

Choosing Mercy

Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways
(Proverbs 3:31).

Scripture: Proverbs 3:27-35

Song: “Pass It On”

Back in the 1980s, one of my favorite television programs was *Hunter*. It featured detectives Hunter and McCall, who solved homicides in Los Angeles. At the end of many of the episodes, Sergeant Hunter shot the bad guy. As a television character, he was seen as the hero, but in real life, his way of resolving things would likely have been deemed a use of excessive force.

Sometimes our natural response to being wronged is to get back at the person. We want them to get what is coming to them or at least to give them a piece of our mind. We might even admire or envy others who follow their vengeful instincts rather than exercising self-control. When we've been profoundly hurt or wronged, extending mercy, grace, or forgiveness can be difficult, even though we're confident that is the right thing to do.

God in His wisdom knows that while vengefulness might feel good temporarily, in the long run it causes us more pain. Revenge doesn't change the wrongdoer's heart or bring them to repentance. God desires restoration instead of revenge. When we show mercy and grace in unexpected ways, we make room for God to bring healing and hope to those who need it.

Father, even when I have been wronged, help me seek Your heart and extend Your mercy and grace to others. In Jesus' name, amen.

August 19–25. **Jenifer Regennitter** lives in Illinois. She is an author and lover of antiques and classic film.

Being a Voice

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute (Proverbs 31:8).

Scripture: Proverbs 31:1-9

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

When I was a child, I remember a man who would press a device to his throat whenever he wanted to talk. An electronic-sounding voice would come out, which seemed strange to me. Then someone explained to me that the man had lost his voice box and required the device—an electrolarynx—to speak.

There are many ways God may ask us to be a voice for others. It may be that they physically cannot use their voice, or it may be that their voice is not being heard for some other reason, such as their status or standing among others or because of fear or shame. Perhaps God has placed you in a position of influence to help effect change for the helpless. Maybe you are in a place to be an advocate for someone who needs help accessing resources. It may be that God has given you a heart for someone who is being ignored or overlooked. Perhaps God is asking you to speak up for someone the world has written off.

We know from Jesus’ life that God has a heart for those who are afflicted, oppressed, ignored, or marginalized. By speaking up for others who cannot speak for themselves, we communicate an important message about their worth. In this way, we shine God’s light and demonstrate His love, letting others know God cares for all people.

Father, help me recognize opportunities to be a voice and an advocate for others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Created for a Purpose

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Song: "Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen in Me"

In Gatlinburg, Tennessee, there is an area called the Crafter's Loop. If you follow the route on the map, you can stop at multiple shops where people make and sell a variety of goods. From pottery to woven rugs to woodworking, these skilled artisans invest much care and take pride in each of the beautiful things they create. And because the wares are handmade, no two are exactly alike.

God has taken great care in all He has created, including us (Psalm 139:14). And God has created each of us to serve a meaningful purpose. Imagine Him shaping and forming us, all the while thinking of the role He has for us in His kingdom (vv. 15-16). Similar to the painstaking efforts of the artisans in the Crafter's Loop, God's care in creating each of us is evident in our uniqueness. He doesn't mass-produce people but has a great personal connection to each one of us as He knits us together.

When we feel lost, we can take comfort in knowing that our creator still has plans for us. He knows exactly what good works He plans to complete through us and knows just the right time to present those opportunities.

Father, thank You for the plans You have for me. Help me ready my heart now to carry out the good works You've ordained for me to do today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith Without Works

Someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds (James 2:18).

Scripture: James 2:14-26

Song: “Screen Door”

If you do any kind of home repair, you may be familiar with two-part epoxy. It is a type of glue that comes in two tubes and is only effective when you mix them together. Used separately, neither is able to provide adhesion for the parts or pieces you might be trying to fix or hold together.

James teaches us a powerful truth in today’s passage. If we say we have faith in Jesus but our actions don’t reflect His teaching and His ways, then our faith is not working effectively. As the lyrics of the song for today put it, faith without works is “about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.” After all, what difference is our faith making in the world if we don’t put it into action?

The natural outflow of faith is good deeds from a heart of gratitude and love for the Savior. When our faith and our actions align, our lives become a powerful testimony to others about God’s goodness and His love for them. Every day there are opportunities to demonstrate our faith by how we choose to speak, act, and serve that will make a difference in others’ lives and bring glory to God.

Father, I don’t want to watch passively from the sidelines. Help me put my faith into action today and every day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Grace and Justice

The LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! (Isaiah 30:18).

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18-26

Song: “Your Grace Finds Me”

Many years ago I worked at a jewelry booth in a merchant’s tent at a Christian music festival. One summer, despite our best efforts to watch the merchandise closely, a ring was stolen. The culprit, a teenager, later confessed, and the booth owners chose to not press charges. Instead, they showed grace, encouraging the young man to make better choices going forward. They got justice in that the ring was returned, and the boy experienced God’s grace.

Sometimes we may feel we have to do or be better somehow—more diligent in prayer, for example—to qualify for God’s help or for God to respond on our behalf. We may forget that God doesn’t show us grace reluctantly or refuse to render justice. He enjoys showing us these things and, as today’s verse reveals, even longs for the opportunity to do so. Grace, compassion, and justice are not things we earn from God. These are things He freely gives and provides.

When we find ourselves questioning whether God cares about our suffering, it helps to remember that He loves justice and is ready to show grace and compassion.

Father, thank You for pouring out Your grace and compassion so generously in my life. When justice seems late, help me trust You as I wait for Your timing. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Let Your Light Shine

[Jesus said,] “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

Song: “This Little Light of Mine”

Have you ever noticed when people lose a lot of weight or get in shape, they tend to wear clothes that show off their new physique? They want people to see the positive results of their efforts. Others can tell by looking at them how working out and eating healthy have changed them.

In a similar way, when we let the light of God’s love shine through us, others can see how we have changed as a result of spending time with Him. When we show others love, generosity, compassion, grace, and mercy, we reflect God’s character to them. It helps others know who God really is and draws them to Him.

When someone is lost in the dark, it’s not helpful to merely suggest a general direction they should go to find their way out; they need light! And when others are lost in spiritual darkness, God sends us, not just to suggest a direction they might go but to shine the light of His love so that they can see their way to Him. As ones who have been sent to be lights in the darkness, we can prayerfully look for those opportunities to shine today, and God will be faithful to reveal them to us.

Father, help me reflect Your light to those around me so that they might find the path to a relationship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Refocusing

[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Scripture: Titus 3:3-11

Song: “Who Am I?”

There is an episode of an old television sitcom in which the three main characters have a day off and decide to tackle a long list of chores. As the day progresses, the three women get distracted by their infamous storytelling, and by the end of the day, none of the work has been accomplished.

One of the easiest ways for the body of Christ to get distracted from our mission is when we focus on disagreements that are not part of our essential faith and mission. Sadly, there are stories of churches having terrible division over the most trivial matters, such as church décor. In today’s passage, Paul teaches that getting side-tracked is unprofitable and useless. What is profitable for everyone is when believers focus on all God has done for them (Titus 3:8). Paul also emphasizes that what believers have gained has nothing to do with anything they have done, but it is solely the result of God’s mercy.

We must be aware of how vulnerable we can be to succumbing to unfruitful arguments that lead to division so that we do not get distracted from what is most important: sharing the gospel message and demonstrating Christ’s love as we grow in grace and truth.

Father, grant me a keen awareness of distractions so I might focus on what is most important. In Jesus’ name, amen.