

*Mercy and Justice in Psalms and*  
**Proverbs**

---

*“Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:3, 4, NKJV).*



Many people think of justice and mercy as things that cannot go together. The use of the scale is to show that balance is maintained when both justice and mercy are used in tandem. As Christians, we should strive to be both just and merciful in how we treat others.

## Introduction

# One Little Act of Kindness

Ps. 82:3, 4

“I don’t think I can go another step,” Martin said as he shook his head wearily and motioned for his friend to stop. They stood at the edge of Saint George’s Square in Eisenach, Germany. His friend nodded. “I feel the same, Martin,” he agreed, “but we have not eaten anything all day.”

Martin looked out across the square. “I know,” he said, dejectedly. “But after the way they treated us at that last door, I think I don’t want to try another one.”

### “But we have not eaten anything all day.”

It was 1497, and Martin Luther was fourteen years old. His father wanted him to have a good education but couldn’t afford to give him one. The best option available to Hans Luther was to send his son to a chorister school.

The church ran the chorister schools and made provision for poor scholars to “earn” their way through school. They were required to do odd jobs at the local parish church and sing from door-to-door to beg for food.

Life was hard for chorister scholars. They were abused, belittled, and antagonized and often went to bed hungry.

One particularly bleak day, Martin and a friend were begging for food as usual. It was bitterly cold, and they were starving. As they made their way down the street, a young woman named Ursula watched them from the second-story window of her home.

She recognized them from her local church and knew they were chorister scholars. She saw how they were abused as they made their way down the street, and her heart was touched. She was determined to give them a different experience.

When they reached her door, she threw it open and greeted them with a warm smile. Then, to their amazement, she invited them in, seated them in front of a warm fire, and gave them a hearty meal. Martin Luther was so overwhelmed by her kindness that he broke down in tears.

Ursula soon found out that Martin’s parents were relatives of her husband, Conrad Cotta. The Cottas invited Martin Luther to live with them and financially supported him for the remainder of his time in Eisenach. He lived with them until 1501, when he went to the University of Erfurt.

Ursula Cotta’s simple act of kindness had a profound impact on Martin Luther’s life. Amid the despair and oppression that colored his daily life, her kindness was a lifeline that not only lifted his spirits but gave him a glimpse of the character of God that he had never seen before.<sup>1</sup>

1. Story of Ursula Cotta and Martin Luther taken from James Anderson, *Ladies of The Reformation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Blackie and Son, 1855).

Luke 10:25–37

## Evidence *Twenty-First-Century Samaritan*

In 723–722 B.C., many of the Jews in Israel were exiled to Assyria. During that exile, however, some were left behind and intermingled with the people of pagan cultures who were brought there. This corrupted the Jewish religion as Judaism and pagan customs were mixed together.<sup>1</sup> Practices such as idolatry (see Exod. 20:4, 5) were now being accepted by this remnant in Israel. Because of their differences in religion and other contentious events leading up to Christ’s time, the Jews shunned the Samaritans (John 4:9).

### God’s mercy toward us should transform us.

With this historical context in mind, Jesus, a Jew, talking about the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) is appreciated with greater significance. Jesus talks about this Samaritan in a good light, which was not a common perspective among the Jews. In the story, two people, a priest and a Levite, passed by the Jewish man who was lying on the road nearly dead. A religious man and one of his own ethnicity passed by him! Though they were technically enemies, it was the Samaritan who stopped and cared for the man, going to great lengths to make sure he was cared for. Likewise, Jesus asks for us to do the same within our own context.

The story of the good Samaritan teaches us to “ ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Mark 12:31, NKJV). If you can love your enemy, how much easier will it be to love your friend? As the world becomes more broken, as it becomes more like the days before the Flood, more selfish desire will arise, and the well-being of people will be increasingly ignored. The greater focus will be on self.

It is our responsibility to develop immunity from these growing worldly trends and to care for the needy around us. We must focus not only on the physical needs but also the spiritual. God’s mercy toward us should transform us; He promises to meet our needs (Phil. 4:19). To think that the King of the universe supports us—what a great joy that is! Should not this mercy of God prompt us to show the same mercy to others? Just as God meets our needs, should we not try to help meet the needs of others?

### **REACT**

1. Is it possible to love God but at the same time disregard everyone around us?
2. Through action, how can we represent ourselves to the world as Christians?

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), pp. 45, 46.

# Logos

## *A Refuge for the Oppressed*

Psalms 82; 101; 146

### ***Psalms: Songs of Hope for the Oppressed (Ps. 9:7–9, 13–20)***

The book of Psalms is a delightful read not only for its richness of themes, which cut across many aspects of worship, but also because of the numerous messages of comfort. A legitimate question about life asked by believers and unbelievers alike has to do with God's justice: "O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?" (Ps. 74:10). It is a meaningful question, and God's apparent silence does not amount to indifference. All the difficulties in making sense of why some prosper at the expense of others will be answered in judgment, where each one will be rewarded "according to his work" (Rev. 22:12, NKJV). This does not mean that even presently God does not act on behalf of His people (Ps. 9:9). Through willing human instrumentalities, God clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, and visits the ones locked up in prison (Matt. 25:40).

---

**The ones who have experienced the worst that this present life has to offer have more reason to look forward to the next one.**

---

### ***"Do Something, God" (Psalm 82)***

Every time we have an unprecedented bite of life's bitter lemons, our cries for the justice of God rise up. The realization of the glaring inequality between the rich and the poor and how the former exploits that advantage at the expense of the latter is enough ammunition for the skeptic to discredit the acclaimed fairness and love of God. The Scriptures affirm that He is concerned with us intimately, even keeping count of the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30). He may not visit immediate judgment on the wicked, but He does not keep quiet forever. His promise cannot be better news: "I've had enough; I'm on my way to heal the ache in the heart of the wretched" (Ps. 12:5, *The Message*).

### ***A King's Promises (Psalm 101)***

While hardship does not entitle anyone to the blessings of God, who allows His sun to "rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45, ESV), it does make us realize more intimately our need of God. The ones who have experienced the worst that this present life has to offer have more reason to look forward to the next one. God promises them the life they have never experienced if only they remain faithful. Proud and independent people will not need the "reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12) when they have had theirs now while trampling over the weak and helpless.

### ***Walking With the Lord (Psalm 146)***

It is a sign of tremendous faith when we can praise God in the midst of affliction. When darkness seems to veil His face, we can rest on His unchanging grace. David speaks of walking in the valley of the shadow of death with no fear. He knows what it's like to live with his heart in his mouth, given how badly Saul wanted him dead. This kind of confidence in God's power does not take away the reality of hardship, but it does give hope of conquering "through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37). This is the work we have been called to as Christians (Mic. 6:8).

When we share Jesus, we share hope and faith that comes with knowing Him. The little we have to offer to alleviate the temporal suffering is nothing compared to the abundant life that comes from knowing and experiencing Him (John 10:10). This joy smiles through sorrow and longs with bated breath for the revelation of the King of kings.

### ***Proverbs: Mercy on the Needy (Prov. 10:4; 13:23, 25; 14:31; 15:15, 16; 19:15, 17; 22:2, 22, 23; 30:7–9)***

The Proverbs are known to be succinct yet punchy. One cannot help noticing the close relationship that they depict between wealth and character. There is something about how we relate to money and power depending on where we stand as far as the law of God is concerned. It is even better to have little with character than abundance with none (Prov. 15:16).

This relationship probably has something to do with the law of love. At the core of love is unselfishness; the willingness to lay down our lives, if that is what it takes, for the benefit of someone else (John 15:13). Perhaps wealth is a curse when all the purpose it can serve is gratifying our desires. Jesus made it clear that there will always be poor people (Matt. 26:11). Is this an arbitrary curse for God to keep some people poor? That would make God a mean and unfair ruler. But we must remember that there is also a "prince of this world" who wields a considerable amount of control (John 12:31).

Poverty is not the only problem aching humanity today; disease, death, war, and hunger, among others, are equally destructive to peace of mind. We are to recognize these as openings to introduce people to the Savior. After all, more than just coming to die, Jesus came to give "beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair" (Isa. 61:3, NLT).

We cannot do this if we are selfish and living only for excess and indulgent gratification. Our work is cut out for us.

### ***REACT***

1. Does God care about suffering and pain? If He does, why isn't He doing anything to stop it?
2. Can Christians be poor if God has anything to do with it?
3. What is more important? Relieving human suffering or presenting the gospel? How can our humanitarian efforts be different from what secular organizations do?

## Testimony

# *Freely You Have Received; Freely Give*

Matt. 10:8

“Those who, so far as it is possible, engage in the work of doing good to others by giving practical demonstration of their interest in them, are not only relieving the ills of human life in helping them bear their burdens, but are at the same time contributing largely to their own health of soul and body. Doing good is a work that benefits both giver and receiver. If you forget self in your interest for others, you gain a victory over your infirmities. The satisfaction you will realize in doing good will aid you greatly in the recovery of the healthy tone of the imagination.”<sup>1</sup>

**“If you forget self in your interest for others,  
you gain a victory over your infirmities.”**

“Dear young friends, remember that it is not necessary to be an ordained minister in order to serve the Lord. There are many ways of working for Christ. Human hands may never have been laid on you in ordination, but God can give you fitness for His service. He can work through you to the saving of souls. If, having learned in the school of Christ, you are meek and lowly in heart, He will give you words to speak for Him.”<sup>2</sup>

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’

“There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”<sup>3</sup>

### **REACT**

1. Knowing that Christ’s method (serving before calling) is the best way to reach out to others, what “small” acts can you start practicing in service to others?

2. “Actions speak louder than words.” How did Jesus serve others in such a way that they would be willing to leave everything behind to follow Him?

1. Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 209.

2. *Ibid.* p. 226.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 143, 144.

Ps. 82:3, 4

## How-to *Being Just and Merciful*

God is the greatest Judge in the universe. He is the One we should seek to emulate in justice and mercy. In the Bible, He outlines some basic guidelines to help us be more like Him.

God tells us that first, to be just and merciful, we must be righteous. But we cannot be righteous by ourselves. Only by the grace of Jesus are we able to obey and follow God's will for us. This means we must commune with God daily through prayer and meditating upon His Word to be able to discern His will and find strength in Him to obey.

---

### **Only by the grace of Jesus are we able to obey and follow God's will for us.**

---

Justice and mercy are not easy concepts for humans to grasp. Because of our inherently sinful natures, we desire revenge against those who have wronged us. However, God tells us that we should do good to those who have mistreated us (Luke 6:27, 28). He challenges us to rise above our sinful natures and strive to emulate His character. We should forgive as He does, be courteous, respectful, and maintain an open mind and an optimistic attitude about giving second chances. Jesus tells us that we should forgive seventy times seven times. This instruction means to forgive more times than we can count—we should forgive others countless times (Matt. 18:21, 22).

God also instructs us to help those who are less fortunate. He asks us to have mercy on those who are poor, to give to them, and not oppress them (Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 22:22). This instruction means we should do our best to help people who are in need. Although we may not always see the full spectrum of the impact we can have on others, we should serve anyway because we love Jesus and desire to be more like Him.

We are called to help those in need, to do justly and mercifully, and to imitate God's loving character by surrendering our lives to Jesus. We are to give 100 percent of ourselves to God and allow Him to work through us to help guide others closer to Him. If we follow the guidelines given to us in the Bible, we can shine with God's character and bring others closer to Him, showing them that our God is a just and merciful God.

### **REACT**

1. Why does God ask us to help others by being just and merciful to them, and how can we do that if they are unkind to us?
2. How does our being just and merciful to others relate to God being just and merciful to us?

---

*Clara Kolinek, Richmond, Virginia, USA*

## Opinion

*Alms for the . . .  
Responsible People*

Deut. 15:7-11

If you give a homeless person a dollar, have you helped?

For most of us, the easy answer to this questions is “yes,” or at least a sympathetic “sure” (said with a shrug). What if the homeless person spends the dollar on drugs or alcohol? Have you still helped?

**Jesus helped because helping is good,  
and it is the right thing to do.**

I am no expert in ethics or philosophy, but I have done a little reading and exploration into deontology versus consequentialism. Deontology “uses rules to distinguish right from wrong,” meaning the world and choices are very black-and-white.<sup>1</sup> Consequentialism determines, as the name suggests, “whether or not something is right by what its consequences are.”<sup>2</sup> (I encourage you to Google “trolley problem” later.) I will not try to convince you God is one way or the other. However, I think it is clear that God calls us to help regardless of the consequences. Most important, He knows the best way to help.

Yes, the homeless person could spend that dollar on something that you might not agree with, but you do not know whether they will or not. Should we not help because of a stereotype? I think the answer becomes clear if we look at examples of times that Jesus helped. Did He stop to think about the day of the week, the person’s race, the seriousness of the situation (demon possession versus running out of wine), or the person’s past? He simply helped.

We do not know what happened to everyone after their miracles occurred, and it is technically possible that the crippled man from Matthew 9 went home and said mean things to his mother! I highly doubt it, but the point I am trying to make is that I believe Jesus helped because helping is good, and it is the right thing to do. Jesus helped, and by helping others, He led people to the Father.

We, as Christians, can get so bogged down in the details that I think we underestimate the power of God. In a situation where we are not sure what to do, we can ask Him for wisdom. Moreover, we should simply be Christlike examples to those we are helping and lead them to the Father.

**REACT**

1. Has a fear of consequences ever prevented you from helping?
2. As complicated as the world is, what does helping look like?

1. “Deontology,” Ethics Unwrapped, <http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/deontology>.

2. “Consequentialism,” Ethics Unwrapped, <http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/consequentialism>.

Ps. 82:3, 4;  
Matt. 25:45

## Exploration

# *The Least of These*

### **CONCLUDE**

Paul tells us to be imitators of Christ (Eph. 5:1, 2). While Jesus was on earth, He spent a lot of time ministering to those who were considered outcasts in society. If we profess to be followers of God, we will work to meet the needs of others. We must be a refuge for the poor and seek justice for the afflicted. In our ministry to the less fortunate, we should also point them to the Savior and eternal life. When we assist those who are least among us, we are doing it to Christ!

### **CONSIDER**

- Searching the Scriptures for stories about someone who helped those in need. Contemplate telling one of the stories you found to a small group or for a children's story at church.
- Listening to the song "Not Too Far From Here" by Hilary Weeks, which talks about how people around you are hurting and need your help.
- Writing the names of people that you know personally who are sick, poor, depressed, or in need of help. Pray for these people, and ask God to show you just how you can make a difference in their lives.
- Volunteering at a food pantry, homeless shelter, nursing home, or a hospital for a few hours.
- Looking for opportunities to lend a hand to anyone who needs help throughout the day.
- Going on a mission trip with your local church or a Christian organization. This is an excellent way to minister to those who are less fortunate.

### **CONNECT**

Psalms 9:9, 17, 18; 82:3–5; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:45; Ephesians 5:1, 2; Isaiah 58:6–10; James 1:27.

Ellen G. White, *A Call To Stand Apart*, chap. 15, "Social Justice."