

Sunday, July 26, 2026

Moved by Compassion

Exodus 34:6; Isaiah 49:13-16; Matthew 9:35-38

1. Opening Discussion: Feeling Bad or Showing Compassion?

Begin with this scenario:

Imagine you see a student sitting alone at lunch. You know something difficult has been happening in their family. You look at them and think, 'I feel really bad for them.' Then you sit with your usual friends and never speak to them.

Ask:

- Did you care about that person?
- Did you show compassion?
- Is feeling bad for someone the same as helping them?
- Why might someone notice another person's pain but still choose not to get involved?

Allow students to answer honestly. Possible reasons might include awkwardness, fear of saying the wrong thing, being too busy, worrying what friends will think, or assuming someone else will help.

Today's video shows us that God's compassion includes deep emotion, but it does not end with emotion. God is moved by suffering, and that movement leads him to act.

2. Review Exodus 34:6

Read Exodus 34:6:

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Ask:

- What was the first word God used to describe himself?
- Why do you think “compassionate” appears first?
- What did we learn last week about the situation in which God said these words?

Remind them that God gave this description after Israel’s rebellion with the golden calf. Compassion is not something God shows only when people have behaved perfectly. Compassion is part of who God is.

3. Understanding the Hebrew Word

The Hebrew word translated “**compassionate**” is *rakhum*. A related word, *rakhamim*, means “compassion.” Both come from the same word family as *rekhem*, the Hebrew word for “womb.” The word creates a picture of the tender, protective concern a parent feels for a vulnerable child.

Explain:

The Bible is not saying that God is biologically male or female. It is using parental imagery to help us understand God’s care. God’s compassion is deep, protective, personal, and emotionally engaged.

The word can carry the idea of being “**deeply moved**.” In 1 Kings 3, Solomon discovered the identity of a child’s true mother because she was so deeply moved that she would rather surrender her child than see him harmed. Her compassion moved her toward sacrifice.

Ask:

- What does the connection between compassion and a parent’s care teach us about God?
- Does this picture make God seem distant or personally involved?
- Why might vulnerability draw out compassion?
- Can you think of a time when another person’s pain affected you deeply?

Be careful not to pressure students into sharing painful personal experiences.

4. Watch the Video

5. Discussion Guide

A. Compassion Notices Suffering

1. What stood out to you from the video?

Possible follow-ups:

- Was anything new or surprising?
- Was there anything you did not understand?
- What image or story stayed with you?

2. Why do you think compassion begins with noticing?

Ask students to consider how often they move through their day without really seeing the people around them.

- What can distract us from the needs of others?
- Do phones and social media help us notice suffering, or can they sometimes make us numb to it?
- Why is it easier to notice the pain of our friends than the pain of someone we dislike?
- Can we become so accustomed to suffering that we stop seeing it?

Make this point:

We cannot respond compassionately to pain that we refuse to notice.

3. What is the difference between pity and compassion?

Help them develop something like this:

Pity can look at suffering from a safe distance. Compassion moves closer.

Pity says, “That is terrible.” Compassion asks, “How can I help?”

Pity can sometimes look down on someone. Compassion recognizes their dignity and enters their situation with humility.

Ask:

- How can helping someone make us feel superior?
- How can we serve without treating people like projects?
- Why is listening sometimes more compassionate than immediately giving advice?

B. Compassion Feels Deeply

4. Does being emotionally affected by someone's pain make a person weak?

Students may have heard messages such as “toughen up,” “do not be emotional,” or “it is not your problem.”

Ask:

- Why do people sometimes treat compassion as weakness?
- Does caring deeply make someone easier to hurt?
- Could refusing to care actually be a form of weakness?
- What would our world be like if no one allowed another person's pain to affect them?

Explain:

God is not cold, detached, or indifferent. The suffering of people matters to him. Scripture describes him as hearing the cries of Israel in Egypt and being moved to rescue them. His emotion does not make him powerless; it motivates powerful action.

5. What does it mean to believe that God is moved by our suffering?

Ask:

- Does God's compassion mean that he immediately removes every painful situation?
- Can God be compassionate even when we do not understand what he is doing?
- How might knowing that God sees and cares change the way we pray?
- When you are hurting, are you more likely to move toward God or hide from him?

Clarify:

God's compassion does not mean that every problem disappears immediately. It means that we never suffer unseen, unnoticed, or abandoned by him.

C. Compassion Moves to Action

Read Exodus 3:7–10.

Ask students to listen for what God sees, hears, knows, and does.

6. What actions grew out of God's compassion?

Possible answers:

- God saw their misery.
- God heard their cries.
- God was concerned about their suffering.
- God came down to rescue them.
- God sent Moses to participate in the rescue.

Emphasize:

God did not merely say, “I feel terrible about Egypt.” His compassion became rescue.

The video traces this pattern through Israel's story: God hears his people, provides for them in the wilderness, forgives them, and works to deliver them from oppression and exile.

Ask:

- Why did God involve Moses rather than doing everything without him?
- Could God still choose to answer someone's prayer by sending one of his people?
- What happens when we pray for hurting people but refuse to become involved?
- Is prayer an alternative to action, or can prayer prepare us for action?

7. Does compassion always mean giving someone exactly what they ask for?

This is important for students to understand.

Ask:

- Could giving someone what they want ever make their situation worse?
- Is it compassionate to help someone hide dangerous behavior?
- Is it compassionate to keep abuse, self-harm, or threats secret?
- Why might telling a trusted adult be the most compassionate response?

Explain:

Compassion should be joined with wisdom. Helping does not mean enabling destructive behavior, ignoring truth, or placing yourself in danger. Sometimes compassion comforts. Sometimes it confronts. Sometimes it gets help from someone who is better equipped to respond.

D. God's Compassion Is Like a Parent's Care

Read Isaiah 49:13–16.

Israel believed that God had forgotten them during exile. God responded with the image of a mother and her nursing child:

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you.”

The video uses this passage to emphasize that God's people remain continually before him, even in one of the darkest moments of their story.

8. What does this image teach us about God?

Possible answers:

- His care is tender.
- His people are not forgotten.
- He is attentive to the vulnerable.
- His compassion continues even in dark seasons.
- His love is not casual or distant.

Ask:

- Why might Israel have believed God had forgotten them?
- Have you ever mistaken God's silence for God's absence?
- What is the difference between feeling forgotten and actually being forgotten?
- How could this passage encourage someone going through a difficult season?

Add this pastoral clarification:

Some people have wonderful parents, while others have experienced neglect, disappointment, or harm. God is not simply a larger version of an imperfect human parent. He is the standard of perfect parental love—the kind of care our best human relationships only partially reflect.

E. Jesus Embodies God's Compassion

Read Matthew 9:35–38.

Jesus saw crowds who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” and he had compassion on them.

9. What did Jesus notice that other people might have missed?

Possible answers:

- He saw more than a crowd.
- He saw confusion and exhaustion.
- He saw people lacking guidance.
- He saw individuals rather than interruptions.
- He recognized spiritual as well as physical needs.

Ask:

- What groups of people are easily treated like a problem rather than as people?
- Who might feel overlooked in your school?
- Who gets judged before anyone knows their story?
- What might change if we saw people the way Jesus sees them?

10. What did Jesus' compassion lead him to do?

Jesus taught, healed, welcomed outsiders, touched people others avoided, and eventually entered human suffering and death to rescue humanity. The video presents Jesus as God's compassion embodied in a human life.

Ask:

- Why did Jesus often move toward the people others avoided?
- What did touching lepers or eating with outsiders communicate?
- How does the cross reveal both the depth of human suffering and the compassion of God?
- What would it look like for our youth group to become known for moving toward people who feel forgotten?

F. Becoming Compassionate People

Read Luke 6:36:

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Depending on the translation, the verse may read, “Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”

11. Can followers of Jesus claim to know a compassionate God while consistently ignoring hurting people?

Allow them to wrestle with the question.

Ask:

- Why should God's character shape our character?
- Is compassion natural, or does it have to be practiced?
- What habits could help us become more attentive to others?
- What keeps Christians from responding compassionately?

Possible obstacles:

- Busyness
- Fear
- Prejudice
- Selfishness
- Discomfort

- Assuming someone deserves their situation
- Worrying that helping will cost too much
- Waiting for someone else to act

12. Who might God be asking you to notice?

Encourage students to think without immediately saying a name aloud.

Possibilities might include:

- Someone who eats alone
- A student who is regularly mocked
- Someone dealing with grief
- A teammate who is struggling
- A new student
- Someone whose family is going through difficulty
- A person they normally avoid
- Someone who appears angry but may actually be hurting

Then ask:

What is one compassionate action you could take this week?

Keep the action simple and specific:

- Sit with someone.
- Send a message.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Invite someone to join the group.
- Defend someone being mocked.
- Tell a trusted adult when someone is unsafe.
- Help with a practical need.
- Pray with someone.
- Apologize.
- Forgive.
- Give your time.

6. Closing Activity: Notice, Be Moved, Act — 5 minutes

Give each student a piece of paper. Ask them to complete these three sentences privately:

- 1. God, help me notice...**
- 2. God, move my heart toward...**
- 3. This week, I will...**

They do not need to turn the paper in or share their answers.

Say:

“Biblical compassion follows a pattern: we notice suffering, we allow ourselves to be moved, and then we respond. We cannot solve every problem, but we can faithfully respond to the person God places in front of us.”

One-Week Compassion Challenge

One person. One need. One action.

Challenge every student to intentionally notice one person, identify one need, and take one compassionate action before the next meeting.