

COMPASSION



'Compassion' and 'sympathy' have much in common and both are stronger in meaning than simply 'feeling sorry for' someone. The words have their roots in the idea of 'suffering with' someone, putting yourself in someone else's shoes and experiencing what they experience. This leads to a desire to act, to do something. It is not patronizing. It is not about 'doing good' from a position of strength or 'remembering those less fortunate than ourselves'. Compassion requires an act of imagination and humility to share in the lives of others. Notice the qualities that Paul links together. He says 'clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.' (Colossians 3:12) Jesus showed compassion towards the 'harassed and helpless' crowds (Matthew 9:36) and his works of healing were always prompted by compassion for people's suffering. He wept at the death of Lazarus and was moved to act. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is not just forgiving. He is described as being filled with compassion. 'But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.' (Luke 15:20) The father seems to understand everything that his son is feeling and responds by giving him everything he needs: a whole-hearted welcome, acceptance and love. Christians have always had to wrestle with the problem of how a loving God could allow there to be evil and suffering in the world. There is no simple answer to this but we make the first step towards understanding when we grasp the idea that God the Father is not passively observing the suffering of the world from the outside. God fully identified with human suffering in the life and death of Jesus and continues to work to transform the sufferings of the world through the work of the Holy Spirit.