

God is Compassionate

God is... (Part 2)

Exodus 34:5-7

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Exodus 34:5-7

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "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; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."¹

The Angry God of the Old Testament?

- How many of you heard people compare the terrible God of the Old Testament to the loving and good God of the New Testament?
- Many of you have probably wrestled with the apparent brutal God of the Old Testament with the loving Son of God in the New Testament. Many Christians have this idea that God's nice Son has actually come to save us from His angry Dad.
- This issue has been around a long time. In the years 140-155, Marcionism was deemed heresy and was rejected by Christians.
- I'm not going to deceive you or put my head in the sand. In a face value reading of some parts of the Old Testament there are some disturbing images of God in the Old Testament. We don't need to ignore those passages. But we must read them in context and in the context of the rest of Scripture.
- Does the Old Testament display God as an awful, vengeful, tyrannical, monster? Many people think so. I don't think so.
- Since there is such a popular assumption that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful monster, we as Christians should...
 - Read the Bible for ourselves, and see what the character of God is really like.
 - Faithfully represent and accurately display of the character of God in our culture and world, pointing whomever will listen to the true God whose fullness is found in Christ
- This is why our study of Exodus 34:5-7 is so important. The most important question(s) we can seek to answer is this: "What is God like?" and "How do we relate to Him?"

Context of Exodus 34:5-7

- After God gave the people of Israel His Law and made His Covenant with them, the people turned away from God and made a golden calf to worship. This upset Moses so much that He destroyed the tables given him by God. As Moses goes back up to

¹ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Mount Sinai to receive two new tablets, he requests that God reveal Himself to Moses. He wishes to understand more about God. So God tells Moses to go into a cave, and He will pass before Moses.

- This is the clearest picture of God in the Old Testament.

The Compassionate God

- This is the first thing mentioned about God. This is significant.
 - "In the Hebrew Scriptures, order matters. Order is a clue as to what's most important. That fact that 'compassionate and gracious' is at the top of the list of Yahweh's character traits means it's the dominant one--the most important thing there is to know about Him."²
- *raham*: the original Hebrew meaning of compassionate
 - *raham* - *compassionate or merciful or deeply moved*³
 - The idea behind it is the *feeling* a mother has toward her infant child
 - "The Hebrew word used first to describe compassion is *rakhum*, which we translate as "compassionate." The noun, verb, and adjective form of this word are all related to the Hebrew word for womb, *rekhem*. This image, in context, draws out the nurturing nature of God."⁴
 - Same three letters in their shared root word
 - *raham* is how parents *feel* about their children.
 - This is an exchange between two women who went to King Solomon, the wisest person in the world. Two women were arguing between themselves about whose child this baby was.
 - *1 Kings 3:26* - The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"
 - *raham* is a *feeling* word
 - Let that sink in: God feels. God feels a certain way towards us.
- "Of all the references in the Bible to compassion, 80 percent refer to God's compassion to us, and only 20 percent refer to human compassion. Put another way, this word used to describe a feeling of deep emotion is most commonly used to describe God."⁵
- The Old Testament on God's compassion and *raham*
 - God commanded Jonah to go preach to the city of Nineveh. Jonah hated the Ninevites, so he refused to go. When praying to God he says the reason he did not want to preach to the Ninevites is because God is compassionate and gracious. He did not want God to show compassion to his enemies.

² John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 127.

³ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 128-131.

⁴ "Character of God: The Womb of God?," *BibleProject*, <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/the-womb-of-god/>.

⁵ "Character of God: The Womb of God?"

- *Jonah 4:2* - He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."
 - David wrote *Psalms 103*. You can tell that as he wrote this psalm, Exodus 34 was on his mind. In this psalm we see God's compassion compared to the compassion a father has for his children.
 - *Psalms 103:8-13* - He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: **8** The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. **9** He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; **10** he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. **11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. **13** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.
 - As *Psalms 103* compares God's compassion to compassion a father has for his children, Isaiah compares the compassion to God to the feeling a mother has towards the children she nurses.
 - *Isaiah 49:15-16* - "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! **16** See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.
 - Mothers don't forget their children, especially the children she nourishes. That's the deep love and feeling God has for His people. It's a very moving image.
 - When God's people as a whole (Israel) sin and turn away from Him, He still has a deep feeling of compassion towards them.
 - *2 Kings 13:22-33* - Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence.
 - King David also wrote *Psalms 51*. *Psalms 51* is David's response to God after he sinned by sleeping with Bathsheeba and killing her husband, Uriah, a deeply troubling sequence of events in David's life.
 - *Psalms 51:1* - Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
 - *Isaiah 55* is in the middle of an amazing prophetic foretelling of the Messiah who was to come.
 - *Isaiah 55:7* - Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

- God's feelings towards His people. (Ephraim refers to Israel)
 - *Jeremiah 31:20* - "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord.
- "God's baseline emotion towards you is mercy."⁶
- Compassion = empathy
- "[Character of God: Compassion](#)" BibleProject video (5:05)⁷

How does Jesus exemplify being gracious and merciful?

- We have and will point this out every week of this study on the characteristics of God: Jesus is the clearest picture of God we've got. "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (*Colossians 1:15, 19*). God is like Jesus. Jesus is like God. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. This means that if God is a compassionate God, Jesus perfectly exemplifies the compassion of God.
- Jesus is the most compassionate person ever.
- What are some specific examples from the life of Jesus when He was compassionate?
- "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (*Matthew 9:36*)
- Parable of the Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11-32*)
 - One of the most popular stories Jesus told is the story of the Prodigal Son.
 - *Luke 15:20-24* - **20** So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. **21** The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." **22** But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.
 - According to Jesus, this is God's disposition towards you.

How do we respond to our compassionate God?

- We have and will point this out each week in this study on the characteristics of God also: God created humanity, all people, in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). This means we were created to be like Him, and are to live into God's intent for our lives. God is compassionate. This means we're to strive to be compassionate like Him.
- Rest in God's compassion.

⁶ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 140.

⁷ "Character of God: Compassion" BibleProject, September 1, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJEtyAiAQik>.

- *Exodus 33:13-14*
 - [Moses speaking] "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."
The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."
 - When Moses asks to understand more about God (*Exodus 34:5-7*), God responds to Moses and says He will give Moses rest.
 - When we see who God really is, our response should include rest. Rest in the character of God. God feels deeply compassionate towards you. Rest in that.
- Some of us are tempted into thinking and living like we earn favor with God.
 - We do not earn favor with God. We are only saved and loved because of His compassion, not because of our awesomeness.
- Some of you are afraid of God and view God as an angry tyrant.
 - God is compassionate
- Who are the people you have opportunities to show compassion to?⁸
 - *Ephesians 4:32* - Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
 - Our motivation to be compassionate comes from the compassion God shows to us.
- Believe that God is your Father (parent).
 - God is relational. He feels toward you like a mother to her child.

⁸ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 148.