

# Fruits of the Spirit

## Compassion

What do you think compassion is? Is it being nice to others? Is it being sympathetic? Is it being empathetic – being willing to listen to another and understand her or his plight? Probably, if we were to define compassion we would settle for these definitions. Unfortunately, while they capture part of what it means to be compassionate, they fall short. Compassion is deeper than these.

What is compassion? To look at the root of the word, it literally means to “suffer with” another person. When we have compassion for another, we are able to suffer with them in their pain. This is a very different approach from what most 21<sup>st</sup> century people try to do. Sitting with another in her or his suffering frustrates us. We want to fix their problems. We don’t want to sit idly by and do nothing but share their pain. We want to find solutions to their dilemmas. So, we give them advice on how to find a better doctor, counselor, or treatment. We try to tell them what to do or how to find answers. While these things can be helpful, true compassion often means being willing to stay with another in his or her suffering, even if we can’t do anything to relieve that suffering.

When we are truly compassionate, it often renders us helpless. We don’t necessarily know what to do. We listen patiently to the struggles of another, even if we don’t know how to alleviate them. We do small acts of love and kindness, even if we know it is inadequate to help them. Our hearts break when their hearts break, we struggle as they struggle, and we sit in life’s darkness with them, hoping that somehow our mere presence might shed a bit of God’s light upon them.

When we are truly compassionate, we often don’t know what to do. But we do anyway. To be truly compassionate with others means to become vulnerable. We may place ourselves in the path of another’s anguish, and then feel the brunt of their pain. This is the model of Jesus. He was compassionate to the poor, the outcast, and the hurting. His willingness to be with these people considered misfits by the powerful left him vulnerable. He did not surround himself with powerful people but with powerless people. But it was his willingness to be compassionate with everyone that created the conditions for God to break into the world through him.

Ultimately, to be compassionate means to share another’s suffering so that God can enter into that person’s life. God works through our compassion. It may not even be to relieve the suffering or to heal the person, although that can happen. True compassion simply creates the conditions for God to enter a person’s life and be a presence. We do what we can and *patiently* (which literally means to suffer) wait for God to work through us and others.

# Compassion

## Week Two

### **Centering Prayer:**

Find a quiet place and center your heart upon God by silently saying, “Help me reach out,” as you breathe in, and “with a compassionate heart” as you breathe out. Do this for a minute or two until you feel calmed and centered.

### **Prayer of Humility:**

O holy God of compassion, I am surrounded by the hurting, the helpless, the poor, the struggling, and the hopeless, yet what do I do? As Christ, you saw the hurting and the hopeless all around you, and you responded with compassion, grace, and healing. We see the same people but turn our backs. We try to justify our actions by asking, “What can I do? I am only one person.” But before you this is no true excuse. For at the very least you call us simply to care, to have compassion, and to do what little we can. Help us to become more compassionate and caring. Help us to reach out with Christ’s heart.

*Take time for silent prayer and reflection on your struggles with being more compassionate, and give to God those impediments that stand in the way*

*Continue in prayer:* Thank you God for patiently listening to me, and help me to receive your guidance as it comes in the voice of the Holy Spirit and my heart. Help me to listen in faith.

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:**

*Read Matthew 9: 35-39. Using your journal, reflect on the following questions:*

- *How did Jesus respond to those around him who were harassed and helpless?*
- *What can you do to reach out to those who similarly are struggling in their lives?*
- *What does this passage say about the compassion?*

### **Closing Prayer:**

Take time to offer prayers for yourself, others, the church, the world. Also, take time to thank God for all that God has done for you.

# Compassion

## Week Three

### **Centering Prayer:**

Find a quiet place and center your heart upon God by silently saying, “Help me form,” as you breathe in, and “a compassionate heart” as you breathe out. Do this for a minute or two until you feel calmed and centered.

### **Prayer of Humility:**

O Holy Lord, we live in an age of fear and alienation. We live in a time of distrust and anxiety, suspicious of the motives of others and reluctant to believe the best in others. We see violence on television, hear words of division on the radio, and read about scandals and plots in the papers and on the internet. It is so easy to become cynical, self-protective, and fearful. Yet this is not how you call us to be. You call us to be compassionate to others, no matter how anxious they make us. You call us to care about the poor, the oppressed, the hurting, the marginal, and the struggling, even if it puts us at risk. We are so slow to respond. Help us to form compassionate hearts so that we can reach out to others with your compassion.

*Take time for silent prayer and reflection on your struggles with being more compassionate, and give to God those impediments that stand in the way*

*Continue in prayer:* Thank you God for patiently listening to me, and help me to receive your guidance as it comes in the voice of the Holy Spirit and my heart. Help me to listen in faith.

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:**

*Read Luke 10: 29-37. Using your journal, reflect on the following questions:*

- *What does this passage say about being compassionate?*
- *What gets in the way of your being more compassionate?*
- *What can you do to become more compassionate in your life?*

### **Closing Prayer:**

Take time to offer prayers for yourself, others, the church, the world. Also, take time to thank God for all that God has done for you.

# Compassion

## Week Four

### **Centering Prayer:**

Find a quiet place and center your heart upon God by silently saying, “Soften my heart,” as you breathe in, and “and fill it with Your love” as you breathe out. Do this for a minute or two until you feel calmed and centered.

### **Prayer of Humility:**

The truth is that I suffer in my life, O Lord. My suffering may not be great on a world scale, where there are so many others who suffer worse than me, but still I struggle. Often I don’t even admit this to myself, for I have formed a hard callus over my wounds, but my struggles are there. I have many fears, anxieties, and private pains because of the wounds I’ve had in my life. I know that you ask me to turn these wounds into a source of compassion, but it is hard for me, Lord. I do not really want to face those in pain. My temptation is to walk away. Help me to soften my heart so that I can see others in pain and reach out with compassion and love.

*Take time for silent prayer and reflection on your struggles with being more compassionate, and give to God those impediments that stand in the way*

*Continue in prayer: Thank you God for patiently listening to me, and help me to receive your guidance as it comes in the voice of the Holy Spirit and my heart. Help me to listen in faith.*

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:**

*Read Hebrews 10: 32-39. Using your journal reflect on the following questions:*

- *What does this passage say the key is to forming a compassionate heart?*
- *Reflecting on the passage, what can you do to become more compassionate?*
- *How do you live this passage throughout your life in a practical way?*

### **Closing Prayer:**

Take time to offer prayers for yourself, others, the church, the world. Also, take time to thank God for all that God has done for you.