



Revive Our Hearts™

UNCOMMON  
*compassion*

Revealing the Heart of God

ERIN DAVIS

Foreword by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

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# Foreword

NANCY DEMOSS WOLGEMUTH

When the marriage you've invested in for decades suddenly and painfully falls apart, what does your heart long for?

When physical illness (whether you are the patient or the caregiver) prevents you from living the active life that you love or serving in the church where you worship, how do you hope others will react?

When you feel lost, broken, helpless, or hopeless, how do you picture God's response?

*We all crave compassion.* There are needs we cannot meet, goals we cannot achieve, and patterns we cannot break. We long for someone to look us in the eye and say, "I see you. I hurt because you are hurting. And I will help you."

And yet overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of need in the world, in the lives of friends and family members, and in our own lives, it's easy to develop compassion fatigue. We may be tempted to look away, to seek distraction, or to hope someone else will come along to meet the need.

Apathy is the norm. *Compassion is uncommon.*

## COMPASSION IS LOVE IN ACTION

As we read Scripture, we can't miss the fact that God cares for the needy. God tells us, "If [the oppressed] cries to me, I will hear, *for I am compassionate*" (Ex. 22:27). As God reveals Himself to us through His Word, He wants us to know that He is a God of compassion.

The Old Testament contains literally hundreds of laws that address the protection of the poor, infirm, and oppressed, along with widows, orphans, and sojourners. These are not just antiquated statutes for a distant culture. They are a reflection of how God feels about *us*.

God's law is more than a list of do's and don'ts. God gave these provisions to reveal His heart and to guide us, His image-bearers, in our mission to display Him to a lost and broken world.

So what is compassion, exactly? How does it impact our lives to know that we have a compassionate God? *Compassion is love in action*, a theme we see over and over in Scripture:

- God put love into action when He clothed Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen. 3:21).
- Our heavenly Father put His love into action by sending His only Son, Jesus, to earth as Immanuel, God with us (Isa. 7:14).
- Jesus put His love into action by going to the cross to bear our sins so that we could be made righteous (2 Cor. 5:21).

From the Garden to the Gospels, from Genesis to Revelation, we see a God of compassion who unceasingly puts His love for His people into action.

## OUR NEEDINESS, HIS RESPONSE

It was King David who prayed:

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,  
for I am poor and needy. (Ps. 86:1)

David had nearly limitless riches at his disposal. He was Israel's most beloved king. Yet he considered himself to be "poor and needy." What could he possibly have lacked? The answer comes when we realize

that David wasn't praying about his *physical* needs. Because he was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), he was in awe of the holiness of God and keenly aware of his own sinfulness. Broken over his spiritual poverty, David realized there was nothing he could offer to earn his way into God's favor.

Spiritually speaking, we are all poor and needy. Sin bankrupts us. We need a Savior! Yet God looks down from heaven and responds with *compassion*. Rather than responding to our many needs with apathy or frustration, He responds with love in action.

## GOD'S MERCIFUL COMPASSION

In Luke 1, Zechariah described Christ's imminent birth when he prophesied:

*Because of our God's merciful compassion,  
the dawn from on high will visit us  
to shine on those who live in darkness  
and the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace. (vv. 78–79 CSB)*

Zechariah blessed the Lord for His “merciful compassion” that would move Him to visit His people in the form of Christ, compassion that would alleviate the misery caused by sin.

“Merciful compassion” (“tender mercy”—ESV) translates the Greek word *splanchnon*. This is a rich word, which is used often in the New Testament. It refers to the inner parts of the body, the part that feels most deeply. It's what a mother feels for a child that might be in danger, or hurting or sick or needy. There's something in a mother's heart that yearns with compassion as she loves her child.

This is the heart of God toward us. His compassion is deep-seated, tender, and yearning, motivating Him to move toward us in love.

Understanding our Father's compassion helps us move toward Him with confidence in His love, like children responding to their mothers. Seeing His love in action through Christ our Savior motivates us to turn toward others and respond to their needs with compassion—love in action.

In this resource, my friend Erin Davis gives us snapshots of our compassionate God and His merciful compassion toward us, beginning in Genesis and ending in the book of Revelation.

Each chapter includes questions designed to help you consider His compassion toward you and to encourage you to express this uncommon compassion to others.

May the uncommon compassion of our God move you to worship and awe. And may it inspire you to let His compassion—His love in action—flow through you to meet the needs of those around you.

As we display His compassion together, our world will be brought face to face with the amazing, irresistible, saving grace and love of Christ.

## *An Uncommon Beginning: Compassion in the Garden*

It's impossible for any of us to imagine the "before."

Before there were planets . . .

Before there were bumblebees . . .

Before there was oxygen to breathe or lungs that needed filling . . .

Before rivers teemed with fish or skies filled with birds . . .

*There was God.*

Genesis 1:2 describes it, "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

Hold your breath for a moment. Try to picture it. Imagine that everything you've ever seen, tasted, touched, or heard is about to be formed. Let the fact that God made everything from nothing take your breath away again (or for the very first time).

In Romans 1:20, the apostle Paul writes, "His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived."

*Creation is God's first missionary.* The tulip shape of your newborn's lips, the shocking hues of a peacock's splayed feathers, and the cotton candy colored sky at sunset are all meant to reveal something about the character of God. But what, exactly?

If you're hoping to select one right answer from a multiple choice

list, I'm afraid you might face some level of disappointment. (At least, initially.) This is more like an essay question. Paul didn't tell us that the invisible *attribute* of God, singular, is visible in creation, but His *attributes*, plural. God's attributes are the characteristics that are true about Him. And since God doesn't change (Heb. 13:8), they are characteristics that have always been true of Him.

What does creation reveal to be true about God? Go ahead, make a mental list.

Here's a peek at mine:

- God is creative. (Wouldn't He have to be to come up with the aardvark?)
- God is powerful. (He made volcanoes, after all.)
- God is wise. (Which is why the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 104:24, "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all.")
- God is meticulous. (Did you know marigolds have exactly five petals?)
- God is in control. (Matthew 8:27 tells us that even the winds and waves obey Him.)

There's another attribute I see in creation, one that's easy for me to miss if I race through the account found in Genesis 1 or stay too immersed in my to-do list to observe the world around me—*it's God's compassion.*

## OUR COMPASSIONATE CREATOR

God's tender attention toward creation is striking. He is a limitless God who could have created the world any way He wanted to. With a single word everything, and everyone, could have burst onto the scene all at once.

Instead, we see God taking His time. He is a hands-on Creator who made the world with skillful order.

First came the light, followed by the darkness (Gen. 1:3–5). Then came the waters and the land (vv. 6–10), followed by plants and stars (vv. 11–13), the moon and the sun (vv. 14–19). Then, fish started swimming and birds started flying (vv. 20–23). Cows started mooing, and horses started galloping across the land God had made (vv. 24–25).

It wasn't until after God had created a home filled with food and flowers, soft grasses for lying upon, and trees filled with leaves for shade, that He created something (or rather someone) altogether different.

God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them. (v. 27)

This snapshot of humanity predates the Fall (we'll get to that in a moment), but the absence of sin in Adam and Eve did not mean the absence of need in them. They were naked and vulnerable, utterly dependent on the Lord's care.

As a parent, I understand the Lord's response to mankind's neediness. Like Adam and Eve, my four sons each came into the world naked and vulnerable, utterly dependent on me for survival. As their tiny cries for milk and warmth and comfort reached my ears, I didn't turn away in frustration. I didn't fuss at my newborns to "get it together" or to figure it out for themselves. I moved toward them with compassion, motivated by a deep awareness that they could not meet their needs on their own. Every loving parent is simply bearing the image of our first Parent, our heavenly Father, who has always moved toward His children in tender response.

Listen to Genesis 1:28–29:

God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the

earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”

Before Adam was formed from the dust or Eve was made from Adam’s ribs, God had a plan for compassionate care. He didn’t leave them to fend for themselves or to wonder about their purpose. He created humans with needs, and He lovingly, *compassionately* met those needs.

All these years later, our needs are not altogether different from those of our foreparents. We are still weak and vulnerable. We face physical and spiritual hunger. We need shelter, security, and direction. The first chapter of the Bible shows us that God is attentive to the world He has made. He is not indifferent or apathetic to our weakness. Rather He responds to our inadequacy with lovingkindness.

## COMPASSION AT THE SCENE OF THE FALL

God’s compassion at creation is one thing. Eden was shiny, new, and untainted by sin. Don’t most parents happily put their love into action when their bundle of joy cannot disobey, talk back, or leave their toothpaste guck in the sink?

What about after Adam and Eve rebelled against God? Did sin cause God to withdraw His compassion?

I hope you already know the story. Genesis 3 tells us that the serpent slithered into Eden with his heart set on deception (v. 1). Eve took the bait and reached for fruit the Lord had forbidden (v. 6). She gave some to her husband, Adam, and he ate it, too (v. 6).

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (v. 7)—this verse makes my stomach tie in a knot. The nuclear bomb of sin was dropped on God’s world, and we’re all living in the fallout zone. There’s no use sugarcoating it; Adam and Eve blew it. They disobeyed their Creator even though He had given them everything they would ever need.

I can think of a thousand ways I would have responded. My sons are not newborns anymore. They are big enough to have minds of their own, and often, those minds make choices reminiscent of Adam and Eve's rebellion. They go against the rules their dad and I have established for their good. They question our authority and sometimes our goodness. They are prone to think *their* way is better than *our* way. They're not bad kids (in fact, I think they're pretty exceptional), but their DNA has been stamped with sin. Because mine has too, my inclination is not to respond to their sin with compassion but with anger or despair. God, however, moved toward His rebellious children with tender mercy.

The LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (Gen. 3:9, 21)

Adam and Eve's sin did not go unpunished. They were sent away from their perfect garden home, and their work and relationships were cursed. Because of their sin they were forced to face physical death and would never again walk with God within the walls of Eden.

Their punishment was severe, but it was laced with compassionate grace. While Adam and Eve were hiding, God was seeking them out. When they cowered in shame, He tenderly covered them. Their weakness had just been compounded to the nth degree. There was nothing they could do to hide their sin and no way for them to make things right. But God is a compassionate Creator. At the epicenter of the Fall, He put His love into action.

Sin-free Eden is long gone. If God's compassion had been used up on that first sin, you and I would be without hope. Praise God, it wasn't!

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a  
beautiful headdress,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (61:10)

Sin has stripped us of our holiness. Like Adam and Eve, we stand bare before the Lord with no way to hide our sin and shame. Any attempt to earn our way back into God's graces is the spiritual equivalent to Adam and Eve trying to make themselves clothes out of leaves. It won't work. And yet God does not look upon us with disgust. He moves toward us with compassion.

God's compassion toward our sinful condition is so great that He sent His Son so that we might wear robes of righteousness, that we could not earn, but that Jesus did (2 Cor. 5:21).

God's compassionate response toward human sin and brokenness didn't stop at the Garden of Eden. He moved toward us in compassion at Calvary. He moves toward us in compassion still.

## COMPASSION UNLIMITED

I long to be the ambassador Christ calls me to be, and yet my heart runs away from God's law daily. I see so much of me reflected in Eve. I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if we could swap places, I'd reach for the forbidden fruit, too. And when I sin, my first inclination is to try to hide myself in shame.

Paul said it this way:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I have

the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. (Rom. 7:15, 18–19)

Like Paul, like all of us, my life is lived on the teeter-totter of sin. I want to live righteously, but I don't. I want to run away from the things God has "forbidden" but find myself running toward them instead. There are times that I can't help but wonder if God will give up on me. *He won't*. He has promised to be "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There is no expiration date, no statute of limitations, and no quota of grace God refuses to go past.

Creation is not the only tool God uses to reveal who He is. He has graciously given us His Word as a road map to His character. When we use the Bible as the lens to see our sin, we see that though we are sinful and spiritually weak, God responds to us like He did to our parents in the Garden. *He responds with compassion.*

As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.  
(Ps. 103:13)

## Pause to Reflect

How do you see God's love in action in the world around you?

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How does God’s response to Adam and Eve’s sin encourage you?

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When you consider God’s response to your own sin, what words come to mind? How does adding “compassion” to your list shift your view of God?

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