



**COMPASSIONATE
LIVING
STARTS HERE**

When Compassion Meets Action

MIKE SEATON

Compassionate Living Starts Here

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Mike Seaton



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INTRODUCTION

We live in a crazy, busy world—one that throws countless demands and choices at us every hour of every day. It certainly seems like this craziness is not going to change. In fact, it looks as though the world is on a path to turn faster, push us harder, and demand more from us each day.

So many choices! So many possibilities! It's enough to make your head spin. You might be asking, *God, where does my faith fit in this crazy world? Is it just about attending Sunday service and going to a Bible study? What is your purpose for me, and what difference can I make in this world? What difference can my church make?*

Quite simply, this booklet is a guide to help you understand what compassionate living is, where you fit in the compassion landscape, and what it means to be part of a compassionate community of Christ followers.

Together we'll explore these questions and more as we look at what it means to live compassionately as a Christian in a world so in need of Christ's love!

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

*God so loved the world that he
gave his one and only Son.*

JOHN 3:16, NIV

What is compassion? There are two ways we can define this word: the world's way or God's way. As you might guess, they are very different!

Much of the difficulty we face in living out *God's version* of a compassionate life is that we're surrounded by the *world's version* of compassion. That struggle can leave us feeling guilty or—even worse—paralyzed by the enormity of the need.

To help us understand the difference,

let's take a closer look at both definitions of compassion.

First, the world's definition: *Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary* tells us that compassion is “a feeling of wanting to help someone who is sick, hungry, in trouble, etc.” This definition describes compassion as a *feeling* we might have. There is no moral command in the definition. It doesn't say that compassion is the *action* of helping someone. It says that it is the feeling of *wanting* to help someone.

One conclusion we might draw from this definition is that compassion is dependent on convenience and timing—that when we have some extra time or the situation is right, we may want to help someone in need.

That definition seems perfectly fitted to the world we live in. Instead of being a way of living, compassion has become a marketing symbol that hangs out around the edges of our lives, like the Salvation Army

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Christmas bucket or a telethon fund-raising drive. These are worthy causes, but they're not part of the very air we breathe. Instead, they're planned by someone who hopes to catch our attention and promote a *feeling* of compassion.

Now, for a contrast, let's look at God's definition of compassion. He has two big points to make, both of which are more encouraging and more complete than the *Merriam-Webster* definition.

God so *loved* the world that he *gave*
his one and only Son.

JOHN 3:16, NIV (EMPHASIS ADDED)

First, we see that God takes action. He doesn't just *feel* bad for us; he takes action to save us. He was willing to *give up* his beloved Son for us. We have many examples and lessons from Scripture to help us understand what compassion looks like, examples

through which God defines and demonstrates how to be compassionate. Here's another one:

The whole law can be summed up in this one command: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

GALATIANS 5:14 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

This second definition tells us that compassion is a *command*, which initially might sound difficult and rigid. But here is the part of that definition that offers us so much hope: the command is to love—not to follow rules, meet a quota, or do something impossible—but simply to love. Show love, give love, create love, and even receive love!

When we take these two definitions together, we see that God's compassion is, quite simply, love in action. What's more, God tells us to “do everything with love” (1 Corinthians 16:14).

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It seems God's purpose is to move us away from thinking about compassion as something we *feel* like we should be doing and to move us toward living a life of love in action. This is the invitation to a compassionate life.

Compassionate living, day to day, every day, is the goal. You will get there, but not without some challenges along the way. One reason you'll face trouble is that the world likes us to follow the safer, less-engaged version of compassion—a version based on how we're feeling in that moment, if we have time, and if it doesn't cost us too much. To be truly compassionate, you will need to show compassion even when you don't quite feel like it, or when you don't have time or money to spare.

At this point you may be asking yourself, *With all the risk and no apparent reward, why should I care? Why should I do this?*

There are many good reasons we'll get into later, but at this point, we'll fall back on an old saying from William Cobbett for an

answer: “You never know what you can do till you try.” For example, let’s say a friend is trying to convince you to go skydiving. You’d be hard pressed to find a good reason to throw yourself out of an airplane with only a parachute between you and the hard ground. But after you jump that first time and stick the landing, no one can tell you it wasn’t worth the risk. It’s the same for compassionate living! The feeling you have when you follow God into a deeply compassionate experience is perhaps the closest you’ll feel to heaven on this earth. Personally, the people I know who have begun to live a compassionate life say that they are *more* blessed and rewarded now, as they give away their time and resources for the good of others, than they were before, when they kept their blessings to themselves.

As it turns out, you may already be living the beginning of a compassionate life. Every time you

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- See an elderly person struggling to get a bag of groceries into his car, and you stop what you're doing to help him—you're being compassionate.
- Notice a coworker has a critical report due before the end of the work day, and you set your own work aside to help her finish her work first—you're being compassionate.
- Call your neighbor to say hi and find out he's been down and out with a cold, so you whip up a dish of home-cooked comfort food and hand deliver it to him—you're being compassionate.

These little acts of compassion are the first steps toward a fully engaged, compassionate life. Society calls these acts common courtesy or showing kindness or being neighborly. We just need to learn how to scale up these little acts into full-blown compassionate living.

So where do we go from here? We'll take the next few chapters to look at how we move from feeling compassionate to living compassionately. Our goal is to help you answer the following questions:

- Why am I here?
- How can I find out more about God's purposes for my life?
- Why are the choices I make every day important?
- What choices can I make now that will move me closer to compassionate living?
- Why should I live and serve in community?
- How can I begin to connect with believers around me?
- What is the purpose of the church?
How can I help my church move toward that purpose?

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- What are some of the wonderful things that might happen as I travel this journey of compassionate living?
- What should I do next?

God so desires us to be his compassionate children—for each other and for the world. If we are willing, we can embrace that desire and help each other get there. That is the goal of this booklet: to help you take that all-important first step—with hope and a measure of understanding.