

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 1

COMPASSION



PREPARATION

The following could be useful to help you with this discussion:

- Bible
- Candle
- Post-it notes
- Pens

OVERVIEW

There's a great story in the Bible where Jesus is moved with compassion for the large crowd who have been with him for three days and have no food (**Matthew 15:29-39**).

Concerned about their wellbeing, Jesus stepped in and performed an incredible miracle – involving the disciples and members of the hungry crowd in the process. With just seven loaves and a few fish to hand, thousands of people were miraculously fed in what has become one of the most famous stories of Jesus' ministry.

It's incredible to note how Jesus himself was 'moved' with compassion. This prompted him to act. If compassion was an important trait for Jesus, how much more so should it be for us?

This week's theme of compassion is a characteristic that's important for all Christians. It's what moves us to respond with concern, sorrow, and love when people are suffering.

The UK is a wealthy country but too many people in communities across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are struggling to afford the basics. Increasing need for the emergency support provided by food banks is a sign of this.

The Trussell Trust's food bank network has sadly seen year-on-year increases in the number of emergency food parcels given to people facing crisis.

Nine in ten households forced to use a food bank are facing extreme poverty, unable to afford the basics like food, shelter, and energy. The average weekly income after housing costs for people referred to food banks is just £50.

Some of the challenges that can contribute to people needing to use a food bank are:

- Problems with the benefits system (e.g. delayed payments, being turned down for disability benefits, and reductions in the value of benefits).
- Challenging life experiences such as ill health, eviction, divorce, or losing a job.
- Having exhausted support from family, friends, and other sources.

This knowledge challenges us to really think about what it means to show compassion. Can compassion lead us to tackle the long-term causes of a problem? How do we respond when suffering persists? What does it feel like to receive compassion?

We're going to spend some time now reflecting on our own experiences of compassion - whether that's giving or receiving it - and on what the Bible has to say about this topic.



READ

Let's reflect on some key Bible verses about compassion. Perhaps take a few moments of quiet time as we ponder God's Word and ask Him to guide us and speak to us through our time together.

TIP

You could light a candle or play some gentle worship music in the background while you reflect together on these verses.



PSALM 145:8-9

"The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."



COLOSSIANS 3:12

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."



1 PETER 3:8

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

DISCUSS

1 Think about a time you felt compassion for someone or a group of people.

- What prompted this?
- What did it feel like?
- Did you do anything in response?
- How did you decide what to do/not do?

2 Have you ever been aware of God's compassion towards you, or had compassion shown to you by someone? What was this like?

3 What examples come to mind from the Bible of where Jesus shows compassion? What would you say characterises the way he treats people who are suffering?

4 Which of the following do you think could be expressions of compassion? Can you pick one that stands out to you and say why you think it could be a way of showing compassion?

- Giving to charity
- Listening to someone
- Voting in an election
- Teaching a skill
- Campaigning for change
- Standing up for someone

5 The facts we heard earlier about poverty in the UK make for saddening reading. What do you think a compassionate response to this situation would look like? What kinds of compassionate action do you think are needed to help to change this and enable people to flourish?

TIP

You could split your group into smaller groups if that dynamic would work best. Perhaps appoint a spokesperson in each group to report back to the larger group for feedback afterwards.

PRAY

We are going to close today's session with a time of prayer.

You might want to ask God to give you a greater compassion towards others, or to give you a better understanding of your own need to be treated with compassion.

Pray about how you might respond compassionately to people experiencing poverty in your community. If there is a food bank in your area, pray that this would be a place where people experience compassion and are supported to find ways out of crisis.

TIP

Sometimes praying out loud can be awkward. Depending on your group's preferences, you could ask everyone to write down their prayer needs on Post-it notes and then the group could collectively pray for everyone's needs and suggestions.