



“A Heart For God”

Lesson 4: The Roots of Compassion

BOOK CLUB NOTES: JUNE 6TH & 10TH

Keeping Your Eyes on God...

We've all had those moments when we feel like we live in someone else's shadow. We believe someone is more talented than us, more intelligent than us, more loved than us, even more holy than us. We have seen people receive awards, promotions, or other recognition that we thought we deserved. We've felt outshined by a sibling, a friend, a co-worker (or a complete stranger).

Modern Western culture fosters an attitude of competition in people. Retailers compete for business. Athletes compete for awards. Students compete for scholarships. Children compete for parental attention. Media entertainment pedals stories of all sorts of rivalries from business to sibling to romantic. We hear descriptive phrases like "healthy" or "friendly" competition.

We have seen that envy fosters feelings of emptiness, torment, low self-esteem, distorted thinking, sinful behavior, or abusive outbursts. Here is the gut check: ***If you are busy keeping your eyes on other people, you are not keeping your eyes on God. If you are standing in someone's shadow, it's because you've forgotten that you have feet to step out of that shadow.*** In the end, God isn't going to compare us to other people. He will judge us by our own words and talents, by our own actions, our own obedience, our hearts, and according to how we've used the gifts He has given us. Therefore, quit trying to walk the path that the Holy Spirit set for another and start walking with God.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

- MATTHEW 18:21-35

The Lessons of King David's story so far...

KING SAUL: THE MODEL OF ENVY. In adversity, he evaluated his situation through a human perspective and attempted to solve his problems by human means rather than turning to God and trusting in His provision. When David shined by comparison, envy took root in Saul and became a source of consistent torment that ultimately led to violence and madness. Saul became alienated from God, his family, and his people. Yet, at no time did Saul consider repenting of his sins and turning back to God.

DAVID – THE MODEL OF FAITH. Faced with adversity again and again, David recognized the truth: His battles were not his own but rather belonged to God. They were opportunities for God to be magnified and glorified. David trusted God to deliver him from any enemy or circumstance. He recognized God as Creator and provider and served Him with humility, obedience, joy, and gratitude.

LET'S NOW EXAMINE ANOTHER BIBLICAL MODEL:

JONATHAN – THE MODEL OF COMPASSION

Jonathan: The Model of Compassion

We know that Jonathan, as son of King Saul, was in line for the throne. Here was a man who was both a loyal son to Saul and a loyal friend to David. Thus, Jonathan was caught between the two as Saul's envy descended into violence. Let's examine his response:

- Jonathan celebrated David's military victories by bestowing his own royal garments on his friend (despite the implications this action had about Jonathan's path to the throne).
- Jonathan risked his own life trying to reason with his father as Saul continued to persecute David. He even determined that David's very life was in danger from Saul.
- Where Jonathan might have concerned himself with preserving his path to the throne by turning against David, Jonathan responded from a heart of brotherly love. He concerned himself with doing what was right in God's eyes.
- Because Jonathan knew God as Creator, as the one who set and controlled his destiny (as well as David and Saul's), he could peacefully submit to God's sovereignty and trust in God's will. He could do what was right in God's eyes.
- Coming from a place of submission rather than self-interest, of right relationship with God, Jonathan was able to share David's joys, to empathize with David's troubles, and to risk his life in doing the right thing.

Two paths lay before us...

THE WAYS OF CULTURE

- Competitiveness
- Judgement
- Self-concern & self-reliance
- Materialism
- Social Status
- Independence

THE WAYS OF GOD

- Love
- Humility
- Compassion
- Dependence
- Forgiveness
- Service
- Peace

REMEMBER THAT GOD HAS GIFTED EACH ONE OF US UNIQUELY FOR HIS PURPOSES

We are meant to use our talents, skills, knowledge, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and our hearts for the purpose of GLORIFYING and MAGNIFYING GOD.

God gifted us so that we can build up the Body of Christ. We are meant to lift up, inspire, and bless others. We are meant to shine the light of God to the unbelievers and the unchurched that they can see how we live and be drawn to God's forgiveness, love, and salvation.

To magnify God, we must do as God would do in all our circumstances.

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF COMPASSION

AND WE ARE MADE IN HIS IMAGE...

Compassion requires two things: 1) Empathy/ Sympathy and 2) A positive action to relieve someone's suffering

THE EXAMPLE OF GOD

God demonstrates compassion through:

- Mercy
- Peace
- Love
- Kindness
- Patience
- Forgiveness
- Grace

He responded by *acting*: He sent Jesus for our salvation.

We are God's image, meant to magnify Him. This means we are to step out of the shadows of envy and walk into His light, reflecting His qualities of compassion.

THE MODEL OF JESUS

Jesus demonstrated compassion for:

- The helpless
- The sick
- The hungry
- The widows
- Those who mourn
- For ALL sinners and lost sheep

He responded by *acting*. This was everything from healing to raising the dead to His sacrifice on the cross.

We are the Body of Christ. We are meant to walk in His example by demonstrating compassion. For whom?
For EVERYONE.

HOW, THEN, DO WE PRACTICE COMPASSION?

GOD LOVES US UNDESERVEDLY AND UNRESERVEDLY.

Therefore, we are to love others regardless. God has deemed us worthy of love despite our broken condition. He loves us whether we've asked for His love, whether we've earned His love, and whether we even recognized our need for His love.

As His image, we must extend the same love to our neighbors...undeservedly and unreservedly.

GOD HAS COMPASSION ON US WHEN WE ARE BROKEN, SEEING OUR NEED FOR HIM.

Every human is broken inside from the effects of sin on our lives and our hearts. How many times in the Gospels are we told that Jesus looks upon people in their broken states, in their illness, in their confusion, and is moved with love and empathy for them?

Therefore, as His image, we are to be moved with empathy for others.

HOW, THEN, DO WE PRACTICE COMPASSION?

GOD IS MERCIFUL, DELAYING JUDGEMENT THAT EVERYONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO COME TO HIM FOR SALVATION.

God has mercy upon us, whether or not we've asked or realize our need for it. However, His mercy is greatest on those who seek it sincerely from a heart of repentance.

Therefore, we are to be merciful to others. As the battle belongs to God, so does discipline, judgment, and vengeance. To be merciful is not weakness. Would we say that Christ was weak when He asked the Father's mercy for mankind even as He was crucified on the cross?

GOD HAS FORGIVEN US WHEN WE DO NOT DESERVE IT, EVEN AS WE REPEATEDLY FALL BACK INTO SIN. SEVEN TIMES SEVENTY TIMES.

*Lucky for us. Therefore, God expects us to forgive from the heart. **This does NOT mean that He expects us to remain in abusive relationships. This does NOT mean you must invite hurtful, dangerous people back into your life,** particularly if their actions damage your relationship with God or cause you to fall into sin. Pray on your circumstances.*

*It merely means that **GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP ON US.** He leaves open the door to our salvation no matter how many times we botch things up. It merely means that when you say you forgive someone, you must do so with sincerity and finality.*

The Fruits of Compassion

We are set free!

- We are not judged in comparison to others, but by our own faithfulness to God. If God is not comparing us to others, *why do we torture ourselves by doing so?* Get out of their shadows! Stop staring at them and lift your eyes up to God!

- When we are not consumed with envy, we are free to experience the peace that comes with knowing God's grace. We can celebrate the blessings of others, sorrow with them in grief, be a blessing to them in turn, and maybe even lift them up during their "wilderness season".

- Our future, blessings, worth, successes, gifts, etc. are in God's hands. His plans for us are of hope, not despair. Concentrate on your own relationship walk with God and how to live out your gratefulness for His grace. This isn't a "one and done" deal—you must practice compassion and empathy for it is countercultural and sin rails against a heart of mercy and forgiveness.

TWO THINGS TO REMEMBER...

1) WE MUST SEE OURSELVES ACCURATELY BEFORE GOD, JUST AS JONATHAN DID.

God is our creator. He loves us without measure. Recognizing our broken condition and sinful state (and better yet, realizing the gift of His mercy and forgiveness) should only inspire us to want to submit to God's will and trust Him to guide us in His ways.

When we see that we have been given God's grace and received His love, we should feel humbled, grateful, and compelled—even eager—to extend that love and grace to others who are broken.

2) GOD NEVER BLESSES OTHERS AT OUR EXPENSE.

It's true. You may think someone else has been given something that you desire and deserve more—be it wealth, status, family, recognition. Ask yourself: Are they really being blessed? By whose standards? Culture's? Man's? Yours? God's? If God has truly blessed them, we should rejoice for them and celebrate with them, just as Jonathan did. If their success is by man's standards, we have nothing to envy. It is only God's standards that matter.

Keep it in perspective: Such things are transitory (you can't take it with you, as they say). It's true God blesses others, but it's equally true that God has special blessings in store for you. Trust Him. Trust His wisdom. Trust His plans. Trust His timing.

References for this lesson:

“A Heart for God”, Rebecca Manley Pippert,
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*“What Does the Bible Say About
Compassion?”*, Compelling Truth,
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