

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Compassion



“ Jesus ... was moved with *compassion* toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. ”

Mark 6:34

## WHAT IS COMPASSION?

The Hebrew and Greek words translated “compassion” in the Bible mean “to have mercy, to feel sympathy and to have pity.” We know that, according to the Bible, God is “full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:15). Like all of God’s attributes, His compassion is infinite and eternal. “His compassions fail not. They are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, exemplified all of the Father’s attributes, including His compassion. When Jesus saw His friends weeping at the grave of Lazarus, He felt compassion for them and wept alongside them (John 11:33–35). Moved with compassion for the suffering of others, Jesus healed the large crowds who came to Him (Matthew 14:14), as well as individuals who sought His healing (Mark 1:40–41). When He saw the large crowds as sheep without a shepherd, His compassion led Him to teach them the things the false shepherds of Israel had abandoned. The priests and scribes were proud and corrupt. They despised the common people and neglected them, but Jesus had compassion on them, and He taught and loved them.

When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that it is to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. But He added that the second commandment “is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:34–40). Jesus stated not only *what* we are to do, but also *how* to do it. To love our neighbor as ourselves is the natural

result and confirmation of our loving devotion toward God.

1 John 3:17 asks, “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?” Originally made in His image, man is to exemplify God’s traits, including compassion. From this it follows that “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20). The Bible is clear that compassion is an attribute of God and of God’s people as well.

—GotQuestions.org

## THE COMPASSION OF THE SAVIOR

Throughout the four Gospels readers are flooded with examples of the compassion of Christ. In His miracles, Christ shows His compassion by giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk, or curing people with extreme sickness. In His parables, He consistently shows that His desire for His followers is to show compassion. However, the greatest example of the compassion of the Messiah came at the end of His earthly ministry. Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross for sinners is not only the greatest example of compassion in His ministry, but it is the greatest expression of compassion in all of history.

Isaiah 53 provides a picture of the extreme compassion of Christ. The first half of verse 3 says, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” God came to the earth as man, and men rejected Him. At first reading,

this verse appears to speak of the men that were physically present during the crucifixion, or possibly more broadly this verse appears to apply to the Jews of the day. However, Isaiah, writing at least 600 years before the life of Christ, says at the end of the verse, “He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.” Why would Isaiah include himself with those who offended Christ?

God is a holy God. Holiness means that He is set apart, there is no one else like Him. One of the most important ways in which God is holy is that He is set apart from sin. This means that God cannot be in the presence of sin. Isaiah included himself as an offender of Christ because he, just like all of us, had sinned against God throughout his life. All people have sinned, all mankind has offended God—all of us are included in verse 3 as those who have despised God.

But then verse 5 describes the ultimate compassion of Christ. “But He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities: the chastisement of *our* peace was upon Him; and with His stripes *we* are healed.” Moved with compassion, God became man to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He died a sacrificial death in the place of man, so that we could be saved. If one dies for someone who never wronged him, it is a great sign of compassion. But Christ’s sacrificial death for those that sinned against Him is the ultimate display of compassion.

Through the compassion of Christ, all who turn to God in repentance and faith are forgiven of all their sins. On the cross, Christ took the wrath of God so that sinners could be spared from that wrath. We can go to God in the same way David did after he sinned: “Have mercy upon me, O

God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). We can ask the Lord to blot out our transgression against Him, and trust that in His compassion He will. —Erik Rasmussen

## LINCOLN’S COMPASSION

I am reminded of a story from the Civil War about a young man who had been tried by court-martial and ordered to be shot. The hearts of his father and mother were broken when they heard the news. But the young man’s sister had read the life story of Abraham Lincoln. She said, “If Abraham Lincoln knew how much my father and mother loved their son, he would not let my brother be shot.” She wanted her father to go to Washington to plead for his son. But the father said: “No, there is no use; the law must take its course. They have refused to pardon one or two who have been sentenced by that court-martial, and an order has gone forth that the President is not going to interfere again. If a man has been sentenced by court-martial he must suffer the consequences.” That father and mother did not have faith to believe that their boy might be pardoned.

But the young lady was strong in hope. She got on the train in Vermont and started off to Washington. When she reached the White House the soldiers refused to let her in. But she told her pitiful story, and they allowed her to pass. When she got to the secretary’s room, where the President’s private secretary was, he refused to allow her to enter the private office of the President. But she told her story again, and it touched the heart of the private secretary, so he passed her in. As she went into Abraham Lincoln’s room, there were United States sena-

tors, generals, governors and leading politicians, who were there discussing the war. The President happened to see her standing at his door. He inquired of her what she wanted, and she went right to him and told her story in her own heart-felt words. He was a father, and great tears trickled down Abraham Lincoln's cheeks. At once, he wrote a dispatch and sent it to the army to have the young man sent to Washington at once. When he arrived, the President pardoned him, gave him thirty days furlough, and sent him home with his sister to cheer the hearts of the father and mother.

Do you want to know how to go to Christ? Go just as that young lady went to Abraham Lincoln. It may be possible that you have a dark story to tell. Tell it all out; keep nothing back. If Abraham Lincoln had compassion on that young lady, heard her petition and answered it, do you think the Lord Jesus will not hear your prayer? Do you think that Abraham Lincoln, or any man that ever lived on earth, had as much compassion as Christ? No! The heart of Christ will be touched when no other will. He will have mercy when no one else will. He will have pity when no one else will. If you will go directly to Him, confessing your sin and your need, He will save you.

—From *The Way to God and How to Find It* by D. L. Moody

## THE MERCY AND COMPASSION OF CHRIST

Since Christ is the incarnate display of the wealth of the mercies of God, it is not surprising that His life on earth was a lavish exhibit of mercies to all kinds of people. Every kind of need and pain was touched by the mercies of Jesus in His few years on earth.

### COMPASSION FOR THE OUTCAST

When the blind beggar cried out, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," many were embarrassed and indignant. But "Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 18:38,42).

Lepers were feared due to their revolting appearance and the possibility of contagion. But when they cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," He stopped and took pity on them and said, "Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:13-14). Even more remarkably, Mark recalls the time another dreaded leper fell on his knees, pleading with Jesus to make him clean, and Jesus not only spoke to him, but also touched him: "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed" (Mark 1:41-42).

### COMPASSION FOR THE SUFFERING

When Jesus saw a widow who had not only lost her husband but now her only son as well, Luke tells us, "[Jesus] had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Luke 7:13). Then he raised her son from the dead. And in this case, not a word was said about her faith. It was a free and lavish overflow of divine mercy, even before faith.

Mercy also drew Jesus to those who were made miserable by demons. One man brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus after years of sorrow. The boy was unable to speak, and the evil spirit often threw the boy into the fire. The father pleaded with Jesus, "Have compassion on us and help us." And even though the grieving father could only manage

a mustard seed of faith—"I believe; help Thou mine unbelief"—Jesus responded to the cry for pity and rebuked the spirit and cast it out (Mark 9:17–27).

#### COMPASSION FOR SINNERS

Not only was the mercy of Jesus kindled by suffering, but also by sin. When Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners," the Pharisees and scribes criticized Him. But Jesus told three parables to explain what He was doing. One was the parable of the prodigal son. The climax of this parable pictures God, filled with compassion for His sin-soaked, homecoming child: "his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). In other words, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners because He was the incarnate display of the Father's tender compassion for sinners.

#### COMPASSION FOR MULTITUDES

Jesus showed this compassion not only for individuals who sin and suffer, but also for whole multitudes. He did not look on masses with contempt or with impersonal indifference. Once when great crowds had followed Him and had not planned well for their food, Jesus looked on them and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat" (Mark 8:2). On another occasion, it was not their hunger but their spiritual need for truth that filled Him with compassion for the crowds: "Jesus ... 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 AND THE LAW

One of the most sweeping statements about God's mercy that Jesus ever made came from Hosea 6:6. It

was Jesus' way of putting the whole Old Testament ceremonial law under the banner of mercy instead of meticulous rules. When He was criticized for going to dinner at Matthew's house with unclean tax collectors, He turned the criticism around and said, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice [Hosea 6:6]: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). And when His disciples were rebuked by the Pharisees for picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath, Jesus said, "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). In other words, Jesus' entire ministry was shaped by the insight that mercy is the ultimate meaning of God's law. And since Jesus came not to abolish—but to fulfill—that law (Matthew 5:17), He was the incarnation and manifestation of the wealth of the mercy of God.

#### COMPASSION FOR US

The same is true of Jesus today. In this regard "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). This is why God, who is called "the Father of mercies" (2 Corinthians 1:3), beckons us to come boldly to His throne through Jesus Christ who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus is our sinless, all-sufficient High Priest. He has offered Himself as our substitute in perfect obedience and perfect sacrifice. All the Father's mercies belong to those who come to God through faith in Jesus. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

—From *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper

## MOVED BY ALL OUR SORROWS

Have you ever paused to marvel at the compassion of Christ? What a wonder that when God Himself takes our own flesh and blood, and walks among us in our fallen world, He is known for His compassion.

We might expect He would be erupting with anger and frustration at every turn. Human sin is cosmic treason against Him and His Father. To purchase a people for Himself, He would be brutally abused and mistreated, even to the point of an excruciating death. Make no mistake, it was fitting for the Son of God to burn with righteous anger. He did (Mark 3:5), and He will (Revelation 6:16). And yet, as God Himself moved among us, in utter holiness and perfection, He gave us stunning glimpses into a heart of compassion.

### COMPASSION ILLUSTRATED

Remarkably, the two parables which may be Jesus' greatest, and most well-known, illustrate the compassion of Christ. In Luke 10:25–37, Jesus tells of the good Samaritan. Verse 33 is the hinge: "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion." Both priest and Levite had passed by the man lying there half dead. But when the Samaritan passed by, he—like Jesus Himself—had compassion.

Compassion is the key for seeing the heart of the parable. Compassion is Jesus' calling card in the Gospels; it is attributed to no one else. Jesus is the one who characteristically has compassion and then acts: He shows us mercy by approaching us, addressing our wounds, carrying us to safety, and making provision for our care until His return. First and foremost,

the Son of God Himself has been a neighbor to us sinners—stemming from His compassion. Now, having become recipients of His mercy, we then echo it in our treatment of others.

The second, of course, is the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). How will the father respond to his son who has "wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:13)? Verse 20 is the turning point: "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." Here again, a heart of compassion, rather than contempt, unleashes a series of merciful actions. Like the good Samaritan, the father moves toward his half-dead son, rather than away. And he runs, showing us not only the heart of Christ Himself but His Father's heart toward us through Him. The Father feels compassion for His prodigals, runs to them, embraces them, and kisses them by sending His own Son as His compassion incarnate.

### COMPASSION DELEGATED

The implications for Christ's people—those who are the recipients of His compassion—are plain enough in the Gospels, but the Epistles make them even clearer. Christ not only has compassion on His people and gives them His help, but He also forms His people into instruments of His compassion on others. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Such people show compassion on fellow believers in prison, even at great cost to themselves (Hebrews 10:34). We learn to show sympathy and comfort to the hurting among us, not like Job's three friends (Job 2:11), but like his brothers and sisters (Job

42:11). And we put on, with compassion, its accompanying virtues: “mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12). In other words, we become the kind of people who see others and then have compassion on them.

Both parables, of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son, may hinge on compassion, but in both parables, and in Jesus’ own life and ministry, *seeing* preceded *feeling*. “When he saw him, he had compassion” (Luke 10:33). “His father saw him and had compassion” (Luke 15:20). And Jesus Himself, with the widow at Nain: “When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her” (Luke 7:13). As with the crowds: “When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them” (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; Mark 6:34). Perhaps the biggest obstacle to our doing likewise is that our gaze is so often fixed on self, not others. May God give us eyes to see—and the compassion of Christ.

—From “Moved By All Our Sorrows” by David Mathis

## ARE WE SELFISH?

For a Christian, the battle against sin is an everyday fight. One sin that is difficult to expose is selfishness. Surveys show that Americans, who live in one of the richest nations in the world, give less than 2 percent of their income to charitable and religious causes. While we pride ourselves on our generosity following major disasters, the facts state that we Americans as a whole are selfish with our money and relatively indifferent to the physical and material needs of people less fortunate. And even our relief giving tends to be in response to the more dramatic events. There was a great outpouring of money following the tsunami of 2004 off the coast

of Indonesia, but almost no response to the almost equally-devastating earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan.

This is an especially crucial issue for believers. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). And Jesus said, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise” (Luke 3:11). Taken together, these verses tell us that we are to cultivate hearts of compassion toward those in need and then put that compassion to work through our giving.

Every dollar we receive, even when earned by our work, is a gift from God. We are to be stewards of that money and not consume all or most of it on ourselves. To do so is to be selfish with our money, while ignoring the needs of others.

—Adapted from *Respectable Sins* by Jerry Bridges

## GOD REPAYS

*“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again” (Proverbs 19:17).*

We are to give to the poor out of compassion. Not to be seen and applauded, or to get influence over them, but out of pure sympathy and a genuine heart of love we must give them help.

We must not expect to get anything back from the poor, not even gratitude; but we should rather consider what we have done as a loan to the Lord. He undertakes the obligation, and if repayment will be made, it will be made by Him alone. What an honor the Lord bestows upon us when He condescends to borrow from us! A merchant is greatly favored who has the Lord on his books.

It would seem a pity to have such a name down for a minimal amount; let us make it a substantial sum. The next needy man that comes your way or mine, let us help him.

As for repayment, we can hardly think of it, and yet here in Proverbs 19:17 is the Lord's promissory note. Blessed be His name, His promise to pay is better than gold and silver. Are we running a little short through the depression of the times? We may venture humbly to present this bill at the bank of faith. Has any one of our readers oppressed the poor? Poor soul. May the Lord forgive him.

—Adapted from *Faith's Checkbook* by Charles H. Spurgeon

## COMPASSION REQUIRED IN LEADERSHIP

The word that jumps out of the gospels describing Jesus' emotion toward people in need is compassion. Our Lord often felt compassion, or was moved with compassion to heal and to save. The compassionate care He and the apostles gave to the poor and sick is inspirational. His unheard-of acts of compassion drew people to Him like a magnet.

After Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven, the apostles were involved in compassionate ministry to the poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 4:34–35). In fact, their work of distributing money to the poor became so time-consuming that they had to appoint seven men to take over this task so that they could concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1–6).

Although Paul's primary calling was the proclamation and defense of the gospel, he also gladly cared for the needy (Acts 11:30; Galatians 2:10). At one point in his ministry, Paul initiated, mobilized, and delivered a

Gentile relief offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem. He considered the giving by the Gentile churches to be a concrete demonstration of Christian love to the needy Jewish believers (2 Corinthians 8:24).

The New Testament elders' ministry involves pastoral oversight of the local church in four major categories: teaching, leading, protecting, and healing. Although elders teach and lead the church, they also minister to the weak and sick (Acts 20:34–35; Titus 1:8; James 5:14). Thus they are to have a heart of compassion for the needs of people. The New Testament deacons' ministry is one of benevolence, mercy, and servanthood in an official capacity. Both elders and deacons, then, are to demonstrate loving compassion and proactive concern for the welfare of needy saints. They are to set an example for others to follow.

The local church is to be a family, a community of people who meet one another's needs, bear one another's burdens, and sacrificially serve one another. It is to be a picture of love in action—a compassionate, generous, and giving community. Such love starts with the leaders, and their example should be followed by all believers.

It's true that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. A leader will not have much of a ministry if people do not know that he or she truly cares about them. So a leader needs to demonstrate a tender heart toward suffering members, a genuine concern for the sick, a generous disposition to the poor, and a spirit of mercy to help relieve the misery that characterizes the lives of so many people today.

—From *Leading with Love* by Alexander Strauch.