For the LOVE of GOD
Principles and Practice of Compassion in Missions

edited by Jerry M. Ireland

Compassionate missions constitutes a growing focus among evangelical denominations and agencies. Because of this, there exists a growing need to be guided by sound principles and best practices. This edited volume sets forth both the biblical foundations and preferred methods for churches wanting to engage in compassion as part of their missionary efforts. The aim throughout is that compassionate missions would be guided by indigenous principles that help establish autonomous local churches, capable of being salt and light in their communities. The contributors to this volume have over 200 years of missions experience. Through their first-hand knowledge of the challenges and pitfalls faced by missionaries engaging in compassion, these authors set forth foundational principles and practical guidelines related to some of the most pressing issues confronting missionaries today. These include HIV/AIDS, UPGs, human trafficking, orphans and vulnerable children, gender issues, and many more. Pastors, missionaries, missions boards, and educators will find this a valuable resource as the church in the twenty-first century continues to engage in the Great Commission.

Jerry M. Ireland is director of Africa AG Care, promoting church-based compassion all across sub-Saharan Africa. He is author of Evangelism and Social Concern in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry (Pickwick, 2015).


“Wish For the Love of God were available when I began my church-planting ministry as a missionary more than 30 years ago. It took me many years to find a framework for ministry that truly integrated evangelism and compassion, made followers of Jesus, and lifted poor communities out of cycles of poverty and disease. This book is a must-read for every evangelical engaging in compassionate and/or church-planting ministry.”

—Terry Dalrymple, Coordinator, Global CHE Network; Vice President, Alliance for Transformational Ministry

“This is a must-read for pastors, members of missions task forces, missionary leaders and practitioners, Christians involved in development projects, and mission thinkers. Here we are able to join a stimulating and insightful conversation regarding Christian mission. This work is broadly global, thoroughly evangelical, carefully biblical, theologically clear, uniquely grounded in the life of the local congregation, missionally transformational, and wonderfully practical.”

—Charles (Chuck) Van Engen, Arthur F. Glasser Senior Professor Emeritus of Biblical Theology of Mission, School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary

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Part 1
Introduction

JERRY M. IRELAND

Perhaps more than ever before, there exists a profound need to clarify a biblical and responsible approach to the church’s compassion mandate in cross-cultural missions. Though Christian missions has a long history of demonstrating compassion, today’s missionary faces an ever-growing number of challenges and pitfalls in this area. In recent times, cross-cultural Christian workers have responded to a wide range of issues, including the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, HIV/AIDS in Swaziland, human trafficking in India, a Tsunami in East Asia, and extreme poverty with its many devastating effects in many places around the globe. These tragedies all demonstrate that missionary work frequently intersects with human need and suffering. Sometimes missionary responses to these needs have been well thought out and guided by sound biblical and indigenous principles. Other times, the well-intentioned but ill-conceived efforts of missionaries in response to various compassion-oriented issues have created dependency and exhibited little or no connection to the local community. Such efforts can have a net effect of leaving those we would help worse off than they were before.

1. In this volume, “missionary” and “cross-cultural Christian worker” are used synonymously. See also the definitions of “mission” and “missions” in this chapter.
2. Corbett and Fikkert, When Helping Hurts; Lupton, Toxic Charity.
Some missions agencies have also witnessed an astonishingly sharp increase in new missionary candidates and short-term mission teams interested primarily or solely in “social justice”—which has become something of a catch-all term for all things related to compassion. Others have noticed an increase in giving toward relief and development type ministries, while funds going to evangelism and discipleship have declined. These realities have forced at least one major American denomination to articulate more clearly its approach to compassion ministries when it noticed that many candidates wanting to work in the area of social justice saw no need to connect their work to evangelism or discipleship. Yet, when compassionate missions stand apart from evangelistic efforts and apart from the work of the local church, the uniquely redemptive role of the church is either diminished or lost altogether. Therefore, missionaries must find ways to engage in compassion in ways that are more directly linked to the evangelistic calling of the church. The biblical paradigm is one in which word and deed are not two separate tracks of ministry, but rather are inherently connected and interwoven.

This book is designed to help bridge the gap that sometimes exists between compassion and evangelism. To accomplish this, we not only address the theoretical and biblical principles of compassion in what we hope is a sound and somewhat expansive manner (part one), but also provide some practical guidelines intended to help missionaries navigate the difficult terrain of compassionate missions (part two).

All of the contributors to this volume have at least one advanced degree related to the topic they address. This formal training is buttressed by years of hands-on experience. Together they have well over two hundred years of missions involvement. They have worked in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. As they have traveled the globe and taught on compassion in missions and worked with local believers to build healthy churches that exhibit a robust understanding of God’s own concern for the poor and marginalized, they have found themselves searching in vain for a single volume that addresses both the theoretical and practical side of compassionate missions. This book was born out of that search.

Another reason for this text is that dominant issues in compassionate missions change frequently, and not always for good reasons. Not long ago, HIV/AIDS and orphans were a primary concern. Nearly every evangelical church in the United States had heard of Heidi and Rolland Baker and their

ministry to street children in Mozambique. In early 2015, as this book was being written, the Ebola crisis in West Africa and its once non-stop coverage by Western news outlets had begun to fade. At the same time, human trafficking had been a dominant focus of evangelical compassionate missions for at least a decade. By the time this book goes to press, it seems likely that a new crisis will have captured the attention of evangelicals, and some will demand that we drop everything and turn our attention there. Yet, some of these issues never went away or even subsided to any significant degree on the world stage. Consider, for example, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Though significant milestones have been reached, this virus continues its devastating spread in countries around the world, and though the emphasis on HIV/AIDS as a major concern in missions has diminished, the need has not. To put it plainly, our tendency to change course in pursuit of what appears to be "the next big thing," even before we have sufficiently addressed the last big thing, merely points to the enduring need to direct emotional and cultural currents with solid biblical foundations and best practices. When this does not happen disaster often ensues. In short, to paraphrase the late Carl F. H. Henry, a reactionary theology will not do. As Scott W. Sunquist puts it, "Christian missionary involvement must not be bound to what is popular, popularly known, or even what seems like 'viable' mission."

Another reality that presses the need for this text centers on the fact that evangelical missionaries have not always done a good job of integrating compassionate work with the national and local churches in the country where they serve. Because of this, we are forced to ask some searching questions. Are our compassionate efforts in missions driven by real needs and by biblical mandates, or by whatever captivates our attention? Do we engage in compassionate ministries out of a need to feel good about ourselves or out of a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches? Does the manner in which we conduct compassionate missions focus on the needs of those we are helping or on their assets? Do we involve those we seek to help in the process, or do we merely presume to know what they need and forge ahead? What is the difference between compassionate work done by missionaries and that done by any number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

5. See for example, Stafford, "Miracles in Mozambique: How Mama Heidi Reaches the Abandoned."
6. For a helpful discussion on the importance of HIV/AIDS being incorporated into theological education, see Chitando, "HIV and AIDS and Theological Education: Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education," 242–250.
9. This statement refers to places where the church has been planted.
and parachurch organizations? Should there be a difference? These are questions every missionary working in compassionate ministry should take the time to consider and work through, and this volume has been conceived with these very questions in mind. We have made a conscious attempt to not be driven by the ever-changing and fickle winds of a consumer culture, but by realities that we know, from first-hand experience, directly impact the task of reaching the lost for Christ.

OVERVIEW

Part one of this text focuses on guiding and foundational principles. In chapter 2, Jerry Ireland explores the theological foundations for compassion through a study of the biblical concept of the kingdom of God, wherein compassion constitutes a fundamental aspect of what it means to be the people of God. He then looks at how this biblical understanding should inform the praxis of missionaries and the flourishing of indigenous local churches. Following this, Alan Johnson further develops the idea of how compassion can be done according to indigenous principles. Following Ralph Winter, he distinguishes between the marks of the church and the purpose of the missions band, noting important differences in purpose and function. In chapter 4, JoAnn Butrin and Chad Thornhill articulate social and biblical definitions of poverty. They adopt the widely held view that poverty should be defined by more than economic factors and set the definition within a scriptural framework. Rounding out part one of the text and this section on guiding principles, Suzanne Hurst introduces the essence of a development approach to compassion. Development focuses on the dignity of every person and seeks to avoid the creation of dependency. It also focuses on assets rather than on needs.

In part two, we turn to specific applications of the principles outlined in part one. This section opens with a chapter by Jeff Palmer and Lynda Hausfeld on unreached people groups (UPGs). Included in this chapter is a discussion of how simple acts of compassion can be an effective means of reaching Muslim women. Then, Jean Johnson looks at sustainability in compassionate missions. She proposes ways that missionaries can respond to compassionate needs without depending on outside resources or creating systems that cannot be locally run and locally supported. Following this, several authors propose some specific guidelines that focus on the church's response to dominant issues in contemporary missiology. Brian Fikkert discusses economic development, focusing especially on micro-financing. JoAnn Butrin, Brandy Wilson, Jerry Ireland, and Suzanne Hurst provide
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guidelines for the churches response to injustice, including issues such as human trafficking, gender inequality, and war and genocide. Jerry Ireland discusses the church’s response to the needs of children and considers the value of things such as child sponsorship and orphanages. Karen Herrera and Paula Ireland address the church’s response to health issues, looking specifically at some of the most common global challenges, such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, diarrhea and others. Jeffrey Hartensveld writes about church-based responses to natural disasters, based on his experiences in Indonesia during the 2004 tsunami that hit that area. Finally, Jason Paltzer provides some helpful guidelines for how faith-based organizations (FBOs) might more effectively work with local churches.

THE APPROACH OF THIS TEXT

This text addresses compassion in missions from a thoroughly evangelical perspective. As such, this text will center around three themes to which we will often return: biblical foundations, the local church, and development principles. The central thesis of this text is that these themes must guide evangelical responses to compassion if we are to be faithful to Scripture and to the church’s uniquely redemptive purpose. We will argue that Christian compassion is fundamentally a matter of discipleship and that modern Christian missions often tends, contrarily, toward the professionalization of compassionate ministry. Such an approach robs local believers of their God-given mandate to love their neighbors (Matt 22:39).

Defining Mission(s)

What is “missions” and what does it mean to be a “missionary”? As Ott and Strauss have observed, since the 1960s, the singular form “mission” has been increasingly used to mean all of “God’s sending activity in the world: God’s mission in the world.” The plural “missions” generally refers more precisely to cross-cultural efforts to plant the church and thereby take part in the expansion of God’s kingdom.10 This seems like a helpful way to understand these concepts and we will generally follow this pattern. A missionary then would be those who engage in missions (plural). All believers should participate in mission (singular), as all of God’s people are called to involve themselves broadly in God’s redemptive plan. Such activities would include near-neighbor evangelism and compassionate acts of service to one’s church

and community. In Scripture, though, there are those who are set apart and specifically called to the task of planting and nurturing churches. We see this especially in Acts 11–13, where Paul and Barnabas first go to strengthen the newly planted church at Antioch, and then are later sent by the Antioch church on a church-planting mission among gentiles. "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2b).

We are primarily concerned with understanding compassion within the context of the cross-cultural movement of God’s people to plant the church where it does not exist and to strengthen the church where it does exist. As Christians help plant churches where there are no churches, we inevitably enter into partnerships with local believers, and these partnerships, ideally, become a means for the continued movement of the gospel into new territory.

Biblical Principles

Biblical principles must guide all that we do as the people of God, no less in compassion than in church planting and evangelism. As Evangelicals, we hold that the Bible is the primary source for knowing God and His purposes. Yet when it comes to taking our cue from the Bible in compassionate missions, we must pay attention to both the question of compassion and the question of missions. In other words, we must first ask, "what does the Bible say about compassion?" Then we must follow that by inquiring, "how should we interpret that in the context of missions?" It would be an illegitimate move simply to discern what the Bible says about compassion and then go out and do that in a cross-cultural context. This is because, as we will see in chapters two and three, what is true of the local church and of every disciple is not necessarily true for missionaries. Each operates under a somewhat different biblical mandate.

To be Evangelical means to give primary place to the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ.11 This means that concern for the lost always oc-
pies the central place in the mission of the church. Evangelical compassion must consistently exhibit a robust concern for the lost, with the understanding that only Jesus can redeem sinful humanity from its fallen state. We shall return shortly to the issue of precisely how evangelistic and compassionate missions relate to one another. First, it is important to establish the primacy of the local church in evangelical compassionate missions.

The Local Church

Disciples of Jesus, those who make up the local church, should function as salt and light in their communities (Matt 5:13–16). The church exists to both proclaim and interpret God’s revealed Word, and to show forth the moral standards of the Kingdom of God. Missionaries should work to plant and strengthen local churches. Yet sadly, some missionaries have approached compassion as a stand-alone enterprise. For example, one missionary working in a restricted-access country was invited to a meeting in which his colleagues were discussing their team’s church planting and evangelism strategies. After sitting silently for an extended period of time during the meeting, this missionary finally spoke up and declared that they were not there to do church planting and evangelism, but only social justice work. When he said this, the other team members sat back in disbelief. Where did this person get the idea that social justice work, important as it is, could legitimately be divorced from the work of establishing churches or making disciples? Do not those being given relief from temporal sufferings also need relief from eternal suffering? How could anyone think that a denominationally-sent missions team, including each member, could neglect its only unique role, that of proclaiming God’s gracious offer of salvation to all persons?

In the context of Christian missions, the reality of human suffering cannot be interpreted apart from the larger biblical narrative and its overarching redemptive structure. The need for compassionate responses must be understood within the context of the fall and human rebellion against God (Genesis 3) and God’s gracious offer of salvation in and through Christ. Injustice exists because creation is in rebellion against the Creator. Not only this, but the church, defined as the people of God, and it alone, is tasked with the divine purpose of proclaiming that the same God who wills justice will also one day judge all people. Therefore, when Christian missionaries

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12. The precise biblical foundations for this will be developed in chapter 2.
engage in compassionate outreach, if they are to be true to their calling as part of the church, they must set forth the reality of God's coming judgment and the offer of hope in Christ. Furthermore, this is a function that can only be achieved by the church, which is tasked with providing entrance to the Kingdom and standing sentry against the forces of evil (Matt 16:16–20).

The role of missionaries is to equip local believers to be the primary responders. We see this pattern in Acts 11:19–30. Here we are introduced to the church at Antioch, which is the first majority gentile church in the New Testament, and the first place where believers were called Christians. Paul (referred to here as Saul) and Barnabas spent a year teaching and equipping the disciples. When a prophet announces a coming famine, the local church responds of its own initiative and out of its own resources. “The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). In other words, the teaching/equipping ministry of the missionaries led directly to the indigenous compassionate response of the local church. The disciples, not the missionaries, decided on an appropriate response and financed that response out of the resources they could muster themselves. This in fact appears to be a New Testament pattern, as we see much the same thing in 2 Corinthians. Paul, speaking this time of the Macedonian believers, says, “For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord” (2 Cor 8:3).

When we focus on empowering and equipping local churches for compassionate outreach, we are helping prepare those churches for cross-cultural missions. By this, we simply mean that people often do not begin to love people across the border until they have started to love people across the street. The global missionary impulse of God's people has always moved from the local to the global, from Israel to the nations, from Jerusalem to the utter most parts, from the community of faith to the broader human family. Consider for example the apostle Paul, who instructs, “while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Gal 6:10; NASB). Though the church has an obligation to the larger community in which it resides, its compassionate mandate must begin at home. From that starting point, the church then discovers the infinite resources bound up in loving God and neighbor.

Development

The term “development” in this text refers to an approach to compassionate missions that starts with people's assets rather than their needs. Furthermore, a development approach to compassion has as its primary objective,
do no harm. Compassionate efforts that are most fruitful are those that avoid the creation of dependency, which often robs those we would serve of their God-given dignity as divine image bearers. Development can also be distinguished from short-term relief efforts aimed primarily at alleviating immediate needs arising from disasters or catastrophe. Development requires long-term commitment and emphasizes local ownership and resources. As such, it shuns the quick fix.

A driving idea behind development principles is that of sustainability. This means simply that compassionate efforts should be able not only to persist, but thrive, even without missionary presence and involvement. Such an approach requires tremendous humility and long-term commitment. The missionary who engages in development work cannot be in the spotlight or play the dominant role. Development requires empowering and training local people. This idea finds its ultimate basis in Jesus’ own mission, as He came not to be served, but to serve (Matt 20:28).

**THE PRIORITISM–HOLISM DEBATE**

Evangelicals have, for decades, been locked in a somewhat bitter and often divisive debate over the relationship between compassionate service (deed) and evangelistic efforts (word). How should we understand these issues as they relate to the mission of the church? Is there a priority, and if so what does priority mean? Does prioritizing one thing mean that the other thing is optional, as some have claimed?14 Or, does priority simply refer to an *ontological priority* that especially defines the nature of the church, but does not necessarily apply to every concrete situation?15

To answer these questions a brief survey of some of the historical circumstances that have given rise to this debate will prove helpful. It is widely acknowledged that much of the modern confusion over the relationship between compassion and evangelism can be traced to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that peaked in the early decades of the twentieth century. Prior to this, as Ed Smither has pointed out regarding the early church, the relationship was somewhat intuitive, as church leaders declared, “of course we preach the gospel; of course we feed the poor.”16

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The Enlightenment

To understand modern developments, we must begin with the Enlightenment, which has dramatically shaped modern thinking on numerous fronts, including the place of moral or compassionate virtue in the Christian life. The Enlightenment, also called the “Age of Reason,” can somewhat simplistically be defined as “an emphasis upon the ability of human reason to penetrate the mysteries of the world.”

The Enlightenment, perhaps more than any other era in human history, has shaped and defined the modern western mind. Specifically, the Enlightenment represented a challenge to or shift in traditional views regarding several key areas of human thought, especially (1) individual autonomy, (2) the role and usage of reason, (3) an emphasis on the natural, entailing a de-emphasis on the supernatural, (4) the power of human progress, and (5) a tendency toward pluralism and tolerance. These were the primary themes of the Enlightenment. It was an era that would radically transform approaches to religion in general and to Christianity in particular.

Liberal Theology

Liberal theology embodied Enlightenment ideology and came to emphasize especially the supposed moral agenda of Jesus, and moved away from classic orthodox understandings of historical dogma. By emphasizing Jesus’ ethical teachings, liberal theology sought to rescue Christianity from the devastating effects of the Enlightenment, which in denying the supernatural left both the nature and content of Scripture, along with many Christian doctrines, unstable.

Fundamentalism answered with militant opposition to liberalism coupled with cultural retreat and often overly simplistic defenses of classic Christian doctrines. Because social concern had become the very center of liberal theology, fundamentalism tended to reject social justice issues as being too focused on temporal things rather than on the weightier matters of eternity. In fundamentalism the Kingdom of God came to be understood primarily in futuristic, spiritual terms with little or no practical relevance to the

18. Livingston, Modern Christian Thought, 6–11.
19. For example, see Marsden’s comment that William Jennings Bryan’s “defense of Christianity was essentially pragmatic,” and that Bryan himself admitted to not having had much time to study theology; Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 134.
present church age. Yet, this understanding marked a significant departure from orthodox Christianity, which had long embodied a vibrant social ethic.

The Scopes Trial

The clash between fundamentalists and their modernist, liberal counterparts took center stage in the infamous Scopes Trial that took place in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. That year, twenty-four-year-old teacher John T. Scopes, at the urging of others, taught evolution in his classroom, thereby violating state law. This very deliberate act led to an indictment and trial for Scopes that attracted a flood of media attention, as two of the nation’s top lawyers took opposing sides of the case. In many ways, the Scopes trial was a circus. As Kenneth J. Collins observes, "complex intellectual issues emerged cartoonlike in some of the national papers, with the fundamentalists being characterized as buffoons."20

Clarence Darrow, an agnostic, led the defense of Scopes, while three-time presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, William Jennings Bryan, a fundamentalist Christian, led the prosecution. Biased press coverage, epitomized by that of H. L. Mencken with The Baltimore Sun, frequently misrepresented Bryan to the public, making him appear ignorant and out of touch. Bryan, for his part though, contributed to this through a number of missteps at the trial that resulted in Darrow consistently having the upper hand. In the end, the result was clear. It had not been Scopes who was on trial, but fundamentalism. At least in the public eye, fundamentalism was found guilty of being behind the times and woefully ignorant of developments in science and critical studies of the Bible. Shortly after the trial concluded, Bryan died of a heart attack. And indeed, fundamentalism itself suffered a mortal wound from which it never quite recovered.

About this same time, the Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and others was gaining momentum. As Collins observes, this movement was characterized by a de-emphasis on personal salvation in favor of a focus on social sins, and by a conscious move away from a belief in instantaneous conversion. Many social gospel advocates preferred to understand salvation in terms of human service toward others and conversion was participation in those types of activities.21 Fundamentalists reacted strongly to this, decrying "social service Christianity’ that left out the soul."22

21. Ibid., 50.
22. Ibid., 51.
The Emergence of neo-Evangelicalism

Following these setbacks, fundamentalists began to withdraw from culture altogether and, for the most part, abandoned what had once been a vibrant approach to social needs. World War II (WWII) also marked a serious setback for modernists who had set their hopes on the supposed inevitability of human progress in the social arena. As R. Hilberg says of the Holocaust that lay at the center of WWII: "All our assumptions about the world and its progress prior to the years when this event burst forth have been upset. The certainties of the late nineteenth and twentieth century vanished in its face. What we once understood, we no longer comprehend." 23

Immediately following WWII, Carl F. H. Henry wrote one of the most important books of the late twentieth century concerning the needed revival of Christian compassion and social concern. In The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism, Henry directly challenged the fundamentalist withdrawal from social concern as a knee-jerk reaction to liberal theology that was also un-tethered from the concerns of Scripture. Henry's critique was especially poignant given Henry's own fundamentalist roots and that he was writing as something of an insider. In this text, Henry argued from within a priority framework for the necessity of evangelical social concern. 24

Not only this text, but much of Henry's career would center on efforts to reclaim the social relevance of biblical Christianity that had evaporated during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. As a result, Henry, along with Harold Ockenga, can be credited with launching neo-Evangelicalism, which by definition sought to advance a more socially engaged and intellectually rigorous form of conservative Christianity. Included in these efforts were the launching of Christianity Today (CT) in 1955, which included in its founding principles the necessity of a socially active faith. 25

The Lausanne Movement

After the launching of neo-Evangelicalism by Henry and others, Billy Graham, with the help of Carl Henry and CT, founded the Lausanne Movement by holding The First International Congress on World Evangelization in

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25. Ireland, Evangelism and Social Concern, 49. Also, Christianity Today, when launched, embodied a more scholarly bent than it does now.
Lausanne, Switzerland in July of 1974. This movement would play a major role in the unfolding prioritism-holism debate.

Billy Graham had specifically asked that the 1974 Congress clarify the relationship between evangelism and social concern. It did so, declaring, "In the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary." However, as a follow-up to Lausanne, the Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) convened in Pattaya, Thailand in 1980 and emphasized the necessity of social concern, but reaffirmed the priority of evangelism as stated in the original covenant. However, some thought this resulted from the conference being hijacked by church growth advocates from North America, who were also accused of ignoring voices from the global south and of too narrowly defining the task of evangelism. This led to the 1982 Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR). This consultation allowed for three possible approaches to the question of how evangelism and social concern relate to one another. First, social concern can be seen as a consequence of evangelism, since conversion should result in a transformed life directed toward the service of others. Second, it may be viewed as a bridge to evangelism in that it can help overcome hindrances to the reception of the gospel. Finally, social concern functions as a partner of evangelism, given that the two belong together, "like two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird." The CRESR also upheld "the primacy" of evangelism on two grounds: first, evangelism relates more directly to people's eternal destiny, and second, in order for there to be Christians involved in social action, there must first have been Christian evangelism. There is, by necessity, a logical order between the two, for Christian social action depends on people having already been converted to Christianity.

Mission as Transformation

In addition to Lausanne, several conferences leading up to it, including the 1966 Wheaton Declaration and Ron Sider's 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, have contributed to the growth of a new movement within evangelicalism, variously termed Integral Mission, Holistic Mission, or Mission as Transformation. Leading voices in this movement

26. Stott, Making Christ Known, xix; see §6 of the original covenant.
27. Kirk, Good News of the Coming Kingdom, 15.
29. Ibid.; Sider, Good News and Good, 170.
include Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, René Padilla, Orlando Costas, Samuel Escobar, David Bosch, Ronald Sider, David Gitari, and Kwame Bediako, among others.31

When Lausanne I affirmed the priority of evangelism, it also, ironically, helped birth the modern holistic movement. As Tizon has shown, Lausanne produced a number of subsequent evangelical conferences, such as Wheaton ’83, that first began to develop the theological and practical understanding of holistic missions. In this, the idea of “transformation”, defined as “the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God’s purpose to one in which people are able to enjoy fullness of life in harmony with God,” featured prominently.32 This framework also not only set forth an integral relationship between evangelism and social concern, but also tended to equate the two as being equally important.33 Furthermore, there was within this movement a conscious effort to read Scripture through the lens of poverty and concern for the poor. As Sugden has said, “the revelation of God in Christ was given in a particular context, the context of the poor—whether that was the Hebrew slaves escaping Egypt or the people of the land among whom Jesus ministered—so the context of the poor took priority in exegeting the meaning of the Gospel.”34 Thus, the primary starting point within mission as transformation was poverty. From there, advocates also pointed to what they believed to be unbiblical dichotomies between the eternal and the temporal, and between body and soul.35

Today missionaries continue to polarize around various ends of the spectrum when it comes to evangelism and compassion. The mission as transformation movement has helped Western missionaries to rediscover what the Bible says about God’s own concern for the poor and marginalized. This movement is not without its problems, however; the most significant of which is that it has, as so often happens in the correction of theological error, swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. If, for example, we take Sugden’s observation above concerning the giving of revelation, it seems far more accurate to say that God’s revelation was given in a specific context, and that context was the fundamental need of God’s redemption, and not poverty per se. In other words, we need not eisegetically place poverty as the central concern of the Bible in order to fully appreciate that God’s

31. Tizon, Transformation After Lausanne, 5.
32. Lausanne Movement.
33. See comments by the radical discipleship element at Lausanne, in Stott, Making Christ Known, 24.
35. Ibid., 32.
Word says a great deal about the poor and the necessary response of God’s covenant people.

In addition, the holistic mission movement has tended to set evangelism and compassion on a level plane by locating the theological foundations for both within the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God. Because of this, there has been a tendency within this movement to describe the evangelistic and compassionate mandates of the church in parallel terms, as “two sides of the same coin,” or “two wings of the same bird.” The genesis of this perspective in fact can especially be traced to the Grand Rapids Consultation, as we have indicated.

A Proposed Way Forward

So where do we go from here? How should evangelicals wanting to be faithful to Scripture engage in compassion, and how should compassion in missions be related to evangelism? The approach of this text is that first, evangelism and compassion should never be equated with one another as being essentially the same thing. Sometimes the language of mission as transformation moves dangerously in this direction. Just because evangelism and compassion both find theological backing in the concept of the Kingdom of God, this actually tells us nothing about how these two mandates relate to one another, because it fails to either ask or answer the question of what other theological weight might be attached to these issues. Second, the question of relationship only solves part of the problem for missionaries. As already noted, we must know both the nature of Christian compassion and what that should look like in missions. Too often we have only sought after the nature of Christian compassion, and failed to ask the second, equally important question. As we work through this in chapter two, we will see that compassion rightly understood is necessarily integrated within the Christian life. However, in response to the second question, we discover that there is a strong biblical basis for missionaries to focus more on equipping rather than on doing.

We are indebted to the mission as transformation movement for helping to recover the integrated nature of evangelism and social concern. However, the theological misstep of the mission as transformation movement was that it seemed to presume that some ontological equality (two wings of a bird or two sides of a coin) was necessary to achieve integration. But this is simply not so. Within a biblical worldview, things can be of unequal

status and yet still be integrated. The verbal proclamation of God’s revealed word and its unique role in God’s redemptive plan defines the church’s mission in the world in a way that nothing else quite does. But this need not relegate compassion to optional status. Compassion cannot be thought of, at least biblically, as an add-on to the Christian faith or as optional. How then should we best understand the relationship between evangelism and compassion? In answering this question, Christopher Wright helpfully uses a wheel analogy to describe these two functions of the church in terms of integration and interdependence, even while upholding distinction and difference:

A wheel is an integrated object that necessarily must have both a hub at the center (connected to the axle and an engine), and a rim (connected to the road). Without a rim, a hub is just a rotating axle end. Without a hub, a rim is just a hoop, spinning anywhere and soon falling over. A hub and a rim are distinct things, but unless they are integrally working together, neither constitutes a wheel. If evangelism is like the hub, connected to the engine of the Gospel of God, then it also takes the living demonstration of the gospel in Christian’s engagement with the world to give the hub connection and traction with the context—the road.38

By differentiating both evangelism and compassion, and by understanding their unique role in the Christian life, we can keep central to the missionary task the uniquely redemptive role of the church in God’s salvific plan. The wheel of missionary endeavor works best when both evangelism and compassion are properly defined and practiced. What follows in this text will therefore be the unfolding of these two things as they relate to the compassionate mandate: proper definitions and best practices.

A Missionary Theology of Compassion

Jerry M. Ireland

In the Bible, compassion consists of a whole system of interrelated terms and ideas that define human response to God’s own compassion and mercy. These ideas especially include compassion (or mercy), love, justice and righteousness, and peace. Furthermore, these terms all lay at the center of what it means to be the people of God. They are inseparable from a vibrant and God-honoring faith. For missionaries, the challenge is not only to understand the biblical mandate for God’s people as it relates to compassion, but also to discern the best methods for advancing that mandate in a cross-cultural context.

This chapter will set forth three key ideas related to a theology of Christian compassion. First, the kingdom of God is the unifying theme of Scripture. As such, the kingdom (or reign) of God forms the primary theological basis for the compassionate response of God’s people. Second, Christian compassion is primarily a matter of discipleship and should be seen as the proper response to God’s own mercy and grace. Third, the local church as a compassionate community exists as the preeminent sign of God’s present and coming kingdom. Because of this, missionaries should work to strengthen the work of local churches so that they become all God intends them to be.
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

A sound theology of compassion requires a canonical reading of Scripture that takes into consideration the various contexts of each passage. These contexts include the natural divisions within each chapter, the entire book in which a passage is found, as well as the overarching context of the entire Bible. This approach is known as biblical theology. As Brian Rosner has observed, “Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible.”\(^1\) It is that overall theological message that will serve as the glue that holds together the varied components of Christian compassion and provides an understanding that stands on solid biblical footing. When carefully followed, this approach will help us overcome many of the common blunders related to proof-texting.

A common case of failing to consider the broader context in establishing the theological basis for compassion involves Matthew 25:31–46. This passage is often cited as the quintessential statement by Jesus calling the church to an active concern for the poor and needy.\(^2\) In fact, Jesus says that when compassion is demonstrated for the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and those in prison, it is as if those things were done to him directly. “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me’” (Matt 25:40).\(^3\)

But a crucial and often overlooked phrase in this passage is “these brothers of mine.” To whom is Jesus referring? It is difficult to answer that question simply by looking at Matthew 25. However, when we look to the entirety of Matthew’s Gospel, we discover that “these brothers of mine” always refers to the disciples. So, as one commentator observes, “This passage thus expands on the message of 10:40–42: how people respond to Jesus’ representatives is both a sign of their attitude to him and the basis for their reward.”\(^4\)

That “these brothers of mine” refers to Jesus’ disciples (“representatives”) and not the poor in general would be difficult if not impossible to know apart from reading the passage in the context of the whole Gospel of Matthew. Furthermore, the proper understanding of this passage in its context does not excuse neglecting the poor in general. As Leon Morris points

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3. All Bible quotations in this chapter unless otherwise noted are from the Lockman Foundation, New American Standard Bible, updated edition, 1995 (NASB95).
out, “such an attitude is foreign to the teachings of Jesus. Everyone in need is to be the object of Christian benevolence.”5 We just must look elsewhere for the biblical basis. In other words, the wider we expand our interpretive horizon to include more of the biblical text, the more likely we are to arrive at a faithful interpretation of the Bible’s teaching on compassion.

Normally a biblical theology progresses book by book through the Bible. Space however does not allow for this. Instead, we must look to the Bible as a whole and ask, what is the dominant theme? Then we can look for the basis for compassion by asking how passages dealing with compassion fit within and relate to that theme.

WHY COMPASSION?

“Compassion” constitutes the primary focus of this book and of this chapter. The reason for this lies in that discussions of the benevolent aspects of missions praxis have often centered around language that either inaccurately or only partially captures the biblical picture. This is evident in the tendency to describe every kind of compassion-type work as “social justice.”6 While justice is an important theme in Scripture (and a topic we deal with in some depth later on), it is not the same thing as mercy or compassion. Compassion constitutes a broader theme encompassing social justice and other important concepts as well, such as love and peacemaking. Also, in common usage, the word compassion often refers to any number of humanitarian-type endeavors done by missionaries. Because of this we will use “compassion” to broadly refer to all that the church does in missions in response to physical human need.

WHAT IS THE CENTRAL THEME OF SCRIPTURE?

If our starting point should be the dominant theme of Scripture, then what is that theme? To answer this, we could start with the Old Testament and look for recurring emphases and then ask how these emphases are carried over into the New Testament. Better still, we could start with the New Testament, and especially with the Gospels and ask, did Jesus ascribe a unifying theme to the Old Testament? Was there a central theme to Jesus’ own preaching and teaching? If so, how did that theme inform His own life and ministry?

6. McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church, 206.
This approach helpfully rests final authority on Jesus’ understanding of the Old Testament and, importantly, emphasizes that a faithful Christian interpretation of the Old Testament depends on reading it in light of the New Testament. In asking these questions, we allow Jesus’ own understanding of the Scriptures He inherited (the Old Testament), and the direction He gave to the Scriptures He was commissioning (the New Testament), to act as the foundational hermeneutic for a theology of compassion. Plus, it allows us to overcome ambiguities about how the Old Testament should function for the church. Scripture rarely gives us the specifics of how to demonstrate compassion. Rather, as we shall see, it most often provides guiding principles. Our goal then becomes to show compassion in ways that aim for the Bible's highest ideals.

When we look for the central emphasis in the teaching of Jesus, the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God clearly emerges. There does exist some debate among scholars as to whether or not the Kingdom of God, or reign of God, constitutes a central theme or the central theme of Scripture. However, scholars agree that the Kingdom of God constituted the center of Jesus’ own preaching. For example, George Eldon Ladd observed decades ago that “modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.” Gordon Fee agrees, noting that “the universal witness of the synoptic tradition is that the absolutely central theme of Jesus’ mission and message was ‘the good news of the kingdom of God.’” In other words, Jesus especially framed his own life and ministry within the concept of the Kingdom of God. As Carl Henry observes, “no subject was more frequently on the lips of Jesus Christ than the kingdom.” Furthermore, Jesus drew his understanding of the kingdom from the Old Testament. For Jesus, this was the central focus of Scripture.

**DEFINING THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The Kingdom of God refers to the rule or reign of God. This is the meaning behind both the Hebrew word *malakh* and the Greek word *basileia.* The exact phrase “Kingdom of God” is not found in the Old Testament, even though the concept of God as King occurs frequently. The Old Testa-
The Old Testament prophets anticipated the coming of a truly righteous King, a Son of David, who would fully restore God's righteous reign over all of creation. Toward this end, Isaiah prophesied saying, “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness” (Isa 9:7). Both Matthew and Luke in their Gospels immediately describe Jesus as the fulfillment of this declaration. Luke records the angel saying of Jesus, “He will be great, and will be called the son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:32–33; cf. Matt 1:1).

Jesus himself taught that his own ministry was the inauguration of God’s promised Kingdom. “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel’” (Mark 1:14). Notice that repentance is the first-order response to the kingdom. But not only does the coming kingdom entail a spiritual deliverance, but physical deliverance as well. When John the Baptist found himself in prison, he wondered if indeed Jesus was the promised Davidic King. Jesus sent a telling response. “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Luke 7:22). In other words, the appearance of the promised King of Righteousness brings both spiritual and physical deliverance. John questioned whether Jesus was truly the King he expected because his own literal release from captivity had not taken place. John’s question highlights the expectation that the promised Son of David would bring about such a deliverance. Jesus’ answer indicates that He would indeed do both. The physical and spiritual aspects pick up on Jesus’ inaugural sermon of Luke 4:18–19 and underscores the totality of the salvation that Jesus offers. Jesus’ life, and especially his resurrection, overturns the effects of the fall and points to the coming consummation when all things will be put right.
Because of this dual emphasis on the “already” aspects of the Kingdom and the “not yet” aspects, scholars now widely agree that the biblical Kingdom of God should be understood as in a sense both present and future, or what theologians call inaugurated eschatology. The reign of God exists now and is demonstrated in and through God’s covenant people—Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament. Jesus declared that the Kingdom had come in His Person (Matt 12:28). That reign, however, is not yet perfectly realized, as John the Baptist had discovered. The world awaits the full appearance of God’s reign, when Jesus will return, destroy evil once and for all, and the entirety of creation will again be declared “good,” as it was in the beginning (1 Cor 15:24–28).

COMPASSION, COMMUNITY, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Both in the Old Testament anticipation and in the New Testament’s partial realization of God’s righteous reign, a key concern was the formation of a community of chosen people who reflect the character of God in their daily lives. This compassionate community functioned in two ways according to God’s redemptive purposes. First, it functioned redemptively and formatively in that the compassion of the community was intended toward the creation of a people who reflected the mercy and compassion of God. Second, this compassionate community functioned missiologically. The missiological aspect itself functioned in two ways. First, the compassionate character of God’s people was meant to attract the attention of outsiders and draw them in. This is evident in Jesus instruction to His disciples, when he said, “let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:11–12). It also served in judgment as God’s Kingdom people set forth in their behavior the standards by which God will judge the world.12

A number of biblical terms inform the compassionate outlook of God’s people. These terms, as we have seen, figure prominently in discussions about the kingdom of God. What exactly do they mean? As we unpack these terms, the dual emphasis described above will become clear.

Mercy and Compassion

Usually compassion in Scripture refers to the compassion or mercy of God in offering the opportunity for repentance. For example, in Exodus 34:6–7 we read “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” This redemptive thrust and assurance of God’s unfailing compassion toward sinners and a rebellious people is carried throughout the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. A similar emphasis appears in Isaiah 54:8, where compassion and redemption are explicitly tied together: “In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, But with everlasting loving-kindness I will have compassion on you,’ Says the Lord your Redeemer” (also Isa 49:13; 55:7).

That said, God’s compassion also demanded of this redeemed people a compassionate response to the needs of others, and thereby fashioned the people of God to reflect God’s nature. “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,” said Jesus (Luke 6:36). Consider also the following verses which link compassion for the poor and needy to faithful obedience to God:

- Proverbs 14:31 He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.
- Proverbs 19:17 One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.
- Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?
- Zechariah 7:9–10 Thus has the LORD of hosts said, ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’
- Colossians 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
- Titus 3:14 Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.
Throughout Scripture, the compassionate response of God’s people to human need and suffering is declared more important than the exercise of religious duty. This is the point of Isaiah 58, in which God declares that strict religious devotion, in this case fasting, is fruitless if divorced from an active concern for the poor and needy. Furthermore, in this passage God declares that His people can have no expectation of justice and mercy themselves if they do not dispense it to those in need (Isa 58:2, 10–11; cf. Hos 6:6). This idea is reiterated by Jesus who said “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5:7).

A prime example of the formative nature of compassion for God’s people can be seen in the events of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. God, in an act of compassion, redeemed His people from their bondage. God’s mighty and historically situated acts pointed to His presence among His people. “And [God] said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Exod 3:12). And indeed, the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt is paradigmatic for the greater redemption provided for in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.13

Nehemiah explicitly attributes the deliverance of the Israelites and His provision for them in the wilderness to the compassion of God (see Neh 9:19–28). As we have observed, God’s compassion then is oriented toward deliverance from oppression. But that is only one side of the story. The redemption of God results in God setting forth certain ethical and moral standards for His covenant people, not as conditions of their release, but as the proper response to God’s grace. This is most evident in the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament. Both of these articulate what it means to love God and neighbor (Exod 20:1–17; Matt 5–7) and relate the faithful response to God in the context of moral and ethical expectations. To be the covenant people of God meant reflecting the character of God in every relationship. To know God was to honor Him through the merciful and compassionate treatment of others.

The compassion of God also functions missiologically. This was explicit in the promise made to Abraham when God said, “through you the nations will be blessed.” This missiological aspect found frequent emphases by the prophets throughout Israel’s long cycle of rebellion and repentance. Isaiah for example declares of Israel’s Babylonian captivity, “When the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land, then strangers will join them and attach themselves to the

13. For example, Jesus’ encounter with Satan in the desert casts Him as a new Moses (Luke 4:1–13).
Similarly, Hosea declares “I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘You are my God!’” (Hos 2:23). What are the prophets saying here? They are saying that just as it was in the Exodus, when God delivers His people from their Babylonian captivity, He will do so because of His compassion for Israel and as a demonstration to the nations of the compassion of Yahweh. Simply put, God's love for His people provides merciful relief for those in need, and signals to those outside that the God of Israel is a compassionate God.

Justice and Righteousness

No qualities are more directly linked to the nature of God's rule or reign than that of justice and righteousness. Scripture describes justice and righteousness as the primary characteristics of God's reign, as evident in the twice repeated formula that these “are the foundation of His throne” (Ps 97:1–2; 89:14). This can only mean that these two qualities especially define the reign of God in a way that nothing else does.

The terms justice (Heb. mishpat) and righteousness (Heb. tsedeqah) occur together about forty times in the Old Testament. As with compassion, these also often refer both to God's own character and to what God expects of His covenant people. The Psalmist declares that God “loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord” (Ps 33:5). These same qualities are to characterize the lives of those who worship YHWH. Of Abram God declares, “I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing justice and righteousness” (Gen 18:19). And Job declares “I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban” (Job 29:14).

Frequently God's justice and righteousness find expression in concern for the poor and needy, especially for orphans and widows. Those who are most vulnerable in society are a special concern of God and thereby of God's people. “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving them food and clothing” (Deut 10:18). Scripture expresses this care for the vulnerable in both a passive and active sense. The people of God are to take care not to oppress the poor, the needy, orphans, widows, and foreigners, but also to come to their defense when others mistreat them. For example, Jeremiah captures both senses in the exhortation to “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed.
from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed blood in this place” (Jer 22:3; cf. Isa 1:17). Justice and righteousness thus require of God’s people both the avoidance of repressive behavior toward others as well as rescuing the victims of oppression whenever we become aware of their plight.

The common linking of justice with righteousness indicates that they are to be understood together as referring to a single idea. Amos captures this clearly in the form of a Hebrew parallelism, declaring “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never ending stream” (Amos 5:24). A parallelism is a poetic device used to express a single idea in two different but similar (parallel) ways. As Cray says, “these things form the basic characteristic of God’s rule as King. Righteousness and Justice form one quality, not two. The Old Testament knows no distinction between social justice and private morality.”

The Bible’s call for the people of God to demonstrate justice and righteousness therefore can be understood as emphasizing both the inherent rights of individuals (justice) and human actions that provide for, ensure, and protect those rights (righteousness). The Ten Commandments in fact are inherently “rights” oriented. Murder is forbidden because others have a right to their own life. Stealing is forbidden because they have a right to their own property. These rights find grounding in that all persons have value by virtue of being created in the image of God. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah specifically links oppression of the poor and needy to neglect of their rights (Jer 5:28). Justice and righteousness then are crucial to the formation of a Kingdom people. As Smedes says:

The prophets of the Old Testament walked the streets of Israel’s cities, probed into Judah’s courts, poked around in the market places, and were outraged at what they saw. They saw injustice aplenty, and they roared their indignation at those who had money and power for raping the poor and oppressing the weak. They were not detached philosophers spinning out theories of justice; they were angry prophets attacking injustice as they saw it. Yet when the prophets spoke for justice, they must have been moved by some vision of justice, of a people made whole and right in the kingdom of God.

15. On the link between justice and rights in the Ten Commandments, see Smedes, Mere Morality, 15–16, 23. See also Mott, who defines “rights” as “God’s claim on us.” He further says “rights . . . are as much a matter of responsibility as they are of freedom. Every right implies a duty,” Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change, 53.
17. Ibid., 27.
The New Testament uses a single word, *dikaiosunē*, to express both ideas (justice and righteousness). Unfortunately, most of us think of this term in the New Testament solely in terms of justification, of being made right in the eyes of God through faith in Jesus. And in several passages that is indeed the intended sense. But in other passages, righteousness is used in keeping with the Old Testament pattern of ethical obedience characteristic of God’s covenant people. This is evident in Rom 6:13–20, in which righteousness is contrasted with living in sinful disregard of God. In Eph 4:24 the righteousness of those who are a new creation in Christ is to result in kindness and forgiveness toward others, based on God’s own undeserved kindness and forgiveness. Righteousness also produces generosity (2 Cor 9:10), and believers are to be trained in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). For Paul, God’s righteousness creates a people whose lives testify to the reconciling love of God. We might also recall that Jesus spoke of righteousness not primarily as a state of being but as an action. It was something to be practiced in a way that surpassed that of the Pharisees (Matt 6:1; Matt 5:20). Jesus and Paul also directly associated righteousness with the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33; Rom 14:7) and as a quality of God to be imitated.

Love

The basis for the people of God defending and providing for the needs of others is not duty, but love.18 Two Old Testament passages of Scripture especially emphasize the importance of loving both neighbors and strangers. Leviticus 19:18 instructs the Israelites, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Later in that same chapter we read, “The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” Jesus combines Leviticus 19:18 with Deut 6:4 in declaring that the greatest commandment is loving God and the second is loving one’s neighbor (Mark 12:29–31). This means that, as Lewis Smedes has said of the Ten Commandments, they not only point to the minimal requirement of justice, but also to the maximal requirement of love.19

If loving our neighbor is the second greatest commandment, we may be inclined like the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan to ask “who is my neighbor?” In his response, Jesus combines the definition of neighbor and stranger, making the point that they can be and often are one in the


19. Smedes, 16.
same. A neighbor is anyone in need and cannot be defined according to race or social or economic status (Luke 10:30–37). The kind of love God requires is not just loving one's family and friends but also one's enemies (Matt 5:43–46). Furthermore, the motivation for enemy love is the indiscriminate compassion of God, who causes "the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous" (5:45b). Once again, the compassion of God provides the model for the compassion of God's people.

In Scripture, love is concrete and action oriented. It is not primarily an emotion. A number of passages bear this out, such as 1 John 3:16–18. Here the loving actions of Jesus in laying down His life for others is described as a paradigm for the loving actions of his followers. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Jesus' love is not only a pattern to be followed, but makes possible the love of His disciples. "Even as I have loved you, love one another" (John 13:34; RSV). As Mott points out, "Jesus' love is both the source and measure of their love."20

Hesed

Another important biblical term that informs our understanding of compassion is the Hebrew noun hesed, frequently translated as love, loving-kindness, or mercy. Hesed constitutes the highest expectation of God for his people. It is the measure par excellence of what God desires in our relationship with Him and with one another. In Hosea 6:6 God says, "For I delight in loyalty (hesed) rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Likewise, Micah declares of God, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love kindness (hesed) and to walk humbly with your God." And in Proverbs we read "What is desirable in a man is his kindness (hesed)" (Prov 19:22). All three of these passages emphasize that the people of God should be especially characterized by the expression of kindness and love toward others. In all of this, the goal is that the people of God would reflect the qualities of God's own nature. As we have seen again and again in this chapter, faith and compassion go hand in hand.

20. Mott, Biblical Ethics, 41.
Peace

In the Bible, peace (shalom) represents a state of being, wholeness, where justice, righteousness, and love are present as the realization of God’s will (cf. Isa 52:7). The term occurs roughly 250 times in the Old Testament. The New Testament equivalent (eirēne) occurs about 100 times. From these several important aspects of peace can be discerned. Peace represented the blessing of God (Num 6:26). Jesus instructs his disciples to be peacemakers (Matt 5:9), and his conflict with Satan is described as the absence of peace (Matt 10:34). Paul describes peace as an essential quality of God (“God of Peace”; Rom 15:33, et al.). Paul and other New Testament writers also describe peacemaking as something believers are to actively pursue (Rom 14:19; 2 Tim 2:22; He 12:14, 1 Pet 3:11; James 3:18).²¹

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND DISCIPLESHIP

The real danger in contemporary missiology when it comes to compassion lies in the tendency toward the professionalization of compassion. Many missionaries today conceive of compassionate missions according to an NGO or parachurch structure. These structures often develop independently of local believers and tend to be funded and run by outsiders. As a missionary living in West Africa, I have heard countless tales told by African pastors describing how donor-driven projects connected to NGOs have ruined the image and effectiveness of the local church. These stories are sadly similar. An organization wanting to do good comes in and starts some sort of benevolence program. Often times the organization offers to provide their service through a local church. I even recently heard of one organization that was using a local church to distribute lump sums of cash in the amount of $100. I presume the idea was that folks would use this money to start small business that would eventually help people escape poverty. Yet, almost all of these programs end the same. Eventually resources run out, but only after having created dependency in the community. Those called to be salt and light are no longer preserving and illuminating, but have become dependent and materialistic. Local church members end up losing sight of the joy of giving and think only in terms of what they can get. And when the handouts disappear, so too does most of the congregation.

All of this results from the loss of compassionate virtues and ethics as part of the disciple-making process. The cure for this malady is to understand Christian compassion primarily as a matter of character formation, or

discipleship. In fact, looking back at the early church, one discovers that the compassionate lifestyle of potential converts was a chief concern in the disciple-making process. In some cases, individuals were denied baptism who showed no genuine love toward others. Because of this, the process of conversion involved more than simply saying a short prayer. Instead, the process of discipleship could take years because the development of this compassionate orientation was considered indispensable for true conversion. To cite one example among many, in the early Christian text known as The Apostolic Tradition, usually reckoned to be a third-century discipleship document, we read that candidates for baptism should be carefully examined in order to establish “whether they lived uprightly as catechumens, whether they honored the widows, whether they visited the sick, whether they were thorough in performing good works.” Early Christians placed great value on the ability of the faith community to demonstrate radical forms of love for both one another and for outsiders. This love attracted unbelievers and made them want to be part of this compassionate community.

Somewhere along the way this emphasis has been lost. Perhaps, when it comes to missions, we have lost this emphasis on character formation because it is not something we can put in a shoebox and ship around the world. We cannot pile it into shipping containers or send a six-person team to build it in a week’s time span. But when compassion is understood in terms of character formation, then this has radical implications for the way we go about missions. Most importantly, we should never engage in compassionate missions in a way that robs local congregations of this aspect of their essential Christian identity. As we look to what Scripture says about the compassionate orientation of God’s people, we will see that the primary focus is on the development of a community that daily lives out this compassionate disposition, as it loves God and neighbor.

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

This approach of the early church relating to compassion and discipleship is strengthened by looking at the meaning of conversion. In Scripture, conversion is a matter of accepting the merciful offer of God’s redemption and of

23. Hippolytus, On the Apostolic Tradition, 261. The Didache, usually dated to the late first or early second century, also highlights the necessity of compassion among new believers as a matter of discipleship.
living under the rule of the King, as we have already seen. This includes becoming compassionate (merciful) towards others in need. Paul describes this using the imagery of light: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Those given entrance to the Kingdom are not to just believe the truth, they are to practice it (John 3:21).

Paul K. Moser has described this interdependence of faith and obedient, loving action as *kardiatheology*, from the Greek word *kardia*, meaning “heart.” Moser defines theology of the heart as “an entrustment of oneself to God that involves one’s motivational heart and is therefore action-oriented.” Moser’s point is that true biblical faith is not solely internal and spiritual. Rather true faith should result in obedient and loving action modeled on the loving actions of God. In defense of this idea, Moser refers to Paul. “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19, RSV).

So strong was the link in the early church between conversion-discipleship and the necessity of caring for the needy that later commentators were perplexed that “almsgiving seem[ed] to be encouraged more for salvation of the giver than for alleviation of poverty.” In other words, sermons in the early church tended to emphasize that if one was not actively concerned for the poor, then one’s salvation was in question. This issue was not so much how much was given, but whether the giving was done freely and joyfully. The basis of this was that one’s outward life reflected the attitude of the heart. One’s action’s revealed one’s true beliefs and showed whether a person had truly appreciated the mercy God had shown them.

This idea of the interrelationship between faith and compassionate or loving action is born out in the story of the rich man in Luke 18:18–27. It is also noteworthy to observe that the story is framed in the context of the Kingdom of God, and the need to enter the kingdom as a child (Luke 18:17). The questioner, described as “a ruler” is certainly someone of elevated social status. Indeed, by calling Jesus “Good Teacher” the ruler made an effort to force a return compliment regarding his status. Social norms of the day called for nothing less. But Jesus would have no part in this social game. By asking “why do you call me good?” Jesus challenged the widely held idea that goodness and social status went hand in hand. Specifically, he challenged the man’s notion of “goodness” by bringing up the Ten Commandments, which as we have mentioned, formed the theological and ethical basis for

26. Ibid., 21 (emphasis in Moser).
27. Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich*, 75.
the people of God. The man responds that he has kept all of them since his youth. To which of course, Jesus responds, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me” (Luke 18:22). Luke then records that the ruler went away sad.

The point of this story is very much in concert with what has been said throughout this chapter. The kingdom of God has both spiritual and ethical dimensions. To be a subject of the King is to care about what the King cares about, including the poor (cf. Exod 23:11; Lev 19:9–16; Deut 15:1–18). As with Isaiah 58, religious duty divorced from caring for those in need misses entirely what it means to be the people of God. True obedience to the commandments (conversion) involves both a change in heart and in actions. God has graciously and freely shown compassion, and his people are to do the same. Religious commitment and obedient actions are inseparable. Faith without works is dead.

Luke goes on to present a stark and surprising contrast to the rich ruler. This time the focus is on someone of low social status, namely Zaccheus, a tax collector. In many ways, Zaccheus is the very antithesis of the rich ruler. Though also rich, Zaccheus is socially despised because of his role as chief tax collector. Plus, in the biblical account he had no influence over the crowd that blocked his view. He had wealth but not power, whereas the young ruler had both. Zaccheus though displays an attitude very different than that of the rich ruler. He is clearly not concerned about social appearances, even risking humiliation by publically climbing up a tree to see Jesus. Jesus not only notices, but honors Zaccheus by coming to his home. Deeply touched by the gracious mercy of Jesus, Zaccheus freely gives half of his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:1–10). Everything that the rich ruler should have been, Zaccheus was. He trusted not in his status, but in Jesus. The mercy of Jesus compelled him to likewise be merciful. Salvation was not something to be earned, but to be received. His conversion resulted in a changed heart from which flowed loving deeds.

In many ways, the contrast between the rich ruler and Zaccheus might also serve as a parable of modern missions endeavors and compassionate outreach. The rich ruler, sadly, represents many western approaches to compassionate missions. We often go trusting in our resources and in our status as highly-educated, well-financed, and knowledgeable experts. We not only know the Ten Commandments but have at our disposal half a dozen different versions of Scripture in which to read them, along with countless commentaries and theological dictionaries. Yet, have we truly understood these commandments? Have we seen in them the necessity and importance of a people of God empowered to freely and voluntarily give out of their own
resources, like Zaccheus? Are we instead approaching compassionate missions with vain confidence in ourselves, thinking we have all the answers? If the latter, the solution lies in a renewed emphasis on the compassionate character of the Christian community and engaging in compassionate missions in ways that foster and develop that character.

THE CHURCH AS A COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

The people of God under the New Covenant were to embody God’s own righteousness. As with the Old Covenant this was never to earn God’s favor, but as the proper response to God’s grace. The disciples’ righteousness was to exceed that of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20). Thus Paul describes the church as helpers in the Kingdom (Col 4:11). He also says, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). He therefore instructs Timothy to pursue righteousness (2 Tim 2:22). To repent in response to God’s gracious offer of mercy is to in turn become one whose own life reflects that same mercy toward others.

“Be merciful just as your heavenly father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). By their preaching and by their living the church is to declare what good things are to come for those who put their trust in Christ.

What Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he also modeled. This is evident in that Jesus’ miracles were often driven by his compassion for social outsiders, including the sick (Mark 5:25–34), the poor and needy (Mark 10:46–52), women (Luke 7:11–17), racial and religious outcasts (Luke 17:11–19; Matt 8:5–13), and sinners (John 9). In each case Jesus, moved with compassion, responded to someone in need through loving action. As such, Jesus’ miracles served a dual role. They evidenced His status as the promised Son of David, and pointed forward to the final restoration of all things. Therefore, His miracles are both eschatological evidence—the Kingdom has appeared in the person and work of Jesus, and eschatological sign—the Kingdom is still coming, and healing and wholeness are its essence. So, while the church as the charismatic people of God should seek after and pray for miracles with faith and fervency, to stop there is to miss the full importance of miracles in Jesus’s ministry.

There is a direct connection between Jesus’ miracles and the compassionate expectations of the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ significance as the primary locus of the reign of God gave compassionate direction to the church He called into existence. The church cannot therefore simply pray for the poor and needy, and consider that we have done our duty. James warns

against precisely this, saying “if a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:16; cf. 2 Cor 8:7–9).

The reality is that Jesus’ followers cannot always miraculously heal. We can always ask, seek, and knock, but healing is ultimately the prerogative of God. The church can always engage in loving action even when healings do not take place. The compassionate response of the early church to the needs around them emerged precisely on these grounds. As Verhey points out, Jesus’ compassion for everyone regardless of social status “shaped the mind of the early church to a similar indiscriminate compassion.” In other words, Jesus’ miracles not only compelled his disciples to become a charismatic community in which signs and wonders were present, but to become a compassionate community of practical service as well. If we are to be like Jesus, then it is not enough to simply pray for others. We must also be moved by compassion to take action. Thus, what Jesus said to the lawyer who questioned Him in the parable of the Good Samaritan he says to the whole church in regard to compassion (mercy): “go and do likewise.”

THE KINGDOM, MISSION, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Since our primary concern is to articulate a theology of compassion for cross-cultural missions, it is worth asking at this point precisely how the concept of the Kingdom of God relates to the concept of missio Dei, or mission of God, especially since there is a direct theological connection between the Kingdom of God and missio Dei. Furthermore, these concepts directly inform the nature of the local church.

The term missio Dei relates to the church’s participation in the redemptive mission of God to all nations. God’s plan for the redemption of fallen humanity calls forth a covenant people tasked with participation in declaring the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ. As such, the Kingdom of God and missio Dei overlap in that it is God as King who issues forth divine commands through His revealed Word. Thus, Johannes Verkuyl rightly states that the Kingdom of God is the goal of missio Dei. God works in the world to accomplish His redemptive purpose to save creation from the fall

30. Ibid. By “early church” Verhey means the apostolic church, as he refers solely to material contained in the Gospels.
31. For missio Dei as the grand narrative of Scripture, see Wright, The Mission of God.
32. See Tennent, Invitation to World Missions, 55–59.
and all its effects (Rom 8:22). Missionaries are those called to be involved in this work by engaging directly in cross-cultural ministry. Local churches differ in purpose in that their focus lies primarily, though not exclusively, in reaching and discipling believers in their own context. Local churches too have a missions mandate, as is evident throughout Paul’s letters. So, while there is certainly overlap between the nature and function of missions and that of the local church, it is vitally important that we do not confuse the two. Alan Johnson will develop this idea in more detail, but for now a few basic ideas need to be established, and to do so we turn to the important work of Charles Van Engen on this topic.

In his book, *God's Missionary People*, Van Engen discusses the dangers of compassionate missions being divorced from the local church. Pointing to the “baby boomer” generation in America in the 1960’s in support, Van Engen shows that compassion came to be separated from a direct attachment to local congregations, as that generation became increasingly dissatisfied with the church as an institution. People gave up participation in local congregations, though still considered themselves part of the Church universal. These “free range” Christians, as I call them, then went out and joined the Peace Corps and any number of other programs geared toward the transformation of society.

The social activism in which they engaged, once divorced from the local church, resulted in a deformed understanding of missions. Believers largely lost sight of participation in *missio Dei* as a cross-cultural endeavor. Instead, they tended to see everything the church does as mission. It was in this context that Stephen Neill responded saying, “if everything is mission, nothing is mission.” As Van Engen explains, “they wanted mission without the church, and they would only give allegiance to the church insofar as it fulfilled the political and social functions they considered to be mission.”

The solution for overcoming this is two-fold. First, we must understand the local church as a compassionate community such as described above. This compassionate community exhibits first of all, care for needy members of the faith community, and secondarily, for their neighbors who are in need. Second, missionaries working in compassion should direct their efforts toward the strengthening of this capacity among local churches and local believers. As Scot McKnight says, “The only place kingdom work

is and can be done is in and through the local church when disciples (king-

dom citizens, church people) are doing kingdom mission."\textsuperscript{37}

To better understand the first aspect of this, we again turn to Van Engen, who has borrowed and expanded on Oscar Cullman’s understanding of the reign of God in terms of concentric circles. Cullman referred to an inner and outer circle, designating the inner circle R1, and the outer R2. R1 indicates the reign of Christ in the church, the place where Christ reigns most fully in the present. R2 refers to the reign of Christ over all creation (Ephesians 1; Colossians 1). This reign is exercised over the unwilling and unknowing, who have never made a decision to follow Jesus. To this, Van Engen adds R3, designating to the reign of Christ over “principalities and powers.” Missionary churches are planted in R2, where the Lord reigns over the lives of the unwilling. Through their evangelizing and living as re-born citizens of the Kingdom of God, local believers constantly press in and expand the territory of R1 by adding to their own numbers. As it does, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Matt 16:18), which is presumably what Van Engen means by R3. In all of this, the church does not usher in or bring about the Kingdom, but it points to it as a sign.\textsuperscript{38}

The goal then of the local church is not to just do good things in the community. Anyone can do that. Rather as subjects of Jesus the King, churches ultimately want to see those living under R2 pack up their things and take up residence within R1. The aim is to invite the lost into the church and for the church to so powerfully evidence the presence of Christ in both word and deed, that joining the community becomes irresistible. This is the first step in conversion.

In some ways, our missionary endeavors in the realm of compassionate ministry run the risk of doing to the local churches we partner with something very similar to what the baby boomers had done. We run the risk of separating the compassionate mandate inherent in the kingdom of God from its primary locus as a matter of discipleship among local believers. This robs local congregations of their missional mandate. We do this by setting up compassionate programs that do not involve the local church or involve it only as a passive partner. The result is that the local church has no reason to look outward because the outward aspect of its mission is being done by others. Local churches then inevitably turn inward, and all of their activities become about their own people and programs.

Van Engen argues that if the local church is to emerge as a truly missi-

\textsuperscript{37} McKnight, \textit{Kingdom Conspiracy}, 208.

\textsuperscript{38} Van Engen, under chapter 7, “The Local Church and the Kingdom of God.”
it must demonstrate all of the following marks: koinonia (community), kerygma (proclamation), diakonia (service), and martyria (witness). Of these, koinonia provides the foundation for all the others. When it does not function properly, neither do the others.

If the church turns all its attention inward and fails to engage the needs of the community, then koinonia changes into what C. Peter Wagner calls koinonitis. The power of community mutates into the plague of self-interest. Then, not only is koinonia left unrealized, but all the other distinguishing marks of the church suffer as well. As Van Engen explains, “being for the world, identification with the oppressed, mission, proclamation witness, and yearning for numerical growth are meaningless outside the light of this supreme mark of the Church.” What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 holds true. Without love it is all for nothing.

Charity Begins at Home

The importance of koinonia means that the church’s compassionate activity must begin with those in need within the faith community. A number of passages of Scripture bear this out. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Acts emphasizes this communal aspect of caring for one another as well (Acts 2:45). And indeed, the primary meaning of koinonia relates to sharing life together, including one’s possessions. Paul also argues for prioritizing the needy within the church, but also declares that it must not stop there. “So then, while we have opportunity, let us therefore do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). But there are important theological reasons for this. The church in mission functions best when its members are healthy and whole, when they experience shalom. This requires community because in Christianity, to be saved is to enter a Christ-centered community.

Therefore, it is not surprising that much of the New Testament emphasis in giving and caring for the needy focuses on the faith community. This brings us back to our main point. Whenever missionaries insert themselves as the sole source of compassionate ministry, the result will always be local churches whose spiritual growth is stunted. When compassion becomes
Howard Synder has argued similarly from Ephesians 2:8–10. This passage says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” From this passage, Snyder draws two conclusions. First, the church accomplishes God’s purposes “by what it is (a redeemed community) and by what it does (good works).” Therefore, “the Church’s first task is to be the redeemed community.”43 It is to be the people of God being increasingly made whole through their common life together in worship of Christ and service to one another. “The Church is before it does.”44 Missions efforts then that short-circuit the power of “being” do damage also to a local congregation’s motivation and impulse to “do.” By recasting missionary compassion in terms of building the capacity of local churches, which as we have argued is the biblical paradigm, we avoid overestimating the role of the church in community transformation.45

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that to be the covenant people of Christ the King means not only believing the right things, but also doing the right things. In Christianity faith and action go together as God’s covenant people live in such a way as to reflect the mercy and compassion of God who is Himself merciful and compassionate. Compassion is a vital part of Christian discipleship, and where compassion is absent it is appropriate to question the genuineness of one’s commitment. This seems to have been a pattern present in the early church at least up through the third century.

This has profound implications for missions. Missionaries going to majority world nations often find themselves gripped by the vast human suffering they encounter. They find themselves face to face with young children (who perhaps remind them of their own children) standing on street corners dressed in rags and begging for food, or families living in shanty compounds with little or no access to running water or basic necessities. We see these things and we want to help. Where we often go wrong, however, is in forgetting that the role of missionaries differs fundamentally from that

43. Synder, The Community of the King, n.p.
44. Snyder, chapter 4.
45. Snyder, chapter 4.
of the local church. It is the local church that is called to push back the
darkness inherent in the world (R2) and work for the expansion of God's
reign through the church (R1). The local church does this first by caring
for its own members, through shared life, through koinonia. Church mem-
ers then experience a degree of shalom, which propels them out into the
world as salt and light. Their goal is not the transformation of society, but
to see God expand His Kingdom. They serve this goal by living as children
of the King and by lavishing mercy and compassion on all those in need,
and especially on those who can never repay them. As McKnight points
out, "Christian public actions are, then, the 'spillover' of the church's inner
workings. A Christian not engaged in the world in 'good works' has failed
to live according to the kingdom vision." Christian compassionate missions
therefore must work not only to foster this notion of "spillover," but also
work in ways which do not hinder it.

46. McKnight, Kingdom Conspiracy, 207.