

# First Light

In a world where strength, power, and dominance prevail, it's interesting that the word **mercy** is used so many times in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, mercy is a theme that just keeps showing up. In fact, it's mentioned in the Psalms alone 29 times! So, if being superior is so coveted, is mercy really worth all that press? Scripture suggests that mercy is part of God's DNA and an unmistakable part of his identity. If you listen closely to the word of God, mercy is actually one of his heartbeat sounds. In the alphabetical line-up of all of God's traits, **mercy** sits just down the row from **justice** (Matt. 23:23). These two virtues don't arm wrestle or fight or bicker to see which one is best or most honored – they just quietly occupy the role God has assigned them. Mercy tends to be a little quieter and more reserved, not as outspoken. About the most distinct image of it is in the body of the Savior, merciful to humanity via a long, bloody day on a cross he never deserved, all for our just recompense. So, is that what God demands from each of us?

No and yes. Consider the words of the humble prophet Hosea when he says God wants us to show simple mercy more than he wants an award-winning sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). Jesus echoes this verbatim in Matt. 9:13 and 12:7. So, if God can do anything he wants and can create anything he desires, why can't he make us be merciful? He can't... or better said, he just won't. But if you've ever really messed up and the other person had every right to throw the book at you but didn't, that unbelievable relief you felt in being forgiven was mercy's touch. Truth is, we all want gentle mercy when we need it, but sometimes we also want hard justice for those who rub us wrong or cut us off or cheat or break a rule that we follow. But mercy extended is a different bird altogether. It requires that we experience pain, loss, disappointment or sorrow from someone else, of which we didn't deserve. Not easy stuff here. So, rather than dropping the proverbial axe, we cut some slack instead – a dab of grace, packaged in a healing bandage of mercy, with no strings attached and no fine print. And the cross? God gave us that lasting picture of what sweet heavenly mercy can look like on a hard, sour earth. As for our forgiveness and slate-cleaning? Completely undeserved, phenomenally expensive, eternally effective. For Jesus, it required blood, body and life, all for us. In a world full of vengeance, anger and selfishness, soft-spoken mercy won't win many powerlifting contests. But when we embrace his example and extend mercy, something spiritually nuclear happens in our world to change the way we see each other, the way we treat one another, the way we love our brother. When we extend mercy, God sees in us a striking resemblance to his Son. So, if you're still waiting at the foot of that blood-stained cross – guilty, hoping and pleading for mercy, here's some good news - it's been granted. Now pass it on.