

OPEN MY MOUTH GROUP STUDY 2



God's Christian compassion can be a means to share our faith with our nonbelieving friends.

Objectives

1. To understand the difference between Christian compassion and non-Christian compassion.
2. To understand that every Christian, regardless of his or her experience, is capable of compassion and sharing Christ with others.
3. To arm group members with ways to invite nonbelieving friends and to start conversations around the topics of compassion and justice.

Introduction

Remind group members of the previous discussion about God's heart for every human because each is created in His image. As Christians we are concerned for the poor and hungry but not because of their position compared with us. Rather, we recognize that the poor and hungry are also made in God's image. We help the poor and hungry in order to restore their place as image-bearers of God. This act of restoration is what we call justice.

Say something like: *As we think about how we're about to participate in that justice, I wonder if God wants it to affect more than just us. Is there a way that we can open our mouths to inspire others not only to join our cause, but also to meet with the One who motivates it, Jesus?*

Let's begin with a case study.

[Share with the students a story that illustrates non-Christian compassion. Here's an example.]

Bill Gates is one of the world's most famous philanthropists. He cofounded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which raises billions of dollars per year to help fight poverty around the world. Current projects of the foundation include fighting polio, HIV and other diseases in developing countries. The foundation also funds agricultural development in Africa and improved education for the impoverished all over the world. The foundation has the support of some of the largest corporations in the world.

Bill Gates chose to work part time in his role at Microsoft in order to devote most of his time to the Foundation.

[Discuss the following questions.]

- *How would you evaluate Bill Gates' compassion toward the poor and vulnerable?*
- *What is noble about his compassion?*
- *Is what Bill Gates doing compassionate in the eyes of God?*

This case may leave us with a very important question: *What does it mean to have compassion?* We know that compassion is a universal experience: Every human experiences it and is capable of demonstrating it. *Yet, is there a difference between Christian compassion and non-Christian compassion?*

Let's be clear from the beginning. The compassion demonstrated by Bill Gates is noble. Gates' interest in helping the poor stems from compassion. He has seen individuals who suffer from poverty and hunger in the world, and now he wants to utilize his resources to help as many people as he can. His work is good and necessary.

Let's also make a couple of observations. Most likely, his compassion centers on the suffering individual. The non-Christian feels a need to help, but it's all in relation to where the non-Christian is. "Compared with me, this person is poor, underprivileged, etc." All too often this kind of compassion can lead to a "hand up" [gesture as if you're helping up someone who has fallen down]. In other words, "I'm the wealthy one giving to you, and you are poor because you're not like me. My charity is designed to make you more like me."

Other times it's just a "handout." As the wealthy one, you as a poor person have nothing to give to me. I'm not really interested in a relationship with you. I just want to give you some money and move you on your way.

There's no doubting the generosity of Bill Gates. But this example should prompt us to take a careful look at ourselves. Could our acts of compassion be simply non-Christian compassion in the name of Jesus? We have all at some time in our life not treated the poor with dignity.

Lesson

Those who believe in Jesus have a different definition for compassion. Our demonstration of compassion is fundamentally rooted in the compassion God has shown to us. We can see this based on the story of Andrew in John 1:35-42:

- Andrew follows Jesus because he recognizes from John's declaration that Jesus is "the Lamb of God," the One Who God will use to have compassion upon man and take away the sin of the world. [See John 1:29.]
- In ancient Israel, if a student wanted to learn from a rabbi, he had to ask the rabbi permission to study under him. Andrew and the other disciple asked Jesus for permission to study under him because they recognized Jesus for Who He really is.
- The first thing Andrew does when he receives Jesus is to tell his brother Peter about the Lamb of God. Andrew brings Peter to Jesus and Peter is received by the Messiah.

See how Andrew receives compassion. Notice Andrew's experience. He recognizes that Jesus is the Lamb of God, and he pursues Him. Jesus invites him to come and stay with Him. Andrew is invited into a relationship of being Jesus' disciple! This invitation is one to come and follow Him.

If we have chosen to follow Jesus, then our stories are similar to Andrew's. We might have gone astray, but God demonstrated compassion on us by taking on the iniquity of our sin through Christ [Isaiah 53:6 or Romans 5:8]. Jesus recognizes that we are like sheep without a shepherd and has compassion on us [Matthew 9:36]. Paul sums it up in another way — though He was rich, Christ became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich [2 Corinthians 8:9]. When we respond to the call of Jesus, we acknowledge our neediness, our brokenness, in short, and our own poverty. Jesus is the only One Who can understand our poverty and restore us to the wealth of His kingdom. We understand what compassion is because God has shown us great compassion!

Andrew invites others to experience the compassion of God. There's one more thing about Andrew's response to Jesus. The writer tells us that Andrew invites his brother Peter by saying that Jesus is the Messiah [1:41]! As he experiences Jesus' compassion, he invites others to come and experience that compassion as well. Andrew has compassion on Peter and leads him to Jesus. In following Jesus, our idea of compassion takes on deeper meaning. Whenever we act in compassion, we acknowledge that God has demonstrated compassion to us first.

Andrew, the brother of Peter, is barely spoken about in the New Testament. He always seems to take a second seat to his brother, "the rock," the leader of the early Church. However, can you imagine what the history of the early Church would look like were it not for this seemingly quiet man, Andrew? What is so outstanding about the story of Andrew is that it does not take him long to serve Jesus. Andrew recognizes that Christ is the way by which God will make His justice and compassion known to the world. He invites Peter to experience this compassion. Peter accepts Andrew's invitation and joins Jesus in this ministry.

Likewise, could God be calling us not only to respond in compassion to the injustices of the world (such as hungry and vulnerable children), but also to invite others to come and experience the compassion of God? Here's the opportunity: We can invite others to participate in an act of compassion and it can also be an opportunity for them to meet the God of compassion, Jesus Christ!

But how do we do that? Here are key concepts to remember as we invite others to take part in the cause helping others and Christ's compassion:

- **Availability:** Andrew made himself immediately available to share Christ's compassion with others. He was a simple fisherman and a new believer who knew little about God's will. Nevertheless, he understood when and where he needed to be in order to share the good news of God's compassion to others. We must make ourselves available to God as examples of His compassion. Do not be afraid to share with friends and family members the compassion God has for you and your desire to make His compassion known to all the nations!
- **Willingness:** Andrew was willing to not only go and tell his brother about Jesus, but also to bring his brother to meet Jesus. Andrew's willingness to share Jesus does not end with his brother. When a group of Greeks came to ask the apostle Philip if they could meet with Jesus, Philip enlisted Andrew for assistance. Andrew convinced Philip to come with him and tell Jesus about the Greeks [John 12:20-22] because he knew that Jesus' compassion extended to the Greeks as well. Andrew was constantly inviting outsiders into the community of Christ.

- **Boldness:** Once Andrew met Jesus, he did not hesitate and left his fishing nets behind to follow his leader. Like the apostles we need to be bold and break out of the monotony of our everyday lives. It is our calling to share Jesus with others. This does not mean that we make ourselves an inconvenience, but we can call people to a better story.

Closing

It is my hope that you will invite others, even nonbelievers, to participate in activities related to learning about global poverty. In doing so, I hope you will be able to have conversations about who Jesus is, and why God's heart is motivating you to care for the poor and vulnerable. You may even have an opportunity to share how God has shown incredible compassion to you in your poverty!

What kinds of questions or conversations related to helping others could lead to a spiritual conversation? Let's think of a few, and in your small groups, take some time to really script out some answers that might lead into a more spiritual conversation. Be ready to share your testimony and even the gospel!

[You could solicit questions from students if time allows.]

1. *Why are you helping others in need?*
Do you think it matters?
Does it really make a difference?
2. *Who are we giving to?*
What do they do? Why?

Do not feel the need to explain God's heart and compassion to a nonbeliever all at once. Through experiencing a community of believers, a nonbeliever can experience God's compassion for himself or herself.

It is also important that we encourage one another as Christians. Remember, Andrew did not open his mouth on his own; he would eventually have 11 others who labored with him to make Jesus known. Likewise, we have the opportunity to open our mouths together to remind each other of Christ's compassion.

Finally, we need to take the time for prayer and reflection. Is our compassion simply a one-way relationship between ourselves and the impoverished? Remember the larger picture: the justice and compassion God desires to make known to all of us.

Small Group Questions

1. What do you think it means to have compassion? How do you think you demonstrate compassion to other people?
2. What are some of your fears/concerns about inviting others to join you in your efforts to help others?
3. What makes you excited about inviting other people?
4. How would you answer these questions in a way that could lead to a spiritual conversation/testimony/gospel presentation?
 - Why are you doing this?
 Do you think it matters?
 Does it really make a difference?
 - Who are we giving to?
 What do they do?
 Why?