

Knowing the heart of God

Why is this so important?

Because ministry is about relationship, and not about word.

We are called into a relationship- see these men:-

Moses	I will be with you (Exodus 3:12)
Joshua	I am with you (Josh 1:5)
Jeremiah	I am with you (Jer.1:8)

1. The Compassionate Heart of God

Why must we know this? – It will keep our heart open to the possibilities

What is “Compassion?”

The word most often used in the Gospels for “compassion” is the Greek word “splanchnizomai.” Vine’s dictionary gives this definition:-

Splanchnizomai — “to be moved as to one’s inwards (splanchna), to be moved with compassion, to yearn with compassion.”

It is frequently recorded of Christ towards the multitude and towards individual sufferers: Matt 9:36; Matt 14:14; Matt 15:32; Matt 18:27; Matt 20:34; Mark 1:41; Mark 6:34; Mark 8:2; Mark 9:22 (of the appeal of a father for a demon-possessed son); Luke 7:13; Luke 10:33; of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:20.

That’s a rather forensic description, even if a very accurate one. To get a clearer understanding, we need to reflect on the way Jesus is described as having compassion. In all the references which follow, “compassion” is the translation of the Greek word “splanchnizomai.” It all looks a bit lifeless in cold print, but we have to read with our imagination, and with our heart open to feel as Jesus felt. So let’s look at some examples from Scripture where Jesus ‘had compassion.’

A. Jesus had compassion on the people because they were helpless.

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matt 9:35–38)

Jesus identified with the people. He felt their lostness and their despair. Perhaps that's why they flocked to him in their thousands. It wasn't just what he could do for them which drew them, it was how he felt about them which was so special. He didn't stand above their struggles, nor did he lecture them. He felt their position, and they knew it. He made them feel special. To do this must have placed a great strain on his emotions, but he was willing to make that commitment. God is truly moved with compassion for his creation, and for every member of that created order.

B. Jesus had compassion for the needs of people

“Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” (Matt 15:32)

It's amazing to think that Jesus would have compassion just because the people were hungry. After all, they were only hungry because they had made no provision for their needs, and they would probably not die before they got home! So why bother to feel for them, or to feed them?

To think like this is to fail to grasp the compassion of God. His compassion isn't measured by circumstance or reserved for crisis or tragedy. We commonly think that Jesus would only have compassion in a life or death situation, but in other circumstances he would just have mild concern. Jesus doesn't think in this way. His compassion is one hundred percent in all circumstances, great or small. His compassion is “full on” at all times, regardless of the circumstances. This is what we have to take hold of, and when we do, our real journey of knowing God is just beginning to blossom.

C. Jesus had compassion to help undo the ravages of sin

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matt 14:14)

“Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” (Mark 1:41)

The compassion of Jesus was always stimulated in the presence of the ravages of sin. Seeing the sick, he healed out of *splanchnizomai*. His healing ministry seems to have been motivated in part by his compassion.

D. Jesus had compassion which wants to make a way back

“So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)

This is the story which grips me the most. The cost to the father was immense, yet he waited in expectation that his child would return home. When it happened, his arms

were open wide, forgiveness was assured, and the future was changed beyond recognition for father and son. The compassion of God knows no bounds. His compassion grieves at our loss, longs for our return, and welcomes us back. Then it goes even further, restoring us to our position as sons and daughters of the King, all at his expense.

These are the biblical facts of God's compassion, seen through the word *splanchizomai*. This is what we have to try and understand, if we are to grasp the depths of this word for Hong Kong. We have to remember that compassion, while being theologically correct, is in the end not about facts but about feelings. I have not put personal stories in this section, preferring to let the texts speak for themselves. But I too had to be changed in my view of compassion. For me it was far from an intellectual experience.

I was visiting Mumbai in India. I went, being quite sure that the best way to help people was to give to charities and missions working with them, and not to give to people on the streets. I still think that this is the right way to give, but I didn't realise how much I had intellectualised the experience of compassion. As I walked under a railway arch, a beggar woman, carrying a small baby, rushed up to me. She spoke words in Hindi that I couldn't understand, and then touched the hand of the baby on my arm. As I looked at that tiny hand resting on my arm, my heart was touched with God's compassion, for the child that should it be used in this way, for its mother, and the whole system which produced this beggary. I know all the theory about giving to organisations and missions who know what they are doing, but that tiny hand forced me to a different level, well beyond money. I felt the Lord might be saying to me, "It's not about money, it's all about hearts." I was moving away from my intellect to my feelings, which were reflecting God's feelings.

I'm not against the intellect. Our mind is such a valuable recourse, enabling us to study the biblical use of compassion, so as to get a deeper grasp of what God is saying. But in the end, we have to move across from intellect to emotion. It's in the feelings world that we encounter compassion, and are changed by it. This process, as I have discovered, is not as easy as it looks.

2. Pain in the heart of God.

Opposed (Mark 3:6) insulted (Mark 6:3) and ultimately rejected (John 19:12) he knows all about these feelings. He warned us that the world would reject us, as it rejected him. So when we are exposed to rejection because of our ministry, we are in good company

We will encounter this over and over again.
Why must we know it?

3. Longing and hope in the heart of God

God longs for our return to his side. See these passage:-

Prodigal Father	Luke 15
Ephraim	Hosea 11:8
Never forsake	Hebs. 13:5

The pain and the longing go together. We have to learn to know both, to experience both, and to take both into our hearts. This is so hard, but it is the only way to a deeper relationship, and consequently, deeper prophecy.