

SEEING GOD AS HE IS

LESSON 5: God's COMPASSION

I. "I Am" - a God of **compassion**

A. Definition of biblical words used:

1. *racham* or *rakuhm* (Heb, used in OT) – this Hebrew word means to love deeply, to yearn, to have mercy, to pity, & to be compassionate (this same word was used in the previous lesson for mercy); these qualities are all closely interrelated, allowing for the same word to be used for all of these qualities; *racham / rakuhm* is closely related to the word for 'womb'—suggesting the depth of God's compassion for us, as well as his ability to carry us in his tender care.

2. *oiktirmos* (Gk, used in the NT) – to have affection, have pity, show mercy; to show compassion; well-known uses: Rom. 12:1 (mercies); 2 Cor. 1:3 (mercies); Phil. 2:1 (compassion); Col. 3:2 (compassion); Heb. 10:28 (mercy)

3. *splagchnitzomai* (Gk, used in the NT) - *splagchnizomai*, translated as compassion, means the stirring of the inward parts, literally the twisting of the intestines; compassion is a visceral or 'gut-wrenching' emotional response that moves us to act - when we see someone else experiencing a pain we have experienced, we internalize that pain and respond physically, emotionally, and decisively to help

4. *compati* (Latin) – the direct root of our modern word – 'to suffer together with'; it is having a deep awareness of the suffering of another, and having the desire to relieve it

B. To have *compassion* is to recognize the suffering of others and then take action to help. It is more than feeling concern for the distressed, or than just caring about others' misfortunes - there is a call to *action*;

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1. To fully understand, this idea, we must differentiate between certain English words we use in connection with suffering:

a. *Sympathy* means you can understand what another person is feeling

b. *Empathy* means that you are actually able to feel what another person is feeling

c. *Compassion* is the willingness to relieve the suffering of another person

2. love demands compassion, and the action of compassion is *mercy* - pity, compassion, and mercy are thus closely related qualities essential in expressing our love to others

II. Understanding compassion

A. His compassion is *unlimited* and *eternal*

1. In Ex.34:6-7, we read: "...the LORD, the LORD, the *compassionate* and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..." – the first word He uses to describe His character is **compassionate**

2. The Bible gives many pictures of God's compassion – it is freely and tenderly given (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15), just as a parent, a father, and even as a nursing mother would give a child

**Isa. 49:15-16 - "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands..."*

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**Hos. 11:8 - "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows."*

**Psalm 103:13 - "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him."*

3. God's compassion is not indiscriminate, it is consistent and just, even working to correct or punish sin in order to cleanse, instead of just ignoring it

a. Ex. 33:19

b. Deut.13:17

c. 2 Chron. 30:9

d. Psalm 51:1

e. Micah 7:19

4. God's compassion is rooted in His covenant relationship with His people (2 Kings 13:23)

5. The compassion of God is fully revealed in Jesus - Jesus is the full compassion of God fully explained to mankind

B. Other scriptures about God's compassion:

***Psalm 145:8** – The Lord is gracious, and full of **compassion**; slow to anger, and of great mercy

***Psalm 86:15** – But you, Lord, are a **compassionate** and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness

***Mark 6:34** – When He went ashore, He saw a great crowd, and He had **compassion** on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd

***Hebrews 4:15** – we do not have a high priest who is unable to **sympathize** with our weaknesses, but one

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who is in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of **compassion** and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

C. What does scripture say to US about compassion?

1. Key scriptures:

*1 Peter 3:8 – Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be **compassionate** and humble.

*Ephesians 4:32 -Be kind and **compassionate** to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you.

*Colossians 3:12 - As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with **compassion**, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

*Phil. 2:1-2 - Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and **compassion**, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

2. What does compassion look like?

a. Being compassionate compels one to *actively* seek out those who are suffering

b. Showing compassion forces one to be more *alert* and *sensitive* to the cries of those who are suffering, and not neglect opportunities when presented

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c. Showing compassion demands that one *does the right thing* to relieve the suffering when it is uncovered, and demands that one *does not easily quit* or give up in fulfilling that need

d. Compassion softens the heart of the bearer:

1). causing one to become more loving

2). causing one to become more considerate

3). causing one to become more generous

4). causing one to become more humble

e. Showing compassion to others can make us more *aware of our own* weakness and frailty, keeping us focused on our own great need for dependence on God

f. Showing compassion *transforms* us to become more like God

3. Outstanding biblical examples – notice how true compassion often crosses barriers:

a. Exodus 2:6 – the Egyptian princess and Moses

b. Story of Ruth

c. Luke 10:25-37 – the good Samaritan

d. Luke 15:11-32 – the profligate son and his father

4. How do we become *more* compassionate to others?

a. *Pray* about it regularly, and ask in earnest - but be careful! God will listen and quickly fill your life with opportunities!

b. *Learn to recognize suffering*, and work on developing a more sympathetic and empathetic attitude

c. *Practice regularly* – start “small”, and help those you already know who are suffering (spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially); as you develop your

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compassion skills, you will see more & more opportunities, and God will give you more resources and abilities to fulfill the needs in those who suffer

d. *Find your talent* – as you practice compassion, you will uncover your God-given abilities to address different or specific aspects of the suffering of others

e. Establish yourself as a regular and willing *resource for others* who are struggling

