

COMPASSION vs INDIFFERENCE

COMPASSION MEANS RESPONDING TO A DEEP NEED WITH A LONGING TO DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO MEET IT

“A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:33).

DEFINITION OF COMPASSION

The phrase “bowels of compassion”, which is often used in the New Testament, comes from the Greek word *splagchnon*. It means “a yearning of our inward emotions, with a tender love and affection.” To be “moved with compassion” describes Jesus’ response to the deep needs He saw. The Hebrew word *racham* means “to have tender affection; have mercy; love deeply.” It is used to describe the tender love that a father and mother have for their children and the mercy that God shows to His people.

Another Greek word for *compassion* is *eleeo*. The wicked servant who was forgiven much had no compassion (*eleeo*) for the one who owed him little. It is from this word that we get the term *eleemosynary*, which describes the benevolent giving of humanitarian aid. Other concepts that describe compassion are “to have pity, to spare from destruction, and to show mercy.”

HOW COMPASSION DIFFERS FROM SYMPATHY

Many people confuse compassion with similar terms such as sympathy and empathy. Sympathy means feeling sorry for people who are hurting. Empathy means feeling the pain with hurting people. But compassion goes beyond these feelings—Compassion means doing something about the pain. The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates the differences well. Three men saw a wounded traveler by the side of the road. The first one surely felt sympathy as he passed by. The second indicated empathy as he came over and looked at him. But the third, the Good Samaritan, had compassion as he stopped and helped him.

COMPASSION IS STIRRED BY AN URGENT NEED FOR HELP

- Pharaoh’s daughter had compassion on Moses as a baby—“When she had opened it (the basket), she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him” (Exodus 2:6). It is interesting that the cries of a baby caused the king’s daughter to have compassion, and the cries of a nation caused the King of Kings to have compassion. Then God used the baby who had received compassion to give compassion. (See Exodus 2:23-25, 3:9-10.)
- Jesus had compassion on a grieving widow—When Jesus saw a widow whose only son was being carried to his burial, “he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not” (Luke 7:13), and He raised her son from the dead.
- The Good Samaritan had compassion on a wounded traveler—“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead...A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:30, 33).

COMPASSION RESULTS FROM DISCERNING A DEEP NEED

- **Jesus saw the spiritual needs of the multitudes and had compassion**—“When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest (Matthew 9:36-38).
- **Jesus saw the physical needs of the multitude and gave healing and food**—“Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick...He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes...And they did all ate, and were filled” (Matthew 14:14, 19-20).
- **Jesus saw the leadership needs of the multitudes and had compassion**—“And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

COMPASSION IS ACTIVATED BY HUMBLE PLEAS FOR HELP

- **The hopelessly indebted servant begged for patience**—“The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion and loosed him, and forgave him the debt” (Matthew 18:26-27).
- **Two blind men cried out for healing**—“And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David...So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him” (Matthew 20:30, 34).
- **A leper knelt and appealed for healing**—“There came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (Mark 1:40-41).
- **The father of a boy with an unclean spirit cried out for help, with tears**—“Straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” (Mark 9:24-25).
- **The prodigal son repented and pled for mercy**—“He arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

COMPASSION IS A NORMAL RESPONSE TO AN URGENT NEED

- **A cry for help indicates humility and dependence**—Most people are reluctant to acknowledge a personal need or ask for help. Thus, a cry for help is humbling and acknowledges a personal inability and inadequacy to meet an urgent need. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

- **Refusing to meet a need requires us to “shut up” our “bowels of compassion”**—“Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? (I John 3:17).
- **Wealthy people are urged to distribute to the needy**—“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute” (I Timothy 6:17-18).

COMPASSION PRESUPPOSES AN ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

- Jesus drew from the power of His divine nature to feed the multitude.
- The Good Samaritan drew from his own resources to provide healing.
- We are to draw from the resources that God has entrusted to us to meet the needs of others. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (II Corinthians 9:8). “Be kindly affectioned one to another...Distributing to the necessity of saints” (Romans 12:10, 13). “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38).

COMMANDS TO BE COMPASSIONATE

The character quality of compassion is not a suggestion for those who would follow Christ, but rather a command.

1. **Have compassion one of another**—“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (I Peter 3:8-9).
2. **Put on bowels of mercies, kindness**—“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:12-13).
3. **Have compassion, making a difference**—“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 21-23).

HOW TO DEVELOP A COMPASSIONATE HEART

1. Focus on our great debt to God.

It is all too easy to shut up our bowels of compassion to those who have offended us, yet our attitude should be totally different when we realize the huge debt we have toward God. The wicked servant who was forgiven a huge debt did not have the same kind of compassion on one who owed him a small debt, because he himself was not humble enough to plead for mercy—he asked only for an extension of time. Thus, he did not appreciate the compassionate mercy shown to him, nor could he show similar mercy to one who asked him for an extension of time.

Matthew 18:23-34 (New American Standard)

23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. 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 "The slave therefore falling down, 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. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33' Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

2. Enlarge your heart with a prayer list.

The larger our hearts, the more compassion we will have. David asked the Lord to enlarge his heart. (See Psalm 119:32.) Paul urged the Corinthian believers to enlarge their hearts toward each other and toward him in the same way that his heart was enlarged toward them. (See II Corinthians 6:1-13.) One of the obvious ways that Paul enlarged his heart for compassion was to have a detailed and extensive prayer list. (See Philippians 1:4.) He carried the daily responsibility of all the churches and prayed for many of the believers by name. (See II Corinthians 11:28.)

3. Turn personal suffering into compassion for others.

All believers are called to experience suffering. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Peter 2:21). One of the purposes for suffering is to learn the compassion of Christ. By understanding how others feel when they go through suffering, we can give them the comfort we receive from the Lord. Notice that it isn't experiencing the same type of suffering that is the common denominator, but rather, God's comfort that we have experienced. "God comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in *any* trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (II Corinthians 1:4).

4. Look for ways to good to all people.

Compassion is a practical expression of genuine love, and all believers are commanded to have love toward each other and toward others. Not only is love the credential of being a disciple, but it is also the means by which we fulfill the instruction of Galatians 6:10: "Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

HOW COMPASSIONATE ARE YOU?

- Are you “moved to compassion” when you see a group of people in need of Christ?
- Do you pray that God will send forth laborers into His harvest?
- When a neighbor has a need, do you say, “Let me know if I can help,” hoping he will not call on you? Or do you find a way to show compassion?
- When you see a disabled person of another race, do you provide practical help?
- Do you have funds or skills that are available to help those who have a need?
- Who was the last person who asked you for help, and how did you help him?