

Mercy and Might

When the Lord saw [the widow], his heart went out to her (Luke 7:13).

Scripture: Luke 7:11-17

Song: “I Believe in Miracles”

On Christmas Day 2021, NASA launched the James Webb Space Telescope, hoping to make astronomical history. The early images didn't disappoint. Glimpses into a cosmic cloud of dust and gas exposed a star-birthing region filled with giant baby stars. Other images unveiled superclusters with thousands of galaxies, exoplanets in distant solar systems, even a star surrounded by square-shaped rings. Out of nothingness, God spoke this vast universe into existence! The miracle is awe-inspiring.

The miracle of raising one dead man to life is equally awe-inspiring when we consider the impossibility of undoing death. But the moment recorded in today's passage shows us something else about God's character: His mercy. It's not just that a man has died. That man is a woman's only son. And that woman is a widow who, with neither husband nor son to ensure her future, has lost everything.

The widow didn't ask Jesus for help. He saw her need and, filled with compassion, chose to comfort her. We, too, can receive the comfort of knowing how much Jesus cares for us. In the face of suffering, we can count on His mercy. His heart goes out to us. He understands how much we need Him, even when we don't ask.

Father, I praise You for Your mighty miracles, and I thank You for Your mercy, Your compassion, and the life You offer me. In Jesus' name, amen.

April 15–21. **Cindy Peavy** lives in Alabama but loves camping across the country, exploring the miracle of God's creation.

The Power of Music

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name
(Psalm 92:1).

Scripture: Psalm 92

Song: “He Is Exalted”

At age 5, Donna Stoering performed her first piano concert. By age 19, she had earned a graduate degree in music while touring worldwide. When her listeners shared how the music moved, soothed, or otherwise helped them, she began researching the power of music. She learned that we’re wired to receive and respond to melodies. They light up different regions of our brain, triggering changes in blood pressure, emotions, and moods. Modern science proves that music is a form of communication more powerful than words alone.

But this new insight is really ancient wisdom. In Psalm 92, the author declares that it’s good to praise the Lord in song. And there is much to sing about! He makes us glad through His deeds and great works (vv. 4-5); He gives us strength and triumph (vv. 10-11); and He plants us in His house, nurturing us with His grace, mercy, and love (vv. 12-13). And if we remain “fresh and green” into old age, it’s so we can continue bearing the fruit of praise (vv. 14-15).

Sometimes we feel anything but fresh and green. After a difficult day, we may feel worn out and stressed, our patience drained. But God offers a remedy: we can refresh and renew our spirits by singing of His love in the morning and His faithfulness at night (v. 2).

Father, I will sing songs that praise Your worthy name so my heart and spirit may be lifted up to rightly honor You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Prayer of Faith

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective
(James 5:16).

Scripture: James 5:12-20

Song: “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

Spotlighted by the morning sun, the leaf captured my attention. Microorganisms or insects had eaten the spongy, green parts, leaving behind a leaf skeleton. I stooped to pick it up and held it toward the sun so I could study it more closely. With the leaf backlit, I could see the beautiful, lacy network formed by the complex interconnection of veins.

In today’s passage, James holds up the topic of prayer to help us study it more closely. He begins by exhorting us to pray in times of trouble (James 5:13). When our hearts are distressed, coming to God in prayer steadies us. James also directs us to praise God in joyous times when our soaring spirits add fullness to our praise (v. 13). And in times of sickness, we are to seek out church elders and other faithful believers for prayer (vv. 14-16). James then reveals the interconnections between prayer, faith, healing, and righteousness, affirming how very powerful and effective prayers are when offered earnestly in faith from pure hearts (v. 16).

Knowing this interconnection, we can prepare for times of prayer by confessing our sin and receiving God’s forgiveness. We can grow in righteousness and purity by pursuing a closer relationship with God. Ultimately, though, we pray and persist in prayer because we trust God, and it is His grace at work in our lives that makes our prayers powerful and effective.

Father, thank You for showing me how prayer connects so beautifully with my life of faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Rise Again

Though I have fallen, I will rise (Micah 7:8).

Scripture: Micah 7:7-20

Song: “Love Lifted Me”

At the 1992 Olympics, Derek Redmond was expected to win the gold medal in the 400-meter race. Fifteen seconds after the start, though, he felt agonizing pain in his right leg and collapsed to the ground with a torn hamstring. Determined to finish, he struggled to stand and limp forward, his face wrenched in pain. He'd hopped only a few steps when a man ran past officials, took Derek into his arms, and supported him to the finish line. The man was Derek's father.

Micah paints a similarly touching picture of our Heavenly Father coming to aid His people. The southern kingdom of Judah had become corrupted by injustice, abuses of power, and idol worship. But even in this darkness, there was hope. If God's fallen people would turn back to Him and His ways, He would help them rise and would bring light into their darkness.

There's such comfort for us in these words! When we've fallen into sin, we can humbly seek God's mercy and forgiveness. When we're suffering the painful consequences of living in a fallen world, we can call on Him for help and rescue. Our Father is able to lift us up again and lead us out of darkness. As we lean on Him, He will remain by our side and light our way.

Father, when life is difficult and I lose hope, give me courage to go on and humility to lean on You as You help me to the finish line. In Jesus' name, amen.

Begging for Answers

When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me (Psalm 86:7).

Scripture: Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17

Song: “God Answers Prayer”

In the classroom, third-graders often beg for help, asking questions such as, “What should I write next?” While they hope I will provide an idea, it’s more important that I teach them strategies that will help them the next time they’re struggling. My students may not receive their hoped-for response in the moment, but I always answer with love, providing what will help them learn and grow.

In Psalm 86, David begs God for help. He asks God to hear him, answer him, guard him, and save him; he asks that God have mercy on him, bring him joy, teach him God’s way, and give him an undivided heart. Supporting his petition, David offers reasons why he believes God should act on his behalf. But David also realizes that it’s not his own righteousness that causes God to answer his prayers. God faithfully hears the prayers of His people because He’s forgiving and good, loving and compassionate.

Distress prompts us to call on God, and David’s prayer shows us that it’s OK to beg for help. Pleading our case helps us reflect on our relationship with God. It also helps us reflect on who God is. Even when we don’t get the answers we desire, we can experience God’s peace and strength in our struggle, knowing His love abounds for all who call on Him.

Father, thank You for hearing my pleas. I will surrender my hoped-for response, trusting that You always answer with what I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Father Love

The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship (Romans 8:15).

Scripture: Romans 8:1-16

Song: “No Longer Slaves”

Bill knew his coworker Suzanne struggled as a single mom, and he prayed that God would provide what she needed. As time deepened their friendship, he began to hope that he might be the one to meet the need. He confessed his love to her welcoming heart, and they married a few months later. Eager to become one family, Bill petitioned for adoption of Suzanne’s two children. When the judge asked him why, Bill responded, “Because I love them unconditionally.”

God loves *us* unconditionally! In today’s passage, the apostle Paul teaches that as believers in Christ, we are under no condemnation before God because Jesus has paid our sin-debt. When we receive Him as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us and becomes our constant source of comfort and guidance. Instead of living as slaves to sin and fear of condemnation before God the judge, we have peace and life as children of God the Father.

Once, when someone asked Bill whether he ever wished for his own children, he was genuinely surprised. I heard his answer: “What do you mean? I have two kids.” God treats us with the same, full acceptance as His own children. We can go to Him, assured of His love, protection, and provision. And we can call Him the most intimate of names: *Abba*, Father.

Father, in my prayers, I call out to You as my Father. As Your beloved adopted child, I bask in Your unconditional love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Forgiven Much

[Jesus asked,] “Which of [the forgiven debtors] will love [the moneylender] more?” (Luke 7:42).

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Song: “Forgiven”

I felt nervous attending my first women’s conference alone, dreading the awkwardness of finding a seat at meals. At lunch, however, I was drawn to a table where there was joyful talk among the women there. As we introduced ourselves, I learned that one woman had previously been incarcerated for years. Several others were recovering addicts, and many were trying to regain custody of their children. Yet the conversation of these women—all residents at a recovery center—was filled with amazement, gratitude, and love for God at the miracles He had worked in their lives. What a blessing it was to sit among them!

Simon the Pharisee couldn’t understand why Jesus would associate with notorious sinners like the woman who washed and anointed His feet. Jesus addressed Simon’s unspoken thought with a parable of two debtors. Simon recognized that the person with the larger of the two forgiven debts would love the moneylender more. Likewise, the woman who had many sins demonstrated her great love and gratitude for Jesus as He freely forgave her.

Whether our sins seem many or few, they cost more than we can pay. All our own efforts to become righteous will never be enough to cover our debt. It is only when we humbly come to Jesus in faith that we can know the peace of His complete forgiveness.

Father, though my sin is great, I look to You for forgiveness, and I express my gratitude with an outpouring of love and joy. In Jesus’ name, amen.