

- Mercy -

Prodigal Son

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" (Luke 15:21)



Berean Lamp Ministries
For the Body of Christ

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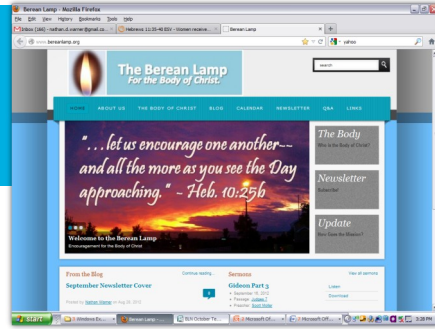
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The Berean Lamp Ministry is a service of the Berean Christian Fellowship of Zimmerman, MN.

The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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An Excerpt...

God's Abiding Mercy

"Do I take any PLEASURE in the death of the WICKED? declares the Sovereign LORD. RATHER, am I not PLEASED when they TURN from their ways and LIVE?"
(Ezekiel 18:23 NIV)

"I URGE, then, first of all, that PETITIONS, prayers, intercession and THANKS-GIVING be made for ALL PEOPLE—for kings and all those in AUTHORITY, that we may live PEACEFUL and quiet lives in all GODLINESS and holiness. This is good, and PLEASES God our Savior, who WANTS all people to be SAVED and to come to a KNOWLEDGE of the TRUTH."
(1 Timothy 1-4)

"The LORD is not slow in keeping His PROMISE, as some understand SLOWNESS. Instead He is PATIENT with you, not WANTING anyone to PERISH, but everyone to come to REPENTANCE. But the DAY of the Lord will come like a THIEF. The heavens will DISAPPEAR with a roar; the ELEMENTS will be destroyed by fire, and the EARTH and everything done in it will be laid BARE. Since everything will be DESTROYED in this way, what kind of PEOPLE ought you to be? You ought to live holy and GODLY lives as you look forward to the DAY of God and speed its COMING. That day will bring about the DESTRUCTION of the heavens by fire, and the elements will MELT in the heat. But in KEEPING with His PROMISE we are looking FORWARD to a new heaven and a new earth, where RIGHTEOUSNESS dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are LOOKING forward to this, make every effort to be found SPOTLESS, blameless and at PEACE with Him."
(2 Peter 3:9-14)



The origin of God's mercy is His desire that none should perish and that everyone would be reconciled to Him. It is up to man, therefore, to decide if he will submit to God's mercy and be reconciled through obedience to Jesus Christ.

By Scott Moller

Obtain Mercy

By Nathan Warner

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it and let us celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

(Luke 15:21-24a NASB)

Mercy is God’s gift to repentance. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines **mercy** as “kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly.” All mankind deserves to be treated harshly, for our transgression is great. It is our fleshly nature to transgress, to disobey God. All mankind are prodigal sons who have left their father’s house to live a life of sin. Not everyone realizes, as the Prodigal Son did, that the largest estate in sin is far more wretched than the least in the Kingdom of Heaven, for “when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my Father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men”’” (Luke 15:17-19).

There are many responses to God’s offering of mercy. A repentant man sees it as the undeserved gifting of life to his doomed inheritance in death. The unrepentant man scoffs at mercy as an insult to his pride, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency; while the hypocrite, who feigns repentance, sees it as leverage to avoid punishment in order to continue his ways. They seek to take advantage of God’s mercy to continue in their transgression, despite His command to not sin. They are deceived into thinking God can be deceived, ignoring the commandment

delivered by Paul: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). As human beings, we naturally sow transgression, and so we can only reap death unless we repent of that transgression. There is no escape from that destiny if we remain in transgression. There is nowhere to hide.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

Before a righteous King, all mankind is criminal – we are all guilty of transgression. “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all” (Romans 11:32 ESV).

This disobedience, this transgression, is what is called sin. Everyone is guilty of sin regardless of whether they will admit it, for “if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves” (1 John 1:8a). Therefore, it only remains for us to confess our sins if we hope to prosper (or succeed) in life. This is not physical life—it is Eternal Life.

We see that it is not enough to simply confess our sins, as many among the wicked will happily tell us the wicked deeds that they have done. We must also forsake (or repent) of sin to obtain God’s mercy.

The world seems content to take advantage of God’s mercy to continue in their sin, mistaking God’s patience as proof of His non-existence, ignorance, or tolerance. Even as Believers, the Apostles warned us not to abuse the freedom we are given by God’s mercy. How many people calling themselves Christians “think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4) God’s mercy gives us freedom, and we are instructed to “act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God” (1 Peter 2:16).

Why is there a warning to the world and to Believers about using God’s mercy as a cloak for sin? Because regardless of what we believe, “the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS

DEEDS" (Matthew 16:27). *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

This will not be voluntary. The account of our deeds will be entirely and completely compulsory. It will be utterly thorough without room for embellishment or exaggeration to soften, bias, or impress the One to whom it is delivered. There will be no room for a case, no stirring defense or blustering counteraccusations in animated language. There will be no defense lawyer to help wiggle men out of the situation by coloring his client as a victim, as a product of his upbringing and experience with no responsibility for the actions he has committed.

Why is there no room for argument? Because the Word of God will be judging us: *"For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"* (Hebrews 4:12-13 ESV). We are completely and utterly exposed before the eyes of God. He sees all. What we truly are behind our face is cast into the light, and there is utterly nothing left for the hypocrite to shift blame onto or to hide behind.

For the Believer, it is a good thing that God cannot be duped, because we will stand before the One who has covered our sin with His own offering of salvation—His gift of redemption—and He will see it in us by His discerning Word! As Believers, we have security in our standing: *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to*

help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Whether a man believes or not, our transgressions can never remain concealed, because the thoughts and intents of our heart are known to God. Everything is exposed to God and we must all give account. Therefore, the only option available to man is to confess his sin, repent of his transgression, and obtain mercy at the hands of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us before the Heavenly Father. If we do not, then our guilt remains on our heads, and we must bear the punishment without the intercession and blood of Jesus Christ that removes the guilt of sin. That punishment is separation from God, which is what Jesus endured in His death on the cross when He took the sins of all mankind upon Himself and bore our guilt before God.

Thankfully for Believers, Jesus rose again, entered into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God interceding for those who accept His atonement for their sins and have thus parted with the guilt of their sin before God. If we forsake our sin, we should be confident that we are no longer deemed guilty before God, through the blood of Jesus Christ, and we can approach the Throne of God through prayer in our times of need, and we will be with Him in eternity because Jesus has been made the Truth, the Life, and the Way to communion with God. Jesus has been made God's mercy towards us, so *"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16b). Even so, Amen.



The Faithfulness of His Mercy

By Ginny Larsen

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him.' The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."
(Lamentations 3:22-26 ESV)

It was from these verses that one of the most beloved hymns was written in 1923: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" by Thomas Chisolm. What a hymn it is! What encouragement to our hearts to know our God and Savior is a God of faithfulness, with character unchanging, perfect in every way. Because He is faithful to the character of Who He is, we know He is faithful to His own children in everything.

Can We Be Shaken?

Have you ever struggled with trusting what you believe? Have you ever wondered, "What if our theology is wrong? How do I know my theology will keep me through the real test?" These questions made me realize our faith can be shaken, if it is built on anything less than His faithfulness, His salvation bought by His blood, and His righteousness.

God may shake our theology at times, in order to draw us to the Word itself for confirmation and true understanding, so that our faith is not based on a system of theology but on Him alone and His living Word. My theology was shaken at several points in my life. It was shaken till I felt as though the rug was pulled out from under me. What it did was eliminate the "dross" and purify in my heart a more clear faith in my Lord to confirm and establish it in me.

We know of His faithfulness to us because of His Word. This is where our hope is built

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(Proverbs 28:13)



and kept. His Word tells us Who He is, what He will do, and His plan for complete salvation and full redemption. His Word tells us of all His mercies towards us. He does not change. We change, and our fears and circumstances change. Our knowledge changes as we grow in our knowledge of Him, and our faith changes and hopefully grows as we learn of His faithfulness. Our hope, our faith, our complete rest in every trial and loss must be in the cross of Jesus Christ, which will never fail. His mercies never fail...they are new every morning. His plan is set in motion. It will not fail. He accomplished a finished work, which brings complete salvation for all those who have embraced and put their trust in that work and Who He is that accomplished it. There is nothing new in Himself, yet He is new to us every morning as we learn of Him and how He

has provided for all in our walk through this world.

It is HIS faithfulness, not ours, that gives us true hope. It is HIS faithfulness to His Word and to Himself that is our surety. It is HIS mercies, those of "the God of all mercy," that are new every morning according to our need. It is Jesus Christ Himself Who can never change or fail that we cling to. If we cling to our own selves, our own ability to understand (Prov. 3:5-7), or our own feelings or experience, we are standing on sinking sand. There have been times in my life where I had to learn this. I had to learn that when I CANNOT, He CAN and He will. I had to learn that just because I did not understand everything in His plan for me, this did not mean that He would fail to carry out any bit of it. His working in our lives is not dependent on our "theology"



MERCY

"This 10-point buck came into view while Joe was hunting, but all he did was take a picture as it stamped its foot at him."

- Kevin Tvedt

Photo by Joe Winter at Knife River's concrete pit on Hwy 10 in St. Cloud, MN

because it may fail, but His Word will never fail. His mercy will never fail. He will do all He said He would. The more we are in His Word, which is a living and powerful Word, the more closely we come to it ourselves, in our understanding of Him, His purposes in it, and His character. The more we read it, in faith, in seeking Him, the more we have a foundation that is unshakeable. Regardless of what comes to us in the way of hardship, persecution, or trial, our faith can be built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness, or it will fail. We do not need to ask ourselves if He will really do what He said. We know He will. He will never fail us or forsake us. His mercy is there in all our time of need. It is when we are brought to the place of humility that we recognize our need for it.

I will let the hymn speak to us....

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.*



*"For God has consigned
all to DISOBEDIENCE,
that He may have
MERCY on all."
(Romans 11:32)*

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above;
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, **mercy** and love.*

*Pardon for sin And a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today And bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, With ten thousand beside.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

There is nothing more sure. There is no greater hope. There is nothing to give more confidence than His mercy and His faithfulness. Don't try to "interpret" it, allegorize it, or explain it away. Just read it in His Word and believe it.

Dangers of Legalism

I used to live by my own set of "Christian laws," and *felt* God smiling on me, so I thought, when I followed my legalism well. When I didn't succeed, I felt under condemnation. I was up and down with my feelings in my *relationship* with Him. I thought my standing with God was based on my performance. But God taught me that it was based on Who He is and what He did for me. It was something far more sure than MY *relationship* with Him. It was based on HIS relationship with me – in His death and resurrection and my being in Him through grace alone, by faith. My standing before Him is based on His Word of truth and life to do His work in me with POWER, carrying it to completion. I am to walk through this life based on His power to keep me – His promises to carry me through all that He allows and brings to me. I am not to walk by "feeling." Feelings can be based on false concepts of God and false understandings of His Word. They can be up and down, and we can even at times convince ourselves to feel right about something that is not right according to His Word. If our relationship is

built on how we feel we're doing, or how happy we are, or how well things are going, then our relationship with God can sink at almost any turn in our lives. We can even deceive ourselves into thinking our relationship with God is good. That is why we need the Word, which is powerful and as sharp as a two-edged sword that pierces and divides soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12).

His Strength, Not Mine

Sometimes I think of the very worst thing I could possibly have to face in life, and I cringe, KNOWING that I CANNOT endure it. This "knowledge" is too much for me to endure by myself, because it pleads to my flesh, and I cannot muster up enough faith, courage, or endurance to handle it. I KNOW I can't. But I've learned that He CAN. I've learned if God brings these things my way or allows them in my life, He already has been there and prepared a way for me. He is able to provide, strengthen, and establish the faith in me that is needed. His mercy fails not. He already knows what He will do. He already has a plan. He already knows how He will be glorified in and through me as I take His hand in faith and let Him lead me through it. And for myself, I know I can lean on His never-failing Word and promises to keep me through it. There is no possibility of failure with Him.

I've learned that it grieves God's heart when I focus on my deficiencies and fear my failure in what He wants me to do. It grieves Him because it shows how little faith I have in His ability to be faithful to me. Sometimes, it's an easy lesson for us to learn that we can't accomplish God's will, but it's so hard for us to learn with confidence that God can and will. We fear, correctly, that if it is up to us to persevere through trial, we would fail. When God allows us to fail this way, He is chastising us for correction to train us in godliness, so that our trust is in Him, not ourselves.

We must trust HIM! I don't need to fear that He will fail His Word, because my Lord promised that He is coming for me to take me

to be with Him where He is: *"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:2-3).

It is a Sure Word

I don't need to fear that somehow I'm reading that wrong or that it won't happen. I can put my faith in His sure Word – His promise He will do exactly, literally, what He said He would do. I can see that His purpose in everything is our salvation for His glory, and that is all in Him, complete. I can see that I don't need to go through an evangelical type of "purgatory" (John 5:24) to be purified enough to measure up to Him before He comes for me to take me home. I can see by His Word that my being made "without spot or wrinkle" is not through myself but through His blood and righteousness. I must put my complete faith in Him as my righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). I can see that His faithfulness is a guarantee of that salvation and resurrection to be with Him. I can see that His Spirit given to me when I trusted in Him to be my Savior is a guarantee that I belong to Him and will be with Him! I was not appointed to the wrath that will come on this world in the day of His judgment (1 Thess. 5:9). It's a sure Word. It's a faithful Word. It's a faithful promise and blessed hope. His mercy is sure. Saints in times past have given their lives for it, knowing their hope in it would not be disappointed (Heb. 11).

In trusting in the faithfulness of His mercy, I have a hope that not only keeps me in this walk and through whatever I suffer, also gives me a motivation to live for His glory now and to reveal that glory and that salvation and that faithfulness to all that are willing to hear of it and believe. I have a motivation to live pleasing to Him, not in sinful self-seeking and pleasure. I have an expectation that any moment on any day, I could be there with my Savior face-to-face. My perspective becomes

An Excerpt...

Prophecy Concerning the Mercy of God Through His Son, Jesus Christ

"And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring JACOB back to Him, so that ISRAEL might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), He says, 'It is too SMALL a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the TRIBES of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a LIGHT of the nations So that My SALVATION may reach to the end of the earth.' Thus says the LORD, the REDEEMER of Israel and its Holy One, To the DESPISED One, To the One ABHORRED by the nation, To the Servant of RULERS, 'Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has CHOSEN You.'"

(Isaiah 49:5-7)

Fulfillment

"Do not MERELY look out for your own PERSONAL interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this ATTITUDE in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who, although He existed in the FORM of God, did not regard EQUALITY with God a thing to be grasped, but EMPTIED Himself, taking the form of a BONDSERVANT, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He HUMBLed Himself by becoming OBEDIENT to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this REASON also, God highly exalted Him and BESTOWED on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those that are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

(Philippians 2:4-11)

eternal, not temporal. I see my real life as hidden in Christ with God. My love for Him grows deeper, and I live for that which He is making me into. I live for what I will become when I see Him face-to-face. I see the momentary pleasures in this life in their proper place and see all that He has given me to enjoy is only a small portion of what He intends for us eternally. I can give up everything of this world because I am not OF this world. Free of condemnation, I see myself under His merciful grace and as a new creation, made for a NEW country, as His own child, which makes my heart long to live up to that image more and more.

Great are those mercies He shows us each day as we learn of Him and trust in Him. Great is His faithfulness! It will never fail! I just have to add another hymn before I close that speaks again of our sure trust in Him alone and nothing else. These hymns give such hope and encouragement to us to look to Him that never fails!

My Hope Is Built

(Words: Edward Mote, 1834)

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.*

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

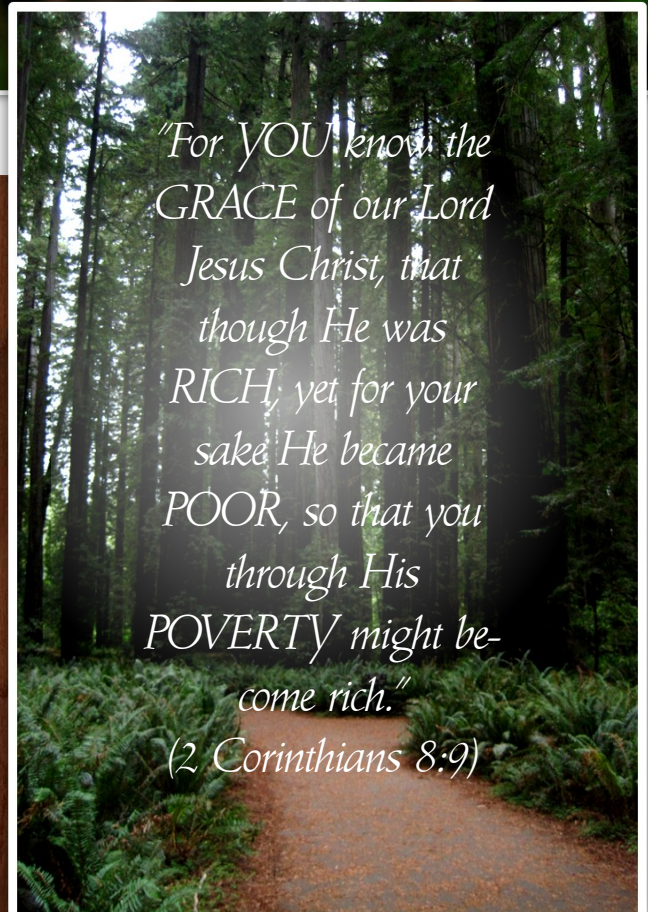
*When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.*

*His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.*

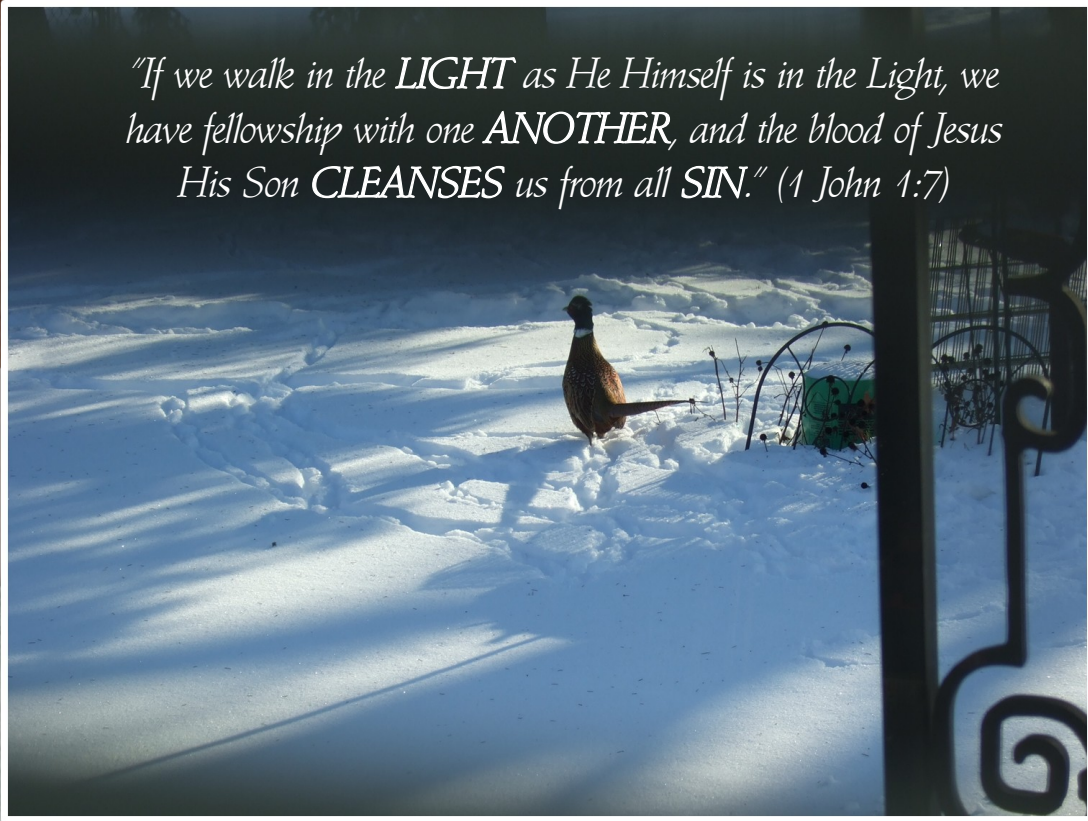
*When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone,*

Faultless to stand before the throne.

May the Lord reveal to our hearts just how sure the hope is that we have in Him (Ephesians 1:17-2:9) and just how faithful He is to the hope that He gives. May we discover His mercies daily as we walk in faith in that hope. May we seek His mercies and grace in all our times of trial, to receive all we need from Him, that He may be glorified in us.

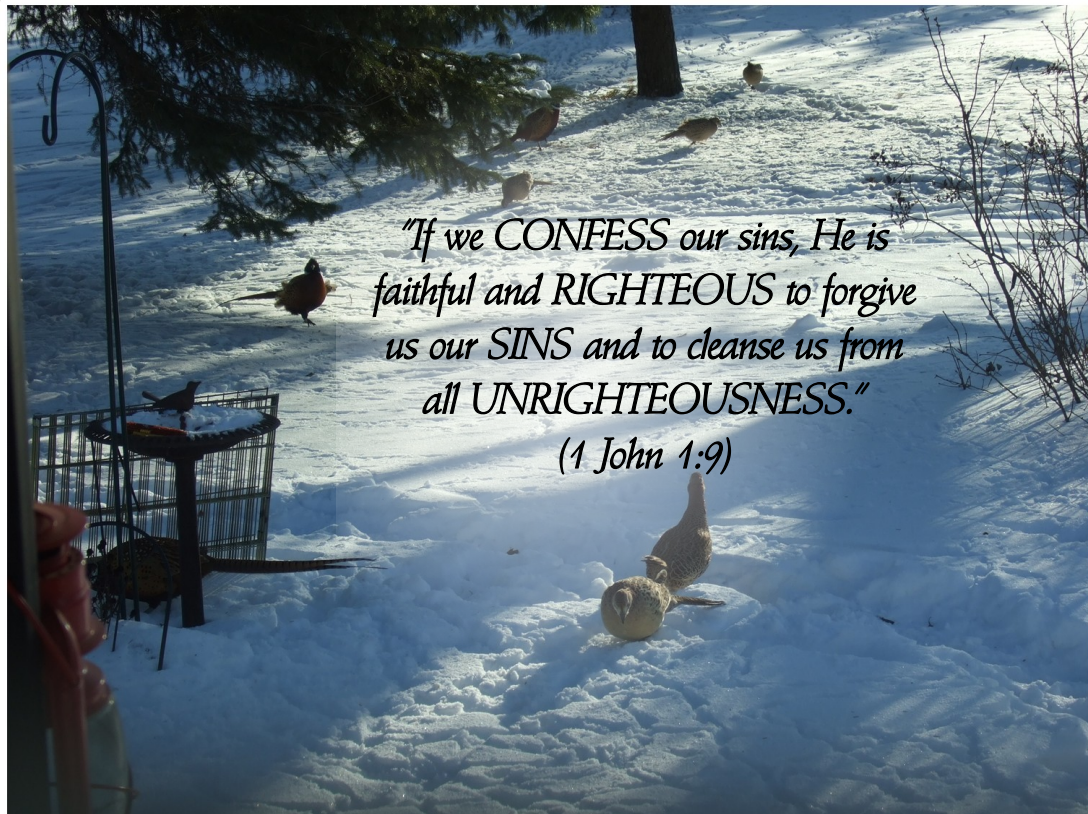


*"If we walk in the **LIGHT** as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one **ANOTHER**, and the blood of Jesus His Son **CLEANSSES** us from all **SIN**." (1 John 1:7)*



By Lynn Warner

*"If we **CONFESS** our sins, He is faithful and **RIGHTEOUS** to forgive us our **SINS** and to cleanse us from all **UNRIGHTEOUSNESS**." (1 John 1:9)*



Merciful Perfection

By Lynn Warner

*"To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."
(1 Timothy 1:2)*

What does a "true child in the faith" look like? The Bible states that *"you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matthew 5:48b). What is perfection? The world describes it as "the condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects" – Google Dictionary.

By this definition, I am certainly not perfect in myself. Is this God's definition of perfection? I assumed it was. I assumed I had to work at this perfection, but the more I lived, the more I realized how imperfect I was. I looked back at my life and saw how sinful and weak I had been in my heart, despite my attempts to be perfect. It has been a dark country at times. When I first began to realize this, I feared for my salvation because I saw that I kept wandering back into this dark country. I could identify with the hymn "Come Thou Fount" by Robert Robinson, which described my dilemma.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave
the God I love...*

But my desire was to call upon the Lord and cry:

*Here's my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for
thy courts above.*

Many times when I was struggling to be perfect, God came after me saying, "Return to me, My daughter" or as Scripture says, *"Be reconciled to God"* (2 Corinthians 5:20b). It is then that Jesus, *"the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man"* (John 1:9), shines His Light into my heart and shows me I have wandered. In so doing, Jesus, the

Good Shepherd, shows me His kindness (John 10:11). We know that the kindness of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Just so, His merciful kindness leads me to repentance and reconciliation (peace) with Him beyond my attempts to be perfect. He carries me back like a lost lamb to His New Country, the Heavens.

The stunning revelation to me has been that my straining to be perfect is sin, and here I have stumbled around in the spiritual night of seeking perfection by following the laws of commandments. Here we act as if we are in the day when we are truly in the dark and thus prove ourselves hypocrites (or actors). It isn't the overt, scandalous sin that easily comes to light. It is hidden sin in the land of the heart, but God sees it. In His mercy and kindness, He sheds His Light on the dark country of every heart, because only God can expose the hypocrite. Jesus exposed the hypocrite and the inner heart's sinfulness when He explained to the Pharisees, *"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME'"* (MATTHEW 15:7-8). As an example, He taught that *"everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28). Regardless of the outward appearance, the hypocrite is exposed when the intentions of the heart become clear. Here, the outward image of perfection is laid bare for the sin it truly is.

How many times God has come after me, exposing my hypocrisy, saying, "Where are you?" I look around suddenly as His Light illuminates the dark country nearby. I believe He allows me to wander at times because He is so intent to show me my weakness, dependence, and desperate need for Him in His grace, mercy, and peace. For a while, I lived in great fear and dread because I was becoming more and more aware of my dark heart, my wandering, and my imperfection. What was I to do to be perfected? Paul asks the Galatians, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"* (Galatians 3:3) We cannot perfect our-

selves. We cannot be perfected by the flesh, but we can confess our sins, for *"if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9), for *"if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). Only God can perfect us by His grace and mercy. Because God forgives us, loves us, and perfects us, we have no fear in the day of judgment, for *"there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love"* (1 John 4:18). Therefore, perfection comes only by the love of God as a gift of grace and mercy through our repentance of our sins and acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ which covers us and makes us perfect in the eyes of God, reconciling us to Him.

This is what growth looks like for a true child in the faith. We ARE "to be perfect" as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), but this perfection is spiritual perfection, gifted only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Perfection, then, as a Christian definition, is to be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. By His sacrifice, we are never separated from the grace, mercy, and peace that streams to us from God the Father. We are to be perfected in love, to walk in the true Light of Jesus, Who enlightens our darkened hearts and shows us our hypocrisy and wanderings away from Him. Jesus, in His kindness, leads us as the Good Shepherd to repentance and reconciliation (peace) with Him. As Believers, we are being perfected in His love and mercy.

Yet for Your Sake, He Became Poor

By Natalie Warner

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."

(James 4:8a NASB)

What a thought to delight in! That a Holy God, the Creator of the universe, the only One True God, would tenderly reach for those who are rebellious, selfish, and belligerent against the name of Him Who created them. That the Lord Jehovah, the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent I AM, would willingly sacrifice His own life for sinful humanity - it is a truth most humbling and the greatest cause for thanksgiving.

The Lord's mercy to mankind is seen so clearly in the First Testament, where He chastised in love, delivered, taught, and drew nigh to His chosen people the Israelites, despite their fickle faith and continual acts of sin. And though He knew their rebellion and saw every corrupt thought, word, and deed, He was and is righteous and steadfast in love. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses sang in the presence of Israel, *"The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. They have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect; but are a perverse and crooked generation."* Moses continued, asking the people, *"Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you"* (Deuteronomy 32:4-6).

And O how He cares for us as He did also for His chosen! Moses cried, *"He found him [Jacob, vs. 9] in a desert land, and in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions"* (Deuteronomy 32:10-11). And when they provoked the Lord to anger by their

*"Or do you
THINK lightly of
the riches of His
KINDNESS and
tolerance and
PATIENCE, not
knowing that the
KINDNESS of
God leads you to
REPENTANCE?"
(Romans 2:4)*



By Natalie Warner



wickedness, as verses 16 and 21 tell, He mercifully did not forget them but punished them severely in love, for they “*neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth*” (Deuteronomy 32:18). And while He is a just God and a jealous God, He is also wise, constant, and compassionate. In mercy He protects and in mercy He punishes. Every action of God has a just and perfect purpose, and in each one of these is mercy, for He holds back what we truly deserve: eternal damnation for our sins without a chance for forgiveness.

The Lord mercifully punishes and restores us. He does not abandon His people, nor cease to desire all men to come to Him. The First Testament documents the constant holiness and mercy of God toward His people, and it is a foreshadow of the mercy He again illustrated later in sending His Son Jesus Christ to earth to be born of a virgin and die for the sins of humanity, Jews and Gentiles both. The gift He sent to die on the cross, the Lamb of God, is mercy in the truest of definitions. The Heavenly Father who seeks to “*restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers*” (Malachi 4:6a) also seeks to restore all humankind to the heart of their Creator.

A hymn titled “Here I Am, Lord” by Daniel Schutte (1981) beautifully depicts the mercy of our God toward His people and the tender care with which He both chastises and shields us, in spite of our oft rebellious and wandering hearts.

*I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry,
All who dwell in dark and sin My hand will save.
I Who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My Light to them?
Whom shall I send?*

*I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne My people's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them.
Whom shall I send?*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them.
Whom shall I send?*

The humility and unceasing love of the Son who came and suffered humiliation in perfect love should never cease to create in us reverent thanksgiving. It's difficult to comprehend: God created man to glorify Him; yet, man sinned and so death entered the world and is in all men; and for rebellious, strong-willed, blasphemous, thankless, and flippant men, the Savior came in meekness and humility. “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich*” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

And before the men who despised Him, He was silent. “*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth*” (Isaiah 53:7).

What is our response to the mercy poured out by the Savior? In the Church, it is often met with casualness—sometimes with blatant disregard. It's easy to snuggle up in a comfortable chair, hug a cup of steaming peppermint tea, marvel at the Creator's sacrifice, and bid others to follow in it. But do we really try to comprehend the sacrifice and the mercy He has for us? Do we examine ourselves in light of it? Hardly! As the hymnist wrote, the response to Christ's sacrifice should be ours! *Whom shall I send? Here I am, Lord!*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I fail much of the time when it comes to showing God's mercy to others. And what's the greatest way we can do this? By sharing His Gospel, His Light - by boasting about our

Savior and the sacrifice He bore for us! We should carry love for the lost in our hearts day by day, and we should be practicing sharing the Gospel with those we meet. I have missed so many opportunities I see now as I look back and remember feeling the Spirit's prompting but disobeying it. Let's purpose to "hold His people in our hearts," just as He held you and me in His heart as He went to the cross.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."
(2 Corinthians 2:14-17)



"Since then we have a great HIGH priest who has passed through the HEAVENS, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our CONFESSON. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to SYMPATHIZE with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been TEMPTED as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with CONFIDENCE draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive MERCY and find grace to help in time of NEED."
(Hebrews 4:14-16)





*"Jesus said to him, I AM the way, and the TRUTH, and the life.
No one COMES to the Father except THROUGH me."
(John 14:6)*

By Patty Buswell



January/February Newsletter Theme—Holiness

Submission Deadline: January 19

Publish Date: January 28

Verses on Holiness (from the NASB version)

"And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.'" (Isaiah 6:3)

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed in this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1-2)

"Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

"For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." (Hebrews 12:10)

Ideas for Submissions

- Write a poem praising the attribute of holiness in our God.
- Write about how God's holiness relates to the Gospel.
- The Israelites knew the holiness of God and feared Him. Write about how much churches today have strayed away from that reverent fear. Have we forgotten the true meaning of holiness?
- Paint a picture relaying some truth about His holiness - such as a verse, a story, or a personal testimony.
- Do a study on God's commandments to us to be holy - what can we do to strive to be holy like He is?
- Share a personal testimony about something God has taught you about His holiness.
- Use a household item for an object lesson on holiness.
- Research the origin of holidays or "holy days" and write about their history. Research Biblical festivals and holy days the Lord told the Israelites to set apart and commemorate. What are the purpose of these "holy days"?
- Do a study on 2 Timothy 2:20-22 and write about how this applies to holiness.
- Draw a sketch of the Temple as mentioned in Exodus 26:33, 34 and 2 Chronicles 3:8 and point out the Holy of Holies.
- Do a study on the Holy of Holies within the Temple and write about it.
- Look out for small details of God's creation. Take pictures of beautiful snowflakes, droplets of water, details of tree bark, a fleeing squirrel, or footprints in mud.

Further Out—March/April 2014: Humility