

"I AM": Compassion

Childbirth...

The ears of the nurses ringing from the screaming voice of the 'lady in labor'... "*Just get that thing out of me!!!*"

Moments later the world is at peace with the mother's gentle cooing... "*She's so precious, the most beautiful baby in the world.*"

For the rest of her life a mother will experience pains of a different kind, pains emerging from deep within. I suppose most people have some understanding, but no one understands like a mother. It is the pain felt when one of her little ones scrapes a knee or cuts a finger. It is not mere emotion tugging at the heart, but rather, a true inner pain that hurts along with the child. Dad's can feel the same kind of pain, just not, I think, quite like a mother. That deep-seated inner feeling that aches when your little one hurts is called *compassion*.

Of all the words God used to describe himself, the word *compassion* is more descriptive of his emotional involvement with humanity than any other word. Psalm 78 tells us of God's compassion toward his child, Israel. But first, a little background.

God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery through a dramatic display of miracles which ended with their crossing of the Red Sea on dry land. Yet, after only a few days, their singing and dancing turned into complaining. They were thirsty and hungry.

God was angry with His people for their lack of faith. Having seen His mighty hand of deliverance they should have known that He would also be their provider. Yet, they doubted and complained and went after false gods. The Psalmist wrote:

Their hearts were not loyal to Him.

They did not keep his covenant.

--Psalm 78:37 (NLT)

Yet, in spite of their weak faith, God responded with compassion:

**Yet he was merciful and forgave their sins
and did not destroy them all.**

**Many times he held back his anger
and did not unleash his fury!**

**For he remembered that they were merely
mortal, gone like a breath of wind that
never returns.** --Psalm 78:38-39 (NLT)

God was compassionate when the people deserved His furious anger. God would have been justified in destroying the Israelite nation for their faithless complaining and sinful idolatry. There was nothing they could do to redeem themselves; nothing that they could offer to make amends. There was no 'undo.' Their only chance for survival was the deep mother-like love that would move God to act with kindness instead of justice.

God responded with compassion toward Israel. It is tempting to say that He responded because of their weakness, but in reality it was because of His compassionate character. So it is with us today.

A mother's compassion is merely an illustration of God's compassion. It is God who gives meaning to *compassion*.

God is compassionate as a part of his divine nature. He does not *try* to show compassion. It is not 'second' nature. He does not wrestle with his inner will until compassion wins out over something else. God is, in Himself, by nature, full of *compassion*. It is just who He is.

God extends compassion when it is not deserved, when justice calls for rejection, judgment, or even death.

God could have said to Moses, "I AM who I am; I am compassion."

Oh wait . . . He did!

The LORD God, compassionate....

--Exodus 34:6