

Talking about Compassion

HEARTLINES film – The Other Woman

Preparation for the discussion

Read the notes “Leading a discussion group around the eight values” on pages 2 & 3. It is recommended that you also read the Bible notes on Compassion in the ‘Go deeper’ section on page 24.

KEY THOUGHT to keep in mind when leading a discussion on compassion:

Compassion is more than being sympathetic – the literal meaning is to ‘suffer with’. God calls us to reach out to others with compassionate service, and in so doing we are serving Christ Himself.



Botshelo



Refilwe

1) Introduce the discussion 3 Minutes

Briefly introduce the film “The Other Woman” and the value of “compassion” that the film highlights. Read the following Scripture from Mark 10:43-45 where Jesus says: “...**whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

2) Show the film 17 Minutes

Show the HEARTLINES film “The Other Woman” as provided on the DVD in the back inside cover of this book. If you are extending the discussion over 2 sessions, and have already watched the film, read the summary at the start of the second session.

3) Start the film discussion 20 Minutes

1. What is the central message of this film?
2. How did Refilwe change during the course of the story?
3. What do you think about the way that Bongani showed love? Is that kind of love possible?
4. Refilwe knew the truth about Siphonot being Tshiamo’s father. What motivated her to continue to help Botshelo?
5. Refilwe makes the statement that the children are also hers. Why do you think she said this? How does this illustrate her change of heart?

[film summary]

Refilwe is a classy, highly paid advertising executive who is living a life of luxury, with the latest BMW 3 Series and a beautiful home. She suddenly has to decide whether or not to help Botshelo, an ex-girlfriend of her husband, Siphonot, when she discovers that Botshelo has AIDS. The story takes us on a journey of how this business executive struggles with her self-centred lifestyle and emotions. Refilwe is also forced to face her own bitterness towards Botshelo.

She develops a relationship with Tshiamo, Botshelo’s daughter, and is challenged by the example of Bongani, a friend, who shows consistent love and compassion to Botshelo. As Botshelo’s health deteriorates, Refilwe has to decide between caring for Botshelo and her family, or to pursue her lucrative career. Refilwe is challenged to re-evaluate her life and values. She finds that it is in giving, that she receives.

4) Discuss the film quotes *15 Minutes*

Show the following clips as provided on the DVD and use the relevant quote as a springboard for discussion:

[CLIP 1] Bongani introducing himself to Refilwe

"I'm a construction foreman by day and a Florence Nightingale by night."

[CLIP 2] Bongani explaining to Refilwe why he is helping Botshelo

"God has been good to me and I want to give something back."

[CLIP 3] Cutter encouraging Refilwe not to give up her work

"You don't have to throw away your life." (Cutter)

"You know what, I've found it." (Refilwe)



Tshiamo, Kamogelo, Refilwe & Bongani

[film discussion summary]

There are many among us who would love to become like Refilwe, the beautiful and classy advertising executive in this film. All the perks of the new South Africa — a high income, the latest BMW 3 series, an upmarket home in Sandton and a sophisticated set of friends — sets Refilwe apart from the rest of us. In the eyes of many, Refilwe has "made it", or is certainly on her way.

However, we find ourselves facing a challenge when we stumble across Jesus' words in Scripture which say that: "whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:44). He added a warning: "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matthew 19:30). The standard by which God measures us is very different to the standard that we normally use to measure each other or ourselves. Usually our own instinct is to achieve first place in everything, which means that we are serving ourselves. But the primary characteristic of the Christian life is service to others and, as we shall see, service begins with compassion.

"But many who are first will be last..."

5) Discuss: How can we practise compassion? *25 Minutes*

1. Get each person in the group to say in one sentence what they think compassion means. Share the literal meaning of the word "compassion" with the group. Ask them to briefly discuss this meaning in comparison with their own definitions.

[leader's note]

The literal meaning of compassion, as given in the Oxford English Dictionary is: "suffering together with another, participation in suffering." The root words of compassion are "com" (with), and "passion" from the Latin pati (to suffer) – the emphasis being on personal involvement with the needy, suffering with them, not just feeling for them or giving to them.

2. When do we find it difficult to show compassion?

[leader's note]

Allow a broad range of answers for this question, but reasons may include issues such as the cost (time and commitment) of showing compassion, feeling that the person is to blame for their own suffering, the fear of being taken advantage of, hardness of heart, desensitization because of all the suffering around us, self-interest, busyness etc.

Group discussion on Compassion

3. How does the Bible describe compassionate behaviour? Refer to Matthew 25:35-36 *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*

[in compassion Jesus never stops reaching out to us]

Jesus fleshed out compassion among very ordinary and sinful people:

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Jesus’ compassion extended to the needy and the sick (Matthew 14:14 & 15:32). He described His (and God’s) compassion for the rebellious (Luke 15:20) and He demonstrated it to even the rich (Mark 10:21). Perhaps the most touching example of Jesus’ compassion was when He was with those grieving over the death of Lazarus: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

4. Matthew 14:14 reads *“And when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.”* (NKJV). Discuss.
5. Read James 2:16-17 *“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* Read also Philippians 2:1&4 *“Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”*

Q: Where do we find the strength and ability to overcome our selfishness and show compassion?

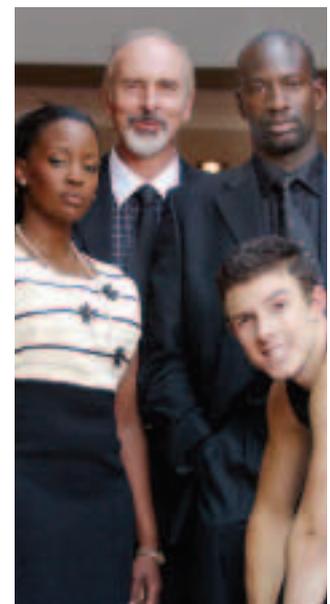
[compassion is from the heart of God]

As we receive the compassionate touch of God in our hearts by the work of His Holy Spirit, **we will know a transformation within us.** Rather than feeling nothing for those in need, we will find ourselves experiencing compassion, even for those with whom we would rather never get involved: the sick, the deranged, the socially unacceptable. In doing so, we will have discovered God’s heart. As Refilwe discovered: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life.” (Matthew 20:26-28)



Bongani

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...”



Refilwe, Cutter, client and Ferdinand

[time to think...] 10 minutes

Read the following and ask each person to reflect on compassion in their own lives.

Ask the group to reflect on the words of Christ in Matthew 25 when He states that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me".

- Do you need to ask God to forgive you for a lack of compassion?
- Think of people to whom you can personally show compassion: What similar categories of people do you encounter? Who is hungry or needs clothing or shelter that you know? Who is sick? What are they sick with (AIDS is one kind of sickness, depression can be another)? Who is in prison?
- Ask God to move your heart with the things that are on His heart for people.

"I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?" (Mother Teresa)

At home this week:

Encourage the group to read Matthew 25:31-46 and to ask these questions: What measure does God use to evaluate our time on this earth? Do I see Jesus in people I find repulsive or distasteful or offensive? Why is it important to be directly involved with acts of compassion, and not just pay other people to do them? **Encourage everyone to memorise James 2:26 "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."**

6) Talking about HIV&AIDS (Optional) 10 minutes

1. What should the attitude of Christians and the Church be towards people living with HIV&AIDS?
2. How can Christians put their faith in action when confronted with this issue?



[leader's note]

HIV in South Africa should move Christians to compassion and not judgement.

We have to weep with people who are weeping and broken. We should not only have compassion because people have needs, but also because, as Christians, Christ has instructed us to love and care for each other. One of the most Christ-like values of all is compassion.

Jesus' compassion to lepers and other outcasts was central to his ministry. Today He walks on earth through His Body, the Church. Does He not wish us to make it a priority to reach out to those living with or orphaned by HIV&AIDS?

7) Compassion in Action: Ideas to make a difference in your community

Think of people in need in your community – are there:

- Children's homes • Prisons • Old Age Homes • AIDS home based care activities
- Police Stations & Child Protection Units • Shelters for homeless people

...that you could contact to find out their pressing needs? This could be either on a project basis or on an ongoing support basis.

Make sure that your group / church is committed to this project so that you can finish what you started. Consider the cost of the commitment and pledge to do all you can to let God use you as His hands and feet in this outreach.



What God says about Compassion

HEARTLINES film – The Other Woman

There are many among us who would love to become like Refilwe, the beautiful and classy advertising executive in the HEARTLINES film – *The Other Woman*. All the perks of the new South Africa – a high income, the latest BMW 3 series, an upmarket home in Sandton and a sophisticated set of friends – set Refilwe apart from the rest of us. In the eyes of many, Refilwe had “made it”, or was certainly on her way.

However, we find ourselves facing a challenge when we stumble across Jesus’ words in Scripture which say that: “whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). He added a warning: “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (Matthew 19:30). The standard by which God measures us is very different to the standard that we normally use to measure each other or ourselves. Usually our own instinct is to achieve first place in everything, which means that we are serving ourselves. But the primary characteristic of the Christian life is service to others and, as we shall see, service begins with compassion.

COMPASSION is hands-on

James 2:26 says that, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” Normally, we think of faith as being a thing of the spirit. But here James reverses the image and talks of faith as a physical thing - a body that needs to be brought to life by deeds of service, and it is these deeds that are the “spirit”. Too often in our modern Christianity we have switched the order and intellectualised and spiritualised our faith. But God’s Word shows us that faith has to have hands and feet to be real. It is a hands-on business, being a Christian.

James is pretty clear about what being “hands-on” means. It consists of the very things that you and I would probably rather not do: care for orphans, look after widows, treat the poor as equals, provide food and/or clothing to those in need (1:27, 2:1-9, 2:15-16).



Tshiamo and Botshelo



Tshiamo and Kamogelo

“Faith has to have hands and feet to be real.”

When Jesus taught His disciples He was equally clear about what service should look like: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:35-36). What similar categories of people do you encounter? Who is hungry or needs clothing or shelter that you know? Who is sick? What are they sick with (AIDS is one kind of sickness, depression can be another)? Who is in prison?

COMPASSION is necessary in the Christian life

These words of Jesus come in the context of a story He told about what will happen at the end of time, “When the Son of Man [Jesus] comes in his glory” (25:31). Jesus will “sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left” (25:31-33). In this story, the sheep are to be understood as those who are acceptable to God and the goats as those who are unacceptable to God. On what basis will they be accepted or rejected?

It turns out that God assesses us based on how we treat our fellow human beings. If we have demonstrated compassion towards those who are in need or in trouble (Jesus doesn’t say whether those in prison that we should visit are there for just or unjust reasons) we are doing things that are of utmost importance to God. If we neglect to do such acts of compassion, we are far from thinking or acting on God’s priorities.

We have talked elsewhere about that essential component of human identity - being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27 - see notes on Acceptance). Jesus makes the link to that concept here, for He tells us that when we reach out to the disadvantaged we are in fact reaching out to Him: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Serving with compassion is in fact serving God directly.

As Isaiah proclaimed centuries before, to serve the needy is to worship God:

[from the word]

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice ... to set the oppressed free ...? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Isaiah 58:6-7



Client

“His faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

In *The Other Woman* Refilwe’s boss remarks that the rich can use their money to pay other people to do works of compassion. This is not a bad use of money, but it passes on to someone else our responsibility to be directly involved in the life of the person who is in our path. In a similar way James confronts Christians who spiritualise a need into a prayer item or an opportunity to quote Scripture:

[from the word]

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:14-17

How many times have you or I done exactly this? More challenging still is that God doesn’t give us any loopholes by which to escape His judgment. In concluding His story of the sheep and goats, Jesus shows we cannot say that we weren’t aware of such people’s needs - it merely reveals that we were deliberately keeping our eyes closed: “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:44-46).

A very important principle of God’s Kingdom is at work here. Just as forgiveness does not come to us from God if we refuse to forgive another (showing that we don’t really take seriously our own sinfulness - Matthew 6:15) so, in the same way, acceptance does not come from God to us if we reject our fellow man or woman in his or her real needs (for then we show that we don’t understand what God has done to accept us - Philippians 2:5-8). As James says, it doesn’t matter if “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder” (2:19). He then says that in a righteous man like the biblical hero Abraham, “his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did” (2:22).

COMPASSION STARTS in the heart

Overcoming our blindness to the needs of another can be helped by exposure to needy people, by charity ad campaigns, or by the testimonies of people in our church. The trouble is, in our sinfulness we are thoroughly self-focused. Compassion is other-focused. What has to happen in our heart to move us to compassion for others?

We cannot truly know compassion until we have received God's rejuvenating and regenerating Holy Spirit in our lives. We don't have to be a Christian to be compassionate, but until we allow Christ's saving power to work in our hearts, our compassion will always have its limits: a type of person, a set of circumstances, the demands on us. God's promise is that in Christ "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). Paul says that if we are united with Christ we will then know his "encouragement" and "fellowship with the Spirit" and that this creates in us a heart of "tenderness and compassion." Out of this should flow a natural instinct to "look ... to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:1 & 4). Compassion comes from a changed heart.

ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER

IN COMPASSION He never stops reaching out to us

Do a search for the meaning of the word "compassion" in the Bible and you will quickly find that it is used almost entirely with reference to God's heart towards all people. Very often, in the Old Testament, the word is used to refer to God's persistence in loving the people of Israel, despite their equally persistent unfaithfulness to Him: "you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert [Israel] ..." (Nehemiah 9:17).

In his persistence God sent Christ among us. Jesus fleshed out compassion among very ordinary and sinful people: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Jesus' compassion extended to the needy and the sick (Matthew 14:14 & 15:32). He described His (and God's) compassion for the rebellious (Luke 15:20) and He demonstrated it to even the rich (Mark 10:21). Perhaps the most touching example of Jesus' compassion was when He was with those grieving over the death of Lazarus: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

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[from the word]

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life"

Matthew 20:26-28



Botshelo and Refilwe

"Compassion comes from a changed heart."

How can we practise Compassion

1. Say in one sentence what you think "compassion" means.

2. When do you find it difficult to show compassion?

3. How does the Bible describe compassionate behaviour? Refer to Matthew 25:35-36 *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."*

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