

God Is Merciful; Ready to Pardon

by Shane Idleman

God is merciful and ready to pardon us for our sins, and He honors those who are faithful and fear Him.

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Scripture: Nehemiah 7:2, Nehemiah 8:9, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 30:5, Isaiah 40:29, Matthew 11:28, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, James 1:19-20, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Faithfulness", "God's Mercy"

Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes God's mercy and readiness to pardon, drawing from Nehemiah's leadership in Jerusalem. He highlights the importance of faithfulness and reverence for God, as exemplified by Nehemiah's choice of a faithful man to oversee the city. The sermon encourages believers to embrace God's grace and mercy, reminding them that despite their shortcomings, God is always ready to forgive and restore. Idleman also discusses the significance of being mindful of influences in our lives and the necessity of repentance and joy in our relationship with God. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of God's character as gracious, merciful, and slow to anger.

Transcript

The title is God is Merciful, Ready to Pardon. And in chapter 7, we read that Nehemiah gave charge of Jerusalem to a faithful man who feared God. So what happened, I don't know if you've been here the last few weeks or not, but Nehemiah has been trying to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem.

He finally completed the wall after many challenging setbacks from Sanballat and Tobias. These people that were after him and pestering him and trying to get him to stop the building of the wall. But he finally finished the building of the wall.

And then instead of exalting himself, because that's what they said he was going to do, you're going to exalt yourself, you're going to become a king, and you're going to rebel against the real king. And he said that's not true. So when the wall was done, what he did, he appointed, he gave charge of Jerusalem to a faithful man who feared God.

And I want to talk about those two points just for a minute. God will honor the person who keeps their commitment. God will honor the person who is faithful.

Faithful is faith-filled. They persevere. Their word means something.

Their handshake is good enough. They don't need a contract. They're faithful.

You can count on them to be here. And that's what I love about those who serve at this church. I don't even need to contact sound or media or different departments.

It just runs like a well-oiled machine. Because people are there. They know they're going to be there.

They show up, and I love that. Because when I came out of corporate America, it was the opposite. Right? Everybody's trying to get a sick day.

Everybody's hungover. Nobody shows up. Or when I was in construction many years ago, trying to hire labor that would show up on time.

And actually be there. You don't find that in our culture a lot. But God will honor those who are faithful.

If you have a struggle in this area, I would encourage you tonight to change that. Let God change that. And say, Lord, I want to be faithful.

I want to be a God-fearing man, a God-fearing woman who is faithful. Really what that means is your word is your bond. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

When you say something, do it. That's why you want to be also slow to speak. Right? Because there's so many people, I'd love to do that, I'd love to do that.

But then when it comes down to it, they don't show up. They're not committed. God looks at that in such a way that it can bring dishonor to His name if it's a Christian.

How can a Christian be unfaithful at work? Or unfaithful in their marriage? Or unfaithful in church? So I just want to bring this point home that God, I believe, will promote people. Will bless them and promote them wherever they're at if they're faithful and they fear Him. God-fearing man.

That's hard to find these days, isn't it? A God-fearing man. A God-fearing woman. They fear God and they live by that.

And I've talked about this a lot of times before, so I don't want to go into a lot of detail here. But this isn't the kind of fear that you would fear, say, an angry parent. Or somebody who's been physically abused.

And in that environment. It's not that type of fear. It's a reverence, it's a respect.

Not only for God, but for others. You fear God, so you treat others well. And this is why I wish our nation would get God-fearing men back into office.

Back women, back running into office. The Supreme Court. Can you think about, if they were God-fearing? You think that would change a little bit? The Supreme Court of the land.

I would lose sleep over it. If I was a justice. And knowing what we know.

And honoring God. Because that's not the Supreme Court. God is the Supreme Court.

And we need men and women who fear God. So Nehemiah appointed a faithful man who feared God to oversee Jerusalem. And then in chapter 8, something interesting happens.

Ezra, which as you know, is before Nehemiah. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs. Ezra started the process.

Zerubbabel actually started the process many, many years before this to build the temple. Then Ezra comes into Jerusalem to help. And then Nehemiah.

So Ezra is still there. And he actually reads the law to those who could understand. And they all stood.

It's interesting that the Bible says he read the law. Which is this. He read the law.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers probably concentrate just on Moses' law. He read the law to those who can understand. And this is a good point for children's ministry even.

I think. If a child or a young adult can read and understand what the word of God is. I would encourage them to come into the service.

We've had 10-year-olds and 11-year-olds and 12-year-olds receive Christ. Pray, repent, and want to get baptized. And I know sometimes kids think it's boring and different things.

So I understand that. I really do. But according to many biblical passages.

You want to focus on when it comes to group setting. Often it's those who can understand what is being read. Now what that age is.

It all depends on the parents know. Right? We've got the little squiggly one on the front row. Who's 6 and still squiggly.

And they're not understanding. Or maybe it would be 8 for that person. But the bottom line is.

That all of the kids. The young kids. Male or female.

They would listen to the law being read. All that could understand. And I guarantee it wasn't just a 5-minute reading.

It could take a while. And they would reflect and remember on who God was. So they all stood.

And it's something. I think we've lost that. I've thought about bringing that back before.

From time to time. Depending on what the message is. But would you stand for the reading of God's word? Have you heard that? Not now.

Because I'm not going to read it. But that's what. We stand for presidents.

We stand for dignitaries. We stand for others. You know.

Have you ever. The bride comes in. What do we do? We stand and look.

So it's the same thing. And sometimes. You know.

I mean. Sitting is good obviously. But there's something that happens when you can stand.

At the reading of God's word. You come to attention. There's a focus.

There's a central focus. It means something. And if it doesn't mean something to us.

It might not mean something to God. Because he looks at our heart. I don't want to give God that which costs me nothing.

So they all stood. Those who could understand. And he read the law.

And guess what happened? Verse 9 in chapter 8. They all wept when they heard. Because what happened. What happens is.

They read the law. The law told them. What would happen if they forsook God.

They actually forsook God. A Jerusalem was taken. It was destroyed.

And now they're back. Still captives. They're still captives.

In this land. The king allowed them to go. And rebuild.

So they're reading. Almost a prophecy. Many years beforehand of what happened.

They're actually living that life. Of God saying. I will take away.

And nations will judge you. So they heard. Have you ever read something.

You've been convicted in God's word. It's a very good thing. Very good thing.

And there's a big movement right now in the church. That they don't want to convict. Just center.

Center everything around. Feeling good. And not convicting.

And I think the reason is. Because we go to the other side of that. Right.

Like it's always beating up. And people feel beat down. They're not encouraged.

They're discouraged. And it's just the Bible. Just pound them with like a sledgehammer.

And that's not healthy either. We want to encourage. But as you know.

We don't change often. Unless we're convicted. Unless somebody lovingly challenges us.

Unless we're convicted about something. We won't see change. So they read the word of God.

They wept. But the Bible records. That Nehemiah said this.

Do not be sorrowful. Do not be sorrow filled. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. And this is what I love about God. Is there's sorrow.

Right. Have you ever done something wrong. And you realize there's tremendous sorrow.

Lord I can't believe I did this. I can't believe I made this mistake. And you have this sorrow.

However. God at some point will say. Stop weeping.

Stop being sorry about this. I've covered your sin. I've built you up.

I've encouraged you. You're back with the flock. The one that's lost of the 99.

They come back home. The prodigal son comes back home. And God says stop sorrowing.

Let my joy be your strength. Let that relationship you have with me. Be your strength.

Let that be how you continue. And move forward. And it's very encouraging.

Because you have to understand the heart of God. The more time you spend in the Bible. The more you'll see the heart of God.

And we get this. Sometimes we get this impression. If we had a hard father.

Anybody ever have a hard dad? Hard father? And we can kind of view God that way. Or how others have taught God. That's why I encourage you to spend time in his word.

Dig into the Psalms. You'll see that yes. There are consequences for our choices.

Yes there's a God who calls us to holiness. And yes there is a judgment to come. But it's that same God who says.

Come to me all your weak and heavy laden. I will give you rest. I will build you.

I will sustain you. Yes you sin. Yes there's consequences.

But now I'm going to rebuild you. So turn that sorrow into joy. Weeping may endure for the day.

For the night. But joy cometh in the morning. So it's healthy.

Don't get stuck in sorrow. That would be a good bumper sticker. Because we can get.

Oh look at my life. And this is one of the hardest things for me. To do with people.

Especially next door in the prayer room. It happens a lot. Is to continually encourage.

Alcohol has brought tremendous devastation to their life. Addictions. Different things.

And they're living in tremendous sorrow. Their past is haunting them. But there comes a point where God says.

Listen. Let that go. Yes there's consequences.

But I'm going to hold you. And get you through it. Let the sorrow have it's effect.

Which it did. Let the sorrow bring you to repentance. Which it did.

Let the sorrow have it be. Where you're not going to do that again. Okay great.

But now. Take great joy and strength. And that I am your God.

And I will see you through. And I will uphold you. With my right hand.

It's very encouraging. Now verse 9. I'm sorry chapter 9. So we see in chapter 7. He gave charge to a faithful man of God. Chapter 8. Ezra reads the law.

To those who could understand it. And then chapter 9. A separation had to take place. The people actually were getting married to pagan wives.

And Ezra said. You need to break that off. You need to.

But we know in the New Testament. That we have different guidelines now. Because we encourage people.

If they have to marry an unbeliever. And they're already married. To stay with that unbeliever.

In hopes that that person would come to know the Lord. There are different exceptions of course. With infidelity and different things.

But this was a special time in Nehemiah. Where God called his chosen people. To rebuild the temple.

To be a people of God again. And they begin to marry pagan wives. Now we don't really realize the full effect of this.

But I will tell you this. Often you don't pull others up. They pull you down.

Remember the illustration of your hair Sunday. Is it easier for me to pull my daughter up to me. Or is it easier for her to pull me down.

It's much easier to be pulled down. So be careful in this area. Because there are influences in your life.

That eventually can pull you down. Versus you pulling them up. How do I know? Well quick reflection here.

What direction are they taking you? What direction are you going to go. If you continue to allow their influence. To take you in the wrong direction.

Now it's interesting. Because there comes a time and a place. Where you might be able to minister to those.

Who are pulling you down. It all depends on where you're at growth wise. Christian growth.

Maturity. I remember a lot of when I came out of my old lifestyle. In 1999 I had to give up a lot of friendships.

Eight or nine friendships. Because it would lead me back into the old lifestyle. But now I'm talking to four, five or six of those people.

And trying to help them. Sending them sermons. Sending them books.

I'll get lunch. And they're not pulling me down. Because they're depressed.

They're needing hope. This is interesting. I just thought about this yesterday.

I don't know why I didn't think to write this down. But of all my friends in high school. My best friends.

I can think of. I'll just say the first name. Two Kevins.

A Mike. Dan. All of them.

Are still alcoholics. Right now. And they're taking medication.

To offset the alcoholism. Because there's severe depression that comes with alcoholism. So they take the Xanax to offset that.

Then they mix them. It's a never ending suicide. One of them texting.

Hey you know I had to drive up and meet him. 20 years ago they would pull me down. So it's not something that's an absolute.

It all depends on where you're at. And where you're at with maturity wise. And also it's what you open yourself up to.

You know. If I meet with them. And they're like.

Oh yeah I remember the good old days. Yeah I do remember. Oh that's great.

You start reminiscing. Hey how about just one beer won't hurt will it? Oh yeah I guess one won't hurt. And then see now they're calling the shots.

Now they're the shot caller. You don't let that happen. You turn that conversation back.

You know we're not going there. How you doing with the Lord? Oh I don't want to talk about that right now. Well that's why I'm here.

That's what we're going to talk about. You know. We're not going to reminisce over the old.

The days that were terrible. The days where we don't remember how we got home. The days where we almost got arrested.

The days where we lost everything. Those days. So you have to be careful in this area.

But if there's somebody. Especially young adults. If there's somebody.

A group of people that are pulling you in the wrong direction. It's just a matter of time that you will eventually fall off that cliff. Unless you cut those ties.

Well how do I know? Are you convicted? Is God showing you? I need to cut these loose. I need to cut these things off. And God will show you.

I believe. So verse chapter 9. That was all about separating from pagan influences. What about what we watch? Uh oh.

You want this to hit home this evening? What about what we watch? What we're allowing in here. The influences. Because and I know it in my own life.

Let me just talk to you not as a pastor. But as a person. If I stop reading this.

And stop doing this all the time. What's eventually going to be influencing me? That. What I'm putting my mind in.

As a man thinketh in his heart. So is he. Let this mind be in you.

Which was also in Christ Jesus. And we see in Philippians. Finally brethren wherever things are pure.

And honest. And noble. And upright.

Do what? Meditate on these things. And this is so interesting as well. I mean this.

Now I know the Bible to be true. But so much confirms it. Because you'll get a couple who's dealing with.

Maybe the man's dealing with severe anxiety. Severe anxiety. And can't sleep well.

And always worried. And then all you have to do is look at his Facebook posts. And always lines up.

The government's out to get you. Conspiracy theories. They're going to take our guns.

Our ammunition. This. That.

He's just all conspiracy. All new stuff. And then you see somebody else.

Who's just. You know. Shame.

I'm struggling with infidelity. I'm struggling with. I don't know if I should even be married anymore.

Well what. Oh. Yeah.

You just watched the new Fifty Shades of Grey. And you love these soap operas. And you're reading these books.

And you're. All these things that are drawing you away from your marriage covenant. And away into pagan influence.

So see. You can. This will tell you often where you're going.

That. So what. Maybe it's a good time to take a. An inventory in our own lives.

And listen. I like entertainment just as much as anyone. But I know when something is starting to not take my mind in a good direction.

And that's what we're looking at here. Is those things need to be cut off. When possible.

Because they will influence us. And then in chapter nine also. They were reminded of God's faithfulness.

And that their father. And that their fathers rejected God. Meaning the.

The nation of Israel that came before them. They're reading the law. They're convicted.

They're probably saying. Oh Lord. Look at what our fathers did.

Look at how we got in this predicament. Lord this is. This is unbelievable.

I can't believe we drifted from you. This far. But they saw God's faithfulness.
And we read in verse 17. God is ready to pardon. See this is what I love.
God is ready to pardon. Gracious and merciful. Slow to anger.
Abundant in kindness. And does not forsake them. Now let's break this down.
To really feel the weight of this. God is ready. Ready to pardon.
Ready means easily available. Or obtained. Within reach.
It's within reach. God is ready to pardon you. If there's sin.
If there's iniquity. If you've stumbled. God says I'm ready.
It's within reach. Would you just reach out? And this just. I just thought of this just now.
Remember what I said. Some of you might remember this. A couple years ago.
I wrote it in one of my books as well. On the hardest part about pastoring. The hardest part about pastoring.
You'll never guess what it is. Most of you. Think for just a second.
It's not doing memorial services. Or difficult appointments. It's watching people die spiritually.
With living water. Just steps away. They are dying of thirst.
And it's right there. They're dying. Of thirst.
They're going to die in three days. If they don't drink water. It's right there.
And I see it. Talking to people. Marriage counseling.
To addiction. You name it. I know it.
And that's why I try to get. I don't want to over promote this. But I try to get more people.
To come at 630 in the morning. On Sundays for worship. For early morning worship.
Because that living water. Listen. I don't know how to counsel somebody.
I'd say in your finances. I don't know what you should do. Your marriage issues.
You've got a toughy going on. But I can tell you who you should seek. I can tell you what you need to do.
How you need to prioritize your life. Get on your face before God. An hour up here.
Will do more than a year's worth of sermons. But he's ready to pardon. Gracious.
And merciful. So no matter what your situation. He's ready.
It's right here. It's within reach. It's within reach.

What about us that maybe are distant from God? We're saved. But there's distance. He just says.

Just take of it. But then pride comes in. Right? So I'm good.

I'm good. Oh really? You're good, huh? Why do you know you're not good inside? You feel that disconnect from God. The Bible you haven't read in weeks.

Maybe months. God seems distant. I just want to encourage you that he is ready.

But we have to remember that he's not. We are not robots. And I've been guilty of this.

Lord, would you whatever. And I know it's my responsibility. Not his.

Because usually we have to act. And then he blesses that action. So he's ready to pardon.

What is pardon? Pardon is to release someone who owes a debt. Is it not? He's ready to release someone who owes a debt. So this actually applies to unbelievers as well.

There's a huge debt. God is ready to pardon that person. God is ready to.

He's within reach. And then he's gracious and merciful. Gracious means courteous, kind, and pleasant.

Look at this view of God. Is this the view we get painted sometimes? Not in the media, right? Vengeful, wrathful God. Did God allow this to happen? Why does God allow? He's gracious.

He's ready to pardon. He's merciful. What is merciful? Bringing someone relief from something unpleasant.

If there's something unpleasant in your life, God is merciful. God is willing to pardon, willing to fix that. Listen, you'd be amazed at how many marriages are broken in the church.

I think this is what shocked me the most when I started pastoring. It's not the hardest part, but it shocked me the most. Because we come in with our church smiles.

Right? Got my church smile on, and I say the right things, and might even hold their hand. Hold the spouse's hand. But inside, things aren't going well.

And people are broken. People are hurting. And they need this fixed.

They say, Lord, I can't keep living like this. But I do know that God is merciful. God will repair that.

And I think the recent statistic, I think I've shared before, is one in 1,500, one in 1,500 end in divorce. Where they're reading the Bible and praying together. Isn't that interesting? Because right before you divorce, you don't want to do those things.

God's not the center. Now, granted, I have great compassion for difficult marriages. You can't just tell people, oh, just get over it.

Just get over it. Just go home and take it. You know, there has to be compassion there.

There has to be consideration. But I rarely see people run to the altar. They'll run to the billboard that says, oops.

Have you seen that? That's terrible. Divorce attorney. It says, oops.

Ring and ring. O-O-P-S. Call this number.

Oops, I made a mistake. And then we've downplayed that so much. I just want to encourage you, God is ready.

He's gracious. He's merciful. He's slow to anger.

Slow to anger. See, God doesn't fly off the handle. Wish we could say that, right? God does not fly off the handle.

He's patient. He's not in a hurry. That's why I often say, are we confusing God's patience with His approval? That's what I think many people are, especially in our nation today.

Oh, look it. God doesn't care. Look how blessed we are.

Look at the stock market. Look at the housing market. There's patience, not approval.

He's patient. He's long-suffering. Slow to anger.

Oh my God. Thank You, Lord. I mean, my goose should have been cooked so many times.

I just think of that. How many times He could have just taken me out. But slow to anger.

Slow. Folks, if this doesn't make you worship Him, I don't know what will. I honestly don't know what will.

And then abundant in kindness. This means overflowing. More than any person could ever offer.

Abundant in kindness. It's overflowing. It's more than any person could ever offer.

So when we worship tonight, I want you to think about God as this. He's ready to listen. It's easily available.

It's within reach. He's gracious. He's merciful.

He's slow to anger. Maybe you came in here thinking, God is angry at me. He's really mad at me right now.

He's angry at me. No, He's patient. He's patient.

And there's abundance in kindness. Overflowing. More than any person could ever offer.

So two things I want to happen tonight. One, I want to spark a heart of worship. With blessing here, it's just the guitar and Jason.

And just that heart of worship. And just pressing in. And sometimes it doesn't take five minutes or ten minutes.

Or fifteen minutes. You have to hit rewind sometimes. And I've learned, the more you say no, the flesh eventually submits.

The flesh thinks it's going to get away with it the first five minutes. Or ten minutes. An interesting concept as well, or parallel.

With fasting, you tell the flesh no for five or ten, fifteen minutes, that hunger's gone. For a few hours. Then it comes again, you tell it no, and it's gone.

See the flesh always wants to negotiate. It always wants to distract. So sometimes during worship, you've got to fight that.

And you've got to say, Lord, I'm just going to press in, I'm going to worship you. So that's what I want to do, is create an environment of worship. But I also want to encourage, because I know this message will go out, people will hear it, people here tonight, that God is not, I believe, mad at you, or hating you.

But there are consequences. He is a God of justice. He is a judge.

He is a king. He is a lawgiver. But He's also gracious and merciful, loving, kind.

So if any of you don't know Him tonight, young, adults, older, turn your life over to Him. He's willing to pardon. He's merciful.

He's gracious. And for the believer, use tonight to strengthen yourself. Get back on track with the right influence.

Godly influence. Godly influence. Through His Word, through worship, through prayer.

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