fruit of the Spirit as faith leads to new behaviour. At the

same time, involvement in social ministry nurtures faith by providing opportunity and occasion for the demonstration of its actuality and practicality as far as both creation and the social world are concerned (Nelson 1990:240).

However, Wuthnow (1991:123) writes that the role of faith in our societies appears to have weakened over the years. This begs the following question: Does one need to be religious to care? Is it about being part of a religious context or is it more about specific beliefs and teachings (Wuthnow 1991:127)? Are all religious people caring? He says that even religious conservatives and liberals differ in their basic understanding of compassion. Religious conservatives would say that religion teaches them to be caring. Although people might have different values, they still care for others. This is the crucial question: Why do people care?

What is it that moves people to care for others in need? How can one protect oneself from emotional burnout when helping others? This article is an attempt to understand the motivations for and limits of compassion as reinforced by the Christian religion, by (1) interpreting a key text in the New Testament and by (2) using modern psychological insights. It is important first to consider what 'care' of and 'service' to others involve.

A definition of service to others

Compassion is a 'concern with the suffering of others, accompanied by the urge to help'. It 'involves an active moral demand to address others' suffering' (Sznajder 1998:117). Dykstra (1986:42–43) defines 'service to others' as 'providing hospitality and care to strangers, suffering with and for another and our neighbours, participating in activities that promote social justice in society, and praying for them'. Hugen *et al.* (2006:413) mention activities that support the physical, material, emotional and social well-being of people. It is important to note that the focus of this article is not on organised community ministry but on individual involvement with others in need out of personal motivation or individual involvement in organised voluntary work. Nelson (in Morsch & Nelson 2006:ix) says that service to others is about looking at others as people who could use a hand; about looking at our hands and realising that they already contain what others need.

There seems to be different levels of service to others:

- taking note of the needs of others and praying for them
- listening to those in need but leaving them to come up with their own solutions
- helping people to understand the reasons for their needs
- guiding people to help themselves
- helping people find an organisation to help them
- fulfilling their needs.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, the Levite and the priest passed by on the other side whereas the Samaritan fulfilled his needs. It might be helpful to further investigate this parable as it plays a key role in Christians' understanding of compassion and service to one's neighbour.

An interpretation of Luke 10:25–37

The identity of the man in need in this parable is not given. It does not seem to be relevant whether he was a Jew or not. Snodgrass (2008:357) states that this story is intended to show that love does not allow limits on the definition of neighbour. It is important, however, first to consider the context of this parable in Luke.

The context of Luke 10:25–37

The gospel of Luke was written to communicate God's plan of salvation as revealed by Jesus. This author, Luke, focuses particularly on women, children and social outcasts, a focus which is not found in the other gospels. Luke 10:25–37 is part of the story about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. On his way, Jesus explained in parables who God was and what He expected of his people. From this narrative, Jesus emerges primarily as a teacher of ethical wisdom, someone who is very much interested in the virtues of compassion and forgiveness among his followers.

The expert in the Law tried to test Jesus and asked, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' (Lk 10:25). Esler (2000:333) argues that this was 'a challenge – an attempt to enter the social space of Jesus ... with the aim of winning'. Knowing that this man was an expert on the Torah, Jesus replied with another question: 'What is written in the Law?' (Lk 10:26). Then this man answers correctly by quoting the Pentateuch: '[L]ove your God and love your neighbour' (Lk 10:27, as stated in Lv 19:18 and Dt 6:5). The Law demands love for God and for one's neighbour. The expert in the Law then asked, 'Who is my 'neighbour'? Bauckham (1998:475) rephrases this question as follows: 'In what circumstances should I identify someone as the neighbour whom the commandment requires me to love?' Fitzmeyer (1985:886) interprets the implication of this question as: 'Where does one draw the line?' Esler (2000:335–337) notes that it is a boundary question, namely 'What is the outer limit of the people we must treat as neighbours?' It is almost an invitation to Jesus to engage in group differentiation. Then Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

When we read the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37, we see different reactions of different people to the man in Jesus' story. The *robbers* robbed and beat him and left him injured and in need. The *priest* and the *Levite* regarded him as a problem to avoid and simply passed by on the other side. The *innkeeper* simply provided a service to him for which he would be paid. However, when the *Samaritan* saw this man in need, he took pity on him, and his pity moved him to take care of the injured man, bandaging his wounds and taking responsibility for him. All three men who passed by *saw* this man in need, but each reacted differently.

The reactions of the Levite and the priest

The Levite and the priest were two well-known figures in the community. However, neither of them helped the victim. Leviticus 21:1, Ezekiel 44:25 and Numbers 19:11–13 provide

a possible explanation for their reactions. From these texts, it seems that helping the victim would have made them unclean. Snodgrass (2008:344) argues that seeing the man in that condition was an impetus for the Levite and the priest to exercise caution and self-protection. The priest was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho, probably returning home after his temple service. Snodgrass (2008:355) reminds us that the victim in this parable is described as half-dead. Whether the Levite and the priest thought he was dead or alive is unclear. Leviticus 22:4 warns that if a man touches a corpse, he is defiled and forbidden to eat the sacred offerings until he has been cleansed.

On the other hand, some say, Jews were required on religious grounds to bury an abandoned corpse. The fear of being defiled through contact with the body of a dead person should not stand in their way of saving a life. It is not clear whether these men in Jesus' story feared for their own safety or rather defilement. The fact is that their religion, self-interest and self-preservation caused the Levite and the priest to decide not to help the injured man. They did not necessarily lack love or compassion, but they took no action to help the man. Thus, they lacked the caring and mercy needed to help him. Choosing to walk on the other side of the road clearly indicates their attitude of not wanting to get involved. They chose to place religious purity over helping the injured man in need. Esler (2000:339) points out that these two men were in a difficult position. One cannot therefore say for sure that their refusal to help him necessarily showed hard-heartedness.

Manson (1949:261, 263) says, '[n]eighbourhood does not create love, love does create neighbourliness.' In other words, the Samaritan regarded the man as his neighbour because of the love in his heart. One cannot say that the Levite and the priest did not have love or compassion in their hearts for the injured man. It is possible that they did notice him and did feel sorry for him. Perhaps they also prayed for him but that they feared for their own safety and did not act to help him cannot be denied. Although it may be possible that racism or an attitude of superiority killed their love and compassion, causing them not to see the man as a neighbour, their actions are not criticised in the story as such.

Boundas (2004:173) explains that one does not *have* a neighbour; you simply *make* yourself the neighbour of somebody else. The Levite and the priest were thus not willing to make themselves the neighbours of the injured man. However, the Samaritan made himself a neighbour by making himself present and available to this man. He was willing to take the role of neighbour. One's neighbour is surely any person in need, not even excluding one's enemy (Zerwick 1955:292).

The reaction of the Samaritan

The good man in this parable could have been a Jew, but Jesus sets up an embarrassing scenario for his questioner (Snodgrass 2008:358) by making the good man a Samaritan, that is, an ethnic outsider. Knowles (2004:166) underscores the appropriateness of employing a Samaritan as the central

figure in this parable to illustrate the proper interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4–5. Esler (2000:342) argues that Jesus challenged the whole structure of group differentiation by bringing into the story a representative of one of the hated out-groups.

The adjective 'good' that is used to describe the Samaritan would contradict the stereotypical view of the Samaritan race. Acting to help the victim, it is as if he is actually going against his Samaritan-ness, earning the appellation 'good' (Drew 2008:40). This Samaritan showed what love really meant. He was not a Jew who recited the *Shema*¹ twice a day, yet he was willing to help this man. He showed charity and self-sacrifice. Zerwick (1955:291) calls this man a 'nobody' from Samaria. He has no definite religious motives, persuasions, resolutions or principles. He simply follows the voice of his good and compassionate heart (Zerwick 1955:291, 295).

Snodgrass (2008:344) points out that seeing the man is the source of the Samaritan's compassion which motivates his helping. Luke 10:33 reads: 'When he saw the man he was moved with compassion.' I would not agree that seeing the man was the source of his compassion. Rather his compassion was a 'reaction' to his seeing the man's vulnerability, and his actions resulted from his compassion. The Samaritan's act of goodwill towards the man in need proved that he was kind and generous enough to give help to someone in need. Tang *et al.* (2008:868) contend that the Samaritan's motives for helping were purely intrinsic and altruistic in nature. This intrinsic motivation results in genuine selfless serving of his fellow man.

It is noteworthy, however, that this Samaritan was not only compassionate but also in a position to help the victim. Knowles (2004:150–151) points out the narrative details about this Samaritan. He carried oil and wine with him on his journey; he was accompanied by his own animal, and he carried funds with him. This Samaritan was thus wealthy and in a favourable financial position to help another person. When we add to this that the Samaritan appeared to have been heading in the direction of Jericho and intended to return along the same route, it is reasonable to say that this man did not really have to walk an extra mile. Helping the man was completely within his means and would not have pushed him to any limits to do so.

However, the fact remains that all three saw the injured man, but compassion moved only one of them to take action. Bearing in mind that the Samaritan was considered an enemy of the Jews, the Samaritan's pity and compassion is striking in this story. This begs the ultimate question: Why do we feel sorry for others?

Conclusive

In this story, the Levite and the priest both had the skills to help the injured man. Whether they decided that it was in their best interest to leave the man for somebody else to help

1. The *Shema* is an affirmation of Judaism and a declaration of faith in one God.

is only speculation. Perhaps they were being selfish as they were tired and scared of the situation. The fact remains, it was not possible to help the victim within their contexts. The Samaritan was the one who acted out of his natural instinct of compassion and his willingness to help others. It is possible that he knew he had the time, finances and energy to help the injured man. He must have gained some fulfilment from his choice to help. He made himself the neighbour of the injured man, and it is not impossible that he knew God and passed his love on to the injured child of God. Whatever his reasons, the Samaritan had gained God's approval.

Bauckham (1998:478) holds the view that this 'parable constructs a situation in which observance of a purity law conflicts with the duty of neighbourly love'. Luke's story, however, does not communicate this to me. Jesus never said in this narrative that the Levite and the priest were wrong in their actions. Esler (2000:343) points out that Jesus did not ask: 'Given the response of the Samaritan, were the priest and the Levite justified in not treating the man as a neighbour?' Jesus was not at all interested in presenting this narrative as illustrating justifiable reasons to ignore the commandment to love one's neighbour. Jesus' intention was to say, '[a]ssist anyone in need' (Esler 2000:345). Therefore Jesus instead asked the scribe, '[w]ho do you consider the neighbour of this man?' In this particular scenario, the Samaritan (against all odds) made himself the neighbour of the injured man by acting out of compassion for the man. Whilst it was not convenient for the Levite and the priest to act out of compassion by assisting the man, it turned out to be a convenient time for the Samaritan to walk a mile with another person.

The motivation to care for others

Why are we interested in the suffering of others? What will make some of us ignore or hastily pass by a beggar, whilst others will at least listen to their tales of suffering? What moves a person to become involved? Tang *et al.* (2008:867) are of the opinion that people are moved by both intrinsic and extrinsic motives to help others. By intrinsic motives, they mean a genuine concern for people, the goal to increase the welfare of others (Tang *et al.* 2008:869). Helping others may provide satisfaction and happiness for both the helper and the person in need. Extrinsic motives are related to benefits and rewards by which Tang *et al.* (2008) mean motives such as impression management, social exchange and self-handicapping. Everyone has the desire to impress others, to have a positive public image. Then again, there is the issue of reciprocal social exchange – an exchange of favours (Tang *et al.* 2008:870). By self-handicapping is meant that helping others may be used as an excuse for failure in other things.

It seems possible that a person can be moved to help others because it is a natural instinct to be concerned about others. Psychologically, it seems that one could gain happiness and satisfaction with oneself when one helps someone else. Thus, many people who help others may be motivated by self-interest.

Compassion as a natural instinct

Morsch and Nelson (2006:3) write that scientists have already discovered that humans have a tendency for altruistic behaviour, that is, a tendency to bond closely with others and to act for the welfare of others as well as the self. This tendency is deeply rooted in human nature. The question is whether compassion is present in young children (Pines 1979). Noddings (1984:83) says that compassion does exist in humans, waiting to be developed. Wuthnow (1991:52) states that some would say that compassion is part of their personality. Compassion seems to be a natural instinct in all human beings, given by God. Although we can assume that compassion is in some way inherent in the nature of human beings, Morsch and Nelson (2006:4) say that there is still a choice involved.

People belong to different cultures, and those cultures shape their definition of compassion and tell them how to express compassion. One's definition of compassion leads one to choose and take on some roles in society because one cares. The question is what motivates people to choose to serve others when they feel compassionate?

Selfish reasons for compassion

Wuthnow (1991:54, 61, 109) labels the following reasons as self-interested:

- hope of friendship
- hope of service
- gaining a reputation for magnanimity
- freeing the mind from pain
- to assuage guilt
- to look generous
- to curry favour
- to buy attention or affection
- to earn a return gift
- to keep peace in a family
- to earn approval, status and power
- to gain experience.

The above are very often some of the reasons why some people act compassionately. For example, imagine a company where promotion to a managerial position is possible when it is noted that the employee is compassionate towards colleagues. Political leaders try to prove their concern for their voters by volunteering in events or programmes aimed to help people in need. A political leader might gain power, approval, status and eventually more votes in his or her society by becoming involved in the pain of that particular society. It is almost like the patron-client relationship in the ancient world where those with status, for example, political leaders, were willing to help somebody less fortunate whilst expecting some goodwill in return, usually in the form of support. A medical student might, for example, consider volunteering to work in developing countries in the medical field, not for good remuneration, but because it affords the student an opportunity to gain experience. Such motivations and attitudes do not necessarily bring about psychological meaning or fulfilment.

Psychological motivation

What happens psychologically when you invest time and energy in another person's life? Morsch and Nelson (2006) say that, by transforming the lives of others, we transform our own lives, that is, it gives us a sense of meaning and fulfilment. It seems true to say that compassion is a natural response of all human beings when one considers that almost everyone has the desire to feel worthwhile or good about themselves. As we are social creatures, it seems natural that good feelings, satisfaction and a sense of personal fulfilment or self-worth should be associated with efforts to help others (Wuthnow 1991:87). Our motivation might even be guilt reduction or relief from fear and anxiety (Wuthnow 1991:55). All human beings have a need for self-esteem and the desire to feel useful (Wuthnow 1991:66).

Wuthnow offers an interesting metaphor to explain this social transaction. When one helps another person, it is a voluntary action. In other words, the help is offered like a gift. Remember the feeling you have when you give someone a gift: The act of giving expresses your goodwill and symbolises your caring and compassion for another person (Wuthnow 1991:89). Exchanging gifts is a pleasurable moment for both parties, as is reaching out to others. The question is, if compassion for others is a natural instinct in human beings, what is the role of religion in this process?

The role of religion in the reinforcement of compassion

The world's major religions all encourage their followers to be compassionate (Wuthnow 1991:122). The Koran teaches that the compassionate guard themselves from evil. For Buddhists, compassion is the most important of all virtues. For Christians, love for others is a duty owed to God.

The parable of the Good Samaritan presents love of God and love of neighbours as the path to eternal life. It is all about love, mercy and compassion. Love is, however, not enough. It needs to be put into action. It is not only about knowing God but about being willing to be one of his disciples. Snodgrass (2008:359) says that this parable seeks to turn a man of knowledge into a man of practice. It shows that it is important to *do* mercy, to *act* (Hedrick 2005:128). Therefore serving others is about an attitude and availability to do whatever is needed – with love (Morsch & Nelson 2006:20). Serving others is an outcome of love.

Nelson (in Morsch & Nelson 2006:xi) writes that serving becomes part of some people's lifestyle as they see the power available to change the way they view the world, for others and for themselves. It is thus all about transformation in the lives of those who serve. Once one has chosen to serve others, '... something wonderful happens' (Morsch & Nelson 2006:4). It is good for the soul. It gives one an experience of being alive; it gives purpose and meaning (Morsch & Nelson 2006:5–6).

Jeavons (1994:47–48) avers that, in the New Testament, Jesus taught people to preach and practice faith as belief and

behaviour are inseparable. As Scripture exhorts us to serve one another, to care for the poor, widows, orphans and 'the least of brethren' (Mt 25:40), Jeavons says one's faith should become visible to and meaningful for others. Serving others creates opportunities for witnessing one's own faith to others. Christians love God and act on the basis of a calling according to God's purposes (Jeavons 1994:50). Service to others thus results in spiritual growth. It gives one a heavenly reward (Wuthnow 1991:54).

Whilst we are all created with the ability to care for others, it is God's love in us that automatically moves us to act on behalf of the person in need. We are automatically willing to be God's arms and legs for others in need because we know and love Him and because his love in us reaches out to others. When Jesus gave the command to serve others, He wanted all human beings to obey their human nature, to have the characteristic of serving others and to prove their faith through this behaviour. However, serving others is not without problems.

The dangers of service to others

Hugen *et al.* (2006:414) asserts that the greater the personal investment a volunteer makes, the greater the 'personal risk, e.g. feeling disappointed or even feeling a sense of inadequacy, when the outcome of one's help is not positive'. Sznajder (1998:132) refers to Aristotle and Plato who rejected compassion because it carries the danger of overwhelming one with emotions. It concerns the fear of losing moral autonomy and self-control. Wuthnow (1991:191–192) tells the story of a caring woman who had an obsession with being compassionate; she became a self-destructive neurotic.

Morsch and Nelson (2006:9) argue that perhaps the primary obstacle in serving others is the fear of the unknown. We fear that serving others might take us where we lack the emotional energy to go. Wuthnow (1991:207) tells about a rescue-squad worker and volunteer fire-fighter that both experienced several episodes of burnout. Caring affects one emotionally. The problem is not only how to protect oneself emotionally but also to determine the extent to which one should be involved in another's pain. There must be some limits to compassion.

The limits to compassion

Limits to compassion are not only necessary because of the dangers of emotional burnout but also for other reasons. The questions are:

- Do you interfere with destiny when you help another person? For example, is it not perhaps the destiny of poor people to suffer in that specific way? Should they not learn life's lessons through that suffering? Do you take away their opportunities to develop by taking away their suffering when you help them?
- What is the correct way of helping someone? Is it by fulfilling the need or by helping to cope with needs? Or

is it by helping them to understand the reason for their needs, or even by guiding them to fulfil their own needs or, at least, by helping them find a place where help is available?

We need to set some boundaries. Wuthnow (1991:193) argues that we do not need to give up on caring for others entirely in order to take care of ourselves. The trick, Wuthnow contends, is to develop skills that allow us to show compassion and at the same time take care of our own needs. Thus, we need to learn when to pass by on the other side of the road.

We have to differentiate between the *roles* we take on and *ourselves*. To be a mother is not who a woman is, it is only one of the roles she plays. Some roles may be so large or time-consuming or central to our lives that they might define a person. We can distance ourselves from roles and take a vacation, but we cannot get away from ourselves (Wuthnow 1991:194).

Although compassion might be an instinct and become a personal character trait and thereby become part of the self, we need to limit the roles that we take on because of our compassion. Those roles must not be allowed to become our identities, otherwise they will destroy us and take over the role of God in our lives. God expects us to care of others and to take on roles in this regard, but He does not expect us to become permanent volunteer workers. Once the role you play in another person's life becomes who you are, it could mean that you are interfering with that person's destiny or that you may have taken on the wrong role or that you may have taken the wrong actions to help that person.

It is tricky to determine the exact role one should play in the life of a needy person. Should you merely listen to the stories of needy people and allow them to come up with their own solutions, or do you need to get involved? As God's love for us leads us to reach out to others, we need to be sure about how and when we should attend to the needs of others or alternatively help them to cope with their needs. Perhaps we should merely guide them to fulfil their own needs or help them to find a place where help is available to them.

Wuthnow (1991:203) points out that the existence of charitable organisations in our society helps to limit one's commitment to the needy. As these organisations are established specifically to serve people in need, they help to restrict an individual's obligations to these people who elicit our compassion. These charitable organisations create roles for us to play, such as donor, contributor, councillor, supporter or sponsor. In playing one of these roles at a time, people can associate their compassion with a specific part of their lives rather than having to be compassionate in everything as part of their selves (Wuthnow 1991:205). In this way, one's identity does not become wrapped up in one's compassion.

In helping others in need, we have limited roles to play for a limited period of time, performing limited tasks. Wuthnow (1991:205–206) refers to a psychologist and social worker who once said the following: 'To care about the individual

is one thing; to over-identify with their pain doesn't help them a bit. Empathy must be balanced with detachment.'

Being of help to another person should not become the identity of the helper, and under no circumstances may the well-being of the self be sacrificed. This should guide one in one's determination of the role to be played when assisting someone in need. The question should be asked: What do I have to offer in this situation that will not destroy myself?

Conclusion

Human beings are created by God with an instinct to care for others, to have empathy for the pain, sorrows, losses, problems and needs of others. In every instance, people have a choice to either become involved in a needy person's life or not. In this choice, they are affected by various factors. They might simply choose to become involved for selfish reasons. Psychologically, people feel rewarded with fulfilment once they have become involved in serving others. From a religious point of view, believers act out of their love for God in order to be like God and to obey to his instruction to help their fellow human beings.

Helping others out of compassion implies some emotional dangers like burnout or being overwhelmed. There is also the danger of choosing the wrong role to play or taking the wrong action or getting the timing wrong. Therefore some boundaries or limits have to be set in order to avoid these problems. Everyone should determine what and how much he or she has available to help others. No one should sacrifice their own well-being to help another person. You should consider what skills you have and how much time and energy you have to devote to another person.

It is believed that God who created us with the instinct of compassion expects us to show compassion for our neighbours or fellow human beings, but He does not expect us to over-identify with that role, burn ourselves out and overplay our hands in his plan. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan and indicated that a person who reaches out to those in need is being obedient to God. The roles that we choose to play in helping others in need must not be allowed to become our identities because we might interfere with their destinies or we might take the wrong actions and sacrifice our own well-being in the process.

This principle of not sacrificing the *self* should guide us to determine how and when we should fulfil people's needs, help them to cope with or understand the reason for their needs, guide them to fulfil their own needs or help them to find a place where help is available.

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