

God's Unconditional Love

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions (Psalm 51:1).

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-12

Song: “Forgiven”

As a child I knew that I was in trouble when my mom would say my name, complete with my middle name. Trembling, I would stand before her as she stated my crime, judged me, and gave out my consequences. Often she would send me to my room to give me time to reflect on my poor choice. This was very effective, as my thinking usually led me to remorse. And remorse led me to humbly go back to my mom and say, “I’m sorry.” Then my mom had a choice. She could forgive and love me despite my failure, or not. She always chose to forgive and love me, modeling what God does.

When we confess our sin to our heavenly Father, He always chooses to forgive us because of His great love for us and the sacrifice of His Son in our place. God’s unconditional love is not based on what we do, but on who He is. Our response to His forgiveness should be greater obedience and gratitude. This helps us go forward sharing God’s love with others.

Father God, thank You for Your unconditional love. Help me to love others the same way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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September 14–20. **Cynthia Bolds** lives in a Chicago suburb with her husband of 38 years. She enjoys gardening and shelling, as well as acting and directing shows for a special-needs troupe.

Christ's Sacrificial Love

“You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him” (Luke 23:14).

Scripture: Luke 23:9-15

Song: “He Took My Place”

Imagine standing trial for a crime that you didn't commit, and then being convicted and sentenced to death. A study in the United States found that 1 in 25 executions involved people later found innocent. Sadly, these individuals stood before a judge and jury, taking the blame for someone else's crime. That is what happened to Jesse Tafero, who was convicted of murder and sent to his death in 1990. Two years later the conviction of his crime was overturned.

Out of His love for each person ever born, Jesus stood before Pilate and Herod. After receiving His sentence, He was flogged and crucified. But Jesus was completely blameless. He didn't commit any crimes—not one sin. He took on the punishment that each of us should receive for everything we have done wrong. Jesse, I'm sure, wasn't a person willingly accused. But Jesus was. He knew the cross was His heavenly Father's will, and He humbly submitted himself to the pain of the cross for us.

Christ's sacrificial love on the cross opened the way for sinners to receive eternal life with God instead of punishment with eternal death.

Dear Father, my heart is overwhelmed with Your amazing love. Thank You for sending Jesus to stand trial in my place and take my punishment. I praise You now and look forward to worshipping You forever in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

Loving Through Compassion

Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan (Genesis 42:5).

Scripture: Genesis 42:1-5

Song: “Everyone Needs Compassion”

Through a child-sponsorship agency, my family learned of a 12-year-old African girl needing support. Compelled to help someone disadvantaged, we have financially provided for schooling, meals, and life-skills training for her. Our African “daughter” still needs our support even though she no longer goes to school.

Compassion motivates us to help another person on the other side of the world, whom we have never met. Compassion for another is actually God's love in action. This is what Joseph showed to people from outside of Egypt who came because they heard there was food in Egypt.

We are compassionate when we use our resources in tangible ways to show God's love to others. We all have resources to use, and our money is certainly not the only one.

God showed His compassion for us by giving His Son to die on a cross—the perfect sacrifice for our sins, one that none of us could ever give. And we who have received His sacrifice for our salvation certainly have much reason to show compassion with a resource we all have—our knowledge about God and our experience with the compassion of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your compassion. Please lead us into ways that we can show compassion to others. We know that when we help others, we are extending Your compassion. In Jesus' name, amen.

Look for Mercy

[One of the brothers] saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. “My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. . . . Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling (Genesis 42:27-28).

Scripture: Genesis 42:26-28

Song: “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

I looked in the rearview mirror, and my heart sank when I saw the flashing lights of a patrol car. I prided myself, at the time, on my perfect driving record and wondered what I had done. The officer explained that a new law had gone into effect and the speed limit was lower than what I was driving. I thought, *Surely he will see that I have a perfect record and show mercy.* Nope. When I explained that this was my first ticket, he responded that I wasn’t the oldest in the first-traffic-ticket club. Earlier in the week he had given a first ticket to an 89-year-old. He was not one to show mercy.

When Joseph was in Egypt, there seemed to be no law regarding foreigners who came for food. But Joseph might have been expected to declare some sort of violation in the case of his brothers, whom he recognized (42:7). Joseph could easily have denied food to them. But he not only chose to act with mercy—he also gave them provisions for their return trip and returned their payment without telling them. If they had recognized these acts of mercy, one would think their hearts would be joyful, not troubled.

Every day God shows His mercy. Look for it and be joyful.

Father, thank You for showing us mercy and for the hope we have in looking for Your goodness in our lives each day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Restoring Relationship

“Bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men” (Genesis 42:34).

Scripture: Genesis 42:29-34

Song: “Second Chance”

“Sorry. I won’t do it again.” . . . “I bombed. Can I try it again?” Have you heard anyone say these things—maybe even yourself? We all come to times when we want a second chance. We want a fresh start, a new beginning when we can put offenses behind us. It is especially heartwarming to see companies give people second chances. There is a local coffee-roasting company near my home that employs former felons looking for a clean start.

Joseph heard his brothers say they were honest men. But he wasn’t ready to take a chance on their claim just yet. He didn’t have enough recent experience with them to counter what they’d done years earlier when they sold him into slavery (37:27-28). Joseph had forgiven his brothers, and now he was giving them a chance to prove they were honest and trustworthy. It was a second chance to prove themselves worthy of relationship, which they could do by bringing his youngest brother, Benjamin, to him.

Giving opportunities to demonstrate sincere change is a way to help restore relationship with those we have forgiven for doing us wrong. This kind of love is risky for us, but God is our strength and example. Turn to Him for help to restore broken relationships.

Father, please help me see opportunities to give second chances to people around me and to love them as You do. Thank You for all the chances You’ve given me for restored relationship. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Loving the Difficult

Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring [Benjamin] back to you” (Genesis 42:37).

Scripture: Genesis 42:35-38

Song: “Love Them Like Jesus”

I do some acting on television projects. The work leaves time backstage to talk with other actors. Most are very different from me, and I sometimes find that loving them is hard and leaves me vulnerable to their rejection. However, I have sensed God’s help to risk stepping out to befriend an atheist who let me pray for her and her husband with cancer. I invited another woman, who swears like a sailor, to church. Another actress irritated me, but I started a conversation with her anyway. We connected on our work with special-needs children, and from there I was able to encourage her in some of her struggles.

Years before the time of today’s Scripture, Reuben had stuck his neck out trying to protect Joseph—their father’s favorite—from the brothers (37:21-22). He did this from love for their father, even though their father favored Joseph. Reuben likely didn’t gain much favor with his own brothers by doing that. Reuben brought up his protection again when the brothers were in Egypt (42:22).

Then in today’s passage, Jacob was still playing favorites among the sons, having transferred his love to Benjamin. Here Reuben not only offered to protect his father’s now favorite son but also was ready to sacrifice his own two sons, should he not safely return Benjamin home. That was some tough loving offered to a difficult person.

Father, help me to love others even though it may be hard. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Loving Over Our Emotions Through Forgiveness

[Joseph] turned away from them and began to weep (Genesis 42:24).

Scripture: Genesis 42:6-25

Song: “You Are My Hiding Place”

Corrie ten Boom was held in a concentration prison during World War II. In her book *The Hiding Place*, she relates how, after the war, she told her story at various places. At one talk, a man, who had been a former prison guard of hers and had since become a Christian, approached her. As he held out his hand to shake hers, he declared that Jesus had forgiven his sins. Corrie recounts how she hesitated and resisted his invitation because of all the emotions that welled up from the past abuse.

When Joseph tested his brothers during their first visit to Egypt for food, he heard their expression of guilt for how they had mistreated him (42:21). We don't know why he was overcome with emotion—perhaps by past pain or by joy over their apparent change and the fulfillment of God's promise (vv. 6, 9). No wonder he hesitated, and even stepped away.

Corrie ten Boom desired to do the right thing, even if against emotions over past pain. She silently asked God for help to forgive the man so she could shake his hand sincerely. We can also ask God to help us love those who have hurt us, even when love is not yet what we feel. God knows our emotions and can help us manage our emotions to love others well.

Father, thank You for not only giving us emotions but also being present and ready to help us love others. In Jesus' name, amen.