
The Lovingkindness of the Lord

By David Wilkerson

August 9, 2010 Dearly Beloved:

A WORD FROM THE CHIEF SHEPHERD.

To his flock of sheep, Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29).

I find such hope and rest when I know I am in the Lord's hand. No man and no devil can pluck me out of his hand.

When Satan comes at us like a flood — bringing waves of fear, discouragement and lies — we can rest in this glorious truth: **GOD GAVE US TO JESUS.**

Christ will see us through our hard times. Hear his words in the innermost part of your soul: "My Father gave you to me. You are mine."

When we are at a low point, we must not think of quitting. We are to hold fast to our position in Christ. Above all the conflicting voices, all the floods of fears, we can know this: The Father who gave us to Jesus, for now and for eternity, has obligated himself to see us through.

Encourage yourself in the Lord.

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In Christ,
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Newsletter: The Lovingkindness of the Lord

August 9, 2010 Throughout the Bible we hear these wonderful words spoken by many of God's servants: "Your God is merciful, kind, gracious, anxious to forgive, full of lovingkindness, slow to anger" (see Exodus 34:6, Deuteronomy 4:31, Jonah 4:2, Joel 2:13, Romans 2:4). These words about God's lovingkindness are recited again and again by such men as Moses, Jonah, David, the prophets and the apostle Paul.

Some Christians may be surprised to know Moses spoke of God's lovingkindness. After all, Moses was known as the Lawgiver, delivering stern admonitions about obedience to God's law. He warned the people that if they refused to walk in righteousness they would be judged.

Yet Moses also had this great revelation about the Lord's lovingkindness. How did he learn of this aspect of God's nature? The Lord revealed it to him in the cloud of his presence:

"The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord God, *merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*" (Exodus 34:5-7, my italics).

Even as Moses preached warnings about judgment, he always remembered this important aspect of God's character. Indeed, Moses urged the people, "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee" (Deuteronomy 4:30-31).

In the Old Testament, God's people forsook him again and again, yet each time he restored them and blessed them incredibly. The Lord had every right to give up on Israel, but he remained ever faithful to them. Nehemiah sums up this wonderful truth about his nature:

"After they had rest, they did evil again before thee...yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies.... For thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God" (Nehemiah 9:28, 31).

Isaiah also knew this aspect of God's nature. Like Moses, Isaiah preached about God's judgment against sin. He spoke of dark days of despair to come upon those living in continual rebellion. Yet amid one of his most direct messages, Isaiah stopped to make this statement:

"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us...according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses" (Isaiah 63:7).

Everywhere Isaiah turned he saw backsliding and apostasy in Israel. Yet despite this, Isaiah looked into his heart and recalled a revelation of what God was truly like. And he began praising God for his faithfulness: "Oh, Lord, we have rebelled against you and turned from your Holy Spirit. Save us again by your great mercy. Stir up your compassion toward us. You are full of lovingkindness."

The prophet Joel also gave dire warnings about days of thick darkness. He prophesied massive earthquakes and the darkening of the sun and moon. Yet Joel stopped suddenly in the midst of a dire warning and began to speak of God's loving nature:

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:12–13).

The word "repenteth" here means God wants to overturn the judgment that must follow sin. Simply put, he doesn't want judgment for us. His desire is that we will mourn over our sins and turn to him to be restored.

The foundation for all victory over sin is to understand that God is tender and full of lovingkindness. "Thus saith the Lord...let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23–24).

If you have walked with the Lord for any length of time, you have probably encouraged others that God is gracious and forgiving. Now, let me ask you: When you fail the Lord, is it suddenly a different matter? Do you find yourself working through terrible feelings of guilt and shame?

You may say, "Shouldn't we experience those kinds of feelings when we sin?" Indeed, those feelings are the natural result of sin. But as children of God we are not supposed to continue for days and weeks thinking our Father is mad at us. Because of Christ's provision at the cross, all guilt and condemnation may be lifted quickly. He has made it so.

Still, even after we've repented, we may feel we have to make up our failures to the Lord. Like the Prodigal Son, we can have the Father hugging our neck, kissing our cheek, putting a ring on our finger and a robe on our back. He tells us to forget the past and to come into his house and enjoy the feast he has prepared for us.

But inside we protest. We think, "I can't go in. I'm not worthy! I've sinned against the Lord. I've got to show him I'm sorry. I need to grieve, to carry this guilt a while longer."

For many Christians it is easy to believe that God forgave Israel's gross sins. We have no trouble accepting that he forgave Nineveh in the Old Testament and the dying thief in the New Testament.

But, oddly, we find it hard to accept the same forgiveness for ourselves. For some reason, it's hard for us to grasp that the moment we turn to him in repentance he quickly and lovingly accepts us as if we had never sinned.

The Bible promises it is possible to understand the Lord's lovingkindness. Note David's words here: "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even *they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord*" (Psalm 107:43, my italics). David says this psalm contains the key to understanding God's lovingkindness. What is that key? It is repeated four times in the psalm: "Then they cried..."

David had received an awesome revelation of God's gracious, forgiving heart. And he discovered it simply by looking at God's past record of dealing with his beloved children. David reports to us:

"Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way.... Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (107:5-8).

When the children of Israel wandered away from the Lord, they became hungry, thirsty and lost because of sin. What did they do? "Then they cried unto the Lord...and he saveth them out of their distresses" (107:9).

Yet again they rebelled and backslid, falling even lower. Again we read: "Then they cried...he sent his word, and healed them" (107:19, 20).

Finally, God's people again came to their wits' end. A storm raged and their souls melted with trouble: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still" (107:28, 29).

Here is what the Lord was teaching David through this history lesson: "Take a look at my record of dealing with my children. They have failed me time after time. But then they cried; they reached out to me. And my heart is touched by the tears of all my children. I am moved with compassion when they return to me. That is my nature. I am touched by the feeling of their infirmities."

David responded to this revelation, "Look how easily God's heart is moved. Oh, how quickly he responds to the cries of his children. There is no end to his mercies."

Beloved, you don't have to continue in agony and guilt. Go instead to the Lord, cry out and confess to him. He is a tender Father who is touched by your every cry.

A time came when David himself needed a revelation of the Lord's mercy. It is well known that King David fell into horrible sin, committing adultery and covering it up with murder. Moreover, we know David was full of the Holy Spirit, so he must have been miserable. David could only go for so long before confessing the horrible acts he had perpetrated.

The prophet Nathan confronted him, saying, "You have brought reproach on God's name." Immediately, David confessed and repented. Even as he was still weeping Nathan assured him, "Your sins are forgiven."

Yet hearing that assurance wasn't enough for David. You see, it is one thing to be forgiven and quite another to be free and clear with the Lord. David knew that forgiveness was the easy part. Now he wanted to get things right with God, to be able to get his joy back. So he cried, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11).

Psalm 51 was written as David remembered the merciful, longsuffering nature of the Lord. In the opening verse he appeals to God's tender forgiveness: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

David knew just what to do: He cried! "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (34:6). "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (34:15). "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles" (34:17).

Dear saint, here is your victory over every battle. It is to possess this confidence: *No matter how grievously you have fallen, you serve a Lord who is ready to forgive.* Indeed, he is anxious to heal you. He possesses more lovingkindness toward you than you could ever need.

So, here is your weapon: Cry! Cry out as David did, with all of your heart. Go to the Lord and confess your sin. Appeal to his lovingkindness, saying, "Lord, I know you love me. And I know you are ready to forgive me. I repent before you right now."

At that very moment you are clear with God. It is futile to think you can repay any amount for your sin. God loves you so much that he gave his Son, Jesus, who has already made all payment. Our merciful, loving Advocate is yearning to help and deliver you: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

I remember strolling alongside my young granddaughter, Tiffany, as she walked atop a low concrete wall. I held her from behind to keep her from falling, but she tried to knock my hand away. Eventually I let go, and she toppled over, though without hurting herself. When she fell, I did not desert her, of course. I didn't say, "Look at what you did. You're not mine anymore!" No loving grandparent would do that.

The Lord showed me through that experience, "David, you allow yourself such love for this child. But at times you don't allow me to love you in the same way. You swell with pride over your children, but at times you won't allow me to take pride in you."

Not long after that day, I heard the Lord speak a tender word to my heart. He said, "Son, you bless me. You bless my heart!" No one has ever said anything better to me in my life. And I know that particular word to me is true. The Bible says God takes pleasure in his children.

God's lovingkindness is to be enjoyed. Jonah was a prophet who fully understood the lovingkindness of the Lord. But he was a man who could not enjoy or appropriate it. Instead, Jonah turned God's lovingkindness into a burden for himself.

You see, the Ninevites were enemies of Israel. Now God was commanding Jonah to go to the wicked city Nineveh and prophesy its quick destruction. But Jonah ran away in haste. Why? It was because of the lovingkindness of the Lord. Jonah explained to the Lord, "For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:2).

In other words: "God, you've commanded me to tell Nineveh they have only forty days before destruction comes. But I can't do that because I know you. You are easily touched. Tears and repentance soften your heart. I know what will happen. When you see the Ninevites crying, you'll change your mind. Instead of sending judgment you'll stir their hearts toward you. I'll end up looking like a fool!"

Finally, Jonah did go to Nineveh, but only by way of the belly of a giant fish, who spit him onto dry ground. Jonah proclaimed God's judgment to Nineveh, and, sure enough, the people did repent. The sin-hardened Ninevites wept, fasted, mourned and put on sackcloth, even on their animals. It was one of the most sweeping revivals ever recorded in the Bible.

Yet in the midst of all this Jonah became angry. He actually sulked because God spared Nineveh rather than rejoicing that they were made righteous. In short, Jonah didn't enjoy God's lovingkindness. Beloved, as the people of God, we dare not make the same mistake. We need to thank him for his merciful lovingkindness to us, his church, and to our nation.

God's lovingkindness must be proclaimed. We are to preach about the Lord's lovingkindness to all of humankind. David testified, "I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation" (Psalm 40:10).

David didn't just appropriate this wonderful message for himself. He knew it was also sorely needed by the whole congregation, by the entire nation as well, and by a hurting world. He was grateful to God for such great love, because he was sorely aware of his own failings: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me" (40:12).

It doesn't matter how badly those around us have sinned. God still loves all. That is why he sent his Son. And we should be preaching it to the world. Can you say with David, "I have not concealed thy lovingkindness...from the great congregation"? That is his desire for all of us.

Here is one of the most quoted and sung verses in all of God's Word: "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Psalm 63:3). You may ask, "What does it mean, 'His lovingkindness is better than life?'"

The truth is life is short. It fades like the grass, which is here one season and gone the next. Yet God's lovingkindness endures forever. A million years from now Jesus will be as tender and loving to us as he is now. Others can take your life away from you, but they can't take away God's lovingkindness.

Consider for a moment: God is not mad at you anymore for your failure. If you're ready to forsake your sin you can be forgiven and restored at this very moment. The Word says nothing can come between our Lord and us — no sin, no guilt, no condemning thought. You can say, "My life is a blessing to the Lord. And I am able to rejoice and praise him. I am clean, free, forgiven, justified, sanctified, redeemed."

You have a loving, tender Father who cares about you. He has bottled every tear you've ever shed. He has seen your every need, known your every thought. And he loves you! If you could only grasp how tender he is toward you — how patient, caring, ready to forgive and bless you — you wouldn't be able to contain yourself. You would shout and praise until you had no voice left: "His lovingkindness is better than life!" Amen.

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