

# Bible Study - God's Character

Week 2 - Compassion

## Recap

- ❖ God's character can be summarized through Exodus 34:6-7
- ❖ Exodus 34:6-7 comes as a result of God forgiving the Israelites for disobeying Him by building the golden calf
- ❖ The emphasis on loyal love and faithfulness indicates God's inclination towards mercy and grace when dealing with humanity



Opening Question:

What do you  
associate with the  
word “compassion”?

## Objectives for today's Bible Study

- ❖ Understand what compassion means
- ❖ Feel the emotional component of the word
- ❖ Learn the implied action of the word
- ❖ Observe instances of compassion throughout the Bible



# *Rakhum* and Related Words

- ❖ As we saw in the video, the Hebrew word for compassion is *rakhum*, which can also be translated to “compassionate one”
- ❖ What word is *rakhum* derived from, and what does it mean?
- ❖ *Rakhum* is derived from *rekhem*, which means “womb”
- ❖ This connection to the word “womb” is meant to evoke an image of tender care for infants when they are at their most vulnerable

# Rakhum and Related Words

- ❖ This makes compassionate an emotional word with clear connotations in the Hebrew
- ❖ The rekhem word group includes the following:
  - Verb
    - To show compassion”, “to deeply feel”, “to love” (*rakham*) - appears 47 times
  - Adjective
    - “Compassionate”, “compassionate one” (*rakhum*) - 13 times
  - Nouns
    - Womb (*rekhem*) - appears 31 times
    - Compassion (*rakhamim*) - appears 39 times

# The Emotional Component of the word Compassion

- ❖ In the Hebrew Bible, the word compassion seems to signify emotion
  - Genesis 43:30
  - 1 Kings 3:26
- ❖ It is often used to describe God's response when He hears His people cry out, depicting an emotional response to their suffering
  - Nehemiah 9:27 - 28
- ❖ Compassion is also used in contrast to anger, so that having compassion represents turning away from anger
  - Isaiah 54:8
  - Psalm 77:9

# The Emotional Component of the word Compassion

- ❖ In the Bible, God is often compared to a parent because of His compassion. Sometimes, He is described with imagery of a nursing mother who is caring and attentive to her baby
  - Isaiah 49:15-16
- ❖ We also see God nurturing Israel like a parent would a child
  - Isaiah 49:10
- ❖ Compassion is often used to describe action towards children. In addition, the word is used for humans who should have compassion on children
  - Lamentations 4:10



# The Implied Action of the word Compassion

- ❖ So compassion is an emotional word, but it also motivates action. We see this in the way it is used in parallel relationship with the concepts of forgiveness and deliverance
- ❖ Compassion as Forgiveness
  - The words for compassion are consistently used in parallel with the idea of forgiveness. So God's compassion is often expressed by His forgiveness of people

Micah 7:19	Nehemiah 9:17	Daniel 9:9
Psalms 78:38	<b><u>Psalms 51:1</u></b>	
<b><u>Isaiah 55:7</u></b>	Psalms 79:8	

# The Implied Action of the word Compassion

- ❖ Compassion as Deliverance from Suffering
  - The words for compassion are also consistently used in the context of deliverance or rescue (which may also involve forgiveness). God having compassion on His people can be synonymous with delivering them from suffering and restoring His people from exile.

Deuteronomy 30:2-3	<b><u>Hosea 1:7</u></b>	Isaiah 49:13
Isaiah 14:1	<b><u>Zechariah 10:6</u></b>	Jeremiah 30:18
Isaiah 54:7	Psalms 116:4-6	Zechariah 1:16

# Compassion in the Story of the Bible - The OT

- ❖ Many times throughout the biblical narrative, Israel fails God and worships other gods. The golden calf story of Exodus 34 sets up the paradigm for this narrative, and it also shows us God's compassionate response...
- ❖ ...yet Israel repeats the same pattern throughout scripture...
  - What are some examples of when the Israelites failed God in the Old Testament?
- ❖ ...but God continually looks on them the way a parent does with a loved child and responds to their cries

# Compassion in the Story of the Bible - The OT

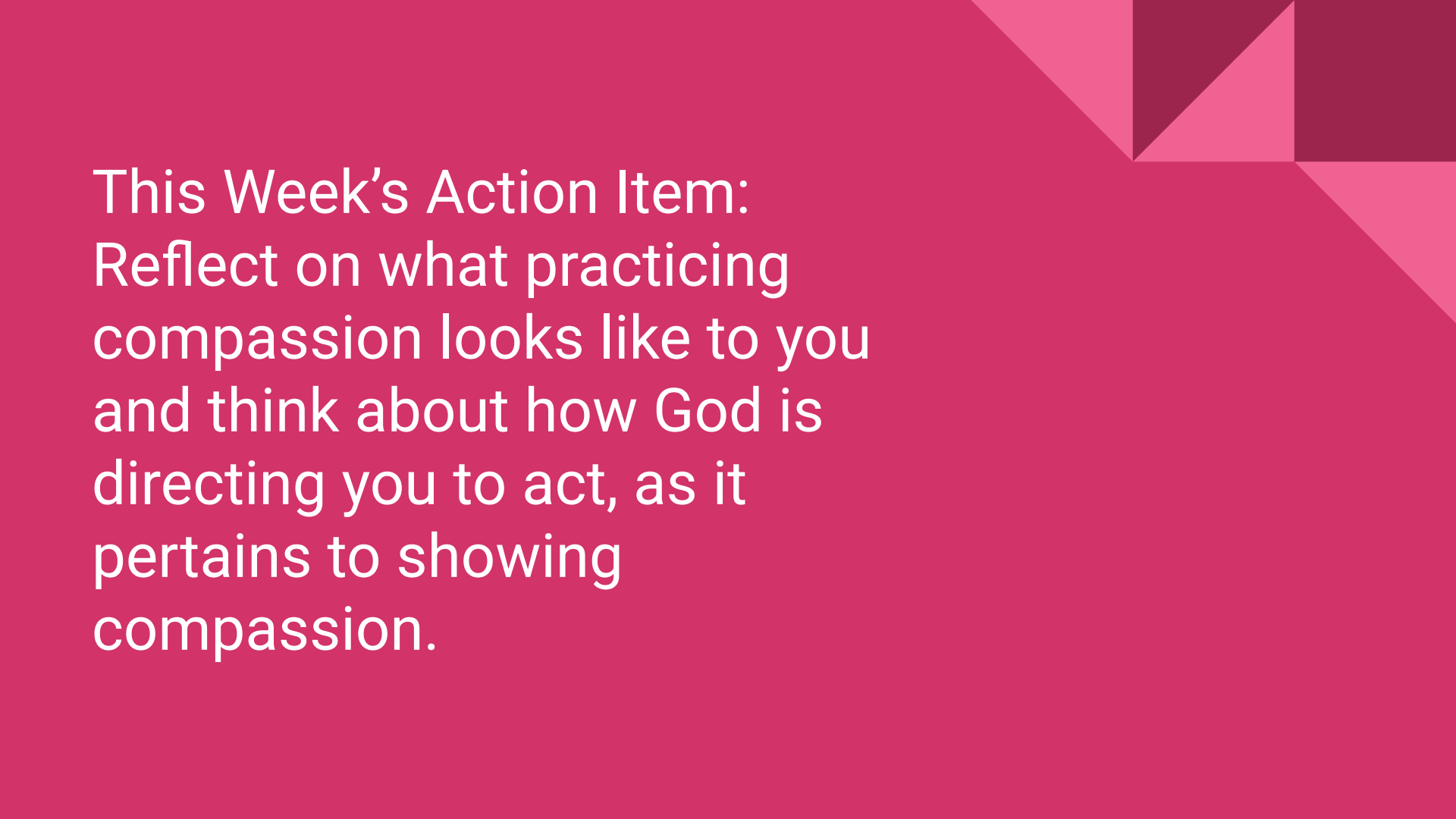
- ❖ Ultimately, the people's rebellion against God lands them in exile, and they are scattered to the nations (2 Kings 17, 25). This is a state described as God not having compassion on them (Isaiah 27:11)...
- ❖ ...yet God is still compassionate and does not abandon the Israelites forever. Which is why there are many messages of hope coming from the prophets to the people in exile...
  - Jeremiah 31:20
- ❖ ...and as the Old Testament closes, the people are encouraged to continue to hope in God's compassion, that He will rescue His people
  - Zechariah 10:6

# Compassion in the Story of the Bible - The NT

- ❖ When we get to the New Testament, we see the story of God's deep compassion continue to play out in Jesus. Jesus is God's deep compassion embodied in human form.
- ❖ The Hebrew words for compassion get translated into Greek as either *oiktirmos* or *spagnon*, and shows up at least 35 times in the NT
- ❖ The idea of God's compassionate care, forgiveness, and rescue from suffering is seen repeatedly in the person of Jesus as He embraces the sick, cares for the outcast, and is deeply moved by human suffering
  - Matthew 14:13-14

# Compassion in the Story of the Bible - The NT

- ❖ Jesus also uses the imagery of motherly compassion that we found in the OT to express His care for His people. He compares Himself to a mother hen who uses her wings to shield her chicks from danger.
  - Luke 13:34
- ❖ And, in the ultimate expression of compassion, Jesus is moved to take humanity's suffering on Himself, unto death, to rescue and bring us near to God.
  - 1 Peter 2:24
- ❖ And then, as followers of Jesus who have received God's compassion, we are called to also be compassionate to others.
  - Ephesians 4:32



This Week's Action Item:  
Reflect on what practicing  
compassion looks like to you  
and think about how God is  
directing you to act, as it  
pertains to showing  
compassion.