



## God's Method of Mercy

We are all familiar with God's message of mercy. That is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. But have you thought about God's method of mercy? How does God show His mercy? The gospel accounts reveal this method. It appears in Christ touching the leprous man; His talking to the Samaritan woman; His taking to Himself a human nature. These actions teach us the how of mercy. Think for a moment of Jesus touching the leprous man; an act forbidden because that would make the person touching unclean also. Imagine being afflicted with a disease that cuts you off from the community and prohibits your being touched. Now imagine what it means when Christ draws near and touches you for the first time. Or think of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar whom everyone would rather bypass, until Christ stops and pays attention to him and heals him. What a profound method of mercy revealed by Christ.

### The spirit of mercy

Christ has ascended on high. He is no longer physically present. What is His method of mercy now? How does He touch, pay attention to, administer mercy to those in need? It is through you, a Christian, as a member of the body of Christ, that He administers mercy to those who are in need. What is God's method of mercy, today? As we consider this method of mercy, rather than look at the service of mercy, I want to focus this article on the spirit of mercy. Every Christian is endowed with the Spirit of Christ. That means we must be conforming our thinking and our attitude to the thinking and attitude of Christ (Rom. 12:2; Phils. 2:5). It is for this purpose that we need to appreciate what God is doing in giving us children and members with disabilities. This spirit of mercy is vital for ministering to those with (recognizable) disabilities, and also vital for serving all of God's people. God has a way of magnifying His mercy in the weakness of His people. What I will be addressing regarding people with disabilities also applies to every Christian who is going through trials.

### What is a meaningful life?

The disabled expose our perception of what is meaningful in life. When our children are born we all have ideals and dreams on their behalf. We look forward to the stages of life they will go through. These goals and accomplishments are what we hope will give them a meaningful life. Beyond the infant stage of crawling, walking, and talking, we envision study, driving, working, marriage and much more.

Here is the challenge of a disability. It exposes our fear of the loss of function. Talk with someone who has lost a particular ability and you will hear the struggles of accepting that they are unable to perform. They can't function as they would like. Grief sets in because of this inability or loss of function. This directly challenges the goals we set and the hopes we have. If my child, can't accomplish X will they have a meaningful life? What happens when X is a moral or spiritual target? What if they can't express their faith accurately, or behave in a controlled manner? Will they have a meaningful relationship with Christ?

Those with disabilities challenge our understanding of what is meaningful. We need those who are disabled so that we will grapple with what we regard as "normal." We need to know and love those who are disabled so that we can begin to understand how God demonstrates His method of mercy in our lives. We will see the mercy we have received and minister in the same Christ-like way to others. We wrongly presume that life becomes more meaningful through the achievement of goals.

But what happens when those goals are always out of reach? I am not saying that we shouldn't have goals or dreams, hopes or wishes. Rather, we should realise that the spirit of mercy is more readily apparent not in achievement but in the struggle of inability to achieve. Often God's Word shows us the struggle that His children face, but He withholds the reasons for their struggle. Job wrestled with that. He demanded to know the reason. He wanted God to give an account to him. In the end, he came to realise that God is not accountable to us but we are to Him. Habakkuk was confused by the reasons God gave. They didn't make sense, but then God reveals that the just shall live by his faith. Not by the solutions, not by attaining goals, but by clinging to God in faith. Paul is the one who provides us with what is the closest thing to an answer, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9). In the performance culture that we live in today, this answer rings hollow, and we twist it to think, I am weak so that I can get more grace, achieve more sanctification. God says, His power is perfected (it has reached its goal, it is complete) in our weakness. The point of life is the struggle not the overcoming, nor arriving at the perfect understanding of the struggle. Suffering has a way of refining our faith to show us that our acceptance with God comes completely for the sake of Jesus Christ.

### **From getting to giving**

This means our outlook on life needs to change. Change from making our ideals according to what we hope to get, accomplish, or perform; to making our ideals what we have to give, surrender, and accept. Jesus taught His disciples and us that greatness in the kingdom of God is not in being served but in serving. Sacrificial service is the goal; giving of ourselves just for the sake of giving in the name of the Christ. That is mercy. When we think of great people what is our criteria of greatness? John Calvin, Martin Luther, the apostle Paul. Don't we often regard them as great because of their accomplishments? I have learned to see another form of greatness. It is in my daughter with Down syndrome. She, like her other siblings, is teased and upset and sometimes angered by the teasing, but when the person who has done the teasing gets hurt, she will be the first to go and give a cuddle. She has something to give, unconditionally. That is great. How profound a lesson she has to teach us!!!

Jesus blesses the little children and says the kingdom belongs to such as these. Not in their innocence, nor in their potential. The kingdom belongs to such because of what He gives them. The disciples didn't see this. Their Lord was too busy and they shooed the children away. The children would hinder His accomplishment. We need to heed Jesus' rebuke. Wait a minute, those in need are not a hindrance to the kingdom, children such as these are an example of what it means to enter God's kingdom. God is the best giver of all. When man had corrupted His world through sin, God gave more, He gave His promised Son. That is how we are received by Him. Not because of what we have to contribute, but because of what He has given us in His Son. That is the spirit of mercy that energizes the service of mercy. Often our service wears thin because it doesn't accomplish anything. But is that really the point of mercy? Have we lost the spirit of mercy?

That's why we need people with disabilities: to present us with the need. To help us understand what Christ-like-mercy really is. It is giving. Not to get, but to see the need and use our strength to serve those who are in need. Not because we hope they will accomplish something, but just because they are created in God's image, and placed in our life. That is Christ's method of mercy. This method will need the Spirit of Christ to perform that mercy, mercy extended for His sake only. So read this Faith in Focus and consider those with disabilities among us. Read it not because of what you can get out of it; not only so that you can understand their accomplishments; but so that you can see what you have to give to them and others solely for the sake of Christ. That's the spirit of His mercy.

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