

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM

COMPASSION

WEEKEND!

WILL PENNER

9 INTO THE BROKENNESS

“One cannot have both compassion and innocence.” Eugenia Collier wrote those words in the short story *Marigolds*, in which she reflects on her experiences of growing up during the Great Depression. She highlights the time when she and some friends destroyed a neighbor’s flower garden, one of the few areas of beauty in an otherwise stark landscape. The marigolds were a symbol of hope to the neighbor and to others in the community as well. Through their callous vandalism, the children ended up destroying more than the flowers.

As the narrator describes the turmoil that occurred following the incident, she recognizes how much of her innocence was lost through that experience and becomes vividly

aware of how her actions affected both herself and others in powerful ways. She also realizes that her depth of empathy has grown through shared pain and struggle.

Because she has finally allowed herself to feel the pain of another person, she is able to truly feel compassion—but it has come at great cost.

12 JULY>AUGUST 2016

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COMPASSION

WEEKEND!

Compassion sounds good, but most of us limit our compassion to those we naturally care for. We show compassion for family members or close friends because we have already invested deeply in our relationships with them. When they are hurting, we hurt with them; and when we wrong them, we automatically feel twangs of guilt.

But how can we develop compassion for

- + people with whom we have not developed relationships?
- + kids who are so different that we barely understand what they're talking about?

+ people who act as if they're smarter, funnier, prettier, more athletic, or just plain better than we are?

+ bullies who are actively mean?

Romans 5:8 tells us that God's love is not restricted to those who are easily loveable; Jesus was willing to die for us even when we were the worst of the worst. He submitted himself to the vilest form of brutal torture and death to demonstrate how much he loved us. God was

willing to enter into the brokenness of humanity to demonstrate true compassion.

Our world is full of brokenness and pain. As Christians, we are not supposed to separate ourselves from the world's brokenness. We are called to enter into it and to be part of God's redemptive work. We can't fix many of the injustices in the world, but we can be willing to get down in the muck and grime of life and to walk alongside others in their times of need. ◀

Will Penner is a husband, father, teacher, youth worker, author, and speaker in Fairview, Tennessee. He believes compassion to be one of the only redemptive features of the loss of innocence.

10 NEXT DAY STRETCH

A member of my youth group once told me, "I wish I'd never come on this mission trip; I don't want to know that people live like this." My heart broke. She wanted to go back to believing that everyone lived as she had lived—with a loving family, a feeling of complete safety, and pretty much everything she wanted. The mission trip had destroyed her innocence, but it also offered her opportunities for compassion that were previously unavailable to her.

What are the fairy tale endings or the protective bubbles that you are actively constructing in your life to keep from seeing the realities around you? Pray about how God is calling you out of the comforts of your naiveté and into compassion for others.

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