

Lesson 20

GOD'S COMPASSION AND MERCY

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Compassion is a key part of spirituality. The Hebrew and Greek words translated “compassion” in the Bible means “to have mercy, to feel sympathy and to have pity.” The definition of compassion in English is: “a feeling of deep sympathy or sorrow for another who is stricken with misfortune, accompanied by the strong desire to alleviate the suffering.” The Oxford dictionary goes on to include the word pity. The entire Bible is the story of God’s compassion for mankind. From the opening book of Genesis until the final conclusion of Revelation we see a God that designed a world just for us only to have us sin against Him. Yet, He doesn’t abandon us, but rather pursues us and brings all who believe in Jesus in to a right relationship with God through the shed blood of Jesus. That is true compassion; when someone who knew no sin, became sin for us and died on a cross so that we could have life eternal with God! Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Our Lord is a compassionate God.

Whenever I’ve been sick or hurt, I’m overwhelmed by the compassion of family and friends as they tend to me or visit to show me their love and mercy. I am even more overwhelmed to know that the Almighty Creator, God has full compassion for each of us. According to the Bible, our God is “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Like all of God’s attributes, His compassion is infinite and eternal. His compassion never fails. God also exemplified compassion through His Son, Jesus.

- *Psalm 86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.*
- *Lamentations 3:22-23 The LORD’S loving kindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*
- *2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, exemplified all of the Father’s attributes, including His compassion. When Jesus saw His friends weeping at the grave of Lazarus, He felt compassion for them and wept alongside them. Moved with compassion for the suffering of others, Jesus healed large crowds who came to Him, as well as individuals who sought His healing. When He saw the large crowds as sheep without a shepherd, His compassion led Him to teach them the things the false shepherds of Israel had abandoned. The priests and scribes were proud and corrupt; they despised the common people and neglected them, but Jesus had compassion on them, and He taught and loved them.

- *John 11:33-35 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, 34 and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” (35) Jesus wept.*
- *Matthew 14:14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.*
- *Mark 1:40-41 And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” (41) Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”*

God describes Himself as “The Lord, The Lord God, compassionate and gracious”.

- *Exodus 34:6: Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, **compassionate** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;*
- *Deuteronomy 4:31: For the LORD your God is a **compassionate** God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.*
- *2 Chronicles 30:9: For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find **compassion** before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and **compassionate**, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.”*

- *Nehemiah 9:17: “They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and **compassionate**, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them.*
- *Nehemiah 9:31: “Nevertheless, in Your great **compassion** You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and **compassionate** God.*
- *Psalms 78:38: But He, being **compassionate**, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger And did not arouse all His wrath.*
- *Psalms 103:8: The LORD is **compassionate** and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.*
- *Psalms 111:4: He has made His wonders to be remembered; The LORD is gracious and **compassionate**.*
- *Psalms 112:4: Light arises in the darkness for the upright; He is gracious and **compassionate** and righteous.*
- *Psalms 116:5: Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is **compassionate**.*
- *Lamentations 4:10: The hands of **compassionate** women Boiled their own children; They became food for them Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.*
- *Joel 2:13: And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and **compassionate**, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil.*
- *Jonah 4:2: He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and **compassionate** God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.*

In the book of Exodus, Moses asks God to show him His glory, to which God agrees. And in that revelation God formally introduces Himself to Moses, *Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, **compassionate** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; Exodus 34:6*

Genesis tells us that God made man in His image. And one of the earliest revelation by God of His attributes is that He is a compassionate God. But, what does it mean to be made in the image of a compassionate God? As always, we must look at Jesus’ life to see the image of God Almighty. Throughout the Bible it says Jesus was “moved by compassion”. Compassion motivated Him to heal the sick, love the marginalized, reach out to the broken, and to continually bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

In answering the question of what it mean to be made in the image of a compassionate God, two thoughts strike me instantly.

1. The tremendous opportunity we have to be in a relationship with a compassionate God, and to feel His compassion in our own lives.
2. The tremendous privilege we have to show others what His compassion looks like, not out of duty or selfishness, but simply by living as we are created to be; God’s image bearers.

God is passionate about heart transformation. God wants to see our hearts seeking after Him and encountering His transformational love and compassion. He created us for relationship with Him, and the amazing result is that being in constant, close relationship with Him changes our hearts to look and act more like Jesus to the people around us. We see God through Jesus and the lost see Jesus through us.

God’s compassion is the basis of God’s mercy. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that it is to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. But He added that the second commandment “is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” The Pharisee had asked Him which single command of God is the greatest, but Jesus provided two, stating not only what we are to do, but also how to do it. To love our neighbor as ourselves is the natural result of our loving devotion toward God.

- *Matthew 22:34-40 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. (35) One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, (36) “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (37) And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ (38) This is the great and foremost commandment. (39) The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ (40) On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”*
- *John 3:17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*
- *1 John 3:17 But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

Originally made in His image, man is to exemplify God’s traits, including compassion. From this it follows that “If anyone says, ‘I love God’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (*1 John 4:20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.*). The Bible is clear that compassion is an attribute of God and is to be emulated by all God’s people as well.

God being merciful basically means that, when we deserve punishment, He doesn’t punish us, and in fact blesses us instead. Mercy is the withholding of a just condemnation. Throughout the Bible, God gives many illustrations of His mercy. God fully demonstrates His mercy in Jesus Christ.

God was merciful to the wayward Solomon in *1 Kings 11:13 (However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.)* .

God was merciful to Israel in captivity (*Psalm 106:45 And He remembered His covenant for their sake, And relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness.*;

Nehemiah 9:31 “Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, For You are a gracious and compassionate God.)).

David illustrated God’s mercy when he showed kindness to Mephibosheth (*2 Samuel 9:7 David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly.”*).

God’s mercy was illustrated every year on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Holiest Place and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy seat (*Leviticus 16:14 Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times*).

Another illustration of God’s mercy is found in Matthew 18:23–27 (“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. (24) When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. (25) But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. (26) So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ (27) And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.). In this parable, Jesus describes a rich ruler who was owed a large sum of money. The ruler ordered that money be collected, but then the debtor came and begged for mercy. The ruler, in turn, graciously forgives the debt. Here’s the point: we owed God a debt we could never repay, and He has freely forgiven us that debt in Christ! Interestingly, after the ruler in the parable forgives the debt, the person who owed the money refuses to forgive someone else. The ruler then judges that ungrateful person.

Not only are we to be compassionate, God requires us to be merciful and forgiving to others here on earth (*Matthew 6:15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*). We who have been forgiven so much have no right to withhold forgiveness from others.

God's mercy has been defined as God not giving us what we deserve. We, as sinners, deserve eternal punishment away from His presence, yet in His mercy He has chosen to offer us a way for salvation (*Ephesians 2:4; Romans 5:8*). *Deuteronomy 4:31* and *Psalms 103:8* say that God is merciful. A beautiful picture of God's mercy is shown in the parable of the Prodigal Son in *Luke 15*.

- *Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*
- *Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
- *Deuteronomy 4:31 For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.*
- *Psalms 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness.*
- *Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."*
- *Luke 15:11-31 And He said, "A man had two sons. (12) The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. (13) And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. (14) Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. (15) So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. (16) And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. (17) But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! (18) I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' (20) So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (21) And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (22) But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; (23) and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; (24) for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. (25) "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. (26) And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. (27) And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' (28) But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. (29) But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; (30) but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' (31) And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. (32) But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"*

Mercy is a resultant action of compassion but is also coupled with other attributes of God as seen in *Psalms 86:15*, "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth. God's mercy is rooted in His love for us. He is merciful, in large part, because He is love (*1 John 4:8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*).

As sinners, we deserve punishment (*Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*). God's righteousness requires punishment for sin—He wouldn't be holy otherwise. Since God does love us and is merciful, He sent His Son (*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*).

The fullness of His mercy is seen in Matthew 27. Jesus is brutally beaten and murdered on our behalf; Jesus received our just condemnation, and we received God's mercy.

Because of His love for us, God wants us to be with Him. His mercy is required for that to take place; there is an inseparable connection between God's love and mercy. Jesus laid down His life and became the sacrificial lamb so that God's mercy could be extended to us.

- *Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.*
- *John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*
- *Ephesians 2:4–5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*

Instead of punishing us for our sin, God allowed His Son to take the condemnation in our place. That is the ultimate act of God's mercy. To our eternal benefit, "mercy triumphs over judgment"

- *James 2:13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment*

Out of God's Compassion, instead of judgment, God's blessings, God's Mercy! Hallelujah!