

God Is Passionate *and* Compassionate



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 103:13, Isa. 49:15, Hos. 11:1–9, Matt. 23:37, 2 Cor. 11:2, 1 Cor. 13:4–8.*

Memory Text: “‘Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you’ ” (*Isa. 49:15, NKJV*).

Emotions are often viewed as undesirable and to be avoided. For some people, emotions are intrinsically irrational, and thus, the good man or woman would not be described as “emotional.” In some ancient Greek philosophy, the idea of the “rational” man, who is (mostly) either impervious to passions or who rules over his emotions by way of unemotional reason, is prized as the ideal.

Unbridled emotions can be problematic, yes. However, God created people with the capacity for emotions, and God Himself is displayed throughout Scripture as experiencing profound emotions. If God can experience deep emotions, as the Bible consistently portrays, then emotions cannot be intrinsically bad or irrational—for the God of the Bible is perfectly good and possesses perfect wisdom.

In fact, there are beautiful truths to be garnered from the realization that God's love for us is a deeply emotional love, but always with the caveat that though God's love (emotional or otherwise) is perfect, it should not be thought of as identical to emotions as humans experience them.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 25.

More Than a Mother's Love

Perhaps the greatest love common to human experience is the love of a parent for a child. The Bible often uses the imagery of the parent-child relationship to depict God's amazing compassion for people, emphasizing that God's compassion is exponentially greater than even the deepest and most beautiful human expression of the same emotion.

Read Psalm 103:13, Isaiah 49:15, and Jeremiah 31:20. What do these depictions convey about the nature and depth of God's compassion?

According to these texts, God relates to us as His beloved children, loving us as a good father and mother love their children. Yet, as Isaiah 49:15 explains, even a human mother might "forget her nursing child" or "not have compassion on the son of her womb" (*NKJV*), but God never forgets His children, and His compassion never fails (*Lam. 3:22*).

Notably, the Hebrew term *raḥam*, used for compassion here and in many other texts describing God's abundant compassionate love, is believed to be derived from the Hebrew term for womb (*raḥam*). And thus, as scholars have noted, God's compassion is a "womb-like mother-love." Indeed, it is exponentially greater than any human compassion, even that of a mother for her newborn.

According to Jeremiah 31:20 (*NKJV*), God views His covenant people as His "dear son" and "pleasant child," despite the fact that they often rebelled against Him and grieved Him. Even so, God declares, "My heart yearns for him" and "I will surely have mercy on him." The term translated "mercy" here is the term used above for divine compassion (*raḥam*). Further, the phrase "My heart yearns" can be translated literally as "My innards roar." This description is the deeply visceral language of divine emotion, signifying the profound depth of God's compassionate love for His people. Even despite their infidelity, God continues to bestow His abundant compassion and mercy on His people and does so beyond all reasonable expectations.

For some of us, recognizing that God's compassion for us is akin to that of a loving father or mother is deeply comforting. However, some people might struggle because their parent or parents were not loving. What other ways could God's compassion be revealed to them?

Gut-Wrenching Love

The incalculable depths of God's compassionate love for humanity are manifested in Hosea. God had commanded the prophet Hosea, "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD" (*Hos. 1:2, NKJV*). Hosea 11 later depicts God's relationship with His people, but with the metaphor of a loving father for his child.

Read Hosea 11:1–9. How does the imagery in these verses bring to life the way God loves and cares for His people?

God's love for His people is likened to the tender affection of a parent for a child. Scripture uses the imagery of teaching a young child to walk; taking one's beloved child in one's arms; healing and providing sustenance; and otherwise tenderly caring for His people. Scripture also states that God "carried" His people just "as a man carries his son" (*Deut. 1:31, NKJV*). In "His love and in His mercy He redeemed them" and "lifted them and carried them all the days of old" (*Isa. 63:9, NASB*).

In contrast to God's unwavering faithfulness, His people were repeatedly unfaithful, ultimately pushing God away and bringing judgment upon themselves and deeply grieving Him. God is compassionate, but never to the exclusion of justice. (As we will see in a later lesson, love and justice go together.)

Have you ever been so upset about something that your stomach churns? That is the kind of imagery used for the depth of God's emotions over His people. The imagery of one's heart turning over and compassions being kindled is idiomatic language of deep emotions, used of both God and humans.

This imagery, of compassions being kindled (*kamar*), is used in the case of the two women who came before Solomon, each one claiming the same baby as her own. When Solomon ordered the infant cut in two (with no intention to harm the child), this imagery described the emotional reaction of the real mother (*1 Kings 3:26; compare with Gen. 43:30*).

Anyone who has ever been a parent knows what the lesson is talking about. No other earthly love begins to compare. How does this help us understand the reality of God's love for us, and what comfort can, and should, we draw from this understanding?

The Compassion of Jesus

In the New Testament, the same kind of imagery as in the Old is used to depict God's compassion. Paul refers to the Father as the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (*2 Cor. 1:3, NKJV*). Further, Paul explains in Ephesians 2:4 that God is "rich in mercy" and redeems humans "because of His great love with which He loved us" (*NKJV*).

In various parables, Christ Himself repeatedly uses terms of visceral, gut-wrenching emotion to depict the Father's compassion (*Matt. 18:27, Luke 10:33, Luke 15:20*). And the same language that depicts divine compassion in the Old Testament and New Testament also is used in the Gospels to depict Jesus' compassionate responses to those in distress.

Read *Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:14, Mark 1:41, Mark 6:34, and Luke 7:13. See also Matthew 23:37. How do these verses shed light on the way Christ was moved by the plight of people?*

Again and again in the Gospels, Christ was said to be moved to compassion by people in distress or in need. And He not only felt compassion, He addressed the people's needs, as well.

And yes, Jesus also lamented over His people. One might imagine the tears in Christ's eyes as He looks out over the city—"How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (*Matt. 23:37, NKJV*). Here, we see that the lament of Christ matches closely with that depicted of God throughout the Old Testament. In fact, many biblical scholars note that the imagery of a bird taking care of her young is imagery only used of divinity in the ancient Near East. Here, many see an allusion to the imagery in Deuteronomy 32:11, of God as a bird hovering over, protecting, and taking care of its young.

There is no greater example of God's great compassionate love for us than Jesus Himself—who gave Himself for us in the ultimate demonstration of love. Yet, Christ is not only the perfect image of God. He is also the perfect model of humanity. How can we model our lives after the life of Christ, focusing on the felt needs of others, and, thus, not merely preaching God's love but showing it in tangible ways?

A Jealous God?

The God of the Bible is the “compassionate God.” In Hebrew, God is called *el rahum* (Deut. 4:31). The term “*el*” means “God,” and *rahum* is a different form of the root for compassion (*rahum*). Yet, God is called not only the compassionate God but also the jealous God, *el qana*. As Deuteronomy 4:24 puts it, “‘The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God [*el qana*].’” (See Deut. 4:24, Deut. 6:15, Josh. 24:19, Nah. 1:2.)

First Corinthians 13:4 declares that “love is not jealous” (*RSV*). How could it be, then, that God is a “jealous God”? Read 2 Corinthians 11:2 and consider the way God’s people were unfaithful to Him throughout the narratives of the Bible (see, for example, Ps. 78:58). What light do these passages shed on understanding divine “jealousy”?

The “jealousy” of God is often misunderstood. If you refer to someone as a jealous husband or wife, you likely do not mean it as a compliment. The term jealousy often has negative connotations in many languages. However, in the Bible, divine jealousy has no negative connotations. It is the righteous passion of a loving husband for an exclusive relationship with his wife.

While there is a kind of jealousy that is against love (*1 Cor. 13:4*), according to 2 Corinthians 11:2, there is a good and righteous “jealousy.” Paul refers to it as “godly jealousy” (*2 Cor. 11:2*). God’s jealousy is only and always the righteous kind and may better be spoken of as God’s passionate love for His people.

God’s passion (*qana*) for His people stems from His profound love for them. God desires an exclusive relationship with His people; He alone is to be their God. Yet, God is often depicted as a scorned lover, whose love is unrequited (see *Hosea 1–3, Jer. 2:2, Jer. 3:1–12*). Thus, God’s “jealousy” or “passion” is never unprovoked but always responsive to the infidelity and evil people. God’s jealousy (or “passionate love”) lacks the negative connotations of human jealousy. It is never envious but always the proper righteous passion for an exclusive relationship with His people and for their good.

How can we learn to reflect that same kind of good “jealousy” toward others that God displays toward us?

The Significance of Pentecost

The God of the Bible is compassionate and passionate, and these divine emotions are supremely exemplified in Jesus Christ. God is sympathetic (*compare with Isa. 63:9, Heb. 4:15*), deeply affected by the sorrows of His people (*Judg. 10:16, Luke 19:41*), and willing to hear, answer, and comfort (*Isa. 49:10, 15; Matt. 9:36; Matt. 14:14*).

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. In what ways does this passage call us to reflect God’s compassionate and amazing love in our relationships with others?

We long to be in relationship with persons who exemplify the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. But how often do we seek to become this kind of person toward others? We cannot make ourselves long-suffering and kind; we cannot make ourselves not be envious, conceited, rude, or self-seeking. We cannot muster a love in ourselves that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,” and “never fails” (*1 Cor. 13:7, 8, NKJV*). Such love can be exemplified in our lives only as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And praise God that the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into the hearts of those who, by faith, are in Christ Jesus (*Rom. 5:5*).

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, in what practical ways might we respond to, and reflect, God’s profoundly emotional, but always perfectly righteous and rational, love? First, the only appropriate response is to worship the God who is love. Second, we should respond to God’s love by actively showing compassion and benevolent love to others. We should not simply be comforted in our Christian faith but should be motivated to comfort others. Finally, we should recognize that we cannot change our hearts, but that only God can.

So, let us ask God to give us a new heart for Him and for others—a pure and purifying love that elevates what is good and removes the chaff from within.

Let our prayer be: “may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, . . . so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (*1 Thess. 3:12, 13, NKJV*).

Why is a death to self and to the selfishness and corruption of our natural hearts the only way to reveal this kind of love? What are the choices that we can make in order to be able to die this death to self?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Beatitudes,” pp. 6–44, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“All who have a sense of their deep soul poverty, who feel that they have nothing good in themselves, may find righteousness and strength by looking unto Jesus. He says, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden.’ Matthew 11:28. He bids you exchange your poverty for the riches of His grace. We are not worthy of God’s love, but Christ, our surety, is worthy, and is abundantly able to save all who shall come unto Him. Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character. He pleads before God in our behalf, saying: I have taken the sinner’s place. Look not upon this wayward child, but look on Me. Does Satan plead loudly against our souls, accusing of sin, and claiming us as his prey, the blood of Christ pleads with greater power.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 8, 9.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at what inspiration above said about how, thanks to Jesus, we are presented to the Father. “He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character.” No matter how discouraged we might get at times over our faults and shortcomings, or how often we don’t reflect to others the kind of love that God pours out on us, why must we always come back to the wonderful news that we are accepted by the Father because Jesus “presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character”?
- ② Imagine how the mother must have felt in the case of the two women who came before Solomon claiming the same baby was their child. Consider again the language of emotion described in 1 Kings 3:26. How does this shed light on the same kind of language that is used to describe God’s emotions for His people, in Hosea 11:8?
- ③ Throughout the Gospels, we have seen that Jesus often was moved by the needs of people. And what did He do? He acted in a way that addressed the people’s needs. What are practical ways that you as an individual, or even perhaps as a class, can meet the needs of those who need comforting?

Attacked by Drunken Men

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A drunken man accosted the 21-year-old missionary woman on a public bus and tried to hug and kiss her. As she struggled against his advances, the other passengers looked the other way until an elderly woman yelled something to the bus driver. The bus stopped, then under the guidance of the elderly woman, several passengers threw the man off. She came over to the sobbing missionary, patted her arm, and said something that the missionary couldn't understand.

This was the nightmare that Joanne (Park) Kim seemed to face nearly every week in Mongolia. It was the early 1990s, and she was a single American woman serving as one of the first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries in impoverished, post-Communist Mongolia.

On another occasion, a drunken neighbor mistook Joanne's apartment for his own. He kicked down her flimsy wooden door with his steel-toe boots and started to beat her. Joanne grabbed a broom and, screaming, fought back. It was a losing battle until Joanne used the broom to bang on the ceiling and her fellow missionaries, a married American couple, heard from their apartment above, and rushed down to rescue her.

The last straw for Joanne came when she and a fellow missionary were waiting at a bus stop on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital. A mother had invited them to her child's first haircut, which called for a big celebration in Mongolia. Joanne was instructed to wait at the bus stop because she would never be able to find the *ger* home on the unmarked streets, so she and the other missionary sat on the curb and waited for the mother to arrive.

Then four drunken men sat beside them and tried to hug and kiss Joanne.

Joanne and the other missionary moved away, but the men followed. Everyone at the crowded bus stop looked away. The men dragged the women to a deserted alley. Joanne screamed and kicked and fought back, but she was no match for the four men. Then the men threw the women onto the ground. Joanne thought it was the end.

Suddenly, the men's faces turned pale. They turned and ran away.

Joanne looked around to see who had come to save them. No one was there. At that moment, Joanne knew that the men must have seen an angel.



This mission story offers an inside look at American missionary Joanne (Park) Kim, who helped start the Seventh-day Adventist work in post-Communist Mongolia and continues to serve as a missionary there. You also can participate in the mission work through this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, part of which will help open a recreation center where children can grow spiritually, mentally, socially, and physically in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Read more about Joanne next week.