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## Kingdom Mercy







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# 2025: Kingdom People



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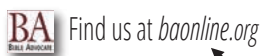
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## Lord, Have Mercy!

The older I get, the more I lean on that simple line “Lord, have mercy!” Sometimes a prayer, often a plea, or just a whisper for the need of the moment. Is there a greater, a nobler, or more comforting characteristic of King Jesus than His mercy? I cannot think of any. As we observe in the Gospels, His mercy runs throughout His story.

Mercy is there from the beginning in the song of Mary and prophecy of Zacharias (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79). Jesus commends it in His formal instruction (Matthew 5:7; 23:23); in beloved parables (18:21-35; Luke 10:25-37); and in His active ministry to people of all kinds. Those encounters are the most revealing. Upon someone meeting the Son of David in the flesh, “Have mercy on me” is the common cry.

Surely my own cries for mercy are influenced by that Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:22); that father of the epileptic (17:15); those two blind men sitting by the road (20:30, 31): “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!” Nobody leaned more on God’s mercy than King David. “For His mercy endures forever,” he wrote so often (Psalm 136). Now his son Jesus has come to embody the sure and tender mercies of God, and finally, fully, that mercy is made known to all upon the cross.

Mercy is the way of the King, but not so much the way of this world. That is why kingdom mercy must be learned. In fact, mercy is the one thing Jesus specifically says to “go and learn” (Matthew 9:9-13). He’s talking to Pharisees there, but it’s a word for us too. The pharisaic mindset can infect us all. As kingdom people, Jesus commands us to “go and learn” mercy so we can “go and do” mercy (Luke 10:37).

Mercy is manifold. It is lending an ear, a shoulder, or a hand; it is sharing a meal, a smile, or a word. Kingdom mercy is the *King’s mercy*, reaching others through us, bestowing freely the same forgiveness, kindness, help, and hope that He has freely shown us.

*Lord, have mercy! Make us Your mercy!*

— Jason Overman





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Following the world's way or  
the commandment of Jesus.

**by Stephen R. Clark**

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When I was little, I had a shirt with a drawing of a skunk and the caption “I’m a little stinker!” Just now I’m realizing that my mother intentionally bought me that shirt. I guess she knew I was going to need a lot of mercy along the way!

I lived up to my shirt even after outgrowing it and was a bit of a stinker in my pre-teen years. More than once, after doing something I probably knew I shouldn’t have and Mom finding out (she always found out), she’d

say those heart-stopping words “Just wait until your father gets home!”

When this happened, I began to hone my appeasement skills big time. I’d beg for a time-out right then or the assignment of some chore — anything that would yield mercy from the Dad-given correction. I would even gather small bouquets of wildflowers for her that were mostly dandelions. My goal was to atone right then with Mom rather than later with Dad.

It wasn’t that Dad was mean, just that he had different methods of setting me right. Mom was always a softer touch.

What a relief when Mom responded to my appeal for mercy! Dad would still hear of my indiscretion and lecture me on how

to be a better man. But that part of the “punishment” was a little easier to take. Correction by ear as opposed to the rear was always my preference.

From His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:7, Jesus offers the beatitude “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” In a sense, I offered my parents many opportunities for them to be blessed!

Some might say my parents extended grace to me or were just acting in love. Yes and no. Some definitions are in order. Grace gives us what we don’t deserve. Mercy deflects from us what we may or may not deserve. Love animates both actions.

Another word for *mercy* is *compassion*. Both are more than

mere actions. They reflect an attitude, a way of looking at the world. Fortunately, my parents were merciful people and had mercy on me.

I didn't deserve grace; I deserved to be punished for my misbehavior. Yet because they loved me, my parents extended grace. By it, I was mercifully delivered from harsher punishment.

### Learning mercy

Jesus adds a twist to being merciful when, as reported in Matthew 9:13, He tells a gaggle of Pharisees, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Desiring mercy over sacrifice is a great line, but what does it mean?

Jesus is quoting Hosea 6. Like the people of Israel back then, the Pharisees were better at being religious than at being merciful (true righteousness). As meticulous law-keepers, they placed keeping the minutiae of the law above everything else, including compassion, mercy, and just being a nice human being. And they considered themselves righteous (more like self-righteous) for doing so. The Pharisees were especially good at picking the specks out of the eyes of others, while ignoring the logs in their own.

This was not God's intention. The point of the sacrificial law was to highlight the holiness of God and foster kind and caring human interactions. Meanness and holiness cannot coexist.

The Pharisees missed the point. They were bent on identifying every little mistake people made regarding the law. They

were what we now call legalists. They went around with legal lists of do's and don'ts and measured everyone by their nitpicky interpretation of standards.

Instead of gently correcting people and disciplining them to do better in living a godly life, they instead loved to inflict punishment and derision on any they believed fell short. In other words, they lacked mercy but loved sacrificing people's dignity and well-being in the name of righteousness. Of course, when it came to applying the law to themselves, their standards eased significantly.

### Better way

James, the brother of Jesus, approaches the same topic from a different angle. He writes, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (2:13). This statement, combined with the beatitude about mercy, essentially says that those who show mercy will receive mercy, but those who are merciless will be condemned.

Simply put, for believers, mercy is the better way. Jesus hit on this over and over in His parables and teachings.

In the story of the prodigal

“Grace gives us what we don’t deserve. Mercy deflects from us what we may or may not deserve. Love animates both actions.”

Jesus knew that much of the "righteousness" of the Pharisees was all for show. While they appeared holier-than-thou, their hearts were corrupt. He bluntly calls them on this: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (23:25).

son, the father graciously extends mercy to his wayward yet returned son. The older brother is more inclined toward judgment (Luke 15).

From the parable of the good Samaritan, we learn who our neighbors are through the mercy shown by the Samaritan toward the man who was robbed and beaten. The legalistic religious people who passed by the man were following the letter of the



law, since they judged him as technically unclean and untouchable (Luke 10).

In Matthew 25:35, 36, Jesus makes a startling claim that contradicts this:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.”

Really? When did this happen? Jesus explains that each time we

did not do to others as was done to him (18:21-35).

Seeking to get even flies in the face of Jesus’ teachings and of the explicit warning “Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, ‘Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

### First reflex

For the church, while revenge isn’t usually the issue, and shouldn’t be, judgment in the form of condemnation is.

Nancy Pearcey writes in her

be our first reflex, an embedded character trait. When someone has sinned, we show mercy first and then apply loving correction. If someone is in need, we mercifully provide what we can to allay their need. When someone does us wrong, mercy is the response, not revenge.

Jesus expands the circle of those who are to receive mercy from us when He admonishes, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). When you truly love someone and can see them as your neighbor, revenge fades and mercy bubbles up.

The reality is that, in our sinfulness, we are all “little stinkers.” Scripture affirms that we are all sinners in need of His mercy (Romans 3:23). In fact, Lamentations lays it out for us: “Because of the LORD’s faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!” (3:22, 23).

At the conclusion of the good Samaritan story, Jesus offers a simple directive, that when it comes to compassion and mercy, we are to “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37). All are our neighbors. And when it comes to how we view and treat them, mercy is not an option. **BA**

“Speaking and doing mercy must be our first reflex, an embedded character trait.”

show mercy to others, we are ministering to Him and enriching His kingdom.

Today, our culture and politics — and, sadly, even the church — often fail to exhibit anything even resembling mercy. The adage “It’s a dog-eat-dog world” is apt. We are surrounded with admonishments to take what’s yours, to do whatever it takes to get ahead, to exact revenge on anyone you believe has held you back or opposed you in any way, and so on. “Get even!” is the phrase of the day. It brings to mind the story of the unforgiving servant who received mercy yet

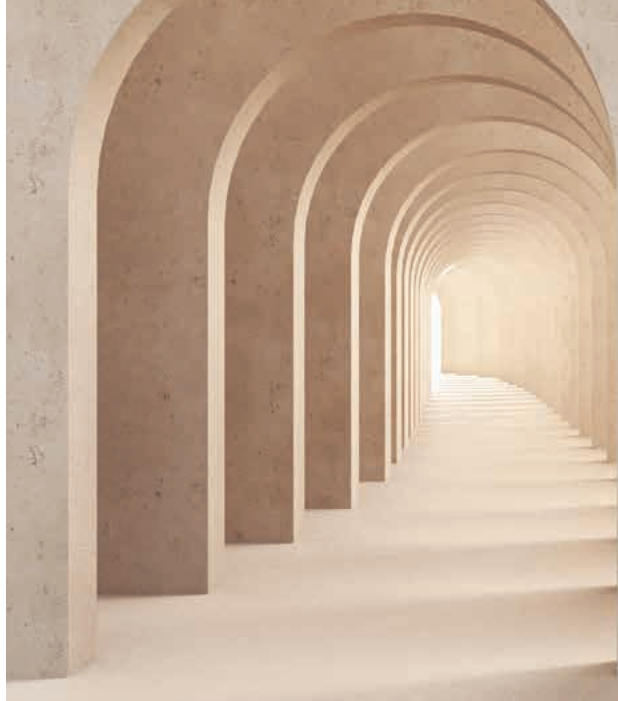
book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, “When the only form of cultural commentary Christians offer is moral condemnation, no wonder we come across to non-believers as angry and scolding.”

The Greek word used for mercy in Matthew 5:7 is *éleos*. Its fuller definition embraces the idea of “kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them” (*BlueLetterBible.org*). In other words, compassion.

As believers who have pledged our allegiance to Christ, speaking and doing mercy must

**Stephen R. Clark** writes from Lansdale, PA. Scripture quotations are taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*.





# The Infinite Mercy of God

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by **Cindy Arora**

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6, ESV).

Do you get depressed reading the book of Judges? I did.

Judges describes Israel's dismal cycle of rebellion, oppression, and repentance — repeatedly. The Israelites would forget about God and His commandments. They would marry into the evil nations around them and do evil themselves. God would allow their enemies to oppress them until they turned their face to Him. Then God would raise up a judge to deliver His people. This happened time and time again because everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

The similarity to my own nation is the depressing part. It seems that my nation has forgotten God and His commandments. We have married the world's ideas and values, and evil abounds. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. I do see pockets of revival but no national repentance. Consequently, I generally close the book of Judges with a heavy heart.

But not today.

Today I am rejoicing in the example of the book of Judges. God himself left the evil nations around

Israel to test them (3:1). That generation had not known war; they didn't know how to fight. If they had looked back one generation, they could have seen that purity was paramount to victory (Joshua). Unfortunately, they had to learn that the hard way.

I see a parallel in our personal lives. God has left you and me in the midst of evil to test us as well. Will we follow God's commands? Will we keep ourselves pure in a perverse generation? The spiritual battles are intense. If we don't know how to fight, we will perish.

This is the lesson that the nation of Israel was learning and relearning in the book of Judges. How about you and me? Have we married the world by accepting their ideas and values? Have we forgotten God? If so, we need only to repent and cry out to God. He has already sent a deliverer to save us: Jesus Christ.

No matter how many times we follow the world and forget God, our Deliverer is ready to rescue us, again. That is good news! Now, I am rejoicing over Israel's dismal cycle of rebellion and repentance because I see in it the infinite mercy of our God. He delivers us time and again. Thank You, Jesus! **BA**

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**Cindy Arora** writes from Redmond, WA.







# When Families Hurt

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How to heal from damaging relationships.

by **Bob Hostetler**

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Families are a gift from God. They can provide us with life and love, hope and happiness, strength and security, blessing and beauty. But families can also be the source of our greatest concerns and deepest hurts. Even the healthiest families can wound us in multiple ways.

It might be in the past: Someone ignored, neglected, or abused you. It may be more current: He can't let you be right; she won't let you forget. It could've been a single

occurrence or something that happened repeatedly.

Whatever hurtful family experience you've been through, a careful look at a page in one family's photo album — an account that followed multiple hurtful experiences — may offer comfort, wisdom, and hope today.

## Awkward reunion

Jacob and Esau were brothers — twins, in fact. Even before they were born, they were fighting. Jacob was a mama's boy; Esau was his dad's favorite. Jacob tricked his father into giving *him* the inheritance that was supposed to go to Esau, simultaneously defrauding both. When Esau found out, he plotted to kill his brother, so Jacob ran, ending up at the home of a distant

relative. There he met a girl, started a family, and prospered in business, until he had to get out of town quick — again.

Jacob and his family, servants, and flocks had nowhere to go but back home . . . where his brother Esau would be, the one he had betrayed and cheated. So Jacob devised an elaborate scheme and sent messengers to his brother with word that Jacob was coming home and that he hoped Esau would receive him. Those messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming to meet Jacob — with four hundred armed men!

Jacob responded by dividing his caravan into two groups, hoping if one was attacked, the other could get away. He sent a string of messengers ahead, each with gifts of goats, camels, cows, and



donkeys to appease his brother. And Jacob prayed, wrestling with God all night long, hoping to survive the coming family reunion. When morning dawned, the showdown was imminent:

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; . . . But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. Esau asked, "What's the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself" (Genesis 33:1, 4-9).

### Biblical insights

This passage provides insight into how to heal from a hurtful family experience — not from Jacob, the man who wrestled with God, but from Esau. It suggests several things.

**Give up your desire to get even.** Jacob had never treated Esau right. He'd repeatedly gotten the better of him. So at their first meeting in twenty years, we

might expect Esau to be thinking that Jacob was right where he wanted him. He could've been avenged with a wave of his hand, just a word to his armed men. But no. He said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself" (v. 9).

That's key to healing from a hurtful experience: You must give up on revenge. That may be hard. It doesn't seem to make sense. We tell ourselves, *If I could just make them suffer as I've suffered, I can get some closure.*

But that's a lie. You'll never get "closure" that way. You won't experience healing by getting even. The path to healing is giving up that urge and choosing forgiveness instead.

But forgiveness isn't experiencing waves of warm feelings for that person. It's not forgetting what was done to you and pretending it never happened. In fact, you can't forgive *without* acknowledging the wrong that was done. If no one did anything wrong, it wouldn't need to be forgiven. But forgiveness is releasing the desire to get that person back. That means not just refraining from killing or humiliating them. Forgiveness also

means not talking about them, not reminding them constantly of what they did, not making them squirm, not making them sorry for what they did.

And, yes, sometimes people *aren't* sorry. We tell ourselves if they would just be sorry, maybe we could forgive. But that attitude gives them power over your ability to forgive, as if they have the power to not only hurt you but also keep you from forgiving. In truth, no one has such power over you. No one can keep you from healing as long as you will give up your right to get even.

**Accept what they're able to give.** Notice what happened after Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself":

"No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it (vv. 10, 11).

“The path to healing is giving up the urge to get even and choosing forgiveness instead.”

“Don’t feel guilty because your relationship has changed. Simply give what you’re able to give.”

Many of our hurts come from people who *should* have been something to us or done something for us, but they weren’t or they didn’t. “She should’ve protected me.” “They should’ve been there for me.” “They could’ve at least *called*.” So many of our hurts spring from a need that wasn’t met.

But in Genesis 33, Esau doesn’t seem to want anything Jacob offered. Perhaps the one thing he wanted had been taken from him years earlier — but Jacob could never give that back. So Esau accepted what Jacob could give. It was the best Jacob could do.

A major step to healing is accepting what the person who hurt you is able to give, accepting who they’re able to be. It may not be what you want, it may not make up for anything, but it may be the best that person can do, being who they are. It’s a step toward healing to accept what they’re able to give.

**Give what you’re able to give.** Notice what happens next:

Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”

But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must

care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.”

“But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord” (vv. 12-15).

Neither brother could erase what had been done. Neither could change the course of the previous twenty years. And while Esau seems to be the picture of kindness and grace, who could blame him if he were thinking, *Has Jacob really changed? Is he playing me again?*

Maybe that’s why Esau didn’t give Jacob the keys to his camel but offered instead to escort his brother back to their ancestral home — perhaps thinking it was a good idea to keep him under surveillance. But Jacob resisted, so Esau said he could at least leave some of his armed men with Jacob’s party. Again, however, Jacob resisted, and asked only for his brother not to make

trouble as Jacob continued his journey.

So Esau gave him that.

Another key to healing from a hurtful family experience is giving what you’re able to give to the person or persons who hurt you. You may be able to forgive, but you may not be able to give that person the keys to your camel. You may not be inclined to join that person for holidays. You may not want to go back to the way things were. And that’s okay.

Just give what you’re able to give, not withholding anything out of spite, not trying to make them suffer, but as kindly as you can, giving to that person and that relationship what you’re able to give: a birthday card, a dinner invitation, something you enjoyed together before the hurt, or something else entirely. Be generous and kind, but don’t feel guilty because your relationship has changed. Simply give what you’re able to give.

**Define healthy boundaries for a new relationship.** Look once more at Genesis 33:

So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. Jacob, however, went to Sukkoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Sukkoth (vv. 16, 17).

So Esau went one way and Jacob went another? That’s not exactly a Hallmark Channel ending. And Jacob still seems to have only a casual acquaintance with the truth because after saying he would join his brother in Seir, he goes west after they part.

*continued on page 24*



## Questions & Answers



**What** is meant by “Do not quench the Spirit” in 1 Thessalonians 5:19?

**Simply** put, it means to allow the Holy Spirit freedom to work in the individual and community of believers. So the phrase “quench the Spirit” can be understood as actively hindering the Spirit’s work by extinguishing, suffocating, or ignoring His leading. More specifically, and in context with the next verse, “Do not despise prophecies” (v. 20), the phrase suggests not repressing, or failing to nurture, the spiritual gifts within the church (1 Corinthians 12).

Consider this from *Robertson’s Word Pictures*:

Quench not the spirit (*to pneuma mē sbennute*). Mē with the present imperative means to stop doing it or not to have the habit of doing it. It is a bold figure. Some of [the believers] were trying to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit, probably the special gifts of the Holy Spirit as [1 Th 5:20] means. But even so the exercise of these special gifts (1Co 12:14; 2Co 12:2-4; Ro 12:6-9) was to be decently (*euschēmonōs*, 1Th\_4:12) and in order (*kata taxin*, 1Co 14:40) and for edification (*pros oikodomeēn*, 1Co\_14:26). Today, as then, there are two extremes about spiritual gifts (cold indifference or wild excess).

Paul warns the Thessalonians not to interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit. His instructions in the wider context regarding behavior (5:12-28), both individually and corporately, indicate the ways that the Spirit might be quenched. The Thessalonians were to stop something they had been doing. In essence, “stop extinguishing or suffocating the Spirit.”

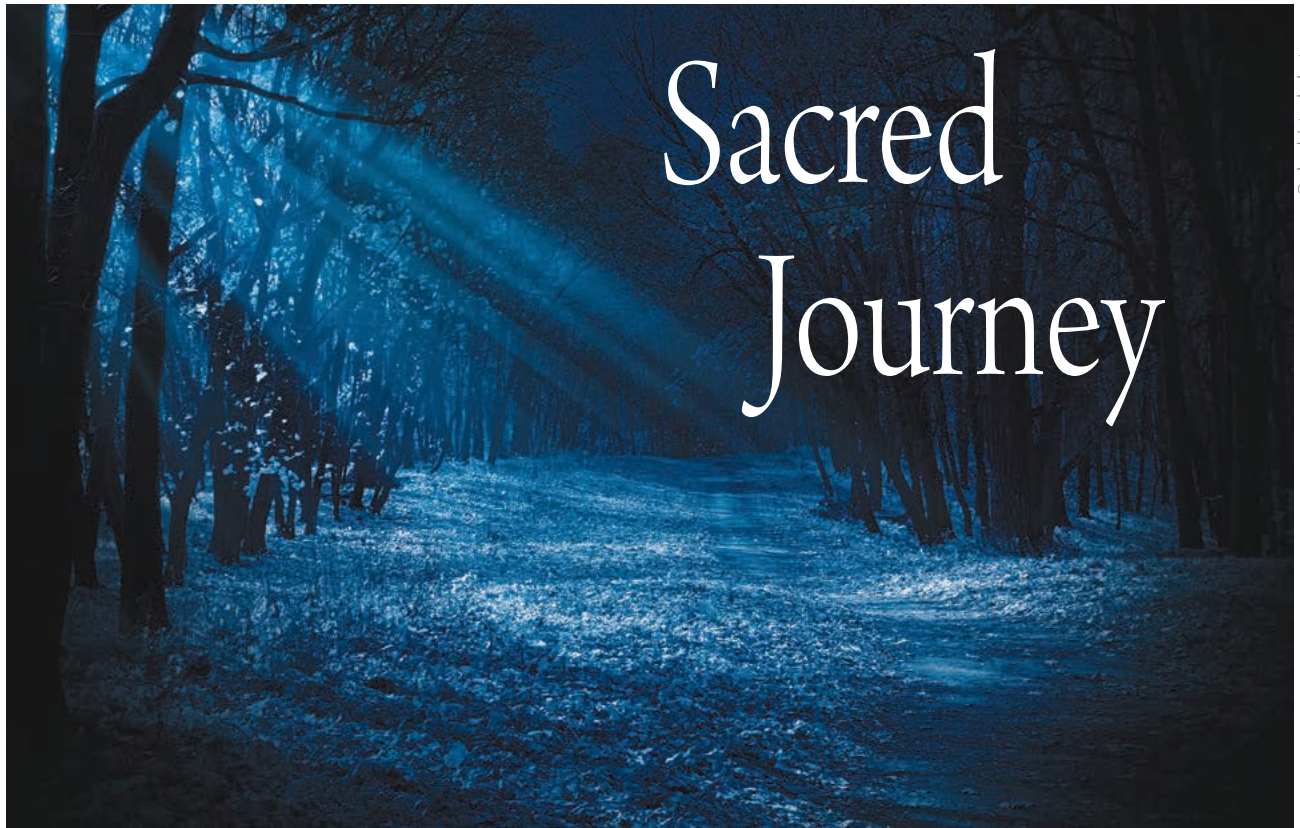
Similarly, aside from the special gifts, Paul’s writings in Ephesians 4:17-32 about Spirit-gifted living say, “do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” While some distinctions may be made, there is a similarity between the commands “do not quench the Holy Spirit” and “do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” In a longer list of specifics, Ephesians 4:17-32 spells out some things that resist the Spirit’s influence. Attitudes and behaviors that impede His work seem to both grieve and quench the Holy Spirit.

However, note that the Holy Spirit is not grieved for Himself; God is sovereign and omnipotent. Rather, grieving the Holy Spirit is for the believer because of the need for love. Significantly, the apostle commends *love* to the believers in both Thessalonica and Ephesus. As chief fruit of the Spirit, it is essential for unity and growth in the church:

I . . . beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . . but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:1-3, 15, 16; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6, 12; 4:9; 5:8, 13).

Therefore, let us give free reign to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us — both individually and corporately — so that we may never be found to have quenched the Holy Spirit.

— Elder Chip Hinds



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## Embracing mercy in the deep, dark woods.

by Kathleen Barrett

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American poet Robert Frost penned the poem "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." The last stanza is haunting:

The woods are lovely, dark  
and deep.

But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

Along a Christian's sacred journey, we may endure a season of extreme dread, loss, or loneliness. The forest grows darker, drawing us into an almost comforting solitude. We may contemplate lingering in the dark woods of despair. I know; I once was there.

One never intends to get that close to entering the secret, isolated place of self-soothing or self-pity, yet it seems so lovely to steal away and forget the pain of our circumstances. We promise ourselves that it is just for a little while. But then days turn into weeks, weeks to months and sometimes years.

And then, as the light of hope pierces the darkness of discontent on this solitary journey, a decision must be made. We can either cling to self-imposed hopelessness or look forward to the miles ahead and the promises we must keep. And though we may have experienced the "bread of adversity and the water of affliction" (Isaiah 30:20), the prophet reminds us of the Lord's gracious way out: "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'"

(v. 21). We can escape the dark woods and enter into freedom and healing by obeying God's leading.

## Promises and miles

Frost's poem is set somewhere in New England, where, on one lovely, snowy evening, he and his "little horse" linger to see the woods fill with white, icy crystals of wonder. Frost stays there long enough to contemplate the mystery of the woods. Suddenly, he senses promises he was to keep and the miles he had to go before he would sleep.

The biblical term for death is *sleep*. As Christ's followers, do we dare linger too long in despair's deep, dark woods before we depart this life? Be assured: The Lord has promises for us that He must keep in the meantime, along the miles we go before



we die. The dark is temporary; the light is eternal, even in the waiting.

If you are in a waiting period, praying to find your way out of the darkness or waiting for your miracle, use that time to talk to God. Shout to Him as though He is deaf. Thank Him because He is listening with both ears. Cry to Him as though He doesn't care. Praise Him because He does!

We cry out, and in His time, He leads us out. But we must beware of getting stuck in these dark woods. Jesus warns in the parable of the sower, "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world . . . choke the word, and it proves unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). If we wallow in them, the cares of this world, the trials of this life, will choke out the word and joy of Jesus that sustain us through dark times. They can harden and finally silence the cry of a broken and contrite heart.

But even here, in God's mercy, He extends a helping hand to the least of us — the sinners saved by grace, the ones lost in the woods and too afraid to fight their way out. We can become comfortable and complacent in our grief, fear, and brokenness. We can become deaf to the very purposes of the cross of Calvary: forgiveness, freedom, healing, and change.

When we receive the call of the Holy Spirit, God makes us righteous in Christ Jesus. That never changes. What constantly changes are our circumstances, attitudes, and people in our lives that can lead us into the dark woods. Our response to this unexpected detour will determine

how long or difficult it will be to find the path out.

### The way out

Recently, my daughter and her children walked through a heavily wooded park they had never been to. They met a stranger along the way. She appeared out of nowhere, barefoot, a bit bedraggled, and talkative. She assured my daughter that she knew the way out of the park. They followed her but gradually realized they were off course in this stranger's direction.

This reminds me of what Jesus said and why it is so critical: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John

Spirit — to find our way out.

Let's consider, for instance, the cardinal points of a compass: North, East, South, and West. In the darkest of hours, the compass points due north. We may think of this as the need for forgiveness and freedom from guilt. In the unexpected seasons of life, the compass may point east, offering peace amid the shadows of uncertainty. Anxious thoughts may lead the direction south, where soundness of mind needs to dispel the spirit of fear. If we go west, the Holy Spirit helps us take those courageous steps out of the darkness.

Here, hope arises, bringing healing and healthy change. The woods may be dark and deep,

“Cry to God as though  
He doesn't care. Praise Him  
because He does!”

10:27). When we come to know Christ through a personal relationship (prayer, worship, Scripture study, and understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives), we develop discernment and follow Him because we know His voice.

There is more good news: God will never leave nor forsake us. When we wander or are forced into a deep, dense, dark thicket of the unknown, we can remember that the Lord has given us a compass — the Holy

but, like Frost, we may find momentary beauty and solace. Like Frost, we realize there is no time to linger with miles ahead, and God's promises He will keep. **BA**

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**Kathleen Barrett**  
writes from Port  
Saint Lucie, FL.  
Scripture quotations  
are taken from the  
*English Standard  
Version*.



# Let's Connect!

## Engage

Convention is for connection. Need a boost in your connection with your Lord? There's good promise of that happening here. Do you desire to find better ways to connect your faith with your actions? Plenty to learn in that regard in this space. Convention lets you connect with like-minded believers from distant states and provinces. Don't discount the importance of those relationships!

Whatever reason suits you best, we call all members to recognize the importance of their attendance at GC Convention 2025 in Salt Lake City. Your presence is requested!

As you make your last-minute plans, here are a few items to remember:

- Are you registered? Go to [cog7.org/convention](http://cog7.org/convention) to add or modify your reservations. Stay in one of the official convention hotels and help us save money on meeting space (yes, they're connected!).
- No group excursions are planned for this year, but that doesn't mean there is nothing to do in the area! Get some friends and family together and come early/stay late to take advantage of the zoo, Thanksgiving Point, Park City, Arches National Park, and

other attractions that suit your fancy. Lots of excursion information is listed on the convention website.

- The UTA\*Trax train system is free to ride in the downtown area where we are located. It's also only \$2.50 to ride from the airport (Green line). The train or bus system can connect you with a cheap ride to various excursion points, including Thanksgiving Point.
- Come for the full week! Monday is a great day for an excursion or to check out the area. The Monday evening reception is a fantastic way to kick off our week together!
- General meal tickets won't be offered (with the exception of Sabbath), but concession stands will be open and restaurants are within walking distance. Consider attending one of the Special Meals or purchasing Sabbath meals to help us meet our contracted minimum.
- Review the links on the convention website to familiarize yourself with workshop options and business session preparations. Come prepared to participate.

We so hope to see you in just a few short weeks!

— Convention Planning Committee



# David Discovers

## Mercy



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by **Marcia Sanders**

David raced home and began to clean his room. An hour later, it looked like a different place. All books, games, and toys were in their places. Dirty clothes were now in the laundry basket, and clean clothes were laying neatly folded in their drawers. The bed was made, and the desk was cleared of its clutter. After looking around to make sure that the room would meet Mom's approval, David headed downstairs.

No one else was home yet, so David grabbed the vacuum and cleaned all the carpet. Next, he found a cleaning rag and began to wipe down the surfaces. As he was finishing, he heard Mom's car in the driveway.

Sighing with apprehension, he went to the door and called, "Do you need help carrying anything in?"

Mom smiled. "Sure. Come grab some of these groceries." She appreciated the help.

As Mom walked into the freshly cleaned house, her suspicions began to rise. Out of curiosity, she peeked into his room and was surprised to see everything in its place.

"Is there something you need to tell me?" she asked.

"Uh, maybe," David responded.

"So . . . ?" Mom eyed him pointedly.

"Well, you know how you told me to invite that new kid, Jake, over this afternoon?" David began. Mom nodded.

"Well, I got to thinking about how uncomfortable it would be to spend time with someone I didn't

know, so I didn't invite him. I mean, he's kinda weird, and the other kids make fun of him. I figured if they found out that I invited Jake over, they'd make fun of me too. So I thought maybe if I did some extra chores, that it would make up for not doing what you had asked — kind of balance it out."

"I do appreciate the clean room, floors, and furniture," Mom began.

"I hear a 'but' coming," David lamented.

"But I appreciate both obedience and kindness more. Think about it. Can you imagine how lonely Jake is? He's in a new town and a new school and knows no one. You, on the other hand, have lived here your entire life and have lots of friends. Do you honestly think your friends would turn on you that easily?"

David looked at the floor. "I guess not."

Mom smiled. "It reminds me of what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 9:13, and again in chapter 12: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' I want to raise a son who thinks more of others than of himself — one who is more concerned with obeying God than making himself comfortable. Does that make sense?"

"Yes. I didn't really think about what Jake was going through, being new and all. If I were new to this area, I'd hope he'd try to be a friend. I'll walk down to his house now and see if he can come shoot some baskets." **BA**

**Marcia Sanders** writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



# Costly



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The high price tag of forgiveness.

by R. Herbert

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**I**t might seem strange to talk of putting a price on forgiveness, yet that is exactly what Jesus did in His parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35). Here Jesus painted a detailed word picture of a king's servant who owed the ruler ten thousand talents (v. 24).

A talent was not a unit of currency but of weight. The *New International Version* translates this word as "ten thousand bags of gold." But it is far more likely that silver would have been the precious metal involved in the transaction, as even ten thousand talents of silver would represent an almost unimaginably large amount. In fact, ten thousand talents of silver would have been too large for a normal servant's personal debt. The word *servant* Matthew uses in this passage could refer to a king's high-ranking employee who controlled

massive amounts of money as part of his work.

By contrast, the second servant in the parable who owed the king's servant money was doubtless a far less powerful individual. He had borrowed "a hundred silver coins" (v. 28, "one hundred denarii," NKJV; "a hundred pence," KJV). We read that the servant who owed a huge amount that was forgiven was himself unwilling to forgive the individual who owed him a much smaller debt.

## Debts and talents

For a true sense of the relative amounts Jesus spoke of, we turn to the parable of the men working in the vineyard (20:1-16). Here Matthew tells us that an acceptable rate of pay for a laboring man was one denarius per day (v. 2, et al.). So the debt of the minor servant who owed the king's servant one hundred denarii was equal to a hundred days' pay — some four months of wages calculated on a regular workweek and certainly not a small amount.

But for a sense of the debt that the king's servant was responsible for, we must realize

that a talent was equal to approximately six thousand denarii in value. So that debt equaled ten thousand times approximately six thousand days' pay for an average laborer. That is some sixty million days, or about one hundred sixty-six thousand years' pay at three hundred workdays per year, based on talents of silver and not gold. Of course, if the talents were of gold, the amount would be far greater still!

Either way, the price of forgiveness given by the king to his servant was an astronomically high one. According to the ancient historian Josephus, by comparison, the combined annual tribute that Judea and other surrounding areas paid to Rome at about this time was only six hundred talents. Still, the amount Jesus mentioned is not an impossible one, as the servant of the king could have been a treasurer or the governor of a whole country. Also, the loan may not have been a personal one but money the servant was responsible for. Nevertheless, the amount remains far beyond any possibility of being repaid.





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## Digging deeper

It is easy to think that this parable was simply teaching that our neighbor's spiritual debts to us are far less than what we owe God as a debt of forgiveness. While this is true, the parable has greater depth than that.

Clearly, the king in the parable represents God, and the king's servant represents us as debtors to God because of our sin. The minor servant represents those who are "indebted" to us through sins against us. But we should remember that the amount owed by the minor servant (a hundred days' pay) was not trivial. The parable admits that those who sin against us may indeed sin to a substantial degree, leaving us significantly hurt.

Christ was not downplaying the debts, or sins, of others against us, but the parable puts that hurt in perspective. It shows that the high debt we have incurred through our own cumulative sins far outweighs whatever sin may have been committed against us — no matter how bad it was. Christ's story shows a ratio of almost one million to one, meaning that the sins of

others against us are about one millionth of our own sins against God. That is why Jesus ended His parable by saying that the unmerciful servant was severely punished by the king. He also said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (18:35).

Ultimately, however, Jesus' parable is not about numbers or balance sheets. Its primary message is that we ought to forgive as our King has forgiven us. And we should not forget the context in which the parable was given. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was responding to Peter's question of how many times we should forgive those who sin against us. "Up to seven times?" Peter asked.

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. *Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king . . .*'" (vv. 21-23, emphasis added).

According to Jesus' answer to the question, the forgiveness given to us is extravagant both in amount and in repetition. Finally, it is extravagant in terms of our attitude required in giving forgiveness. True forgiveness,

Jesus tells us, is so extravagant that it cannot be repaid. It is so extensive that it does not run out in our lifetime. And it is so truly meant from the heart that no price can really be placed on it. **BA**

**R. Herbert** (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Don't miss the  
Online Extras for  
this issue:

"A Bowl of Mercy"  
by Sarah Schwerin

"The Healing Touch of  
Kingdom Mercy"  
by Leslie Williams



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■ [Leadership]

# So Great a

by Brian Franks

Anyone who has ever accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, repented of their sins, and been baptized is the recipient of great mercy. To need mercy, you must have done something wrong, but you can't afford to make restitution because the cost is too high. The cost of the sin each of us has committed must be paid by our own death — but for the mercy of God. Any of us who believe can ask God for mercy, provided through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This merciful transaction so clearly depicts the character of God to us. Indeed, one of the long names for God in the Bible (Exodus 34:6) includes the word *hesed*, most often translated “mercy” or “merciful” in the *New King James Version*.

Though any professed Christian has received this amazing grace, Christians are too often known for their judgmental smugness. Why? Because mercy is so hard to give to others. Our human nature, sinful as it is apart from God, is unwilling to grant to others what it cries

out to receive for itself. This sad fact makes Jesus' statements on mercy so challenging to those who claim to bear His name yet act unmercifully.

## Mercy in action

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). This sermon is Jesus' manifesto of the kingdom of God. As part of it, this beatitude tells believers that we must show mercy to others, regardless of who they are.

We see Jesus doing this in His earthly ministry. In response to Pharisees who were angered that He would talk to and eat with tax collectors (thought of as traitors and swindlers), Jesus says, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (9:13). At the end of the parable of the good Samaritan (Samaritans were an ethnic group the Jews hated and avoided) Jesus poses a question: “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

A law expert recognizes what the good Samaritan did and gives the right answer: “The one who

had mercy on him” (Luke 10:36, 37).

These passages show mercy as an action that sacrifices its rights to serve others. The reality of “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” is that every believing Christian has received mercy from God. None of us deserves it either! Therefore, we must show mercy to others. Jesus reached out to tax collectors, sinners, and even the corrupt religious leaders because He wanted to demonstrate mercy. Even those we think of as enemies and might despise should receive definitive acts of compassion. Living this way can change the world.

## Bridging the gap

If mercy reflects the character of God and if our human nature apart from God isn't particularly interested in showing mercy to others, how do we bridge the gap?

The first step is simply to pray to be more merciful. It would be easy to procrastinate and make excuses as to why other theological issues are more important to engage, but the prayer to be more merciful should be



# Mercy

a priority for any who bear the name *Christian*. If God is ruler of a kingdom built on mercy, and if Jesus' quintessential act — His atoning sacrifice of Himself — demonstrates profound mercy, then how can we not see the necessity to be people of mercy in a sinful world?

Praying to be more merciful is no suggestion; it is an imperative of the highest degree. If you have prayed to receive mercy from God to become a Christian, you've experienced the receiving side of it and know how life-giving it is. Therefore, pray to be more merciful to others. Follow the example of Christ, and be a light in this cruel world.

Second, read and meditate on the teachings of mercy in the Bible. Besides the ones mentioned, consider Joseph forgiving his brothers (Genesis 45); that God's throne in the tabernacle/temple is called the mercy seat (Exodus 25:17-22, NKJV); David's mercy shown to Mephibosheth and his plea for mercy after the Bathsheba affair (2 Samuel 9; 11, 12; Psalm 51). Also consider God's mercy on the pagan Ninevites and on Israel's wayward prophet (Jonah 1-4); the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32); the woman

caught in adultery (John 8); and Paul's transformation (Acts 9), among others.

Another significant story is the parable of the merciless servant (Matthew 18:21-35). The servant owed his master an impossible-to-repay debt. Yet when he asked for mercy, his master forgave the debt. This servant, free of his tremendous burden, immediately found a fellow servant who owed him far less — a manageable amount. The wicked servant threatened and choked the other servant and had him tossed into a debtor's prison to work off the small amount he owed. When this was reported to the master, the merciless servant was given the judgment he wished on his fellow servant.

It's no stretch to see God as the master, us as the servant, and humanity, including Christians, as the other servant who owes us a little debt. Often we cannot see past our impatience and anger toward our fellow servants who owe us. We lose sight of the debt of sin that God's mercy paid for us.

## Practice mercy

This brings us to the final point: Practice mercy, a key attribute of God and a sign of true faith in Christ. We surely can think of people who have wronged us or who do things we can't stand, or even people we might try to hide from and decline to help. We might judge individuals or groups in our hearts, and excuse our behavior because we didn't do anything bad to them in practice. As we pray for mercy and study instances of it in the Bible, we will surely have the opportunity to reach out with mercy to others. In so doing, we live out the kingdom of God and add to it those in need of mercy.

Just be prepared. As you try to show mercy, it will be impossible to do so, save for the grace of God giving you the wisdom and strength and purity to do it. Also, be prepared that some will not receive mercy and will not respond in kind.

Remember, Jesus did everything perfectly and was still persecuted, even unto death on a cross. When we take on His name, we walk with God in newness of life and serve as conduits of mercy. But doing this puts us

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Looking to the One who gave to us, then sharing it with others.

**by David R. Downey**

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Someone said, “A life wrapped up in itself makes a very small package.” This would certainly apply to a person who lacks mercy and finds it difficult to forgive other people. To be unforgiving, one would need to be certain of their own righteousness, or at least unmoved by their sin.

The Bible is full of calls for followers of God to be merciful. When we do so, we show that our hearts have changed. God’s

mercy is first in view, then we act out of our awareness of His testimony.

### Example of Jesus

In Matthew 9:9-12, we have just such a case. Jesus had just called Matthew as one of His disciples, and He went with him to Matthew’s house to sit down and eat. It is not surprising that many of Matthew’s friends came to his invitation. The guest list included other tax collectors. Memorably, Matthew adds, “and sinners.”

Jesus was meeting with some of the most unrighteous and despised people in the community. This would be tantamount to the local preacher meeting at a drug dealer’s house and sitting with all the users the man could gather. “Righteous” folks would certainly

notice, just as they did in Jesus’ day.

But we must remember that this event just followed Matthew’s agreeing to the call of Jesus (v. 9). He had left his tax office, so there had to have been a change of heart. Enough time had passed that Matthew could organize what Luke called a reception (Luke 5:29). Here we have a changed man who was excited about the Lord — the One who could change him so radically. Matthew naturally called his friends to join him.

This event is disturbing in several ways. One is that we do not have the habit of meeting with people like this. To put a finer point on it, we try to avoid them. This would be natural as we do not have the same worldview and we walk in different circles.



But we should be honest that we might be more concerned about our reputation than the spiritual brokenness of people like Matthew's friends. Sadly, we might defer to people like the Pharisees in the story, the so-called righteous.

Jesus did not seem to worry about appearances. He came to seek and "to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He was not obsessed with making impressions as we are likely to do, but was more concerned with the spiritual health of His subjects.

This scene is disturbing in another way. Why would Jesus choose such a person as a tax collector to staff His team? You would think the Master would pick better talent.

The answer comes in Jesus' answer to the accusation of the Pharisees, and it guides us in these dark days. The Pharisees asked the disciples why Jesus mingled with sinners. Overhearing this, Jesus responded, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12, 13).

### Tending to the sick

Imagine a doctor who decides one day that he has had enough. Sick people are possibly contagious, and if they aren't, they are generally a lot of trouble. All sorts of coughing, limping, and complaining people are in his office.

Then the doctor has a eureka moment: Why not stop treating these people and open his office only for those who are healthy?

There would be less trouble, the environment would be more positive, and the doctor would not have to be around all that disease! Happy days would ensue!

This doctor would also soon be without a job. Doctors treat people who are unwell, or at least keep them from being unwell. Part of the Hippocratic Oath doctors adhere to says, "I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required . . . I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug."

Jesus understood this. He was

people. Those are the ones who tune in. They are open to help and to the Redeemer.

### Our shared sinfulness

Obviously, we should not remain helpless. We are sinners, but we have been redeemed. We are not what we once were.

Babies are cute, and almost everyone loves them. But if a child were to grow into a teenager and still need constant care, throw tantrums when their will is thwarted, and refuse to consider anything but their own needs, we could rightly determine that something was wrong.

In the same way, no matter how sinful our heritage is (in-

“Jesus was focused on those who needed His help. He generally avoided those who thought they were fine.”

focused on those who needed His help. He generally avoided those who thought they were fine.

I have noticed the people our churches attract are often like birds on the beach, flying in front of a storm: They are broken, hurt, confused, and in need. We have it backwards when we develop a country club mentality in church, because this is opposite to Jesus' emphasis. We should hope our churches are made up of broken

fancy), we should be growing daily in a likeness to Christ. This is where Jesus' words concerning mercy leap from the page: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (NKJV). Growing in mercy means we are aware of the grace that led us to maturity.

Jesus called people like Matthew to His team first because they were desperate. They were not aware they needed help until Jesus shined His light. Then they were overwhelmed

*continued on page 26*



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## The transforming power of kingdom mercy.

**by David Zepf**

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"Blessed are the merciful,  
for they shall obtain mercy"  
(Matthew 5:7).

In a world that increasingly celebrates revenge, kingdom mercy stands as a radical alternative — a divine characteristic that marks God's people as truly different. But what does it mean to be people of mercy in an unmerciful age? And how does mercy shape our witness to a watching world?

### Nature of mercy

On a cold morning in first century Jerusalem, a crowd gathered

around Jesus, bringing with them a woman caught in adultery. The religious leaders, sensing an opportunity to trap this teacher who spoke so much about mercy, posed their challenge: "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" (John 8:5).

Jesus' response — first writing in the dust, then declaring, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (v. 7) — reveals the heart of kingdom mercy. It neither ignores justice nor celebrates wrong but creates space for transformation through grace.

One by one, the accusers departed, leaving the woman alone with Jesus. His words to her capture the essence of kingdom mercy: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (v. 11).

This scene illustrates how

kingdom mercy differs from mere tolerance or overlooking wrong. True mercy acknowledges the reality of sin while extending the possibility of redemption. It's not mercy if there's nothing to forgive; it's not kingdom mercy if it leaves people unchanged.

### Cost of mercy

Living as people of mercy comes with a price. It requires us to die to our natural instincts for revenge, to surrender our "right" to hold grudges, and to actively participate in God's redemptive work in others' lives. This can feel particularly challenging when we've been personally wounded or when showing mercy seems to disadvantage us.

Consider Joseph's response to his brothers who had sold him into slavery. Years later, with power to exact revenge,



he instead chose mercy: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph’s mercy didn’t minimize his brothers’ sin; rather, it positioned him to participate in God’s larger redemptive purpose.

This kind of mercy isn’t passive or weak. It’s a powerful force that can break cycles of violence, heal generational wounds, and transform both the one showing mercy and the one receiving it. Kingdom mercy costs us our pride, our desire for revenge, and sometimes even our sense of justice. But it yields eternal dividends.

### Mercy in action

What does kingdom mercy look like in practice? Consider these modern expressions:

**Restorative justice.** Rather than simply punishing wrongdoers, kingdom people seek ways to restore and heal both victims and offenders. This might mean working in prison ministry, supporting reconciliation programs, or advocating for justice systems that emphasize rehabilitation over mere punishment.

**Radical forgiveness.** When the families of those killed in the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting publicly forgave the shooter, they demonstrated kingdom mercy that shocked the world. Such forgiveness doesn’t negate justice but points to a higher reality.

**Economic mercy.** Kingdom people practice mercy through extending debt forgiveness, participating in generous giving, and creating economic opportunities for others. This might mean cancelling debts, helping someone

start a business, or supporting initiatives that provide economic dignity to the marginalized.

**Relational mercy.** In an age of cancel culture, kingdom people choose to extend second chances, maintain relationships even through disagreement, and actively work toward reconciliation when possible.

### Mercy as power

Kingdom mercy transforms both giver and receiver. When we show mercy, we participate in God’s character and allow His nature to be formed in us. When we receive mercy, we experience the heart of God and are changed by His grace.

Consider the story of John Newton, the former slave trader

kingdom mercy serves as a powerful witness. When Christians show mercy in situations where the world expects vengeance, it raises questions that point to the gospel.

Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Similarly, our practice of mercy, especially when it’s costly or counter-cultural, identifies us as kingdom people and attracts others to our King.

### Challenges to mercy

Living as people of mercy presents several challenges in our current context.

**The justice question.** How do we balance mercy with the legitimate need for justice? Kingdom

“Kingdom mercy transforms both giver and receiver.”

who encountered God’s mercy and was transformed into an abolition advocate and wrote “Amazing Grace.” His life demonstrates how experiencing mercy leads to showing it, creating a beautiful cycle of transformation.

### Mercy as witness

In a world marked by polarization, revenge, and the celebration of others’ downfall,

mercy doesn’t negate justice but transforms how we pursue it.

**The wisdom test.** When does showing mercy enable destructive behavior? Kingdom wisdom must guide our expression of mercy.

**The personal cost.** Showing mercy often comes with personal cost: emotional, financial, or relational. Are we willing to pay that price?

**The cultural pressure.** In a

*continued on page 26*



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Thank you!

## When Families Hurt

*continued from page 10*

But there's a lesson even in that.

If you would heal from a hurtful family relationship, it's OK — even wise — to define healthy boundaries for a new relationship. Too often when we've been hurt, we think that forgiveness and healing mean going back to the way things were, when that might be the worst thing we could do and a thing not at all pleasing to God. Moving forward by defining the healthy boundaries of a new relationship — exercising your freedom to make grown-up decisions, perhaps taking the initiative, finding a way to be loving but firm with the person who hurt you — is also a loving thing to do. It may even be the *most* loving thing you can do, not only for yourself but also for the person who hurt you, and for others in the family.

It's not easy to heal from a hurtful family relationship. It can be challenging to give up our urge to get even. It can be tough to accept what the other person is able to give, and often tougher to give what we can. If we can do that, however, and define the healthy boundaries of a new relationship, we may, as Esau did, find our way "home" again. **BA**

### Bob Hostetler

writes from Nevada, where he lives with his wife, Robin. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



# Touching Jesus

(Mark 5:24-34)

Oh, Jesus, You are very near  
but You're so busy that I fear  
You'll hurry on and pass me by.  
And yet, I hope my heart You'll hear.

I reach a timid, well-worn hand  
to grasp Your cloak — even just a strand.  
And before I can utter a tiny cry,  
I feel something in my soul expand.

Then on trembling knees I humbly bow  
as I hear You say You do avow  
my deepest need to now supply  
as Yourself my spirit You endow.

I rise again, my being spry  
to walk in ways that glorify  
You who heard my inner cry  
and stopped instead of passing by.

Chris Ahlemann



## So Great a Mercy

continued from page 19

in conflict with the broken and dying world God desires to save. Do not let the world's pain and darkness deter you from offering the mercy God has shown you in Jesus Christ. **BA**

**Brian Franks** lives in Colorado Springs, CO, with his wife and four children. He is also the co-director of Artios Christian College. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



## Having Received Mercy

continued from page 21

with their need. Fishermen like Peter thought they were capable until they met Jesus. Then they learned how much they lacked. The Thomases of the world were self-confident in their cynicism and in their certainty that things always go wrong, until Jesus showed them that a life of faith always has promise.

These men, and others like them, were broken beyond repair even without knowing it, and when Jesus lifted them up, they were ready to show mercy. They were forgiven great wrong — what they could not justify themselves. And having received mercy, they could extend it to others.

Some of us were saved from the very depths of degradation. Others of us came to Christ

young and before we could fall deeply into sin. It does not matter our history; our heritage is the same: We each would be hopelessly lost without Jesus' sacrifice and provision.

In Matthew 9:13, Jesus was referring to Hosea 6:6. He did not want our sacrifice (religious attempts to secure forgiveness) but our mercy (faithful awareness of being the recipients of mercy).

Being in the Master's presence overwhelms us. We are then ready to repent and extend the invitation of grace to others. **BA**

**Dr. David Downey** writes from Burleson, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted.



## The Revolution

continued from page 23

culture that often celebrates revenge and "canceling" others, choosing mercy can make us appear weak or naive.

## Growing in mercy

How do we grow as people of mercy? Several practices can help.

**Remember our own need.** Regularly reflecting on God's mercy toward us helps us extend mercy to others.

**Practice small mercies.** Start with daily opportunities to show mercy in small ways: in traffic, at work, in family relationships.

**Study Jesus' example.** The Gospels provide numerous examples of Jesus showing mercy. Study these carefully.

**Pray for your enemies.** Jesus' command to pray for those who persecute us cultivates a merciful heart.

## Agents of mercy

Kingdom mercy is revolutionary. It breaks cycles of revenge, transforms relationships, and witnesses to God's character in a world desperate for hope. As kingdom people, we're called to be agents of this divine mercy, letting it flow through us to touch a hurting world.

When we do this, we don't just help others; we participate in God's ongoing work of redemption. We demonstrate that there's another way to live, another kingdom operating by different principles. In doing so, we fulfill our calling as kingdom people: to be light in darkness, to be agents of transformation, and to show the world what God is like.

As we embrace our identity as people of mercy, we find ourselves changed. Our hearts expand, our capacity for love grows, and we become more like our merciful King. In a world crying out for hope, kingdom mercy offers a revolutionary alternative — one act of grace at a time. **BA**

**David Zepf** writes from West Plains, MO.





## Artios Newsletter

The Artios 2025 newsletter keeps Artios students, alumni, staff, faculty, resource participants, and supporters updated on what we've been up to. Be sure to check it out.

English: <https://artioscollege.org/newsletter/>

Spanish: <https://artioscollege.org/es/newsletter/>

To receive the next newsletter, subscribe here: <https://artioscollege.org/sign-up-for-news/>.

## Children's Curriculum

Bible Advocate Press has developed Bible curriculum for children ages 3-5, primary students (grades 1-3), and intermediate students (grades 4-6).

Start developing your children's faith in church. Order at <https://store.cog7.org/pages/current-quarter-curriculum-single-purchase>.



## Fundraising for GC Missions

Here are three easy ways to raise funds for GC Missions:

### Change for Change.

Collect your change each Sabbath. Your coins and dollar bills can multiply when you set a fundraising goal.

**One Dollar a Day.** Save a dollar every day. At the end of the year, send us your donation.

**Events.** Your local men's, women's, and youth groups can organize an event to raise funds for GC Missions.

Send donations via Zelle to [give@cog7.org](mailto:give@cog7.org). Or mail your check to P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233. Make sure you write "GC Missions" on the memo line. You can also give online at <https://secure.cog7.org/giving/>.



## Quarterly Lesson Videos

The official CoG7 YouTube channel helps you discover more about Sabbath lessons — from the author. Play the videos prior to the lesson so your students can engage in each class. Encourage young adults to prepare ahead of time so each Sabbath lesson can fulfill its purpose.

Check out the videos at [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZt1RwqAGRk\\_zkUeHGkk\\_TOR5ohOoJrl7&si=UHQ6FwwcO8o5TjrO](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZt1RwqAGRk_zkUeHGkk_TOR5ohOoJrl7&si=UHQ6FwwcO8o5TjrO).



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Loving others begins with  
loving ourselves.

by Christine Rhyner

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During a conversation with my co-worker Leiah, the topic of self-worth came up. She smiled at me and gushed, “I love myself!”

“How?” I asked, wanting in on whatever secret she had for self-love.

“I just love me!” she exclaimed, as though born delighted with herself.

To tell the truth, I was envious of Leiah’s positive sense of self and her unabashed vocalizing of it.

I was in a period of life when I was distressed with so much about me. I routinely drank into

the early morning hours with co-workers at the café where I worked. Then I’d sleep my days away and head back to the café in the evenings. I didn’t enjoy waiting tables while struggling to find a job as a writer, and I made poor choices in men.

I had read dozens of New Age self-help books to help me understand myself, my strengths, and my purpose. I even went to an astrologer and a psychic.

Phil, the astrologer, knew things about my life he couldn’t possibly have known, unless he was tapping into some source. He knew about my love of writing and problems diagnosed with my health when I was in college. I thought at the time that astrological planetary alignments provided him this information. But I know now that if Phil wasn’t getting his information from God,

which he wasn’t, it could come from only one other source: the Enemy of our souls.

Thankfully, none of these efforts helped with my self-confidence or positive momentum. I shudder to think what might have happened had I traveled further down that broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). It would have ruined me and the people who needed to hear about the Lord.

### Revelation

I had to work on my own healing in the right way. Shortly after my exchange with Leiah, I began attending church with another co-worker. When I started reading the Bible, a particular story caught my attention: the paralytic at the healing pool (John 5). After finding that the man had



spent thirty-eight years in the same condition, Jesus asks him, “Do you want to get well?” (v. 6).

It was as though I were staring into that healing pool and seeing my own reflection. Yes! I wanted to get well! It struck me that Jesus not only could forgive my sins but also wanted to heal me emotionally and spiritually. I accepted Christ as Lord and Savior soon after this revelation.

I removed all the self-help books from my apartment and repented of my former occult dabbling. I stopped the late nights and drinking, yet my sense of worth didn’t immediately change. I lacked an understanding of who I’d become in Christ.

Considering my huge shortfall of self-love, I also fretted over how to love my neighbor as myself (Mark 12:31) so I could show them Christ’s love.

I wondered if self-love isn’t a bit vain and selfish. Paul warns in 2 Timothy 3:2 that in the last days “People will be lovers of themselves.” Then I realized that what Paul describes here is not the self-love God desires for me. “Lovers of themselves” means haughtiness and elevation of the self above loving God. The love for myself that God wants me to have isn’t a pride thing or about my attributes or even about how God blesses me.

Rather, self-love begins with loving God first, as Jesus states: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). That love flows out to others so we love our neighbors as ourselves (v. 31).

## Loving God, loving self

This presented another problem: How could I love God without trying to muster feelings for Him? I was grateful that Jesus bore my sins on the cross, and was so thankful that He scooped me out of the pit I was in. But doubts lingered that I was loving God as He desires of us. Was I simply grateful for and accepting of salvation and healing?

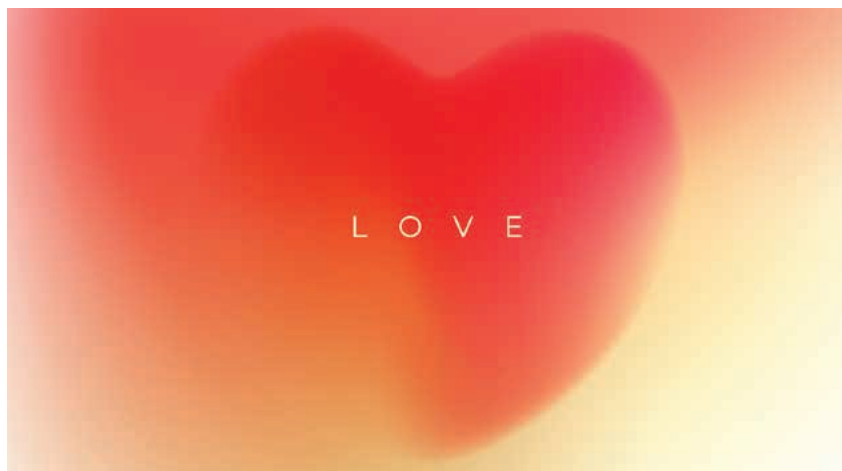
Reading more of the Bible, I came to understand that loving God results from getting to know Him through prayer and studying Scripture. Love for God is active. John 14:15 says, “If you love me, keep my commands.” Love of the Lord equals obedience to the Lord, but obedience didn’t happen overnight. The Word had to take hold in my heart, and

cares about even the small things I wrestle with, who hears and answers me.

Loving myself is about seeing myself as Jesus does: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). If Jesus thought I was worth dying for when He already knew all the sins I would commit, how could I continue in self-loathing?

My foundation had to be an understanding of my changed status as that of a new creature in Christ.

The following Bible verse is like a gentle breeze refreshing my spirit: “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV). Loving self is believing that I am now loved by God as a righteous child of His with my name engraved in



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the Holy Spirit had to illuminate things I didn’t realize were sins.

Loving God also stems from putting my faith and trust in Him when I’m going through challenges. When I see Him moving me toward victory in my struggles, the measure of faith I first exercised begets more faith in Him. It spurs me on with greater love for the One who

the palms of His hands (Isaiah 49:16).

God’s Word also says that I am a co-heir with Christ in His inheritance (Romans 8:17), that I am victorious through Him (1 Corinthians 15:57), and that “He will exult over [me] with loud singing” (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV). That’s a God who delights in His children!

I learned that I should be content with who I am because God made me with certain qualities, gifts, and talents. I shouldn't compare myself with others, because I am unique to the Father. After I put my faith in Christ and repented, I became secure in who I am *in Him*, not in who the world tells me I am.

## Completing a work

I've met a number of Christians who don't love themselves. Many of them carry burdens of their pasts. Admittedly, at times I also look back and regret my many years of sin before meeting Christ.

But to ruminate on this makes me unable to love my neighbor, because I'm *unavailable* for my neighbor. It causes me to isolate myself in shame for my former carnal life and even for mistakes and sins I commit as a Christian, though Jesus bore my shame on the cross. That's like saying the cross wasn't enough for me. It's living in condemnation — and the devil loves it. Satan knows that condemnation makes me less effective, or worse, utterly ineffective for the kingdom.

I reject lies about myself when I think of what God's Word says He is doing in me: completing a good work He began (Philippians 1:6). As long as I am open to the Holy Spirit's conviction and instruction, that work continues. I can reflect the love of Christ to others and, most important, lead the lost to Him. That is my primary purpose as a Christian.

## Loving others

All this makes it possible to look at others — even difficult

people — with Jesus' eyes of compassion. When someone waves at me with one finger on the road or when I am tempted to gossip about someone, I remember Christ died for them as well. This lifts me out of feelings of offense and toward forgiveness for that person.

When people devalue me, as they sometimes do, instead of owning it, I remember God's great love for me. What I do own is sin and mistakes made against others. Whether they want to forgive me or not, I ask their forgiveness. I ask for God's

forgiveness and repent. Then it's time to move on.

Do I love myself? I would now respond to that former co-worker, "I love me, too, because of Jesus" — and pray that the Holy Spirit would spur her to ask me about Him. **BA**

### Christine Rhyne

writes from Port Charlotte, FL. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.



The screenshot shows the BA Online website interface. At the top is a navigation bar with links: HOME, ABOUT, MAGAZINE, PUBLICATIONS, PARTNERS, CONTACT US, SHOP, and ENGLISH. Below this is a large featured article titled "At His Feet" with a background image of a hand. Underneath the featured article is a "RECENT POSTS" section with three circular icons and corresponding article titles. Below that are three columns of article thumbnails: "CURRENT ISSUE" (Current Issue), "ONLINE EXTRA" (Servant, Slave, Savior), and "NOW WHAT?" (Finding the Way Forward). At the bottom are three more columns: "LEAD UP" (In With the New), "FOR KIDS" (David Discovers Servanthood), and "MEDIAS" (No Address). The entire screenshot is framed within a decorative border.

# Check out the BA Online!

[baonline.org](http://baonline.org)



## Kingdom Justice, Kingdom Mercy

The apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans is a bad news/good news letter. Paul first declares all humanity guilty of rebellion and sin against God, totally deserving of God's wrath. This condemnation climaxes, "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one'" (3:10-12, ESV throughout).

But then, with Romans 3:21, the good news begins to flow: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (vv. 21, 22).

In Romans 3:21-26, we find four characteristics of this "righteousness of God." First, it is "apart from law." Why? Because of Romans 3:20! "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Law reveals our sins, but it cannot save us from them.

Second, God's righteousness comes "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." This is Paul's consistent gospel: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Third, God's righteousness is God's gift to all who believe: "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans

3:22-24). Again, all have sinned, all face justice, all who place their faith in Jesus are forgiven and saved.

Fourth, God's righteousness is available because of Jesus. He had to live a perfect life as one of us so He could give His life for our sins in place of us. This made it possible for God to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (v. 26).

Because of His own nature and integrity, God faced what would seem to our human minds as an insurmountable challenge: How could He remain both just and merciful toward sinful humanity? If God is simply merciful and He ignores our sin, then He is not being just. The "wages of sin is death" (6:23), and justice requires that the wages must be paid! But if God is simply just and He does require us to die for our sin, then He is not being merciful. How can He remain both just and merciful? How can He be both "just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"?

God's solution is amazing! "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In this way, the wages of sin are paid, so God remains just. And those who believe in Jesus are forgiven, so God remains merciful. In Jesus, the penalty for our sin has been paid. In Jesus, God's wrath against our sin has been fully delivered. In Jesus, we stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Thank God for kingdom mercy!

— Loren Stacy





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