

# COMPASSION

Learning to Love Like Jesus



**Vernon Grounds**



*introduction*

# Compassion

Learning to Love Like Jesus

**If we had the compassion of Jesus,** it would change our families, churches, and neighborhoods for the better. It would allow us to give to others what all of us want for ourselves. It would enable us to fulfill the purpose for which we leave our footprints on this planet.

Vernon Grounds was one of the directors of

Our Daily Bread Ministries, a past president and chancellor of Denver Seminary, and a mentor to numerous men and women whose lives he influenced. He modeled better than anyone else I have ever known the compassion he wrote about in the following pages.

*Mart DeHaan*

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*one*

# The Meaning of Compassion

**watched from the corner** and squeaked a smile through the vise that had been squeezing my head all day. Wrapping paper and new toys cluttered the living room floor. “Do you like my train book, Grandma?” My son was busy making sure everyone saw and adequately appreciated his birthday presents. Having turned the last page of his

new train book for her, it was time to show another gift.

“It’s time for cake!” The phrase turned him around with the speed only an excited 4-year-old can manage. The hurried 180 caused his socked feet to slip on the smooth flooring. Face met floor. Teeth met lip. Liquids flowed. Clear from his eyes, red from his mouth.

Scooping him in my arms, I rubbed his back. His tears and blood damping my shirt and the party. With his head buried in my shoulder, we sat down in the rocking chair, his wailing loud and strong.

The teeth of my day-long gnawing headache were quickly blunted by fear and concern. “I want it to be better! I want it to go away!” With each sob, my own physical pain changed, sinking from my head to my heart. The next hours were spent in intermittent sobs with cold cloths held against a continuously swelling, but thankfully clotting, lip.

I wanted desperately to take it away. The best I could do was try to comfort. My son was injured and I hurt with him.

Experts differ over the precise meaning of terms



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like pity, sympathy, mercy, and empathy, but these are all aspects of compassion,<sup>1</sup> which we'll define as "love in action."

↗ **Compassion:** *n.* to sympathize: sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

Pity and sympathy are everyday words. They express how we feel when we observe another person experiencing pain in body, mind, or heart. If our connection with the sufferer is strong enough, we call it empathy. It's as if we somehow crawl inside the sufferer's skin, and the two of us merge into a sort of emotional oneness. Aroused by an encounter with need and distress, an empathic reaction elicits a heartfelt sense of concern. We see with their eyes and feel with their hearts. That sense of identification comes from the innermost center of our being.

In Colossians 3:12, the apostle Paul used a Greek term for internal organs to refer to a "heart of compassion" (NASB). By



*Paul [referred] to a "heart of compassion" (NASB). By focusing our attention, we receive insight different from any knowledge provided by logic or science; we experience a profound and intimate perception.*

focusing our attention, we receive insight different from any knowledge provided by logic or science; we experience a profound and intimate perception.



*two*

# Compassion in the Bible

## The God of Compassion

**M**ost humans believe in a power greater than themselves. If they don't know the true God, they are apt to create a god or gods to help them explain the mysteries of life. The god of human speculation is a god without a heart, who has no emotions, since emotion involves a change from one state of feeling to another. This kind of emotionless god is like an icicle that never melts. By contrast, the true God of the universe is

not merely a mind. He is not just thought or eternally thinking thoughts. The God of the Bible, while unchanging in his nature and purpose, is genuinely personal. We know this to be true because the Bible uses personal pronouns to talk about the true and loving God.

Because we are made in his image (SEE GENESIS 1:27), we can begin to grasp what God is like by using our own personhood as a clue to God's divine personhood. If we eliminate anything imperfect about ourselves and magnify everything we know about God to an infinite degree, we may begin to understand God's flawless personhood. The Bible also tells us that the one true and living God actually feels. He experiences a whole range of emotional reactions that are similar to our own. He laughs (PSALM 2:4), he grieves (GENESIS 6:6), he hates (PSALM 5:5), he is patient (NEHEMIAH 9:30), and he is compassionate (PSALM 103:8).

Scripture tells us God is eternal, holy, just, all-good, wise, powerful, and loving. And because he is loving, he is compassionate. That adjective points to a divine attribute that is like the trait we have in mind



*If Jesus is the self-revelation of the God of the Old Testament, then compassion will be embodied in him.*

when we characterize a human as compassionate. Eliminate God's compassion, and he is no longer God—the personal God who interacted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Eliminate compassion, and God is no longer the God who has experiences similar to our own states of joy, regret, grief, and merciful kindness. Eliminate compassion from God's nature, and Scripture must be rewritten, our understanding of the divine nature must be radically revised, and theology must be turned inside out. But compassion <sup>¶</sup> can't be eliminated. It must be given its proper place among God's attributes. He is the caring God. It follows, therefore, that if Jesus is the self-revelation of the God of the Old Testament, then compassion will be embodied in him.

¶ *As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. **The Lord is full of compassion and mercy** (JAMES 5:11).*

Old Testament believers were taught to be compassionate by God's deeds and declarations. And we certainly see God's compassion highlighted by the inspired authors of the Old Testament. King David included in a prayer, "But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (PSALM 86:15). Isaiah, the prophet, wrote: "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will

bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the LORD your Redeemer. . . . 'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, who has compassion on you" (ISAIAH 54:7-10). And the prophet Micah wrote, "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (MICAH 7:19). Texts like these give God's people an in-depth perception of God's heart.

## Living in Shalom

In the beginning, God established a world of wholeness and peace. Once that world was shattered by Adam and Eve's disobedience, God chose to reestablish the state of shalom through his chosen nation, Israel. If Israel had obeyed God's law of compassion, life in Israel for both women and men would have been the happiest place possible in our fallen world.

The Hebrew word for "peace," *shalom*, is so rich that it's almost untranslatable. Thus the society envisioned by the psalmist in Psalm 85:10, as a society of shalom, is an order of life characterized by joy and justice, piety and plenty, kindness and caring. But God's people failed to achieve God's loving ideal. Isaiah graphically depicted the moral and spiritual

sickness of that disobedient nation (ISAIAH 1:5-7). Divine punishment, administered in sorrowful grace, again and again overwhelmed Israel.

Although the nation lasted more than 450 years, eventually Israel was overtaken by invading empires. Thousands of God's people were taken captive and carried to another land. But God in his mercy allowed a remnant of Israelites to return from exile. They fiercely resolved not to repeat their ancestors' sinful failure. So began a long period of legalism that extended from roughly 400 BC to AD 400. Well-meaning rabbis, many of them devout and learned, developed a restrictive system of rules and regulations. At first these teachings circulated orally, but gradually their interpretations were written down. Life-giving laws that were once a delight and joy as well as the source of soul-enlightening guidance and blessing (SEE PSALM 119) changed into a rigid system of religious ritualism that Jesus denounced (MATTHEW 23:13-14).

To be sure, there were teachers of the law, rabbis, priests, and scribes who, as spiritual servants of God, proclaimed and practiced Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Likewise, many ordinary Israelites were models of virtue and piety, loving God and doing good to their neighbors. The Jewish people as a whole found life a heavy burden

under the oppression of their Roman conquerors and the rigid rules and structure of the Pharisees. Economically impoverished and spiritually ignorant, they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (MATTHEW 9:36).

Yet into this turbulent situation Jesus came as compassion incarnate. He made caring central in his ministry, sweeping aside any legalistic distortions and ethnic limitations, and focusing on the all-inclusive grace of God. A Jew by birth and a devout Jew by practice, Christ knew that his heavenly Father, the God of the Old Testament, is the God of compassion. Our Savior and Master modeled perfectly the compassionate neighbor-love that Paul later wrote about to the church in Corinth (1 CORINTHIANS 13), declaring it to be the greatest of all virtues.

↪ *“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have **love**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud” (1 CORINTHIANS 13:1, 4).*



*three*

## Compassion in the Life of Jesus

**J**esus came with his revolutionary message of God's kingdom—a kingdom accessible only by faith. It required loving obedience to the King and Father, as well as loving service to brothers and sisters in God's family and to every member of the human family. Love was its one all-inclusive law, a love that Jesus spelled out in his Sermon on the Mount (MATTHEW 5), and a love that fulfilled the Ten Commandments (ROMANS 13:10).<sup>¶</sup> The controlling attitude and behavior in this born-again society was to be compassionate, demonstrate love in action, and

to provide caring concern for others—all of which was modeled by Jesus himself.

↗ *“Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law**” (ROMANS 13:10).*

As God incarnate, Christ flawlessly reflected his Father’s nature, not only the divine holiness but the divine heart. Because he was sinless and most acutely sensitive to sin, Jesus sympathized with sinful people who were suffering the consequences of inherited depravity and personal sinfulness. He was aware that the multitudes he ministered to were made up of sinners, most of whom were spiritually weak and emotionally brittle. He realized too that in the crowds pressing around him were people whose faith was not burning brightly but was at best smoldering (MATTHEW 12:20). Gently, without judgment, Jesus tried to strengthen the weak and ignite their faith. One Old Testament text that he continued to emphasize was Hosea 6:6, where God said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings” (MATTHEW 9:13; 12:7). Jesus appropriated



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those significant words spoken by God himself to defend his tradition-violating compassion.

## Jesus's Compassion for Children

The people of Israel were a society that prized their children. Abortion and child exposure—leaving children outside to die—which were practiced by the pagan nations surrounding the Holy Land, were sinfully abhorrent to God's elect people. They hailed every birth with joy and gratitude. ▀

▸ *The high value that the Israelites placed on their **offspring** is shown in this passage. "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court" (PSALM 127:3–5).*

Growing up with brothers and sisters, Jesus, no doubt, had opportunity and responsibility to help care for his younger siblings. He thus acquired realistic insight into the characteristics and needs of children (MARK 3:31–32; 6:3). While the Gospels give no specific information about the family relationships in the home of Mary and Joseph, we have good reason to believe they were sensitive, caring, and God-fearing parents.

As his own attitudes were influenced by the attitudes of his parents, Jesus became a lover of children. During his ministry, he was delighted to welcome them whenever they clustered around him. He had an acute

understanding of their need for warm acceptance and adult help. Some of the children in the crowds that followed Jesus were acutely hungry or at least malnourished. Some were sick with all-too-common ailments. Some of them were deformed and blind. Some were in the grip of demonic powers (MARK 9:17–18).

The disciples of Jesus were annoyed by restless children and tried to push them to the outskirts of the crowds. They ordered them to be quiet or to go away. Nevertheless the children who sensed Jesus's love for them, clustered about, waiting to be picked up and held in his welcoming arms. Jesus embraced them and even prayed God's blessing on them, much to the surprise of his disciples, who he later rebuked (MARK 10:13–16). Not only that, he declared that children were to be welcomed in his name and that they—so dependent, so trustful, so teachable, so innocent—serve as models of the faith needed to enter God's kingdom (MATTHEW 18:1–5). He declared that anyone who causes a child to go astray will suffer severe punishment (MARK 9:35–37, 42).

➤ **Infanticide** was a frequent practice in the Greco-Roman culture before and after the time of Christ. A revolting example of the cruel indifference to one's own offspring is a letter from the first century AD, sent by a Roman husband, Hilarion, to his wife Alis. He expresses tender greetings yet instructs her, "If—good luck be with you—you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it live, if it is a girl, throw it out." Absolutely antithetical to this cruel callousness was the tenderheartedness of Jesus.

## Jesus's Compassion for Women

Israel was a patriarchal society in which women occupied a subordinate position and in many ways were treated as social and spiritual inferiors to men. It's difficult to generalize, because rabbis differed among themselves on this issue, and fathers differed in the upbringing of their daughters. Husbands also differed in how controlling and restrictive they were with their wives. Love and the personality differences of the Hebrew men in the lives of women created a wide variety of experiences. Yet it is undeniable that generally a woman's lot in that patriarchal society was difficult.

Not only was Jesus compassionate toward children, He was also uniquely compassionate toward **women**. Indeed, his attitude toward them and his relationship with them were revolutionary.

The **prevalent belief in female inferiority** found terse expression in the prayer offered by Jewish males: "God, I thank Thee that I was not born a dog. I thank Thee that I was not born a Gentile. I thank Thee that I was not born a woman."

In their younger years, daughters were often treated with suspicion. They were closely supervised in order to prevent anything that might be viewed as unchaste. When she began her menstrual cycle, a woman was unclean and needed purification (LEVITICUS 15:19–30). To touch a menstruating woman was to undergo defilement that required ritual purification.

Incidentally, a man was not to touch any woman except his wife, not even if she was his cousin and the touch accidental. When a girl reached a marriageable age, she was bartered by her father. After marriage she could be bartered by her husband. The female role was that of housekeeper, a time consuming and physically strenuous series of tasks. Her other role was that of childbearing with frequent pregnancies—the more children she bore, the higher a wife was held in esteem. After childbirth, a woman was regarded as unclean and in need of purification (LEVITICUS 12). If a wife displeased her husband, he could divorce her, but a wife was not granted the same right (DEUTERONOMY 24:1–4). If she was suspected of adultery, a wife could be subjected to the frightful water ordeal (NUMBERS 5:11–31), but no such provision was made for testing a suspected husband. A woman had no property rights. She could not serve as a witness. She could not share equally in worship. Singing and chanting were done by men exclusively while women listened in their own synagogue compartments. Ten men had to be present for a service to be held. Nine men plus one woman would not do! <sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> As a rule **girls were not taught** the Torah as boys were. Some rabbis went so far as to declare, “Let the words of the law be burned rather than committed to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery.”

Jesus, however, was sensitive to the needs of all people whether male or female. He exhibited an all-inclusive compassion that broke through the traditional gender restrictions and taboos. In order to heal her, Jesus allowed a woman, who had been bleeding for twelve years, to touch him. He didn't react with a shudder and he didn't follow the prescribed routine for cleansing. Instead of condemning her for such a male-contaminating act, Jesus gently led her to understand the difference between a belief in a kind of magical contact and a saving faith in divine grace (LUKE 8:42-48).

Another woman, a prostitute, approached Jesus while he was eating in a Pharisee's house. She poured precious ointment on Jesus's feet and washed them with her tears. Compassionately, Jesus, who knew her penitence and faith, defended that bold, extravagant action and sent her away with a benediction of peace (LUKE 7:36-50).

Jesus again disclosed his compassionate attitude toward women, and particularly those who were marginalized by their own sin, when he refused to engage in the stoning of an adulteress caught in the very act. Jesus, with pitying tactfulness, handled this sordid situation righteously yet forgivingly. He absolved the woman of her guilt, warned her against future temptation, and sent her away to live a changed life (JOHN 8:1-11). He didn't condone sin. Not in the least! Yet lovingly he offered pardon and hope to those

women whom society pushed aside as moral refuse.

Widows especially elicited Jesus's compassionate help. The Old Testament provided specific commands that widows were to be treated with kindness and respect (DEUTERONOMY 14:28–29; 24:19–21; 26:12–13; ISAIAH 1:17). Nevertheless some families may have neglected to provide companionship and care for their widowed relatives, thus moving them to the outskirts of the family.

A typical example of Jesus's attitude toward widows was his encounter with a funeral procession outside the city of Nain. A young man had died. He was the only child of his grief-stricken mother who faced loneliness and in all probability destitution. When Jesus saw the funeral procession and heard the mother sobbing, he was moved with compassion. "His heart went out to her" (LUKE 7:13). He didn't wait for any appeal. He acted. He touched the coffin, risking ritual contamination, and commanded the corpse to rise. Miraculously, the son obeyed as life returned to his body. Imagine the mother's gratitude as uncontrollable joy replaced inconsolable sorrow! (vv. 11–17).

In Jesus's sermon in Nazareth as he inaugurated his public ministry, he referred to a widow (an alien from Sidon) as an object of God's saving grace. That reference, made intentionally, not casually, contradicted the prejudices of his audience (LUKE 4:25–26).

The Sidon widow was not the only bereft widow whom Jesus used as an example to challenge his contemporaries and today's readers. In Jesus's day,

men had only a meager knowledge of God and a superficial fellowship with him. The plight of women was far worse. Therefore Jesus, in defiance of tradition, allowed them to be among his followers and actually engage in the service and support of his ministry (LUKE 8:1–3). Women, together with men, were being taught about God’s grace that rules out gender distinction. With compassion, Jesus told women, individually as well as collectively, the truth about God and his kingdom. He took time to instruct Mary of Bethany (10:39). Significantly, he gently rebuked Martha the sister of Mary, counseling her that it was better for a woman to learn about God than to be preoccupied with household chores. In so saying, he was turning the traditional role of women upside down.

At Jacob’s well, he gave a brief course in theology to a Samaritan woman. No wonder his tradition-bound companions were astonished. He was talking to a woman alone and in public! She was a despised Samaritan woman, someone of a race that pious Jews viewed as heretics! (JOHN 4:1–30).

Christ was motivated by one thing—compassion. He saw people in the whole gamut of their need. He



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saw people not in abstract categories such as males and females, Jews and Gentiles, aliens and citizens, adults and children. Jesus saw people as individuals made in God's image, each a member of God's human family and a potential member of his spiritual family.

## **Jesus's Compassion for Others**

As Jesus was compassionate toward women and children, so he was toward those on the edges of society. In first-century Israel, tax collectors and publicans were understandably despised and hated. They were Jews who acted as agents of the Roman government. Their task was to gather a specified amount of money from fellow Israelites with no exceptions. If they could extort anything beyond what was due, they pocketed the extra for themselves. So when Jesus wanted to stress the seriousness of sin in the church, he taught his disciples to treat the person as they would a tax collector if they didn't repent (MATTHEW 18:17). People must have been scandalized when Jesus ate with a tax collector and even invited one to be an inner-circle disciple! (MARK 2:13-17). They must have been furious when Jesus invited Zacchaeus, a notorious publican to receive God's redeeming, forgiving mercy! (LUKE 19:1-10). While telling a parable, Jesus must have perplexed his audience when a tax collector rather than a Pharisee received God's grace! (LUKE 18:9-14). The crowd must have been furious when Jesus, the friend of tax collectors and sinners (7:34),

declared that the tax collectors and prostitutes who had responded repentantly to the preaching of John the Baptist would enter into God's kingdom ahead of the self-righteous religious leaders! (MATTHEW 21:31–32). According to Jesus, divine compassion could and would change members of the ostracized out-group into members of God's in-group.

In his saving mercy, Jesus also broke through other barriers. <sup>↗</sup> He didn't hesitate to touch lepers who were to avoid all human contact (MATTHEW 8:1–4; MARK 1:40–44). He exercised his power on behalf of needy individuals regardless of their race. He healed the son of a centurion, an officer in Rome's oppressive army (MATTHEW 8:5–13). He healed the daughter of a pagan, a Canaanite woman (MATTHEW 15:21–24). He talked with a Samaritan woman and shared with her the liberating truth about God and the worship that was pleasing to God (JOHN 4). He chose a Samaritan as a model of God's own compassion—a Samaritan who had compassion on a victim of theft and violence (LUKE 10).

<sup>↗</sup> *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save **the lost**” (LUKE 19:10). To Jesus the “lost” in society included: children, women, widows, the lame, the blind, the demon possessed, the religious illiterate, those with leprosy, prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans, Canaanites, Gentiles, and Roman warriors. He touched the untouchable, fed the hungry, raised the dead. He did the unexpected and changed the world.*

Jesus welcomed the common people who gladly listened to him (MARK 12:37). The Jewish religious leaders looked down on the people with contempt because they were religiously illiterate (JOHN 7:49), but Jesus who was moved with compassion taught the crowd, fed them repeatedly, healed their sick, and freed those who were possessed by demons (MARK 5:1–17; 8:1–10). Jesus’s pity toward the poor in their sickness, in their hunger, and in their suffering emerges in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (LUKE 16:19–31) and again in his vision of judgment (MATTHEW 25:31–46). His heart and his arms were open wide, as they still are, to the lowest, the least, and the lost (LUKE 15).

## **Jesus’s Compassion for the Spiritually Needy**

Certainly Jesus was concerned about hunger, disease, and injustice, but he was more concerned about people’s relationship to God and their destiny in the world to come. When he read from Scripture in the synagogue at Nazareth, he quoted Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed, free to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (LUKE 4:18–19).

By quoting this passage from Isaiah, Jesus announced his twofold mission. First, he would literally help restore sight, give comfort, and liberate

those in bondage to destructive habits and addictive behavior. Second, he would bring spiritual renewal, enlightening the spiritually blind (JOHN 6), liberating the spiritually shackled, comforting the spiritually guilt-ridden and distressed.

While his pity took in the whole gamut of human affliction and his healing miracles provided relief, his concern was also spiritual. His society was permeated with religion, but the religion established by God for the blessing of his people had degenerated into a legalistic straightjacket. So he denounced, with fiercest vehemence, the Pharisaic traditionalism that took away the “key to knowledge” (LUKE 11:52) and left its soul-empty adherents in ignorance of God.

Jesus was shaken to the center of his being by his vision of their fate in eternity—exiled from the light, the love, and the life of God in darkness and despair forever. Again and again He begged the crowds to flee from the wrath to come. He spoke with a heart-melting eloquence, using the most vivid imagery to jolt the complacent, the indifferent, and the unrepentant out of their apathy. A contemporary rendition of Jesus’s words would be something like this: Don’t stumble zombielike into a destiny worse than the judgment poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah (MATTHEW 11:24). Don’t refuse the grace of the pardon-offering God who can destroy both body and soul in hell (MATTHEW 10:28). Such a terrifying

prospect filled Jesus's heart with grief. Even though Jesus ate and drank with sinners, and even though he shared in the happiness of wedding feasts, he never lost sight of "the dark line on God's face." He had entered our world as the embodiment of mercy, willing to die in order that lost sinners might not perish but have everlasting life.



*four*

## Examples of Christlike Compassion

**D**uring his years here on earth, Jesus went about doing good (ACTS 10:38). Whenever he encountered a need in individuals or multitudes, his concern motivated immediate action. He fed, healed, taught, calmed turbulent seas, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. In all he did and said, he set an example for his disciples to follow through the ages (1 PETER 2:21). They, like Jesus, were to be agents of compassion communicating by word and deed the message of God's saving grace. They were to serve as conduits for the outflow of Spirit-empowered helpfulness.

The best way to appreciate how Jesus's compassion has impacted history is to consider the lives of individuals

who have served as conduits of his caring love. They have been light in the darkness of a depraved culture and voices pleading for mercy and kindness. Here are just two illustrations of Christlike compassion.

**Jackie Polinger**, who was born and grew up in Great Britain, was a musician by vocation and a Christian by conviction. From the age of five she felt that God was directing her into missionary service. Eventually she found herself in Hong Kong. All alone, she began a compassionate work of witness in the notorious Walled City, where more than 50,000 people were crowded into a mere 6.5 acres. It was a refuge for criminals of every kind. Its streets were lined with heroin dens and opium dives, to say nothing of the pornographic theaters.

Jackie was only twenty years old, untrained and unprotected, when she moved into that nightmare and began to share the good news of Christ's forgiveness and love. She met with violent hostility. Yet slowly Jackie's unfaltering compassion, dauntless bravery, and Christ-centered preaching had an impact. Her ministry was dynamic and transforming, indeed it showed the very power of God for salvation. Through Jackie, Jesus continued his work of compassion.

**Mary Reed**, born in Ohio in 1858, was another conduit of Christlike compassion. Hearing about the plight of lepers in India, she decided to do what she could to alleviate their distressful situation and share with them the good news of God's love. She moved to the

city of Cawnpore where conditions were indescribably difficult. After 8 years of compassionate labor, she suffered a physical breakdown, so she returned home to recuperate. But after a while she returned to India and went to Pithoraterth in the Himalayas.

There in the mountains she came across a tragic group of five hundred lepers, subsisting by themselves, with no human agency concerned about their misery. Burdened for their helpless and hopeless situation, Mary could not forget those neglected sufferers. After another year of intense ministry, she collapsed and was sent back to her American home. Mary knew she had contracted leprosy. Yet, rather than being horrified, she saw it as God's gift, an answer to her pleas that somehow she might be permitted to work among those lepers in the Himalayas.

Back in India, Mary went to that leper settlement where no missionary had gone before. "I have been called by God to come and help you," she told the astonished sufferers. And there she remained as God's agent of Christlike compassion, providing healing, help, and hope to the once utterly hopeless outcasts. For 53 years she lived and served at Chanbag, dying there in 1943.

**These two servants** of the Lord Jesus are representative of a great host of his disciples, the majority of them unknown and unapplauded. But their names are known in heaven, and they have

received the only commendation they desired and deserved, their Lord's word of approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

If we have named Jesus as our Redeemer and Master, we are challenged to follow in Jackie's and Mary's footsteps as they followed in the footsteps of him who was compassion incarnate. As recipients of saving grace, we have the privilege of letting the love of Christ flow through our lives and out into the needy world. As we do that only then can some of humanity's needs be met.

Henri Nouwen instructs us how to be conduits of Jesus's compassion: "When I pray for the endless needs of the millions, my soul expands and wants to embrace them all and bring them into the presence of God. But in the midst of that experience I realize that compassion is not mine but God's gift to me. I cannot embrace the world, but God can. I cannot pray, but God can pray in me. When God became as we are... He allowed us to enter into the intimacy of the divine life. He made it possible for us to share in God's infinite compassion. And by grace we not only share the experience of God's compassion. By his enabling grace we can become the conduits of that compassion, following in Christ's footsteps as did a host of our spiritual forbears. But if we indeed are copying Christ, as Paul urged in 1 Corinthians 11:1, our compassion will not be limited to bodily needs. It will have soul needs as its supreme priority." 🌿



*Our mission is to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to all.*

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