

VIRTUE 14

COMPASSION

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

—Proverbs 31:8-9

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

—Ephesians 4:32

Having compassion simply means to possess a deep feeling of sympathy and sorrow for those who are stricken by misfortune, coupled with a strong desire to alleviate their suffering. Ramon Lull explains that one of a knight's key roles is to perform acts of compassion:

The Knight must maintain and defend women and respect and defend those less powerful than he. The office of a knight is to maintain and defend women, widows and orphans, men diseased; and those who are neither powerful nor strong. For as custom and reason is that the greatest and most mighty helps

the feeble and the lesser, and that they should have recourse to the great.³⁵

The Civil War was a controversial war with devout and authentic Christians who fought on both sides—the North and the South. One of the generals from the South, Robert E. Lee, demonstrated compassion in a powerful way when he encountered an injured soldier from the North. The soldier himself recounted the following story:

I was at the battle of Gettysburg myself, and an incident occurred there which largely changed my views of the Southern people. I had been a most bitter anti-South man and fought and cursed the Confederates desperately. I could see nothing good in any of them. The last day of the fight, I was badly wounded. A ball shattered my left leg. I lay on the ground not far from Cemetery Ridge, and as General Lee ordered his retreat, he and his officers rode near me. As he came along, I recognized him, and though faint from exposure and loss of blood, I raised up my hands, looked Lee in the face, and shouted as loud as I could, “Hurrah for the Union!” The general heard me, looked, stopped his horse, dismounted, and came toward me. I confess that I at first thought he meant to kill me. But as he came up, he looked down at me with such a sad expression upon his face that all fear left me, and I wondered what he was about. He extended his hand to me and grasping mine firmly and looking right into my eyes, said, “My son, I hope you will soon be well.”

If I live a thousand years I shall never forget the expression on General Lee’s face. There he was, defeated, retiring from a field that had cost him and

his cause almost their last hope, and yet he stopped to say words like those to a wounded soldier of the opposition who had taunted him as he passed by! As soon as the general had left me, I cried myself to sleep there upon the bloody ground.³⁶

This is an incredible example of compassion. Finding this enemy soldier in the middle of a war, General Lee could have done anything—he could have passed by, he could have insulted him in return, he could have even killed him. But instead, he showed the soldier mercy and compassion.

Next, let's take a look at displays of compassion made by Christ:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick (Matthew 14:13-14).

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do

not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way” (Matthew 15:30-32).

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Matthew 20:30-34).

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured (Mark 1:40-42).

Jesus did not have much of a filter for choosing who to help—when He was led to have compassion on those around them, He gave whatever He had based on whatever they needed. When He saw a need, he met it. Biblical giving is radical at times but should be balanced based on different circumstances (see the Virtue 12: Charity).

Compassion is when you stop your busy life to pour into the needs of others. It is an active requirement of any modern knight’s daily life.

REFLECT

Knights who have eyes which cannot see the feeble and weak, have not the heart nor the might by

which they may record the deeds to be in the Order of Knighthood.

—Ramon Lull

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

—2 Corinthians 1:3-5

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

—James 5:11

RESPOND

1. How will you know when to have compassion on someone, and how you should act (see Ephesians 2:8-10)?
2. How should acts of compassion made by Christians differ from others' acts of compassion (see Luke 6:27-36)?
3. Is it ever appropriate not to show compassion?
4. How did Christ have compassion on others?
5. How can we show compassion to others in ways that do not require money?]

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