

COMPASSION

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In the sixth chapter of Mark is a story about Jesus that's repeated, at one place or another, in all four gospels. Jesus was welcoming his disciples home from their very first missionary journey. They were all tired, worn out, very much in need of rest, surrounded by crowds, and hadn't even had time to eat. But although they went by boat to a deserted place, people recognized Jesus, and soon there was another great crowd.

Jesus looked at the crowds, and had compassion for them. Yes, he was tired; yes, he and all his disciples needed some rest, some food, and some "down time". But Jesus, moved with compassion, postponed his rest in order to teach and minister to the crowd: he saw they were like "sheep without a shepherd".

Years ago I taught a Bible study called, *The Attributes of God*. We saw that God is powerful, loving, wise, all-knowing, filled with grace, just, and holy. And God is indeed all those things and more. But as I read scripture and consider the ways God has moved in my own life, I see that, just as in Mark, he is always moved with compassion.

When we're ashamed of our sin and reluctant to confess, expecting to be punished, we find instead a God who is grace-filled and usually has more compassion for us than we do for ourselves. When we're fearful, reluctant to obey, we expect God to be mad at us ... and instead we discover a God who is compassionate and patient. We expect judgment and anger, and instead find forgiveness and compassion. We expect to somehow find a way to pay for our sins, and find instead ... Jesus. Out of God's compassion and love, he paid for our sins himself.

Does this mean God's a pushover? Do we see compassion as weakness? I hope not. If we look at our own lives, we see that it's much easier to judge than to be understanding; it's much easier to blame than to forgive; and it's much easier to criticize than it is to be compassionate.

True compassion, Godly compassion, requires strength and maturity and humility. It's so much easier to hate and hold a grudge! And sometimes, surprisingly, we need to have some compassion for OURSELVES ... receive God's grace and love whether we think we're worthy or not. Then, forgiven and free, filled with the compassion and understanding that can only come from God, we are equipped and ready to show the compassion of Jesus to our world.