

WHAT IS GOD'S HEART LIKE?

Summary: God's heart is not cold or distant—He is loving, compassionate, merciful, and faithful.

Psalm 103:8-14 (NASB 1995)

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.
⁹ He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
⁹ He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.
¹² As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.
¹⁴ For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are but dust.*

Introduction

Let me ask you a question. When you mess up—when you fail, when you fall short—what do you imagine God's face looks like?

Many of us imagine God's face looking disappointed, or turned away in disgust. We assume His heart is like ours—quick to take offense and slow to forgive. We think we have to "clean up" before we can show up.

But Scripture tells a different story. If you want to know what God's heart is truly like, don't look at your feelings; look at His self-introduction. Don't listen to the devil's lies. Listen to God's Word.

The most famous revelation of God's character happened during Israel's worst moment. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the tablets of Ten Commandments, the people below were already shattering it—trading the glory of the living God for a golden statue.

Common sense says God should have walked away. But here is the **shock factor:** In the very moment Israel deserved a final sentence of judgment, God didn't respond with a list

of their failures; He responded by inviting Moses back up the mountain to hear the most beautiful description of His heart (recorded in Exodus 34).

Content

Let me provide the background info on this chapter. Before Chapter 34, Moses had a meeting with the LORD in the tent. During his meeting, he asked the Lord to show His glory to him. The LORD said, “*You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!*” (Exodus 33:20). Later, in his meeting on the mountain, the LORD showed Moses His back. Here, He speaks His own name (the LORD twice) and reveals His true nature to Moses.

I. GOD'S HEART IS REVEALED, NOT HIDDEN

As He passed by in front of Moses, the LORD proclaimed as follows (Exodus 34:6–7):

… “*The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;....*”

Please note here that this is not Moses describing God. This is **the LORD God describing Himself**. Pay attention to the words that He declared. The first words God chooses to say about His heart are not: “I am Almighty,” “I am demanding,” or “I am easily offended.”

Instead: “I am compassionate,” “I am gracious,” “I am slow to anger,” and “I am abounding in steadfast love.” E.g., Imagine introducing yourself to someone for the first time. What you say first matters most. In the same way, the LORD introduces Himself by revealing His mercy.

He wants to be known to us with right understanding of Him—not with misconception. Not as an angry or harsh God, but a merciful and compassionate God.

Now, if God is not hidden, but has revealed Himself as compassionate, how does that compassion look when it meets our reality? That leads us to Psalm 103.

II. GOD'S HEART IS MOVED BY COMPASSION

Psalm 103:13 says, “*Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*”

Please note here that God's compassion is not passive sympathy. It is **active concern**. When you suffer, do you picture God looking away in boredom, or do you picture Him leaning in with active concern? E.g., Remember Christmas? God sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sins. He didn't wait until humanity says we are sorry. He took initiative. His compassion is proactive.

In fact, Scripture testifies that our compassionate God *sees, hears, and acts*. To understand God's heart, we must understand the difference between **sympathy** and **compassion**.

E.g., Imagine you are walking down a city street, and you see someone who has tripped and fallen into a muddy puddle. Their groceries are scattered, they are soaked, and they look embarrassed and hurt.

- **Sympathy** stands on the sidewalk, looks down, and says, 'Oh, that's terrible. I feel so bad for them. I hope someone helps them.' Sympathy stays on the dry pavement. It feels a nudge in the heart, but it doesn't move the feet.
- **Compassion**, however, doesn't just feel—it acts. Compassion steps off the curb and into the puddle. It gets its own shoes muddy. It bends down, picks up the groceries, and offers a hand to pull the person up.

When the Bible says Jesus was 'moved with compassion,' it uses a Greek word that means He felt it in His 'gut.' It wasn't a polite, distant pity. It was a physical ache that forced Him to move.

When Jesus met the leper in Mark 1, He didn't just shout a prayer of healing from a safe distance. He **reached out and touched him**. He stepped into the 'muddy puddle' of that man's life. He took the risk of becoming 'unclean' so that the man could become clean.

The Application for You: Maybe you've been sitting in a 'puddle' of grief, or a mess of your own making, and you think God is just standing on the sidewalk watching you. But the Gospel tells us He has already stepped off the curb. In Jesus, the Lord got His hands dirty. He didn't stay in the 'dry' safety of heaven; He entered our mess to pull us out.

Compassion is not weakness—it is holy strength directed toward suffering. God does not turn away from our pain; His heart moves toward it. That leads us to the next aspect of God's heart: grief.

III. GOD'S HEART IS GRIEVED BY SIN, BUT NOT REPULSED BY SINNERS

Genesis 6:5-6 says: “⁵ Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

continually.⁶ *The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.*"

Let me read it again. "*The Lord was grieved in His heart...*" Does this verse shock you? God is not emotionally distant. Sin genuinely grieves Him. But the good news is that His grief does not equal rejection of people.

We often confuse **grief** with **repulsion**. Think about a doctor who is treating a patient with a life-threatening disease. When that doctor looks at the cancer, he hates it. He wants to cut it out. He is 'angry' at what the disease is doing to the person's body. But he isn't repulsed by the **patient**. In fact, the more the disease spreads, the more the doctor focuses his attention on the patient. His hatred for the disease flows out of his care for the person.

When Genesis 6 says God was 'grieved in His heart' by the wickedness of man, it doesn't mean He was sitting in heaven saying, '*I can't stand to look at these people anymore.*' It means He was looking at the 'cancer' of sin and seeing how it was destroying the people He created for glory.

The Key Insight: Sin doesn't make God want to leave the room; it makes Him want to intervene. If you have been hiding from God because you are ashamed of your 'cancer'—your habit, your secret, your failure—you need to know this: God isn't repulsed by you. He is grieved by what is hurting you. He doesn't look at you with the eyes of a judge who wants to evict you; He looks at you with the eyes of a Father who wants to heal you.

His grief is the ultimate proof of His love. You don't grieve over something you don't care about. If God's heart is grieved by our distance, His feet are moved to close the gap. That leads us to the final point.

IV. GOD'S HEART RUNS TOWARD THE REPENTANT

We all know the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The story follows a younger son who demands his inheritance early—effectively wishing his father dead—and squanders it on a life of "reckless living" in a distant land. When a famine strikes and he is reduced to feeding pigs (an "unclean" task for a Jew), he "comes to his senses" and returns home, hoping only to be hired as a servant. Instead, his father sees him from a distance and runs to embrace him, restoring his status with a robe, a ring, and a massive celebration. While the son was on his way back home, he was still a long way off, "... his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran, ..." (**Luke 15:20**).

This is the clearest picture of God's heart. The father refers to our heavenly Father who: Sees, Feels compassion, Runs, and Embraces. E.g., In Middle Eastern culture, dignified

men did not run. But this father does—because love outruns dignity. To run, the father would have to "gird up his loins"—essentially lifting his long robes and exposing his ankles, which was considered shameful for a patriarch. God is willing to look 'undignified' in His pursuit of you. He trades His dignity for your restoration. God's mercy moves faster than our shame.

Conclusion

What is God's heart like? It is a heart that is **open** when we expect it to be closed. It is a heart that **runs** when we expect it to sit in judgment. It is a heart that **grieves** over what hurts us, more than it angers over what we've done.

If you have believed that God is disappointed in you, hear this: God is not waiting to punish the repentant—He is waiting to embrace them.

Invitation:

As we close today, I want to challenge the 'default' image you may have of God.

Some of you have been living like the Israelites at the foot of the mountain—you feel the weight of your own 'golden calves,' the things you've put before God, and you're afraid to look up. Others of you feel like you're sitting in a muddy puddle of life's circumstances, waiting for a God who you think is distant to finally notice you.

Here is your action step for this week: Stop trying to 'fix the mess' before you talk to the Father.

If God's heart truly runs toward the repentant, then your shame is not a barrier—it's the very place where His mercy wants to meet you. This week, in your prayer time, I want you to start not with your 'to-do' list, but by saying this simple sentence: *'Father, I believe Your heart is moving toward me right now.'* Don't wait until you're 'clean' to come home. He is already running down the road to meet you. Will you stop running away and let Him embrace you? Let's pray.

Closing prayer: Lord, thank You that You are a 'puddle-stepping' God. Thank You that You are a Surgeon who heals what we cannot fix. And thank You that You are a Father who runs toward us while we are still a long way off. This week, help us believe Your heart is moving toward us. Amen.