



In partnership with

Jubilee+

# COMPASSION

Reflections and ideas for practical action, by Jubilee+



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Bible references throughout this booklet have been taken from the NIV version.

# INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to have commissioned Jubilee+ to write this booklet on Compassion for local churches, which includes theological reflections alongside ideas for practical action.

The Trussell Trust is based on, shaped, and guided by the Christian values of justice, compassion, community and dignity. These values have strong roots in Christian teaching and practice, whilst also being accessible and meaningful for people, whatever their background. Our network of food banks brings together volunteers, staff and supporters of all faiths and none to make a difference. These values therefore provide a strong shared foundation for collaboration towards our goal of ending the need for food banks in the UK.

Compassion is at the heart of everything we do as a community of food banks. Our compassion for others means that we are working together toward a future where no one needs a food bank to survive and everyone can afford the essentials we all need. Until that happens, we are motivated by this same compassion to provide emergency food and practical support for people left without enough money to live on.

We know that the majority of food banks in our network were established by and continue to be sustained by the compassion of local churches like yours. We are so grateful for the incredible generosity, commitment and partnership of churches all across the UK. Our network simply wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the compassionate support of local churches.

Food banks in our network are experiencing their busiest year to date, with many struggling to maintain the level of stock needed to meet this rising need. Our hope is, therefore, that this resource will inspire and motivate you and your church to respond to the needs around you once again. We hope this booklet helps you, as you continue in your life of discipleship, to recommit to treating everyone with kindness and dignity.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet, engage with your community and live out the love of God in your neighbourhood.

**Jess Foster**  
Head of Church  
Engagement,  
the Trussell Trust





# INTRODUCTORY FILM

Start by watching this short film which introduces the subject of Compassion.



Scan the QR code or visit  
[trusselltrust.org/compassion-film](https://trusselltrust.org/compassion-film)

Our world often lacks compassion.

Throughout our lives, we will have all found ourselves in situations in which this has proven true. Perhaps we've experienced trauma and simply needed someone to reach out in love to turn things around. Or our life circumstances have been far from what we've expected, and we've needed somebody's compassion to help us get through.

Perhaps you've suffered because others lacked compassion toward you. Or maybe you have a different story to tell, and your life has been rebuilt and transformed because someone did show you compassion.

Though all our experiences may be different, we have all needed compassion at some point. Similarly, there are many occasions when we have needed to be the ones who show compassion.

When we turn on the news, it feels like we are bombarded with situations in need of our compassion. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming as we see people who are facing hardship in our communities, our nation, or across the world. In situations of injustice, we can feel a deep ache that the world is not as it should be, and that's because it's not.

# OUR GOD IS FULL OF COMPASSION

Fortunately, compassion is in the very heart and nature of God.

We read that *“our God is full of compassion”* (Psalm 116:5) and that *“the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love”* (Psalm 103:8).

We know God’s compassion because we see it in our salvation. When we come to the story of the Prodigal Son, a story that mirrors our own redemption in Jesus, we read that when the son is returning home, *“...his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”* (Luke 15:20). It is God’s merciful compassion that enabled us, though we were far off, to be met by the father and brought home.

God is full of compassion.

This isn’t only something we see in the life of Jesus but emphasised throughout Scripture.

In the very beginning of the Bible is the story of Hagar, a woman who is the victim of injustice, fleeing into

the desert. Pregnant, alone, and scared, we see that God sends the angel of the Lord to meet with her and remind her that there is purpose to her life. She then says, *“you are the God who sees me”* (Genesis 16:13) recognising the compassion of the Lord who saw her in her distress.

The Bible is full of stories like this; people who might be seen as insignificant or overlooked are shown compassion and mercy by God. God’s compassion and justice go hand-in-hand, and this is evident behind the law given to Moses and the way he and his followers were expected to live.

God institutes laws that refugees and people in poverty should be able to glean from the harvest (Leviticus 19:9-10), and that land should be left unploughed and unused every seventh year to allow people in poverty to take what they need (Exodus 23:10). Further still, He institutes the Year of Jubilee in which justice and compassion are demonstrated through the way in which people are told to re-evaluate

their ownership of things: land is returned to its previous owners, even if they lost it due to poverty, and slaves are to be made free (Leviticus 25).

As we read through the Old Testament, we read about the mercy and compassion of God numerous times. There are three Hebrew words that are used to represent the mercy, compassion, or loving kindness of

God: *khesed*, *rakham*, and *khannun*. We see each of these words when God appears to Moses and refers to Himself as *“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness”* (Exodus 34:6). This verse demonstrates that God’s nature is one of compassion that goes hand-in-hand with His mercy and kindness.

## ECHOING THE NATURE OF GOD

We might look at the compassion of God and wonder how, in a world so in need of compassion, we can ever be enough. The good news is that we have been made in the image of this compassionate God (Genesis 1:27), and so we echo God’s nature in our desire to show compassion to people. When we are compassionate, we mirror God.

Paul, in his letter to the church in Colossae, also urges believers to pursue compassion.

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,”* (Colossians 3:12).

This letter is a warning to the church in Colossae to reject false teachers and teachings and seek Christ, and so it’s significant that, within this context, Paul would choose to emphasise the call to compassion for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is at the heart of the true teaching of Jesus that His people would be compassionate and merciful.

Compassion ought to be a hallmark of the people of God.

The world so desperately needs compassion, and the church can be agents of it.

# COMPELLED BY COMPASSION, MOTIVATED TO ACT

As the people of God, Jesus is our forerunner, and the way that He lived can act as a paradigm for how we live out the Christian life. As the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), we see that Jesus is abounding in compassion, kindness, and mercy.

Sometimes when we experience need, pain, or mistreatment, or we hear stories of these things occurring, we can feel a deep aching within us - Jesus felt that too. Several times in the Gospels, the writers refer to Jesus having compassion on individuals or crowds of people. This compassion that Jesus had for people was described like an ache in His bowels or His gut – a graphic image but a helpful one nonetheless. Compassion can sometimes be portrayed as a weak feeling; to have compassion, one might say, is to simply pity someone. The word used for Jesus' compassion helps us understand that it is not mere feeling but an aching deep within us.

That deep aching or longing that we might feel about the needs of others is a God-given feeling, part of our being made in the image of God. It is this compassion that enables us to act. Whenever we read about Jesus having compassion on people, the story never stops there. Every time, He is compelled to act by healing the sick (Matthew 14:14), restoring sight to the blind (Matthew 20:34), teaching (Mark 6:34), and feeding people (Matthew 15).

As Christians, we are called to follow the pattern that Jesus sets for us, and that means that we should be marked out by our compassion toward others. But that compassion is not merely meant to be a feeling but a stirring in our very gut that swells into action.

Compassion is not meant to be passive.



# COMPASSION IN ACTION

To see the way in which we can be compelled to act, we can look to Jesus and the story where He feeds the 4,000 (Matthew 15). Jesus had gone up on a mountainside where many *“lame, crippled, blind, and mute”* people were brought to Him and were healed. They praise God for what Jesus has done. As the story continues, Jesus remarks that *“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat”* (Matthew 15:32) and so He takes the food that His disciples find and multiplies it to feed the people. After they all eat and are satisfied, there are even baskets of broken pieces left over.

If we use this story as a paradigm for how we might be compelled by compassion as the church, we can consider a few ways in which Jesus demonstrates what compassion in action looks like.

Jesus did not keep people at arm’s length. Though there is so much need in the UK, and many are facing some form of poverty, we see that people often try to distance themselves. It can be easy for us to lack compassion toward

people; we might wonder how they ended up in the circumstances in which they find themselves or suffer from compassion fatigue, feeling like we care too much and too often. But Jesus does not keep away from people.

This will look different for each one of us. Sometimes, that will mean getting involved closely with our neighbours, and colleagues, and letting them draw near to us when we might be in need. For others, it might look like getting involved in local government to see change happen there. Others may find that it simply looks like speaking up, rejecting myths and false narratives about people experiencing poverty or hardship in our society.

Jesus saw the need that was in front of Him. He had already dealt with much of their physical needs having healed multitudes of sick people, and their spiritual need in pointing them to God (*“they praised the God of Israel”* in verse 31), yet He still notices their physical need for food. It is this need for food that leads to Him feeling compassion, this stirring in the gut, for these people.

Jesus' compassion compelled Him to act. He does not passively accept this feeling and allow it to sit within Him but is driven to do something about it. Compassion should not stay inside us but compels us to make a difference for people around us who are facing hardship.

Jesus provided in abundance. The disciples brought seven loaves and a few small fish – the contents of a boy's packed lunch – and Jesus multiplied them, such that everyone ate and was satisfied, and there was food left over at the end. Our God is abounding in generosity and compassion – far more than we are – and part of our duty as followers of Jesus is to trust Him and His provision. We step out in faith, and, like the disciples were encouraged to, we bring the little that we have, and God provides the rest. Can we ask ourselves if we can trust God to provide in abundance with whatever it is that we give Him?

If we want the value of compassion to be a driving force in all that we do, we can ask ourselves:

- **Are there people around me who need compassion? What is the need in front of me?**
- **How can I be active in caring for and loving people experiencing poverty or other forms of hardship? In what ways can I ensure that compassion isn't just a feeling, but an action?**
- **Where can I step out with the little I have – like the young boy did with his packed lunch - looking to see God provide?**

Asking ourselves these questions can transform the way that we think about and act toward the people in our communities, including those who live down the road or right next door to us.

The world lacks compassion, but we know the God who is abounding in compassion and love.

# WHAT NEXT?

The following section gives ideas for how you might be able to take action to demonstrate compassion as an individual or as a church.

Many of these ideas relate to ways you can support people facing hunger, poverty or injustice in your community, particularly in partnership with your local food bank. If you don't know where your closest food bank is you can find out on the Trussell Trust website at [trusselltrust.org](https://trusselltrust.org).

## REFLECT

Read Micah 6:8. Loving mercy means extending compassion to ourselves, and to people around us.

Think of situations in your own life when you have needed compassion. Write them down. Perhaps you were bereaved, or you were made redundant. Maybe you were struggling to make ends meet, or you found yourself in a cycle from which you couldn't escape.

Were you shown compassion by someone? What difference did that make to you? Perhaps think of ways in which Jesus might have responded to your need in that moment or think of the ways in which He did meet your need.

Spend some time thanking God for the person/people who showed you compassion, and for the way in which God's compassion was demonstrated through abundant provision in that moment. If you are still in circumstances in which you need compassion, pray that God's abounding mercy and kindness would cover the situation in which you find yourself and if you need to ask for help remember that there is nothing shameful about needing support.

Visit [trusselltrust.org/get-help](https://trusselltrust.org/get-help) to find out what support might be available to you if you need it. Pray that you might be able to use your experiences to help others who may also need help.

# RESEARCH

Take some time over this week to ask God to highlight to you where there might be people in need of compassion. You might want to consider:

- Taking a walk through your neighbourhood, or your town, and noting any situations of need that you might see. Perhaps you're aware of a neighbour going through a difficult time, or you see someone sleeping on the streets in the town centre. Take some time to note down if there are any patterns that you see.
- It can be hard to spot all the areas of need just by looking by ourselves, so you might want to look through the local newspaper or on local online forums to spot any similar stories.
- It is also important to ask those around you who might know more – your local food bank team will know of particular needs in your local area.

- Speaking to people who are involved in any ministries that your church might run such as community cafes, parent groups, debt centres, or homeless shelters. It is important to hear first-hand the stories of people facing hardship.

Pray over each of these situations and ask God to help you think of ways in which your church or community might be able to help.



# RESPOND

Together with others in your church and community, spend some time thinking about how you might go about being compelled by compassion for people facing hardship around you. Consider what you might do within the means of your resources, but also allow yourself some blue-sky thinking – remember that God provided abundantly with the seven loaves and fish to feed 4,000 people. You might want to ask yourselves these questions:

- **Where are the places, situations, or people facing hardship who need compassionate action?**
- **What action is already being taken to help by others and how could I support?**
- **Where are the gaps in local support where your church might be uniquely placed to respond?**
- **Consider downloading and using the ‘Bank the Food’ app. This app allows you to quickly see the items food banks need most urgently. If a few people from your church commit to using this app once or more a week, it could make a real difference to the people running your local food banks. It is a really practical way of providing meaningful, compassionate support to people facing hardship today in your area. Find out more about this app at [bankthefood.org](http://bankthefood.org).**
- **Gather a few people from your church to pray together for your local food bank.**
- **Write a thank you card to the food bank staff, trustees or volunteers who tirelessly support local people.**
- **Have a monthly donation theme for your local food bank as a church. For example, in January everyone brings a donation of UHT milk; in February everyone brings a donation of pasta sauce.**

Everyone needs compassion at some point, and so it can feel like an overwhelming ask, but consider some small steps to begin to help people facing hardship.

**We have included some examples of ways your church could support your local food bank:**

You might also want to look over the Trussell Trust Church Ambassador Calendar ([trusselltrust.org/CA-Calendar](http://trusselltrust.org/CA-Calendar)) for other ideas of how to practically support your local food bank as they extend this compassion to people.

## RESHAPE

It's typical for us to each have a way in which we do things – how we spend our money, our time, our resources.

Spend some time thinking about each of those things and how you use each one over a weekly or monthly period. It might be helpful to keep a diary over a week so that you can see more clearly.

Consider how you might want to allow compassion to reshape your time, money, and resources. For example, could you cook an extra meal each evening to give to your widowed neighbour? Or perhaps you could give financially to an organisation that seeks to help those in your community. Or perhaps you could donate further money, time or resources to your local food bank, perhaps at busy times of the year, or in a behind the scenes role helping with admin support or fundraising?

Start with small steps but allow God to reshape your thinking about what an even more compassion filled life might look like, and how you could use your resources to help people facing hardship.

## RECOMMIT

It's easy to forget that it wasn't our own works that brought us into God's family, but the compassion of God. It is because our God is abounding in compassion and love for us that we can say that we are disciples of Jesus.

Spend some time thanking God for the compassion shown to us. Let that be the starting point to then pray Colossians 3:12 over yourself: *“as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience”*.

Certain of God's compassion for us, ask for forgiveness for times when you have lacked compassion for people, and ask God to give you a heart for people facing poverty or other forms of hardship. Where you feel that you have worked tirelessly for those in need and you are fatigued from compassion, pray that God would refresh your soul. And look on yourself with compassion and kindness – take a break if you need to and ask for help too. Jesus stepped aside to spend time with God and spent time relaxing with His friends. Make sure the love you have for your neighbour includes loving yourself and being ready to receive as well as to give.



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