

*The Lord, the Lord, a God **merciful** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.*” Exodus 34:6-7

OPEN

- On a boat ride you see in a cove a large sign that says, “DANGEROUS ROCKS, NOT SAFE FOR BOATS.” Just beyond the sign is a boat crashed on a rock. What is your first thought? ⁱ

DISCOVER

Read Exodus 34:6-7. The first attribute of God mentioned is “merciful.” Most translations say “compassionate.” The word is related to the Hebrew word for “womb.” Compassion is centered in a person’s core; it’s a picture of a mother showing compassion to her newborn; often with intense emotion; sometimes the word is translated as “deeply moved.”

Read 1 Kings 3:16-27

- What does Solomon in his great wisdom understand about a mother’s compassion?
- What does compassion drive the true mother of the child to do?

Compassion describes more than emotion. Most often it tells about God’s action motivated by his love.

Read Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7-8.

- What are the key elements that contribute to the LORD’s compassion?
- In what ways did the LORD “come down” or take action to show compassion to Israel during the exodus?

- What would you expect to be the response of God’s people when he shows them compassion (see Exodus 4:31; Luke 10:36-37).

Despite the LORD’s compassion, the Israelites turn away again and again, rejecting the LORD and giving their allegiance to other gods. Instead of showing compassion to each other, they do violence and withhold justice and finally are exiled from the land.

Read Isaiah 49:15

- How is the LORD’s compassion different from human compassion?ⁱⁱ

The LORD’s compassion ultimately moves him to “come down” (Ex 3:8) and take on human flesh to rescue those who have forgotten him.

Read Matthew 9:35-38

- What is the situation of a sheep without a shepherd?ⁱⁱⁱ What does a sheep say are the blessings of a good shepherd (see Psalm 23)?
- What does Jesus’ compassion look like for “sheep without a shepherd?” See also Matt 14:14; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22.

DEEPEN

- Why do you think “compassion” is the first attribute listed by the LORD?

- What is the difference between feeling sorry for someone and feeling compassion for someone?^{iv}
- Who are the people you feel the least compassion for? What hinders your compassion?^v
- Colossians 3:12 says to “put on a heart of compassion.” How do you do this? How can you grow in compassion?

SO WHAT?^{vi}

- In what ways have you experienced the LORD’s compassion in your life?
- Do you think your neighbors see the LORD as compassionate? How else, besides hearing God’s Word, might they see that the LORD is compassionate toward them?
- During the prayer time, “*pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*” If the LORD made you the answer to this prayer (see Matthew 10:1-5), who might the LORD be sending you to?^{vii}

ⁱ My first thought: how dumb do you have to be to ignore the sign and ruin your boat! My friend’s response: Perhaps the sign was put up after the boat crash.

ⁱⁱ One difference: the LORD continues to be compassionate even in the face of rejection. Our compassion tends to shrink when the object of our compassion rejects us.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sheep are dumb animals. They will eat to the death; they will forget to eat; they will wander off; they are defenseless against predators; they will not seek shelter from the rain; if they fall over with wet wool, they may not be able to stand up.

^{iv} The LORD’s compassion leads to action.

PRAY

This week, [1] give thanks for one way God has shown you compassion, and [2] pray for one person for whom you lack compassion. If you can’t think of anyone, ask the LORD to show you someone this week who needs some compassion. Remember: keep it simple: “*LORD, thank you for your compassion in sending Benjamin to invite me to church when I was really struggling. I pray for my boss, give him wisdom in leading our group. Amen.*”

Prayer Requests

^v We know you’re a sinner. See if you can be a little more specific. Which of the elements making up the LORD’s compassion in Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7-8 are missing in your life?

^{vi} SO WHAT questions remind us that the goal of studying the Bible is not more information, but life. Jesus says he comes to give us life, abundant life (John 10:10). The Word calls for a response. We can respond to the Word many different ways. We can repent, believe, trust, pray, give thanks, share, meditate, forgive. What is the LORD calling you do to in order to live an abundant life with him?

^{vii} The disciples become the answer to their own prayers.