



"Compassion will cure more sins than condemnation."
—Henry Ward Beecher

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Compassion (Part Two)

Having learned in Part One about biblical compassion, we can see no better example of it than the sacrifice our Savior made for us. Notice how the author of Hebrews explains Christ's ongoing compassion through His self-sacrifice:

Seeing that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of [God](#), let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without [sin](#). Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#))

The Word of God became a man, Jesus of Nazareth, so that He could completely feel both [joy](#) and pain as mankind does. As a God-Being, to that point He knew life only as an eternal, all-powerful Deity. He put on a human form—that of a servant ([Philippians 2:7](#))—to feel our frailty and to know our limitations and weaknesses.

As Creator, God has always had great compassion for His children, but for [Jesus Christ](#) to be a *perfect* High Priest, with *perfect* compassion—for Him to suffer along with His creation—He had to become a human being. What did He experience to give Him the ability to empathize with us?

During His life, Jesus lived with a large family, interacted with neighbors, and dealt with many different kinds of people. He was a carpenter and had to run a business. He worked hard and became tired and hungry. He paid bills, taxes, and tithes. He had to deal with government. He saw firsthand the death of His friend, Lazarus, and likely the death of His own earthly father, Joseph. Of course, He was hounded by the Jewish authorities, arrested, tried, convicted, scourged, and crucified. Because He experienced these things and many others, He now *knows* what human life—and its many difficulties—is really like.

In a similar vein, a friend of mine once related that she had written a letter of comfort and support to a woman who had lost her husband, telling her that she felt terrible, grieved with her, and understood how she must be feeling. But after my friend experienced the loss of her own husband, she wrote the woman again and apologized, explaining that she had had no idea how much pain she had really suffered upon the death of her spouse.

The Wikipedia article on compassion reads, "More involved than simple empathy, compassion commonly gives rise to an active desire to alleviate another's suffering." This agrees with what is written in [Mark 6:34](#) about our Savior's compassion: "When [Jesus] went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things." (English Standard Version)

Jesus' compassion was more than just a feeling. His compassion for others' weaknesses and hardship led Him to exert Himself in positive actions. Whether it was healing the sick, casting out demons, or giving people proper instruction, His compassion motivated Him to work to make peoples' lives better.

Of course, Jesus is our Example to follow, so we need to be expressing this same kind of active compassion to the brethren and to others we encounter. As we saw previously in [Colossians 3:12](#), as Christians, we are to be clothed with compassion. How do we go about putting this superior kind of compassion on?

It is reasonable to assume that the principle of compassion is based on the Golden Rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you," which Jesus states in [Matthew 7:12](#) (New International Version). In turn, His instruction in the Golden Rule is a summation of the last six of God's Ten Commandments, which outline our duty to our fellow man. Jesus summarizes them in another way in His Second Great Commandment, which appears in [Matthew 22:39](#): "You shall [love](#) your neighbor as yourself." All that Jesus did throughout His life and ministry provide examples of real compassion.

Because we must love others as ourselves, it may be necessary at this point to define the word "self." Philosopher and psychologist William James wrote, "In its widest possible sense, however, a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic [mental] powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account." He called this idea of self "the empirical self." His definition covers a great deal of ground—not just our bodies, but also everything we consider to belong to us. It illustrates how extensive our love needs to be for others. If our love for ourselves is this broad, our love—including our compassion—for others must be equally as broad.

While we can never literally do exactly what Jesus did, we can and should, to the best of our abilities, become that suffering person and make that suffering our own. As much as we can, we must place ourselves in his shoes, as it were, and truly experience and feel his suffering, mentally and emotionally, even physically. Then, continuing in our Savior's example, we need to take whatever steps that are in our power to lessen and, if possible, relieve that suffering. When we suffer their pain or suffer from our own hardships, we then need to use our experiences in coping with them to help others make it through their distresses, as we would want others to help us.

This is what Jesus did and what we need to do to follow the apostle Paul's admonition to be clothed with the fullness of compassion that God has for His chosen and beloved people.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Miracles of Jesus Christ: The Resurrection of Lazarus \(Part Two\)](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Jesus' resurrection of His friend Lazarus from the dead proved to be the final straw for the Jews who were trying to kill Him. After contrasting Jesus' weeping with those around Him, Martin Collins considers the diverse reactions of the witnesses to His great miracle, focusing on how it was a sign to them and us.

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