

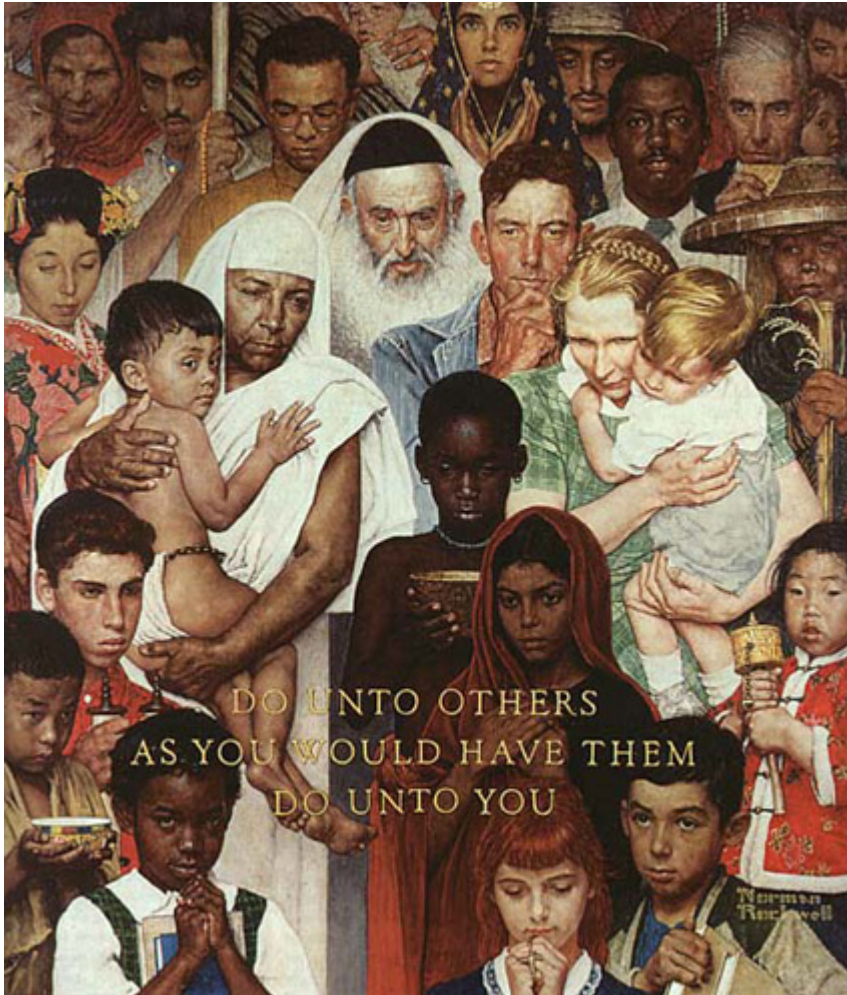
# Faith and science agree: Compassion aids well-being

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WACO—Being good does a body good. The Bible says so, and science proves it, author [Stephen Post](#) told a group at Baylor University.

Medical science demonstrates people experience feelings of serenity when they help others, said Post, founding director of the [Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care & Bioethics](#) at Stony Brook University.

“It turns out when you do face-to-face helping, the brain also releases a chemical, a hormone called oxytocin,” which produces feelings of inner tranquility, he said in a lecture sponsored by Baylor’s [Institute for Studies of Religion](#).



Norman Rockwell's "Golden Rule" painting. Post, best-selling author of [The Hidden Gifts of Helping](#), cited science and spirituality to emphasize how benevolence, love and philanthropy relate to a sense of well-being.

A lifestyle of selflessness and genuine love for others—expressed by giving time, service and money to people in need—results not in feelings of sacrifice but in a sense of spiritual fulfillment, he stressed.

Post pointed to Bible verses that underscore his point. In Psalm 117, the biblical writer declared those who refresh others will be refreshed themselves, he noted.

According to Acts 20:35, Jesus said it is better to give than to receive, and 2 Corinthians 9:7 says God loves a cheerful giver. And 1 John declares

believers are capable of love because of the love they receive through Jesus Christ.

### **Enriching other's lives through love**

So, Post said, people of faith should understand why they have the opportunity to enrich other's lives through love.

"Human nature is not terribly pretty," he said. "It's a mixed bag, but we love because (God) first loved us. Love set the whole thing in motion. Faith makes a difference. What we believe makes a difference."

Post offered his definition of love by quoting American psychiatrist [Harry Stack Sullivan](#): "When the happiness, security and well-being of another is as real or meaningful to you as your own, you love that person."

Post illustrated his point by citing American artist Norman Rockwell's "Golden Rule" painting. Inspired by the admonition to "do unto others as you would have them do to you," the painting features people from various societies, cultures and backgrounds.

### **Serenity and tranquility**

The peaceful facial expressions Rockwell pictured in the painting signify the serenity and tranquility that follows when adhering to the rule, Post said.



The Golden Rule requires people to use their moral imaginations, spirituality and vision to ask themselves how they can contribute to society and others around them, he said.

“In my view, simply stated, (the Golden Rule) far surpasses anything that we really have in contemporary ethical theory,” he said. “It is a part of all the great perennial spiritual traditions for good reason.”

Faith and science agree on the health benefits of loving one’s neighbor and showing genuine compassion to others. Various studies demonstrate the strongest indicator of whether patients will adhere to treatment and take care of themselves is whether or not they feel love and compassion from their primary care provider, said Post, professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook.

The [UnitedHealth Group’s](#) health and volunteering study provides evidence a life of love and generosity benefits physical and mental health, he noted.

### **Improved health and mood**

According to the 2013 study, 76 percent of people who volunteered in the last year said volunteering made them feel healthier, and 94 percent said volunteering improves their mood.

It also showed 96 percent of people felt helping others enriched their sense of purpose in life, and 80 percent of volunteers stated they felt like they had control of their health.

A lifestyle of love and care for others clearly provides a key to health, Post insisted.

“This is a prescription, a clinical prescription,” he said. “Our very lives depend on our constant thought of others.”