

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 4: MERCY AND COMPASSION

Some people are just more empathetic than others. These are the people who show up when someone is mourning, when someone has a need, when calamity strikes. But just because we may not be naturally empathetic does not mean we are exempt from displaying mercy and compassion the way Jesus instructs us to! Mercy and Compassion are virtues for every believer, and we can learn about them from even the briefest glance at the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus had a heart of mercy – and called us to be merciful and compassionate to others. Jesus said, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” ([Luke 6:36](#)).

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Colossians 3:12-13

One of the most emotional events in the life of Jesus was when He cried. The eternal Son of God was all powerful and all knowing, yet He felt such empathy toward His friends that He sat with them and mourned, deeply moved by their loss. Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus, was ill, and in faith they sent for Jesus to come and heal him. They knew the power of Jesus and believed he would heal their brother, but Jesus curiously delayed coming to see him.

Jesus intended all along to let him die so that he would be raised to life, thus demonstrating that death was not the end. And yet, knowing this, Jesus was moved to tears when He saw His friends mourning. Before raising Lazarus back to life, Jesus shared in the suffering of His friends, and out of deep compassion He cried. This compassion led Him to bring Lazarus back to life, restoring him completely.

When we are compassionate we suffer with and come alongside those who are experiencing pain or difficulty. As we feel what they feel, we are motivated to help them. Compassion sees value in the life of another, and hopes for relief, healing and reconciliation. Compassion is not looking down on someone in pity, an excuse to share our own sorrow in commiseration, or selectively loving those who are close to us. Rather compassion is love in action accompanied by a sacrifice of time, emotion, or sometimes material things to help relieve the suffering. Jesus demonstrated compassion in His earthly ministry in many ways – healing the sick and broken, loving people of all social classes, feeding those who were hungry, and leading those who were lost.

God has always expressed His love to us through His grace and mercy. Grace and mercy are related; a very simplified explanation is that grace is giving someone a gift they haven't earned, and mercy is withholding a punishment that is deserved. You can see how God has done both of these for each and every believer! Mercy believes that no one is beyond forgiveness and every life is valuable. We are called to be merciful also.

Jesus gives us a picture of incredible mercy. Not only did He speak about loving our enemies, He practised it. Luke 23 tells us that as He was dying, Jesus begged God the Father to forgive those who tormented Him! Jesus offered second chances to people who were considered a lost cause. He extended mercy to sinners, tax collectors, the woman at the well, and even His own doubting disciples.

He wanted to illustrate what a true act of compassion and mercy was, so told a story about a Samaritan man who was moved with compassion and mercy to come to the aid of an enemy. We can read about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. A Jewish man lay broken and penniless in the street, and people who boasted of their holiness refused to help him. But a man from Samaria stopped to help. Samaritans were hated by the Jews! The Samaritan picked him up, fed and clothed him, cared for him and rescued him. He didn't just toss some money at the man's feet, he bore his financial burden and took him to an inn where he was cared for. The Samaritan had compassion and mercy, which resulted in costly action.

Both mercy and compassion help us to see value in the lives of others. We are responsible to look after our own personal needs. However, sometimes we may have to do without some of our wants and comforts in order to extend mercy and compassion to others. This can cost us time and money, but we will be rewarded with more than just a warm feeling in our heart. We will be blessed as we love and care for individuals regardless of their life circumstances. Choosing mercy and compassion is to see others as God sees them.

Consider the people in great need around you today. What mercy or second chance can you offer to an enemy? What act of compassion can you do to someone in great need or suffering? How can you act as Christ would in your own neighbourhood?

Both mercy and compassion help us to see value in the lives of others. However, sometimes we may have to do without some of our wants and comforts in order to extend mercy and compassion to others.

IN REVIEW

- Merciful and compassionate people seriously consider the suffering of others.
- To extend mercy is to act on the belief that no one is beyond forgiveness and that every life is valuable. It doesn't excuse sin, indulge in it or seek vengeance, but withholds judgement and extends love and forgiveness.
- Compassion means to 'suffer with' or extend love and empathy for another. It is not pitying someone beneath you, and it is not selective in who it shows love to. We are all equal in God's sight.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Consider how God has been merciful to you, and withheld punishment that you deserve. Who would be considered the sinful, unclean people of your community who 'deserve' our wrath? What would it look like to be merciful to them?

- Read Psalm 34:18 and Psalm 56:8. What is God's response when we have pain and suffering? Read Revelations 21:4. What does God promise will happen in the world to come? What do these two things tell you about how God feels about suffering? How does it change our response?

- How did Jesus treat people who had sinned, and were suffering because of their sin (especially those who were repentant)? Did He tell them they deserved to suffer? What should our response be to people who have life difficulties due to their own sin?

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other content is © 2019 Trans World Radio Canada, and may be used in any way you like as long as you use it with the purpose of reaching the world for Christ and do not charge for the use of the material. See more license details at www.discipleshipessentials.org/licensing.