

FROM EMPATHY TO COMPASSION

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My husband was only 27 when he was first diagnosed with cancer; we were expecting our first child. Because he is a middle school history teacher, the news quickly spread, first through school, then town. Right away, Mark's students began donating their own money to help our family. When our daughter was born four months later, we used their gifts to start a college fund for her. Though she wouldn't remember her daddy having cancer, we hoped she would someday understand his students' compassionate generosity.



In the last few years, children have lived through experiences many of us never could have imagined as kids, from losing loved ones to COVID-19 to being separated from their friends for too long. They understand grief. They can empathize with struggle. But like adults, they might not always know how to help those suffering.

Human instinct may also, at times, drive us away from challenging situations we don't know how to "fix." But Jesus clarifies that coming alongside others in their pain is precisely what they (and we) need. He doesn't just tell those he meets, "Hey, I'm sorry to hear you're down and out. Let me know how I can help."

Instead, he heals those who physically suffer. He welcomes the marginalized, inviting himself to their homes (such as Zacchaeus) and asking them to follow him. Wherever Jesus is present, spiritual and emotional healing always accompanies physical healing.

Our bodies will grow weak and pass away, but along the way, God's people bring healing through acts of care and, miraculously, through their simple presence. Our kids have experienced enough in their short lives to understand that distinction. As parents and caregivers, we can help them imagine ways of bringing healing to those who are hurt.

If people had asked me, in my shock and fear, how they could help our little family, I wouldn't have known how to answer. Our days were consumed with trips to the hospital, insurance negotiations, infant care, and, yes, at times, grief. After all, living through cancer was not how we imagined entering parenthood.

Mark's students didn't know if we needed financial support (at that point, we didn't even know). They just imagined we might, and they did something about it. In the end, their act of care mattered more than the gift itself.

When we don't know exactly how to come alongside the pain of others, we can remember this truth: our presence matters most. During our lifetimes, we all have many opportunities to both receive and offer Christ-like compassion. In simple ways, we can help kids comprehend that at an early age.

Want to do a deep dive? Check out Family Fire's article [What it Means to Love One Another](#).

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