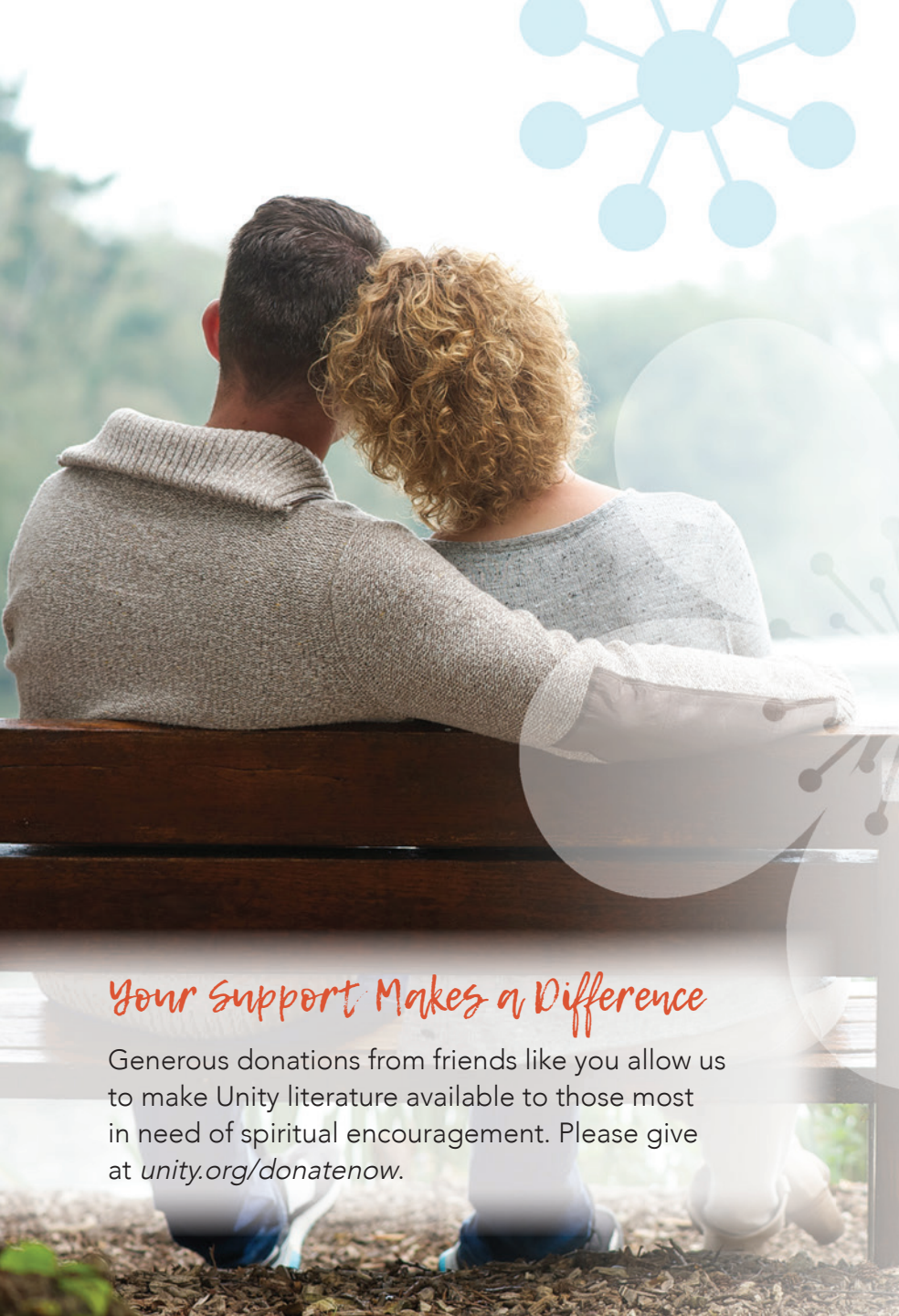




COMPASSION

Living Life With an Open Heart



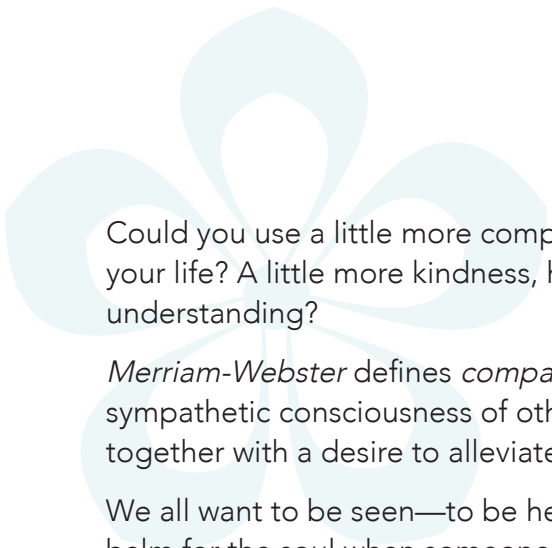


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Could you use a little more compassion in your life? A little more kindness, harmony, understanding?

Merriam-Webster defines *compassion* as “a sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”

We all want to be seen—to be heard. It is a true balm for the soul when someone reaches out in a compassionate way to help us when we are struggling in life.

As conscious, spiritual beings we are also called to show up in a compassionate way for others; to be present to what is and to help where we can, to make a difference in their lives. Sometimes our compassion for others shows up as a simple kindness, a warm hug. At other times our compassion shows up as a fierce tenacity to alleviate another’s suffering—to right a wrong.

The following stories on compassion from your favorite Unity writers focuses on an element of compassion in our daily lives. May they support you and inspire you in living your best and most compassionate life.

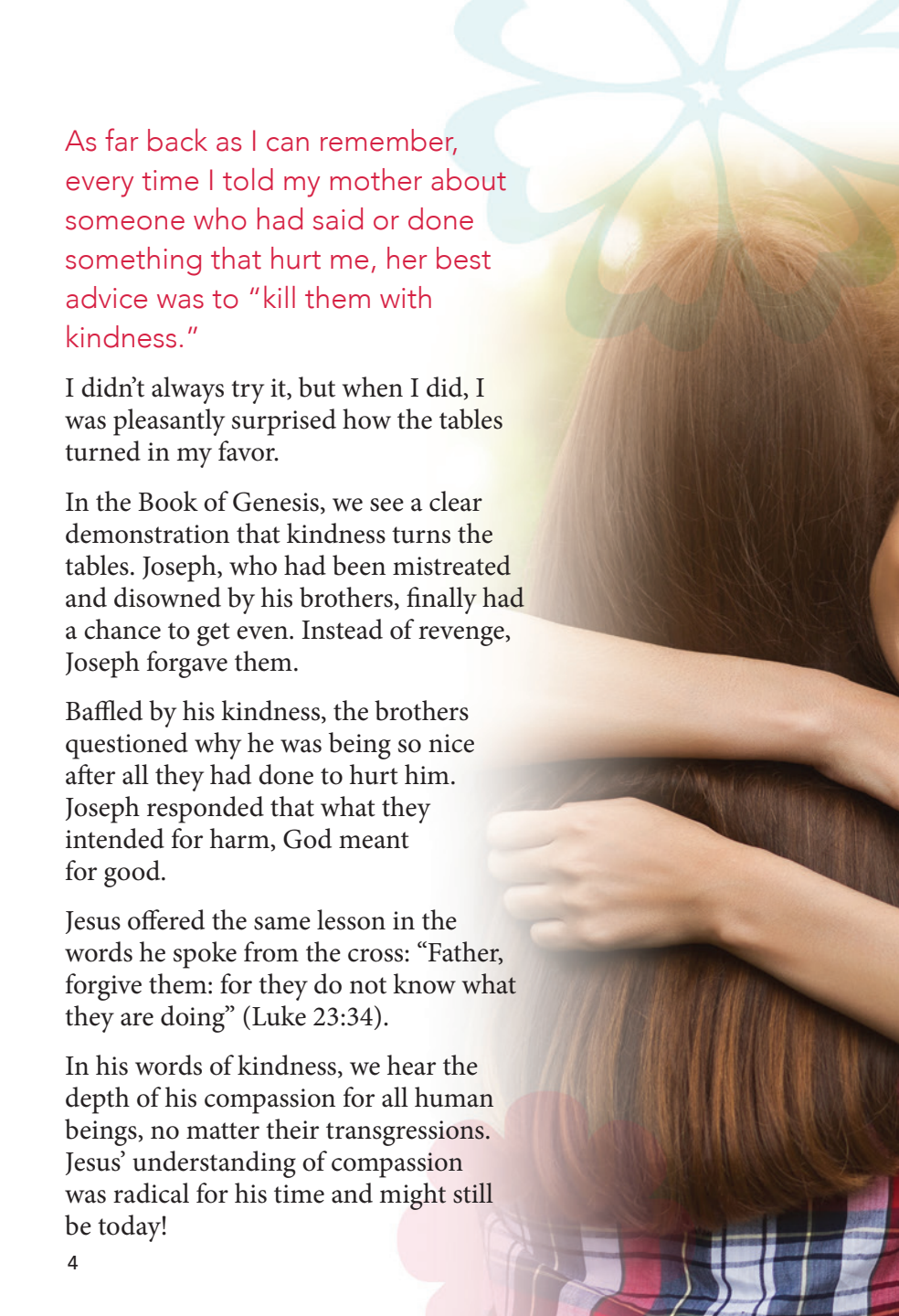
Your Friends in Unity

Kindness

Kindness Turns the Tables

By Rev. Sandra Campbell





As far back as I can remember, every time I told my mother about someone who had said or done something that hurt me, her best advice was to “kill them with kindness.”

I didn’t always try it, but when I did, I was pleasantly surprised how the tables turned in my favor.

In the Book of Genesis, we see a clear demonstration that kindness turns the tables. Joseph, who had been mistreated and disowned by his brothers, finally had a chance to get even. Instead of revenge, Joseph forgave them.

Baffled by his kindness, the brothers questioned why he was being so nice after all they had done to hurt him. Joseph responded that what they intended for harm, God meant for good.

Jesus offered the same lesson in the words he spoke from the cross: “Father, forgive them: for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

In his words of kindness, we hear the depth of his compassion for all human beings, no matter their transgressions. Jesus’ understanding of compassion was radical for his time and might still be today!



“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

Compassion on the Streets

I witnessed a real-life example of compassion through kindness on a sweltering, hot Sunday some 20 years ago. A crowd from Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, gathered in front of my church, Unity Temple on the Plaza, in Kansas City, Missouri, to protest the previous day’s funeral for a young gay man who had died of AIDS.

The protesters blocked the main entrances to the church and created an ugly scene with vile, despicable signs condemning gay people. They loudly proclaimed to the mother of the deceased that her son was burning in hell.

To the visibly shaken and teary-eyed congregants, the minister opened with the Temple’s credo that includes the words: “a place where diversity is praised, and peace and harmony are the rewards.”

He then explained the picketers were part of planet Earth’s diversity and encouraged us not to engage in lower emotions such as hate, anger, or

rejection. Rather, he suggested that in following the teachings of Jesus Christ, we should treat them with kindness.

Two ushers took that advice to heart. After the service, they drove to a nearby convenience store and bought two cases of bottled water, which they distributed to the picketers. Others invited the sweating protesters to come inside to cool off. They declined the offer and left shortly afterward.

The beliefs of the congregants from Westboro Baptist Church differ significantly from the principles we practice in Unity. However, there is one language that we all have in common to express our compassion for each other. It is the language of kindness.

The Most Urgent Question

In 1957, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told an audience in Montgomery, Alabama, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, *‘What are you doing for others?’*”

In October 2014, 13-year-old Peyton James took his life after years of being bullied. Peyton, who was born prematurely and was small for his age, had often asked his mother why people were so mean. Following his death, Peyton’s donated organs, corneas, and skin changed the lives of six people.

In his memory, his mother and other family and friends founded Kindness Matters, a movement that continues to prove that what others intend for harm, God means for good. Kindness Matters is a movement of people who believe that everything we say and do makes a difference and that, moment-to-moment, we can always choose kindness toward ourselves and others.

Kindness is the gracious gesture of compassion; it is the soul’s recognition that another person deserves the same love we give ourselves. It bridges our isolation and reminds us we are all connected at the core of our beings.

Connection

Connecting Through Divine Love

Rev. Margaret Flick

When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do.

— Rachel Naomi Remen





Compassion is love in action. Compassion cannot exist without recognizing our connection to all living things. Connection allows us to see with a compassionate eye.

We develop compassion by being authentic and honest about who we are, then recognizing similar qualities in others. When we are brave enough to face our own pain, suffering, and insecurities, then we can be brave enough to accompany others on their journey through pain.

When I was studying to be a hospital chaplain, there was a patient who had a lot of bravado. I knew he was nervous and afraid, but I didn't know what to say or do with him. In prayer I received a simple idea: *Be quiet, be present, and listen.* In those moments I felt a palpable connection with God and with the patient. There was no separation. The patient felt it, too, and suddenly became vulnerable and open. We both were healed.

Compassion is divine love expressed through connection. The love we call *God* connects us and allows us to respond beyond ego in the realm of divine compassion. In our connection, no one is a stranger. In our compassion, there is only love.

The compassionate person is best described as a listening, loving, nonanxious presence, which is the greatest gift we can give another. We are presented with opportunities to practice this kind of compassion every day—to smile or say hello, maybe give someone a compliment. Stop to admire the artistry of a spider's web and the spider that created it. Compassion is taking the spider outside rather than killing it. It is recognizing the oneness of all beings.




Connection also brings forth compassion in 12-step groups, where members share their personal stories in an authentic and openhearted way. Connection keeps members alive; compassion spurs transformation.

Compassion is love, pure and simple. It is loving our neighbors as ourselves.

“In the Buddhist tradition, compassion and love are seen as two aspects of the same thing: Compassion is the wish for another being to be free from suffering; love is wanting them to have happiness,” says the Dalai Lama.

Compassion is an active prayer that connects us heart to heart. It is love in action.

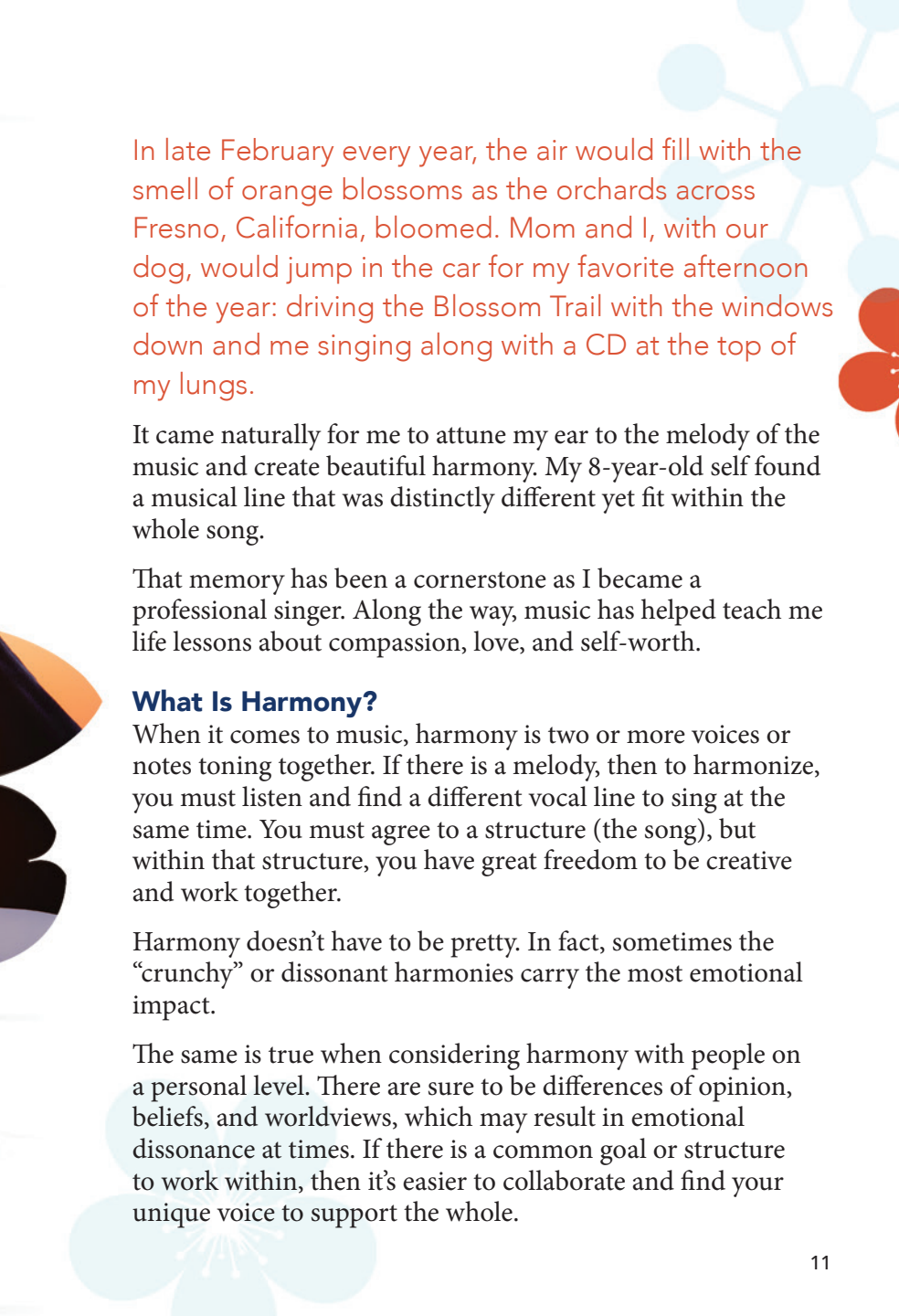


Harmony

Attuning to God

By Cheri Jamison





In late February every year, the air would fill with the smell of orange blossoms as the orchards across Fresno, California, bloomed. Mom and I, with our dog, would jump in the car for my favorite afternoon of the year: driving the Blossom Trail with the windows down and me singing along with a CD at the top of my lungs.

It came naturally for me to attune my ear to the melody of the music and create beautiful harmony. My 8-year-old self found a musical line that was distinctly different yet fit within the whole song.

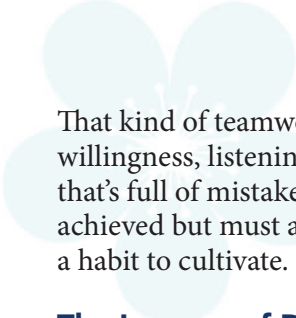
That memory has been a cornerstone as I became a professional singer. Along the way, music has helped teach me life lessons about compassion, love, and self-worth.

What Is Harmony?

When it comes to music, harmony is two or more voices or notes toning together. If there is a melody, then to harmonize, you must listen and find a different vocal line to sing at the same time. You must agree to a structure (the song), but within that structure, you have great freedom to be creative and work together.

Harmony doesn't have to be pretty. In fact, sometimes the "crunchy" or dissonant harmonies carry the most emotional impact.

The same is true when considering harmony with people on a personal level. There are sure to be differences of opinion, beliefs, and worldviews, which may result in emotional dissonance at times. If there is a common goal or structure to work within, then it's easier to collaborate and find your unique voice to support the whole.



That kind of teamwork doesn't happen magically. It takes willingness, listening, transparency, and often messy practice that's full of mistakes. With perseverance, harmony can be achieved but must also be maintained. Harmony with others is a habit to cultivate.

The Lessons of Disharmony

Anne Frank said in her diary, "Why can't we all just love each other and live together peacefully?"

I felt the same way when I was young, listening to my parents fight in the other room before their divorce. I used to think that true harmony was something idyllic, like world peace, a world where everyone gets along.

However, relationships are not always harmonious, nor are they meant to be. Dis-harmony is a call to greater learning and personal growth. It's showing us where inner work needs to be done. It is then our responsibility to muster the strength of heart to heal ourselves.

When I think about achieving harmony with God, I think of words and phrases like *attunement*, *faith*, *surrender*, or *thy will be done*. The first step seems to be relaxing and releasing any feelings of contraction. The second is listening for the still, small voice within and receiving intuitive guidance. Finally, I act upon those intuitive nudges.

As we focus on love, we practice kindness and compassion toward ourselves and others. We naturally harmonize with that vibration, attracting greater experiences and people who reflect love back to us.

It doesn't mean you'll never be upset, hurt, or in discord again—it just means you'll catch yourself more quickly and come back to center. You'll recognize when you're out of



balance, heal triggers from your past, and use those spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer that allow you to attune again.

It makes no difference whether you start cultivating your habit of harmony first with others, with God, or with yourself. Ultimately, you will sense harmony in all areas as a natural result of your spiritual awareness.

We must love all because
we are all one.

—Charles Fillmore



Understanding

I Don't Know What's Best for You

By Rev. Teresa Burton



From a distance, I may believe that I know the facts of your life and think I know how to help or advise you regarding a troublesome situation. I might even indulge myself in judgments about you and the other people involved in or about the situation itself.

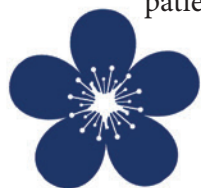
When I truly understand, however, I act and speak with compassion. My innate wisdom lifts my understanding beyond outward circumstance to a deeper, more enduring reality.

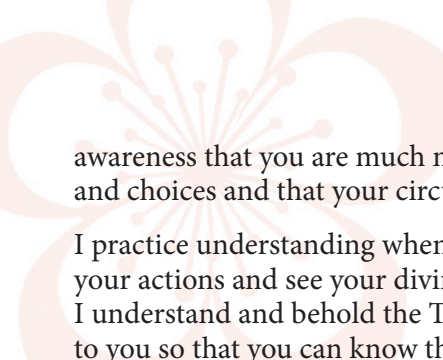
Seeking to understand gives me a blank slate and frees me from preconceived notions about you. Understanding humbles me and frees me from the notion that I know what's best for you and instead encourages me to open my mind and heart to you.

Resisting the urge to offer advice or solutions, I'm no longer invested in trying to get you to think a certain way or see a situation from my perspective. I have no agenda for your choices or the decisions you make, and this freedom gives me the peace I need to meet you with understanding and plant the seeds of trust that will grow between us.

Releasing ideas of right and wrong or good and bad, I practice understanding when I hear beyond your words and listen instead for your feelings. Words of anger may blaze like a bonfire but also fan the quieter flames of fear. Words of loneliness may offer a window into an abyss of grief. Words of hopelessness may point to a path strewn with unrealized dreams.

With understanding, I create a field of acceptance, a safe space that welcomes every part of your human experience with patience, kindness, and love. My understanding imbues my





awareness that you are much more than your words, attitudes, and choices and that your circumstances don't define you.

I practice understanding when I look beyond your history or your actions and see your divine nature. With my loving heart, I understand and behold the Truth of your being and reflect it to you so that you can know the Truth too.

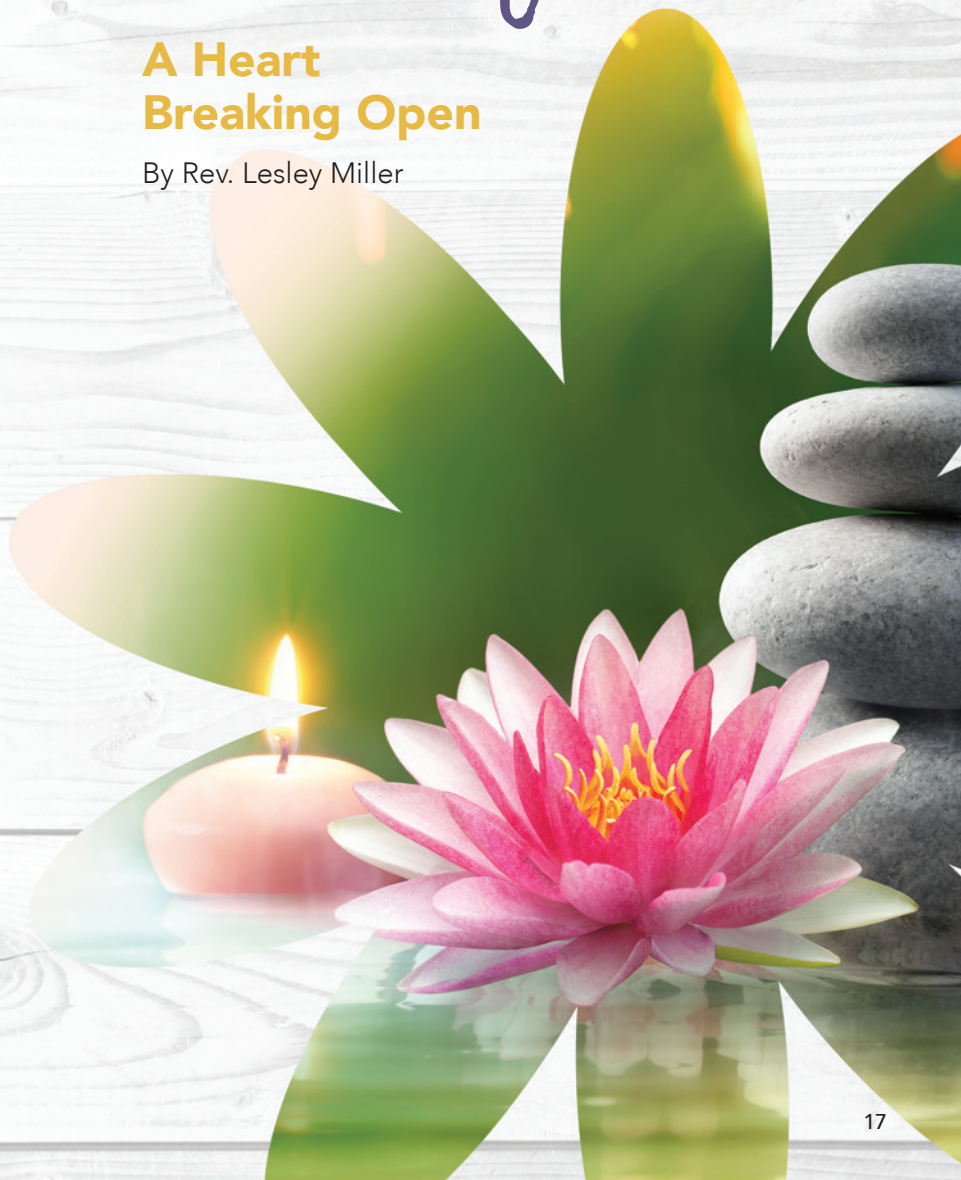
From this elevated perspective, my eyes meet yours and my gaze shows you that I understand. My hand reaches for yours and my reassuring touch lets you know that I understand. My heart opens to your heart, and with deep acceptance and in comforting peace, together we weave a tapestry of compassion and understanding.



Willingness

A Heart Breaking Open

By Rev. Lesley Miller

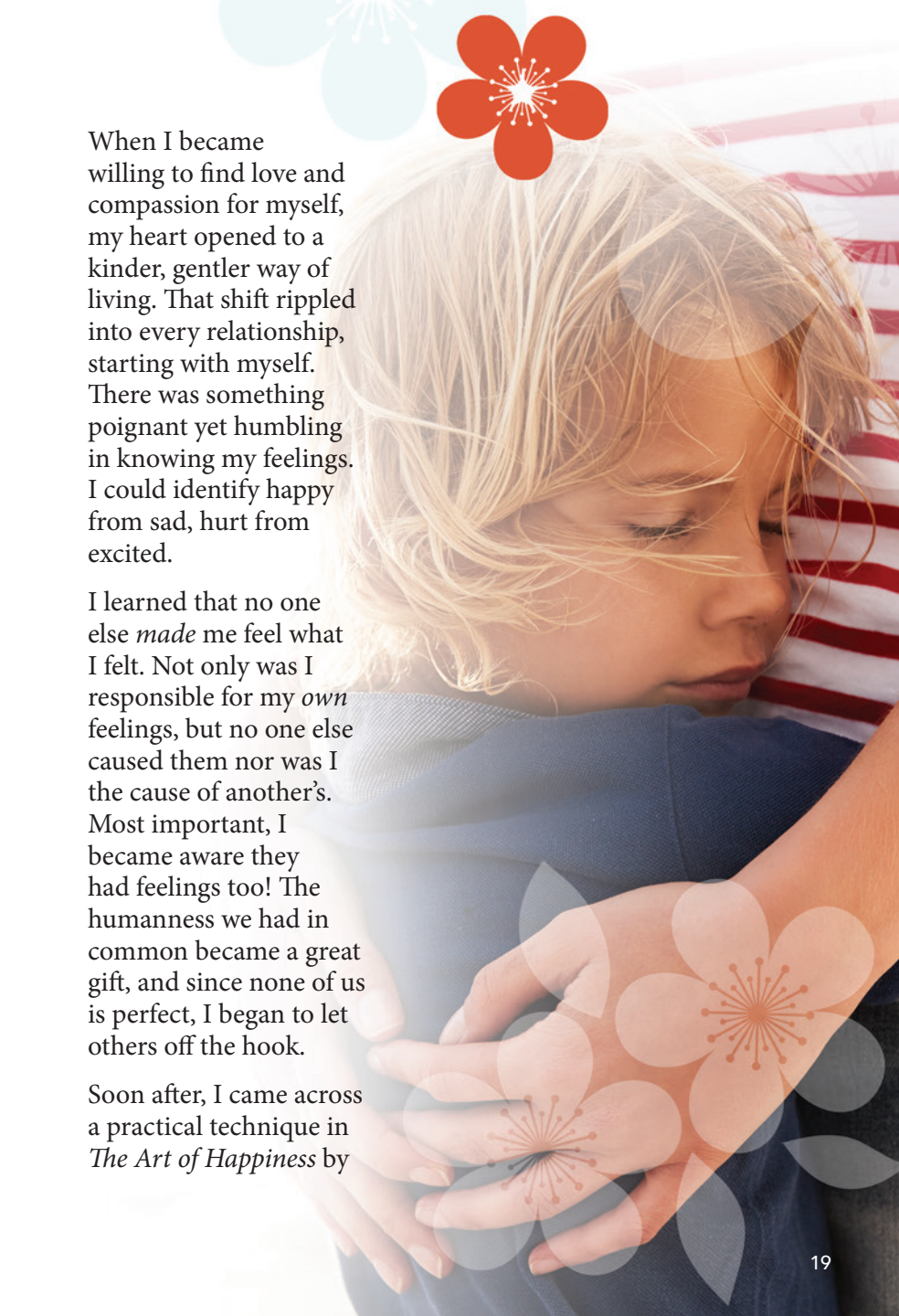


For most of my life I did not understand what it meant to feel my feelings. I had emotions and reactions. I would judge and demand, react or act out. The highs were high and the lows were low. However, deeper feelings of grief or loss—feeling small and unworthy because I wasn't accepted, appreciated, or loved for just being me—stayed locked away tight. I was afraid they could kill me if I opened that door.

Through the wild years and the lost years, the work years and the family years, through the angry and divorcing years, that sad child inside waited to be reclaimed. When the healing years came, they were a steep climb. First, I had to be willing to go back for that little girl because there was no going forward without her.

As I did the work of caring for the innocent child inside, my heart was slowly cracking open. I grieved the childhood that had been frightening instead of secure, punishing when it cried for encouragement. While I could not change the past, I became willing to see it as my own imperfect experience and offered myself new love, support, and appreciation for getting through it as well or as poorly as I did.

To be human means to be imperfect. It also means being a divine and whole creation. Meanwhile, the world teaches us to constantly do better, be better, and strive for perfection. It seems a contradiction to be kind to ourselves when we fail. Then, like our parents and theirs, we perpetuate generations of self-criticism, blame, judgment, and victimhood. It is no one's fault. We forget the love we were created to be until the pain reminds us. That is its job.



When I became willing to find love and compassion for myself, my heart opened to a kinder, gentler way of living. That shift rippled into every relationship, starting with myself. There was something poignant yet humbling in knowing my feelings. I could identify happy from sad, hurt from excited.

I learned that no one else *made* me feel what I felt. Not only was I responsible for my *own* feelings, but no one else caused them nor was I the cause of another's. Most important, I became aware they had feelings too! The humanness we had in common became a great gift, and since none of us is perfect, I began to let others off the hook.

Soon after, I came across a practical technique in *The Art of Happiness* by

the Dalai Lama. His bright, smiling face shone from the cover. I had no pretensions of becoming so saintly, but I did want to know greater happiness. Who didn't?

The book was initially disappointing. It did not hand me answers. It did, however, bless me with three letters that soothed my soul: PTC, which stood for patience, tolerance, and compassion. I discovered when I was willing to look for them, I could go deeper in my mind and heart.

I used PTC during any situation that jammed me up or triggered fear or anxiety. When I was willing to find *patience*, there opened a bit more in me. Then I would look for a little more *tolerance* to put up with what was happening, just slightly more. It was when I got to *compassion* for myself and whoever else was involved that things would turn around. I had to learn compassion by being willing to feel my feelings and remember others had feelings as well.

I still respond first with the habits of a lifetime. It is when I find a little willingness to go deeper that love lifts me up and reminds me that I am okay. Seeing my own small light helped me see the light in others.

First comes a willingness to look. From there, we can all begin to care.



Self-Compassion

Don't Try This Alone

By Rev. Kelly Isola





About 600 years before the writers of Mark, Matthew, and Luke penned Jesus' parable of the mustard seed, Buddha told a parable of a mustard seed.

It revolves around a woman, Kisa Gotami, who lived during the time of Buddha. Kisa's only child had died and, unwilling to accept his death, she carried him from neighbor to neighbor, begging anyone to give her medicine to bring him back to life. Eventually, she was told to go to Buddha and ask for help.

She pleaded with Buddha, so he told her to go to her village and gather mustard seeds from all the households that had never been touched by death. He promised he would create a medicine to bring her son back to life. Relieved, she went back to her village and began asking her neighbors for mustard seeds.

All of her neighbors were willing to give her seeds, but they told her their families had, in fact, been touched by death. After an entire day, she had no seeds. Slowly, she realized the universality of death, and with this awareness, her grief began to lessen. She gently buried her son in the forest and returned to Buddha, confessing that she had not been able to obtain mustard seeds from a single soul.

This story is a powerful example of self-compassion, yet it is almost impossible to talk about self-compassion without including other people. It's not a solitary proposition.



Learning to Let It In

Compassion is not a feeling—it's a way of being. Compassion is an attitude, a way of life, that arises out of spirituality—a sense of interconnectedness that nurtures the soul—and manifests itself in action.

When something painful or tragic happens, we often take that experience and, in our aloneness, we try to pull it apart. We want to understand the pieces because we think if we can make sense of them, we can stop the suffering. We want to gain some new insight from the pieces and then put them back together in a way that might bring us some measure of healing.

But compassion is about inviting ourselves to leave the thing alone so that it has a chance to free us. In the world of self-compassion, we must let things in rather than break them apart.



Three Steps of Self-Compassion

This is the first step with self-compassion—mindfulness. Be present to the present, whatever you may be feeling. Mindfulness is about focus. When the suffering arises, pay attention to the task at hand, even if it's unpleasant. If you focus your attention on the little pieces of a task in front of you, it relaxes the brain, like unclenching your fist. You will not feel drawn to pull apart the experience of suffering; rather, you will mindfully let it live within you.

The second component of self-compassion is remembering our common humanity. Suffering is a part of everyone's life—it only looks different for each of us. This is why self-compassion is not a solitary endeavor. When you feel the suffering, close your eyes, put your hands on your heart, and remember, as Kisa learned, that other people have felt this way. Feel your gentle, warm hands touching your chest as a physical reminder of our common humanity. You are not alone.

Finally, practice kindness. Ask yourself, *What are the words I need to hear?* What would you say to your best friend? Something like, "I know this is really hard, and it makes sense you are feeling angry. I'm here for you." Now say it to yourself. Create words of kindness that resonate with you, words you can speak to your body, mind, and soul.

To see oneself in the experience of another and to do something to heal the experience, is compassion. Self-compassion means we are directing that attitude toward ourselves. Once we stop trying to pull apart our suffering, we step in to self-compassion and can reach a place of peace.

essy



Common Humanity

We need a little more
compassion, and if we
cannot have it then no
politician or even a magician
can save the planet.

—The Dalai Lama

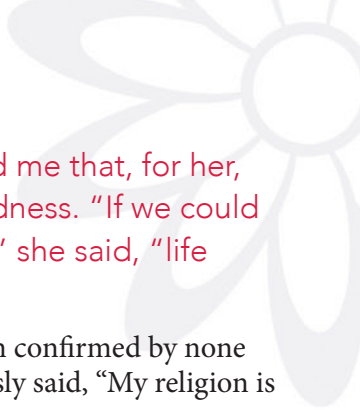



Generosity

Even Saying 'No' Can Be Generous

By Rev. Paul John Roach





When I was a child my mother told me that, for her, the most important virtue was kindness. “If we could all be a little kinder to each other,” she said, “life would be easier for us all.”

I agree. This focus on kindness has been confirmed by none other than the Dalai Lama, who famously said, “My religion is kindness.”


Kindness, compassion, and love as charity, a willingness to give to others, are cornerstones of Buddhism and Christianity—indeed of all the major religions. These religions spring from a common human understanding and desire for connectedness. It feels good to be kind, to reach out and connect, to be generous.

For me, generosity is compassion at its most expansive. Generosity is the opening of our hearts and our arms to give because we realize all we have received from God and the universe. It is joyous willingness to let go and share the good with others because we know abundance is our birthright.

We are not always in that exalted place in consciousness. It is fairly easy to be generous and kind when things are going well and when others are appreciative of our generosity. It is much harder to practice this openhearted approach when we meet resistance or indifference.

This is when the real work begins. We cannot wait for everything to fall into place before we give. There is never a perfect situation or moment to be generous. People do not always conform to our expectations. Remember, take your lead from the wholeness and joy in your heart, not the relative conditions of the world.





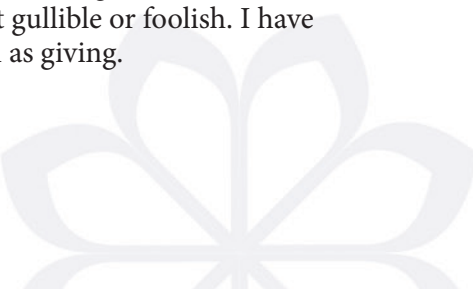
Important, too, is the understanding that being generous and compassionate does not mean pouring our hearts and our resources into an endless black hole. Our innate wisdom tells us how to act skillfully. Trust it. Sometimes tough love is the most generous. Teaching new skills to another is better than giving them a handout.

In the Six Paramitas or Perfections of Buddhist teaching, the first quality is generosity. The levels of generosity extend from giving physical support, to teaching others, all the way to an inherit attitude and willingness to give selflessly to another, to a task, to a dream. The image I see is a person with arms open wide, reaching out nobly to others.

Sometimes that reaching out is leaning over the edge of a precipice! Our generosity can become overextended, and Buddha provides the perfect balance. Quality, second in the Six Perfections, is discipline and moral conduct. Our disciplined discernment shows us the best approach, tempering generous-hearted compassion with clear-eyed insight.

There have been times in my life when I have had to say “no” as well as “yes,” to myself and to others. I am thankful for the gift of discernment that helps me say both *yes* and *no*, that provides the delicate balance of generosity and discipline.

So what do we make of a mother’s simple advice spoken to a child decades ago? I liked its simplicity at the time, and I like it now. Yet, after much practice, I have realized that I can find a greater integrity by being both kind and generous in mind and heart and at the same time not gullible or foolish. I have learned the gift of receiving as well as giving.




Listening

Anyone With Ears to Hear

By Rev. Jean-Marie Schweizer





Listening is an important skill to master, not only for professionals such as nurses, counselors, or ministers, but also in our private lives as family members, friends, or partners.

From early childhood, we are taught to listen to our parents, teachers, or elders, often for our own good and sometimes to keep us quiet. In school, we are expected to listen silently and pay attention. In a partnership, listening is encouraged as part of having a healthy relationship.

What kind of listening is involved in compassion?

Ernest Hemingway said, “When people talk, listen completely. Don’t be thinking about what you’re going to say.”

The suggestion is to listen deeply rather than simply hear. To listen actively is not silently nodding your head while thinking about your own problems. Active listening is caring for others—a selfless act in service to the individual, yes, but potentially inducing an eternal ripple effect for many others, including the self.

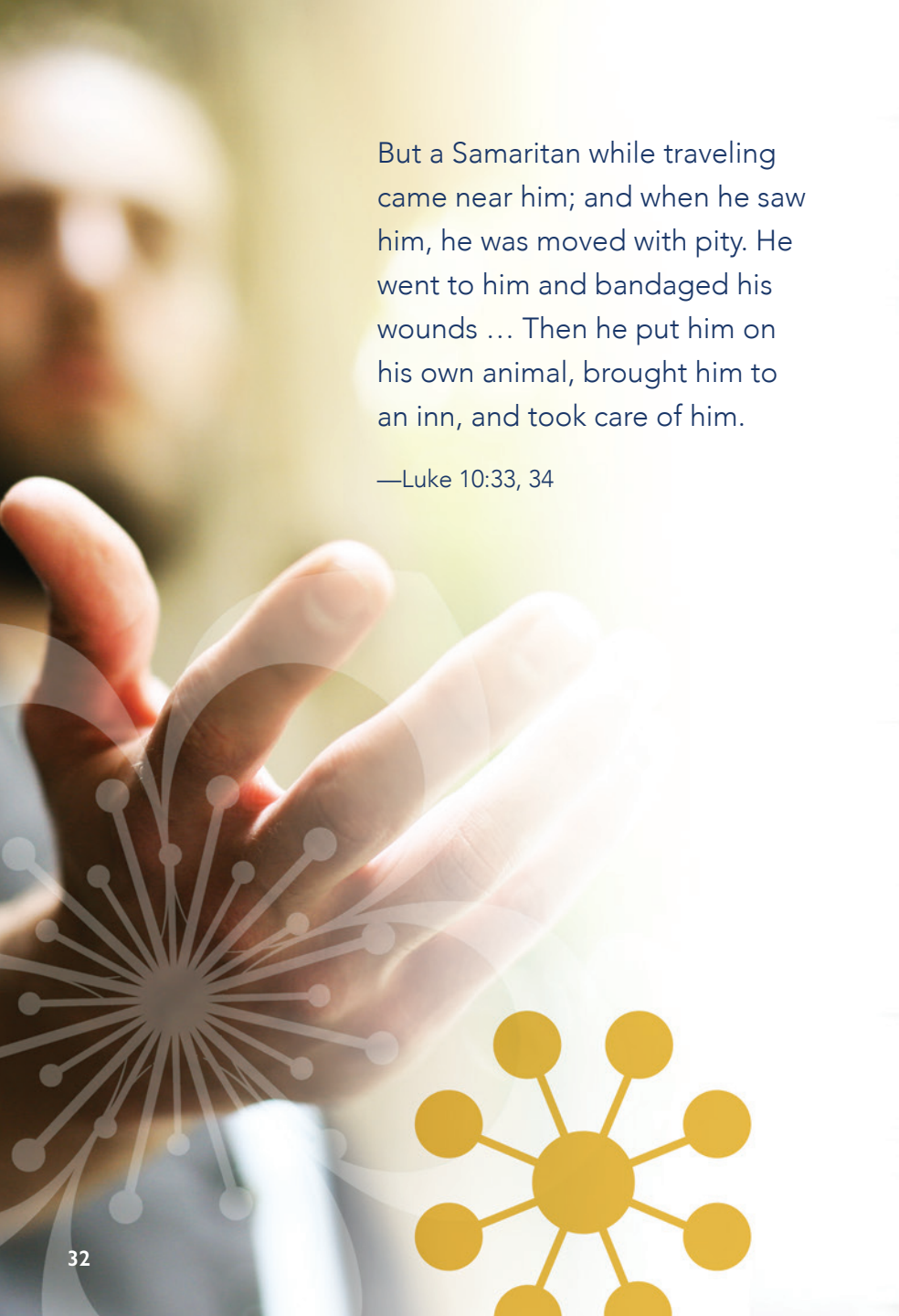
Jesus said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (Mark 4:23). His invitation to an evolved perception of what was being said was extended to those who cared enough to listen carefully and with intent.

If we learn to truly listen, we might discover something heartfelt and meaningful about ourselves, our families and friends, and our society or the world. As our hearts open, we develop empathy and mature our ability to be compassionate.

The counseling profession has a term called “the parallel process” when a client’s problems reflect what is showing up in the counselor’s life as well. Therefore, a careful suggestion may be that whenever we are willing to engage in active listening with a compassionate heart, we are extending the same courtesy to ourselves. What a concept!

Whether we see ourselves as good or bad listeners, there is always room for growth. What counts is our intent. If we are willing to become better listeners, we are on the path to change not only the lives of those we listen to deeply but that of many others, including ourselves.

Active listening means to listen beyond the surface of what is said. The question is, do you have ears to hear?



But a Samaritan while traveling
came near him; and when he saw
him, he was moved with pity. He
went to him and bandaged his
wounds ... Then he put him on
his own animal, brought him to
an inn, and took care of him.


—Luke 10:33, 34

Community

Belonging to the Human Race

By Rev. Bill Englehart





Do we live in compassionate communities? Before we can answer this question, I want to take a crack at defining both terms.

What exactly is *compassion*? I have often heard it used interchangeably with empathy but they are different. Empathy infers I can put myself in someone else's shoes and feel for their situation or circumstance. Having empathy is a great beginning, but compassion is the added step of taking action to bring about positive change.

What exactly is *community*? Dictionary definitions have not kept up with today's realities; they equate community with groups of people who reside within certain geographic boundaries. With the advent of technology, internet, and world travel, geography is only one type of community we can associate with.

For example, I am a member of many communities: I am a Unity minister, a Mustang enthusiast, and a martial artist. I am on Facebook and LinkedIn. Each of these groups are composed of self-selecting community members that extend well beyond *Webster's* definition.

Beyond Our Differences

Let's take a broader/higher view: I'm Irish (not only on St. Patrick's Day) and a Chicagoan. Digging deeper into the subset of being a Chicagoan, I am a north sider not solely by location but by affiliation as a lifelong Chicago Cubs fan.


Recently, I sat next to a guy at the Rose Parade in California, where I now live. I was wearing my Cubs hat. He immediately identified himself as a south sider Chicago White Sox fan.

Initially, there was a little tension. We made peace with each other as Chicagoans first, and then accepted each other's baseball allegiance. We were fast friends by the end of the parade, realizing we have more in common than anything that separates us.

Taking another step back, I am originally a Midwesterner, but I am also a West Coaster, having lived in California for more than a decade. I am also an American. In the past, I worked overseas as an expatriate.

If I expand my view of community even further, I see I am a citizen of the world. It seems to me that our definition of community depends upon the lens we see the world through and how broad our sense of connection is to others.





How we define community is important because it has a lot to do with the scope of compassion we are ready, willing, and able to project.

I colead a support group for prisoners at San Quentin State Prison. In their world, gang affiliation and connection to their local neighborhood meant compassion only for those in the same group or gang. After decades in prison, several can now see how their limited definition led to the acts resulting in their incarceration. If they had only seen “the others” as people first and as fellow community members, they would not have committed some of their crimes.

Whom do *you* define as “others”?

Heroic Compassion

The good news is that every day we hear accounts of people in life-threatening situations where complete strangers act to help with no regard for their own safety: pulling people from burning houses or car wrecks or jumping in to the



water to save someone from drowning.

What I love about those stories is that, when asked, the hero never says he or she questioned the person's race, gender, political affiliation, or anything else before taking action. Rather, they saw someone in need and responded.

To me, this is the most expansive definition of compassion and community: selfless acts (compassion) regardless of who is in need (community).

I ask myself the question: *Do I live in a compassionate community?* I realize the answer depends upon my willingness to help others in need. That is the measure of my compassion. When, or if, I find myself reluctant to assist another, it's an opportunity to reflect on my own definition of community and work to expand it.

We're all in this life experience together. Let's create a compassionate community where we are all members.

Selflessness

The Soul's Call to Service

By Rev. Joan Gattuso





I am here only to be truly helpful.

I am here to represent Him Who sent me.

I do not have to worry about what to say
or what to do, because He Who sent me
will direct me.

I am content to be wherever He wishes,
knowing He goes there with me.

I will be healed as I let Him teach me
to heal.

—*A Course in Miracles*, Chapter 2





These words from the *Course* are written on a small plaque that I keep on my desk as a constant reminder of my spiritual purpose. It has been a daily reminder for decades.

The soul purpose for each of us is to be helpful to one another. Some of us have chosen spiritual paths that keep that mission before us constantly.

Again, early in the *Course*, it states, “All are called but few answer.” You, whoever you are and whatever your life experience has been, have been called by Spirit. Have you answered the call?

We may be called to do great things or small, simple things. What is important is that we answer the call. To answer implies that we are relying on the strength of God and not solely on our ego strength. God’s strength calls us to be the highest image of our self.

This means reaching out to help our friends, neighbors, and even strangers. We of course cannot help everyone; we of course cannot do everything. But we can do something to assist someone.

Our actions do not have to be huge—a phone call, an invitation to lunch, a walk in the park listening to someone share their problems, an invitation to attend church together.

Once, while having lunch alone at a popular mall, I observed two elderly ladies carefully counting out their change to pay the tab. I quickly called the waitress over and asked her to tell the ladies that a fellow diner had paid their bill. They lit up as they scanned the area for a clue as to who had paid for their lunch, while I busily rifled through my purse to remain anonymous.

I have a dear friend who goes with a small group of women to see a current movie every week. She has gotten to know several staff members at their favorite theater. She goes to a ticket agent she knows and purchases two tickets, one for herself and the other for an unknown moviegoer. Then she asks the agent to give the extra ticket to anyone who looks as though they need the gift.

As part of my spiritual practice—in the last 20 to 30 minutes of my morning meditation—I send a blessing from my heart to the heart of whomever I'm praying for. I do this until I feel a deep connection with that person. Then I pray for the specific need of that individual. The recipient may be a friend, relative, or a person in the news. This has been my spiritual practice for years. I highly recommend it.

Serving another lets us know we have been blessed and have plenty to share. In this process everyone is blessed.

When you live your life observing and feeling love for others, you have answered the call and always will fulfill your mission to be truly helpful.




Caring

In Partnership With Spirit

By Rev. Michael Jamison





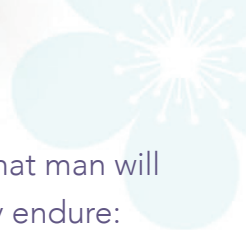
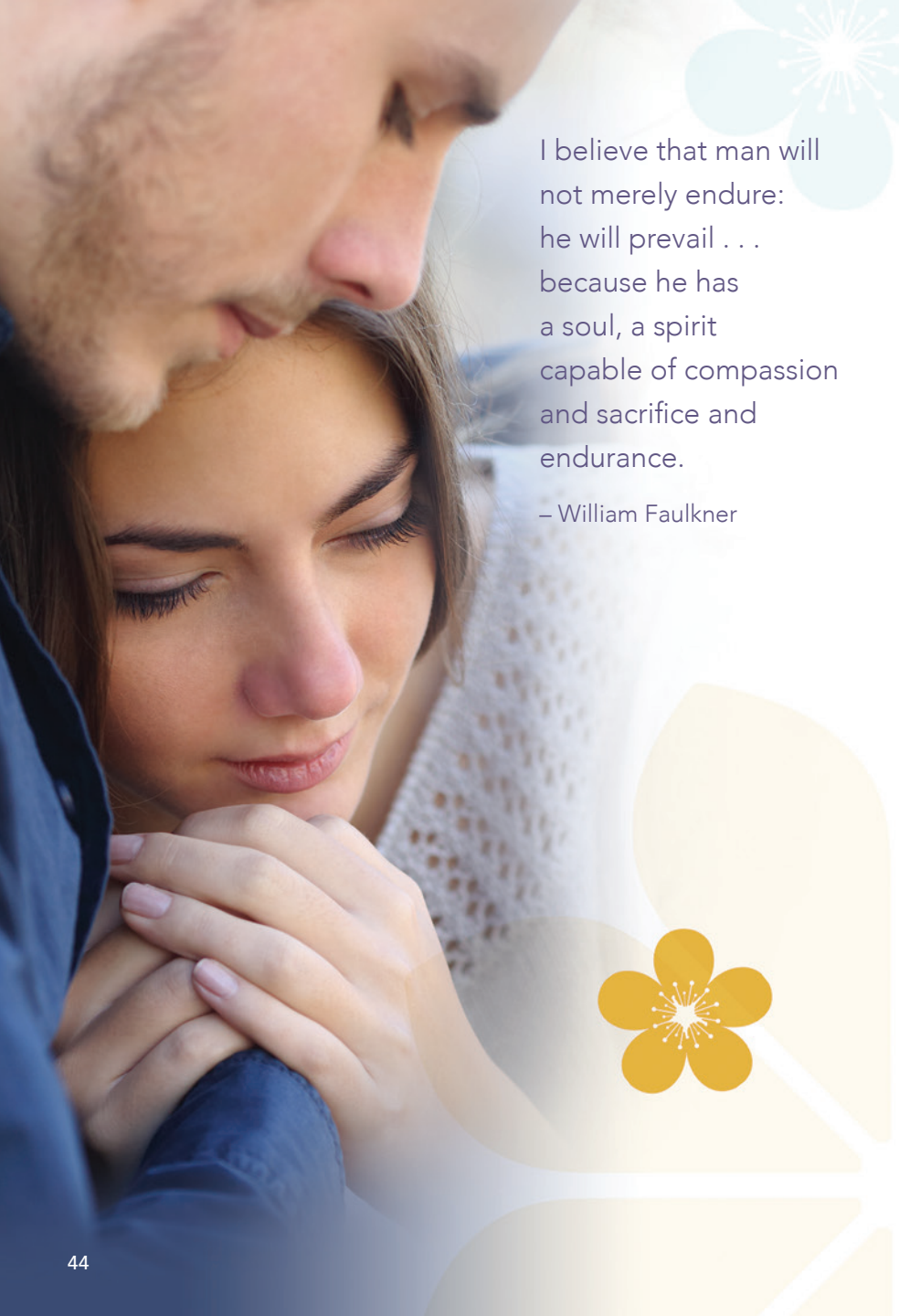
Before I discovered Unity, I worked for a company owned and operated by a fine entrepreneur. Our boss, who also happened to be an enabling father, put his irresponsible son in a management position.

One day the boss asked our janitor, a university student working his way through college, to go mow his son's lawn. The young janitor refused, saying to the boss, "Some things a man has to do for himself." Our excellent janitor was fired immediately. The rest of us employees felt terrible about the firing because we knew the janitor was absolutely right.

Some things a person *does* have to do for himself or herself. Nevertheless, we need not be entirely alone in the doing. We can choose to be interdependent with Spirit, remembering that Spirit can only do *for* us what it can do *through* us. In a cooperative effort with Spirit, we can overcome any challenge in our lives. In partnership with Spirit, we can accomplish every good desire of our hearts.

Of course, assistance from others can be a godsend. Sometimes we all could use—as the Beatles sang—"a little help from our friends."

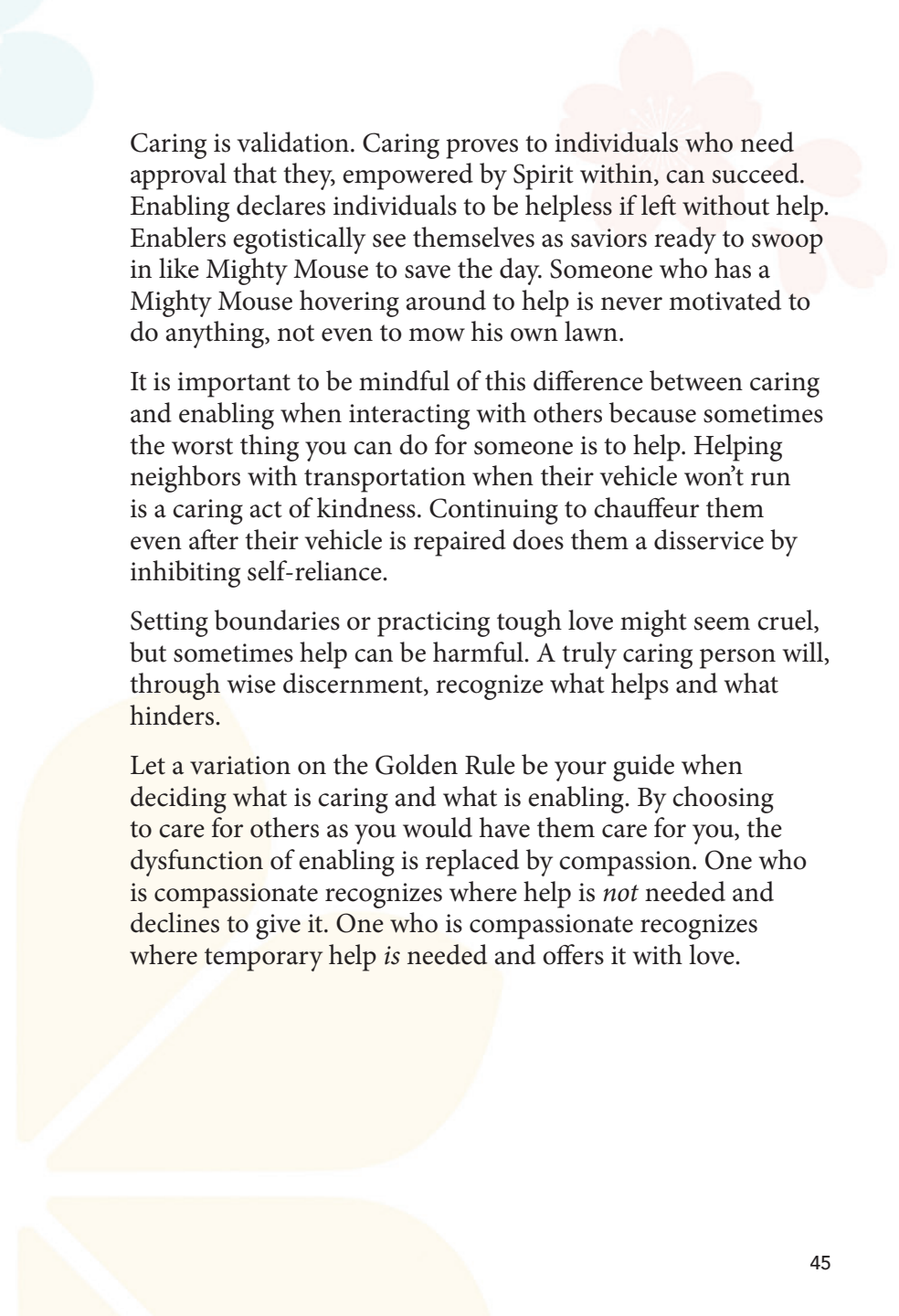
The emphasis is on a *little* help because a fine line separates caring from enabling. Caring can lighten someone's burden, but enabling inevitably stifles initiative.



I believe that man will
not merely endure:
he will prevail . . .
because he has
a soul, a spirit
capable of compassion
and sacrifice and
endurance.

– William Faulkner





Caring is validation. Caring proves to individuals who need approval that they, empowered by Spirit within, can succeed. Enabling declares individuals to be helpless if left without help. Enablers egotistically see themselves as saviors ready to swoop in like Mighty Mouse to save the day. Someone who has a Mighty Mouse hovering around to help is never motivated to do anything, not even to mow his own lawn.

It is important to be mindful of this difference between caring and enabling when interacting with others because sometimes the worst thing you can do for someone is to help. Helping neighbors with transportation when their vehicle won't run is a caring act of kindness. Continuing to chauffeur them even after their vehicle is repaired does them a disservice by inhibiting self-reliance.

Setting boundaries or practicing tough love might seem cruel, but sometimes help can be harmful. A truly caring person will, through wise discernment, recognize what helps and what hinders.

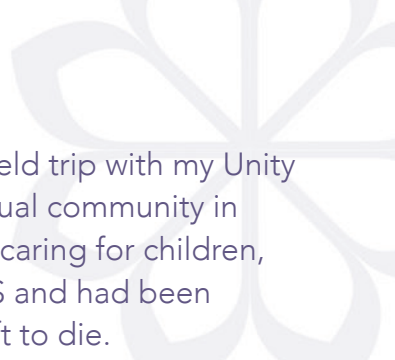
Let a variation on the Golden Rule be your guide when deciding what is caring and what is enabling. By choosing to care for others as you would have them care for you, the dysfunction of enabling is replaced by compassion. One who is compassionate recognizes where help is *not* needed and declines to give it. One who is compassionate recognizes where temporary help *is* needed and offers it with love.

Openness

A Mind and Heart Open to Compassion

By Rev. Elizabeth Longo





In the early 1990s, I went on a field trip with my Unity church to Kashi Ashram, a spiritual community in Florida. The people there were caring for children, teens, and adults who had AIDS and had been abandoned by their families, left to die.

The spiritual teacher, Ma Jaya, told us the way she and her helpers were able to be around so much pain and suffering was by having a regular meditation practice and raising their consciousness beyond the personal. They had to keep their personalities out of the way to be fully present to the healing power of a compassionate heart.

At the time, I didn't understand the importance of consciously shifting from my ego identity to divine identity. Now I clearly see that their practice was to go within and become still, opening themselves to the flow of healing love and compassion.

When the mind is open and present, compassion naturally arises. An open mind and an open heart are in tune with the very essence of compassion, which is beyond our conditioned mind.

In our natural state, we are aware of how connected we are, and a natural tenderness is present. An open mind is vast like the sky, clear like a flowing river, and awake to responding compassionately. It has room for all experiences because it does not label anything as good or bad. It can feel deeply without any story.

Our true nature is compassionate. When we are awake and open to the moment, there is a clarity of mind that naturally sees to the pain of the world, yet nothing sticks. Open and



free, it is fully available to serve all beings. A compassionate heart is alive and rejoicing in the vast space as it cherishes every opportunity to ease pain and be of service.

Shifting our perspective to be available to extend loving-kindness and compassion to another soothes our souls and alleviates our own pain. It rejoices in the awareness of our shared human experience while holding space for the healing power of love to arise.

We realize that we are not alone, that we are all part of the one presence that animates our existence and is knowing itself through us. Then maybe we can be a bit less harsh with ourselves and a bit more compassionate with the world.

Don't you think this would be a better world if everyone were caring and sharing more loving-kindness? Are you willing to open your heart to the transformative power of compassion?



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