

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS



Bill Crowder



introduction

The Compassion of Jesus

One Word

I **f you were asked** to describe someone important in your life with only one word, could you do it? I would certainly struggle. For instance, if I had to describe my wife, Marlene, in one word, I would have too many to choose from. Words like *patient, caring, bright, hard-working* (the hyphen keeps it somewhat in the “one word”

category), *talented*, *lovely*, *Spirit-controlled* (again, the hyphen)—and that is the short list.

Trying to capture a person's heart in one word is difficult. We are complex beings and display many different emotions and responses to life. To capture the essence of a fellow human being, we need a variety of words in the same way an artist needs the full spectrum of colors on a palette to paint a multicolored field of tulips or a sunset over the Rocky Mountains.

How much more difficult to try and capture the heart of Jesus with a single word! We see Him portrayed in the Scriptures in so many different ways. *Wise. Powerful. Authoritative. Pure. Gentle. Resolute.* The list of accurate one-word descriptions could go on almost indefinitely.

Yet for me, when I think of the character of Christ as displayed in the gospels one word rises above the rest.

Compassion.

In so many different situations and settings, the response of the Savior to the plight and struggle of broken people living in a broken world was that of compassion. Let's explore that important idea together. As we begin, it's good to answer a simple question: What is compassion?

Bill Crowder

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one

The Power of a Word

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The verb “to have compassion” (splanchnizomai) is used in the New Testament only by the Synoptic Gospel writers: five times in Matthew (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34), four in Mark (1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22), and three in Luke (7:13; 10:33; 15:20). Suggesting strong emotion, it means “to feel deep sympathy.”

“Strong emotion” connotes passion and sympathy. Some go even further, saying that it carries the idea of “feeling with” someone—that is, entering into their experience and sharing it with them. That is certainly how Jesus is described in Hebrews 4:15:

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in all things as we are, yet without sin. (NASB)

Jesus personally experienced the things we experience. Diving into the gospels, we see Jesus facing temptation (LUKE 4:1–13), hunger (4:2), thirst (JOHN 19:28), fatigue (4:6), rejection (6:60–66), being misunderstood (2:20–21), and more. He experienced (was “tested in”) all of the things that form our experience.

The writer of Hebrews said this holistic human experience enabled Jesus to be a proper high priest for us. In Israel’s way of government there were three primary offices: prophet, priest, and king. The role of the king was, among other things, to arbitrate between people. The task of the prophet was to represent God to the people. The duty of the priest, however, was to represent the people to God. Jesus’s fully human experience equipped Him not to merely represent us before the Father in an official way but also in an understanding way. He can be our sympathetic high priest because He has felt what we feel and experienced what we experience.

That is the key. Although His experience was never marked by sin, He nevertheless felt sin’s effects on His creatures. This commitment by Jesus to share in the human experience is at the heart of His compassion for us.

So, then, where do we start when considering the compassion of Jesus? Interestingly, to explore the compassion of Jesus, we must begin by seeing compassion in the heart of the Father whom Jesus came to reveal to us.



two

The Compassion of the Father

Over the years, expressions such as “like father, like son,” “she has her mother’s eyes,” and “a chip off the old block” have been used to express a significant idea: children are, in many ways, a reflection of their parents. Physical attributes, mannerisms, talents, abilities, and attitudes are just a few of the areas where a parent’s image can be imprinted on a child.

In the case of Jesus, His similarities to His Father were not the result of DNA transfer or chromosomal connectivity between parent and child, but rather were the expression of an eternal equality between the first and second persons of the Godhead.▀ This is implicit in the opening statement of John’s gospel, later affirmed by the apostle Paul:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (JOHN 1:1)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. (PHILIPPIANS 2:5–6)

↗ John 1:1 and 1:14 mention two of the three persons of **the Trinity**. Genesis 1:2 references the third—the “Spirit of God” that was “moving over the surface of the waters.” Jesus Himself promised to send us “the Helper, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth” (JOHN 15:26). And the final verses of Matthew give us direct evidence for the Trinity, as Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (MATTHEW 28:19).

The Word was God. He existed in the form (essence, nature, being) of God.

From all eternity past, ↗ Christ was equal with God the Father, perfectly like Him in every way. This became an important part of Jesus’s mission in coming to earth. Yes, He came to provide us with rescue and new life through His cross and resurrection, but He also came to show us what the invisible God is like. John described this aspect of Jesus’s mission in the prologue to his gospel account:

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (JOHN 1:18)

↯ When Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” the author is describing in human terms **the “time” before time itself**. The Bible teaches that God Himself is the First Cause of all things. John 1 makes clear that Jesus is this Creator, saying, “He [Jesus the ‘Word’] was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (VV. 1–3).

In the upper room on the night before the cross, Jesus affirmed this aspect of His mission in response to a question from His disciple Philip, saying:

He who has seen Me has seen the Father. (JOHN 14:9)

Jesus came to reveal and explain the Father to us. One of the critical elements of the heart of God—whom Jesus came to reveal—was the compassion of the Father. In the Old Testament, Moses met with God on Mount Sinai. During their time together God revealed Himself to Moses with this self-description:

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” (EXODUS 34:6–7)

Compassionate and gracious—this is how God describes Himself. If Jesus is going to represent that compassion and reveal it to the world, what will it look like? One aspect of that representative compassion can be found in His teaching.



three

Compassion in the Parables

We talk about the things we care about: A spouse. A child. A grandchild. A sports team. A new recipe. A favorite book or movie. The list could be a long one. We discuss the things that are important to us.

Jesus had loved the Father since all eternity past, so it's only natural that Jesus constantly talked about the Father in His teaching. In fact, former US Senate chaplain Lloyd John Ogilvie entitled his book on Jesus's parables *Autobiography of God*. Through

His parables, Jesus exposed aspects of the Father's character and heart. And while that can be seen throughout all the parables, we will focus on two of Jesus's most beloved parables, for they reveal God as compassionate.

The Good Samaritan: In this familiar story (SEE LUKE 10:30–37), a man is attacked by bandits on the Jericho Road. They beat him, rob him, and leave him for dead. This battered man is ignored by two religionists before a Samaritan finds him on the side of the road. (Samaritans were despised by the Jews and treated as ethnically inferior outsiders; more on this later.)

But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion.

(LUKE 10:33)

In a pattern found throughout the New Testament (SEE MATTHEW 9:36–38; ACTS 17:16–17), this Samaritan sees something, feels something, and does something. This is powerful, because what drove the Samaritan's actions was compassion. Jesus is picturing here how the Father sees us in our brokenness, is filled with compassion for us, and works on our behalf.

The Prodigal's Father: Arguably the best-known of Jesus's parables, we are probably all familiar to some degree with this story (FOUND IN LUKE 15:11–32). The prodigal (which means “wasteful”) son demands his inheritance from his father—an act of great disrespect—and takes the money and runs. He is the “wasteful” son because he squanders all that he has received and, as a last resort, returns

home in shame and despair. The dishonored father's response is stunning:

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (LUKE 15:20)

Though his son had brought him great dishonor, this father—representing the heavenly Father—welcomes him home because of the compassion he has for this wayward child.

In both of these parables, the Father is seen acting out of His compassion to rescue and restore the damaged person. The beaten man was damaged by others, and the prodigal was damaged by his own choices, but both desperately needed compassion. Jesus, through these stories, reveals to us that this is how the Father views us—with a compassion that works on our behalf.

So, having seen compassion as a vital quality of God's character and a subject of Jesus's teaching, how did Jesus Himself live out the compassion we are talking about?



four

The Power of Compassion

Power is an interesting concept. We might think in terms of political power, exercised in ruling over others. Perhaps we might think of financial power, where a person has the clout to buy and sell to their heart's desire. Or possibly we might be referring to physical power, where one person's strength and/or size positions them to intimidate or control others (the basketball term *power forward* comes to mind).

Most of the time when we think of power, we think of strength, not the softer qualities of humility or gentleness. Or, for our purposes, compassion. Power

and compassion just don't seem like they would travel together, yet the most powerful person who ever walked this earth in human flesh exercised His immense power in harmony with and in response to His compassion.

That is why, as we consider the compassion of Jesus, it's important to remember Hebrews 4:15. He experienced the same things we do. He experienced them personally and profoundly in ways we cannot imagine. He truly knows how we feel.

Add to that experience the fact that Jesus was not merely an emotionally detached observer or a person holding life at arm's length. He entered into the human experience deeply, feeling *with* people as they endured hardships and heartaches of life. In response, Jesus exercised the power of the Godhead in order to express His deep compassion for the people He encountered.

To see how thoroughly Jesus felt the challenges of this life with us, it may be helpful to take a closer look at five of the twelve times the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) use the verb *to have compassion* to describe Jesus's responses to specific parts of the human experience He encountered in His incarnation.

For the sick: As is true in our day, illness and disease were ubiquitous in the first century. Some of this was due to the lack of what we might consider proper medical care, and some of it was due to the lack of sanitary conditions. In Matthew 14, Jesus had just heard about the execution of His friend, cousin, and forerunner, John the Baptizer. Seeking a time of

seclusion, Jesus goes to a quiet place—likely to grieve and reflect.

This pursuit of solitude, however, was short-lived. The desperate needs of desperate people drove them to pursue Him and, in spite of His own grief and personal needs, Jesus responded to those crowds by healing them.

When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

(MATTHEW 14:14)

As we saw with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus saw them and felt compassion for them, prompting Him to act on their behalf. This becomes a clear example of Jesus's refusal to be a disengaged, distant observer. When He saw suffering, the compassion of His heart would not allow Him to stand idly by and ignore it. He was moved with compassion that drove Him to action, even during a time when He could easily have focused on His own grief and pain. Compassion caused Him to feel with them and to work on their behalf.

For the needy: In our day, many differentiate between “spiritual” ministry and “social” outreaches, often swinging to one extreme or the other. Some say that eternity is more important than this life, so obviously the priority is to give people the gospel so that they can receive eternal life. Others, meanwhile, say that when people are dying we should be concerned and involved in coming to their aid.

I suspect that Jesus would say that both groups

are right. The volume of teaching Jesus gave on the kingdom is massive; yet He exhibited daily concern for the temporal needs of those who surrounded Him.

For many of the common people, life in first-century Israel was nearly a subsistence-level existence. For most people and most families, there was rarely little extra. As a result, when Jesus arrived offering a new kind of satisfaction and a radically different fullness, people were drawn to Him. Yet, as the people pursued Jesus, the realities of their challenging times were evidenced when the multitudes followed Him even to the point of physical hunger.

And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." (MATTHEW 15:32)

This again was part of His own experience as well, for Jesus also experienced hunger, thirst, and homelessness during His years of ministry. Jesus's compassion for the poor, needy, and hungry is a vital element of His earthly ministry—and all of it was fueled by His compassion.

The product of that compassion for the needy was not one but two miraculous feedings. The first was the feeding of five thousand men (which might mean 15,000 or more when including women and children). This is the only miracle of Jesus that is found in all four gospel records (MATTHEW 14, MARK 6, LUKE 9, JOHN 6),

and it shows Jesus's response to the physical needs of the crowds that followed Him.

The second is found here in Matthew 15:32–38, where the motivation of compassion is the driving force in the account. This time it is four thousand men (v. 38), “besides women and children.” There can be no doubt that Jesus had great concern for the spiritual well-being of the people who made up the crowds, but that in no way hindered Him from tangibly caring for their physical needs as well.

For the blind: As the Light of the World, Jesus came to penetrate the darkness of this world with His own perfect light. One of His ways of displaying this provision of light was by His dealings with blind men. Like disease, blindness was widespread in the first century; and Jesus had multiple encounters with the blind, restoring their sight and making them whole.

In one such case, Jesus and His disciples were traveling to Jerusalem where Jesus would ultimately experience the cross. Approaching the oasis city of Jericho, Matthew tells us that the Master encountered two blind men (Mark and Luke focus on only one of these two men: Bartimaeus; MARK 10:46–52; LUKE 18:35–43), and Jesus's response to their cries for help were fueled by His compassion.

Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him. (MATTHEW 20:34)

Throughout the gospels, Jesus encountered many blind men. Always, He cared for them and relieved their

blindness because He was moved with compassion. These miracles in which Jesus gave sight to the blind, though addressing legitimate physical needs, also became a metaphor for the spiritual work of providing salvation to those in spiritual need.

This theme was picked up by former slave trader John Newton as, in 1779, he penned arguably the most beloved hymn in history *Amazing Grace*:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.*

Paul described it this way:

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

(COLOSSIANS 1:13)

Giving sight to the blind was a living parable of bringing people out of darkness and into light—all pictured and practiced within the compassion of Jesus.

For the terminally ill: There is something sacred about being in the presence of someone who is leaving this life and entering the next. The reality of death and dying is the great common denominator in the human experience, and no one escapes it. Paupers and kings, intellectuals and uneducated, wealthy and poverty-stricken, all eventually experience death. It is life's great inevitability.

In Jesus's day, however, there were times when a person's appointment with death was postponed because the Prince of Life was on hand to forestall

the impending or recent death of a person who was otherwise beyond hope. One such case was one of our Lord's miracles found in the very beginnings of His public ministry in Mark 1:40–45.

In the first century, leprosy was incurable; so when Jesus is approached by a leper, it is not surprising to see the Lord's response to the man's request for healing:

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." (MARK 1:41)

I'm not sure we appreciate the wonder of this as fully as Jesus's first-century audience might have. Luke, the physician, tells us that this man was "covered with leprosy" (LUKE 5:12), meaning the disease was in its advanced stages. The man was dying, yet Jesus's compassion for the man was stronger than any fear of his leprosy. Jesus touched the man. (This[■] would have shocked the watching crowd who avoided any and all contact with lepers.) And He restored him to full health.

🔹 *The Mosaic law lays out the protocol for dealing with diseases such as **leprosy**. In Leviticus 13 we read of those diagnosed with such a communicable illness: "He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (v. 46). This was not a punishment; rather, it was to protect others from contracting the disease as well.*

The compassion of Jesus responded to a man with a terminal illness and defeated death. What amazing power!

For the grieving: As we have just seen, death is life's great leveler. No one is untouched by it. Not only does this mean we will all eventually die, it also means we will all eventually be touched and broken by the deaths of those we love. Grief is such a profound experience that Israel's King David, upon hearing of the death of his son Absalom, is described in the depths of grief:

The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 SAMUEL 18:33)

Most parents can appreciate that level of grief. The loss of a child was as overwhelming in David's day as it is in ours. And in Jesus's day, when He encountered a woman grieving the death of her son, it was out of His compassion that He comforted her.

When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." (LUKE 7:13)

This woman was a victim of grief not once, but twice. She is described as a widow (LUKE 7:12), so this is now at least the second time she has walked to the place of burial with a broken heart. But this journey to the tomb would be cut short as death is interrupted by life.

Here, Jesus performed one of three "resuscitation" miracles (see also the raisings of Jairus's daughter in Mark 5¹ and Lazarus in John 11). Scholars distinguish between resuscitation and resurrection because in resurrection the dead are raised never to experience death again, while in resuscitation

miracles the dead are restored to life in the present but eventually still face death.

➤ In **Mark 5**, we see how Jesus's compassion works even when competing interests vie for His attention. A desperate synagogue official had approached Jesus begging for help for his dying daughter (vv. 22–24). As Jesus went with the man, He stopped and healed a fearful woman who dared only to touch His garment (vv. 25–34). Even though the man's daughter died, Jesus displayed His compassion for everyone by resuscitating the deceased (vv. 35–43). Christ moves with "unperturbed pace."

These miracles, born out of compassion for the grieving, foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus. His power to restore life to the dead, and to conquer death Himself, would lead to Paul's triumphant declaration:

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 CORINTHIANS 15:55–57)

Jesus's compassion responded with power to the condition of fallen humanity so that every aspect of life was addressed. Illness, hunger, blindness, terminal illnesses, and grief were all the target of Jesus's compassion. His power created a new normal out of those experiences of deep pain and heartache.



five

Compassion for the Oppressed

In one of Jesus's most important statements on the value of *compassion*, He does not even use the word *compassion* itself. In Matthew 25:40 we read:

The King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

In this parable, the king represents Jesus Himself, and He is declaring the importance of caring for those who are the most vulnerable, the most marginalized, and the most forgotten. Those without a voice. The oppressed. All of that is embedded in His call for us to care for the least of these. But as we know, "Actions speak louder than words." Jesus didn't merely teach

this level of compassion as an intellectual exercise, He embodied it as a significant part of His public ministry.

In Jesus's day, the "oppressed" were comprised of a variety of people groups that had something in common. For one reason or another, they were forced to live on the fringes of Jewish society. Sometimes through no fault of their own, their culture and communities pushed them to the societal margins resulting in their experience being marked by oppression, whether physical or emotional.

Women. In ancient Israel (and the ancient world in general), women had little value and few rights. In their male-dominated society, women were often treated as if they were property rather than human beings. Nevertheless, Jesus reached out to women in unprecedented ways. In fact, Luke's gospel provides no less than forty-three references to women.

In the gospels, women came to Jesus from every background and life situation imaginable, including widows (the widow of Nain; LUKE 7:11–17), wives (Joanna, wife of Chuza, LUKE 8:3; 24:10), apparently single women (Martha and Mary, LUKE 10:38–42), hurting mothers (the Canaanite woman, MATTHEW 15:21–28), demonized women (Mary Magdalene, LUKE 8:2), and morally questionable women (the "sinful" woman, LUKE 7:36–50, and the woman caught in adultery, JOHN 8:1–11). Additionally, women were a critical part of the support base for Jesus's public ministry (LUKE 8:1–3); and Jesus allowed Mary of Bethany to sit at His feet during His teaching (LUKE 10:39)—a disciple's role normally reserved for men.

Jesus's acceptance of women would have been

startling in His day. Nevertheless, Jesus displayed His compassion for the women who were oppressed by their culture, giving them worth, welcome, and inclusion.

Demonized. While Jesus rescued many demonized people, one example stands out—the demoniac of the Gerasenes (SEE LUKE 8:26–39). In this particular instance, a demonized man is obviously oppressed by demonic forces in great number (“Legion”). His condition forced him into isolation from his community. In Luke 8:27, he is described as “a man from the city . . . who was possessed with demons; and he had not put on clothing for a long time and was not living in a house, but among the tombs.” This man was delivered by Jesus, whose compassion rescued him and brought him wholeness.

Social Outcasts. A variety of social outcasts lived in first-century Israel. Some were those who, because they did not live up to community standards or religious regulations, had been put out of the synagogue—a prospect that terrified the parents of the man born blind (JOHN 9:22). The synagogue was more than just a religious facility. It was the center of Jewish social life in Jesus’s day. To be put out of the synagogue was to be cut off from community. Relationships ended, employment was lost, and the ability to buy and sell could be severely limited.

The Oppressor. Perhaps most counterintuitive was Jesus’s compassion for the oppressor. The most significant subset of those put out of the synagogue were likely the ultimate social pariahs of that time—the tax collectors. These tax collectors were hated by their fellow Jewish citizens because tax collecting was

collaboration with the occupying Roman government. Like all governments, Rome¹ craved revenue and demanded that its conquered nations pay the freight for the empire. These “publicans” were given tax quotas that they had to extract from the locals. However, tax collectors were allowed to graft as much from the people as they could—keeping the difference for themselves. Rome closed its eyes to the dishonest practices of their publicans as long as the empire got its cut. In spite of the heavy social stigma this carried, Jesus made Matthew the tax collector one of His disciples (MATTHEW 10:3) and continually engaged tax collectors socially and spiritually (Zaccheus, LUKE 19:1–10).

↗ Jesus even showed compassion for the very members of the military who wielded the power of Rome over them. In Matthew 8 we read of a **Roman centurion** who asked Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant. Jesus said of this man, “I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel” (v. 10).

Jesus’s compassion for these outcasts—including even those like Zaccheus who oppressed them—was so profound that the religious leaders gave Him a label He gladly accepted: “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (LUKE 7:34). Jesus wouldn’t let concern over His reputation get in the way of His radical compassion.

Samaritans. This is where racial oppression visited Jesus’s ministry most profoundly. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews (LUKE 9:52–53; JOHN 8:48) because they were of mixed racial heritage. In 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was captured by Sennacherib and thousands of Jews were deported

to Assyria, with thousands of Assyrians likewise sent to northern Israel. This double-migration led to an intermarrying of Jews and Assyrians that resulted in racially mixed people—the Samaritans—who were rejected by the “ethnically pure” of Israel. As a result, the Samaritans were barred from the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, even the temple mount.

Yet Jesus reached out to a Samaritan woman (JOHN 4), defended a Samaritan village (LUKE 9:51–56), and made a Samaritan the hero of one His most beloved parables (LUKE 10:30–37)—no doubt to the great consternation of His Jewish audience. The Samaritans paint a picture for us of people viewed by their culture as the ethnically inferior, the racially “less than”—but people who were both welcomed and shown compassion by the Savior.

In a time when oppression was as universal as the physical diseases Jesus so often encountered, there can be no doubt that Jesus’s compassion was as refreshing to the hurting as a cool breeze on a hot day. While physical healing could produce relief from pain or disability, Jesus offered the oppressed a welcome, inclusion, and acceptance that was rare in their generation and remains so for so many who are oppressed today.

Jesus treated the oppressed as people made in the image of God, showing them a compassion that brought emotional and spiritual healing to the downtrodden people surrounding Him. To Jesus, there was nothing at all least about the so-called “least of these.”



six

The Compassion of a Shepherd

We began by trying to find one word to capture the heart of Jesus, and I chose the word *compassion*. But if I were to collapse all that we have seen about Jesus's compassion into only one biblical text, perhaps the statement that best captures His compassion for human beings is found in Matthew 9:36:

Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

That may be the key. The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus came as a Servant (PHILIPPIANS 2:5–8), as OUR

Savior (MATTHEW 1:21), and as our Sacrifice (HEBREWS 9:26). But don't miss the fact that He also came to be our good (SEE BELOW, JOHN 10), great (HEBREWS 13:20), and Chief Shepherd (1 PETER 5:4).

In ancient Israel, the shepherd provided for all of the needs of the sheep. The shepherd cared for them 24/7 in every circumstance. The shepherd was their everything—their guide, protector, caregiver, food source—because he cared about the sheep.

This is why the role of the shepherd was such an important picture of Jesus and His care for His flock. Jesus's shepherding was even prophesied in Micah 5:4:

*And He will arise and shepherd His flock
In the strength of the LORD,
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God.
And they will remain,
Because at that time He will be great
To the ends of the earth.*

This word picture anticipated the way Jesus would care for His own, and He leveraged that imagery beautifully in John 10:11–18:

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have

other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

Notice the comprehensive nature of the care that Jesus gives to His sheep—a stark contrast to the religious shepherds of Israel’s earlier times (SEE EZEKIEL 34:1–10) and the lack of care their current spiritual shepherds were giving them (SEE MATTHEW 23:1–32[▲]). As such, Jesus called to them as the true Shepherd of their hearts who would care for them and for their deepest needs.

▲ Jesus excoriated the religious leaders of Israel by calling out specific things they did in order to seem spiritual and important. “They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues,” He said (MATTHEW 23:6). He pointed out specific loopholes they created in the law so that they could maintain power and wealth at the expense of justice and mercy (VV. 16–24). He told them, “You . . . appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (V. 28).

That invitation extends to us as well.

Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we have a Shepherd. And this Shepherd is deeply engaged with us. Deeply concerned for us. Deeply

committed to us. Why? Because in every situation of life we know He has experienced what we are experiencing, and He has great compassion for us. His compassion motivates Him to come to our aid.

We are not alone. Our Shepherd is with us. He is the living embodiment of compassion who sees us in our distressed and dispirited state and cares for us as no other can.



seven

Living Like Jesus

An old gospel song prays:

*To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus
All I ask to be like Him;
All through life's journey
From earth to glory
All I ask to be like Him.*

Perhaps nowhere is that more needed today than for His children to live out the compassion of Christ to our world. As Paul wrote to the church at Colosse:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (COLOSSIANS 3:12)

In a world full of people who are hurting, who sin and are sinned against, who offend and are offended, we constantly see those who are distressed and dispirited. We see people all around us who carry the scars of the pains and burdens of this age. To them, we are called to go in the strength of God's Spirit and grace to be like Jesus. To live out before others the compassion we ourselves have received from Him. To show His compassion to those who like sheep have gone astray and point them to the Shepherd whose compassion is a healing balm for their hearts.

As His children, may we live so that the word that captures the heart of Christ might be displayed in us as well.

Compassion.