

## The Joy of Reconciliation

**If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:17-18).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**Song:** “Reconciled”

I was out of contact with a friend for several years because of missteps I’d made. I missed her dearly, but it took a long time for me to realize how wrong I’d been. She accepted my apology, and now we’re reaping the joy of reconciliation.

Because of our sin, all of us have been estranged from God. The good news is that He offers redemption through His Son. After receiving Christ’s gift of atonement, not only do we experience the joy of reconciliation, but now we have the “ministry of reconciliation”—the privilege of telling others how they can be reconciled to God.

When we remember our own joy at having our relationship with God made whole, it can motivate us to share with others how they can experience that joy. Telling our stories of God’s restorative love can have a powerful impact, and it may be just what someone else needs in order to realize what it could be like for them to be reconciled.

**Father,** thank You for reconciling me to yourself. Help me share the joy of that restoration with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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August 5–11. **Tina Clark** has a love for children’s ministry and counseling. She lives in Massachusetts and spends her summers riding her bike and swimming.

## Teachable Moments

**Impress [God's commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up** (Deuteronomy 6:7).

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:4-13

**Song:** "This Is My Father's World"

At a camp where I volunteer each summer, I look for "teachable moments"—opportunities to talk with the kids about important truths. Catching frogs in a stream can become a conversation about treating God's creation with care. Getting tired while walking up a large hill becomes a lesson about how God can provide strength we need each day. And seeing another child who is sad reminds us how God can use us to comfort others.

In Deuteronomy, Moses presented God's commands to the Israelites. He implored the people to remember them and teach them to the next generation. In this way, their faith in God would not die out. The teaching didn't need to be done in a harsh or lecturing way. Parents could relate God's commands as they went throughout their day, looking for and finding teachable moments.

For the Christian faith to continue, it is important that we share God's Word with the younger generation. Some of us may have kids, and some of us may not. Even so, opportunities to spend time with a young person can become teachable moments to connect God's truth to their lives in a way that makes it relevant to them.

**Father**, show me how to make the most of teachable moments that will make You known to the next generation. In Jesus' name, amen.

## When Mercy Reigns

**Mercy triumphs over judgment** (James 2:13).

**Scripture:** James 2:8-13

**Song:** “His Mercy Is More”

As an American plane flew over Germany during World War II, Luftwaffe ace fighter pilot Franz Stigler knew that if he could down that plane, he would receive the Knight’s Cross, a huge honor. As Stigler approached the plane, he realized it was in bad shape and carrying wounded soldiers. Rather than shooting down the crippled B-17 bomber and its crew, he showed mercy to pilot Charles Brown, saluted him, and escorted him to safety over enemy lines. The story was kept secret for many years. Then in 1990 the two pilots found each other and remained friends until death.

It is easy to make snap judgments about others. Stigler could have judged Brown as merely an enemy and shot him down without mercy. Yet he looked beyond “sides” and connected with another human being who was just struggling to survive a war. As Christians, we are reminded in Scripture to show mercy to others in the same way God has shown us His great mercy. Mercy, not judgment, should rule our lives.

When judgments come into our minds about other people, we can take a moment to check ourselves and think about how we can choose to have mercy reign in our interactions with them instead. Showing mercy is an opportunity to give to others what God has given so abundantly to us.

**Father,** I don’t want judgment to rule my life. Because You have given me such great mercy, I want to share Your love by showing mercy to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Down, Not Out

**Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (John 13:38).**

**Scripture:** John 13:31-35

**Song:** “No One Understands Like Jesus”

Years ago, I had every intention to become a teacher. However, after a difficult student-teaching experience, I decided the field wasn't for me. It was hard to accept that I had not followed through on my plan and that the pressure had gotten the best of me, but I would not have experienced the good things that came afterward without that experience.

Peter had every intention of following Jesus, even if it meant his own death. However, Jesus rightly predicted that Peter would not make good on his promise and would deny Him. Peter's failure to follow through caused him great sorrow (Luke 22:61-62). Yet Jesus later compassionately restored him (John 21:15-19). Even though Peter failed miserably, Jesus still loved him and wanted Peter to continue serving Him.

Like Peter, our reactions to situations when we are under pressure may not be what we expect or want them to be. This can sometimes be a source of deep regret and even sorrow. However, we can be healed of and set free from our regret when we understand that Jesus still loves us and wants us to serve Him. Failure does not knock us out; it gives us an opportunity to grow into more effective servants in His kingdom.

**Father**, when I fall short, remind me of Your love and mercy. Thank You for restoring me. In Jesus' name, amen.

## The Relationship Restored

**“The LORD . . . will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing”** (Zephaniah 3:17).

**Scripture:** Zephaniah 3:14-20

**Song:** “Jesus Paid It All”

Six-year-old Tommy was no stranger to strong rebukes. He was always getting in trouble and fighting with other kids. However, his neighbor, a children’s counselor, got to know him and with gentle corrections taught him how to interact more kindly with others. Tommy no longer receives as many reprimands, and now he has more fulfilling relationships with others.

God’s people in the southern kingdom of Judah were no strangers to rebukes either. Due to mixing worship of the Lord with that of other gods, God brought judgment through the destruction of Jerusalem. However, God promised that a day would come when His people would be restored to Him. They would no longer be rebuked, but He would rejoice over them and take delight in them.

It’s common for there to be a rupture in human relationships following a reprimand. However, when done well—with sincere love and the intent to bring wholeness—the relationship is usually restored and ultimately made stronger than it was before. When God rebukes us, He does so for our good, for our healing and restoration. When we respond to Him in humility, we’re restored to joyful relationship with our Savior who takes delight in us.

**Father**, help me to listen to Your rebukes so that I can know the full joy of a restored relationship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Love in Brokenness

**[God has said,] “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”** (Jeremiah 31:3).

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:1-9

**Song:** “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”

In many periods of my life, I have been weighed down with depression. These were times when it was difficult to see a future and when I did not feel I’d make it through. However, in spite of all my brokenness, a part of me always held onto the fact that God still loved me, and that was always what pulled me through.

Jeremiah has been called the “weeping prophet” because he prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and then saw it with his own eyes. He wept for his people who had turned from God and were experiencing the consequences of their actions. Yet he still shared a message of love: In spite of their brokenness, God still loved them. His love would never fail them, and it would last forever.

When we’re in a state of brokenness, we often see only the darkness around us. Yet there is God’s message to us through His Word that He loves us deeply. It is a love that is everlasting and unfailing. Nothing can take it away from us—not sin, not brokenness, not pain. Knowing we are loved brings hope, and that hope can carry us through.

**Father,** You see all my brokenness. Thank You for remaining with me and loving me. Thank You that Your love is unfailing and unending. Help me remember Your love today and find hope in it for tomorrow. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Mark of Love

**This is how we know who the children of God are . . . : Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister (1 John 3:10).**

**Scripture:** 1 John 3:1-10

**Song:** "We Are One in the Spirit"

One night while I was in the ER, a brother in Christ came to visit me. He was always showing kindness not only to me but also to many others in our church. When anyone was struggling, he offered encouragement. When someone was in need, he gave. He truly loved his brothers and sisters in Christ.

In today's passage, the apostle John tells us that a mark of being God's child is having love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. John echoed Jesus' teaching in John 13:35 when Jesus said that people will know His disciples by the love they have for one another. Ongoing discord and strife between believers can eclipse our testimony of Christ's transformative work in our lives. But love between believers is powerful evidence that we have been changed by the grace of God.

As we examine our hearts before God, we can reflect on how we view other believers. Each of us is greatly loved by God. Remembering His deep love for our fellow believers can help us minister to them in ways that honor God.

**Father,** remind me of the love You have for me, and renew my love today for my sisters and brothers in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.