

# MERCY AND LONGSUFFERING

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Scripture, inspired by Abba Himself, tells us that He is both merciful and longsuffering. As I began these writings about the personality of God I though I understood mercy but was not sure about longsuffering. Now I wonder how well I understand either one. I have heard some teachers say that longsuffering refers to 'suffering long'. Frankly, that doesn't increase my understanding at all. My oldest son, Richard, impressed me with an entirely different concept, the one I shall use. He suggested that 'longsuffering' pertains to 'standing alongside and suffering with'. This is not the same as mercy but it does have a very close relationship to it.

Many times over we can see God, our Abba, speaking of and showing by His actions, His mercy. The concept of mercy is pretty simple. By my attitudes and by my actions I deserve judgment and punishment. I am not thinking of this in general terms. I am thinking of specific things, specific attitudes, specific actions which truly deserve judgment and punishment. This is true for every one of us, even those of us who have known the Lord for a long time. I really do try to control my tongue but there are times when I say things I really shouldn't say. I am not talking about swearing. That is not any temptation to me. I am talking about gossip and criticism, things like that. If you do not relate to having imperfections in your life please stop reading and return to this when you have become more self-enlightened. I really and truly deserve punishment. Any just and right thinking person who knew ALL THE FACTS would agree with that. I have done wrong and justice demands punishment, correction. Be assured I am not just talking about murder, rape, robbery, etc. Look inside yourself and you will discover countless 'bad behaviors'. It may be a 'temper tantrum', directed at a 'safe' person instead of the right person. It may be a bit of juicy gossip you pass around just for the pleasure of it. It may be a power struggle for domination with your mate. Look inside. Things such as these are there and you know it {even if I do not}. You still have bent areas inside you which demand correction but cry out for mercy. Abba is merciful. By that I mean that when my behavior, my character, demands a certain consequence, Abba intervenes and provides a more pleasant, or at least a more constructive consequence. Put more simply, I deserve bad, He gives

good. You surely do understand that good does not always mean pleasant and comfortable. It is not merciful to give a small child freedom when they are running into traffic. They are not happy with the stern words, pat on the diaper, and being snatched off their feet. Yet, it is a true mercy to do these things rather than let them be seriously hurt or even killed. And so it is with Abba. There are many things in our life that are parallel to the child running toward disaster. We may be so busy building a career that we neglect spouse and children, neglect to build a life. We may be playing with addictions such as drugs, alcohol, or gambling not knowing that these can become life eating monsters. Abba knows. Often He brings to us a very unpleasant event in order to prevent an even more unpleasant outcome.

In the midst of and all through our selfishness, rebellions, ignorance, and pride, He is with us, in us, and loving us. He is bestowing mercies, new every morning. Scripture tells us who believe that we have passed out of judgment, into life. I believe that this is one reason that we are told in Romans that we are now 'dead' to the law. The law was our teacher, our tutor, bringing us to grace in Christ Jesus. The law specified both rules and punishments for breaking rules. What a mercy it is to we who believe that Jesus has now written His commandment of love on our hearts and the punishments, just though they are, no longer pertain to us. Our merciful Abba has allowed us to enter into His Kingdom of grace. We still receive discipline and discipline is a corrective mercy.

Is Abba merciful to unbelievers also? Of course! Unfortunately we know from our own experience that mercy extended is greater than mercy received. Abba offers, we must accept and most unbelievers do not accept much from the God whom they deny.

Whether we are considering Abba's mercy, kindness, or patience we can rest assured of one wonderful thing. Nothing Abba does with people, with you and me, is impersonal. His mercy is not some grand sweeping law flowing through nature. It is not some policy He has built into His creation. His mercy is applied to each individual need, person by person, action by action. This seems impossible to me. It is still true. His patience falls on each specific situation in the life of specific persons at a specific time. It is intentional, it is purposeful, it is the mercy of a loving God meeting the needs, at the time we need them met. We do not deal with a long ago and far away power that wound up a universe and then retreated to a distant throne to watch it run down. We have a Father who dwells in us and walks with us. He sees and cares for the sparrow that falls. How much more does He care for His very own child in whom He dwells.

In the same way that I believe that kindness is an outworking of goodness, I believe that mercy and longsuffering are also closely connected. Remember, these attributes of Abba's personality are intimately, personally worked into the lives of people like you and me. Longsuffering is suffering with or suffering alongside. We experience many things in this life which cry out for much more than mere mercy. The death of a loved one, a nagging besetting sin, a hard work situation that drags on and on and on all cause us to cry out for both strength to endure and the comfort of understanding intimacy. During these times, more often than we can know, our Abba and the Holy Spirit comes alongside and walks us through the trying tribulation. Scripture tells us that He is the God of ALL COMFORT and that we should comfort others with the same comfort that has comforted us. Abba does this in and through us time and time again. Usually this happens with little or no recognition, usually with no resulting praise. Yet He continues to stand alongside in life after life, day after day, crises after crises. Why? Why does He continue to stand alongside and suffer with us when He seems to get no reward? Well, that is just the way He is. That is just a part of His personality. He teaches us and shows us the path. Then, He does not retire to a hillside where He can rest and see how we do. No! He shows us the way, then He goes along-inside us to help us through. How does He do this? I don't know. It is too much for me to understand. So what? He does it and if we believe, we will enjoy our journey ever so much more.

**FREELY, YOU HAVE RECEIVED.**

**FREELY GIVE!**

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