

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 4: MERCY AND COMPASSION

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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.



CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 4: MERCY AND COMPASSION

PURPOSE

This lesson explores the Christian character traits of mercy and compassion, how Jesus and others in the Bible exhibited them, and how we can develop them in our lives.

LEADER'S NOTE

Some people are more naturally compassionate than others. They have empathy, the ability to feel with and suffer with people. They are in control of their own emotions and willingly express them. Some cultures and communities are more demonstrative of their emotions than others. The scenarios at the end of the lesson can be used in different ways (group discussion, role-playing, etc.). Add to the list examples better suited to your participants. You could also challenge them to find examples of mercy and compassion during the week (in a book, magazine, newspaper, or their own personal experience). The important thing is to examine the difference that these traits should make in the life of every Christian.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What does it mean to be merciful? What is the difference between mercy and grace?
- ❖ Would you say you are a person who is more logical or more emotional? Do you find it easy to connect with the emotions of others?
- ❖ When you see someone suffering or going through a very difficult ordeal, what is the response inside your head and heart? Are you more likely to help, or avoid them?
- ❖ What makes someone worthy of your time and attention?
- ❖ Do you view emotion as a strength or a weakness?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Virtues of Mercy and Compassion:** In previous lessons we have examined how right beliefs lead to right actions. Mercy and Compassion are not considered desirable in some cultures, but God thinks otherwise. Jesus demonstrated incredible mercy and compassion, and we, His followers, should do the same. When we are merciful and compassionate, we consider the lives of others to be of great value and concern to us.
- ❖ **Mercy:** Two ways that God expresses His love to us are through His grace and through His mercy. Grace and mercy are related. Very simply, grace is giving someone a gift they haven't earned, and mercy is withholding a punishment that is deserved. Instead of trying to 'get even' with those who have offended us, the one who shows mercy offers unconditional forgiveness.
 - **Mercy is not Excusing Sin:** While mercy chooses to forgive someone when it is not deserved, it does not excuse sin. Sin is breaking God's law, but mercy extends love instead of judgement (while still believing that sin is destructive and taking a stand against it).
 - **Mercy is not Indulgent:** When we give others all of their wants and desires, we are not extending love and mercy to them. This is indulgence and in some forms can encourage sin and unhealthy behaviour. Mercy forgives but does not reward sin.
 - **Mercy is not Vengeful:** When someone has wronged us, it is our natural response to seek vengeance or punishment. Mercy recognizes that we should be merciful to others. We all have sinned. None of us is righteous; therefore, we should not condemn others for their sin. Instead, we must forgive them.
 - **Mercy is Loving Others:** Jesus commanded us to not only love our neighbour as ourselves, but to love our enemies as well! Loving your enemy, knowing they want to destroy you, is powerful. Mercy is extending love that has not been earned or deserved. Consider what God's Word tells us about mercy:
 - o [Luke 6:36-37](#)
 - o [Matthew 5:7](#)
 - o [Colossians 3:13](#)
 - o [Proverbs 14:21](#)
 - o [Romans 12:8](#)
 - o [Matthew 18:21-22](#)

ASK:

Who would be considered the sinful, unclean people of your community who 'deserve' wrath? What would it look like to be merciful to them?

Are most of your friends like you? Are they of the same religion, background, ethnicity and status? Are there people you won't extend love to because of who they are and what they have done?

How has God been merciful to us? What do we all deserve, yet He withholds from us?



Who are your enemies? Describe how you could love them?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Mercy in the Life of Jesus:** All of us have sinned against God and broken His law. We are born in sin, born as enemies of God and estranged from Him. Jesus not only taught about mercy, He extended it to us.
 - **Jesus Displayed Love for his Enemies:** Jesus taught that we must not just love those who love us, but to also love our enemies (Luke 10: 30-37). Jesus performed miracles not only for His faithful followers, but even for those who wanted to kill Him (Luke 22:47-54). From the cross Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified Him; He had mercy on His tormentors (Luke 23:33-35).
 - **Jesus Forgave Freely:** Knowing that sin was the ultimate offence against God, Jesus still forgave freely. Anyone who repented and accepted Him through faith was forgiven! Jesus had mercy on them (Mark 2:17, Matthew 9:2, Luke 7:47-48).
 - **Jesus Offered Underserved Second Chances:** Jesus was merciful and extended forgiveness to those who repented. Peter denied Jesus, yet Jesus restored him and gave him a great purpose (John 21:15). Sinners were encouraged to live a new life (John 8:10-11).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Mercy:** While we might admire a leader who administers justice and law, God praises those who show mercy to others. It demonstrates humility and love, and places the good of others before selfish ambition.
 - **King David:** When King David came to power, all of Saul's family were killed. David sought out Jonathan's son to whom he could show kindness. Mephibosheth was lame, afraid for his life, and probably faced rejection. David restored him to a respectable life and gave him a place at his table. He also gave him all of Saul's property and servants to care for it. None of this was deserved, but David showed mercy on Mephibosheth because of his love for Jonathan (2 Samuel 9:1-13, 21:7). David knew he had received mercy from God, and could extend this mercy through love to others (2 Samuel 24:14, Psalm 116:1).
 - **Jonah:** God gave Jonah the job of pronouncing judgement on the people of Nineveh. Jonah did not want to warn them of God's wrath because they were sinners and he felt they did not deserve the mercy of God. Jonah didn't see Nineveh the way God did – he was putting his own will first, until God taught him an important lesson. Through the calamities Jonah suffered, he learned that God had mercy on him, and would be merciful to the Ninevites. God, in His mercy and compassion, gave them an opportunity to repent (Jonah 3:10).
- ❖ **Compassion:** The word 'compassion' means to 'suffer with' or to come alongside a person and feel what they feel. When we are compassionate, we do not insulate ourselves from the suffering and pain of others. We enter into it with them hoping to bring about some relief or



encouragement. A compassionate person sees value in the life of the sufferer, and desires that in time they will be restored.

- **Compassion is more than Pity:** Pity is a feeling of sadness because of another person's suffering. Sincere pity should lead to helpful action ([Mark 1:4](#)). Too often, however, pity is not sincere but only a fleeting thought. We think, 'I am glad I am not in their place!' That kind of pity is self-focused. We want others to be relieved of their suffering because their pain makes us uncomfortable. When we pity someone, we must never see them as beneath us and thereby elevate ourselves through their suffering.
- **Compassion is not Commiseration:** Commiserate means "with lament". It is appropriate in every culture to share sympathy and condolence at a time of grief and loss. But when we see others suffer or hurt, it isn't appropriate to share with them our own troubles. Commiseration has come to mean 'sharing together mutual woes'. When we truly have compassion, we are there to help them and share *their* burden, not leave them with our own.
- **Compassion is not Selective Favour:** Having compassion only on those closest to us is very limiting. If we only love our friends and families, we have a shallow compassion and are not moved by the needs of a suffering world. Loving and desiring the best for everyone, even our enemies, is what God calls us to!
- **Compassion is Active Love for Others:** Compassion is always accompanied by action. Compassion is the belief that others' lives have value, and are worth our personal sacrifice. Having compassion means entering into the suffering of others, feeling their sorrow and heartache, and helping them in their distress. Compassion causes us to act on their behalf. Consider these verses in the Bible about compassion:
 - o [Ephesians 4:32](#)
 - o [Colossians 3:12-13](#)
 - o [Galatians 6:2](#)
 - o [1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)
 - o [Philippians 2:3](#)

ASK:

What circumstances bring you to have compassion on others? What action does this compassion lead you to?

There is an incredible amount of suffering in the world. How can we discern where God would have each of us show compassion?

How do other people help you when you are suffering or in need? What does it mean to bear one another's burdens? What is effective relief – simply keeping company and listening with a loving heart, or action that reduces suffering? Are both sometimes necessary?

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **Compassion in the Life of Jesus:** The very act of God the Son being born as a human being on earth and living an ordinary life was an act of deep compassion! God saw the suffering of mankind and entered into it with them. While the suffering of other people cannot be transferred on to us, Jesus did this very thing when he took the sins of all people on Himself!
 - **Jesus had compassion regarding spiritual needs:** Jesus knew people's spiritual needs were more important than their physical needs. He felt compassion on those He met because they had no one to lead and guide them. Putting His compassion into action, He also taught them ([Mark 6:34](#)).
 - **Jesus had compassion regarding physical needs:** Jesus was concerned with the suffering and pain of individual people. Jesus was busy with important plans, but He stopped to heal the sick because relief and reconciliation were dear to His heart. Jesus raised the dead because of His compassion on those who mourned. The miracles demonstrated the power and the heart of God ([Matthew 14:14](#), [Matthew 15:32](#), [Luke 7:13](#)).
 - **Jesus suffered with those who suffered:** Jesus didn't condemn those who suffered or mourned – He helped them. When he saw Mary and Martha mourning the death of Lazarus, their brother, He did not chastise them for their lack of faith. He cried with them even though He knew He would raise him with a single word ([John 11:32-44](#)).

- ❖ **Compassion in the Life of Others:** Many other people in the Bible were compassionate.
 - **The Good Samaritan:** While this was probably a fictional person in a story Jesus told, it clearly demonstrates compassion for us. The Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. A man from Samaria saw a Jewish man hurt, penniless and lying by the side of the road. He did not see him as a problem or an interruption in his day, but rather he had compassion on him. He didn't just toss some money at the man's feet, but physically took him to a place of safety and met his needs ([Luke 10:25-37](#)). The man on the street was viewed as being of value and was treated with compassion. The Samaritan felt empathy, which resulted in costly action.

- ❖ **Evaluate your own Mercy and Compassion:** 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 difficulties you might have in practising these virtues. Our actions are a direct result of our beliefs. Are your beliefs about others Biblical? Does God value everyone, even those who are disobedient to Him? Is God able to save anyone who



comes to Him in repentance? Does God care about the suffering of others? Consider God's thoughts in these verses.

- o [Psalm 34:18](#)
 - o [Psalm 56:8](#)
 - o [Revelation 21:4](#)
 - o [1 Peter 5:10](#)
- Consider the following attitudes and behaviours which could be considered as hate and pity in disguise. Are any of these evident in your life? Are you making excuses about not following the clear teaching of Jesus to be merciful and compassionate?
- o Impatience with others who sin
 - o Reluctance to forgive, fearing it will encourage bad behaviour
 - o Having no friends of different status, background or ethnicity
 - o Not asking people in your church about what is going on in their life
 - o Giving a little money to a charity only to make you feel good
 - o Believing you are not good at comforting those who mourn, and leaving that job to someone else
 - o Holding someone's past mistakes and sins against them
 - o Knowing about the suffering of someone, but not even praying for them

TASK:

Christian character is formed through our choices within the context of community. Divide your participants into small groups of 3-6. Have each group discuss the scenarios that follow this lesson and answer the questions.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ Consider a time in your life when you were in need of mercy and compassion. Did anyone offer it to you? If so, what did they do and how did it change your circumstances?
- ❖ What are some of the best ways to help someone who is mourning a death in their family? What kind of practical help do they need?
- ❖ Why is it easier to be compassionate to those we already know and love, and are in similar circumstances as ours? What should we learn from the example of the good Samaritan? How does God demonstrate His heart of mercy and compassion for all people?



PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would choose to have a heart of mercy and compassion. Pray that they would have eyes to see the value of each person, as they love and care for them as God does. Pray that they would be moved to help in practical ways and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Pray that acts of compassion and mercy would lead to reconciliation with God, comfort, and God being glorified through them.



CHOOSING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

-MERCY AND COMPASSION-

In small groups, consider the scenarios below. For each situation consider these questions:

- o What would your natural response to this situation be?
- o How would someone who is merciful and compassionate respond to this situation?
- o What might the consequences be of demonstrating Christ-like character (specifically mercy and compassion) in this situation?

An employee of yours has served you faithfully, but has made a grave mistake which has cost you time and money. They ask for your forgiveness and a chance to prove themselves again. You are angry and desire to demonstrate your authority, and you wonder if you can risk having them fail you again.

You meet a refugee family who has lost all they had (their jobs, their possessions, their security and community). They want nothing more than to begin a new life free of danger, but you have concerns about refugees draining the resources of your community. They are not your race, religion or nationality, but they are suffering.

You have the opportunity to join a group that ministers at the local prison, sharing the truth of God's Word but also bringing practical items to them. You know that some of the worst offenders are in this prison, and you believe that justice demands they serve their time. You hesitate to interact with people who are such great sinners.

There are children in your community who are orphaned and live on the street. It is such a common problem that you hardly think twice about it any longer. Your own children have beds, food, education, and security, and if you don't think too much about those on the street, it is easy to forget that they are there.

There is a man in your town who you always avoid. He is harsh, angry, and disagrees about everything. You have had arguments in the past, and you think it is wisest to avoid him. A severe storm causes the roof of his shop to collapse, and he is now left without livelihood. You could gather some men from your church to help repair and restore it, but he has never shown interest in the Gospel, and you may be met with insult and ridicule if you attempt to help.

A woman in your congregation was left by her husband for another woman. She has four children and no means to support them. Many people shun her because they assume she must not have been a good wife. She has no family and is all alone. She has even left the church due to her embarrassment.