



A Compassionate Heart:

Session 3

We Come as We Are

Holiness is nothing other than the gift of loving union with God and the sharing of this love in right relationship with others.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

Gathering: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is...
- What did I commit to in Session 2?
- How did I follow through with my commitment?

Praying: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.

- Amazing Grace, New Britain
- For You Are My God, John Foley, SJ
- Gather Us In, Marty Haugen
- Jesus Come To Us, David Haas
- Loving and Forgiving, Scott Soper
- To You, O Lord, Owen Alstott

Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing.

While the process of emptying may be painful, it can also be growthful. The empty times may feel useless, fruitless, and non-productive, but they are actually a means of our falling into the “immense depths” within ourselves where we see more clearly, learn to be less controlling, long more deeply for God, and touch life with more reverence and gratitude.

The Cup of our Life: A Guide for Spiritual Growth,
Joyce Rupp

Scripture for Inspiration

Romans 5:1-5

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Lord, God of consolation, help us to remember in times of distress that you are always by our side strengthening us. Infuse renewed life into us so that we may face our difficult moments with courage and create authentic change in our lives. Help us to be grateful for all that is, both the sorrows and the joys. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen

Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh when we learn where the outcast weeps.

Brennan Manning, Franciscan Priest and author

Consider This: (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)



A Compassionate Heart: Man of Compassion

Jesus Knew What He Was About

Jesus knew exactly what his mission was and nothing would stand in his way. Jesus came to reveal a loving God and redeem us. As He lived among the people, the gospel narratives tell us He was moved by compassion for the crowds. He knew that the suffering he witnessed went beyond physical ailments and that those who suffered were often guilt ridden, anxious, and exiled.

As people of compassion, it is essential that we know who we are and what our mission is. Jesus invited each of us to be a disciple knowing we are not perfect, that we are a continuous work in progress. Only by exploring our fears and responses to suffering in our own lives can we be present to the suffering of those around us. By extending compassionate care to others, we become a fuller reflection of God's love for us.

It is a temptation to avoid looking at ourselves and focus on the fears, faults, and failings of others. Jesus addressed this as he challenged us to be aware of the plank in our own eye before attempting to remove the speck in the eye of the other. (*Mt 7:3*) As we learn to forgive ourselves, accept our own suffering, and receive God's mercy, we can reach out to comfort others with less judgment or expectation.

Love of Neighbor as Ourselves

Jesus looked at everyone through the eyes of love. He had a deep conviction that each person is a child of God and worthy of love and salvation. He redefined who our neighbors are and expanded our vision of what it means to love our neighbors. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves—loving even those who hate and curse us. It is fairly easy to love those who appreciate us, think like us, and act like us, but what about those who irritate us, dislike us or even wish us harm? How do we compassionately see with the eyes of Jesus? How do we look beyond our own needs when it is easier to walk away denying the wounded and the suffering?



Quotation for Reflection

The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become - because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

C.S. Lewis, Novelist and poet

Acquire inner peace and a multitude will find their salvation near you.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Author

Being Authentic

All of us have experienced moments of profound pain, loss or emptiness when we felt abandoned, perhaps believing that even God has forgotten us. Some of us are haunted by the struggle to forgive someone who has injured us, by relationship conflicts that are easier placed on the other person, or by addictive behaviors that are difficult to admit to and cry out for behavioral changes. These challenges provide us with a choice – either we hold onto our pain and live in fear or we redeem the suffering.

These opportunities invite us to look deeper into our lives, to intentionally explore who we are, what we believe, and how we will live from this moment on. Although these difficulties don't feel that way at the time, they are the graced moments in our lives that teach us how to live fully alive. They create an intersection in our lives. We can either walk with the pain that we know allowing ourselves to be withdrawn from life or we walk into the desert of the unknown feeling its dryness, lack of color, and character.

If we listen, we are reminded by those who have spent time in the desert, that it is rich in color and teeming with life. These companions stand with us and invite us to receive life in our desert times if only we are willing to look beyond ourselves and reach out for it. We find new life by seeing those who love us expressing their care and concern and seeking God for comfort and strength through prayer as we gently weave ourselves back on the path of joy. Jesus assures us that we can cast our cares and fears to him. Anxiety, despair, and fear are not what he wants for us. Too often we allow our burdens to choke us, to prevent us from living and loving in freedom.

Henri Nouwen, priest and well known author, faced many challenges in his life that could have left him lost in depression, fear and despair. Embracing his struggles through prayer and presence, he was eventually able to find a path to inner peace. The gift of his writings and his profound example of compassionate care for “the poor in spirit” deeply moved many of his contemporaries and continue to inspire us today.

Times of profound loss, emptiness, or interior struggle can be our training course in developing a compassionate heart. In facing ourselves and our inner pain honestly, we discover how to survive desert times. We are no longer afraid of them, we have learned to walk into them, embrace them, and come through to the other side. We are transformed and infused with a deep desire to reach out confidently to others who are suffering through prayer, support, and the companionship of a listening ear.

Have you experienced desert times in your life? How might you describe those times? How do they affect your life today? How do they shape your sense of compassion for others?

Questions for Reflection:

How do I look for the good in everyone that I meet and move beyond my judgments? In what ways am I sensitive to the suffering of others? How do I address the inner confusion and helplessness that I feel when I am with someone suffering?

Notes:

The laity of our Church are moved to act on behalf of those in need because they have come to know Christ in the depths of their own suffering.

Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

Following the Path of Jesus (21 minutes)

Take Action

- Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 3 might have inspired you to serve compassionately this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.
- Reflect on what you have learned from your own suffering and sorrows. Journal your thoughts.
- Consider how you might set aside some time this week to visit with or pray for those who are suffering.
- Begin each day with five minutes of spontaneous conversation with God and listen for a response.
- Attend daily mass and or Eucharistic adoration, one or more times this week.
- Practice giving up judging people for one day. Journal on the experience.
- Journal on one gospel story about Jesus healing the sick.
- Consider volunteering at a homeless shelter this week .

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 4 _____

Closing Prayer (Together)

Jesus our source of healing, you know who we are. Strengthen us in our times of suffering and the times when we least feel loved and loveable. Join with us in our times of joy and celebration. Help us to see ourselves through your eyes so that we can move beyond ourselves into a deeper love for others. We ask this in the name of your Son, our consolation, Jesus.

Additional Resources:

Facing Forgiveness, Loughlan Sofield, ST, Carroll Jiliano, SHCJ, Bishop Gregory M Aymond
Henri Nouwen Online Daily Meditations,
Henrinouwen.org
Finding our Sacred Center: A Journey to Inner Peace, Henri Nouwen
Fifteen Days of Prayer with Saint Vincent de Paul,
Jean-Pierre Renouard
Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life, Richard Rohr
Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self,
Richard Rohr

Scripture Passages

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 6:19-21

Mark 8:34-38

Luke 6:27-38

John 8:31-32



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Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.

God Is Love--Deus Caritas Est: Encyclical Letter, Pope Benedict XVI