

## Filled with Compassion

**T**oo many people think of God only as one who is offended when we make a mistake and who is ready to exact punishment for that offense. The three stories in today's Gospel passage tell a different story. They tell how, when we make a mistake, God runs after us to bring us back. The description "filled with compassion" (Luke 15:20), which describes the sentiments of the Samaritan, is really a description of God.

In Hebrew, compassion or mercy comes from the word for "womb," and it describes the intimate bond between a woman and the life in her womb. Though the Greek word in the New Testament is not related to womb, it does mean deep inner sentiment. The word conveys the deep sentiment the Samaritan felt for a perfect stranger, the deep sentiment of the distraught father with his prodigal son, the deep sentiment of God for every one of us.

These three Gospel stories highlight another important point: The compassion was not a response to repentance. The lost sheep, the negligent woman, and the wayward son were all somehow responsible for their predicaments, but nothing was held against them. Nor did they have to correct their error before the situation was corrected. None of this mattered. This was Jesus' way of saying that God's compassion is there even before we ask for it, because compassion or mercy is not simply an act; it is the intimate and lasting love that God has for us.

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### FOR Reflection

- ★ Reflect on this passage from Isaiah 49:15:  
"Can a mother forget...the child of her womb?"
- ★ Where might you show compassion to others?

*[Jesus said,] "...There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."*

LUKE 15:7



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