

Todd Williams

Well, good morning. Good morning. Great to see all of you this morning as we prepare to head into the weekend. Great to have some guests with us. Great to have a nice full weekend on the university calendar. As I often say this time of year, I just want to remind you as students that we're praying for you as you head down the homestretch of this academic semester, indeed, the whole academic year. Just know that you are being prayed for, and I look forward to praying again at the end of our time together this morning in chapel. I want to continue on with the series that we've been doing this year, Some Basics for Life. We've moved our way through belief, the importance of knowing what you believe, the importance of acting on it, and to live a life that is consistent with your belief, a life where faith is put in action. Then we talked about the importance of steadiness, particularly emotional steadiness, in a day when emotions seem to rule as the chief way of evaluating life and expressing yourself, that for the Christian, we are to be steady with regard to emotion, self-controlled and careful.

Todd Williams

Then last time I was with you, we talked about the importance of working, of being productive, of industriousness. Today, I want to tackle the C in Basics. I want to talk about the important characteristic and quality of compassion. This series is about the way in which you think about living life well, according to God's word in a way that is pleasing to him, but to live it well. What does it take to navigate life in this world as a Christian? We begin with that first premise that you must believe that God is, that he is a rewarder of those who seek him, that he is the creator and sustainer of all things, that he is the judge, the righteous, holy judge of the world and humanity, that he has made a way for us in and through his son, Jesus Christ, to be redeemed and forgiven and to live with him forever. That belief should spill over into other areas of your life that just like you be careful in terms of shaping that primary belief, the primary issue of your faith in God and in Christ, that then you should be responsible to shape other beliefs, what you believe to be true about truth, about marriage, about love, about discipline, about work, that it's important that you not wing it as you go through life.

Todd Williams

I want to talk about this issue of compassion linked to all the other principles and truths that we've been talking about this semester. Because you would be making a mistake to say, I will be compassionate when I feel like being compassionate, on whom I feel like being compassionate with, that I do it because it makes me feel better about myself, the act of living a life that is marked by compassion has to be tied to our faith, the consistent application in living out of our faith, a right and responsible biblical approach to emotions, and the importance of doing good work and working hard to please the Lord in this life, and then going through life without blinders on to see the needs of those around you. The passage that Dean Gordon read for us is the one I would like to look at this morning in Colossians, where the apostle Paul is writing to this group of believers, and in this very important passage, talks about the fact that we've been raised with Christ, and so we put off the old and we put on the new. He says in verse 12, Put on then as God's chosen ones, Holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another.

Todd Williams

If one has a complaint against the other, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you. It's a tall order. It goes against our very nature when we start thinking about the tendency we have to watch out for ourselves, to simply live a life that gratifies us as individuals, to go through life thinking that we are the center of the universe or being preoccupied with our own issues. And yet what the apostle Paul is saying to these Christians is part of the new life in Jesus Christ is you bear these qualities, these virtues, become a part of who you are, and every one of them in this list is other-oriented. And this idea of compassion that he presents in chapter 3 in these verses is a powerful one. It has the idea of pity or mercy, empathy, looking at the state or condition or circumstances of another and being moved. In fact, the verse here is this word for compassion, that mercy and pity See, very closely tied with the word heart here, in your guts. In other words, something deep and visceral. That word is a word that's used often to describe Jesus's compassion in the Gospels, that it's a moving in our innermost in our guts, our sense of empathy and pity and compassion on another for their state or their suffering, that we're moved that way.

Todd Williams

Paul is telling the church here that that's part of the new life. You put off the old things that serve your self-interest, like slander and gossip and immorality and all of these things that gratify your own individual passions and desires. Rather, you put on these things which are other oriented, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness. It's a stark contrast, isn't it? The things that we put off in the old life of slander and gossip and ill will and immorality, those are things that are rooted in our desire to gratify ourselves. What we put on then are these things that are other oriented. We find no better example of compassion that is other than is genuine, that is heartfelt, that's gut-wrenching than those that we see in the life of the Lord Jesus recorded for us in the Gospels. In Matthew 14, there's this great passage where Jesus, After receiving word that John the Baptist has been beheaded and all of the emotional strain that that put on the disciples and the burden that Jesus is bearing and the grief that he's bearing, they withdraw, remember, by boat to a desolate place place to get away from the crowd, but the crowd followed him.

Todd Williams

When he went ashore, it says in chapter 4, verse 14, he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Jesus wasn't thinking about himself. He had a rough run in the preceding passages. He and his men were going through a bit of personal trauma. And yet when Jesus went to withdraw from the place and the crowd began to follow, he looked out on them and had compassion on them. He has moved in his innermost being to their station, their status, their suffering, their hardship, not his own. And so what does he do? He does what he can do, which is heal the sick that were among them. In Mark 6, we see a similar passage. In verse 34, we read where Jesus, again, is getting ready to perform miracles based upon his compassion. Similar setting, roughly the same time when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them. Then the passage tells us he went on to feed them. Jesus doesn't do this to advance his own marketing strategy or to win more people to follow him.

Todd Williams

It says the Bible is very clear that he looked out and in his bowels, in his gut, he was moved to pity and mercy. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd and begins to teach them. He sees them in a desolate place with serious need and he heals them. Then we see again, in just a few pages after this in Mark's gospel, in Mark 8, it's the same thing beginning in verse 2. In those days when, again, a great crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat. He called his disciples to them and said, 'I have compassion on the crowd because they've been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. ' I love that passage of scripture because it's so counter to the way we think of things today. Jesus looks out on the crowd, and I'm sure some of his disciples are thinking, Well, now is our moment, Jesus. We have a big crowd. We could do something really big. We could gain in number. We could start to push the Romans. We could start to push the Jewish leaders.

Todd Williams

We could actually start to have some success and some momentum. We have the big momentum in our favor now. Here's this crowd, Jesus do something, and he does. He performs a miracle and he feeds the multitude, but not for the purposes of public relations advancements, not for the purposes of making himself feel better. That doesn't even enter into Jesus's mind. He looked out and had compassion on them. He explains the compassion by saying, "They've had nothing to eat. If we turn them away now, they'll faint on the way home." Jesus doesn't do compassion to make a statement or to signal. He is moved by the state and suffering of others, and he acts. He teaches, he feeds, he heals. When the apostle Paul is saying to these Christians, "You must, as part of the new life, lay off these things that are self-oriented and put on these things that are other oriented, and one of those is a compassionate heart. It means that in accordance and in a consistent way with the teaching and example of Jesus, you would be people who are moved in your innermost being by the state and suffering of others.

Todd Williams

Then be moved to action. It's a very powerful idea. It's a very important aspect of the Christian life, and it's illustrated for us perfectly and beautifully by the Lord Jesus. He looks upon humanity and

sees their needs. He has come to do his Father's will. He has come to be the sacrificial lamb. When he looks out, he sees them as hungry, he sees them as weary, and he sees them as sheep without a shepherd, and he meets those needs. He meets those needs. But one thing we must note in the compassion of Jesus is that his gut-wrenching empathy, pity, and mercy displayed on those who are in a serious state of trouble or suffering or lost like sheep without a shepherd, does not cause him to alter his course, to change his view on truth or diminish his claims of exclusivity that he is the Son of God, the living water, the bread of life, the good shepherd, the only one by which you can be saved. Jesus's compassion does not move him to alter his message, rather to live out his message in meeting the needs of those around him. Therefore, what we see in Jesus is perfect compassion.

Todd Williams

It isn't exercised in a way to serve his own needs or to make him feel better about himself or to win people to his favor. It doesn't cause him to alter his message. In fact, there's a great, great illustration of this when Jesus feeds the crowd. Then they start to gather around and he says them, Oh, well, of course. Of course, you followed me. I gave you food. That's what you came for, was dinner and a show. But I tell you, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, You have nothing to do with me. The Bible tells us that the crowd departed him, and his disciples said, Why do you talk like this? It's a hard saying. Jesus' response is paraphrasing, Yeah, but it's the truth. It's the truth. I can give you fish and I can give you bread and I can cause you not to faint on the walk back home. But what I really could give you is forgiveness and redemption and life ever lasting. But to do that You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood. You have to believe in me as the atoning sacrifice for sin.

Todd Williams

You have to recognize that God is not just the creator and sustainer, but the righteous judge of this world and humanity. The penalty for sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus's compassion doesn't cause him to stray. Not one fraction of one millimeter from that reality. When the apostle Paul says to these Christians, You should be compassionate, he isn't saying to them, The world will like you better if you're kinder. He isn't saying to them, If you're compassionate and you actually look like you care about the suffering of others, people will like you and us more. That's not what Paul is saying. What Paul is saying is, If you're a new creature, you lay off the old, you put on the new, and one of the things that has to be in those new garments of those new virtues is a heart of compassion. You have to see the needs of others. You have to see their suffering. You have to see their state. It's interesting, I think, what compassion actually requires of us. Some of us are labeled as softies, and the people who know us know we're just given to compassion.

Todd Williams

We never fail to see someone suffering. Even if it's just that they got shorted on Waffle fries at Chick-fil-A. We're just moved to mercy for everyone at every turn. Others of you think, Well, yeah, I'm just a little hard-boiled. I don't really do the compassion thing. Guess what this passage of scripture is saying? You don't get to be flippant with compassion, and you don't get to dismiss it. The truth of scripture is we're required by Christians to bear compassionate hearts, to actually take compassion seriously, not too lightly, and to actually discipline ourselves, to look at the needs of others and see them as God does and not dismiss it. We don't get those options. The option for the Christian is to have a compassionate heart. A couple of things I'd like to tease out here for you to think about. The first is that to have a compassionate heart, as with all of these Paul lists here, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiving, others, requires you to think rightly. It's absolutely striking to me the longer that I walk with the Lord and read his word. It's absolutely striking to me how inextricably tied together our thoughts and our emotions This is what the teachings are in the teaching of...

Todd Williams

This idea somehow that you can be a heart person or a head person is inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible. In order to really care about the needs, the suffering and state of others, you must be aware, thoughtful of this truth, there but by the grace of God go I. We forgive as we have been forgiven. That we look and we understand the state of humanity because we're honest about our own state. We're honest about the righteousness and perfection of God. We're honest about the reality of sin and the pain and suffering and death that comes from it. We're honest about this truth that the

only way through that is through the shed blood of Jesus. We have to be thoughtful when it comes to compassion. If we're not thinking rightly about God ourselves and the world in which we live, you will take a whimsical or dismissive approach to compassion. That shouldn't be the thing that marks us as Christians. We should be people of gravitas, of sobriety, of seriousness, of emotional connection, of real gut-wrenching compassion for those that are suffering, for those that are in a state that is harmful to them, for those that are lost like sheep without a shepherd.

Todd Williams

Someone told me years and years ago, when I was a college student, That for many of us, we are hesitant to evangelize because we've lost awareness of our own tragic, sinful state. Because if we actually looked at the loss the way Jesus did, We would want not just to heal them and give them food, but give them the truth of the gospel, to share with them what it means to follow Jesus and to enjoy the blessings and benefits of redemption and forgiveness and eternal life. So one of the things that compassion requires is a degree of thoughtfulness. You should be thinking rightly about God yourself and the world in which you live. The other thing is you have to be looking. If we We see this and we talk about it all the time. Wisdom, as we see it in the Book of Proverbs and the Old Testament, requires that you be looking around. Observe the ant, look at the field of the slugger. You have to actually be looking. And the same thing is true here. Jesus told his disciples, Look up, behold. Look at the fields. They are white as snow. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send workers into the field.

Todd Williams

Christians, we cannot wear blinders or look down at our own feet. We cannot be thinking only about our own state. We have to look to the needs of those around us. That's the manifestation of love and compassion and meekness and humility, considering others more important than yourselves. It means thinking rightly about God, yourself, and the world in which you live, and living life where you're looking around you and you see people. You see them as they are. You work to understand how God might see them. Then, finally, compassion that is thoughtful and compassion that is based upon your observations is absolutely useless if it isn't married to action. A kind word, a prayer, a way of meeting a need. Jesus set aside himself to heal and to teach and to feed. Christians here being exhorted to put on hearts of compassion. It's not just simply to sit around feeling compassion, it's actually to act with one another, toward one another with compassion. You have to think rightly about God yourself in the world in which you live. You have to look around and see the needs of those around you and understand them as God sees them.

Todd Williams

Then you have to actually be moved. That The word that describes Jesus's compassion is not just he was troubled inside, it moved him. His gut-wrenching mercy and pity on others for their state and suffering moved him to actually act. Now the question is, you must apply biblical truth and wisdom into what appropriate actions are. I remember very early being confronted in my life with a loved one addicted to alcohol. Very obvious how much pain and suffering was part of his life. The act of compassion towards him was not to affirm his addiction or to provide him more alcohol, to make the shakes go away. The actual act of compassion and love in that particular case was actually to see him through what was the worst yet to come before deliverance from that. It is not not just to feel sorry for someone, it is to have mercy and pity and want for them what is best. Isn't it interesting when Jesus meets the woman at the well? He sees her. He knows that she's an outcast. He knows that she's a woman who is an outcast culturally, who's living in immorality. He doesn't say, You're fine the way you are.

Todd Williams

He actually confronts her sin and gives her the offer of living living water and eternal life because his compassion moves him to give her what she needs and what is best for her. You think that being moved to compassion is to give the student in the seat next to you the answers to the exam. It is not in their best interest. That is not compassion. It may be pity in the world's understanding of it, but it's not Godly biblical compassion. The way in which we move to act when we're showing compassion matters. It should be in accordance with the Bible and truth and wisdom. It should be with a view of what is best for the other person. The other thing I'd say is that for some of you, this is a very tough

thing to be confronted with because compassion isn't your strong suit. Whatever it is that's happened to you in your life, whatever you've been through, you just tend not to be oriented towards it. Others of you think this is the summum bonum of life. To see needs everywhere and to amplify them as the most drastic and to think that the primary objective of human existence is to eliminate all suffering.

Todd Williams

You must be careful not to make your emotional reactions of pity a false idol. You have to actually think, think, be moved, yes, act accordingly, but be careful with the way in which your emotions can rule your judgment. This approach to compassion that Paul is outlining here, the exhortation is in the context of a letter to the church that's full of teaching and doctrine about thinking rightly, about showing sound judgment, about understanding your place in the body. It is not to be ruled by your whims or your emotions, but rather to live a life that is in accordance with God's will and way. Bring him glory and to please him. So some application, implication, thoughts, observations to think about. This idea of compassion has this notion of being moved. If you're not someone who is moved by the suffering of others, if you don't experience pity and empathy, the first thing I would say to you is consider whether or not you are honest about yourself regarding your own need for the pity and mercy and compassion of God. Is there a hard shell of pride that is actually keeping you from acknowledging that you are in need of this from the Lord himself?

Todd Williams

Because once you cross that bridge, it's a lot easier to give it to others. He who has been forgiven much, loves much. It should move us. If you're not being moved, there's a need to do some soul searching. It is other. It is selfless. It is not something that we should talk about. It's in this list of humility and meekness. The last thing you want is a friend who says, You know, humility is my strong suit. Compassion is not something you declare or herald or pat yourself on the back for. It's not something you call attention to. I'm an extremely compassionate person. We will know if you're a compassionate person. You don't need to tell us whether you are or you're not. We will see it because true compassion is this compassion. We don't need you to wear your bumper sticker across your chest that says, I am compassionate. We will know that you are other-oriented. In the same way, then, compassion is to be genuine. It is not simply to make a statement or to signal our acknowledgement of some political or cultural issue. It is really an act of genuine empathy. I would point this out that we often miss.

Todd Williams

We read the scripture so often and we especially in our culture, where we read it as though it's actually designed to help us feel better about ourselves, when in fact, it actually calls us to a different life. I would say this it's about compassion, you're better off giving it than you are demanding it. Because if you walk around demanding the compassion of others, what you'll find yourself doing is demanding it for things that are not worthy of it. You'll trivialize trials in your life. You won't really be oriented towards perseverance and endurance. You'll simply be wanting what my dad used to refer to as a pity party all the time. Much better to be oriented to give compassion than to demand it for yourself. If you give it, you will find that biblical principle of whatsoever a man sows, he reaps. I think that this idea of biblical compassion is a difficult one in the days in which we find ourselves for all these reasons. But authentic, genuine faith in Jesus leads us to act upon that faith, to be steady in our own emotions, to be about doing good work. And part of that is making sure that our lives are marked by compassion, that we follow the exhortation of the apostle here to put on compassionate hearts.

Todd Williams

We strive to live our lives in with the teaching and example of Jesus, to be moved by the state and suffering of others, moved to action, rightly thought out and rightly executed. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for the days that you give us, for your goodness and grace, for your loving kindness, for your mercies which are new every morning. We thank you for the way you meet our needs and care for us according to your good and perfect will. We thank you for the blessing that we have to even enjoy the freedom to gather in a place such as this, to pray and to sing and to hear the reading of your scripture. We thank you for that blessing, for that freedom, and we pray that we would not take it for granted. We thank you for the blessing of Christian community, where we can live together and work together, serve together, where we can uphold one another in prayer and strive to

meet the needs of one another. We pray that you would make us mindful of our obligations to one another, to act humbly and meekly, to forgive, to be compassionate.

Todd Williams

Father, I thank you for each one assembled here today and for the work you are doing in their lives. For those that are struggling physically, we pray for strength. For those that are feeling overwhelmed, we pray for calmness and clarity. For those that are experiencing joy and blessing and happiness, we pray that you would make them grateful. For those who are running or in rebellion, we pray that you would draw them to yourself and break them to be your servants. Father, we pray for this day that is ahead of us and for the weekend that you would use us to bless and encourage one another, we pray in the strong name of Jesus. Amen. Have a great weekend..