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# How to Show Compassion to the Sick

By Rick Warren



COVID-19 is spreading at rates few of us could have imagined just two months ago. Yet this pandemic gives the church a tremendous opportunity to love and care for people around us.

Philosophical and religious communities around the world engage illness differently. Some call it an illusion. Others are indifferent toward it. Some chalk it up to God's will. Still others urge the sick to just grit it out.

But Christians historically have engaged illness with compassion, mercy, and tenderness. Jesus himself modeled this for us. Matthew 14:14 tells us, *"When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw the large crowd. He felt sorry for them and healed everyone who was sick"* (CEV).

Just as Jesus modeled compassion to the sick around him, pastors must model compassion for their congregations in times like this. Because of the unique makeup of this pandemic, we can't always be present with people struggling through this sickness—but we can still demonstrate compassion.

Helping the sick isn't rocket science. Everyone can do these six actions, even now, as we show compassion to the sick in our communities.

## **Be thoughtful.**

People have illnesses—whether COVID-19 or not—all around us. Before you can care about these needs, you must be aware of them. God models this for us. Psalm 106:44 says, *"God saw their misery and heard their cry"* (ICB). Notice, God sees and hears. When you're distressed, God notices.

Pastor, do you notice when other people are distressed in your life? You and your congregation can't minister to the sick unless you open your eyes to the needs around you.

## **Show up.**

Most of us are uncomfortable around sick people. In fact, we tend to run away from them. But God did the opposite. Isaiah 63:9 says of God: *"In all their suffering he also suffered, and he personally rescued them"* (NLT).

While we tend to run away from those who are hurting, God sent us his presence when we were sick with sin. God didn't send an angel. He didn't send a letter. He sent himself! That's exactly what God asks us to do for others when they're sick: show up.

Is this difficult right now, not being able to be physically present with many people who are sick? Of course, it is. But let's do what we can to check-in with others, using technology to be as present as possible with those who are sick.

## **Accept people without stigmatizing them.**

We tend to get embarrassed by sickness—ours and the sickness of others. Regardless of the reason why someone got sick, we need to accept them as they are. Just because someone got sick as a result of a bad decision doesn't mean we abandon them.

God did this for us! Jesus accepted us as we are without approving of everything we've done. Paul writes in Galatians 4:14, *"My illness must have caused you some trouble, but you didn't hate me or turn me away because of it. You welcomed me as though I were one of God's angels or even Christ Jesus himself"* (CEV). Part of helping people who are sick is to remove the embarrassment and stigma associated with it.

## **Affirm others.**

It's not enough just to accept people who are sick. We need to affirm them, too. Affirmation gives us hope. One of the greatest things you can do to people who are ill is to give them hope. People can handle almost anything in life if they have hope.

Proverbs 18:14 says, *"A healthy spirit conquers adversity, but what can you do when the spirit is crushed?"* (The Message). It's therapeutic to give people hope and let them know they can overcome their current situation.

## **Help prevent the spread.**

Hopefully, we're all doing this right now. One of the most important ways you can care for the sick is by preventing others from getting sick. You've likely heard the phrase "flatten the curve" lately. When we help to slow down the spread of COVID-19 and prevent others from getting it, we make sure that the people who need help get it.

Pastor, we need to model these behaviors to our congregations. We can't care for people who are sick if we show no interest in making sure more people don't get sick.

## **Pray.**

Ask God to heal the people you are serving. All healing comes from God, no matter who he uses. He uses doctors and medicines. Sometimes he uses miracles, as well.

James 5:16 in the Message paraphrase says, *“Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.”*

Our prayer matters. It's not a superficial part of the healing process. It's something *“to be reckoned with”* and the most important part of how people get well.

Our churches have an unprecedented opportunity to love and care for people who are sick. Let's do what we can to model Jesus' behavior to care for the sick.