COMPASSION: A QUALITY OF GOD FOR US TO IMITATE by Rick Liggin

The book of Lamentations is not exactly the most “upbeat” book in the Bible. In fact, it’s quite depressing…because in it, the author laments bitterly over Judah’s lost condition in Babylonian captivity. Yet, sad as it is, the writer also has something positive to say! He emphatically affirms, “The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:22-23). You might recognize these words from a song we often sing about our God entitled “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”! Despite all his mournful lamentations, the writer must also confess that God’s faithfulness is great because His “compassions never fail”!

“Compassion" is a sympathetic [consciousness](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness) of another’s distress together with an active desire to alleviate that distress. It is *active* pity, mercy, or sympathy. It is to *feel with* someone, and then to act in a way that is aimed at that person’s real benefit.

The Bible teaches that this is a consistent attribute of our God. He is a God of compassion! He is sympathetic to His creatures…especially to His people. We serve a God who is *sympathetically conscious* of our condition, especially when our condition is one of distress. And it doesn’t matter what has caused our distress; even if our distress is the result of our own careless or sinful conduct, our God feels for us and actively works for our benefit to help us resolve our problems in real and meaningful ways.

A great example of this is seen in the book of Isaiah (49:15-16). Here God asks, “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb” (49:15)? Is this even possible? We would say, “Surely not! Surely, it’s not possible for a mother to forget her own child, especially a nursing mother!” Well, listen; even if the unimaginable were to actually happen…even though “these may forget,” God assures us, “I will not forget you” (49:15)! And what assurance does He offer? “Behold, I have engraved (esv) you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (49:16). God has *engraved* us on the palms of His hands! He’s not just made a note of us on His hands with a blue ink pen! God has *etched* a permanent mark on His hands, so that He *will not* forget us or fail to have compassion on us! Wow! Our God is One whose “compassions *never* fail”; and this is a great comfort to those of us who falter and fall but pick ourselves back up in hopes that God will compassionately forgive!

Now, think about Jesus! He is the very image and exact expression of God (Heb. 1:3). This being so, we are not surprised to see God’s compassionate nature in Jesus. Jesus was often motivated by His compassion to act on behalf of others. It’s why He often healed the diseased (Mk. 1:40-42; Matt. 20:34; Lk. 7:11-15) and fed the hungry (Matt. 15:32).

But Jesus’ sense of compassion was most strongly stirred when He saw people in their plight with sin. More than once, we are told that when Jesus saw lost people, “He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk. 6:34; cf. Matt. 9:36). Jesus could have felt disgust or indignation or even indifference for these people; after all, their lost and broken condition was the result of their own sinful behavior. But instead, He felt compassion for them; and notice that He felt compassion for them specifically “*because* they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk. 6:34)! It was precisely *because* of their situation (though self-imposed by their own sinful choices) that Jesus felt *compassion* for them.

And then Jesus acted in their best interest; compassion moved Him to act…to “teach them many (needed) things” (6:34). Lost people need to be taught how to correct their sin and how to access God’s mercy and forgiveness. And that’s what Jesus did…because He was compassionate!

This leads us to turn this topic in application to ourselves! We are to be “imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1). God wants us to imitate His character, and He also wants us to reflect the image of His Son (Col. 3:1-11)! For us to do this, we must put on (among other things) a “heart of compassion” (3:12). Like our Father and His Son, we must learn to show real compassion for all men, especially those suffering in sin! And if we think about it, this ought not to be too hard for us! Developing compassion, especially for sinners, ought to be relatively easy for us since we already know God’s compassion ourselves…since we have already “tasted the kindness of the Lord” when He saved us from our sins (1 Pet. 2:3)!

Listen, folks; we know that even though we should have been “consumed” in our sins, we were not and are “not consumed” (nkjv: Lam. 3:22)! Why? Because our Lord’s “compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great [indeed, *is* His] faithfulness” (3:23). Because we, ourselves, have been shown compassion by our Lord, we must be compassionate, too! We must be compassionate with people in their suffering and even in their sin! And, unfortunately, we don’t always do this very well! Sometimes, especially with certain kinds of sinners, instead of compassion, we feel…and even show…disgust or indignation or indifference! We need to do better than that. For the sake of the lost and for the glory of God, we need to develop true hearts that are full of compassion.

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