



SEVEN DAYS OF COMPASSION

A Devotion From Nazarene Compassionate Ministries



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INTRODUCTION

Our enthusiasm to serve others, to make a difference, and to participate in the Kingdom of God breaking in on earth begins in rhythms of spiritual growth that nourish our souls and support our actions.

Leo Tolstoy once wrote, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” Theologian Richard Foster later expanded on that idea when he said, “We have real difficulty here because everyone thinks of changing the world, but where, oh where, are those who think of changing themselves? People may genuinely want to be good, but seldom are they prepared to do what it takes to produce the inward life of goodness that can form the soul. Personal formation into the likeness of Christ is arduous and lifelong.”

We seek to be a holy people, growing into the likeness of Christ. We know we need to be changed ourselves before we can change the world. We must begin healing in our own brokenness before we can begin to heal broken systems. We have to be freed from sin before we can free others from oppression.

As we seek to be a people of holiness, we see in the life of John Wesley a deep commitment to personal spiritual growth alongside a deep commitment to the holiness of the community. We become truly holy in relationship with others, which implies the need for all people to be able to live healthy, whole lives.

This seven-day devotional follows the threads of compassion that are inherent in the character of God and, therefore, essential for the character of the Body of Christ. Each day follows a similar structure of prayer, Scripture, and reflection. The devotions also offer practical steps you can take. May these words encourage and empower you to join God’s redemptive work in our world by living out compassion as a lifestyle.



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OPENING PRAYER FOR EACH DAY

Holy God,

You are the Creator of all good things.
You offer mercy to all who call on Your name.
You show compassion for all who are hurting.
You free us all from bondage.
You enact justice on behalf of all the oppressed.
You reconcile all things to Yourself.
You are making all things new.

Guide us as we seek to know You better.
Sustain us in our pursuit of holy living,
personally and in community.
Shape us so we may love You with all we
have and love our neighbor well.

Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.
We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus and
in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

DAY ONE: ALL THINGS GOOD

GENESIS 1:1-5, 26-27, 31 (NRSV)

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. ...Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.



REFLECTION

From the very beginning of the Christian story, there is goodness. God brought the world and humanity into being and called them very good. With so much suffering, destruction, and injustice in the world today, it can be too easy to forget the original intentions for a healthy, thriving world where all people live in right relationship with God, one other, and creation. Focusing on God’s good design gives us a vision for co-creating a world of wholeness alongside the Creator.

A compassionate life begins by seeing the world through God’s lens. It begins when we see each and every person as someone who is made in God’s image and who is dearly loved by God. A compassionate life also requires us to step back and see ourselves as part of a world that was created by and is loved by God.

Author David Dark reminds us that “like the God in whose image people are made, people are irreducible. There’s always more to a person—more stories, more life, more complexities—than we know. The human person, when viewed properly, is unfathomable, incalculable, and dear.”

It's often easy to forget the image of God in others, to categorize people or to see them as other than ourselves. And it's easy to take God's creation for granted or, worse, to abuse it. Yet we are called to live as God's image in our world, and as we do, we will more easily recognize that image in others. We will more easily treat others with love and compassion. We will more easily live toward God's image of wholeness for God's children and God's creation.

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, You have made all things good. You have created a world anchored in love, and You have made us and everyone we meet in Your image. Please help us to see Your world and the people in it as You do, as made by and dearly loved by You. Give us strength to bear Your image to the good world You created. Amen.

LIFE STEPS



- Take a day to look for God's image stamped on others. Each time you encounter someone, look him or her in the eye and say to yourself, "This person is made in God's image."
- Take time to ask someone to share more of his or her story with you.
- Take a walk in nature. Observe the very good things God created and offer thanks.
- When you garden, farm, or work outdoors, consider how you are co-laboring with God.
- Pray for people living in areas affected by drought and famine, that God would provide ways to heal the land to productivity.
- Pray for vulnerable children living in poverty and children at risk of exploitation. Consider sponsoring a child as a way to remind that child that he or she is created in God's image and to help that child grow into the person God created him or her to be.



DAY TWO: COMPASSION

MARK 8:1-10 (NRSV)

In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd. They had also a few small fish; and after blessing them, he ordered that these too should be distributed. They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.



REFLECTION

It is easy to become dismayed, or even paralyzed, by large numbers. Caring for the 700 million people who live in extreme poverty globally sounds like an impossible task. Trying to provide food for the 795 million people in our world who don't have enough to eat seems futile. Providing safety for the 65 million people in our world who have been forcibly displaced from their homes seems like an unattainable goal.

A crowd of thousands must have looked intimidating to the disciples as well. They questioned how it would be possible to feed so many people with so few resources. But Jesus had a different response. Jesus had compassion for the crowd. Compassion means to suffer with. In Scripture, Jesus' compassion is described as a response that comes from the gut. Jesus identified with the people He met and intimately knew their hurts. His connection with their suffering led Him to action.

In the book *Compassion*, Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill, and Douglas Morrison describe it this way: “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

Jesus was the incarnate God, the Word made flesh, God’s compassionate love dwelling among people. Now, as the church we are called as the Body of Christ to continue to show God’s compassionate love to broken and hurting people in a broken and hurting world.



CLOSING PRAYER

Compassionate God, You came to live among Your people and to suffer with us in our pain. May we recognize that when one part of the Body suffers, we all suffer. Give us courage to respond with Your compassionate love to each person we meet and to be moved to action when we see needs. Amen.

LIFE STEPS

- Open your home to share meals with friends. Invite neighbors you might not know well, or consider hosting a refugee family who is seeking safety and stability.
- Reach out to someone in your community who feels lonely or overwhelmed—perhaps a widow or widower, a single parent, or the parent of a child with disabilities.
- Pray for people living in areas without access to safe water and sanitation, that God would provide a way for comprehensive WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) programs.
- Host a prayer service where you lift up local and global needs, cultivating a culture of compassion in your church. Ask what God can do with the resources you have, even if they don’t seem like enough.

DAY THREE: MERCY

LUKE 10:25-37 (NRSV)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

REFLECTION

The lawyer who asked, “What do I have to do to get eternal life?” knew the right answer: “Love God with everything, and love your neighbor as yourself.” If it had been a written exam, he would have earned a perfect score. But he wanted to know how much wiggle room he had in the actual living-it-out part. He was a lawyer who knew how to find loopholes, so he pushed the conversation further, asking Jesus to define “neighbor.”

Instead of a legal definition, Jesus gave him a story. In it, the understanding of neighbor is tied to the concept of mercy. God’s merciful character finds its expression in the ways we love our neighbor. Since God’s mercy is offered to us each and every day, as Lamentations 3 reminds us, we are called to offer mercy to others each day. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite intentionally cross over the road to avoid helping the injured man. Showing mercy required the Samaritan to come close to the injured man—to see him. In the moment he truly saw the other man, he was moved to a compassionate response.



In *Beyond Words*, author Frederick Buechner writes, “When Jesus comes along saying that the greatest command of all is to love God and to love our neighbor, he too is asking us to pay attention. If we are to love God, we must first stop, look, and listen for him in what is happening around us and inside us. If we are to love our neighbors, before doing anything else we must see our neighbors. With our imagination as well as our eyes, that is to say like artists, we must see not just their faces, but the life behind and within their faces. Here it is love that is the frame we see them in.”

Like the priest and the Levite, we miss out on God’s call to show mercy if we take steps to isolate ourselves from the suffering of others. And like them, we miss out on the opportunity to love our neighbor when we are too preoccupied to pay attention or when we refuse to come close enough and stay long enough to truly see.



CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful God, Give us eyes to see Your face in the face of those who suffer. Grant us the strength to embrace the pain and resist sheltering ourselves from uncomfortable situations. May we follow in the steps of the Good Samaritan who truly loved his neighbor. Amen.

LIFE STEPS

- Practice affirming others’ dignity by making eye contact with people who are experiencing homeless, asking for money, or otherwise in need.
- Volunteer your time at a hospital, health clinic, or senior care facility. A warm smile and a listening ear can play a part in the healing process.
- Pray for children around the world who are affected by HIV and AIDS, that God would provide ways for them to gain opportunities for a healthy future. Pray for comfort for parents who needlessly lose children to diseases like malaria, and pray that God would use churches to provide prevention strategies such as mosquito nets.
- Develop a congregational plan for how to respond to the needs that come through your doors. Partner with other local churches to offer multiple ministries in your community.
- As a church, consider supporting a local refugee family by gathering needed items for their new home and supporting their job search, education, and settlement into your town.
- Pray for children who are displaced and traumatized because of violence and persecution. Pray for Nazarene schools in the Middle East that are providing education and support to children living as refugees.

DAY FOUR: FREEDOM

EXODUS 3:7-12 (NRSV)

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

REFLECTION

God's story is one of freedom. From the Exodus story to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God's compassionate purpose for His people is freedom.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann explains, "Exodus has given us a model to understand that the key problem in human experience is the problem of oppression, embodied here in the Pharaoh. ... And the Passover, our memorial activity of the exodus, centers in the affirmation, 'Once we were slaves and now we are free.' ... The Gospel stories may indeed be seen as a new exodus recital, for time after time Jesus leads people out of old, secure oppressions into new wildernesses of freedom."

In our world today, more than 20 million girls, boys, women, and men are living under the oppression of modern-day slavery through human trafficking. God's plan for them is freedom and wholeness, not bondage. Hundreds of millions of people are living under the oppression of poverty, unable to experience the fullness of life. God's plan for them is freedom and wholeness. Tens of millions of people live under the oppression of war, conflict, and persecution. God's plan for them is freedom and wholeness.

Oppression is found in other circumstances, too. For those who find their sole value in wealth and work,



God wants freedom and wholeness. For those living under the weight of busyness and stress, God offers freedom from striving. For those enslaved by sin and guilt, God offers forgiveness and freedom.

When Jesus announced His public ministry in Luke 4:18-19, He chose these words from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus came to bring freedom for all—particularly for those who are poor, those who are captive, those who are blind, and those who are oppressed. This is also the ministry Jesus left to those of us who follow in His ways, those of us who are part of the Body of Christ here on earth. As author Bethany Hoang writes, “Our own personal freedom and reconciliation in Christ is not the end of the story. We are free so that we can be a part of God’s work of setting others free. ... Our lives are meant to proclaim that Jesus has broken our spiritual chains, and in this proclamation we join Jesus in the simultaneous proclamation of good news to the oppressed, breaking literal chains as we do.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God of freedom, we give thanks that You heard the cries of the oppressed and freed Your people from slavery to Egypt. And through Christ, You have freed us from bondage to sin. Through Christ, You free us from oppression. May our ears be listening for similar cries in our communities around the world, and may our freedom propel us toward compassionate action that leads to the freedom of all people. Amen.

LIFE STEPS

- Pray that God would reveal to you things keeping you in bondage that you may not be aware of, and ask God to release you from those things.
- Thank God for the freedom found through Christ, and pray that God would show specific ways you can offer freedom to others.
- God gave the Sabbath in part as a reminder that God’s people are no longer slaves. Celebrate the Sabbath, thanking God that your value is found not in work but as a child of God.
- Come together as a church to pray for an end to the evil of human trafficking, or host an awareness workshop at your church on human trafficking and the ways your church can engage in the fight for freedom. (Visit ncm.org/trafficking for resources and ideas.)
- As a congregation, ask: How can we bring Your good news to the poor? How can we proclaim release to the captives? How can we proclaim recovery of sight to the blind? How can we help the oppressed go free?



DAY FIVE: JUSTICE

ISAIAH 58:6-9 (NRSV)

*“Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?”*

*Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

REFLECTION

According to the words given to the prophet Isaiah, it’s good to faithfully show up at worship services, spend hours reading our Bibles, and regularly pray and fast. But if the way we live our lives does not lead to active care for others, then God is not pleased. The act of fasting described in Isaiah 58 looked good on the outside, but it still was not acceptable to God. That’s because the actions that accompanied the fasting included oppressing workers for personal gain, fighting and quarreling, and striking with a “wicked fist” (verses 3-5).

God is concerned with the wholeness of all people. The fast that God chooses is one that brings freedom and loosens the bonds of injustice. The justice God calls us to is one that is relational; God’s justice is fundamentally a restorative justice that puts the world and relationships right.

Sharing bread here is more than handing out food to those in need; it’s a picture of breaking bread together, of sharing a meal in relationship. Bringing in the “homeless poor” is more than providing a bed and a blanket; it’s showing hospitality to those who are cast out, those who are unable to care for themselves, those who are seeking refuge. Covering those who are naked is more than cleaning out our closets and giving our worn-out, cast-off clothing to



a charity; it is to offer a decent clothing—and the dignity that comes with it—to those wearing ragged clothing or clothing that won't keep them warm. Not to hide from your kin is more than answering the phone when a family member calls; it is being truly available to your family and generously offering help when they need it.

True holiness is a love of God that leads to living in God's ways. This love leads to a change of heart that affects how we treat others. It is impossible to love God and not love others. The words found in 1 John 4:20 puts it bluntly: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."

Living as the holy people of God looks like enacting God's righteousness through action. Our personal lives and our communities should reflect God's concern for other people, especially those who are hungry or poor or oppressed. Yet without compassionate love for others, even these good acts could easily become empty acts done out of a sense of obligation rather than love.

God is pleased when sharing becomes part of who we are, rather than acts of charity on a religious checklist. God is pleased when we begin to see others as people who are made in God's image and when our love for God results in compassionate efforts to loosen the bonds of injustice for others.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Justice, we want to please You in our acts of worship, and we want our love for You to change the way we relate to others. Help us strive to be channels of Your love that break the chains of injustice in our world. Use us to restore Your world and set relationships right. Amen.

LIFE STEPS

- Spend time in prayer, asking God to show you ways that your actions may be contributing toward injustice for others. Ask God to reveal specific ways you can share and act in a way that ensures others have what they need, too.
- As a church, consider hosting a community dinner where you break bread together with neighbors who may be in need.
- If you live in a cold area, consider hosting a coat and sock drive to benefit neighbors in need. Request new or gently used items.
- Next, consider ways your church can support ministries that help people gain employment so that they can purchase their own food and clothing with dignity.



DAY SIX: RECONCILIATION

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21 (NRSV)

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”



REFLECTION

Not only does God offer reconciliation for us through Christ, but God also invites us to be reconcilers in the name of Christ to the world. God entrusts us with this ministry of reconciliation and calls us to be ambassadors, or representatives for Christ. In such a divided world, this ministry is a powerful witness to the character of God. As the church reaches out to foster right relationships among its members, its community, and across the world, our actions reflect the reconciliation initiated by God.

Reconciliation is restoring a relationship or bringing two together again. Reconciliation creates a new starting point, a new opportunity, a new relationship.

In *Radical Forgiveness*, author Brian Zahnd explains that reconciliation does not undo past wrongs, but it does restore relationships. For example, in the story of the Prodigal Son, the inheritance the son had wasted could not be restored, but the broken relationship could be. “The past cannot be fully undone,” he writes. “Every past wrong cannot be made right. What can happen is reconciliation. Not cheap reconciliation, but the costly reconciliation based in repentance and grace. This is what God calls justice.”

In the same compassionate way God offers us forgiveness and grace, we are to offer forgiveness and grace to others. In the same way God seeks to reconcile to us, we are to reconcile ourselves to others.

Zahnd writes, “It is forgiveness alone that has the capacity to break the chains of injustice and give us the possibility of a new future—a future unchained from the past and free of bitterness. ... Unforgiveness has a devastating way of eliminating new possibilities. Everything remains chained to the past, and the suffered injustice becomes the single informing event in the life of the embittered soul. But the choice to forgive breaks the tyranny of injustice and the bitterness it seeks to create.”



CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, in Your compassion, You have reconciled us to Yourself so we can be in right relationship. Thank You for forgiveness and new beginnings. May we prove worthy of the ministry of reconciliation You have entrusted to us. Help us to forgive, even when it's difficult. As ambassadors for Christ, help us to restore relationships and to hold on to the hope of newness. Amen.

LIFE STEPS

- Do you have a broken relationship with someone in your life? Make an effort to reach out. Ask for and offer forgiveness.
- Evaluate your own perspective and any bias that may prevent you from being truly reconciled to those who are different from you.
- Read the stories of people whose experiences are different from your own—stories of displacement, persecution, poverty, and so on—and ask God to help you see them in new ways. (Find stories of God's work around the world ncm.org/blog.)
- Build a relationship with someone who comes from a background that is different from your own (faith, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.). Ask questions, listen, and share your stories together.
- Consider a new kind of mission trip that values partnership and reciprocity. If your church is in a community with financial resources, consider hosting a missions team from an area without those resources; instead of spending money to travel yourselves, consider using your resources to bring the other group to your community.

DAY SEVEN: ALL NEW THINGS

REVELATION 21:1-6 (NRSV)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I hear a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; Mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

REFLECTION

God, who in the beginning created all things good, is now at the end making all things new. God’s ultimate vision is restoration. The suffering and injustice of our broken world find healing and wholeness in the eternal Kingdom. We have been invited to participate in this renewing work as we live compassionately and pursue God’s ultimate vision through relationships with God and with others.

God is not waiting to make all things new one day far from now. God is making things new today. And our actions today matter into eternity. If we allow, God will use our compassion to make things new. If we allow, God will use our efforts at bringing about justice to make things new. If we allow, God will work through our reconciled relationships to make things new.

In *Surprised by Hope*, theologian N.T. Wright says, “The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing close up, in the present, what he was promising long term in the future. And what he was promising for that future and doing in the present was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose—and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that large project.”



CLOSING PRAYER

God, You are the Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the End. All life starts from You and ends with You. Give us glimpses of Your ultimate vision so that we are moved to join in the present renewal. May we partner with You as You usher heaven into earth. Amen.



LIFE STEPS

- Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal God's vision of the Kingdom to you.
- Consider the ways God has brought newness in your own life, and offer thanks.
- For an entire day, pay attention to your interactions with other people. How can God use your relationships to offer restoration and newness?
- Commit to pray the Lord's Prayer each day for a month and see what God reveals to you about specific ways you can participate in the building of God's Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.
- Come together as a church to study teachings on Kingdom values to encourage spiritual growth and compassionate engagement in your community and around the world.



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