



Lesson 1 Who is God Bringing to Our Church?

Opening Prayer

Loving Father, you love us with a love that knows no limits. You desire to see such love in our hearts toward others. Help us to understand that when you bring to us people with hurts, these are people you want to know your unfailing love. These are souls you want to be part of your family, your body of believers, your Church. Through the Spirit's grace and by the power of your Word, give us compassionate eyes that see where help is needed. Give us a desire to know those you bring into our lives and into our church for help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Jesus, the God of love, was moved with compassion when he saw people in difficult circumstances. The Bible tells us he had compassion for a widowed woman whose only son had died. Jesus had compassion for a large multitude that had followed him for three days to hear him teach, and now they were hungry. He was moved and had compassion for those who were blind and those who had a horrible skin disease. People needed help, and Jesus wanted to help. In each instance where he had compassion for someone, Jesus acted and put his love into practice to help them.

What situation in a person's life tugs at your heart so much that you really feel for them? Is it a particular illness? A death? An abuse? A lack of something? A life situation? Something the person destroyed? How would you finish this sentence, "It really hits me in the heart when I see someone who ..."? Take 45 seconds and write down one situation. Then share with those at your table how you finished the sentence. We'll hear a few samples.

Compassion is more than feeling for a person’s situation, putting ourselves in their shoes, or trying to understand another. Compassion includes taking action to help the person. The hurting people around us need our compassion.

Search the Scriptures

In the New Testament, people who hurt needed compassion. At your table, or on your own if you prefer, choose one of the three sections of Scripture (John 4:4-30,39-42; Acts 9:1-19,26,27; Luke 19:1-10), which are on the Scripture pages. Complete a case study of someone who was hurting and needing compassion. Fill in the chart for your case study. We'll hear samples from the groups. What we see from these case studies will help us recognize the need for compassion in our own congregation.

The person needing compassion was ...	
What were things the person needed help with? For what did they need the grace of God?	
How do you think what they did made sense to them?	
Where in the account is an acknowledgment that something bad was done?	

<p>What do you suppose were the feelings of the person who needed help? Put yourself in their situation.</p>	
<p>In what ways were they shown compassion (action taken)?</p>	
<p>Give examples of similar situations today that you may run into at your church.</p>	
<p>What needs to be done for that person (action taken)?</p>	

Bringing It Home

Read through the following passages. Use the passages to help you complete the following activities.

John 13:34

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

Ephesians 5:21

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Romans 12:10

Be devoted to one another in love.

Romans 12:10

Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with one another.

Romans 15:7

Accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God.

1. List two or more dangers for us and the hurting person if we don't recognize God has forgiven the hurting and they've paid a price for what they've done (prison time, rehab, something taken away from them). Take 90 seconds and answer the following.

Danger for us:

Danger for the hurting person:

2. Reflecting on the "one another" passages above, give a specific example of an action that demonstrates each type of compassion.
 - a. There is a time when punishment ends, and we express love and support and a new direction.
 - b. We aren't to see ourselves as better than someone else.

Living My Faith

Compassion involves action. Jesus acted for those for whom he had compassion. He lived a life of perfect compassion. His cross was the greatest act of compassion. Look for a way to be compassionate with someone hurting this week. Identify one or more people in your life that might be hurting right now. List one or more specific action(s) you will take to help one of these hurting ones whom Christ loves.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, compassionate Lord, your compassion for the hurting is a gift to us and an example for us. Without your perfect compassion, we wouldn't have you as our Savior. Without your perfect compassion, we would never see the model we strive to imitate. Grow our hearts to appreciate your compassion and lead them to desire not just feeling for others, but a longing to act with Christ-like compassion for hurting ones. In your name we pray, Amen.

John 4:4-30,39-42

⁴ Now [Jesus] had to go through Samaria.

⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"

¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹ "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵ The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to

him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (NIV)

Acts 9:1-19,26,27

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

¹² In a vision he has seen a man named

Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. (NIV)

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

⁹ Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (NIV)

The Tax Collector (Publicans)

But whether passing through town or country, by quiet side-roads or along the great highway, there was one sight and scene which must constantly have forced itself upon the attention of the traveller, and, if he were of Jewish descent, would ever awaken afresh his indignation and hatred. Wherever he went, he encountered in city or country the well-known foreign tax-gatherer, and was met by his insolence, by his vexatious intrusion, and by his exactions. The fact that he was the symbol of Israel’s subjection to foreign domination, galling though it was, had probably not so much to do with the bitter hatred of the Rabbinites towards the class of tax-farmers (Moches) and taxcollectors (Gabbai), both of whom were placed wholly outside the pale of Jewish society, as that they were so utterly shameless and regardless in their unconscientious dealings.

[T]he publicans also levied import and export dues, bridge-toll, road-money, town-dues, etc.; and, if the peaceable inhabitant, the tiller of the soil, the tradesman, or manufacturer was constantly exposed to their exactions, the traveller, the caravan, or the pedlar encountered their vexatious presence at every bridge, along the road, and at the entrance to cities. Every bale had to be unloaded, and all its contents tumbled about and searched; even letters were opened; and it must have taken more than Eastern patience to bear their insolence and to submit to their “unjust accusations” in arbitrarily fixing the return from land or income, or the value of goods, etc.

All wanted to make money of the poor people; and the cost of the collection had of course to be added to the taxation. We can quite understand how Zaccheus, one of the supervisors of these tax-gatherers in the district of Jericho, which, from its growth and export of balsam, must have yielded a large revenue, should, in remembering his past life, have at once said: "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation"—or, rather, "Whatever I have wrongfully exacted of any man." For nothing was more common than for the publican to put a fictitious value on property or income. Another favourite trick of theirs was to advance the tax to those who were unable to pay, and then to charge usurious interest on what had thereby become a private debt.

[T]he Rabbis in distant Palestine might be excused for their intense dislike of "the publicans," even although it went to the excess of declaring them incapable of bearing testimony in a Jewish court of law, of forbidding to receive their charitable gifts, or even to change money out of their treasury (Baba K. 10. 1), of ranking them not only with harlots and heathens, but with highwaymen and murderers (Ned. 3. 4), and of even declaring them excommunicate.

Edersheim, A. (n.d.). Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ (excerpts of pp. 51–58). The Religious Tract Society.