

CHAPTER 8

Compassion

KEY IDEA

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need.

KEY VERSE

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. — *Psalm 82:3-4*

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

Look up the definition of the word “compassion” and you will get answers like the following:

> From dictionaries

- < sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it
- < sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.
- < a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.

> Other sources

- < *Compassion* means “to have so much mercy and tenderness for someone else that it actually causes pain.” —Kenneth Copeland
- < Compassion, a form of love, is aroused within us when we are confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable. — BIBLESTUDYTOOLS.COM
- < Compassion, literally a feeling with and for others. — W. L. Walker

> BELIEVE says this: *Compassion literally means “suffer with.”*

Synonyms for compassion are: to show pity, to love, to show mercy, to be loved by, to show concern for, to be tenderhearted, and to act kindly.

God calls us to come alongside of people who are suffering and suffer with them so they are not alone. It doesn't mean we can fix the problem, but it does mean we can enter into their pain. Before we act or practice this belief, we must believe it is God's call on the life of all Christ followers. When we believe this in our heart, we will show compassion to all people, especially to those in need. This is not a “do as I say, not as I do” command from the Lord. God himself is merciful and full of compassion.

WHY IS LOVING OTHERS SUCH A MAJOR ISSUE WITH OUR HEAVENLY FATHER?

The roots of our understanding of compassion lie within the Bible's understanding of the nature of God. Psalm 86:15 But you, Lord, are a **compassionate** and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

> In Hebrew God has many names. When his name refers to his compassion it is *El Rachum*.

FROM DISCIPLES OF THE MESSIAH

Anyone who is inclined to show mercy; having a tender heart, we would say that

individual shows compassion. When God passed before Moses, it was His characteristics of being a compassionate God (EL RACHUM) that He wanted revealed and made known. "The LORD, the Lord God, merciful (compassionate) and gracious, long suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth." (Exodus 34:6 NKJV)

In Deuteronomy 4, we read of God's warnings against disobedience and also of His promises of mercy. In speaking to the Israelites, this was said about the God of compassion. "He will not leave you, destroy you, or forget the covenant with your fathers that He swore to them by oath, because the LORD your God is a compassionate God." (Deuteronomy 4:31 NCSB). Once again that name....a compassionate God in the Hebrew is EL RACHUM. The KJV uses the word merciful, and the word merciful in the Hebrew means compassionate.

When we look at the Hebrew word "gracious", once again this Hebrew word means compassion or favor. God through His Word (and His actions) is using every means to emphasize this part of Him.

In the name *El Rachum*, the root word, "rechem", means "womb", which suggests the compassion a mother has for her child.

> We see this used in verses such as:

< Deuteronomy 4:31 ³¹ For the LORD your God is a merciful God [El Rachum]; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.

< Nehemiah 9:31 ³¹ But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God [El Rachum].

> This could be seen as womb-like, nurturing and holding, as a mother's womb nurtures and holds the growing child, giving of herself.

Why is God so determined for us to live a life of love?

> Love is the one word that fully encompasses God's nature. (1 John 4:8)

< He is completely filled with compassion. (See Exodus 22:27; 34:6 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Lamentations 3:21-23; Joel 2:13.)

< Compassion is what moves God to do everything He does.

> God made man in His own image. He didn't just want someone to love, He wanted a family through whom His love could be multiplied—that would bless and fill the earth with His own compassion... God's plan was not just for man to be blessed, but for mankind to be a blessing to everyone and everything he came in contact with. - Kenneth Copeland

According to the Bible love and compassion are huge issues in the mind of God. In Matthew 22:36-40, we read that Jesus was asked a very important question from a Pharisee: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

> Love is the ultimate spiritual law. It seems all the operations of God's kingdom function through it.

GOD FULL OF JUSTICE AND COMPASSION

Throughout their history, the Israelites struggled to stay true to God. Sometimes they followed God, but those periods of faithfulness were followed by times of sin and rebellion. But God's love for his people was always evident. His compassion was constant as he offered the people relief from the misery caused by their own sin.

In Nehemiah 9:1-38 (*BELIEVE* pgs. 125-128) the Israelites have returned to the promised land after being in Babylonian exile for 70 years. Nehemiah and Ezra were among those who returned to Jerusalem when the Persians conquered the Babylonians and allowed them to return to rebuild the Temple.

> The people had gathered and Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses.

< The people heard the Word and praised and worshiped God.

< Understanding what God said also touched them deeply and they began to weep and grieve over their sins.

FROM Nehemiah 9:1-38

9 On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.

In the previous chapter they were feasting and celebrating. But in chapter 9 we see them with contrite hearts. They put on sackcloth, they mourned and grieved over their sin and threw dust on their head.

NOTE: Sackcloth was a garment of dark, coarsely woven goat or camel hair. It was generally worn as a sign of mourning and grief and used for somber occasions. Its coarseness irritated the skin and served as a way of chastisement.

NOTE: Sometimes the Jews would sit on the ground and sprinkle handfuls of dust and dirt over their head and body. This could signify different things:

> *A symbol of the grave and death, for dust you are and to dust you will return.*

> *A symbol that sin makes people dirty and of low estate.*

> *A symbol that sinners are as worthless as powdered dirt.*

² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. ³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. ... They cried out with loud voices to the LORD their God. ⁵ And ... said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting."

"Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. ... You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

⁷ "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram You have kept your promise because you are righteous.

⁹ "You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. ¹⁰ You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, ... ¹¹ You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, ... ¹² By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

¹³ "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. ¹⁴ You ... gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. ¹⁵ In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

¹⁶ "But they, ... did not obey your commands. ¹⁷ They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. ... But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, ¹⁸ even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf ... or when they committed awful blasphemies.

¹⁹ "Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. ²⁰ You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. ²¹ For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

²² "You gave them kingdoms and nations, ... ²³ You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess. ²⁴ Their children went in and took possession of the land. ... they reveled in your great goodness.

²⁶ "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. ²⁷ So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

²⁸ "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

²⁹ "You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, 'The person who obeys them will live by them.' Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. ³⁰ For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples. ³¹ But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

³² "Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, ³³ In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly. ³⁴ Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. ... ³⁸ "In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

Go back over the scripture above and underline/highlight phrases concerning the compassion of God. What are your thoughts?

Summary of Nehemiah 9:6-38, the longest prayer in the Bible.

- > The people praised God and acknowledged that he is the Creator (v. 6).
- > They recalled his dealings with Abraham, the Exodus, and his dealings with the Jews at Mount Sinai (vs. 7-15)
- > They acknowledged the rebellion of the Jews and God's patience with them in the wilderness (vs. 16-21).
- > They credited God for their conquest of the Promised Land and for giving them deliverers when their enemies were oppressing them (vs. 22-28).
- > They credited God for sending prophets to call for repentance and acknowledged that the prophets were ignored (vs. 29-31).
- > They asked God to understand that their suffering had been great and admitted that God's punishments were just because their kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors were all guilty (vs. 32-35).

> They told God they were in great distress, that they were making a commitment to him, and that they were putting it in writing (vs. 36-38).

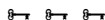
God could have destroyed the nations of Israel and started over again (Exodus 32:10; Numbers 14:11-12), but he graciously spared them. In his mercy, God didn't give them what they deserved, and in his grace, he gave them what they didn't deserve.

Think about where you might be if God had given you what you deserved. Where do you think you would be without God's compassion for you?

- > God is concerned about the needs of his people.
- > He is a generous God who gives us far more than we deserve.
- > He is a God who keeps his promises even if we are unfaithful.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

Chapter 8 of Nehemiah shows the people rejoicing and celebrating after hearing the Word of God read to them. But Chapter 9 tells about their awareness of how far the Israelites had left and neglected their God. The Lord calls us to joy and to experience his grace. As we experience the grace of God we draw close to Him. As we draw close to Him we become aware of how far we are from where we should be. And as we draw even closer to the Lord we become aware of where we could be.



Throughout history God has graciously shown compassion for his people, with the ultimate demonstration being the sacrifice of his only Son, Jesus Christ. Because the only just response to the sins of humankind was death, our just God, according to his righteousness, issued the death penalty on us. Then, out of his grand compassion, he offered Jesus as a “substitutionary atonement” — that is, Jesus took humanity’s place. Through this one act God demonstrated his complete compassion without budging an inch on his complete justice. We who are guilty are made just by the sacrifice of the only person who was completely righteous.

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-26 (VOICE)

²¹ But now for the good news: God's restorative justice has entered the world, independent of the law. Both the law and the prophets told us this day would come. ²² This redeeming justice comes through the faithfulness of Jesus, the Anointed One, the Liberating King, who makes salvation a reality for all who believe—without the slightest partiality. ²³ You see, all have sinned, and all their futile attempts to reach God in His glory fail. ²⁴ Yet they are now saved and set right by His free gift of grace through the redemption available only in Jesus the Anointed. ²⁵ When God set Him up to be the sacrifice—the seat of mercy where sins are atoned through faith—His blood became the demonstration of God's own restorative justice. All of this confirms His

faithfulness to the promise, for over the course of human history God patiently held back as He dealt with the sins being committed. ²⁶ *This expression of God’s restorative justice displays in the present that He is just and righteous and that He makes right those who trust and commit themselves to Jesus.*

In the OT law, righteousness came by obeying the laws of God. In the NT, righteousness comes by believing, then obedience and service flows from that belief.

> If one is trying to relate to God on the basis of goodness, devotion and service alone—or the Law alone, they will not receive this righteousness.

< The law cannot justify us. The law brings us to the realization that we are in need of God’s saving grace through the redemptive work of Jesus. Then our justification comes through faith, in that redemptive work, to save us.

> “...[we] must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because the source of justification lies embedded in the Person and work of Jesus.” -Jon Courson

Verse 24} Some translate the word “freely” as the Greek translation “without a cause.”

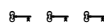
> There was nothing we did to merit the grace freely given.

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY:

... in the center of every Greek city stood the agora—the place of redemption—where buying and selling took place. ... This was the place where slaves were bought and sold. Thus, the Greek word for the act of redemption is agorazo. But agorazo is not the word used in this verse.

There's a second word for redemption ... exagorazo, or "the act of purchasing or redeeming never to return." ... Oftentimes, a man would buy a slave, use him for a season ... and then return him to be sold again. Exagorazo was the antithesis of this practice, in that it spoke of permanent possession. But exagorazo isn't the word used in this verse.

Apolutrosis, the third Greek word for redemption, is the word used in this verse. Apolutrosis speaks of a man going into the agora to purchase a slave for the purpose of setting him free totally and completely—never to be a slave again. ... For us redemption is agorazo—for we have been purchased by the Lord. ... It is exagorazo—for we'll never be sold again. But even more than that it's apolutrosis—for we were purchased for the purpose of being set free. "I no longer call you servants, but friends," Jesus said (John 15:15).



We’ve looked at God’s extravagant grace and read of His unbiased love for everyone. What do we do with His expression of Grace and Love.

> We accept them as they were given—freely.

> We determine how God wants us to choose to use His gifts.



KEY QUESTION: "What is my responsibility to other people?"

1 John 4:7-10} ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

ISRAEL: CALLED TO COMPASSION

Compassion was an important aspect of the testimony of the people of Israel to the world. When God set up the foundational laws for his people, he revealed through Moses specific guidelines for helping the poor and those in need.

Deuteronomy 24:10-15

¹⁰ When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. ¹¹ Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. ¹² If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. ¹³ Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God.

¹⁴ Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. ¹⁵ Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

The dignity of the poor person, who is forced into a loan, is preserved. The protection and comfort of a poor person could not be sacrificed over the matter of a loan security.

- > It also guards against violence or theft.
- > Vs 12 forbids a person's cloak, which doubled as a blanket, to be taken to secure a loan.
 - < The basic rights of a vulnerable person are protected.

The daily wages one earned were often necessary to buy food for a workers family each day...that day.

- > Some employers would keep the wage in order to entice them back for another day or days.

Deuteronomy 24:17-22

¹⁷ Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

¹⁹ When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²¹ When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²² Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

These three groups (foreigner, fatherless and widowed) were seen as landless people and represented the most vulnerable and the most in need of charity and compassion.

- > Israel's time spent in Egypt as slaves was to motivate proper treatment of landless people.
 - < Those most greatly liberated should exercise greatest grace to others in need.

We see it was the responsibility of the farm owners to leave some of the grains and fruit. This made provision for the poor.

- > The blessings of the land were for all the people to share.
- > This would provide food for those who were too poor to have their own land and crops.
- > The Israelites were taught that all people deserved certain rights, and their Hebrew brothers were to be especially provided with the basic needs for themselves and their family.

Do you see this as a Biblical type of "Welfare System"?

How does this differ from the government's welfare system?

Pagan peoples sometimes had regulations like these in order that some would be left for the gods, or the demons.

> Here God tells the people to leave it for the needy.

God's heart and compassion for the poor is impossible to miss.

> He commanded His people to be kind—to think differently than the world around them.

If we are to be followers of Jesus, we need to be like Jesus and serve Him by serving others.

James 2:15-16} *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?*

Colossians 3:12} *As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

1 Peter 3:18} *All of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.*

To whom are we to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, sympathetic, and loving? **Everyone else on the planet.**



KEY IDEA: I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need.

The Israelites were given laws to ensure their compassion to others. Psalm 72 urges the reader to be compassionate. The source of this compassion is the great King, God himself.

FROM Psalm 72

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. ...

May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; ...

For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.

He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.

He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.



JESUS: MODEL OF COMPASSION

Throughout his teaching ministry Jesus masterfully instructed his followers to show compassion to people in need as the ultimate fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Toward the very end of his life on earth, Jesus provided his disciples with divine insight into the ministry of compassion to the poor and needy. He tells them their acts of compassion now have eternal consequences. When Jesus returns he will separate the obedient

followers from the unbelievers. How we treat others should make it clear into which of the two groups we fall. After all, our behavior has results that reach far beyond our time on this earth.

In **Matthew 25:34 – 39**, Jesus teaches his followers the divine priority of serving people. We see the degree to which Jesus pays attention to the details of our lives.

> He also calls us to pay attention to the details in serving others:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

> Jesus made our mission abundantly clear in meeting the needs of the forgotten, unlovely, and unpopular — “the least of these.”

< His declaration, that to serve them is to serve him, is both countercultural and life-changing.

FROM LIFE APPLICATION STUDYBIBLE

The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about. ... How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

Good question for thought, “How well do your actions separate you from the pretenders and unbelievers? Be honest!

Jesus makes it clear we are to be like Him when it comes to compassion:

Mark 10:45} *“Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

John 15:13-16} *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last — and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”*

To be a part of the family of God it is important to place others first in order to meet needs today.

> We will often reap the benefits of changing the future for anyone who will respond to the message of salvation through our act of compassion.

BELIEVERS: THE ONGOING CALL TO COMPASSION

The same challenge given to the people of Israel to live a life of compassion was also issued to the newly formed Christian church after Jesus’ death and resurrection. James, who became the leader of the church in

Jerusalem and was likely the half-brother of Jesus, wrote what may have been the first book of the New Testament. In his letter, James instructs new believers on the practical how-to's of living this new life in Christ. These same charges apply to believers today.

FROM James 1:19-2:13 VOICE

¹⁹ Listen, open your ears, harness your desire to speak, and don't get worked up into a rage so easily, my brothers and sisters. ²⁰ Human anger is a futile exercise that will never produce God's kind of justice in this world. ²¹ So walk out on your corrupt liaison with smut and depraved living, and humbly welcome the word of truth that will blossom like the seed of salvation planted in your souls.

²² Put the word into action. If you think hearing is what matters most, you are going to find you have been deceived. God the Father is the giver of all things and is looking for every opportunity to bless us. But many people have difficulty trusting and receiving good things, even when those things come from God. The problem is that we not only have trouble trusting God's work in our lives, but we also don't always respond to God's voice. People often hear the Scriptures but don't really listen. People store truths in their brains but never put them to use. For James, the only good religion is religion lived out every day.

²³⁻²⁴ If some fail to do what God requires, it's as if they forget the word as soon as they hear it. One minute they look in the mirror, and the next they forget who they are and what they look like. ²⁵ However, it is possible to open your eyes and take in the beautiful, perfect truth found in God's law of liberty and live by it. If you pursue that path and actually do what God has commanded, then you will avoid the many distractions that lead to an amnesia of all true things and you will be blessed.

Looking at verses 22-25

NIV} ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

... So many times our tendency is to think that just because we're reading the Word, we're obeying it... (We) deceive (ourselves) if, having seen what needs to be taken care of in the mirror of the Word, (we) then don't do it. One of the great dangers for us who love the Word is to falsely assume that simply agreeing that we should pray means we're praying; or knowing we should worship makes us worshipers.

Putting action to what we read in the Bible and/or hear at church can sometimes be difficult. Procrastination and busyness can lead to forgetfulness and apathy. Do you have any thoughts on how to put the Word in action?

FROM TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

Just hearing the Word is not enough, we must do it. Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or sitting in on a Bible study is what makes them grow and receive God's blessing. But the doing brings the blessing, not the hearing. ... Our beliefs should control our behavior.

Hearing the word without action is self-deceptive, while hearing that results in doing the word is a blessing. -ESV Study Bible

²⁶ *If you put yourself on a pedestal, thinking you have become a role model in all things religious, but you can't control your mouth, then think again. Your mouth exposes your heart, and your religion is useless.* ²⁷ *Real, true religion from God the Father's perspective is about caring for the orphans and widows who suffer needlessly and resisting the evil influence of the world.*

Here we see three characteristics of the one whose religion is right:

- > First, he refuses to deceive himself by thinking his religiosity can be his authority over others, so he thoughtfully controls what he says.
- > Second, he shows compassion and love to those who are under oppression by helping them.
- > Third, he keeps himself separate from the "evil influence" of the world by resisting it's influence.

2 My brothers and sisters, I know you've heard this before, but stop playing favorites! Do not try to blend the genuine faith of our glorious Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, with your silly pretentiousness. ² *If an affluent gentleman enters your gathering wearing the finest clothes and priceless jewelry, don't trip over each other trying to welcome him. And if a penniless bum crawls in with his shabby clothes and a stench fills the room, don't look away or pretend you didn't notice—offer him a seat up front, next to you.* ³⁻⁴ *If you tell the wealthy man, "Come sit by me; there's plenty of room," but tell the vagrant, "Oh, these seats are saved. Go over there," then you'll be judging God's children out of evil motives.*

⁵ *My dear brothers and sisters, listen: God has picked the poor of this world to become unfathomably rich in faith and ultimately to inherit the Kingdom, which He has pledged to those who love Him.* ⁶ *By favoring the rich, you have mocked the poor. And, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't it the rich who step on you while climbing the ladder of success? And isn't it the rich who take advantage of you and drag you into court?* ⁷ *Aren't they the ones mocking the noble name of our God, the One calling us?*

In the first century there was radical social separation. Merchants and landowners were taking land and possessions from the poor.

- > James challenges his readers as to why they would honor the rich in the worship when it is the rich unbelievers of the world who do not honor the name of Jesus.

NOTE: The wealthy often used the court system to steal from the poor. This situation was the primary reason for the revolts that led to the war of 66-70 AD.

We are often mesmerized by the rich, powerful, and beautiful people of the world. We dream of associating with them; but when we focus our attention on the fashionable people of this world, it is often at the expense of those who need it the most. Ignoring the needy and favoring the wealthy is completely contrary to the example Jesus modeled for us while walking on earth. God often chooses those who are the poorest materially to be the richest spiritually. We should welcome everyone equally into God's kingdom, even if it means upsetting boundaries like class and race. The rule is simple: we should treat others in the same way we want to be treated. God does not play favorites, and neither should we.

⁸ *Remember His call, and live by the royal law found in Scripture: love others as you love yourself. You'll be doing very well if you can get this down.* ⁹ *But if you show favoritism—paying attention to those who can help you in some way, while ignoring those who seem to need all the help—you'll be sinning and condemned by the law.* ¹⁰ *For if a person could keep all of the laws and yet break just one; it would be like breaking them all.* ¹¹ *The same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also says, "Do not murder." If you break either of these commands, you're a lawbreaker, no matter how you look at it.*

¹² *So live your life in such a way that acknowledges that one day you will be judged. But the law that judges also gives freedom,* ¹³ *although you can't expect to be shown mercy if you refuse to show mercy. But hear this: mercy always wins against judgment! Thank God!*

True freedom is freedom to obey God and do what pleases him.

- > The law of Christ provides freedom from sin through the gospel.



FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make in the way I live?

If we choose to show compassion to people as God does, then . . .

- we will change our priorities and how we use our time
- we are set free to give, because we trust God for our needs
- people who have been forgotten by society will be cared for and restored
- we will truly reach our neighborhoods and our cities
- the Spirit of Christ will be alive and well in our lives

The oft-quoted phrase “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” will come to life. As people see how much we care and ask us what we know, we may respond with, “It’s not *what* we know, but *who* we know. His name is Jesus, and he would love to meet you.”

While compassion is a deeply emotive feeling any human may experience, the Christian belief of compassion is coupled with the motivation to act on those feelings. The divine filter of seeing people as God sees them will lead us to both see the need and find the resources to meet them. So let me offer a simple assignment: the next time you feel compassion welling up in your soul, let it trigger action in your hands and feet to be Jesus to “the least of these.”

