

In Scripture, grace is God's favor. Mercy refers to the tender love of a mother, another form of the word suggests pity or compassion. God's mercy is also compared to a father with his child. *13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.* Psalm 103:13

We have grown so accustomed to excusing rebellion against God that we don't realize how desperately we need these wonderful attributes of God. The actor Kirk Cameron has outlined a good reality check to help us get in touch with the way God sees the world in the Ten Commandments. He asks if we have ever stolen anything. That could include using company time for personal use, illegally downloading copyrighted material, or not reported all your earnings on your taxes. That makes you a ... And have you ever said something that wasn't true or exaggerated to make yourself look good? A person who tells an untruth is called a ... And have you hated someone in your heart and wished they ceased to exist? Jesus said that was the same as murder (Matthew 5:21-22). He also said to look on someone lustfully was the same as adultery (Matthew 5:28). So if you have done those things, in God's eyes, you are a lying, thieving, murdering, adulterer.

Now do you realize how much you need God's grace and mercy? **The closer we get to God's heart the more we realize just how sinful we are (Job 42:5-6).** The farther we have sunk into rebellion against God, the less we see our sinfulness. So how close are you to God today? The extent to which you recognize your need for God's mercy says a lot about your nearness to God.

When our short life is over and we stand before the Judge of our souls, why would God let a lying, thieving, murderous, adulterer into His heaven? Why would He not send you and I to judgment? You can say you aren't guilty, but He knows every thought you have contemplated. (Romans 8:27) How can we receive the grace and mercy we so desperately need?

The Bible often mentions the two virtues side by side and even with other attributes of God. We see them both in God's self-description that we have read in previous sermons. *19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.* Exodus 33:19 It sounds like the Hebrew God is as arbitrary as the Muslim god, but as you read further in Exodus, you will find that these attributes are bounded by justice and righteousness (Exodus 34:7).

The Psalms also list mercy and grace along with steadfast love. *8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* Psalm 103:8 This verse is repeated in Psalm 145:8. These wonderful attributes of God describe who He is. *31 For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the*

Commented [PW1]: Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)
²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'
²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Commented [PW2]: Matthew 5:28 (ESV)
²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Commented [PW3]: Job 42:5-6 (ESV)
⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;
⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Commented [PW4]: Romans 8:27 (ESV)
²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Commented [PW5]: Exodus 34:7 (ESV)
⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. Deuteronomy 4:31 Notice that these attributes are displayed because of a covenant. We see the same thing in 2 Kings 13:23. *²³ But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now.* All those who have trusted in Jesus for their salvation have entered into covenant with God and can be sure of His mercy.

This mercy and grace was sometimes displayed in discipline, but thankfully we see it displayed in restoration and forgiveness as well. Notice mercy is abundant and is according to God's steadfast love. *¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.* Psalm 51:1

This mercy to forgive sins is also seen in the Minor Prophets. *¹⁸ Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.* Micah 7:18-20 As before, God's grace and mercy are related to His steadfast love to those with whom He is in covenant. This is why most rabbis of Jesus' day taught that all descendants of Abraham through Isaac were guaranteed a place in the kingdom to come. However, Rabbi Saul, whom we know as the Apostle Paul, explained that it was not flesh and blood descendants, but the spiritual descendants, that are the people of faith (Romans 9:6-8). We enter into the covenant by faith, just as those before us did. In the system of sacrifices, they looked forward to the provision for sin that was to come. We look back on the provision of sin that has come in Jesus, and so by faith we become recipients of the grace and mercy of God.

Here is where we can see a subtle difference between grace and mercy. Grace reaches out to all and invites them to have faith, and I would suggest even enables them to have the faith to repent. Not everyone will chose to act on that grace given them. Those who do will receive the mercy of God in forgiveness of their sins because of Jesus' death as payment for their sin (Titus 2:11).

Here is where the critics of Christianity will say our God is not gracious but evil. "How could I kill my son to take away your sin?" they ask. Their big mistake is that they are not God and their son is not sinless. Nor did their son agree to pay that price. You and I can simply forgive one another because we are prone to the same weaknesses (Matthew 6:12). God can forgive because the penalty for rebellion against righteousness was taken by His sinless Son. It's not as if God didn't know He would rise from the dead (Mark 8:31). That doesn't lessen the cost. More went on in those hours of darkness than we can comprehend (Luke 23:44). Nevertheless the grace of God reaches out to the critics of the very grace that would save them.

Commented [PW6]: Romans 9:6-8 (ESV)
⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,
⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."
⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Commented [PW7]: Titus 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 6:12 (ESV)
¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Commented [PW9]: Mark 8:31 (ESV)
³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Commented [PW10]: Luke 23:44 (ESV)
⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,

Without the mercy of God we would all be consumed. That is the justice we deserve. When Nehemiah was praying about the sins of his fathers he prayed, ³¹ *Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.* Nehemiah 9:31 God is so patient and merciful! When most people read the story of Israel's history through, they are amazed that God didn't just make an end to them. Are our lives any different? It is because of God's great mercies that He does not make an end of us. His steadfast love and mercy are like a crown upon our heads, wrote one psalmist (Psalm 103:4). Because we are sons and daughters of God, we are royalty that receive His mercy.

In the New Testament we find the very same God with the very same attributes. While the references to mercy are just as common, the major difference is the increase in the mention of grace. This is because of the coming of Jesus, and in the words of John, ¹⁶ *For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.* John 1:16 We might say grace piled on grace. God is so gracious and merciful to rebellious mankind that He came in the flesh to make a way for our souls to be healed. I don't think we are able to grasp the magnitude of grace piled on grace.

If you could make a creature to love and it constantly disobeyed and tried to destroy itself, wouldn't you just let it destroy itself? If it told you that you didn't make it, that it was just an accident of time and chance and it had no reason to obey your good guidelines, or your pleas for it to receive your love, I think you might smash it and try again with different programming. If it were my creation, I certainly wouldn't become like it and let it destroy me to show how much I loved it. But that is just what God did for us.

Let's take a look at how Jesus expressed this grace and mercy in a few examples. I've always been awed by the ministry of Jesus in teaching and healing as reported by the Gospel writers. Crowds would come to Him and He would heal every sick person that came to Him with a word or a touch and then preach to them. He would so thoroughly pour Himself out that He could sleep through a storm (Mark 4:38). He knew that these people had sinned against Him, yet He graciously healed them (John 5:14). One of them even turned around and informed His enemies (John 5:15-16).

The fame of Jesus' grace was so prevalent that His enemies thought they could pit Him against God's laws by bringing a woman caught in adultery and to see if He would participate in stoning her or refuse to follow the law. Jesus had mercy on the woman and told them that the one that was without sin could cast the first stone (John 8:7). That was mercy toward the accusers as well. He could have exposed their hypocrisy. Instead, He let their consciences convict them. We are all sinners in need of God's grace.

When Jesus landed on the shore of the Decapolis region and was met by the man filled with a legion of demons. Certainly that man had allowed those spirits to possess him. But Jesus mercifully cast them all out, setting the man free. When the man asked to follow Jesus, we read, ¹⁹ *And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your*

Commented [PW11]: Psalm 103:4 (ESV)

⁴ who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Commented [PW12]: Mark 4:38 (ESV)

³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Commented [PW13]: John 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Commented [PW14]: John 5:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Commented [PW15]: John 8:7 (ESV)

⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." Mark 5:19 I think that is the task assigned to us all, to share with others the mercy God has had on us.

Consider that when blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus he said, "Son of David, have mercy on me." When the crowd tried to quiet him he called out even louder (Mark 10:47). If you want to get Jesus' attention, make a plea to this attribute of mercy that is so prevalent in Him.

Another demonstration of mercy that is above human capacity was His forgiveness of Peter. Peter claimed he would never desert Jesus. He promised to never deny Him. Even after spending three years together, seeing all the miracles, being warned of what was about to happen, Peter still denied Jesus with curses (Mark 14:71). But when Jesus met Peter on the shore, there was no rebuke, only a call to love and follow while feeding God's sheep (John 21:17). Could you have resisted at least asking what happened to the promise Peter made?

But as with every attribute, we see it most clearly displayed on the cross. The cross incorporates all the attributes of God in a grand display for all the world to marvel. When Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (John 12:23)," I believe He was speaking of the crucifixion. There we see the outshining of God's glory. Grace and mercy were certainly shined brightly in every word He spoke and in the spiritual warfare that He undertook. He mercifully did for us what we could not do for ourselves. His gracious sacrifice made it possible for us to receive the mercy of God, the forgiveness we could never have found in any other way. Justice was met, and mercy triumphed over judgment (James 2:13).

It was the mercy of God that saved us! ⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8 We certainly didn't deserve it. It was all the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). We never would have sought Him on our own. His Spirit pursued us. Listen to how Peter says it in the introduction to his letter. ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* 1 Peter 1:3 That is great mercy. And Paul wrote to Titus, ⁵ *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,* Titus 3:5

Our Gospel is unique, for it is the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). We often hear that all religions are basically the same, however, every other faith in the world is about being good enough. The good news of Scripture is that God is merciful and gracious and will extend that mercy to all who come to Him by faith. The Bible recognizes that we can never be good enough for a holy and righteous God.

I recently read Nabeel Qureshi's book, *Seeking Allah and Finding Jesus*. It is the true story of a boy in a good Muslim home who was drawn to know Jesus as his Savior. I noticed how God's grace met him step by step. Nabeel met a zealous Christian when he entered college. They became friends because they were both zealous about their

Commented [PW16]: Mark 10:47 (ESV)

⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Commented [PW17]: Mark 14:71 (ESV)

⁷¹ But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak."

Commented [PW18]: John 21:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Commented [PW19]: James 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Commented [PW20]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Commented [PW21]: Acts 20:24 (ESV)

²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

beliefs. This friend had just enough knowledge about apologetics to answer most of Nabeel's questions. Nabeel was trying to influence the friend toward Islam. They would get in arguments and be upset with each other, but they had to come back together as they shared rides and had some of the same classes. God even put a scholar on the resurrection in Nabeel's path. For four years his friend patiently witnessed to him. Finally, as their years in college ended, Nabeel had come to a point of decision. When examining Islam with the same scrutiny that he had used toward Christianity, he found he could not defend it. He pleaded with God for a dream.

Though Nabeel knew Christianity was more logical and defensible, he did not want to lose his loving family. He had to be sure. God gave him a vision. Nabeel asked for a dream. God gave him a dream. He asked for the Islamic method of interpretation and the meaning was clear. He was to follow Jesus. He asked for another dream. Now if I were God, I'd have given up on the guy. Four years of fellowship with an on fire believer. The logical evidence had been presented. He discovered the flaws in Islam, had a vision and a dream. Why should God give him anymore? Because God is gracious and merciful. God knew the pain in his heart at the thought of causing his family such grief. God answered his prayer and gave him the dream and a Scripture. ²⁶ *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.* Luke 9:26 Nabeel received the saving grace of God in Jesus.

But salvation is just the beginning of the work of grace in our lives. Allow me to rapid fire list for you **a few of the things Scripture declares that grace means to those of us who believe:** We stand by grace (Romans 5:2). That means that we continue in this walk of faith by the grace of God. We are justified by faith (Romans 3:24). We reign in life by grace (Romans 5:17). We don't just muddle through barely making it. We are more than conquerors. Grace ends the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14). Grace enables us to say, "Not going there!" The gifts of the Spirit are given to us by the grace of God (Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:7).

Grace is at work in us (1 Corinthians 15:10), to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Grace gives us sufficiency in all things (2 Corinthians 9:8)! It helps us deal with our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9). Grace gives us eternal comfort and good hope (2 Thessalonians 2:16). And last but not least, God's grace strengthens us (2 Timothy 2:1).

How we need the grace of God! I think most believers take it for granted or think that somehow they are able to stand, walk in victory, exercise their gifts, and have hope. Are we thanking God that we can do all these things because of the abundant grace and mercy of God? May God help us to realize the abundant grace and mercy we continually receive from the God who is always expressing His steadfast love toward us. Take some time to consider where your life would be without the grace and mercy of God. Then give Him the thanks, honor, and glory due Him for the continual, good blessings of grace and mercy on your life.

Commented [PW22]: Romans 5:2 (ESV)

² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Commented [PW23]: Romans 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Commented [PW24]: Romans 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW25]: Romans 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Commented [PW26]: Romans 12:6 (ESV)

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

Commented [PW27]: Ephesians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Commented [PW28]: 1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Commented [PW29]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Commented [PW30]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Commented [PW31]: 2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Commented [PW32]: 2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Commented [PW33]: 2 Thessalonians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

Commented [PW34]: 2 Timothy 2:1 (ESV)

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,

If you haven't accepted God's grace and mercy upon your sins, made possible by the cross of Jesus, I plead with you to do so today before your heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Recognize the great gulf that sin puts between you and our loving Creator and come to Him for His grace and mercy. Just like these that have been baptized this morning, bury yourself with Jesus and be raised to a new life. Bury your old thinking and align thoughts with God's thoughts. It's anything but boring. It's a daily adventure.

Questions

- 1 What is the difference between grace and mercy?
- 2 How are they similar?
- 3 Who is in a covenant with God?
- 4 What is fundamentally wrong with the brutal God argument?
- 5 Give examples of Jesus expressing grace.
- 6 Where do we see the attributes of God most clearly displayed?
- 7 How were we saved?
- 8 How was God's grace and mercy seen in Nabeel's conversion? In yours?
- 9 What other effects of grace work in our lives?
- 10 Can you share about some of the times the grace of God has intervened in your life?