

Compassion, a Christian Virtue that Never goes out of style.

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When I think of the word compassion, I think of a mother cradling her sick baby, patting his back and singing to him, her voice comforting him and soon he is asleep. She wraps him in soft blankets and gives medicine to ease his discomfort, overlooking the fact that she is tired and needs sleep.

I read a wonderful story of a man who had rescued a dog from a shelter just before the day that he was to be put to death. Taking the dog home, the kind man nursed the dog to good health and soon the dog became his constant companion. One day he and his dog were walking down a trail that had become a daily routine when suddenly the man had a heart attack. The dog watched as his master struggled to get up but soon realized that he ~~couldn't move without pain. He hung on to the dog's leash and commanded the dog to~~ take him home. The dog understood and he trudged home dragging the man all the way to the front door of his house. The man's wife looked out the window and saw the dog struggling to get the man up the driveway. She called 911 and the dog was credited with saving the man's life. Love and compassion go hand and hand. If animals and people can display these virtues in everyday circumstances, how much more does our heavenly Father reach out to his creation with compassion, love and mercy.

In Psalms 78, the Psalmist wrote about the unfaithful Children of Israel, yet God was full of compassion and forgave their iniquity and didn't destroy them. Many times he turned away from anger and didn't use his wrath on them. For he remembered that they were but flesh a wind that passes away and comes not again. Psalms 78:38, 39.

Compassion is the act of sympathizing and entering into another's sorrow and pain.

Psalms 103:11 reads like this: For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgression from us. Like a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him, for he knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust. If you continue reading you will find that the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him and his righteousness unto children's children to all who keep his covenant and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

The four Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus' love and compassion towards men even to those who rejected him. In Luke 13, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and there was a woman who walked stooped over as she couldn't lift herself upright. Jesus called for her to come to him and he healed her. The ruler of the synagogue answered Jesus with indignation saying that there were six days in which to heal the sick and those who needed healing should come to him on those days. The Sabbath was not a day that Jesus should be doing work. Jesus answered him with these words: "You are a hypocrite for who

among you would not loose his ox or donkey from the stall and lead him to get a drink of water? Should not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years be loosed on the Sabbath Day?" Upon hearing these words, his adversaries were ashamed and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Jesus.

In Matthew 9, Jesus showed compassion to a multitude of people. He healed a man sick of palsy and forgave him of his sins. When he was criticized for forgiving sins (for God alone can forgive sins and they accused him of blasphemy) Jesus showed compassion to those who spoke against him with reasoning. "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" he asked. "Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal the sick?" To prove to them that he could do both, he commanded the man to rise and walk.

When the religious leaders criticized Jesus for keeping company with publicans and sinners, Jesus told them that he didn't come to call the righteous, but he came to call sinners to repentance. He used the illustration that sick people are the ones who need the doctor's attention, not those who are a picture of health.

Jesus raised a 12 year old girl from her death bed and healed a woman who suffered from a blood disease when she touched the hem of his robe. He asked "Who touched me?" The woman trembled with fright as she admitted that she had touched his robe. He comforted her by saying, "Daughter, be of good cheer, your faith has made you whole." The blind men were made whole when they cried after him, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on us." Yet when Jesus delivered people from demonic powers, the religious leaders accused him of casting out devils by the power of the prince of darkness.

The false accusations and lies that the religious sects spread about Jesus didn't stop him from doing his Father's will. He went through the cities and villages teaching in synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray that the LORD of the harvest will send laborers into the harvest."

In Romans 9:51, Paul quoted the words of Jehovah that was spoken to Moses. God said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." This was demonstrated over and over throughout the Scriptures.

I think of Jesus as he was dying on the cross, in agony and feeling forsaken, yet he took the time to comfort the robber who was dying next to him. When the man said, "Lord, remember me when you enter your kingdom," Jesus assured him that that very day he would be with him in paradise. The compassion of Jesus towards his created beings cannot ever be adequately expressed in words. It is amazing, wonderful, and it transcends anything that we can comprehend in our minds.

If you read the story of Jonah, there is a wonderful conversation between God and Jonah after God had changed his mind concerning destroying the city of Ninevah and all the inhabitants and animals that dwelled there. Jonah was angry because the destruction that he had warned the people about that was to come didn't happen.

God talked to Jonah and allowed him to express his feelings about the outcome of his mission. Jonah told God that he fled to Tarshis just for that reason. He knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and he repented of the evil that he had planned against the people of Ninevah. God provided a plant to grow overnight that provided shade to Jonah from the heat of the sun. Then God provided a worm to eat the root of the plant so it died. Jonah was angry that he had lost the source of shade that gave him relief from the heat of the day. He asked the Lord to let him die for he was exceedingly angry about all the events that took place and he didn't want to live.

God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?" Jonah replied that it was and he wanted to die. The Lord pointed out to Jonah that he didn't have any investment in the plant for he didn't tend it or make it grow. It was there one day and gone the next. God then said, "Should I not be concerned for the great city of Ninevah in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left and also many animals?"

God's holy character was displayed through Jesus as he ministered to the suffering whether it was spiritual or physical healing they needed; he changed the lives of those who chose to follow him and they in turn became witnesses throughout the world proclaiming the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. God's compassion is extended to any person who hears the Word, believes the Word and who follows the Word.

Believers learn compassion through example and exhortation, imitating Christ through which many have learned to have compassion towards others. Scriptures exhort believers to make compassion an integral aspect of their lives. Zechariah 7:9 tells us to execute true judgment and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother.

Colossians 3:12 is a list that believers are to follow. As followers of Christ, we are to be merciful, kind, humble of mind, meek, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. Above all these things, put on charity which is the bond of perfectness. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which also you are called to one body; and be thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

Compassion is something that needs to be cultivated, nurtured and practiced on a daily basis lest it, like love, will grow dull and cold for lack of care. Compassion is the human disposition that fuels acts of kindness and mercy.

I pray that God will help us to be careful in what we say and do so that our lives will bring glory and honor to God and blessings to those who we come in contact with every day.