



March 26, 2025

# MESSENGER

## QUOTE FOR TODAY

"It is finished, it is OK.  
Dayenu."

Pastor George in this week's sermon

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## YOU FEELIN' THIS?

Recently, Elon Musk made one of his classic in-your-face statements: "**The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy.**"<sup>1</sup> Since then, commentators have tried to soften his words and explain what he really meant. However, if you listen to the context of his conversation on the Joe Rogan podcast, as I did, you'll see that's exactly what he meant.

Now, Elon Musk is not an original thinker; so where did he get this idea? It's interesting that two recent books by popular Christian "influencers" have addressed this subject: **Toxic Empathy: How Progressives Exploit Christian Compassion**, by Allie Beth Stuckey, whose podcast "Relatable" is a pacesetter among thoughtful hard-right Christian thinkers, published in October of last year. **The Sin of Empathy: Compassion and Its Counterfeits**, by Joe Rigney (not to be confused with Joe Rogan), a leader associated with the Gospel Coalition theological movement, published just this past month.

Apparently, the fact that a person might identify with the feelings of an immigrant child being harshly deported, or an unemployed man being turned away from an emergency room during a heart attack, or a lonely old woman being informed she doesn't qualify for Social Security benefits, makes some conservative Christians uncomfortable. These books seem to be designed to help them be more willing to support severe cutbacks in government funding for such needs.<sup>2</sup> It's clear to me that Elon Musk is familiar with the school of thought expressed by these authors and believes this gives him permission to express his radical idea.

Now, I make it a rule not to get involved in politics in the *ABC Messenger* articles I write. But in this case politicians have crossed over and gotten involved in redefining the Christian faith, so I feel I have to comment.

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# March 26, 2025

(Continued from other side)

In short, **Christianity IS empathy!** Empathy is not just one element of Christian faith and practice; it's the very definition of the Gospel message. God's empathy for lost humans impelled him to enter human flesh, to experience the total drama of human lostness, to offer his Son as the Suffering Servant, to go through the excruciating pain of scourging, the agony of the being nailed to the cross, the sense of being totally forsaken by his heavenly Father. Is that empathy? Yes, it can even be called toxic empathy because it was poisonous to Jesus' own well-being.

Furthermore, his primary teaching to all of his followers can be described in that one word --- ***empathy***: *empathy for little children, empathy for fallen women, empathy for aliens, even empathy for enemies. Can we get hurt by having too much empathy? Of course. **He** did. But that doesn't change the fact that it's part of the package we accept as followers of Jesus.*

We live in a strange moment of time. People follow leaders who proclaim that Up is Down, that Darkness is Light and that Empathy is Evil. Jesus, who lived out love for every human he encountered, is perversely portrayed by these false teachers as an angry warrior who takes vengeance on the poor and helpless.

Here's the Jesus I follow:

*Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:35-38)*

As Jesus' field-worker, I'm called not to

harvest with a sharp-edged sickle, but with empathetic love.

Pastor George Van Alstine

<sup>1</sup> The quote can be found at 1:16:00 of this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSOxPJD-VNo&t=4561s>

<sup>2</sup> David French discusses this in an excellent article: "Behold the Strange Spectacle of Christians Against Empathy": <https://inconvenientnews.wordpress.com/2025/02/14/david-french-opinion-behold-the-strange-spectacle-of-christians-against-empathy-the-new-york-times/>.

French also refers to some strange comments by both authors suggesting that because women seem to have greater empathy, they're less trustworthy in making rational decisions. This new version of patriarchy is made clear in the audio quotes included in this podcast:

<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/22/nx-s1-5321299/how-empathy-came-to-be-seen-as-a-weakness-in-conservative-circles>

Pastor George Van Alstine