

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World



Blessed are The Merciful for They Shall Receive Mercy!



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Blessed are The Merciful for They Shall Receive Mercy!

By Janet Treadway

“Blessed [are] the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Mankind by nature has often not been merciful through the ages of time to his fellow man. That is why we need to know how God strongly desires for us to understand the quality of mercy in our world. It is by God’s transforming grace that we can understand how mercy will be a basic trait in the kind of people who will inherit the kingdom of God.

We all make mistakes (oops, mistakes). How do we respond to our own mistakes? And how do we respond to the mistakes of others? Responding in a godly way is a vital part of Christian character.

The proverb, “to err is human, to forgive divine,”

has been popular since the 14th century. Yes, we all need erasers on our pencils. We make mistakes aplenty. But then what? How we handle those mistakes and the mistakes of others can determine how well we do in life, *and how God responds to us when we need mercy.*

This was brought home to me recently when my daughter, Michelle David shared a horrible experience that she witnessed in a store while shopping.

Michelle passed a little girl pushing a buggy. She was so little she could hardly see over the buggy. Her mother was down the aisle looking at products. Suddenly Michelle heard a loud bang. Turning, all she could see was a mass of cookies flying everywhere. The little girl’s mom ran down and screamed at her. You could hear the mother’s voice all over the store. The little girl, mortified at what she had caused by

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running her buggy into the cookies, stooped down to help her mom pick up the cookies. Once again her mother yelled at her and said, "Don't help, you have already done enough damage!"

The little girl cried. She kept telling her mom, "It was accident". But her mother was hearing none of it and kept on yelling. As the two left the store, the daughter still sobbing, the mother still yelling, Michelle could just make out the little girl crying, "hugsie, mommy, hugsie." But all she received was more yelling and scolding.

My daughter's story brought back memories of a huge mistake I once made. Several years ago I worked in a curtain factory as a cutter, cutting the material to be sewn into curtains. Stan, my boss at the time, was a patient and kind man who would take much time in training and helping his employees to succeed on their jobs. I was to learn later what a truly great boss he was.

One day was particularly productive for me. Everything seemed to go right. I must have cut 500 shower curtains, setting a record for me. Needless to say, at

the end of the day I left for home very pleased.

500 mistakes!

But a couple of days later a bomb fell! The curtains I cut went on to the sewing section to be hemmed before moving on to the packers. It was discovered that the curtains were two inches too short. I had forgotten to change the drum they were cut on to the correct size. So now, sitting on the racks, waiting to be packaged, were 500 shower curtains, all of which were too short! I was mortified, because in that year--1993--a shower curtain retailed for at least \$10.00.

My boss Stan, spent most of the morning in a meeting with management over the situation. While I sat out in the plant crying over my stupid mistake, management was discussing my fate. I felt terrible because my mistake had cost the company a great deal of money, and I would probably be fired. Instead, to my surprise and great relief, my boss fought for me. Management only saw the money lost for their company. Stan, my boss, saw me as a valued employee who had made a mistake but was worth keeping instead of being

thrown away. And he did not stop there. Knowing how I felt, he came out after the meeting to encourage me. He told me this was not the worst thing that would happen to me in life, and that I would get through it.

While encouraging me, he began to help me rip out the hems so they could be re-hemmed at a longer length. The curtains ended up at Odd Lots, a bargain store, so the company was able to regain some of its losses.

I have a great memory of a very merciful boss, but what kind of will the little girl in the grocery store remember when she's older? Will it be the kind of memory I had concerning my boss? No-- probably not! And how will she look at God in times when she falls short and needs forgiveness? Will she only expect a harsh God with no mercy?

Just imagine how mortified we would feel if when we fall short or make a mistake only to be rejected by God. We reach up to our Father for forgiveness, only for Him to scream at us and totally ignore us? Thankfully our Father in Heaven is not like that.

Lessons I learned

Be humbled in dealing with yourself and others. Be humble and don't look down on others when they make a mistake and are truly sorry. That is where being merciful comes in.

Though it seemed like a nightmare at the time, I learned some valuable lessons that day from the merciful treatment I received from Stan. What lessons did the little girl in the grocery store learn? Which one of these examples will point our children and others to God in His handling of us?

Ask God to give you a merciful heart. All good gifts come from God, so why not go to the source to obtain a merciful, empathic heart?

Don't Correct in Public!

The little girl's mom belittled her and embarrassed her in front of everyone! Treat others in a way that you would like to be treated. No one wants to be embarrassed in front of others. Do the correction in love and in private

Forgive – and give people another chance!

The little girl wanted forgiveness and encourage-

ment from her mom, and to make amends by helping clean up. Her mother refused all three!

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32; New International Version) . And “A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Proverbs 19:11, New International Version).

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

God is always there with open arms to accept us and forgive us. While dying on the cross, Christ forgave His enemies. While they spat on Him, He prayed , “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

So how do we handle another person's mistakes? Do we use our authority to crush or to build up a person? How do we handle our own mistakes? Do you feel like giving up or do we forgive ourselves, learn from our mistakes and

move on? Mike Ditka, a famous coach, once said, “You are never a loser until you quit trying.”

Only punish for rebellion, not a genuine mistake!

Avoid punishing yourself and others when mistakes are made. Stan did not punish me; he knew that I was already doing that to myself. He could have fired me. He could have given my job to someone else. He could have belittled me. Instead, he forgave my mistake and looked for gentle ways to ensure it wouldn't happen again. When working with your children, be very slow to punish over an accident! Rebellion, yes, but not...over a true accident. Never reject your child when they need to be comforted, and especially when they are trying to say they are sorry. Treat yourself in the same way. Forget it and move on! And certainly be merciful to others.

Be an encourager!

Encourage others when they make a mistake. Sadly the mother failed miserably in reaching out to her mortified child. This could have been a great teaching moment in love and encouragement to

her daughter. On the other hand, Stan's fighting for me, speaking kindly to me, and pitching in to help me fix the mess greatly encouraged me and made me want to try even harder to be a good employee.

Treat others as God treats us.

He knows our frame and how weak we are. He did not call the mighty of the world, but people He could gently work with. He called people who know they are weak without Him.

God sees what we can become instead of focusing on our mistakes. He lifts us up and encourages us to go on. He does not get rid of us, scream at us, reject us, or replace us with someone else. God gives us chance

after chance as long as we have a repentant heart and keep trying. That sums up a lot about God's mercy and tenderness toward us.

God instructs us on how to deal with each other as he deals with us: "Therefore, as [the] elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do]"(Col 3:12-13).

So the next time a child... or someone you know makes a mistake, be gentle, kind and encouraging. Look for ways to solve the problem and don't quit! Treat others the way you would want to be treated if

you were the one who goofed. Keep learning. Keep forgiving. We can all be in God's Kingdom some day in spite of our mistakes. Most of all, be merciful to your children and those around you when they make a mistake.

Always remember how God looks at all of us when mistakes are made and treat others accordingly. "Like as a father pities [his] children, [So] the LORD pities those that fear him. For he knows our frame; He remembers that we [are] dust. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting..." (Psalm 103:13-14, 17).

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

Provoking Peace

By Katherine Rowland

Too many in this world provoke others to anger. But shouldn't we be more like Hebrews 10:24 where it says 'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works'?

I open my Facebook page and try to catch up on my friends' news. But instead of seeing the camp photos, summer trip stories, and new baby updates I'm looking for, I find myself



scrolling past heated words, pictures and cartoons with in-your-face messages, and status updates designed to provoke. My Twitter account is no better as friends and acquaintances of various backgrounds and ideologies loudly proclaim their allegiance and belief in the causes about which they're passionate. Rather than feeling connected with anyone, I start the day feeling like everyone is unpleasant. I haven't said a word to anyone yet, but it feels like the world is shouting at me, and sometimes it's using words that aren't very nice.

I might be the only person who has had this experience, but I suspect that there are others out there as well. Many seem to be wondering whether society is getting ruder, or whether we're just noticing it more. And the problem is intensified on the Internet, where some seem to lose their inhibitions when it comes to speaking in rude, provocative, or angry ways. Often, bold or harsh statements are made in a passive-aggressive way: just vague enough that when someone's feelings are hurt, the author can say, "Well, I'm not angry. I'm just saying how I see things." Or, "I didn't say I

was talking about anyone specific." Others claim the more altruistic motives of "just telling the truth" or "trying to make people more aware." But whatever the reasoning or the motive, the result is not harmony, education, or enlightenment. Instead, these words that fill my screen (and perhaps yours) often result in hurt feelings, damaged relationships, loss of respect, and the creation of a hostile environment.

Does the Bible have anything to say about what seems to be a very modern problem? I found an interesting passage in the book of Proverbs as I was thinking about this.

"If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, Or if you have devised evil, [put your] hand on [your] mouth.

For [as] the churning of milk produces butter, And wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife" (Proverbs 30:32-33).

Matthew Henry's commentary points out that the "forcing of wrath" is equivalent to purposely irritating someone, provoking them to anger.

Strife and anger follow provocative behavior and words. I can certainly testify to that; when others' words are meant to provoke, my initial reaction *is* anger. I want to respond with my own harsh words or provoking statements. But we, as Christians, are called to a different reaction. We are also called to a different action.

Perhaps the clearest summation of how we ought to guide our conduct was written by James. He advised, *"Who [is] wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct [that] his works [are done] in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but [is] earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking [exist], confusion and every evil thing [are] there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace"* (James 3:13-18).

When we compare the proverb to James's instructions, we can quickly see the similarity. Exalting ourselves, says the proverb, is foolish. James points out that wisdom is meek and willing to yield. Righteousness, he continues, is sown by those who make peace; strife—which is the opposite of peace—is created by those who force wrath. There are two options open to us when we choose how to

act or how to speak: wisdom and folly. Wise choices—*righteous* choices—lead to peace. They create it where it may not have existed previously. By contrast, foolish, provocative behaviors create wrath and strife where it may not have been before.

Rude and obnoxious behavior is nothing new. It has existed as long as humans have been alive. We can see from the book

of Proverbs that provocative behavior was not born in the Internet age. The same choices that were open to the ancients—peace or strife, wisdom or folly—are open to us today. We can either choose to say the sharp, provocative thing, or we can choose to stop shouting and start making peace. Only one of those choices shows us as truly wise.



The Sabbath: What It Means to Me

By: Elaine Jamieson



God created the Sabbath to refresh and instruct His people.

In the Fourth Commandment, God says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). What does He mean by “remember?” When I think about remem-

bering, I think about something very important, something I am not to forget; purposely recalling something from memory or bringing something to mind.

A road sign for life

In Mark 2:27, Christ said that we weren't made for the Sabbath, but that the Sabbath was made for us. But why did God make the Sabbath for us? He made it so that we come together to worship Him, and so that He can guide and direct our lives, teaching us His ways.

Exodus 31:16-17 reads, "Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." Notice that Israel was to "observe," meaning to celebrate, keep, or adhere to in practice. It is to be "a perpetual covenant," an agreement or contract between God and man.

Furthermore, it is to be a sign. People need signs to show them where to go or give them helpful information. There are many signs in our society that direct us where we should go, and God has given us signs in the Bible for the same purpose. The Sabbath is one of those signs. Just like a road sign helping you while driving, the

Sabbath points you in the right direction in life.

When God first opened my mind to His truth, the Sabbath was a point that stuck hard in my thoughts. I knew the Sabbath was important, and I was afraid I wouldn't keep it. I had thought Saturday was my day to do what I wanted – to work, go shopping, do recreational things – but now God was showing me it was a day to be close to Him.

Importance of fellowship

I've learned through the years what a pleasure it is to keep the Sabbath together. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." The idea is that people grow from interaction with one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Love and good works need to be stirred up – they do not just occur! We have a tremendous impact on each other. This is why we

need to exhort one another to gather together.

Blessed for keeping the Sabbath

Isaiah 58:13-14 says, "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

So then, this is what the Sabbath means to me: it is a day to rest and be renewed; it is a day to be with God and with family and brethren, knowing His presence is there. As I go through the week, I can meditate, study, and pray

and look forward to the Sabbath, when I can learn more and delight in all the things God has given me.

To learn more about this important time each week, request our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*.

Thy Will Be Done!

By Robert Berendt



Submitting to God's will is not easy for us, but it can be done.

We pray these words in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, King James Version). The words may come easily, but when God's will is not the same as our will then suddenly we have a problem. Mankind has found a myriad of ways to make God into an image that humans have devised. In all likelihood, there are as many concepts of God as there are people on earth. When a group comes together to express a single belief, we realize that even within that group there are

a vast array of concepts that differ. Christianity, for example, comprises thousands of groups. In each group, there are individuals who apply the laws of their worship in a way that suits them. It is not easy for a human being to accept the will of

God. To begin with, we often do not really *know* the will of God, and if we think we do, give us a little time and we will be able to make the changes that suit what we think!

God is Almighty in every way. That means only He is right in all He determines. He sets the boundaries of good and evil. He makes the laws and gives the guidelines of worship. He alone can rightly judge every person on earth while we have trouble judging our own actions. How often I have said: "Why did I do that?" or "Why did I say that?" There are many times that we would like to undo our actions.

Total submission is the goal

The difficulty for us humans is reflected in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. To be sure, Jesus was terribly aware of the fate that awaited Him.

He was to be the sacrificial lamb and He was to be brutally beaten and forsaken. Psalm 22 gives some details of what He would endure. That psalm was inspired by God a thousand years before Jesus was to die—and has acted as a measuring stick of the detail with which God can make a prophecy and bring it to pass. That is what defines Him as God. No human can do that—and certainly not a thousand years before it will occur.

In the hour just before His surrender, Jesus struggled within Himself. He begged God to take the cup from Him if it were possible (Matthew 26:39). God does tell us that prophecies will fail (1 Corinthians 13:8). He showed He can reverse a decision He has made (Jonah 3:10). Jesus' request was not impertinent, nor was it insulting. It reflected what we sometimes have to go through in order to grasp the importance of surrendering our will to that of God. Jesus came to the point of saying, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

In Paul's life, God's will was that he would suffer many things while doing the job God called him for (Acts 9:16). It was nothing

that Paul would have chosen for himself—it was not the will of Paul. But, it was the submission of Paul’s will to the will of God. That is the point to which everyone must come who wishes to inherit eternal life and receive the wonderful eternal gifts from God. In eternity, there will only be one way—His way.

Because we are human, we sometimes chafe at having someone else dominate our lives. That feels like slavery, and people today have only negative concepts of slavery. It is true that our willing submission to the will of God is a form of slavery (Romans 6:22), but it is also the path to total freedom. This kind of slavery is the kind you never want to be released from.

God’s control is seen in the laws of physics

One of the interesting points of human development is the attempts men have made to fly. God devised the laws of flight. Aerodynamics, gravity, lift, wind forces, power, and thrust all work under a rigid set of laws. Break one law and the result could be death. Many people have leaped from cliffs or devised flying machines that

had some fatal flaw. Only when mankind understood the laws governing flight were they able to soar.

Today we see that the more perfect our obedience is to those laws of God, the more freedom we have. It is fatal to resist His laws; it is freedom to follow them. Now we can fly better than the birds of the air in some ways. Just as the physical laws that God has given are His will and lead to success and freedom when we follow them, so too the spiritual laws are given by God, and obedience to them leads to true freedom and the ability to soar.

It seems an easy lesson to learn; however, carelessness, foolishness, defiance, stubbornness, and a whole host of other “qualities” exist in us all. These unseen forces interfere with doing what we know is right. The enemy of God and mankind—Satan—is alive and well. He is an expert at twisting things just enough so that we will fail spiritually unless we are seeking to do the will of our Father. It is a little like a bird trying to fly when a few feathers are missing. Satan certainly knows how to pluck our feathers to that end.

Submitting to God’s will includes action

It is one thing to pray “Thy will be done” and another thing to *really mean* it. Words are not enough. Actions that reflect our words are required. Oddly enough, when our actions are in place a change takes place within us. We come to love the laws that we discover. We cherish the manner in which we can reason, think, develop and build. We can see our relationships with others improving as we make the effort to be a good neighbor. We find a deep inner contentment and happiness once we yield to God and live His way.

We find that we are able to fly because we have learned to follow His laws carefully. There was great joy and celebration in the hearts of those who first put together something that would actually fly. As better understanding of the physical laws developed and as technology was perfected, so the ability to fly was perfected, yet always within the laws of God. Today there are humans in a space station far above earth carefully working within the limits of God’s laws and enjoying an awesome view of God’s Creation.

Scientists rejoice in finding new laws and applying them. True science is the attempt to find the laws that govern things, and more perfectly apply and function within those laws which were designed at Creation. These laws are those that govern our physical world, but the principle is exactly the same on the spiritual level. Above all humans on earth, scientists ought to be able to comprehend the presence and majesty of God most clearly. They live and breathe His laws every day.

There are stumbling blocks to submission

Still, that human element comes in just as in the days of Galileo when he discovered the laws governing heavenly bodies through his crude telescope and noticed that Jupiter had moons circling it. He then realized the earth was not the center of the universe. Upon his presentation of his clear evidence to the Catholic Church, those priests peering into his telescope saw, but said they did not see. The human part of us is where we have our problem.

Total surrender is needed in our lives, in our thoughts, plans, and future

because the majority of mankind knows nothing about those spiritual laws. It is a little like humans struggling for millennia of time before they discovered the laws of electricity, flight, agriculture, health, and so on and not finding those laws. We have suffered, but we remained blind.

Much of the world has also remained spiritually blind. It does not need to happen—God has offered more. His offer of eternity and eternal life stands, but there is only one way to enter—learn His will and embrace it for the freedom and joy it offers. Jesus Christ did follow through with His words. He had His eye on the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Our will is flawed and biased. There is only one way that is right and is based on God's laws. His will is for the good of His Creation and creatures. Those who submit their will and their sense of right to Him are the ones who will find eternal joy and a future that is breathtaking to consider. We have a struggle in order to submit our will to Him. It may be difficult and we may not understand, but we, too, need to echo Jesus' words,

“Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

To learn more about how to submit to God's will in your life, request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

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