

Acts of Compassion group study

Session 4 Understanding Compassion

1. Preparation: Read Chapters 7-9 in *Acts of Compassion*

2. Opening prayer

Pray that God will help you let go of negative attitudes and improve your ability to care about people who need compassion.

3. Warm-up question

When was a moment in your life when you received a big surprise? Did you enjoy the surprise?

4. Chapter summaries and key points

Chapter 7—Compassion and the brain

Compassion begins in the brain and is nurtured by watching for signs of distress in others. By paying attention to thoughts and signals, we can recognize a need for compassion.

- Manage distractions and focus on people.
- Create “buffers” between work and home.
- To calm stress or anxiety, look for something green.

Chapter 8—Self-compassion

Self-compassion calms your inner critic and helps you live a life of courage. It also involves letting go of the past—a place you no longer live. When you focus on what went right rather than your failures, you discover how to let go of the wrongs and move on with your life.

- Self-criticism promotes negative emotions that drag you down and keep you stuck.
- Story about Donna who couldn’t let go of the past.
- Practice “reframing” negative messages and create new beliefs about yourself.

Chapter 9—Receiving compassion

Receiving compassion with joy demonstrates value for the caring of others. Be willing to allow others to show compassion and be sure to appreciate their efforts. Showing gratitude validates the people who show you caring and kindness.

- Slow down and notice times when someone does a kind or compassionate act.
- Linda’s story about receiving compassion during recovery from breast cancer.
- Acknowledge cards and messages from people who show you compassion.

5. Scripture reading **Matthew 29:30-34**

When Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed them. But Jesus stopped and showed compassion for people that others might have ignored.

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”³⁰ The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”³¹ Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.³² “Lord,” they answered, “we

want our sight."³³ *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*³⁴

6. Discussion questions

Our brains sometimes get stuck on seeing the negative in other people or situations. How might compassionate thinking combat this tendency?

In Matthew 20:29-34, Jesus tells the story about the good Samaritan. In today's world, what would this story look like? Would it be a challenge to show compassion to the man who was robbed and beaten?

In recent years, have you shown compassion under fearful or uneasy circumstances?

Do you ever express compassion toward another even though you don't feel like doing it?

Which is easier, compassion for yourself or compassion for others? What does compassion for self look like?

What kind of words can you use to show appreciation when someone shows you compassion?

Actions for this week

Watch for a time when someone shows you compassion. Be extra intentional about expressing gratitude and appreciation. Write a few notes about what you did and how it felt.

Read Chapters 10-12 in *Acts of Compassion*.

Closing prayer

Ask God to help you be willing to show compassion in difficult situations. Ask for courage to offer someone help during those times.

Additional scriptures

If time permits, have someone read these scriptures, then talk about how compassion is described in each of them.

The importance Jesus gives to compassionate living: Matthew 25:35-40

How compassion strengthens a Christian life: 1 John 3:17

A few of the elements of compassion: Galatians 5:22-23