



# The Compassionate Life

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## Focus Scripture

**Matthew 22:34–46**

Additional Scriptures

Deuteronomy 34:1–12

Psalms 90:1–6, 13–17

1 Thessalonians 2:1–8

**We confess, O God, that we are distracted by regulations that disempower. We confess that we invest energy in maintaining boundaries that withhold compassion and exclude. Forgive our limited love and insight. Reconcile us to Jesus' way. Amen.**

Extravagant, unrestricted compassion marks living in God's way. What helps us to stay faithful to living in this way? Some rules promote growth, and energize positive relationships. Others limit, exclude, disempower, harm, and hurt. The gospel of Matthew reminds the emerging Christian community of Jesus' rules: unconditional love for God and neighbour.

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 22:34–46

This focus scripture continues conversations about Jesus' authority recorded in Matthew. The gospel of Matthew shows that Jesus was not critical of the temple or temple worship. Jesus did confront some religious leaders for their support of an elaborate system that required expensive purity rituals prior to entry into God's presence in the temple. At the temple, people purchased and sacrificed animals. To do so, they often needed to exchange currency or take loans. This system could create economic, social, and spiritual debt.

The people who could afford prescribed animal sacrifices benefited by being allowed to enter into temple worship. Others found the debts prohibitive, and some could no longer afford this prescribed way of coming into God's presence. Jesus opposed this corrupted system. Jesus taught that God's law intends to bring God and people into life-giving relationships. Living God's way – loving neighbours with selfless compassion and justice – was of greatest importance to Jesus.

The lawyer's question in verse 36 seems genuine, though Matthew notes it is asked as a test. Jesus supported God's law. It was the practices of some religious leaders to which he objected. Israelite prophets noted God's desire for justice and compassion (feeling the pain of another as one's own). Jesus sought to restore the law's intended focus on the community's relationship with God. In Jesus' comment in verse 40, the gospel writer emphasizes that Jesus' interpretation preserves the essence of the law. Jesus affirms that God's law is not about regulations, rules, and punishments. It is about just relationships between God and people, and between neighbours. Love of God and love of neighbour are bound together. Jesus' interpretation reinforces his identity as a prophet, a common image in Matthew.

According to Jewish tradition, Jesus' interpretation of the law required two witnesses to give it authority. Jesus offered his role as Messiah and David's declaration of Jesus' superiority. Neither witness convinces the sceptics among those listening to Jesus. The Pharisees made the connection, but limited their expectation of Messiah to a liberating political figure.

Jesus probably was not what the Pharisees expected in the Messiah. Jesus was more than a political liberator. The Messiah is the resurrected Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, sharing God's power.

Jesus leads us by example to live according to the law of God's compassion – loving God and loving our neighbours, even strangers. Moses experienced God's compassion first-hand in a face-to-face encounter, as described in **Deuteronomy 34:1–12**. God's steadfast love is the background for the communal lament in **Psalms 90**. The psalmist trusted God, knowing that God's undeserved compassion would come in God's time. In **1 Thessalonians 2:1–8**, Paul's gentle, compassionate approach shows his motivation is from Jesus Christ. His behaviour is evidence of God's love in action.



As the community of Jesus' disciples, we are called to find ways to proclaim the love of God to our neighbours. Congruence between our words and our deeds may be the most convincing witness. Loving with unlimited compassion, as God loves us, is a compelling way to tell the good news of Christ. When have you extended compassionate love to others? What might happen as you and your church share the gospel with your whole being?

Replacement biblical background page for **Reformation Day** is on the **Congregational Life Paired Readings CD** provided with this resource.

Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican** congregations using the **paired reading** stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

