

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Youth Ministry Academy

*Created by Nazarene Youth International (NYI) and
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SESSION 13

Youth Ministry Discipleship:
Compassion and Service

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Youth Ministry Discipleship: Compassion and Service

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Right Focus

Open Our Eyes: Open Our Ears

Refuse to Be Consoled

Responding: Prophetic Imagination

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on developing a compassionate view of the world from God's perspective and working to provide not only compassionate care but also peace and justice through the Church.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- understand that Jesus' call to a life of compassion and service are not just an option but a central calling for all Christians.
- identify the range of social issues that lead to suffering in your community and the world within your reach.
- identify strategies for helping youth learn to empathize with those who suffer.
- articulate Christian practices your own church might employ to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world, particularly to those who suffer.
- articulate at least three practical steps for nurturing a more compassionate youth group.

THE RIGHT FOCUS



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It is becoming increasingly obvious to Christian youth that God's work in the world includes care for the proverbial widow, orphan, and stranger (Deuteronomy 24:17-18; Exodus 22:21-24; Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27). Making disciples of all nations includes teaching the practices of compassion, service, and justice. We must guard against these acts of justice becoming a works-righteousness; we show mercy because God first showed mercy to us.

Faithful youth ministry includes discussions of the temptations to avoid. When working with idealistic young people, youth leaders will be particularly challenged by their temptations:

- To be heroic—try to save the world themselves.
- To wallow in despair—believing “it’s far too complex” “I’m only one person.”
- To forget hope—God is already in what we are doing.
- To not confess their own complicity or to slip into the comfortable apathy of cynicism—“I can’t believe those people could do such a thing.”

It helps to keep the focus on what God has done and is doing in the world around us in very practical, material terms.

OPEN OUR EYES: OPEN OUR EARS



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Listening to the Depths of Exploitation in our World

The pursuit of justice and reconciliation is at the heart of our Christian heritage, the foundation of our church, and the life of holiness. We pursue justice when we let the oppressed go free, share our food with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into our homes, clothe the naked, and satisfy the needs of the afflicted (Isaiah 58). Living a Christian life involves being able to name injustice and confront the powers that cause injustice. More importantly, living a Christian life involves being the kind of people that live God's justice and reconciliation practically in the world.

Historically the Church has responded to the physical needs of the community around them through works of mercy such as:

- feeding the hungry
- giving drink to the thirsty
- clothing the naked
- harboring the harborless
- healing the sick
- releasing the captives

Often they can be used to categorize different ministries at work, many of which you would find on the World Wide Web. These works of mercy serve not only as individual practices but also as different lenses through which to see the injustices in our world. As we grow in the awareness of the problems, and the responses of different people, we begin to see options and opportunities where young people can enter into God's work with these issues.

REFUSE TO BE CONSOLED



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In the very first book of the New Testament, the story of Jesus starts with a mother in mourning: “A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah—weeping and mourning unrestrained. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted—for they are dead” (Matthew 2:18, NLT).

One of the challenges people who have grown up in privilege face is the relative inability to deal with the heaviness of suffering. We are constantly tempted to seek easy consolation and quick fixes. We have little tolerance for pain and suffering. Mourning and lament are Christian practices that help us to connect the pain of the past with a hope for the future. Our rapid-paced, consumer, youth-oriented culture makes this very difficult for us. We have to learn how to mourn with those who mourn. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

We have been taught that our prayers should involve a range of responses toward God:

- praise and adoration
- thanksgiving
- confession
- repentance
- intercession

We need to realize our prayers of confession and repentance can help us make the connection between local and global injustice and our own passive or active participation in that injustice. As youth ministers, we need to pass this truth on to our youth. We need to spend time before God praying for hurting people and the needs they face.

RESPONDING: PROPHETIC IMAGINATION



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In *Compassion: A Reflection on Christian Life*, Henri Nouwen cautions that our actions on behalf of the poor should not come from a sense that we, as privileged people, reach down to people in need. We cannot think we are higher or better than those we assist. We do not practice compassion out of a sense of pity or polite sympathy. Instead compassion means going directly to people and places where suffering is most acute and ministering and serving there.

Compassion and service grow out of the heart of God and must spring up from who we are as Christians. Our actions of compassion and service are grounded in our worship of God and our calling to love one another. God calls us to pour ourselves out for other people in thanksgiving as Christ poured himself out for us on the Cross. God asks us to radically reorient our lives to make possible this kind of love. Just as Jesus invites us to the Lord's Table, He invites all to join together and be transformed. When we glimpse what God might do, much like the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, or even the apostles, we begin to see and imagine a new way of addressing the poor and those needing justice and responding accordingly. Our responses might include providing resources, working with communities to develop their own strengths and resources, or we might be called in advocacy against policies and social structures that harm people and keep them poor. Our ability to see the problem afresh and to envision what God might do through our efforts remains crucial as needs change.

Christians are called to participate in God's justice as a response to God's grace and the forgiveness we have received. We should not be so pretentious as to assume we can end all suffering, as if it only took our creative and communal action to bring about God's justice. As Christians we are the Body of Christ, the hands and feet of the incarnated God who suffered on our behalf. We can be better witnesses to the justice of God already at work in the world by paying special attention to those who suffer most in our world.

Often compassionate action responds to particular contexts based upon the needs of the people and the capabilities of youth. Context might call for specific ministries. Different circumstances or levels of need require different interventions. When people experience sudden crises (flood, fire, typhoon, or other natural disaster) often the response might include crisis care and even counseling to cope with the trauma. Specific, immediate resources often come through agencies that provide basic services, medical treatment, housing, and nurturing presence. Other circumstances may call for ministries that provide prevention and treatment ministries. Children in suffering from natural disasters or poverty ridden areas may need basic medical care or safe sanitation.

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In other contexts compassion may take the form of basic education (vocational skills training) or enrichment (afterschool programs) that help develop methods for self-improvement or self-esteem. Finally, other context or situations may call for ministries of advocacy or empowerment working with people to gain a sense of agency and confidence in circumstances that seem to limit their options and opportunities. Often a key question might be: “What do God’s people need in this circumstance to be able to live through the moment?” Compassionate responses might include a blending of ministries; however, youth may be best suited in a given circumstance to help people at their most pressing need.

Overall ministries tend to reflect three basic approaches: provider, development, and advocacy. Provider ministries offer resources that help people in daily life. Young people can serve in food pantries, sort clothing, and create crisis-care kits that provide basic resources for people who live in the day to day. Often these ministries provide the first line of direct care in areas suffering from immediate disasters and may be short term, strategic, and crucial during crises. Other ministries commit to more difficult situations that require longer commitments. Usually these ministries develop networks to replenish their resources. Vital in many settings, these ministries sometimes create a sense of dependency among the poor unless other approaches are used.

Development ministries attempt to change the basic circumstances of people, often providing resources or education that assist people to grow and improve their situation. Development ministries often take much longer than provider ministries and engage multiple areas of need such as life skills training or tutoring children after school. Youth can serve as a resource for these long-term ministries, serving alongside each phase of community effort; often learning from people who they assist through these ministries. Development projects often result in people who are able to reclaim their lives by finding new means to break the cycle of poverty in their community. Unfortunately some projects falter as agencies realize there are forces that often restrict the people’s ability to help themselves. The restrictions may come from local laws, the presence of economic forces opposed to local development, unfair tax systems and other obstacles. Development alone may not be enough.

Advocacy ministries attempt to help people overcome obstacles either by confronting local restrictions directly or by mobilizing people to change their habits so the poor have a better chance of improving their lives. Youth may take direct action by mobilizing people to overcome modern day slavery through education and fundraising to help children and young women in abusive situations escape their bondage. Youth may encourage people to purchase products created by local business that often do not enjoy tax benefits like large


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corporations. In every circumstance, advocacy can help youth better understand and appreciate the plight of people they work with in compassionate action. Advocacy involves a clear desire to see all people experience justice and peace based upon God's love.

God pays special attention to the poor not because there's anything virtuous in being poor, but in part because they are the ones most often called upon to forgive. We see God's grace and forgiveness no more clearly than when we are with those who suffer. Enmesh your life in the life of those who regularly suffer most and you cannot help but see the evil powers and principalities that oppress. When we are with those who suffer, we do not need extra encouragement to act to resist the oppressive habits and structures that cause suffering.

Christians who seek to participate in the justice and reconciliation of God stand in a long tradition stemming at least back to the call of Moses to liberate the Hebrew slaves. Christians in the United States have long been at the core of social movements pressing for justice, from the abolition of slavery to leadership in the USA civil rights struggle, from contemporary campaigns to end global poverty to the creation of fair trade networks and an end to exploitative labor practices, from fighting against the traffic in global prostitution to calling for an end to the international debt that is choking the poorest of the poor to death.

You might join an international debt relief campaign to begin to participate in the justice and reconciliation to which we have been called. You can start by beginning to see and be engaged in the oppressive habits that are in your own life. Students on campus can work with the administration to get fair trade coffee in the cafeteria; you might want to research what the fair trade movement is all about.

Churches, high schools, and local businesses can be encouraged to buy uniforms from sweatshop-free garment companies; you might want to look into the labor and environmental practices of the companies where you buy your clothing. Young people can join efforts to bring about more affordable housing and more livable wages in their neighborhoods; you might want to find out if companies you or your church work with pay their lowest-wage employees a living wage. We have to at least begin by making time to see those who are suffering in our community.

In every response we might first ask, how might I locally or globally, provide resources, assist development, or advocate with those needing assistance? Strategies may surface through each of these approaches (resource, development, and advocacy) that connect with the issues at hand.



In each case we must remember that we are working with God and He is already at work before we are. We have to remember our motivation comes from Christ's love for the poor, not out of our sense of being different or better than those we help. Young people possess a great capacity to embrace those hurting, to mourn with them. Youth also possess great vision to imagine how God might work through them to raise resources, to create new opportunities, to resist forces that harm others. Our responsibility rests with assisting youth to both help others and alter the patterns of their lives so we live and work together in God's compassion and justice.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Research and summarize the realities facing those that are going hungry, thirsty, naked, etc. in our world either through websites or through service groups within your community attempting similar efforts.

NOTE: At the time this module was placed on the CLT web site, the following agencies and links to web sites were viable. Please be advised, CLT is not monitoring and/or updating these links.

Feed the hungry: Fair trade and the globalization of food
Bread for the World: bread.org

Give drink to the thirsty: Lack of access to clean drinking water
Healing Waters International: healingwatersintl.org
Blood:Water: bloodwater.org
Water Footprint Network: waterfootprint.org

Clothe the naked: Sweatshops and the global garment industries
The National Labor Committee: nlcnet.org
Global Exchange: globalexchange.org

Harbor the harborless: Homelessness in the United States
National Coalition for the Homeless: nationalhomeless.org
National Alliance to End Homelessness: endhomelessness.org
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):
hud.gov/homelessness_resources

Heal the sick: The unequal distribution of global health care to those who can pay for it
Heart to Heart International: hearttoheart.org
Mercy Ships: mercyships.org
Partners in Health: pih.org
UNICEF/For Every Child: unicef.org/reports

Release the captives: The modern global slave trade
Free the Slaves: freetheslaves.net
Anti-Slavery International: antislavery.org
International Justice Mission: ijm.org
Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000:
state.gov/international-and-domestic-law



2. Create a lesson that challenges and encourages young people to show compassion without treating people as somehow less than the youth serving them. Focus on Christ's ability to identify and suffer with people in need. What scriptures might you use?

3. Identify one agency in your area that:
 - serves primarily as a provider ministry
 - offers community development
 - serves as an advocate in your community

Explore how young people in your congregation might join with each of these ministries.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Making disciples of all nations includes teaching the practices of _____.
 - A. compassion
 - B. service
 - C. justice
 - D. all of the above
2. It is becoming increasingly obvious to Christian youth that God's work in the world includes care for the proverbial widow, orphan, and stranger.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. When working with idealistic young people, youth leaders may be challenged by their youth's temptations _____.
 - A. to be heroic
 - B. to wallow in despair
 - C. to forget hope is in what God is already doing
 - D. to slip into the comfortable apathy of cynicism
 - E. all of the above
4. There is a danger that acts of justice might become works righteousness.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. The pursuit of justice is a new aspect for the Church.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. Works of mercy typically minister to physical needs.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. Mourning and lament are Christian practices that can help us to connect the pain of the past with a hope for the future.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. Christians may need to learn how to mourn with those who mourn.
 - A. True
 - B. False



9. People of privilege often struggle with how to deal with the heaviness of suffering.
- A. True
 - B. False
10. Godly, Christian's compassion and service grow out of _____.
- A. our innate goodness
 - B. a sense of guilt
 - C. the heart of God

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. In what ways could you see increasing the role of mourning in the prayer life of your youth group and congregation?
2. What practical steps do you need to take in your youth group to see through the eyes of Jesus and hear through His ears?
3. How can we cultivate our prophetic imagination? How does this impact the way we live? How does our prophetic imagination affect the way we worship? What would a church that lives by God's prophetic imagination look like in practice beyond the walls of the church?
4. How will you help the youth in your ministry develop eyes to see and ears to hear the plight of the widows, orphans, and strangers in their world? How might the worship life of your congregation change to more faithfully witness to God's concern for the widow, orphan, and stranger in our midst?