

## The Goodness and Mercy of God

Psalm 136:1 reads, “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.”

The psalmist urges us to thank God for His goodness, which means His kindness and friendliness. God is inherently and wholeheartedly good. He is good and friendly with joy and delight. He takes pleasure in doing good. He is not embittered by ingratitude. He is good to the unthankful and evil. He is good to everyone; His tender mercies extend over all His works. Therefore, He provides food for all living creatures. He supplies for the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the animals in the fields and forests, and everything that moves and crawls, no matter where. All have their tables set with whatever they need to survive. “*The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season*” (Psalm 145:15), and that includes humanity as well.

God provides for mankind, for the entire human family. He allows His sunshine to shine on both the good and the evil and sends rain upon the fields of the just and the unjust. He generously and daily provides us with all we need to support our bodies and life. We may not always realise it, but we are truly living from God’s hand; where would we be, or what would we have, or how could we survive, if God took away from us just for one day the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and the sea, along with everything in them—the fish, the beasts, the fowl, the corn, the wheat, and the very air we breathe? All these things necessary for our life and sustenance, God made and provided long before we were born, even before any people existed on earth. And God continues to provide. In His goodness, He gives us everything we need. “*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.*”

“*For*” the psalmist continues, “*His steadfast love endures forever.*”

God shows His love through His mercy and compassion. His sympathy and pity for the downtrodden, the unfortunate, and the suffering — especially for sinful and fallen man — are clear. Like the Good Samaritan who had compassion on the man fallen among thieves and went to him, pouring oil and wine on his wounds and taking him to an inn to care for him, so the Lord has compassion on us. As Jesus felt compassion for the multitude when they were with Him in the wilderness for three days and refused to send them away hungry — so God cares for all people. However, nowhere in Holy Scripture is God’s mercy depicted more clearly than in the story of the Prodigal Son. When he had squandered his father’s inheritance on reckless living and found himself in need, he returned to his father’s house as a penitent, and was welcomed and embraced with joy — illustrating how God feels towards us. His heart reaches out to us, longing for our return, always ready and eager to forgive sinners. Therefore, He sent Jesus, His only eternal Son, to redeem mankind from the miserable state of sin and eternal damnation into which they had fallen.

To that end, God also sends out His Word and Spirit throughout all ages to call men to repentance and faith in His mercy. “*God desires all men to be saved*” and “*He is not willing that any should perish*” because His mercy moves Him to compassion and to action.

God is merciful even as He is almighty. There is no limit to His power, and there is no end to His mercy. No one can measure the extent of God’s mercy; it is all-encompassing; it reaches out to and embraces all people; it “*endures forever*”; it never wears out and it never grows old. God’s mercy is not a fleeting sensation or feeling of pity like human sympathy; it is a quality in God as natural and eternal as God Himself. God can no more cease to be merciful than He can cease to be God; as sure as God is God, so sure God is merciful and always will be. He is the same merciful God day in and day out, year in and year out, from eternity to eternity.

His mercy is new every morning, and His compassion fails not. As often as we need mercy and seek it, we shall find it, whether we come in the morning, at noon, or midnight, in youth or old age, for the first time or the thousandth, He remains a compassionate and merciful God. God’s mercy is His everlasting glory, which He revealed to Moses when He proclaimed: “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*” (Ex. 34:6-7).

*Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.*”