

## **Xtreme Lenten Series: Compassion**

### **March 1, 2020**

**Overarching theme:** In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

**Instructions:**

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

**Core Point:**

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

**Start point:**

Lent 2020, the period of 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays), begins on Ash Wednesday, February 26, and ends at sundown on the Saturday, April 11, before Easter. The penitential season of Lent is a season of the church year which commemorates the forty days Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness before he began his public ministry.

During Lent, we enter into a season of preparation, which includes self-reflection and repentance. Ideally, we seek to literally "turn around" and realign our lives and focus towards God. Most people think of Lent as a time to give up things, however, it can be a time to take on new life-giving practices. Lent helps rid ourselves of distractions and our own selfish desires to focus more clearly on God. For example, a person may give up sweets for 40 days and when the temptation to eat a sweet hits, that person instead prays to God for strength.

Practically speaking, Lent is a good way to form a new habit that helps an individual to live and love as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. I used to hear that it takes 21 days to form a new habit. Actually, for me, it took longer. Only you know how long it takes you to form a new habit. So, the intentional practice of incorporating a new Godly habit during Lent allows time for that habit to become a part of your life.

During the Sundays of Lent, we will focus on the following practices: Compassion, Prayer, Simplicity, Forgiveness, Servanthood, and Discipleship.

### **Book of Matthew:**

The Gospel of Matthew was most likely written sometime in the decade of 50 A.D. The Gospel narratives were probably written to help people remember the story from actual witnesses. Most likely, decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the stories about Jesus had morphed into half-truths. Each Gospel had many similar stories but with a unique perspective from the eye witness. The author, Matthew, was most likely one of the disciples and worked as a tax-collector. Matthew, because of his vocation, would not have been held in high esteem. Much like how we view the IRS in the U.S., we love the IRS, right? Matthew's Gospel appears to have the Gospel of Mark as a basis of his writing. Matthew's writing distinctively reveals Jesus as one coming from the Jewish line as seen in the opening genealogy and other statements throughout the Gospel. The writing was directed to the Jewish Christians and tried to help the community see Jesus as the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament.

### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

Matthew 9:35-38 (NRSV)

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Philippians 2:1-3 (NRSV)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,<sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

### **Questions to ponder about the passages:**

What jumps out at you from these passages?

What do you see is common to all three passages?

What is compassion?

What does it look like for the Lord to show compassion?  
What is the desired result in each of the passages?

**Commentary:**

This first week of Lent, we are going to focus on compassion. In the Matthew passage, we see Jesus looking over the crowds before him and feeling compassion. In the Corinthian passage, we see God as the Father of compassion. In the Philippian passage, compassion is one of the qualities needed to live in humility, while regarding others as better than yourself.

The Greek word for compassion in Matthew and Philippians is derived from the root word “splagchnon”. The meaning actually refers to the upper viscera of the body such as the heart. So the meaning is to feel deeply, or intensely from the heart or bowels of the body about someone, or something. It can also be translated to the idea of pity. Compassion in 2 Corinthians is rooted in a different Greek word, “oikirmou.” The meaning is similar in regards to the other two passages, but with less intensity. This word would not have the depth of feeling that is all the way down in the bowel of the individual, or to the depth of soul.

Regardless of which word is used, the meaning is still the same, “Have the same compassion as God in your daily dealings with others.”

**Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

What does it look like for us to show compassion?  
How do you experience the comfort of God in your trouble times?  
How do you consider others better than yourself?  
What stops you from feeling compassion, or expressing compassion?  
What benefit do you think would be the result of you expressing compassion?  
Who do you know this week that needs a witness of God’s grace via your compassion?

**Activity of for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week:  
Matthew 9:37-38 - Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”
3. Pray every day this week at 12 noon for laborers to rise up from FUMC, Coppell to go out and minister to new people in our community.