

INTRODUCTION

Compassion is the third devotional book for celebrating one of the five major endeavors in the season young adult life.

Calling
Conviction
Compassion
Community
Commitment

After seven years of interviewing young adults, I watched many negotiate pivotal challenges, which refined their core ideas and helped to identify and determine their life's intentions. As a result, young adults around the world chose the key passages of Scripture, stories, and characters in the Bible that resonate with their experience. For every devotional book, a group of young adults gathered together to pray, share, study, and cultivate fifty-two devotions. Each one was organized to think, reflect, share, and use for a small group or gatherings for discussion, as well for your own personal journey.

ON *COMPASSION*

Compassion is more than pity or awareness of the pain in this world—it's an active response that includes a combination of justice and love. Compassion is more than sympathy because with sympathy you might understand another person's struggle, but you can walk away hoping someone else will do something about the brokenness of humanity. Compassion is not empathy—although empathy gets closer to the mark. Sometimes you witness an individual who is suffering, and it reminds you of the pain from your experience, but you can't really feel what others feel. Compassion is even deeper than pity, sympathy, and empathy.

In the Bible, the word *compassion* indicates a physical and an emotional sensation. To be moved in your insides—the bowels, the internal parts—is compassion. It's a gut response. Whenever you see God showing compassion, you can be sure that there is an active solution coming soon. God, especially during the life of Christ, responds with compassion and changes life for the better.

My prayer is that God's heart will stir your heart to act with justice, love, and hope for others in this world.

1. HARASSED AND HELPLESS

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
—Matthew 9:35, 36

When Jesus looks on a crowd, He sees each face, knows each name, and numbers every hair on each head. Even before they gathered on this plain, He saw them one by one. Earlier in Matthew 9, Jesus was healing diseases of the body, but Matthew specifies that He was moved to help people who needed something different. Jesus understood where they would be led when they were lost in the world. He understood that finding meaning in life can stir a fire in someone that money or comfort can't compare to.

Picture how pack predators bring down their prey. It's rarely a single strike with teeth or claws; it's a barrage of terror. Basically, the strength of the pack tires the victim—it's a waiting game. You've read the faces of people who, because of one small attack after another, fall down because the fight is unrelenting and their strength has deflated like a punctured tire. But it's not just harassment by the calamities in this life. The verses also describe the crowd as helpless. This feeling is similar but adds another angle that means tossed up and thrown around, as a bull unceremoniously flings the strong and brave matador into the air like a rag doll—the power is unmistakable. Maybe you know someone who has felt powerfully struck down, someone who feels defenseless?

The crowds were described as being harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Compassion is an internal pain that requires a response. Every time Jesus feels compassion for someone, there is always a response—an action. When you witness someone being harassed, know that

having seen it requires an act of compassion.

INSIDE OUT

It's easy to find evidence of the pain and strife that comes with everyday life, but we should consider how it feels in the eyes of a parent.

- Does the pain end with an acceptance of the reality that life is hard, or does it encourage action?
- Is it appropriate to feel that internal pain and not follow with an action?
- Does not feeling that internal pain deserve guilt?

There are people we encounter every day who are lost. What is required of you to be a shepherd? What gives you the right to play that role?

Today, pray for those who are in need, who are powerless against their problems and who are picked apart from all around.

2. HEALING THE MASSES

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

—Matthew 14:13, 14

Jesus had just heard about the death of His cousin. He was grieved and took a boat to a quiet place to be alone. We all have our places of retreat, which bring comfort or security when we are upset. Jesus reached the shore only to find He had been followed. To most, this would be an exhausting sight. All prospect of your precious recuperation time would be gone, and you might be sorely tempted to lash out in exasperation, willing the crowds to disperse. But Jesus is no ordinary man. Scripture says His heart was moved for these people, and He spent time healing them. Isaiah wrote of the expectation that the Messiah would heal the sick and lame:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:5, 6).

While in prison before his execution, John the Baptist had doubts about whether Jesus was the Messiah.

He sent his disciples to ask [Jesus], “Are you the one . . . or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’ (Matthew 11:2–5). By replying in this way,

Jesus acknowledged the title.

Some would see the miracles of Jesus as intriguing, but for Christ they were much more than an opportunity to raise the opinions of cynics or impress those who had influence. “He had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matthew 14:14). Again, compassion is not a feeling, nor is it even sympathy or empathy. Compassion runs deeper—to your guts, where you feel it to the point of action.

Long after the Resurrection, the same spirit of compassion continued through the beginnings of the new church. “The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. . . . As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed” (Acts 5:12, 15, 16).

Today, can we heal with a word, a touch, with something we do, and sometimes with what we don’t do?

INSIDE OUT

As you go through your week, pray for strength and opportunity to be a source of healing for someone. Jesus left for solitude to have some intimate time with His Father; however, He was met with an opportunity to spread healing. You may be surprised by what will arise when you ask God to use you personally.

How can you be a source of healing in some simple way tomorrow?

3. HUNGER

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

—Matthew 15:32, 33

When students flock to places for free food, it's because they are broke, still growing, and they long to be at home. When are you most hungry? Is it at midnight, in the middle of the day, or maybe at breakfast time? When you get hungry, do you get cranky, silly, or super focused?

Jesus, after dealing with some really big issues of life, still cared about a most basic need that humanity craves: food.

If you could fix one problem on the earth, which would you choose to solve?

- Healing for the suffering
- Freedom for those who are oppressed
- Food for those who are hungry
- Education for those who are ignorant
- Community for those who are isolated and alone

Does it matter how you respond? For those who are older, a compassionate response is to come close to those who lonely. Education is the answer for people in the middle stages of life who lack skills. Kids want to fix the world with food—they know what it feels to be hungry, even if temporarily. Hunger is a by-product of being alive. At Creation, people were made to hunger for food and were empowered to satisfy that need. “Blessed are

you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied” (Luke 6:21). “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’ ” (John 6:35).

What are you hungry for at this time?

INSIDE OUT

As you eat, think about hunger and the appetite being satisfied. Consider other areas of your life that bring a similar sensation when filled.

Consider also the feeling you get when you supply something for someone else, such as food, community, or conversation. Reflect on how it must feel for God to do the same for us when we need it.

- Ecclesiastes 9:7
- Exodus 16:12
- John 6:27, 35
- Matthew 4:4

Today, pray to be fed in a way that will be everlasting. Pray that God will provide for something in your life that needs support and prepare for it.