



# HOMEGROWN COMPASSION

THE WORLD NEEDS COMPASSION, AND IT BEGINS RIGHT WHERE YOU LIVE.

EARLY IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC I listened to some leading experts in medicine, economics, politics, and education. Each of them projected what life might be like by June 2021. The picture was vague and washed with shades of gloom, but tiny glimmers of hope still sparkled here and there.

Their conclusion really caught my attention. They pointed out that when life settles back into some kind of new normality, the test of our society will be how compassionate and supportive we have become toward those who are now poor, weak, bereaved, homeless, jobless, and more vulnerable than ever before.

Jesus is our ultimate example of compassion. His eyes noticed the people on the edges of the community and marketplaces, such as tax collectors, tired mothers, people who were rejected and distressed, and people with leprosy, paralysis, and blindness.

He didn't blame them for their problems or tell Himself that it wasn't His responsibility to help them. He was moved with compassion for those who were vulnerable and hurting and who needed His love, acceptance, encouragement, hope, and help. His compassion didn't just stay in His heart as a warm, fuzzy feeling—He acted on that love and gave others just what they needed: healing, forgiveness, respect, value, food, and protection from danger.

## **FAMILY FIRST**

The best place to develop our Christ-like compassion is in our own homes. When we practice compassion in our marriages and families, our “compassion muscles” grow ready for action. God calls us

## *Jesus didn't blame people for their problems.*

to care for our families first, because our closest relationships are always our greatest responsibility. Husbands and wives are called to cherish each other, and parents are called to cherish their children. When everyone in the family has been cherished and cared for, then we are ready to care for those outside the home (1 Timothy 3:4, 5).

Before we can show compassion to others, we must first experience God's loving compassion for us and our loving compassion for each other. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). The more love we pour into our spouse's heart, the more love is likely to flow back to ours. If we want our children to grow compassionate hearts, we first need to show them compassion.

Read Psalm 103 and let the loving picture of God soak into your heart and mind. Encourage everyone in your family to do something kind for everyone else in the family every single day. Ask how you can help each other to experience a small taste of God's incredible love.

### **NEW EYES**

The compassionate love that God showers on us also changes our perspective of others. We begin to see every person as a child of God, just like us. We are called to love and care for them the way that our Father God would want each of His beloved children to be loved. But compassionate eyes don't just see other people as God's children—they are constantly using their peripheral vision to notice the suffering of others, just as Jesus did.

Watch each person in your family. Look for any signs that they are struggling, sad, anxious, or distressed, and ask how you can help. Teach your children to notice other children who might be sad, hurt, or lonely. Role-play the skills of noticing when others need friendship and help, listening to what's bothering them, and caring for their needs.

### **COMPASSIONATE BELIEFS**

Another important aspect of compassion is the belief that it's my responsibility to help those around me who are hurting. As soon as I think that it's not my problem, or that their suffering is in some way their own fault, my compassion evaporates, just as it did for the priest and the Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. True compassion believes that it doesn't matter who you are or why you are suffering. What matters is that another human being is hurting, and my responsibility as a fellow human being is to relieve that suffering, even if it's just by being there.

Nurturing compassion starts in the home. Developing your child's kindness and compassion helps them to grow more like Jesus, strengthens their character, and creates the foundation for greater resilience and happiness. Create worships based on stories of compassion in the Bible. Notice those who are compassionate and kind in your children's reading books and in the news. Help them to find compassionate heroes and role models.



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### COMPASSIONATE FEELINGS

In order to be compassionate, we need to imagine and understand how other people are feeling. It means entering into their emotional world—being sad with them when they are sad and happy when they are happy (Romans 12:15). We need to let our hearts be moved by their emotions so that we can respond in the most compassionate way.

Take time around the dinner table, or at bedtime, to listen to each other's stories of the day. When we regularly ask other family members about their daily challenges, the saddest moment, the greatest joys, and any time when they felt afraid, it becomes easier to talk about emotions together. It also means that we're regularly monitoring each other's emotional well-being so that we can help if someone is being bullied or slipping into depression.

### COMPASSIONATE HANDS

Compassion is empty and useless unless it responds in wise, caring, and practical ways to the other person's needs. Jesus noticed that people were hungry and fed them. The good Samaritan cared for the injured man by cleaning his wounds, giving him water to drink, and taking him to a safe place. In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25), the sheep are the ones who demonstrate their care for others by providing for their practical needs.

Pray together about developing a compassion ministry as a family. You can find lots of kindness ideas at [ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/live-kind](http://ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/live-kind). Regularly involve children in family acts of compassion, and listen to their suggestions for helping others. Look for stories of children and teens who have started compassion projects in their local towns, and inspire the families in your church to become families of compassion. **J**

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