God's compassion
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One of the most important characteristics of God is that he is compassionate. When God sees people who are hurting and in need, he is moved to help them. This is compassion. God is not cold and distant to those who are hurting. He cares for them and helps them. Like many of God's attributes, compassion reveals the God of the Bible to be a God who is intimately in touch with the needs of his people.

God's self-definition
Compassion is so important to God's nature that it is the first word he uses to describe himself. In Exodus, Moses asked God to reveal himself to the leader of Israel. God graciously answered his request. And his answer is basically God’s definition of himself. Imagine if God described himself to us. Well, we don’t have to wonder what God is like. He tells us.

God begins his self-definition by using his personal name, Yahweh. After that, God says this about himself, "The God of compassion and mercy!" (Exodus 34:6). The first character quality that God lists is compassion. He doesn’t say king, holy, gracious or even loving, even though all those words certainly describe God. He uses compassion.

Jesus and compassion
God helps hurting people. He helps those who are hurting through no fault of their own. He helps the poor, the oppressed, and the fatherless. And he helps those who are hurting because of their own sin. As James 5:11 says, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” Far from giving us what we deserve, God shows us mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus had this same sort of compassion in his own life. When Jesus looked upon the crowds of hurting people he had compassion on them (Matthew 9:36). His compassion led him to minister to people’s physical and spiritual needs. He healed the sick and cast out demons because of his compassion toward people. Jesus was moved to help people.

Compassion in the Christian
As recipients of God’s compassion, God wants us to extend compassion to others. In Luke 6:36, Jesus commands us, “You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.” Christians must be known for their compassion, like Jesus, meeting people’s physical and spiritual needs. In fact, showing compassion to those in need is evidence that a person is a Christian (1 John 3:17). A mark of a mature Christian is a growing sense of compassion toward others.

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