

## CHAPTER 22

# GOD

# IS MERCIFUL

Headlines in recent years have exclaimed: “Horrible Earthquake Hits Japan,” “Hurricane Mitch Is Most Devastating Storm on Record,” “North Texas Hit By Severe Drought; Farmers Reeling.”

Why are these things happening to good people? Of course, no one can read the mind of God to find out why He allows certain disasters to occur. However, these headlines also remind us of just how gracious God is to us. For the most part, the natural world around us functions according to an orderly plan. We realize that a fraction of change in our environment could destroy all life on Earth. If the distance between the Earth and sun was changed even slightly, our atmosphere would be too cold or too hot to sustain life. Without sufficient atmosphere around the Earth, harmful rays from outer space would kill us. But God sustains this planet on which we live in a marvelous fashion so that we enjoy night and day, summer and winter, rainy seasons and dry.

Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount, “[God] gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too.”<sup>1</sup> God provides the necessities of life for every human born on this planet. Many times we take His mercy for granted—until we experience a devastating blizzard with the mercury plummeting,

or when summer temperatures soar into the 100s for days on end. Then we complain about how bad things are.

Unfortunately, we rarely thank God for the thousands of days of beautiful sunshine. How often do we stop to be thankful that, year after year, the flowers bloom and our grocery store shelves are stocked with food grown in the farmers' fields? When was the last time you felt gratitude for your enjoyment of food, friendships, music, art, and so many other things?

When we think of these blessings, our thoughts eventually end up at the doorstep of mercy. God's mercy is an attribute that leads Him to show compassionate concern

for His people and tenderhearted treatment of the needy.<sup>2</sup> Our merciful God always seeks the welfare, both temporal (life on earth) and eternal (life in heaven forever), of His children and those who have not yet accepted His love and forgiveness. Although many people show mercy to others, God is the grand master of mercy. His very nature desires to relieve us of the self-imposed misery and distress we experience because of our sin. Let me give you an allegory of a merciful judge that dramatically illustrates how amazing God's mercy is.

### **THE MERCIFUL JUDGE**

The wretched, shackled prisoner trembled with fear as he stood before the imposing bench of the toughest, fairest judge in the district. "You have been found guilty," the judge solemnly announced. Courtroom observers held their breath, waiting for what they were sure was to come.

Without a doubt the man was guilty. The evidence was clear. The judge had no choice but to pronounce a death sentence. There were no appeals for the horrendous crime, no stays of execution allowed.

Suddenly to everyone's shock, the judge did something unprecedented in legal history. He said to the prisoner, "Justice must be served. You are guilty. You are totally unlovable. Nevertheless, I love you, in spite of yourself. And because of my love for you, I have decided to take your place. I will take your punishment for you. I will die in your place. You are a free man. You can go now." The judge's gavel pounded. The courtroom was silent.

After a stunned moment, courtroom guards unlocked the prisoner's handcuffs and legs irons, removed the judge's robe, and snapped the irons on his wrists and ankles. As the judge was led away to death row, the shocked prisoner numbly walked out of the courtroom door to freedom, tears of gratitude streaming down his cheeks.

This, of course, is an allegory about God’s mercy. God is the judge. Since He is perfectly just, all His actions must serve the universal law of justice. We are like the prisoner. We all deserve the death sentence, because we are all guilty of numerous sins: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>3</sup> In His fairness, God must judge our sin with the harshest punishment: “The wages of sin is death.”<sup>4</sup> He cannot allow us to inhabit His perfect heaven, that place without a spot of uncleanness, a thought of wrongdoing, or a charge of guilt.

In the supreme act of mercy, God displayed divine favor and forbearance to us guilty offenders. He took our punishment upon Himself. That is what Jesus Christ did for us at Calvary: “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>5</sup> By His sacrifice, all who put their trust in Him are declared “not guilty” and freed! That was true mercy and grace.

### **OUR GRACIOUS SAVIOR**

The fact is that when we sin, we will never be excused from the penalty. As we saw earlier, because of God’s holiness, sin must always be punished. All our claims that we were tricked into sin or that we did not know our action was sin gets us nowhere with God.

If that sounds cruel and unfair, here is the good news! Jesus provided a dramatic reprieve from our sentence and punishment. Jesus was beaten, tortured, and hung on a cross to die in our place to satisfy God’s demand for justice. The Merciful Judge became Our Gracious Savior!

Peter explains, “[Jesus] bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.”<sup>6</sup> When Jesus came, His blood was spilled so we could experience God’s mercy. Jesus’ sacrifice is the ultimate expression of God’s mercy.

Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross satisfied God’s just nature. God, the divine Judge, showed mercy and clemency for us guilty sinners. It is the mercy of God that sees man weighed down by sin and therefore in a sorry and pitiful condition, needing divine help. At the cross, God’s attributes of *both* justice and mercy found complete fulfillment—simultaneously! Is that not amazing?

## **GOD'S MERCY EXTENDS BEYOND OUR NEW BIRTH**

God's mercy does not end with the forgiveness of our sins. As His children, He provides us an abundant life that is much more than we deserve or could ever expect. In His mercy, He provides what we need to begin growing in His Spirit. His mercy also gives us peace. He shows us compassion as we walk with Him day by day. And His mercy also means that He will discipline us as a father disciplines his child. Let us look at each of these aspects of God's mercy.

First, God does not forgive our sins, then just send us our own way. He has a plan for our lives that will bring us to maturity in His grace.

Scott was a teenage gang member who lived in an eastern U.S. city. At 14 years old, he killed another gang member in a street fight. He was convicted and sent to a juvenile prison. While there, he attended a Bible study led by a Christian from the region. Based on the Scripture passages he was shown, Scott recognized that God's mercy extended even to him. Though feeling terribly unworthy, he received Christ as His Savior.

While in the juvenile prison, he met regularly for Bible study to grow in his new faith. He was still in his teens when he was released, but he did not want to go back to his inner city environment. Acting with the mercy of God, the Bible study leader took Scott into the home he and his wife had established as a discipling center for young men who showed genuine commitment to Jesus Christ while in prison.

Scott spent two years in the halfway house. He made such progress—completing his high school degree and growing as a Christian young man—that he was accepted as a student at a well-known Christian college. As a student, he began sharing the love and mercy of God with other young men incarcerated in the state juvenile detention centers. He wants to minister to inner city youth who are without hope because they do not know Christ.

Ephesians 2:4 describes God as being rich in mercy. Have you experienced this in your walk with God? He has an unlimited abundance of mercy, which originates in His being. He gives His abundance of mercy to us all the days of our lives—and for eternity.

## **GOD'S MERCY BRINGS US PEACE**

Some years ago, I was invited to speak to the inmates of one of the most infamous high-security prisons in America: the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia. When I arrived at the penitentiary's assembly room, several of the inmates rushed over to me,

embraced me, and called me “brother.” They told me they had heard my messages on tape, and had been introduced to Christ or disciplined by my books. Before I spoke, several stood and gave testimony of how they had been forgiven by God through faith in Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection. One man spoke of how he had murdered five people. Another man confessed to killing three. Others had committed similar crimes. They told of how they came to the prison full of hate and fear—and then they met Jesus and were transformed.

Tears streamed down my face as I listened to these testimonies of God’s forgiveness, mercy, and love. Again and again different prisoners said, “I’m glad I’m here. If I had not been sent to prison, I would not know Christ, and I would probably be dead because of my life of crime.”

These prisoners—these men behind bars—had experienced the wonder of God’s eternal pardon from their sins. They had received peace of heart and mind. They were experiencing purpose and meaning for their lives, even in their prison cells.

God’s mercy enables us to break free from the habits of sin that have bound us. As a result, we can have peace, joy, fulfillment, and purpose. We will find the true meaning for living—serving God. We will find the true joy in life—serving others. We will find true peace and fulfillment—living in God’s presence and will moment by moment.

### **GOD’S MERCY MEANS HE HAS COMPASSION FOR US**

What astounds me as an imperfect human being is that God genuinely feels pity and compassion for us during our trials and difficulties. We have the assurance that “the

LORD comforts His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones.”<sup>7</sup> Our loving Father does not just feel our pain, He wants to relieve our pain. He will if we will trust and obey Him.

The Gospels are filled with examples of how Jesus was moved with compassion to help those who were sick, suffering, and in need. The woman who had been ill with bleeding for many years was healed when she touched His garment. Jesus reached out His hands and healed the blind man, Bartimaeus, and the ten lepers. And the woman caught in adultery? He spoke compassionately to her and forgave her, saying,

“Neither do I [condemn you]. Go and sin no more.”<sup>8</sup> We can be sure that our merciful God is beside us through every trial we face and every pain we endure, and will help

us live for His glory in every situation.

### **GOD'S MERCY IS EVIDENT IN HIS DISCIPLINE**

If you are a parent, you know that your feelings of compassion and mercy toward your child will often be tested. At times you will have to exercise discipline. A child does not know he is loved unless his parents set up behavior boundaries and then enforce them in love and fairness.

When Vonette and I disciplined our sons, Zac and Brad, we did so in love. When one of our sons disobeyed us, we would first explain why we were punishing him, then we would follow through with the appropriate discipline. When it was all over, we would hug our son and emphasize that we disciplined him because we loved him.

One day Zac came home from kindergarten with a puzzled look on his face. With a serious tone of voice, he announced, "I don't think many of the children at school have parents who love them like you love me."

Mystified, Vonette asked, "Why do you say that, honey?"

"Because they are so disobedient," he said confidently. Zac had figured out that lovingkindness includes discipline.

The loved child understands when someone cares enough to take the time to correct wrong behavior. That is the way God is with us. When we become part of His family through our spiritual birth, He corrects and rebukes us for the things we do

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wrong. As we listen to His Spirit and obey His Word, we become fulfilled, joyful members of His family.

### **GOD DISPLAYS HIS MERCY THROUGH US**

The most exciting aspect of God's mercy is that we can be His example of mercy here on earth. Let me tell you a story about a beloved friend, a godly man whom I highly respect and admire.

Many years ago in Korea, Dr. Joon Gon Kim and his family were enjoying an evening together. Suddenly, an angry band of Communist guerrillas invaded their village, killing everyone in their path. In their trail of blood, the guerrillas left behind the dead bodies of Dr. Kim's wife and father. Dr. Kim was beaten and left for dead. In the cool rain of the night, he revived and fled for safety with his young daughter to the mountains. They were the sole survivors.

Can you imagine how we would feel if this happened to us? Since Dr. Kim is a man of God, he knew from Scripture that he must love his enemies and pray for those

who persecute him. The Spirit of God impressed upon Dr. Kim to return to the village, seek out the Communist chief who led the guerrilla attack, and tell him that he loved him. Then he was to tell that man about God's love in Christ. Dr. Kim obeyed the impression God had given him. When he met the Communist chief, the man was dumbfounded because he had believed that the guerrillas had killed Dr. Kim. He knelt in prayer with Dr. Kim and committed his life to Christ. Within a short time, more Communists came to Christ, and Dr. Kim helped build a church for these and other Communist converts.

In 1958, Dr. Kim accepted the position as director of Korean Campus Crusade for Christ, our first international ministry. He is a living demonstration of God's mercy. 10

As I walk in the Spirit and grow in appreciation for the mercy of God to me, I find that mercy overflows from my life into the lives of others. If I plant the seeds of God's mercy in the hearts and minds of others, they produce a harvest of love for God and repentance of sin.

### **GOD'S MERCY HAS AN END**

Although God's mercy toward His own people extends throughout eternity, His mercy toward the unrepentant sinner does not last forever.

Before Alexander the Great would lay siege to a city, he would set up a light giving notice to those who lived within the city that if they came to him while that light was still burning, he would spare their lives. But once the light was out—no mercy was to be expected.

In very much the same way, God sets up light after light and waits year after year for sinners to come to Him so that they also may have eternal life. He does not want

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anyone to perish, so He is giving more time for everyone to repent.

But be aware that a time is coming when there will be no more mercy. God does not want us to be destroyed by our sinfulness, so He offers us mercy, but we must be willing to accept it before we run out of time. Those who feel they can wait until later to receive God's offer of mercy can never be sure that they will have the time or opportunity to receive His mercy.

The time is so urgent to call people to repentance. We do not know who has a tomorrow, or whose hearts are soft toward God. Right now is the time to present them with God's message of mercy, to show them the mercy that God has liberally given us. As we approach a new millennium, we are reminded that our Lord Jesus may return at

any moment. While we ourselves must be ready, we must warn those who have not heard of His gracious mercy or who have not heeded God's call.

In light of His mercy to us, our hearts should be filled with gratitude, praise, and worship. We should reach beyond our Christian circles of comfort and extend God's mercy to those who hate or ignore us. Author David Morris writes, "When Jesus came to earth, He changed seats with us and took on all our sin, rejection, and shame so we

could see ourselves from His perspective."<sup>12</sup> We should never lose the awe and appreciation of what God has done for us. We once wore filthy garments stained by sin and corruption; now we are clothed in spotless robes of righteousness—all because of the mercy of God! That perspective will change the way we worship, reverence, and serve our God. We will see differently the need of the people to whom He is sending us.

# LIFE APPLICATION

**EXALT YOUR GOD**—Meditate on the following verses and praise God for the specific ways He has demonstrated mercy in your life.

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; in You I trust, O my God...No one whose hope is in You will ever be put to shame...Show me Your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long. Remember, O LORD, Your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to Your love remember me, for You are good, O LORD (Psalm 25:1–7, NIV).

God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 2:4).

Where is another God like You, who pardons the sins of...His people? You cannot stay angry with Your people forever, because You delight in showing mercy (Micah 7:18).

**REFLECT HIS IMAGE**—The Word of God states in Micah 6:8, “O people, the LORD has already told you what is good, and this is what He requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Do you love mercy? Are you quick to forgive? Spend some time with your compassionate God and ask Him to mold you into His image to become a lover of mercy.

**SHARE HIS MAJESTY**—Do you have a friend who needs to hear about God’s mercy? If he does not know Jesus, share with him Appendix A, “How to Know God Personally.” If he is a believer, remind him that his heavenly Father is “full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:11, NIV).

## CHAPTER 23

# GOD EXPECTS US TO EXTEND MERCY

Think of God's offer of mercy as a banquet to which you are invited. The table is filled with the most luscious foods: spicy appetizers, gourmet entrées steaming on heated plates, a vast array of juicy fruits, iced deserts, and cool, sweet drinks. The table is so large that it has enough room for more than the few who have come. But strangely enough, outside the door to the banquet hall stands a crowd who will not enter. They cry out, "I'm so hungry, so hungry!" You can almost hear their starved stomachs rumbling from lack of food. Yet for some reason, they will not step through the door and help themselves to the free banquet provided for them. A. W. Tozer gives this analogy when he writes:

We may plead for mercy for a lifetime in unbelief, and at the end of our days be still no more than sadly hopeful that we shall somewhere, sometime, receive it. This is to starve to death just outside the banquet hall in which we have been warmly invited. Or we may, if we will, lay hold on the mercy of God by faith, not allow skepticism and unbelief to keep us from the feast of delicious foods

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prepared for us.

God extended His mercy to us even before we were born, and before we acknowledged our need for His forgiveness. Without our Lord's sacrifice on the cross, we could not have a relationship with God. Now, because of Christ's willingness to die in our place, we can have a deep intimacy with the God who loves us unconditionally.

### **THE MERCIFUL EXTEND MERCY**

One day Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive someone. Peter thought that forgiving seven times was pretty good. "No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven!"<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus gave an illustration showing how God looks on our responsibility to forgive:

One day, a king was going over his accounts, settling old debts. He saw that one of his servants owed him millions of dollars. The king ordered the servant brought before him. When he arrived, the king demanded that the servant pay every penny. But the amount was beyond the servant's ability to pay. The king ordered the man and his family sold into slavery to pay the debt. The servant fell before the king and pleaded for mercy. The king felt pity and forgave him this tremendous debt.

That is such a wonderful picture of God's mercy. We are like the servant who could not pay the debt. But God, in His mercy, took pity on us and erased our sin debt completely.

But what did this servant do? He found a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars and demanded payment. Just imagine. He came from the throne room where he had been extended so much mercy and grabbed his friend by the throat and demanded payment! The friend begged for mercy. But the servant would not forgive him and had him thrown into prison.

When the other servants saw the injustice, they went to the king and reported what had happened. The king was angry! He called in the servant and demanded to know why the man had acted so harshly toward his friend when he himself had been forgiven so much. Then the king commanded the servant be thrown into prison until he had paid every penny.

God gave His only Son to die in our place. That is mercy beyond comprehension, beyond description. How, then, can we ever refuse to give mercy to others when we have received so much mercy ourselves? What others may have done to you does not compare with what God has forgiven you. That is why God expects us to have mercy

on others. To the degree that we show mercy to the poor, the wretched, and the guilty, we are like God. The lesson is clear: the merciful shall obtain mercy. And who among us is not a candidate for more of God's mercy?

### **OUR NEED FOR MERCY HELPS US SERVE OTHERS**

Just like the unforgiving servant, sometimes the hardest place to extend mercy is the area where God has given us the most mercy—our area of weakness.

Ed DeWeese came home one afternoon to find that thieves had gone through his home. The TV, stereo equipment, and jewelry were missing—about \$3,000 worth. He called his wife, Beth, at work and she rushed home. The police arrived and took a report. Because the DeWeeses had just moved in, they had not taken out homeowner's insurance. After the policemen left, they prayed, "Lord, we have no insurance and cannot afford to replace these things. Please return them to us."

That is when Ed's situation really hit him. He was an ex-offender. He had gone to jail for embezzlement—sophisticated burglary. He said to Beth, "We must first forgive."

After the thief had been arrested and released on bond, Ed asked a police officer to take him to the offender's home. When Ed met the man who had robbed him, he said, "I'm the man you ripped off. But brother, I forgive you in the name of Jesus."

Ed continued to visit the thief and gave a Bible to his little brother who had assisted in the crime. Soon, the robber told the police where the stolen things were hidden, and the officers recovered the DeWeeses's belongings. When the young man pleaded guilty to burglary, Ed testified in his behalf. He then helped the young man

find a job. And Ed says, "Best of all, he and his brother did receive Christ as Savior."<sup>3</sup>

Our past failures can make us more sensitive to those who need mercy in the very areas in which we once needed mercy. We can minister to others in a more meaningful way because we understand and have experienced the reality of God's mercy in our area of weakness.

### **MERCY MEANS LETTING GO OF OLD HURTS**

Corrie ten Boom encountered a situation in which her willingness to forgive was challenged. During those horrible days in 1944 in the Ravensbruck concentration camp, grim guards in blue uniforms and caps bearing the Nazi swastika stood in a line with leather crops swinging from their belts. The emaciated women dressed in prison garb worked long hours every day under the watchful eye of these guards. Corrie's

sister, Betsie, died in Ravensbruck, a victim of the tortuous conditions.

In 1947, after the war, Corrie spoke to a group of Germans in a sparsely furnished Munich church basement. Her mission was to help those who were ravaged by the war. During her talk, she said, “I have a home in Holland for victims of the war. Those who have been able to forgive their former enemies have been able to rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those, however, who have nursed their bitterness remain invalids. We, as Christians, have every reason to forgive each other, for our God richly lavishes His mercy on us—if we only ask Him.”

When she finished her talk, she was approached by a balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his nervous hands. Horror filled her as she realized he had been one of those guards who had abused Betsie in the camp. His name was Joseph.

Joseph thrust out his hand. “A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

Dumbfounded, Corrie did not take his hand.

He went on, “You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk. I was a guard there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, will you forgive me?”

Corrie remembered how he had pushed Betsie with the butt of his gun. Corrie looked down at his outstretched hand. She whispered to herself, “Jesus, help me.” Her hand slowly moved toward his. Their hands touched and she finally vigorously shook his hand. With tears in her eyes, she said, “I forgive you, brother . . . with all my heart.”

God loves us no matter what we have done. He forgives us when we ask Him. No sin is too big to be thrown into His ocean of forgiveness. Since God richly lavishes His mercy on us, we must show mercy to one another. And that means letting go of all those old hurts caused by others.

### **EXTENDING MERCY HAS A COST**

Often the most difficult place to show mercy is in close relationships—our family and friends. A middle-aged man sat in the pastor’s office, nervously wiping perspiration from his brow with the back of his hand. “There is absolutely no way I can tell this to my wife,” he said. “She would be devastated. She would never forgive me. I just cannot tell her. But I want forgiveness. I need relief from all this guilt.”

In this family’s case, the wife’s career had soared with success, while the husband’s work had plateaued. She traveled on extended business trips, gaining all kinds of recognition and earning a big salary. Meanwhile, the husband was at home

keeping the family fed and attending to household chores. In a weak moment when loneliness drove his attention elsewhere, his wife's best friend began to meet his sexual and emotional needs. He was caught in an ugly trap of betrayal, with seemingly no way out.

After counseling with the pastor, the husband went home and confessed his sin to his wife. He told her exactly what had happened and why. He admitted he was very wrong and assured her that his adulterous relationship with her friend was over. Much to his surprise, she forgave him, and they started all over again. This act of mercy came at no small cost to this rejected wife, but it led to the restoration of the relationship they once had.

God will reward us when we show mercy. One of mercy's rewards is the intimacy we enjoy in our human relationships. Another reward is the intimacy we experience in our relationship with our Lord. Since mercy is of the highest priority to God, when we are merciful, we become instruments of blessing and enjoy communication with God.<sup>4</sup>

### **GOD'S MERCY HELPS US IN OUR FAILURES**

If you ask Steve about God's mercy, he can tell you that it is bottomless. He worked hard in his local church, raising four children with a wife he loved dearly. Yet he was not walking in God's Spirit. He began to have a problem—greed. Little by little, he began taking money from his job. In time, his \$100,000 embezzlement was discovered, and he was taken to court. Still, Steve was not truly repentant. He did not realize his great need for God's mercy and help.

Because this was his first offense, the judge was lenient. Steve received a work-program sentence in which he had to spend his weekends doing community service. He was assigned to the sheriff's department. At first he did simple jobs like washing police cruisers, but soon police officials began trusting him with greater responsibilities. Eventually, they put him in charge of handling sales of items such as pepper spray. Over the next year, Steve began embezzling money from the sheriff's department until he had taken more than \$20,000!

As you might guess, he was caught once again. But this time, the court did not have mercy on him, and he was sentenced to several years in prison. Because of a paperwork mix-up, he was sent to the state penitentiary for violent criminals. Suddenly, Steve's world collapsed. His wife divorced him and he was not able to see his children. Sitting in that prison cell surrounded by men for whom violence was a way of life, he decided to commit suicide. His birthday was coming up, and he felt as

if his life was over.

His three daughters sent him a birthday letter in which they said, “Dad, all we ever wanted was you. We didn’t want the money.” Their words pierced Steve to his very soul. At that moment, he threw himself upon God’s mercy—including his greed and his pride.

When Steve was paroled, he began rebuilding his life. At first, he felt so unworthy that he did not think he could ever serve God again. But little by little, God began to restore him and heal his hurt. Three years after his release, Steve felt God nudging him to work in the singles’ ministry in his church. He approached the singles’ pastor, his conviction papers in hand. “I want to be honest with you, Pastor Ron. I am a convicted felon. But if you could find any place for me to serve God, that’s what I want to do.”

After learning about Steve’s past failures, Ron smiled and said, “Of course, we have a place for you to serve. We just won’t put you in charge of any finances.”

Since then, Steve has humbly served God in evangelism and church leadership ministry. In His mercy, God restored Steve gently and lovingly. He will do the same for you when you come before Him in humility. God wants us to be bold in asking

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Him for mercy when we need it. If we are in distress, guilt-ridden, persecuted, lonely, facing disaster, experiencing the contempt of others, struggling with our weakness, or undergoing some other difficulty, God wants us to come humbly to Him in prayer seeking His help.

Remember, people all around you need to be pointed to the mercy of God. Their hearts ache for that unconditional love and complete forgiveness. As ambassadors of Christ, we know the comfort of God’s mercy and can show others how to receive this unlimited gift.

## **GOD’S MERCY DOES NOT ELIMINATE**

### **ALL CONSEQUENCES**

Isn’t it wonderful to celebrate the mercy God has given us? At the same time, God will not remove all the consequences of our actions just because He is merciful. In Steve’s case, his sin of embezzlement still cost him his marriage. The pain for his children was real. If he could go back and do it all over again, he would rather rely on God’s strength to keep him from sin and not on God’s mercy to rescue him from his wrongdoing.

When David and Bathsheba committed adultery, God forgave David after he

confessed his sin. Nathan the prophet says about David's forgiveness, "The LORD has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin. But you have given the enemies of the

LORD great opportunity to despise and blaspheme Him, so your child will die."<sup>6</sup> But David was also restored. Later, God allowed David and Bathsheba to have another child. That child became the wisest man who ever lived: King Solomon.

God does not forgive halfway. He cleared the sin-debt against David. But God, in His wisdom, knows that if we never suffer consequences for our actions, we will not learn our lesson completely. What would unbelievers think if believers got away with all kinds of misbehavior with no consequences? What would the world say about us? That we serve God because He makes everything easy for us? Instead, our consequences can be a way to glorify God.

### **EXTENDING MERCY IS NOT BEING TOLERANT**

People today, even many Christians, are more concerned about a need for *tolerance* than a need for *mercy*. There is a great difference! Josh McDowell, a fellow Crusade staff member and founder of the "Right from Wrong" campaign, says that tolerance and Christian love cannot coexist. Similarly, tolerance and mercy cannot coexist. The

Word of God exhorts Christians to speak the truth in love.<sup>7</sup> Mercy rooted in love demands that a person be told if he is doing something self-destructive or harmful to others.

The problem we encounter in separating mercy and tolerance is that we live in an age where the majority of our society does not accept the idea of absolute truth. The Biblical concept of sin has been replaced by a demand for tolerance of any activity. Consequently, tolerance has replaced mercy, especially in government, schools, colleges, industry, and the media. Tolerance is demanded for almost every bizarre and perverted belief and behavior.

When tolerance reigns and absolutes are eliminated, when diversity becomes the catch-all phrase for accepting even gross sinful behavior, then people feel no need for the mercy of God. Instead, many rationalize their behavior with excuses like these:

"Even if I am unfaithful to my wife, I'm sure God will understand. After all, He knows I have needs that are not being met."

"Remember, this is my first time with drugs. I am basically a good man who looks after my wife and kids, and I know God will recognize that."

What has happened? We have tried to reduce God to our size, to our standards,

and to what we feel He ought to be like. This makes us feel comfortable. Too often we want *Him* to respond like *we* would respond to sin and injustice. We want *Him* to accept *us* on our standards of behavior. Since we are tolerant and non-judgmental with other's sins, we want everyone including God to be tolerant with ours. In this way, we do not have to change our ways or feel guilty about them. "Live and let live" is the world's philosophy, but it is not God's.

God set the example. He extends mercy and maintains His standards perfectly. He made the dearest sacrifice for our forgiveness; yet He judges and disciplines people for their sin. He loves unconditionally; yet He completely understands our weaknesses and failings. That is what mercy is all about. It is not sweeping bad things under the rug (like tolerance) and looking only at the good side. Mercy sees the whole picture, maintains right from wrong, and loves with the whole heart.

Can you do that? None of us can without the help of the Holy Spirit. Through Him, we can extend strong mercy without compromising with an attitude of unbiblical tolerance toward sin. Tolerance toward wrong behavior is not love; mercy is the loving response. Let us then follow Christ's example as we receive mercy from God and in return extend mercy to all we meet.

# LIFE APPLICATION

**WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART**—Memorize the following statement and verses. Then as you encounter situations during this week where you need God’s mercy, claim these promises by faith.

- Because God is merciful, He forgives me of my sins when I sincerely confess them.
- Daniel 9:9—“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him” (NIV).
- Hebrews 4:16—“Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”

**COUNT ON GOD**—Are you, or is someone close to you, in desperate need of God’s mercy? No matter what you have done—large or small—God’s mercy is sufficient. Go to Him and repent. Confess your sin, turn from it, and open your heart to His love and forgiveness. Your God of mercy will heal and restore you.

**OBEY GOD**—Are you harboring resentment against someone? Did someone wrong you and now you are having difficulty forgiving him? Read over the parable of the ungrateful servant in your Bible (Matthew 18). God has forgiven every sin you ever committed and any sin you will commit in the future. God has bountifully bestowed mercy on you. How ungrateful not to forgive someone who has wronged you! Obey God and go to that person today. Forgive him and experience the joy of showing mercy.