

THE LORD'S
LOVINGKINDNESSES
INDEED NEVER CEASE,
FOR HIS COMPASSIONS
NEVER FAIL. THEY ARE
NEW EVERY MORNING;
GREAT IS YOUR
FAITHFULNESS

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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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” (Lam. 3:22-23 NASB-95). 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 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 pos-

sible 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” (Lam. 3:22 NKJV)! 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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Blue States Need the Gospel, Too!

By AL DIESTELKAMP

THOUGH IT MAY NOT BE OBVIOUS to those who live in areas where congregations of the Lord's people are numerous, those of us living in sparser regions know there is a shortage of faithful gospel preachers—especially a shortage of men who are willing to venture out of their comfort zones.

I've noticed an increased number of larger congregations in the "Bible belt" are recruiting young men fresh out of college (or while still in college) to work with a more experienced preacher for a couple of years. While I recognize the value of such an arrangement, it has contributed to the shortage of men available to work with more needy congregations. It's also noticeable that, upon completing their "internships," many of the young men are quickly snapped up by other large congregations desirous of enjoying a two-preacher arrangement.

Don't get me wrong! I am not critical of having two preachers in one congregation. In fact, I have long been an advocate of it, especially in places where the local work is small. However, where is the need the greatest—in a congregation with multiple elders, deacons, and an experienced

preacher, or in a congregation not so blessed?

There are also a number of efforts by individual preachers to hold "preacher training" sessions—often on an annual basis. Where are all those men who have availed themselves of these opportunities? I recognize that there is benefit for men who don't intend to make preaching their career in learning how to preach, but surely there are a few who are eager to preach the gospel more than just "filling in" when local preachers are away.

Perhaps you think that the problem is that my perspective is a result of living in Illinois. It's true that Illinois's corrupt politics, high taxes, and crime has caused a significant exodus of population—including some Christians—mostly to "red states" near and far. But "blue states" need the gospel, too!

And we haven't even begun to talk about the weather. Admittedly, the climate in the north is not ideal, but it has its benefits. We don't have hurricanes, wild fires, or severe earthquakes. Our summers are more tolerable than many of the more desirable locations. Our winters provide opportunities for adventurous ones to engage in activities such as sledding, snowboarding, skiing, and snowball fights

and help the rest of us to better appreciate each onset of spring.

I'm thankful for the men and their families who have chosen to work in places where the churches are few and far between, where support may have to be raised, and where others are reluctant to go. A few of us from the oldest generation remain, as well as some who are close behind. Some from the following generation, most of whom grew up in the north, have also spent many years here and show no signs of leaving. I'm also thankful for those of the youngest generation—some who are native to the north as well as a handful of young men who grew up in southern climates who are faithfully laboring in the gospel in needy fields. Still, there are congregations that lack the benefits of a full-time worker and have very few prospects due to a shortage of available preachers.

I realize this article won't be viewed as a great recruitment tool for attracting preachers to the north, but I hope it will challenge some to consider sacrificing a few temporary comforts for the sake of the gospel, postponing their search for ideal living conditions until the day when the Lord comes and takes us to the perfect dwelling place (Jn. 14:3).

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GREATER VOICE

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

THE TECHNOLOGY of social media has given *greater voice* to the masses while simultaneously insulating us from face-to-face realities. This has emboldened many to "come out" with their various identity crises with the support of and under the protection of a mob of virtual friends who will not only validate their choices but defensively rail against those who dare to question their choices and/or challenge their reasoning.

However, *greater voice* is a good thing *only* if it has ears to hear. Contrary to the biblical admonition, many are swift to speak, swift to wrath, and slow to hear (cf. Js. 1:19). This is not just a problem on the part of those who are "coming out" but also on the part of those who oppose them. While the worldly-wise nonsensically oppose opposition as unloving hate speech, those opposed to such worldly wisdom too often foolishly resort to worldly methods of opposition, forgetting that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Paul's reminder is not just a condemnation of resorting to the extreme of physical

violence but includes *how* we engage those in error with our words. While the reasoning of those who reject God and His Word can be frustrating and infuriating, our replies need to be characterized by patient, long-suffering grace as exemplified by Jesus rather than in the manner of political leftists or rightists.

One of the advantages of the *greater voice* given to the common man is an exposure to a multitude of perspectives. Looking at things through different lenses or walking a mile in another man's shoes are positive metaphors suggesting that we all still have more to learn from which we can benefit. Interaction with cultures other than the one of our own nativity can greatly affect our perspective on things. One of the dangers of "American exceptionalism" is the lack of objectivity that often comes with such pride. Indeed, for the Christian, any national or ethnic culture must ultimately submit to the culture of Christ and not vice versa (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Yet, one of the disadvantages of the *greater voice* for so many is the confusion that often results when a multitude of diverse perspectives clash. The cacophony of

voices can be overwhelming to the point of two extreme reactions: we stop listening to opposing views altogether, or we become so open-minded that our brains fall out. There's a better place between the alleged bliss of ignorance and the alleged freedom of irrationality; and it is not found in worldly media, regardless of how fair and balanced it claims to be. It is only found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and is thus the *divine voice* to which our ears ought to be bent and tuned. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (10:27). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). "Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice" (18:37). "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

So let us filter the competing and confusing voices of this world through Jesus Christ and the words of His apostles and prophets. Let us find our identity in Christ alone and "come out" from the world "lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (18:4). Let us have ears to hear the greater and *greatest voice*, Jesus Christ.

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Slow Down But Don't Stop **TALK TO EACH OTHER**

By **DAVID DIESTELKAMP**

WHEN JAMES SAYS we are to be “slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19), he doesn’t mean that we should not speak at all. Slow down, but don’t stop! Christians need to talk to each other. Whatever the issue, problem, controversy, or difference is, we need to talk about it. We need to use words that are carefully chosen—“gracious, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6 ESV)—but we need to speak. There should be no passive aggressive silent treatment between disciples of Christ; no refusals to explain why we are angry or leaving; no ghosting discussions because we don’t want to (or can’t) give an answer or “reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15)

Times for silence

I’m aware that Scripture says that there are times to be silent. We should not answer before we listen (Prov. 18:13). We should be quiet if all we just want to hear is our own opinions (Prov. 18:2). We should keep our mouths shut if opening our mouths will show us to be fools (Prov. 17:27-28). We aren’t required to keep talking to a fool or throw our pearls before pigs (Prov. 23:9; Matt. 7:6). We should push the mute button when we are tempted to vent (Prov. 29:11) and put our hands over our mouths when we find ourselves arguing with God (Job 40:4). But is this all there is to the righteous use of the tongue—silence?

A deadly fire

I know that James says that “...the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell...” and “...It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:6-8). Our mouths can cause a world of trouble and hurt through idle chatter, divisive words, gossip, being a busybody (1 Tit. 5:13), and whispering (Prov. 26:20), and meddling in other people’s affairs (1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:11; 1 Pet. 4:15). We can’t forget judging and condemning one another (Rom. 14:4; Jas. 4:11), lying, flattery, bragging (Prov. 26:28; 27:2), slander, arguing (Prov. 18:6; 20:3), and being a false-witness (Prov. 24:28). Swearing, obscenities, dirty words, and even off-color jokes are to have no part in us (Col. 3:8; Eph. 5:4). Is it hopeless? Is silence the only option?

Bridling

While it is true that we can’t *tame* the tongue (Jas. 3:8)—we can never trust it or let it run free—it can be controlled. James uses the illustration of a bit that makes it possible to turn a horse (Jas. 3:3). A bit

is a piece of metal, rope, or leather that is placed in a horse’s mouth and attached to the bridle (the ropes or straps held by the rider). Pulling the bridle to the right or left causes the bit to put pressure on the horse’s mouth, turning the horse’s head and signaling the horse to turn its whole body in that direction. James is reminding us that something small (a bit) can cause a big effect (turn a whole horse). Not only does James warn that our little tongues can do a lot of damage, but also that bridling the tongue can “turn [our] whole body.” We can’t tame the tongue, but it isn’t hopeless. It can be controlled. This is what the wise writer refers to as restraining our lips (Prov. 10:19) and guarding our mouths (Prov. 13:3; 21:23). In doing this, it is possible to teach our mouths and add learning to our lips (Prov. 16:23).

Give grace

Why did God give us tongues and the ability to speak if it is so dangerous? Someone told me it is like giving razor blades to a baby to play with. I’ll confess that I probably spend more time preaching about the dangers of the tongue than I do about the blessings. Unfortunately, this may leave the impression that God made a mistake, that it would be better for us not to have tongues or just to be quiet all the time. This would be worse than all the dangers of the tongue combined!

If it is dangerous and God gave it to us anyway, it must be worth the risk. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” We often stop at the “corrupt word” part and miss the “what is good” part. It’s not enough to “let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth.” Silence isn’t enough. “What is good for necessary edification” must fill the silence. Edifying words “impart grace to the hearers.” (Silence does not.) Imparting grace makes all the risks of the tongue worth it.

What silence misses

Here are a few ways that grace can be imparted with the tongue but can be lost through silence: verbal prayer, exhortation, encouragement, praise, glorification, sympathy, greetings, confession, teaching, correction, rebuke, speaking the truth, expressing forgiveness, invitation, singing, giving thanks, testifying, expressing love and relationship, explanation, apology, accepting responsibility, edification, answers, reasons, clarifications, mediation, peacemaking, advocacy, righteous judgment, wisdom, advice, preaching, speaking the truth... These are a few of the reasons for

the very existence of our tongues! Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” It’s not *just* death! We can give *life* by what we say.

Ungodly silence

I’ve already shown that there is a time for silence. But silence should be the exception and not the rule for Christians. “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6; cf Eph. 4:29). When we choose to be silent, we need to do some soul searching to make sure our motives for not speaking are pure because there is no way to “impart grace to the hearers” by not speaking. It’s not about whether we want to talk or feel like talking. It’s not about it being awkward or difficult. It’s not about whether or not people are approachable or we think they’ll respond well. We have grace to impart to the hearer—to “each person” (ESV)—not just the ones we choose. This is why we have tongues—and our Lord expects us to impart grace!

Problems

Not all differences between Christians need to be talked about. Paul begs: “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:1-2). But let’s be honest—if we can’t bear it, can’t tolerate it, or can’t keep it from affecting our relationship or thoughts of one another—then we need to talk. We don’t resort to silent treatment or avoidance or breaking fellowship without talking. If it’s medicine, politics, styles, culture, friendliness, personality, sports, pets, or other matters of opinion—choose your words carefully (“seasoned”) and bear with each other. If someone sins against you, Jesus Himself says we must go and talk to them with the goal of gaining our brother (Matt. 18:15-17). This is the only option. And there’s no waiting around for the other person to reach out, even if he has a problem with us: “... if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matt. 5:23-24). Communication is not optional.

Be slow to speak, but speak. Use no corrupt words but words of grace. The family of God should be able to talk at times and about topics when the world cannot. And talking can be beautiful, “like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Let’s talk!

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"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"

Philippians 2:4

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Articles
From the
Days Gone By

PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

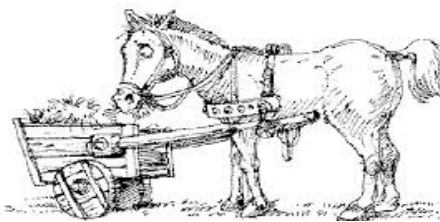
By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

A GOOD PREACHER APPEALED to an able church for support while he worked with a small group of Christians in a vast metropolitan field. His request was declined because the elders felt he was preaching to too few people. "He only preaches to thirty-five or forty people," they complained.

Another able, experienced preacher determined to go to a completely new field to help establish a congregation in a good city there. One elder wrote him advising against it. The elder's plan seemed to be as follows: such new churches should get by with local talent so that the full-time preachers could be available for work with larger congregations.

The two paragraphs above demonstrate the "cart before the horse" attitude. According to such ideas, Paul should have stayed at Antioch. He should have declined the "Macedonian call," explaining to the Lord that he could preach to more brethren in Antioch.

The fact is that some brethren want to hire an "errand boy" for the church, but they have to designate him as "our preacher" to justify the expenditure. Other brethren



seem to measure the worthwhileness of a preacher's support by the number of people he preaches to even if 99% of them are already Christians.

A few years ago I heard from an older preacher who said, "If I were a young preacher, I'd pick me out a good church and settle down for life." This kind of statement almost makes me vomit! And if that sentiment (or the attitude described in the first two paragraphs of

this article) represents a scriptural approach to gospel work and a scriptural discernment of the will of Christ, then I surely don't know enough to come in out of the rain!

But this must not be construed to mean that I believe it is wrong for a preacher to work with a well-established church or that it is wrong for a preacher to stay a long time in one community. I just believe many brethren have established wrong priorities. The first matter of concern for any gospel preacher should be to preach the pure Word and preach it where it is needed most. Likewise, the first priority for the expenditure of money from the church treasury should be to be sure it is spent for support of faithful men in whatever field may present the greatest need and/or opportunity. "The field is the world," and Jesus said, "Go teach."

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