

# FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

## THE LESSON: COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

*“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”*  
(James 2:15-16)

Florence was born to an upper-class English family in 1820, and educated by her father. She had a brilliant mind and an aptitude for a wide range of subjects, including philosophy and mathematics, yet it was the compassionate work of nursing that she was drawn to. At the age of 16, Florence first heard God calling her to a life of service, a call that would lead her to devote herself to the care of those who were suffering. In spite of initial opposition from her family, who believed that such an undertaking was beneath her, Florence was able to take two brief training courses in Germany, and after that put her nursing and administrative skills to good use in London.

*“Her lamp does not go out at night...  
She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.”*  
(Proverbs 31:18, 20)

It was in 1853, when the Crimean War broke out, that Florence really had the opportunity to shine. Reports reached London that injured soldiers were being treated in poor conditions with inadequate supplies and by incompetent staff. Florence’s spirit was stirred. At the very same time as a letter was in the mail from Florence requesting permission to go to the notorious hospital site at Scutari (in Turkey), a letter from a government official was on its way to *her* with the request that she go. So with the official backing of the government, Florence was able to go to Scutari and to take with her a team of 38 nurses.

Florence’s team was not well received by the officers responsible for medical care, and the conditions were every bit as appalling as reported. But only five days after they arrived, a massive influx of newly injured soldiers meant that there was no time to waste. Florence procured much-needed supplies. Her nurses cleaned the filthy facilities, and ensured that the patients were fed, washed and compassionately cared for. Florence herself was called admiringly “the Lady with the Lamp” because at night she would tirelessly wander through the wards, checking on the injured.

A few years later, while still actively caring for injured soldiers, Florence became seriously ill. Her recovery was slow and the illness continued to cause her pain and fatigue for many years, but it did not prevent her from continuing to do good.

*“Blessed are the merciful.”*  
(Matthew 5:7)

When the war ended, Florence’s work did not stop. The statistical data she had kept during the war, her practical knowledge, and her now-celebrated reputation, enabled her to do even more in the decades that followed. Florence wrote books on caring for the sick, she established schools for nursing and midwifery, and she worked to improve healthcare for the poor.

On her thirtieth birthday, Florence had written, “Today I am thirty – the age Christ began his mission... Now, Lord, let me think only of Thy Will, what Thou wilt me to do.” At the age of 65, Florence wrote, “Today, O Lord, let me dedicate this crumbling old woman to thee. Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Kiefer, *Florence Nightingale*). She lived till the age of 90. Florence never married, but remained celibate, and dedicated her whole life to the service of God

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by caring for those in need. Her work and her influence revolutionized medical care in England, and her name has become a byword for mercy and compassion.

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## AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Florence that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Discuss your reflections with a friend or a group of friends, and together commit to a concrete action you can take this week.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

*O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Florence, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)