

OPINION

Empathy is the pathway to compassion

Arthur Brooks, an author, has written on keys to living the lives we want. In essence, for him, it's living a fulfilling life. He writes about empathy, that empathy is a good thing but is lacking in something. For him, empathy does not go far enough.



John Manzo
LOCAL COLUMNIST

"I told you once that I was searching for the nature of evil. I think I've come close to defining it: a lack of empathy. It's the one characteristic that connects all the defendants. A genuine incapacity to feel with their fellow man. Evil, I think, is the absence of empathy."

These were the words of a man by the name of Dr. Gustave Gilbert, which are important in terms of empathy and the need for empathy. Arthur Brooks would not disagree with him but say that empathy comes up short because empathy ends with feeling something. Empathy is the pathway to compassion and a healthy and good person is a compassionate person.

The word "compassion" has its roots in the Latin phrase, cum patior, which literally means to suffer with. Compassion, in many ways, is empathy put into motion. Empathy is feeling the hurt of someone whereas compassion is entering into the suffering person's space and sharing the experience with another person. We can feel badly for a person who is suffering, but when we actually put those feelings into action, we are practicing compassion.

Jesus was a fascinating storyteller and whether one believes in Jesus or not, one can still learn from his stories or parables. One of the best is brought to us in Luke's Gospel about a guy traveling from Jerusalem to a town named Jericho, alone, on a dangerous road. This was night, not a bright move by the man and he paid the price for his lack of wisdom. He is robbed, stripped, and beaten, and left half dead. We never know which half of him is dead, but he's not in good shape.

Two religious officials embody the famous Dionne Warwick song (if you are of a certain age, you remember this song) "Walk on By." Jesus, in his storytelling, often had a satirical edge and the people hearing the story would have gasped at this. Finally, a man from Samaria, a Samaritan comes upon the half dead, naked man. To make a long story short, this was ominous. To say that the half dead, naked guy would have wished he was fully dead instead of half dead is an understatement. The victim's expectations were that the Samaritan would make the robbers look friendly and that his suffering was going to be exponentially compounded. This was really bad news.

Except, turns out, the Samaritan had empathy and turned the empathy into action, and treated the victim with compassion. He treated the man's wounds and brought the man to an inn and gave the innkeeper two days wages so the victim could heal up. This was a pretty incredible twist to the story. It was an incredible display of compassion.

The compassion could not have begun without the initial wave of empathy....that vilified response to people in distress. In a society that is seeking to demonize empathy, Jesus' little story reminds us that empathy is a good thing, and as Arthur Brooks reminds us, it is a pathway to compassion, and compassion is a great thing.

We hear of people, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, and Francis of Assisi and we think well of them. They were all people who took empathy and followed the road to compassion. In many ways, what makes them remarkable is that they were ordinary people who stepped up to do extraordinary things because they had the ability to turn empathy into compassion. Whereas Gustave Gilbert interviewed Nazi war criminals who took their lack of empathy to new levels of cruelty. Look up names like Rudolf Hoess, Herman Goring, Heinrich Himler, Irma Grese, and Adolf Eichmann and we find ordinary people who became extraordinary in their cruelty. They had no compassion on the people who they imposed suffering on because they lacked empathy.

There is a war on empathy and when empathy vanishes, so does compassion. We can buy into this or we can have empathy and compassion. That said, I gave two lists of people. Who do you admire? What do you want your legacy to be?

The reality is the choice is up to each of us.

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What Trump Knows About Superman

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COMMENTARY

The new "Superman" movie isn't an attack on Donald Trump's immigration policies, but it shows how alienated from America many liberals in Hollywood and politics now feel.

Every kid used to know Superman fights for "truth, justice, and the American way."

That slogan has been around since the "Superman" radio show of the early 1940s and featured in the 1978 blockbuster starring Christopher Reeve that inaugurated the modern comic-book movie.

James Gunn, director of the latest flick, has his own take: "Superman" is the story of America. An immigrant that came from other places and populated the country, but for me it is mostly a story that says basic human kindness is a value and is something we have lost," he told The Times of London.

Conservatives feared this hinted Gunn would pit the hero from Krypton against Trump's immigration crackdown. It turns out the bigger problem is the rest of what Gunn said: his Superman is a man from nowhere, whose creed is simple sentimentality not "the American way."

In Gunn's film, America is nothing special — neither, for that matter, is Superman. This bland, demoralizing vision isn't just the director's,

however; it's rather typical on the left side of politics today.

Gunn declared on Twitter during Trump's first term: "we're in a national crisis with an incompetent President forging a full-blown attack on facts and journalism in the style of Hitler and Putin."

Perhaps it's good he directs comic-book movies when his politics are at such a stereotypical comic-book level: he might as well have likened Trump to Superman's archenemy Lex Luthor.

In the movie, he does.

Luthor colludes with Russia — sorry, "Boravia" — and runs a social-media troll farm dedicated to smearing Superman, who gets sent to a super-Gitmo when the U.S. government authorizes Luthor to take the hero into custody.

That's about the extent of parallels between Luthor and Trump, or George W. Bush, however.

Despite the villain's constant references to Superman as an alien, immigration isn't a theme of the movie.

Indeed, assimilation is more of a theme than immigration is — but assimilation into what?

Superman is sent as a child from the dying planet Krypton in a rocket that crashes in Kansas, where this ungodly powerful alien is brought up with good Midwestern values. That's where his devotion to "the American way" comes from.

Last year, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, as Kamala Harris' running mate, demonstrated

how hard it is for progressives to seem appealing to Midwesterners even when they're from the region.

The new movie portrays Superman's adoptive parents, Jonathan and Martha Kent, as cornball stereotypes that would give a Hallmark movie a bad name.

After Superman is disillusioned to learn his Kryptonian biological parents might not have had benign intentions toward earth, Pa Kent's advice amounts to "be yourself," no matter your family's origins or beliefs.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with that — except this Superman has no self, and he's no more a Kansan or an American than he is an invader from outer space.

This Superman doesn't utter a word about "the American way," and when he confronts Luthor at the film's climax, he insists what makes him human are his failings.

Are failings really the main or only thing that make us human?

The movie reflects several unconscious beliefs that many liberals nowadays hold:

First, no one is extraordinary — Superman is just one of a crowd of superbeings in this film, and he's not even the only "Superman": there are three other iterations of the character on the screen, one of them a dog.

Second, sentimentality takes the place of patriotism — Superman hasn't assimilated to America, he's assimilated

to an unplaceable idea of niceness and self-affirmation.

Third, and ironically, liberalism's own ideals are doomed — the thing that distinguishes Superman from other superhumans in this crowded film is his refusal to kill; violence, if necessary, must not be lethal.

Maybe this Superman wouldn't defund the police, but he might take away their guns and certainly wouldn't support the death penalty.

Yet Superman gets humiliated at every turn for adhering to this code: other heroes have to put down a Godzilla-scale monster terrorizing the city and the Boravian warlord Superman roughed up but left alive to start more wars; worst of all, Superman watches powerless as Luthor shoots a man in the head.

Gunn's defenders claim "Superman" isn't a cynical film, but it is — it's a mixture of cynicism and denial rather like what the Democratic Party has become.

What viewers want in Superman is a hero who knows why he stands for America, who doesn't kill not because he's weak but because he's so strong he never has to.

President Trump made a joke with a serious point by putting his own face on the movie poster.

He understands Superman better than James Gunn.

Daniel McCarthy is the editor of Modern Age: A Conservative Review. To read more by Daniel McCarthy, visit creators.com.

In the wake of tragedy, look for the helpers

I saw a video the other day, part of the coverage of the horrific July 4 flash flood that has killed more than 100 people in central Texas.

There was a young woman walking toward the still-swollen Guadalupe River, the body of water that left its banks with a vengeance in the middle of the night and brought death and destruction to Kerrville, Texas, and environs.

The video was accompanied by no sound, and you could only see the woman from the back, but as she approached the river it became painfully obvious that she was crying.

Her shoulders slumped, her body shook, her hand came to her face. What other response could there be to such an unspeakable tragedy?

There is much finger-pointing going on in the wake of the catastrophic flooding. Why wasn't there more warning? Were cuts to the National Weather Service to blame for the agency's response? Was this the fault of the Department of Government Efficiency?

There will be plenty of time for second-guessing later, but it seems clear that cutting personnel at an agency like the NWS that is designed to warn of impending weather disasters, whether they be floods, tornadoes or hurricanes, is not a good idea.

So many of the victims in this tragedy were young, just babies, really. Many were young girls spending part of their summer at Camp Mystic, a facility that has been hosting campers for decades. In fact next summer will mark the camp's centennial.

In 2022 the camp held a



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reunion of former campers. Many of the smiles in the photos of the event posted online are framed by gray hair. This was a generational camp, with women attending as children, then sending their daughters and granddaughters to spend a couple of weeks on the banks of the Guadalupe to have the time of their young lives.

Fred Rogers, yes Mr. Rogers of TV fame, had advice for children who were upset about events they saw on the news. He related what his mother told him, which was "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

There were many helpers as the Guadalupe raged out of its banks and now that it has calmed. Scott Ruskan, a rescue swimmer with the Coast Guard, is credited with saving more than 165 people from Camp Mystic. It was his first-ever mission.

Camp counselors likewise have been hailed for their heroism as the waters rose. Some pushed frightened young girls through cabin windows and others put girls on mattresses to help float on the rising water. Counselor Emma Foltz, a rising senior at Louisiana Tech University, is credited with saving 14 girls under her supervision at Camp Mystic. Emma lost her mother

just a month ago.

They weren't the only heroes during the catastrophe. One father helped his daughter hang onto a tree until she was rescued. He, in turn, was lost to the raging waters.

As an RV park was swallowed up by the raging flood, the owner helped residents escape. Julian Ryan, a 27-year-old who was engaged to be married, broke out a window of his home to help his fiancée, their children and his mother out of the flooded house. When he broke the window he severed an artery in his arm. He bled to death before help could arrive.

Erin Burgess and her teenage son were forced out of their home by the flood. They clung to a nearby tree for an hour before the water level dropped enough for her to walk to a nearby house. She said the only thing that saved her was clinging to her son, who stands more than six feet tall.

Dick Eastland, the director and co-owner of Camp Mystic, died saving some of the girls under his care.

These people didn't, couldn't, save everybody who was in the path of the raging flood water, but they did what they could.

Their heroism serves as a reminder that no matter how grim the news of the day seems there are still plenty of good people in this world, people willing to put others first, themselves second.

This tragedy also serves as a grim reminder that all our lives are finite, and we don't know when our last moment will come.

Which leads me to believe that it is too dangerous to do

anything once you climb from bed in the morning other than to crawl under said bed and spend the rest of the day there.

But that's ridiculous, of course. That's not living, merely surviving. And, besides, there are dust bunnies under there.

We should be mindful of the brief tenure of our lives, but not obsess about it. If you spend all your life looking over your shoulder for trouble that might be coming up from behind you're liable to walk into a light pole, or in front of a car.

Embrace every day, even the crummy ones. We are only given so many on this earth. Don't wait until later to do something you've always wanted to do, whether it be as simple as taking a vacation or as life-altering as making a career change. There is no guarantee there will be a later.

And never, ever, leave a good friend or a member of your family without telling them you love them. There are dozens of families and friends in Texas who will never have that chance again.

If you know someone in pain, comfort them. If you know someone in need, help them as best you can. Be a helper. Every little bit helps.

If nothing else, you can always pray. Pray for the victims and their families. Give thanks for those who survived and the helpers who rescued them. And pray that if you are ever confronted with a situation like the one that occurred in Central Texas not long ago, you will be empowered to be a helper.

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Commonwealth Journal

A Community Newspaper Holdings Inc. publication
110-112 E. Mt. Vernon St., Somerset, KY 42502
Phone: 606-678-8191 • Fax: 606-679-9225
www.somerset-kentucky.com

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