

# God's Mercy Extended

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## Forward

Mercy has been defined as “not giving a person what he or she deserves.” This is exactly what God did for Israel and what he does for us.

Our disobedience demands judgment! But God shows mercy toward us by providing an escape from sin’s penalty through Jesus Christ, who alone saves us from sin.

When we pray for forgiveness, we are asking for what we do not deserve. Yet when we take this step and trust in Christ’s saving work on our behalf, we can experience God’s forgiveness.

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task.

What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus’ words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

Since we wish to receive Mercy from God, we too must show mercy.

## Chapter 1



**God is always reaching out to us in Mercy.**

Genesis 8:21-22

And the Lord was pleased with the sacrifice and said to himself, "I will never again curse the earth, destroying all living things, even though people's thoughts and actions are bent toward evil from childhood.

As long as the earth remains, there will be springtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night."

Countless times throughout the Bible we see God showing his love and patience toward men and women in order to save them.

Although he realizes that their hearts are evil, he continues to try to reach them. When we sin or fall away from God, we surely deserve to be destroyed by his judgment.

But God has promised never again to destroy everything on earth until the judgment day when Christ returns to destroy evil forever. Now every change of season is a reminder of his promise.

Deut. 30:1-6

"Suppose all these things happen to you—the blessings and the curses I have listed—and you meditate on them as you are living among the nations to which the Lord your God has exiled you.

If at that time you return to the Lord your God, and you and your children begin wholeheartedly to obey all the commands I have given you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes.

He will have mercy on you and gather you back from all the nations where he has scattered you, and bring you back again. He will return you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will possess that land again. He will make you even more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors!

"The Lord your God will cleanse your heart and the hearts of all your descendants so that you will love him with all your heart and soul, and so you may live!

Moses told the Hebrews that when they were ready to return to God, he would be ready to receive them. God's mercy is unbelievable. It goes far beyond what we can imagine.

Even if the Jews deliberately walked away from him and ruined their lives, God would still take them back. God would give them inward spiritual renewal (circumcise their hearts).

God wants to forgive us and bring us back to himself too. Some people will not learn this until their world has crashed in around them. Then the sorrow and pain seem to open their eyes to what God has been saying all along. Are you separated from God by sin?

No matter how far you have wandered, God promises a fresh beginning if only you will turn to him.

## God's justice versus mercy

Genesis 18:20-33

So the Lord told Abraham, "I have heard that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are extremely evil, and that everything they do is wicked. I am going down to see whether or not these reports are true. Then I will know."

The two other men went on toward Sodom, but the Lord remained with Abraham for a while. Abraham approached him and said, "Will you destroy both innocent and guilty alike?"

Suppose you find fifty innocent people there within the city—will you still destroy it, and not spare it for their sakes?

Surely you wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the innocent with the guilty. Why, you would be treating the innocent and the guilty exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

And the Lord replied, "If I find fifty innocent people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake."

Then Abraham spoke again. "Since I have begun, let me go on and speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes. Suppose there are only forty-five? Will you destroy the city for lack of five?"

And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five."

Then Abraham pressed his request further. "Suppose there are only forty?"  
And the Lord replied, "I will not destroy it if there are forty."

"Please don't be angry, my Lord," Abraham pleaded. "Let me speak—suppose only thirty are found?"

And the Lord replied, "I will not destroy it if there are thirty."

Then Abraham said, "Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue—suppose there are only twenty?"

And the Lord said, "Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty." Finally, Abraham said, "Lord, please do not get angry; I will speak but once more! Suppose only ten are found there?"

And the Lord said, "Then, for the sake of the ten, I will not destroy it."

The Lord went on his way when he had finished his conversation with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his tent.

Did Abraham change God's mind? Of course not. The more likely answer is that God changed Abraham's mind. Abraham knew that God is just and that he punishes sin, but he may have wondered about God's mercy. Abraham seemed to be probing God's mind to see how merciful he really was.

He left his conversation with God convinced that God was both kind and fair. Our prayers won't change God's mind, but they may change ours just as Abraham's prayer changed his. Prayer helps us better understand the mind of God.

Why did God let Abraham question his justice and intercede for a wicked city? Abraham knew that God must punish sin, but he also knew from experience that God is merciful to sinners. God knew there were not ten righteous people in the city, but he was merciful enough to allow Abraham to intercede.

He was also merciful enough to help Lot, Abraham's nephew, get out of Sodom before it was destroyed. God does not take pleasure in destroying the wicked, but he must punish sin. He is both just and merciful. We should be thankful that God's mercy extends to us.

God gave the men of Sodom a fair test. He was not ignorant of the city's wicked practices, but in his fairness and patience he gave the people of Sodom one last chance to repent. God is still waiting, giving people the opportunity to turn to him (2 Peter 3:9). Those who are wise will turn to him before his patience wears out.

Was God being unfair to the people of Sodom? Did he really plan to destroy the righteous with the wicked? On the contrary, God's fairness stood out.

- (1) He agreed to spare the entire city if only ten righteous people lived there.
- (2) He showed great mercy toward Lot, apparently the only man in the city who had any kind of relationship with him (and even that was questionable).
- (3) He showed great patience toward Lot, almost forcing him to leave Sodom before it was destroyed.

Remember God's patience when you are tempted to think he is unfair. Even the most godly people deserve his justice. We should be glad God doesn't direct his justice toward us as he did toward Sodom.

God showed Abraham that asking for anything is allowed, with the understanding that God's answers come from God's perspective.

They are not always in harmony with our expectations, for only he knows the whole story. Are you missing God's answer to a prayer because you haven't considered any possible answers other than the one you expect?

Though you are at the ends of the earth, the Lord your God will go and find you

## Numbers 35:11-28

Designate cities of refuge for people to flee to if they have killed someone accidentally. These cities will be places of protection from a dead person's relatives who want to avenge the death. The slayer must not be killed before being tried by the community.

Designate six cities of refuge for yourselves, three on the east side of the Jordan River and three on the west in the land of Canaan. These cities are for the protection of Israelites, resident foreigners, and traveling merchants. Anyone who accidentally kills someone may flee there for safety.

“But if someone strikes and kills another person with a piece of iron, it must be presumed to be murder, and the murderer must be executed. Or if someone strikes and kills another person with a large stone, it is murder, and the murderer must be executed.

The same is true if someone strikes and kills another person with a wooden weapon. It must be presumed to be murder, and the murderer must be executed. The victim's nearest relative is responsible for putting the murderer to death. When they meet, the avenger must execute the murderer.

So if in premeditated hostility someone pushes another person or throws a dangerous object and the person dies, it is murder.

Or if someone angrily hits another person with a fist and the person dies, it is murder. In such cases, the victim's nearest relative must execute the murderer when they meet.

" But suppose someone pushes another person without premeditated hostility, or throws something that unintentionally hits another person, or accidentally drops a stone on someone, though they were not enemies, and the person dies.

If this should happen, the assembly must follow these regulations in making a

judgment between the slayer and the avenger, the victim's nearest relative.

They must protect the slayer from the avenger, and they must send the slayer back to live in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest.

" 'But if the slayer leaves the city of refuge, and the victim's nearest relative finds him outside the city limits and kills him, it will not be considered murder.

The slayer should have stayed inside the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest, the slayer may return to his own property.

If anyone died because of violence, murder was assumed, but the murder suspect was not automatically assumed guilty. The cities of refuge assured the accused that justice would be served.

But if he or she left the city, then he or she would be assumed guilty and able to be killed by the avenging party. The people were to be intolerant of the sin, yet impartial to the accused so that he or she could have a fair trial.

The cities of refuge represented God's concern for justice in a culture that did not always protect the innocent. It is unjust both to overlook wrongdoing and to jump to conclusions about guilt.

When someone is accused of wrongdoing, stand up for justice, protect those not yet proven guilty, and listen carefully to all sides of the story.

Ezra 9:15

O Lord, God of Israel, you are just. We stand before you in our guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in your presence."

Ezra recognized that if God gave the people the justice they deserved, they would not be able to stand before him.

Often we cry out for justice when we feel abused and unfairly treated. In those moments, we forget the reality of our own sin and the righteous judgment we deserve. How fortunate we are that God gives us mercy and grace rather than only justice.

The next time you ask God for fair and just treatment, pause to think what would happen if God gave you what you really deserve. Plead instead for his mercy.

Psalm 6:1-3

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by an eight-stringed instrument.

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger  
or discipline me in your rage.  
Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak.  
Heal me, Lord, for my body is in agony.  
I am sick at heart.  
How long, O Lord, until you restore me?

David accepted God's punishment, but he begged God not to discipline him in anger. Jeremiah also asked God to correct him gently and not in anger (Jeremiah 10:24).

David recognized that if God treated him with justice alone and not with mercy, he would be wiped out by God's wrath. Often we want God to show mercy to us and justice to everyone else. God in his kindness forgives us instead of giving us what we deserve.

## Isaiah 35:1

Even the wilderness will rejoice in those days. The desert will blossom with flowers.

Isaiah has delivered a message of judgment on all nations, including Israel and Judah, for rejecting God. Although there have been glimpses of relief and restoration for the remnant of faithful believers, the climate of wrath, fury, judgment, and destruction has prevailed.

Now Isaiah breaks through with a vision of beauty and encouragement. God is just as thorough in his mercy as he is severe in his judgment. God's complete moral perfection is revealed by his hatred of all sin, and this leads to judgment.

This same moral perfection is revealed in his love for all he has created. This leads to mercy for those who have sinned but who have sincerely loved Jesus and put their trust in him.

This chapter is a beautiful picture of the final kingdom in which God will establish his justice and destroy all evil. This is the world the redeemed can anticipate after the judgment when creation itself will rejoice in God.

Isaiah 34 spoke of great distress when God will judge all people for their actions. Isaiah 35 pictures the days when life will be peaceful at last and everything will be made right.

Carmel and Sharon were regions of thick vegetation and fertile soil. They were symbols of productivity and plenty.

## Chapter 2



**God gives us mercy in ways we don't know about.**

Genesis 20:6

"Yes, I know you are innocent," God replied. "That is why I kept you from sinning against me; I did not let you touch her.

Abimelech had unknowingly taken a married woman to be his wife and was about to commit adultery. But God somehow prevented him from touching Sarah and held him back from sinning.

What mercy on God's part! How many times has God done the same for us, holding us back from sin in ways we can't even detect? We have no way of knowing—we just know from this story that he can. God works just as often in ways we can't see as in ways we can.

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**God doesn't give us what we deserve.**

## Judges 2:15-16

Every time Israel went out to battle, the Lord fought against them, bringing them defeat, just as he promised. And the people were very distressed.

Then the Lord raised up judges to rescue the Israelites from their enemies.

Baal was the god of the storm and rains; therefore, he was thought to control vegetation and agriculture.

Ashtoreth was the mother goddess of love, war, and fertility (she was also called Astarte or Ishtar). Temple prostitution and child sacrifice were a part of the worship of these Canaanite idols.

This generation of Israelites abandoned the faith of their parents and began worshipping the gods of their neighbors.

Many things can tempt us to abandon what we know is right. The desire to be accepted by our neighbors can lead us into behavior that is unacceptable to God. Don't be pressured into disobedience.

God often saved his harshest criticism and punishment for those who worshiped idols. Why were idols so bad in God's sight? To worship an idol violated the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-6).

The Canaanites had gods for almost every season, activity, or place. To them, the Lord was just another god to add to their collection of gods.

Israel, by contrast, was to worship only the Lord. They could not possibly believe that God was the one true God and at the same time bow to an idol.

Idol worshipers could not see their god as their creator because they created him. These idols represent sensual, carnal, and immoral aspects of human nature. God's nature is spiritual and moral. Adding the worship of idols to the worship of God could not be tolerated.

Despite Israel's disobedience, God showed his great mercy by raising up judges to save the people from their oppressors.

Mercy has been defined as "not giving a person what he or she deserves." This is exactly what God did for Israel and what he does for us. Our disobedience demands judgment! But God shows mercy toward us by providing an escape from sin's penalty through Jesus Christ, who alone saves us from sin. When we pray for forgiveness, we are asking for what we do not deserve. Yet when we take this step and trust in Christ's saving work on our behalf, we can experience God's forgiveness.

### **Depending on God's mercy**

Psalm 3:1-2

A psalm of David, regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom.

O Lord, I have so many enemies;  
so many are against me.  
So many are saying,  
"God will never rescue him!"

David felt like he was in the minority. There may have been as many as 10,000 soldiers surrounding him at this time (Psalm 3:6). Not only did David's enemies view life differently, they actively sought to harm him.

As king, David could have trusted his army to defeat Absalom. Instead, he depended upon God's mercy (Psalm 3:4); therefore, he was at peace with whatever outcome occurred, knowing that God's great purposes would prevail. We can overcome fear by trusting God for his protection in our darkest hour.

David was not sitting on his throne in a place of power, but he was running for his life from his rebellious son Absalom and a host of traitors.

When circumstances go against us, it is tempting to think that God also is against us. But David reminds us that the opposite is true. When everything seems to go against us, God is still for us.

If circumstance has turned against you, don't blame God—seek him!

The word "Selah" occurs 71 times in Psalms and three times in Habakkuk (Psalm 3:3, 9, 13). Though its precise use is unknown, it was most likely a musical sign.

Three suggestions are: (1) It was a musical direction to the singers and orchestra to play *forte* or *crescendo*. (2) It was a signal to lift up the hands or voice in worship, or to the priest to give a benediction. (3) It was a phrase like "Amen" meaning "so be it," or "Hallelujah" meaning "Praise the Lord.

### **Ask God to temper his discipline with mercy.**

Psalm 38:1

A psalm of David, to bring us to the Lord's remembrance

O Lord, don't rebuke me in your anger!  
Don't discipline me in your rage!

As a child might cry to his father, so David cried to God. David was not saying, “Don’t punish me,” but, “Don’t punish me while you are angry.” He acknowledged that he deserved to be punished, but he asked that God temper his discipline with mercy.

Like children, we are free to ask for mercy, but we should not deny that we deserve punishment.

This is called a penitential psalm because David expressed sorrow for his sin (Psalm 38:18).

He stated that his sin led to health problems (Psalm 38:1-8) and separated him from God and others, causing extreme loneliness (Psalm 38:9-14). He then confessed his sin and repented (Psalm 38:15-22).

### **How quickly we forget God’s mercy.**

Jonah 4:3

Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive because nothing I predicted is going to happen."

Jonah had run from the job of delivering God’s message of destruction to Nineveh (Jonah 1:2-3); then he wanted to die because the destruction wouldn’t happen.

How quickly Jonah had forgotten God’s mercy for him when he was in the fish (Jonah 2:9-10). Jonah was happy when God saved him, but angry when Nineveh was saved.

But Jonah was learning a valuable lesson about God's mercy and forgiveness. God's forgiveness was not only for Jonah or for Israel alone; it extends to all who repent and believe.

Jonah may have been more concerned about his own reputation than God's. He knew that if the people repented, none of his warnings to Nineveh would come true. This would embarrass him, although it would give glory to God. Are you more interested in getting glory for God or for yourself?

## Chapter 3



### How we receive Mercy?

Zech. 3:2-4

And the Lord said to Satan, "I, the Lord, reject your accusations, Satan. Yes, the Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you. This man is like a burning stick that has been snatched from a fire."

Jeshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel. [4] So the angel said to the others standing there,

"Take off his filthy clothes." And turning to Jeshua he said, "See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes."

Zechariah's vision graphically portrays how we receive God's mercy. We do nothing ourselves.

God removes our filthy clothes (sins), then provides us with new, clean, rich garments (the righteousness and holiness of God—2 Cor. 5:21; Ephes. 4:24; Rev. 19:8). All we need to do is repent and ask God to forgive us.

When Satan tries to make you feel dirty and unworthy, remember that the clean clothes of Christ's righteousness make you worthy to draw near to God.

### **How we can show mercy each day.**

Matthew 25:34-40

Then the King will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

"Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?

When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

This last man was thinking only of himself. He hoped to play it safe and protect himself from his hard master, but he was judged for his self-centeredness. We must not make excuses to avoid doing what God calls us to do. If God truly is our Master, we must obey willingly.

Our time, abilities, and money aren't ours in the first place—we are caretakers, not owners. When we ignore, squander, or abuse what we are given, we are rebellious and deserve to be punished.

This parable describes the consequences of two attitudes to Christ's return. The person who diligently prepares for it by investing his or her time and talent to serve God will be rewarded.

The person who has no heart for the work of the kingdom will be punished. God rewards faithfulness. Those who bear no fruit for God's kingdom cannot expect to be treated the same as those who are faithful.

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task. What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

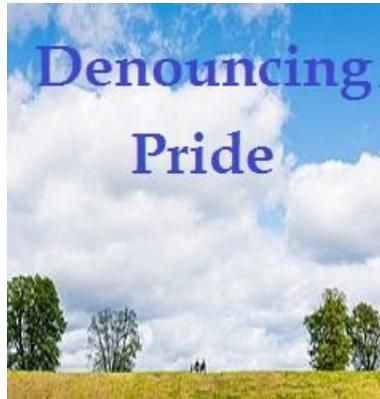
Jesus used sheep and goats to picture the division between believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats often grazed together but were separated when it came time to shear the sheep. Ezekiel 34:17-24 also refers to the separation of sheep and goats.

This parable describes acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received. We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand over this responsibility to the church or government. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7).

There has been much discussion about the identity of the "brothers." Some have said they are the Jews; others say they are all Christians; still others say they are suffering people everywhere. Such a debate is much like the lawyer's earlier question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

The point of this parable is not the *who*, but the *what*—the importance of serving where service is needed. The focus of this parable is that we should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him.

## Chapter 4



**Mercy comes from denouncing pride.**

Luke 18:11-14

The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'

I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."

Trying to protect Jesus, Peter pulled a sword and wounded the high priest's servant. But Jesus told Peter to put away his sword and allow God's plan to unfold.

At times it is tempting to take matters into our own hands, to force the issue.

Most often such moves lead to sin. Instead we must trust God to work out his plan. Think of it—if Peter had had his way, Jesus would not have gone to the cross, and God's plan of redemption would have been thwarted.

The cup means the suffering, isolation, and death that Jesus would have to endure in order to atone for the sins of the world.

Jesus was immediately taken to the high priest's residence, even though this was the middle of the night. The religious leaders were in a hurry—they wanted to complete the execution before the Sabbath and get on with the Passover celebration.

This residence was a palace whose outer walls enclosed a courtyard where servants and soldiers would warm themselves around a fire.

Both Annas and Caiaphas had been high priests. Annas was Israel's high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, when he was deposed by Roman rulers. Caiaphas, Annas's son-in-law, was appointed high priest from A.D. 18 to 36/37. According to Jewish law, the office of high priest was held for life.

Many Jews therefore still considered Annas the high priest and still called him by that title. But although Annas retained much authority among the Jews, Caiaphas made the final decisions.

Both Caiaphas and Annas cared more about their political ambitions than about their responsibility to lead the people to God.

Though religious leaders, they had become evil. As the nation's spiritual leaders, they should have been sensitive to God's revelation.

They should have known that Jesus was the Messiah about whom the Scriptures spoke, and they should have pointed the people to him. But when deceitful men and women pursue evil, they want to eliminate all opposition.

Instead of honestly evaluating Jesus' claims based on their knowledge of Scripture, these religious leaders sought to further their own selfish ambitions and were even willing to kill God's Son, if that's what it took, to do it.

### **God's mercy is what forgives us.**

Ephesians 4:32

Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

We can grieve the Holy Spirit by the way we live. Paul warns us against unwholesome language, bitterness, improper use of anger, brawling, slander, and bad attitudes toward others. Instead of acting that way, we should be forgiving, just as God has forgiven us. Are you grieving or pleasing God with your attitudes and actions? Act in love toward your brothers and sisters in Christ, just as God acted in love by sending his Son to die for your sins.

The Holy Spirit within us is a seal or guarantee that we belong to God. For more on this thought, see the note on Ephes. 1:13-14.

This is Christ's law of forgiveness as taught in the Gospels (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:35; Mark 11:25).

We also see it in the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." God does not forgive us *because* we forgive others, but solely because of his great mercy. As we come to understand his mercy, however, we will want to be like him.

Having received forgiveness, we will pass it on to others. Those who are unwilling to forgive have not become one with Christ, who was willing to forgive even those who crucified him (Luke 23:34).

**References:**

Holy Bible: King James Translation

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