Part Four: What is Compassion?

Read Psalm 86:15, Zechariah 7:8-12, and Colossians 3:12.

How would you define the word ‘compassion’?

Share some examples of how compassion is demonstrated in the Bible.

When do you show compassion towards others? Are there times when you lack compassion?

There are many words that might be used to describe ‘compassion’. Sympathy, mercy and empathy are often considered to describe aspects of compassion. Compassion can perhaps best be described as “an understanding of and concern for the suffering of others and a desire to do something about it”.

In the Old Testament we see the compassion of God towards His people. The Bible tells us that God is eternal, holy, just, good, wise, powerful and loving. His love means that He is also compassionate. And God’s compassion is seen in particular for the weak, the helpless, and the downtrodden.

In the New Testament, as we learn more about the life of Jesus – His miracles and His teachings – one common, recurring theme we see is His compassion for others. We see powerful examples of this throughout the gospel accounts. Jesus showed compassion to children in the way He welcomed them to Him, taking them in His arms and blessing them – despite the best efforts of the disciples to send them away.

We see how Jesus showed compassion towards women and how His attitude towards them went against many of the common attitudes of the day. He talked to them and spent time with them. He even allowed Himself to be touched by a woman that had been bleeding for 12 years so that she could be healed. He forgave all those who turned to him, including prostitutes. Out of compassion, He raised a widow’s son.

Jesus demonstrated compassion towards those marginalised in society. He met and ate with sinners. He touched lepers. He healed the sick and fed the hungry.

And Jesus was compassionate towards the spiritually needy. We see His agony as He weeps over Jerusalem. Through His teachings we see His desire to see people come to know the fullness of a life with Him. The compassion that He had for people’s physical needs was a sign of His concern for the greater needs of their hearts – the need to know Him.

Jesus was motivated by compassion. And we, as Christians, and our churches need to be the same. We need to follow His example. We need to be compassionate! But do we really do this in our everyday lives?
Having compassion means taking action. James 2:15-17 makes it clear that faith should result in a response. And 1 John 3:17-18 has a similar message: “Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth”. ‘Feeling’ compassion is not enough. Biblical compassion calls us to act!

And compassion is powerful. One author put it like this: “If we had the compassion of Jesus, it would change our families, our churches and our neighbourhoods for the better. It would allow us to give to others what all of us want for ourselves. It would enable us to fulfil the purpose for which we leave our footprints on this planet”\(^1\).

Let us ask God to give us His compassion to share with a needy and hurting world. It will make a difference!

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**Further Reading and Discussion**

Consider how Jesus showed compassion towards:

- **Children**: He welcomed and blessed them (Mark 10:13-16).
- **Women**: He allowed the sick women to touch Him (Luke 8:43-48); He forgave prostitutes (Luke 7:36-50); He had compassion for the widow’s son (Luke 7:13).
- **Those Marginalised in Society**: such as tax collectors (Luke 19:1-10); lepers (Matt 8:1-4); the hungry and poor.
- **The Spiritually Lost**: He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44).

Which of these people - or other people on the margins of your own community such as the homeless, addicts, migrants, etc - would you struggle to show compassion to? How do you need God to change you?

**Pray that the compassion of Jesus would be seen more in your life!**

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**Motivated by Compassion**

Kids Alive International has many national staff members who feel called by God to show the love and compassion of Christ to suffering children.

**Fady Khoury** has worked with Kids Alive Lebanon for more than twenty years! In 1991, he gave up a well-paid job as a chef at a restaurant near Beirut to serve as the cook at the ‘Dar El Awdad’ Boys’ Home. Today, Fady cares for all of the needs of our residential children in the role of ‘Residential Manager’ and lives at the Boys’ Home with his wife, Peggy,

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\(^1\) Martin R. De Haan (2008) *The Compassion of Jesus*
and their three children. Fady says: “The first day that I started work here, I knew that God was calling me to be caring for these children and sharing with them the love of their Heavenly Father. It gives my heart such joy to see these kids come from situations of darkness to having a relationship with Jesus. And, by serving them, God has also taught me so much about the love and compassion that He has for all of His children”.

Alida Estevez was once a child in the ministry of Kids Alive and is now back in a leadership role as Administrative Director for the ANIJA school in the Dominican Republic. Alida states that she never really left the ministry! She entered the programme of Kids Alive when she was nine years old. Coming from a difficult background, she needed the resources and help that were given to her as she attended ANIJA in order to succeed. Upon graduation from school as an official student of the programme, she began helping in many different ways. From starting as a teacher’s assistant, to working as a secretary, to teaching French and now serving as Administrative Director, Alida has come to know the programme well. Most importantly she came to know Jesus through the ministry. Alida states “ANIJA is like my family. So much of what God has done in my life has been through my time at ANIJA. I know what it is to be a child in need and God has grown in me a heart to serve children who come from similar situations that I came from. God is able to use me in the lives of these children in the same way that others invested in me. I don’t have words to explain how thankful I am for ANIJA and for the chance to be part of the ministry.”

Pray

Thank God for His compassion towards us.

Thank God for Fady and Alida – and many others like them – and for their compassion for the children in our programmes.

Say Sorry for the times when we have failed to reflect God’s compassion to others around us.

Ask God to make us more compassionate in order to impact the people around us for the better.
Part Five: What is my Response?

“He has shown you, oh man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Our foundation and motivation in life, first and foremost, should be seeking to walk humbly with God. Walking humbly means sacrificing our own desires in order to listen to the needs of others and seek the desires of God. Our attitudes and actions need to reflect this. This involves showing mercy and acting justly towards others.

One aspect of God’s favour is His loving kindness and mercy towards us. We all fall far short of the mark – yet He has forgiven us and called us His children. God’s mercy is not a one-off gesture; it is steadfast and unceasing: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

And, as God has shown us mercy, so we are called to do the same. We should have a heart of love for others and a desire to care for the vulnerable. That means that we should “act justly”. We are called to be people of action for the Kingdom of God. Justice is working for the vulnerable people of our society and world – working for the widow, fatherless, orphan, poor, hungry, stranger, needy, weak and the oppressed, so that they are treated with fairness.

Micah and the other prophets in the Old Testament are very clear that a follower of the Lord does justice. Moses said “Justice and only justice you shall follow” (Deuteronomy 16:20). “For the Lord is righteous; he loves justice” said David (Psalm 11:7). And a cry of Amos was, “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).

Love mercy. Act justly. Walk humbly. These are intentional actions. God wants to change what we do. Action is essential. As James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says”.

Seeking justice for the vulnerable – the orphan, widow, refugee, and the oppressed – should be central to our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. In fact, Job 29:14 actually talks about us ‘wearing’ justice: “I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe.....” It should infuse our whole lives as completely as clothing covers our bodies!

How can we respond? Are we fair in our dealings with others? Do we show mercy? Are we learning humility? How do we go about putting God’s heart for justice and compassion into action?

Ideas for Action

- **Pray.** Commit time to praying about injustice in the world, for Christians to respond, and for lives and communities to be transformed. Explore the issues with other Christians and take time to pray and reflect together. Pray for the work of Hope for Kids International. And remember that God answers prayer and works miracles!

- **Learn.** Find out more about the causes of injustice in the world – and what you can do in response. Read more about what the Bible has to say about justice!
Help. Engage in the life of someone that needs help – in your community or elsewhere in the world. Start with the opportunities you have in your everyday life. Consider helping to change the life of an orphan or vulnerable child by becoming a Child Sponsor (see page 4).

Speak. Tell others about injustice in the world, and get them involved! Encourage others to support the work of Hope for Kids International.

Serve. Consider joining a short-term team or some other form of service to a deprived community to learn more about the needs and provide some assistance. Join a Hope for Kids International short-term team!

Discussion and Next Steps

What does it mean to ‘wear justice’? Would you describe yourself as someone that ‘wears justice’? Why or why not?

How can you better go about putting God’s heart for justice and compassion into action? Identify three or more ways that you might respond to the call to “act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly”. Put a plan in place for implementing these!

What God has Taught Me

Corbey Dukes, Missionary: When I accepted Jesus as my Saviour, I did it as a very selfish act. I wanted to go to heaven. Fortunately, I learned that Jesus is just as interested in how I spend my life on earth as He is in my eternity. A few years into my Christian life (I became a believer at 33), I found myself in Guatemala on a short-term trip. It was there that God not only broke my heart for these children, but also revealed how much He desires mercy, justice and peace for all His people. I discovered that He wanted us to care for orphans and widows in their distress – to be His hands in their lives. This call to something greater than I could imagine has led me to Guatemala as director for Kids Alive here. It is also where He has given me an incredible gift – to be part of His story in the lives of 160 children and scores of families.

Lydia Palfrey, Team Member: Being on a short-term team taught me more about what it means to walk humbly with God. So often, with our Western mindsets, we embark on doing ‘mission’ in order
to do good work, to help those who are not as fortunate as ourselves, and to share the Gospel. Whilst all these things are good, it never ceases to amaze me how much we can also learn!

I was humbled by how much those that have so little are willing to give. I visited families who live in unimaginable poverty, and they welcomed me with open hearts, serving me their precious life-sustaining food and drink. I learnt that my faith costs me so little, that in my culture it is easy to proclaim that I am a Christian. I met families who are persecuted because of their faith, yet continue to live their lives for God despite the cost. I met people living in slums who have joy because of their relationship with God. They meet together to praise Him despite their suffering! Amazing!

Dale Chandler, Child Sponsor:
I love kids. But when God, in miraculous ways, got me to Guatemala, and introduced me to the beautiful children and the work of Kids Alive there, I discovered a whole new meaning to loving kids. Over the past seven years I have seen and heard of the marvellous growth physically, mentally and spiritually of the children I sponsor. Hearing that ‘my’ child “joyfully participates in the daily devotional”; or “is part of the worship team”; or “has not been sick” gives me such joy! And God has further blessed me by leading our daughter and two of our grandchildren to becoming involved too! God has a special blessing for those who welcome children (Mark 9:37) and calls us to care for the widow and the orphan (James 1:27). How else can we respond?

Pray
Thank God for His great love and unceasing faithfulness towards us – and that “his compassions never fail” (Lamentations 3: 22-23).

Pray that God would give you a longing to “walk humbly” with Him – to sacrifice your own desires to seek His heart.

Ask that you would have God’s heart to seek justice for the vulnerable in the world, and that He would show you what action you should take to show His loving compassion to others.
Part Six: What is my Church’s Response?

Reflect on the following Bible verses:

“I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban” (Job 29:14)

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17)

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18)

“...there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need” (Acts 4:34-35)

What do these verses tell us about our responsibilities as Christians – both individually and as part of the Body of Christ?

As individuals, each of us is called to address issues of injustice as part of our lifestyle. Job talks about ‘wearing’ righteousness and justice as ‘clothing’ (Job 29:14). It is something that is practical, continuous, and obvious to those around us.

To counter the individualistic culture we live in, we need also to be intentional about ‘doing justice’ as an expression of our oneness in the Body of Christ. We are called to be salt and light together, influencing and transforming the darkness in the community in which we live – and beyond. Our mandate is to be courageous, and to imitate Jesus in His passion for the weak, the suffering, the poor and the lost. As a community of believers, how are we doing in responding to this call?

Poverty and injustice are often the result of broken systems of government and, while individual Christians can – and do – challenge these systems, there is power and wisdom in addressing the issues “with each part of the body doing its work” (Ephesians 4:16). Many issues are too big to address as a lone voice. A deprived neighbourhood needs many different gifts and skills: people to counsel families on matters of relational poverty; debt counsellors to address individuals’ material poverty; campaigners to lobby against unjust government policies – and much more.

Global issues require similar intentionality to constantly remind us of our relative wealth as a nation compared with the material poverty of so much of the world – a world that God loves in the same way He loves us. We need to be praying for the nations. As we worship, we need to allow God to stir our hearts for the poor. We need to seek ways of engaging in deprived communities in some of the world’s poorest countries. And, as churches, we need to be “generous and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18).
Reaching out to the poor is something that our churches so often find difficult. We battle against materialism and a lack of unity. We can lack compassion and love for others. Our worship and teaching so often fails to address the issues of poverty and injustice.

And yet, the church has been described as ‘the hope of the world’. We need to recognise that giving hope to the poor is one of our core ministries. Our churches need to change radically, so that we care for the oppressed and not just our own comfort. And we can be encouraged by the fact that God gifts and equips His church – us – so that we can serve and be generous (2 Corinthians 9:9). Together we can make a difference, in His world and for His glory!

Discuss

Make a list of those people or groups that are disadvantaged and disconnected in your community. What activities and links does your church have with them? Are they represented? If not, why not?

To what extent is your church informed of the global picture of poverty and injustice? What links do you have with different parts of the world? How do you pray and support churches or Christian ministries working in these areas? What can you do to develop these links?

What are the main challenges that your church faces in getting involved in issues of injustice? How might these be overcome?

Read Matthew 25:35-40. This passage suggests that how we treat the poor reveals our true response to Jesus. Discuss ways in which you can turn your faith and worship into action.

Next Steps

Here are a few ideas for how your church can get involved:

- **Plan a series of talks on justice issues.**
- **Organise a regular prayer time** in church for countries, communities, missionaries, and situations in the world.
- **Follow a Bible study programme** in small groups, and discuss how you might engage more with such issues.
- **Help the children and young people of the church develop knowledge of, and love for, the world.** Encourage them to pray for children in other countries. Help them to develop a vision for how they can help!
- **Become a Church Partner with Hope for Kids International** and explore how your church can engage with – and make an incredible impact on – a deprived community in another part of the world.
Story of a Church Transformed

Calvary Church decided that it wanted to go deeper in caring for the poor and engage with a community that urgently needed help. As a result, the church is partnering with our work to provide for the Mitaboni Children’s Home in Kenya. More than 60 people from the church sponsor children in the Home, and the church provides additional funding to ensure that the needs of the Home are met. Visitors and short-term teams from the church to the Home and surrounding community have been a great encouragement and have helped to open the eyes of church members to the needs in the area, how God is at work – and what they can do to help. The church sees its relationship with our work as a long-term commitment, and has a desire to see lasting change in the community and the lives of children and their families transformed for eternity!

Pray

Pray that churches around the world would mobilise in order to reach out to the poor and meet their physical, relational and spiritual needs. Pray about how God wants your church to respond!

Identify nations around the world where there is trouble or need. Spend time praying for these nations – for their governments, for the local church, for the needs of the people, and for Christian organisations working to alleviate suffering and injustice.

Pray for the work of Hope for Kids International as we seek to meet the needs of orphans and vulnerable children and the communities in which they live. Pray for wise leadership; for increased funding; and for our team of staff. Pray that through our ministry many children will come to know the eternal hope that comes from a relationship with Jesus.