

Magnificent Mercy

by Chuck Swindoll

Chuck Swindoll's sermon emphasizes the profound impact of God's mercy as a source of relief in times of distress and suffering.

Scripture: Genesis 39:21, Exodus 25:17, Ruth 1:3, 2 Samuel 9:7, Job 10:12, Psalm 32:5, Psalm 51:1, Ephesians 2:4

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Divine Relief"

Description

Charles Swindoll preaches on the profound impact of experiencing relief, highlighting how God, as the author of relief, grants us peace, satisfaction, and ease through His mercy. Swindoll emphasizes that mercy is our ultimate source of relief, demonstrating God's active compassion towards both offenders and victims. He delves into various biblical examples where God's mercy brought relief to those suffering from unfair treatment, grief, handicaps, suffering, and guilt, showcasing how mercy mysteriously takes away the anguish in our lives. Swindoll urges believers to remember their undeserving nature before Christ to fully appreciate and frequent the gate of mercy.

Transcript

Several years ago, my sister asked me a question that I'd never been asked before: "What is your favorite feeling?" Ever thought about that? My answer to her was, "I believe my favorite feeling is the feeling of accomplishment."

(Sounds like a driven person's answer, doesn't it?) I like the feeling of getting something done. "Finished" is one of my favorite words.

When I asked her to answer the same question, she said, "My favorite feeling is relief."

I thought that was a great answer. In fact, better than mine! When I checked Webster's later, I found that the feeling of relief means "the removal or lightening of something oppressive, painful, or distressing."

When we are in physical pain, relief means that the pain subsides. When we are emotionally distraught, relief calms us, gives us a sense of satisfaction. When a relationship is strained, perhaps with someone we were once close to, we do not feel relief until we have worked through the painful process of making things right with that person. When we are burdened by heavy financial debt, getting that paid off brings the sweet release of relief. When guilt assaults us in transgression and we seek God's forgiveness, the guilt that ate like a cancer inside us goes away as God brings relief.

Because God is the sovereign ruler over our lives, it's obvious that if we ever have the feeling of relief, God has given it to us. He's the author of relief. He is the one who grants us the peace, the satisfaction, the ease. In fact, I think relief is a wonderful synonym for mercy. Mercy is God's active compassion that He demonstrates to the miserable. When we are in a time of deep distress and God activates His compassion to bring about relief, we've experienced mercy.

Mercy:

Our Source of Relief

The beautiful thing about mercy is that it is demonstrated to the offender as well as to the victim. When the offender realizes his or her wrong, God brings mercy. When the victim needs help to go on, God gives mercy.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:1, 4-5).

"But God," the apostle writes, "being rich in mercy." The connecting link between a holy God and a sinful person is God's love, which activates His grace, which, in turn, sets in motion His mercy. They're like divine dominoes that bump up against one another. He loves us not because of something in ourselves but because of something in Himself. And in His love He demonstrates His grace, which brings forgiveness. And on top of that, grace prompts mercy . . . and there it is: relief!

Some of you have been Christians so long you've forgotten what you were like before Christ. Could that explain why you're still so proud? Maybe that's why the Lord has to spend so much extra time getting your attention. You've forgotten how undeserving you are of His grace. You've forgotten His mercy. Try hard not to forget what life was like before Christ and you will be a frequent visitor at the gate of mercy.

Miseries Relieved

In the Old Testament the Hebrew term for "mercy" is *chesed*. It is a magnificent word, often translated "lovingkindness" or simply "kindness." When I trace *chesed* through the Old Testament Scriptures, I find at least five different miseries to which mercy brings relief. It's like that Visine commercial: "It takes the red out." Mercy mysteriously takes the red out of the anguish of your life.

The first anguish mercy relieves is the anguish of unfair treatment.

For an example of this, we have only to look at Joseph, a great and godly man who was falsely accused. Potiphar's wife comes at Joseph again and again. Each time he rejects her. Finally she corners him alone in her home, with the doors locked and the servants gone and the lights low. Seductively she whispers, "Lie with me." Joseph looks her in the eyes and refuses . . . then makes a mad dash for safety. She is so infuriated that she grabs at him, tears off a piece of his garment, and cries, "Rape!" The word gets to her husband, Potiphar, and Joseph winds up in jail, though he never laid a hand on the woman. The story is found in Genesis 39. Then, at the end of the account, *chesed* appears:

But the Lord was with Joseph and ex-tended kindness [*chesed*, mercy] and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer (Gen. 39:21).

Where did mercy appear? In a jail cell. In an Egyptian dungeon, the Lord visited Joseph and relieved him of the misery of suffering unfair consequences. God ministered to Joseph's heart and kept him from bitterness. God even "gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer."

You may not be in jail, but you may be going through a time of unjust criticism. You're in His will, but now you find yourself in need of His chesed. You need the kind of relief only God can give. It's the same kind the Lord extended to Joseph in that Egyptian cell. Even when you are forgotten by those who should remember you, even when someone doesn't fulfill his promise to you, when you're left alone and you (alone) know your heart is just, God will give you His mercy. He'll bring you relief. He'll meet you in your loneliness.

The second anguish mercy relieves is the anguish of the grief of loss.

The Book of Ruth provides a wonderful example of this. Almost immediately we read that Naomi's husband dies, apparently at a relatively young age, and she is left to raise her two sons as a single parent. About ten years later, both of Naomi's sons die, and suddenly the family consists of the three widows: a mother-in-law named Naomi and two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, grieving over the deaths of their loved ones.

Think of it. Naomi is probably still trying to get over the loss of her husband, and now she has to face the loss of her sons. And the daughters-in-law have lost their husbands. That's a lot of deaths in one family. People need mercy when grief invades their lives.

It's easy to pass over this too quickly, especially if you haven't recently endured a time of grief. But at some time, all of us will. And when you do, remember that God has a special mercy for those who are left as widows and widowers, and for those who are left as grieving parents or grieving children.

It happened on April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Colorado. Heartbroken families were shocked to hear that their sons and daughters and one husband had been shot and killed. That morning, they saw them off to school . . . that night they found themselves standing, grief-stricken, in a funeral home. If ever mercy was needed, it was then. Who could ever explain how such a tragic event could be included in God's permissive will? Mercy soothes such harsh times of confusion.

The third anguish mercy relieves is the anguish of struggling with a handicap.

To see a wonderful example of this, we only have to turn to the Book of 2 Samuel, chapter 9. It has become one of my favorite chapters in the Old Testament. It revolves around a man with a real tongue-twister of a name: Mephibosheth.

Mephibosheth was a grandson of King Saul. According to some ancient customs, when the king died and a new dynasty began to rule, all of the descendants of the old king were annihilated. So when Mephibosheth's nurse heard that both Saul and Jonathan, Mephibosheth's father, had been killed, she took matters into her own hands.

Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 4:4).

Crippled and forgotten, he lived a life of obscurity in a place called Lo-debar, which when translated means "no pastureland." It's a word picture of a place of barrenness. Then one day, out of the blue, in the midst of all his pomp and prosperity, David remembers his dear friend Jonathan, possibly thinking about how much he still misses him--perhaps even still grieving over the loss of his friend.

Then David said, "Is there yet anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" . . . And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet" (2 Sam. 9:1-3).

The Scriptures don't tell us what was going through Ziba's mind, but perhaps he was thinking, "I'd better warn the king that Mephibosheth is crippled, because he may want to rethink his request." But if that was what he was thinking, he didn't know David or David's God, who has a special place in His heart for the handicapped.

The king never misses a beat. I love that. He never says, "Oh, really. How bad is the disability?" He doesn't say, "Is the boy on crutches? Can he walk at all?" No, instead, he quickly replies, "Where is he?"

Mephibosheth probably expected to be put to death, but David shows him God's magnificent mercy.

And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness [chesed--there's that wonderful word again] to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly" (2 Sam. 9:7).

Isn't that good! Better still, isn't that mercy? God has a special mercy for those who are handicapped . . . and let me add, also for those who minister to the handicapped. There's a special mercy that it takes, a special mercy that's needed.

The fourth anguish mercy relieves is the anguish of suffering.

No one exemplifies this better than Job. Here's a man who experienced tremendous anguish, both physical and emotional. Imagine yourself in a hospital in the cancer ward where a person is dying in intense pain, and in the enormity of his physical pain, out come words like this. "Why do I have to live in this physical anguish? How much better had I never been born." That's how Job felt (Job 10:1-6).

But even in the midst of Job's struggle with God's mysterious plan, out of his affliction there comes the magnificent presence of divine mercy: "Thou hast granted me life and lovingkindness [chesed]; and Thy care has preserved my spirit" (Job 10:12).

If you have ever been close to someone who is enduring a lengthy time of suffering, or if you have been through such suffering yourself, you know that there are brief breaks in the pain when God's mercy comes over you like a soft-falling rain of relief that washes your sadness and discouragement away.

The fifth anguish mercy relieves is the misery of guilt.

Here we return to David, who offers us a clear glimpse into the tortured soul of a guilty man. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, placed in the fiercest point of battle where he surely would be killed. Then David kept his sin secret for months until the day Nathan courageously looked him in the eye and said, "You are the man!"

David's response, recorded in Psalm 51:1, was, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness [chesed]; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions."

When the child of God tries to hide his sin, the guilt virtually eats him or her alive But when you finally come to terms with your sin, and you make your confession, when you declare yourself guilty, God "surrounds you with His lovingkindness"--His magnificent mercy.

I acknowledged my sin to Thee,

And my iniquity I did not hide;

I said, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord";

And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. . . .

Many are the sorrows of the wicked;

But he who trusts in the Lord,

lovingkindness [chesed] shall surround him (Ps. 32:5, 10).

God's goodness and lovingkindness--His mercy. Some quaint commentator once suggested that since this psalm is written from the viewpoint of a shepherd and his sheep, that last verse could represent God's sheep dogs named Goodness and Mercy. Sheep of God, do you realize that these two

faithful "dogs" watch over you and care for you? Their presence reminds us that relief has come. They nuzzle us back into the shadow of the Shepherd, who graciously welcomes us and forgives us.

Tender Mercies

When I am treated unfairly, God's mercy relieves my bitterness. That's what happens when mercy comes into my cell. I have been in a dungeon of unfair treatment. Bitterness becomes my enemy, but mercy relieves it. Mercy relieves my heart of bitterness, and I can endure whatever comes my way.

When I grieve over loss, God's mercy relieves my anger. Not instantly but ultimately. Often that's the part of grief we don't want to admit--especially anger against the one who has left us and anger against God for taking our loved one.

When I struggle with a handicap, God's mercy relieves my self-pity. That can be a major enemy for the handicapped--self-pity. When they finally come to terms with it in God's mercy, they are ready to do great things for God.

When I endure physical and/or emotional pain, mercy relieves my hopelessness. The great fear of those in long-lasting pain is hopelessness, the deep anguish that they cannot go on--that there will never be a bright tomorrow.

When I deal with sinful actions, God's mercy relieves my guilt. Grace brings me forgiveness, but it doesn't do anything to my guilt. It takes mercy to relieve my guilt.

I love that old hymn, "Day by Day":

"Ev'ry day the Lord Himself is near me

With a special mercy for each hour;

All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,

He whose name is Counselor and Power."

We often find ourselves in miserable situations . . . mysteriously, yet magnificently, mercy brings the relief that is so desperately needed.

The Basis of Mercy

When God commanded the Israelites to build the tabernacle, He had them construct a special piece of furniture for the holiest place of all. Not simply a holy place, but the holiest of all, the Holy of Holies, hidden safely behind the thick-veiled curtain where God's presence rested. This piece of furniture was a sacred box called an ark, in which the Israelites were to place the tablets of the Law and Aaron's rod that budded.

On this ark was a lid, and over this lid they placed two hand-carved golden angels called cherubim, one at each end, their strong solid gold wings reaching out toward each other. And the place over which the cherubim hovered was the most intimate place in the tabernacle because it was the lid over the box where the blood was poured century after century. Appropriately, this most-intimate part has come to be called "the mercy seat." When the blood was poured out onto the ark, God was satisfied because it represented the sacrifice Jesus Christ would later make to atone for sin. His anger abated as His mercy emerged.

Francis Schaeffer writes, "It was (Martin) Luther, when translating the Old Testament into German, who first used the term 'mercy seat.' It is a beautiful, poetic phrase--but it also accurately communicates what the lid on the ark really was, a place of mercy." It wasn't simply a place of rigid, demanding Law; it became a place of tender, forgiving mercy.

As people of God, we must be people of mercy. We must lessen our demands and increase our compassion, just as our God so often does with us. His tender mercy so beautifully balances His sovereignty and His justice and His holiness.

What a mystery! God, who has every reason to judge us for our iniquities, graciously grants us His mercy. Mercy full of forgiveness. Mercy wrapped in love. The magnificent mercy of God, which we do not deserve . . .but from which we find great relief.

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