Compassion

Week 2: Part 2

Group Time

Ice Breaker
Describe a trip or experience that had a huge impact on you? Why?

Worship
If you’re looking for help with worship, head to https://vimeo.com/album/2977729 and choose a couple of songs for worship. The password is wolsg. Or you can pick up a worship DVD from the Small Groups table at the Welcome Center.

Introduction
This week Pastor Dan spoke about our role as compassionate Christians. Listen to the Holy Spirit’s voice as he nudges you to show compassion to others, to work in community, even when it appears to be difficult and undesirable. You may find that the benefits are greater than you could have imagined.

Discussion Questions and Leader Notes
1. How have you experienced compassion, both in your own life or expressed toward others? Explain. Get into groups of 3 or so and share these personal acts of compassion.

Sometimes the pace of life is so fast that we miss acts of compassion. It can be a good form of reflection, thanksgiving and growth to pause and give attention to the acts of compassion extended toward us and those around us.

2. Read Colossians 3:13-14. Discuss these verses in the group. What did Paul say about forgiveness? How does forgiveness relate to compassion? How can trying to be compassionate without forgiveness be a struggle?

According to verse 13, we are to bear with one another and forgive one another. Specifically, in exhorting us to forgive, Paul used the words “whoever” and “anyone.” There are no “buts.” He also suggested that we must forgive like Christ—no grudges, no bringing up past sins, no shaming people. Sadly, unforgiveness can create a barrier to our ability to show compassion. In fact, when we forgive someone, that is an act of compassion and it has the added benefit of softening our hearts. It is difficult to love when we are mad. Note that forgiveness can be aimed toward others or ourselves. Either way, the first step is to receive the forgiveness that Jesus offers.

This may be a sensitive area for some. When we are angry, it is not easy to love people. It can also be difficult to extend compassion when we do not feel or believe that compassion or forgiveness has been given to us. As a church, we can help people by embracing them as they are, loving them and walking them through the act of forgiveness and subsequent healing.
3. What are the differences between compassion and trying to “fix” a person? Give some life examples. What are the differences between showing compassion and enabling a person? Provide examples. What are the dangers in these paths? Read Matthew 11:30. How can we guard ourselves?

Answers will vary for the first two questions.

When we attempt to solve people’s problems, trying to “fix them,” our efforts are often futile and rarely appreciated. We may come across as arrogant. Rather than showing people love on an equal plane (We all have problems and everyone needs help sometimes), we may even push people away or shame them. Should we find ourselves enabling someone, the danger may be to ourselves as well as to the other person. We may feel used and angry and we are not empowering the person in need.

Compassion is about walking with someone and the place of compassion is reached on the path of empathy. Sometimes, though we mistake compassion with a desire to fix a person. The only way to freedom is through Jesus. The only way to wholeness is through Jesus. When Jesus showed compassion, he met the people at their place of need and showed them the path to him. Our role in compassion always includes showing the path to Jesus. It is not our role to change people. Blessedly, Christ is in the heart-changing business. When Christ is the focus, he makes the burden less for all involved.

4. Read Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:46-47 and 1 Corinthians 14:26. What do these verses have in common? What are some benefits of ministering to others in a group? Discuss some ministering opportunities at Water of Life or in your community. As a small group, choose one that you could do together to practice compassion. Put it on your calendar.

These verses all point us toward participating in community.

This week Pastor Dan spoke about the value of ministering to others in a group. God gave each of us different gifts that are complementary so we are stronger and more effective together! Interestingly, as we see others’ gifts we are given a unique opportunity to learn alternate ways of doing things. Additionally, we may find that we learn new things about our teammates as well as ourselves. For those who are nervous or even fearful about ministering alone, serving alongside other group members can be empowering. It can also be a great way to bond as a group.

The Growth Catalog and Water of Life website have several serving opportunities listed.

**Prayer/Ministry**

Pray: Lord, you were and are the perfect example of compassion. While I was undeserving of your compassion and mercy, you still extended them toward me. I don’t want to selfishly keep the gifts you have given me for myself. Show me how I can extend compassion to others—to those close to me and to the stranger. Amen.

**Cautionary Note:** Please use wisdom when serving others. Do not place yourself in danger as you show compassion to others. Stay in public places. Go in groups, never alone. Organized local outreach as well as mission trips are great ways to reach out to people outside of your usual circle. Try volunteering at CityLink or another charitable organization.
Taking it Home

Going Deeper
Day 1: Read: Philippians 2:3-5.
Reflect: Sometimes our actions are done out of self-interest. Unintentionally, we may hope someone notices our good deeds or that the person we are helping looks up to us with gratitude.
React: Think back on your actions today and this week. Be brutally honest with yourself. Did you congratulate yourself, patting yourself on the back because you did a good deed? Did you hope others would see or know what you did?
Pray: Lord, thank you for being selfless in your ways. Help me to see when I am doing something out of selfish ambition instead of for your glory. Help me to keep the mind of Christ Jesus in all that I do.

Reflect: Life can move quickly but we can still live in an intentional way. Sometimes it is the day-to-day things that serve as reminders to us about the heart of God. While we long to walk in his character it can be difficult if we are doing it in our own strength.
React: As you dress in the morning and put on each piece of clothing, reflect on these scriptures that show us how to dress spiritually. Pray each item of spiritual clothing over yourself for the day. In the evening as you change, reflect on how you allowed God to move in each of those areas. In which areas did you trust God and allow him control? Which ones challenged you?
Pray: Lord, I am so grateful for your grace in my life. Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit to help me as I grow in your character.

Reflect: Imagine running a race through mud in the middle of summer. You might be thinking that you would never run--period. That’s okay! We’re just imagining. You come back hot, sweaty, muddy and just plain dirty. Would you put on clean clothes or would you shower first? Carrying unforgiveness is like coming back from a hot, muddy race and putting on clean clothes . . . without showering!
React: Invite Christ to search your heart. Are there any areas that are muddied with unforgiveness?
Pray: Lord, I want to grow in compassion but know that unforgiveness hinders that. Search my heart, oh God and see if there is anything amiss? I choose to release and forgive _________. Help me to walk in forgiveness.

Reflect: Sometimes looking at all the needs that surround us can feel heavy. That heaviness can shut us off from that place of compassion. As you read through this verse, underline or write the following words from Jesus: “Come to me . . . Take my yoke . . . learn from me.”
React: What are ways each day that you answer the Lord’s invitation? What do you need to surrender to him? What does it look like to take his yoke? What are some ways you are learning from Jesus?
Pray: Dear Jesus, thank you for this invitation and reminder to come to you, to take your yoke and to learn from you. Show me when I am carrying something that I should surrender to you. Help me to continue to grow in compassion.

Reflect: Read this verse aloud. Read it again but now focus on the first part. How have you experienced compassion extended to you from those you know? From a stranger? How did it feel? Stay in that memory and feeling for a moment.
React: Those who extended compassion did so because they allowed themselves to enter your story. As you go through your week, how can you enter someone’s story? How can you go beyond feeling for them and instead feel with them?

Pray: Lord, you came to earth in the form of man. You knew us from the throne and you chose to know us from the flesh as well. Help me to feel for people and feel with them as well.

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Memory Verse
Psalm 145:8: “The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.”