



## Week 3 – Compassion not Fear

### SETTING:

Before the group arrives prepare the room, with seats in the round and a central table. Soft lighting helps, and try to have everything you need in place before people arrive. Place two large plates on the table in the middle of the room. On one put a large bunch of red grapes, the other should be empty. Light the candle and arrange the other items for the Thank you and Goodnight. You will also need some additional tea lights; one for each participant.

As the group arrives play some music to go with the theme. For example: 'Life' (Des'ree), 'We can move mountains' (Martin John Nicholls) 'Paranoid' (Black Sabbath); 'I wish I knew how it would feel to be free' (Nina Simone). Feel free to choose other music that you think would fit the theme or set the right atmosphere.

### WORSHIP AND WELCOME (15 mins):

Begin with these opening words followed by a moment of silence.

**All:     God of the harvest, we have heard your call and we have come.  
          We are in awe of your everlasting love.  
          We are humbled by your belief in us.  
          We are sorry for our reluctance and our apathy.  
          We are ready to toil together in your vineyard, and to unveil your Kingdom on earth...  
          That the last may be first and all may share in your feast of life.**

Silence

Now encourage people to open their Windows on the Week (see course notes) and share those things for which they are thankful (gestures of kindness, gratitude for health, a moment of beauty). Allow a moment of quiet after each to allow the group to reflect. After those that wish to have shared have a time of silence or open prayer followed by:

Leader: God of compassion

Whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,  
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,  
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:  
strengthen us in our daily living  
that in joy and sorrow  
we may know the power of your presence  
to bind together and to heal;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**OR The Lord's Prayer.**

Welcome everyone and thank them for coming.

**OPEN QUESTION (10 mins):**

Ask the group to share, either with the whole group or in pairs, the answer to this question:

*What are you afraid of? (Focus here on external things: birds, heights, open / confined spaces etc.)*

This is intended to engage people at a surface level and help them feel more comfortable. When they have had some time to do this ask them to think on a deeper level:

*What are you afraid of? (Focus here on internal things: failure, letting people down, being alone, illness, worthlessness)*

These can be shared openly, but use your discretion.

**WORD PLAY (15 mins):**

Invite one or two people to read the parable of the workers in the vineyard from the New International Version (Matthew 20:1-16)

Divide the group into up to 5 small groups (it can be less than this). Each group is given a different character from the story (the landowner, those hired at the beginning of the day, at 9:00, 12:00, 15:00 and 17:00). In the groups consider what the hopes and fears of this character might have been, and how it changed during the course of the day. These are presented to the wider group – this could be done in a dramatic first person way rather than simple feedback.

Note the role that fear plays within this parable.

**CONVERSATION (30 mins):**

(Explain) God's most frequent command in the bible is 'Do not be afraid'.

(Ask) *Why do you think this is?*

(Activity) Divide the group up into pairs / threes and give them one of the following readings:

1. *Exodus 1: 8-16 Pharaoh ordering the death of Israelite baby boys*
2. *1 Samuel 18:6-12 Saul becomes jealous and angry with David*
3. *Mark 2:3-12 Jesus heals the paralytic man*

Ask them to explore the role of fear, what lies behind that fear, and to feed back to the group.

(Sum-up) Fear causes damage; both to the object and the subject of that fear.

(Ask) *Where do we see the damage caused by fear in our world today, and what lies behind that fear? Who suffers most because of fear?*

(Ideas) The response to the influx of refugees and migrants in Europe. Conflicts taking place in many parts of the world. When people feel fearful and threatened they want to protect what they have and they close in on themselves. This affects our generosity and our ability to see the image of God, the humanity, in each other.

(Ask) *At the end of the parable Jesus identifies with the landowner, what do we notice about the landowners approach to the workers?*

(Ideas) His response to people is not controlled by fear, but by compassion. He goes back again and again to fetch more workers, aware that they were vulnerable and had need of the day labour that they had waited all day to find. He goes to the market in person rather than sending a servant, which would have been the common practice, showing an interest and care for the people. The pay is controlled by their need and his compassion, not by a human sense of fairness.

(Explain) Compassion was one of the central features of Jesus' ministry, and so also of the character of God. The word often translated as 'compassion' in the bible is a Greek word which refers to the internal organs; it was an emotion that Jesus felt in his guts, not a vague feeling of sympathy. Examples of this are when Jesus looks on the hungry crowd before feeding them (Mark 6 and 8), when he raises the widow's son from the dead (Luke 7), and Jesus tells us that the Good Samaritan acted out of compassion (Luke 10).

*(Ask) What moves you to this kind of gut wrenching compassion? Are there people or situations where you struggle to have compassion?*

(Sum-up) Compassion is used as a verb in the gospels, it is action, and it makes a difference. There is no room for pity or easy answers, but only a love that seeks to make people whole. This is the love that we are called to nurture in our hearts for others.

(Response) Suggest that we start to work on developing this compassion within ourselves now. This compassion is a key characteristic of Christ, and it is for those of us who follow him to nurture it within ourselves. In doing this we bring light into a world where the darkness of fear so often dominates. Ask participants to name in their hearts a situation, or a person, where they would like to develop greater compassion. Invite each person to light a tea light and place it on the empty plate. Hold a short time of silence, encouraging participants to pray for God's to increase our compassion.

"A candle in the darkness is a non-conformist. It says to the dark 'I beg to differ'"

Ancient Indian Proverb

THANK YOU and GOODNIGHT (10 mins):

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on what they've seen and heard, and then invite them to take an item from the table which represents their engagement during the session, and to hold it as they share their thoughts:

*A candle for illumination – light a tea light from the central candle and hold it – it symbolises something new we have seen*

*Salt for faith in action – a pinch of salt from the central bowl – it represents a way in which we have been inspired to make a response in our own lives.*

*A peg for questions – take a peg and hold it – this stands of the reflections and questions we may want to 'peg up' for a while.*

*Bread - tear a piece from the loaf and hold it – it is a sign of how we have been fed and nourished by God's Word.*

As each person holds their item as we offer this prayer

Leader: *As we hold these items we remember that Jesus lived his life amongst ordinary things and by his presence transformed them into the extra-ordinary.*

All: So may Christ, who is the Bread of life,  
feed us by his words and example that we may be full with the abundance of God's Kingdom.  
May Jesus, who commands us to keep our saltiness,  
inspire us to action so that we might be his hands and feet, reaching and walking for justice.  
May Christ, who is the light of the world,  
shine his light into our lives and contexts that we might see with his eyes and peer even into the darkest places.  
May Jesus, who told stories without explanation and left questions hanging,  
help us to hold our doubts and queries as we continue to follow him.  
And may Christ, who reveals to us the very generous heart of God,  
guide and sustain us until we meet again. Amen.

Allow everyone to replace their symbols on the table, except those holding bread. Pass piece of bread to everyone else in the group and in the silence prayerfully eat together.

Leader: Let us bless each other with the words of the grace.

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore.  
Amen.

Play some music as people say farewell and leave.