

**Series:** Real Life, Real Faith  
**Title:** Stretch Out Your Arms  
**Text:** Luke 10: 25-37  
**Key Word:** Step  
**Proposition:** Every Christ-follower can demonstrate Christ's compassion by taking these steps to stretch out their arms.

I'd like to read from the Scriptures a very familiar story. Sometimes when we hear familiar stories, we get a little disappointed. We think the speaker isn't going to tell us anything new. Perhaps you won't hear anything new, but it never hurts to peek around the corner of a verse to see who is standing in the shadows, smell the smells, and see the colors. I invite you to do just that with the story of the Good Samaritan.

*One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" The man answered, "'you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

*Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling on a trip from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.*

*"By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.*

*“Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’*

*“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”*

In his book, Treasure in Clay, Fulton Sheen tells about a visit he made to an African leper colony. As a Roman Catholic, he intended to give a silver crucifix to each of the 500 lepers living there.

Sheen was repulsed by the first grossly disfigured leper. The man’s left arm was eaten off at the elbow by the disease; so he extended his right hand. This hand too, was corrupted by this awful disease.

Unable to bear the leper’s presence, Sheen held the crucifix above the man’s palm and dropped it, where it dropped into decaying flesh. Sheen realized that he had taken the crucifix-God’s sign of identification with humanity—and refused to identify himself with one of God’s beloved creation. Feeling sorry, Sheen dug his fingers into the man’s leprosy and removed the crucifix. This time, he gently placed it in the man’s hand.

Sheen handed a crucifix to each of the remaining lepers and in the exchange, learned compassion.

The leper community encountered Christ's compassion. Our world experiences Christ's compassion whenever we dare to stretch out our arms and place Christ's love on another's hands.

The story of the Good Samaritan reveals four steps for stretching out our arms with Christ's compassion.

**First, compassion heals** the wound... "*The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds.*" (V 34) He saw a need and he met the need. He recognized an opportunity to heal a wound and immediately he healed it. He sensed that God had brought someone along his path to demonstrate his love. That's why he is called the "Good" Samaritan.

The Levite and the Priest, religious leaders in the community, turned their backs on someone in distress. Perhaps they did not want to be made ceremonially unclean by touching one they suspected was dead. Perhaps they were simply in a hurry and did not want to be inconvenienced. Possibly, they were afraid of some kind of trap where they would be taken advantage of. Whatever the reason of their apathy they did nothing. They let the wounds fester. The Samaritan though went and made compassion real.

I believe that compassion is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can read. Everyone understands compassion. Love is spoken in any language regardless of

nationality, rich or poor, old or young, male or female. Compassion is understood because it is not the language not spoken by the head but by the heart.

**Next, Compassion helps** another to their feet... “*Then ‘the Samaritan’ put the man on his own donkey.*” (V 34 b) He was willing to be inconvenienced in order to help this man in distress. Time is a valuable commodity in our world. Fox News reports that Americans spend an average of 4.5 hours a day watching television. The average working American works 8.2 hours a day; sleeps 7.6 hrs; spends 1 hour doing household activities; 1.1 hours eating or drinking; 1.1 hours caring for others; and 1.7 hours in miscellaneous activities. The Samaritan shows that true compassion is a willingness to give someone, a stranger our time. He was willing to risk yet another hour. He was willing to risk getting involved. He was willing to sacrifice his TV time. He was willing to surrender some of his belongings. He was willing to walk, so another could ride. He was willing to offer his coins at the Inn for a man who had none. He was willing to help. Seldom do we have the opportunity to schedule when we need to be involved. Usually, God brings those opportunities unexpectedly, when we feel unprepared. Surprise will always be our first reaction. Inconvenience will always be our first response. Unwillingness will always be our first desire. Then we remember that to truly offer “good” help, we must swallow our pride and let go of our agenda and take the time to help. That is what true compassion is all about.

**Next, Compassion Holds** on to another... “*The Samaritan took him to an inn and took care of him.*” (V 34 c) In his book, Year of Jubilee, Tony Campolo tells the

story of a time in Philadelphia. He was walking down Chestnut Street when he encountered a filthy bum, covered with soot from head to toe; with a huge beard with rotted food stuck in it. He held a cup of McDonald's coffee and mumbled as he walked along the street. He spotted Tony and said, "Hey, Mister. You want some of my coffee?"

Tony knew that he should take some to be nice, and he did. He gave it back to him and said, "You're being pretty generous giving away your coffee this morning. What's gotten into you that you're giving away your coffee all of a sudden?"

The bum said, "Well, the coffee was especially delicious this morning, and I figured if God gives you something good you ought to share it with people."

Tony figured that *this was the perfect set up*. He said, "Is there anything I can give you in return?" Tony's sure he's going to hit him up for five dollars.

He said, "Yeah, you can give me a hug." Tony hoped for the five dollars.

But Tony stretched out his arms and the bum put his arms around him. Then Tony realized something. He wasn't going to let me go. He was holding onto him. Here he is an establishment guy with a PhD and this bum is hanging on him. He keeps hugging Tony. He's not going to let him go. People are passing on the street. They're staring at Tony, wondering what is going on. He's embarrassed. But little by little his embarrassment turned to awe.

Tony hears a voice echoing down the corridors of time saying, *I was hungry. Did you feed me? I was naked. Did you clothe me? I was sick. Did you care for me? I was*

*the bum you met on Chestnut Street. Did you hug me? For if you did it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me. And if you failed to do it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you failed to do it unto me.* That day on Chestnut Street, two strangers took care of one another and God revealed his presence in form of a hug.

Love uses what one has in hand at the moment, money, a talent, time, encouragement, a McDonald's coffee, or a hug. Love takes another into our lives and simply says, "I care."

**Finally, compassion hems** others in. The Samaritan allowed another to demonstrate compassion by asking the Innkeeper to get involved. *"The next day he took two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.'" (v 35)* Compassion that is worth giving to another is compassion that is worth inviting others to give as well.

The Samaritan knew his limitations and the resources of others, so out of compassion he found someone who could complete God's healing and restoration. In this age of large, a tiny rural congregation discovered that they could make a difference.

"Christianity Today" tells the story of this Kentucky Baptist Church with 25 people in Sunday attendance. A 4-year-old Ethiopian girl, is alive and well today thanks to this church's shared compassion.

Last year, Grace, a member, received e-mails from missionaries in Africa about this child's plight. Compelled by the Holy Spirit she brought the need to the attention of her church. As a result, the church arranged for a life-saving operation that has impacted the African community and transformed this rural church.

"It has shown us that we can make a difference," says Grace a laywoman. "One small church can make a difference, not just in our local community but in our global community." "It has definitely changed our outlook on how God can work when we're willing," adds the pastor.

From birth, this child suffered from a rare colon disease that forced her father to regularly flush it with water. After several operations, doctors told her family there was nothing else they could do and to prepare for her death.... With Grace's encouragement, her congregation agreed to pay for this child and her father's visit to the U.S. for an operation.

Media coverage of the operation helped bring in additional gifts, which totaled more than \$18,500 by the time the girl and her dad returned home last September. With funds left over, the Church is sending the Ethiopian family a \$125-a-month stipend until the fall of 2008. The money supplements the father's modest pay of \$ 50 a month and ensures they can purchase the nutritious food needed to maintain his daughter's health. Their witness is urging other congregations to share the compassion of Christ. Whatever happens, this small church learned that hemming in compassion can indeed change the world.

Stretching out our arms of compassion by healing wounds, helping others, holding them, and hemming others in will change our world. Our world is crying out for such real life, real faith.