

seek wisdom  
*The Free Reformed Study Centre*



# *MEN OF* **COMPASSION**

► *The Courage to Care*

# Case Study Guide

## *Learning the Way of Compassion*

|                                            |    |
|--------------------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION                               | 3  |
| CASE STUDY 1      OVERLOOKED PRESENCE      | 4  |
| CASE STUDY 2      SILENT SUFFERING         | 7  |
| CASE STUDY 3      THE SINGLE IDENTITY      | 10 |
| CASE STUDY 4      WOUNDS FROM YOUTH        | 13 |
| CASE STUDY 5      GRIEVING THE UNSEEN LOSS | 16 |
| CASE STUDY 6      WAITING IN SILENCE       | 19 |
| CASE STUDY 7      THE HIDDEN STORM         | 22 |
| CASE STUDY 8      UNDERMINED EFFORTS       | 25 |
| CONCLUDING THOUGHTS                        | 28 |

# Introduction

## *A Message from Dr Reuben Bredenhof*

Thank you for your willingness to work through these case studies together. They are designed to help us reflect on real-life situations and to explore, with care, how we might respond with wisdom and compassion.

Although the cases themselves are fictional, they are drawn from years of lived experience – some personal, some shared by others, and shaped by the kinds of situations many of us will recognise. They are intended to add texture and depth to our conversation, and not simply to provide tick-the-box answers.

As you work through each case, we invite you to engage personally with it. Consider how you might respond as an elder, a friend, a spouse, or a family member. Resist the temptation to treat this as an abstract or academic exercise. Instead, engage with it prayerfully and pastorally, remembering that behind every situation is a real person carrying real burdens.

Listen carefully to the different perspectives offered. Notice how people's experiences shape the way they see, speak, and respond. Above all, let Scripture be your anchor as you seek to honour God and to walk alongside those who are struggling, with compassion, care, and kindness.

Take your time as you read through the case studies, taking care to understand each situation before you explore the discussion questions. Have the courage to care – seeking to respond not just with insight, but with a heart shaped by the compassion of Christ.

With Christian greetings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R Bredenhof." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Reuben Bredenhof

These case studies and discussion questions have been prepared by Dr Reuben Bredenhof, Professor of Ministry and Mission at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario.

Tim and Kim are in their early fifties and are almost empty nesters. They're both active members of the congregation: Tim as an elder, Kim as an organiser of the women's Bible study group and a regular volunteer at the primary school. Pulling into the driveway for the annual home visit, the elders don't really have any concerns about Tim and Kim. They feel like they already know Tim through serving together on consistory, and from what they can see, Kim is doing pretty well.

An hour and a half later, Tim and Kim have seen the elders to the door and are cleaning up in the kitchen.

Kim murmurs something, and Tim looks up: “*Something wrong?*”

## Understand

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are some faults that you can identify in the elders' approach to this home visit?

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2. Was Kim right to feel like she had been neglected? Explain.

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3. What would have been some suitable pastoral questions for the elders to ask Kim, considering her circumstances and life situation?

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4. Why is it sometimes easy to view wives as an extension of their husbands? How can we avoid this misunderstanding and do better?

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For just over two years now, Stacy has been on consistory's watch list. Not long ago, her divorce was finalised. Her husband had been having an affair with a co-worker, Stacy found out, and he admitted it. When everything came to light, her husband immediately left the home, moved in with his new girlfriend, and a few months later withdrew from church. Since then, Stacy's life has been challenging, to say the least: holding down a part-time job at the hospital, raising her three pre-teen children, and trying to take care of the house.

When the elders visit with Stacy, however, they're a bit unsure what to say. She has enough money, so that's good. The three kids are still going to JCS, so that's good. The divorce was legitimate, so it's not like Stacy should be under church discipline. But in reality, Stacy is struggling badly. She is lonely. She finds solo parenting impossible. She feels a lot of shame for how her marriage failed. She is physically exhausted from working, keeping up the household, and full-time parenting. It's not that the elders don't care – they just don't know.

*Take some time to write down your initial thoughts and reactions to this story.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Discussion Questions

1. How can we better understand the struggles of members like Stacy?

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2. Why do people like Stacy find it hard to fit into congregational life? How might feelings of shame and loneliness affect her relationship with the church?

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3. How can the elders collaborate with other members in the congregation to surround Stacy's family with meaningful support and care?

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4. What message from God's Word could the elders bring to Stacy in their next visit?

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5. As a friend of Stacy, what role could you have in supporting her and the kids?

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Before the conversation even begins, Amanda already knows what she is going to hear. It might be a conversation in the church car park with an older lady, it might be during a home visit, or another family gathering. But she can already hear it now:

- Amanda can hear it already now, because she's been hearing it for years. Even though she is a 29-year-old professional who owns her own home, takes part in congregational life, and is serious about walking with God, it's hard not to feel like she's been reduced to her marital status. So many conversations circle back to her singleness. She wonders if people really know her at all and care about her interests, her gifts, her hopes.

*Take some time to write down your initial thoughts and reactions to this story.*

[illegible]

## Discussion Questions

1. What assumptions do we tend to make about people like Amanda? How could we find out whether those assumptions are correct?

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2. As the family or the friends of single members, how do our insensitive comments bring them pain or hurt?

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3. What is some Scriptural encouragement that the elders can give to Amanda as she walks with God and seeks to serve Him?

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4. Can a single Christian be content at the same time as he or she is praying to find a marriage partner?

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5. What could you do as a fellow church member to bless Amanda in her circumstances?

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Gillian's story show about the long-term effects of unresolved sexual sin, especially when the pain is minimised or dismissed?

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2. Do men and women approach things like this differently? Should they?

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3. How could her elders help Gillian move toward healing?

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4. How might a husband's discomfort or silence make it harder for his wife to seek healing?

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5. What Scriptural truths challenge the idea that past sin should simply be buried or ignored?

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6. If you were Gillian's close friend, what advice would you give her in this situation?

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## Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that it is right for Kristen to still be grieving after five years? What is Kristen hearing from Tristan (and the church community) about how she “should” feel? Evaluate this.

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2. How could Kristen begin to share this burden with Tristan and with others?

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3. What Scriptural truths could the elders bring into a conversation with Kristen?

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4. Is there anything the church can do to better support postpartum mothers?

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## Discussion Questions

1. What emotional and spiritual challenges do Roy and Joy face in this struggle with infertility? How might these be made worse by the silence or pressure of others?

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2. Why do we often find infertility to be a difficult topic to talk about together? How can we get better at it?

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3. How can texts like Psalm 37:4 be misunderstood in situations like this? How does it still offer a message of hope?

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4. What would be a good way for the families of Roy and Joy to support them?

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5. How can the elders speak sensitively about God's different calling for Christian couples who may never have children of their own?

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The elders have arranged a home visit for next week. Ironically, the theme this year is “*Harmony in the Home*.” Dana knows that Dan will act all gracious and insightful. But she also knows that if she speaks honestly to the elders about how things are going at home, there will be consequences over the next few days. Dan will be pounding the table again, ranting about how wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord, and that the rod of discipline removes folly from the heart of a child. He will probably blame her for triggering his rage and impeding his headship. She frets long into the night. How will the elders see past the surface to what’s really going on? Will they notice her? Will they hear the silence that she’s too afraid to break? If only people knew the truth.

*Take some time to write down your initial thoughts and reactions to this story.*

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Discussion Questions

1. What subtle signs might indicate that a home like Dan and Dana's is not as harmonious as it appears on the surface?

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2. In what ways can texts like Ephesians 5:22 or Proverbs 13:24 be misunderstood? What is a more accurate interpretation of them?

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3. How can the elders create an atmosphere in which Dana will dare to speak up? What should they do if Dana does?

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4. What is the elders' responsibility when there are signs of emotional or spiritual abuse in the home?

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5. For a long time, Dan and Dana have been good friends with another couple in the church. What role could this couple have in helping them?

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## Andrew and Annette

But it often feels like his efforts fall flat. His wife, Annette, is capable and outspoken, and she has a way of questioning Andrew in front of the children. When Andrew asks their son to do something, Annette points out what he did wrong or quietly redoes the task herself. When Andrew suggests an idea for family devotions, she corrects him or offers a “better” way. Her comments are rarely harsh, but they leave Andrew discouraged – and he worries that his son is learning to dismiss him too.

## Understand

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Discussion Questions

1. How might Andrew's gentleness be both a strength and a struggle in this situation?

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2. In what ways could Annette's comments undermine Andrew's leadership, even unintentionally?

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3. How can Andrew show compassion to his wife while also encouraging her to grow in patience and respect?

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4. What practical steps could he take to support his son's growth without letting these patterns undo his efforts?

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5. What Scriptural wisdom would help Andrew lead with humility and courage?

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# Concluding Thoughts

## *Have the Courage to Care*

Thank you for taking the time to engage with these case studies. They touch on situations that are often complex, painful, and deeply personal, and it is not easy to sit with them thoughtfully and prayerfully. Our prayer is that they have helped you think more deeply about the hurt and struggles present in the lives of God's people – and about the responsibility we have to respond with care, patience, and compassion.

If you recognise yourself in any of these situations, please do not carry that burden alone. Seek wise help and counsel – through your church, a trusted friend, or a qualified counsellor. God has not designed us to walk through suffering in isolation.

Above all, entrust your situation to our gracious and faithful God – the great Counsellor – who knows our pain, walks with us in our weakness, and comforts us as no one else can. As Scripture reminds us, he is “*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction*” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). May that comfort sustain you, guide you, and give you hope.



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