



A PUBLICATION OF
DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES



Reduced to Mercy

BY ANDREW COMISKEY



Kenn Gulliksen, my original pastor and founder of the Vineyard, once said: 'When you've lost mercy, you've lost your calling as a Christian.' He's right. I tend to assess 'mercy' levels in my heart as a gauge of how I am doing as a Christian.

And God is always faithful to reduce me to mercy when I have majored on other things. He does this through suffering, through the slow boil of real life that tends to burn off extraneous things and distill what matters.

In cooking terms, a 'reduction' involves the intensifying or thickening of a liquid mixture through boiling it. Some things evaporate, thus concentrating the flavor.

I won't bore you with details on my 'boiling points'; we all have them, and they either reduce us to the flavor of Jesus or burn up what is good until all that remains is a bitter, proud survivor. Hurling oneself through hell into a self-gener-

ated resurrection does not interest me!

Survival of the fittest offers no hope for the weak. The survivalist can only advise: 'Unless you get tough like me, you will perish.' That's a gospel of a different sort. I reject self-reliance on the basis of Mercy.

Mercy is God's heart.

Why else would He pour out His very essence into a young Jewish girl and manifest Himself as a baby? Helpless and naked, God became the most dependent of mammals, subject to despots and debasement of all sorts. He reduced Himself for us in order to show us the little way of Mercy.

He invites us to celebrate our smallness. Humbled by our own helplessness, we worship the Child-King and entrust ourselves to the power reduced into His tiny frame.

Madeline L'Engle says it like this: 'Power. Greater power than we can imagine, abandoned, as the Word knew the powerlessness of the unborn child, still unformed, taking up almost no space in the great ocean of amniotic fluid, unseeing, unhearing, unknowing. Slowly growing as any human embryo grows, arms and legs and a head, eyes, mouth, nose, slowly swimming into life until the ocean in the womb is no longer large enough and it is time for birth.'

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"...because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."

LUKE 1:78-79





And God is always faithful to reduce me to mercy... He does this through suffering, through the slow boil of real life that tends to burn off extraneous things and distill what matters.

James 2:13

"...because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Reflected Glory

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Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, Christ, the Maker of the universe, willingly and lovingly leaving all that power and coming to this poor, sin-filled planet to live with us for a few years to show us what we ought to be and could be...to show us what it means to be made in God's image.'

He invites us to marvel at His Mercy. God reduced to an infant is the essence of Divine Mercy. One Hebrew word for mercy is 'hesed', or 'unfailing love'; it conveys an objective, rather masculine mercy from the God who keeps His covenant with us, even when we disobey Him. Another Hebrew word for mercy is 'rachamin', and is feminine, rooted in 'a mother's womb'. 'Rachamin' is the mercy God feels for His afflicted ones the way a mother aches for her wayward child.

Baby Jesus is the fruit of God's strong and objective yet deeply caring mercy for us. Jesus is a reduction, a distillation of His all-consuming passion to manifest His love for us.

Similarly, our good and wise God will employ hard things in our lives to reduce us to Himself. He is intent on our becoming like Himself, through the gift of Himself. He may just use suffering to get us there.

Alluding to Simeon's prophecy about the Virgin Mary ('and a sword shall pierce your heart'),

Christoph Schonburg writes: 'Mary triumphs through the sword in her heart, not in her hand.' Similarly, as Christ-bearers, in the spirit of Mary, we are not exempt from the sword that reduces us to Mercy.

Over the last year, I have been pierced in ways that have caused me to cast myself on Him as never before. My prayer: 'Let Mercy triumph over my judgments!'

Annette and I were sharing with our dear friends, Mike and Diane Nobrega, about our boiling points. Diane wisely responded: 'God's Mercy is being distilled in you and Desert Stream. What seems like loss is Him intensifying the anointing.'

"Remember that old praise song, with a chorus that goes: Jesus, reduce me to love?" she said, warbling her version of the song 'Charity'.

You bet we do! 'Charity' was the one big fat hit that our pastor Kenn Gulliksen wrote and recorded in the seventies. Stumbling through the lyrics, we four called Kenn via speaker phone and requested some help.

He gave us a brave solo version of his one claim to pop fame.

He sang 'Jesus, reduce me to love' in a voice trembling from years of piercings and unexpected mercies. Having lived the lyrics, he made it easy to receive them.

May Jesus reduce you to love this Christmas. He reduced Himself to Mercy that we too might be reduced to little else—flavorful, intense, generous Mercy. 🙏

Helpless & naked,
 God became
 the most
 dependent of
 mammals...
 He reduced
 Himself for us
 in order to
 show us the
 little way of
 Mercy.





FOR LEADING

BY CORINA HANSEN KOJACK

I never wanted to coordinate Living Waters. I actually told Andy this when I saw him at a regional conference this year. And he simply replied, "Well, thanks for serving." As he walked off to teach the next session, I felt I owed him an explanation.

I love everything about the Living Waters Program. It is the only place I see people's lives change so dramatically in such a short period of time, as they enter the loving Presence of the Father.

Every year, I budget out the cost of attending National Living Waters Training, on the chance I am asked to serve on the leadership team. I consider it a joy to teach others how to lead or coordinate Living Waters groups. But coordinate a local group in my area? I balked at the awesome responsibility.

Coordinators, in my mind, possessed certain qualities I did not. I placed them on the level of "Super Server" or something. Now the coordinators I met never feigned superiority or perfection. In fact, I learned through Living Waters that effective leadership comes at the cost of transparency and requires living a life of possessing Christ's strength in our weakness. However, in my mind they seemed giants, pioneers of the faith.

So how did I get here? If I remember correctly, I actually laughed when a regional director suggested I be released to coordinate. There was part of me that had settled in sloth, fearing and actually hoping that the National Leadership would see my shortcomings and deem me unfit to

serve. But they didn't and at the 2008 training I was released as a Coordinator. Something in my mind was honored and something else retorted, "Well, I will never have to use it."

"Never" lasted two years and a half years. When I was asked to coordinate, the word "Yes" practically shot out of my mouth. At that moment, I realized God rarely equips us for a position He does not eventually call us into.

Immediately after agreeing, a laundry list of my faults, shortcomings and physical limitations came to mind. I imagine I felt a little of what Moses did, since we have similar responses to God. We both respond to God by telling why we were not fit to serve. God gave Moses a helper in Aaron; God gave me not one, but two unique and gifted coordinators for this year.

Serving God is a step of faith and at times a giant leap. I am learning that God's mercy is limitless and He reserves a portion of His mercy to sustain those who choose to serve him. I never needed to acknowledge the existence of spiritual warfare until I started serving on

the ministry team of a Desert Stream program.

The longer and more I serve, and the more responsibility I am given, the stronger the wall of spiritual resistance coming at me and my family. However, there are great purposes in the cost of serving.

Not too long ago I started to believe God would never completely heal me of my weaknesses because I needed them to tether me to the foot of the cross. Then I started coordinating Living Waters. Indeed, it does not have to be an addiction that keeps me in God's flow of mercy. Spiritual warfare on the one side and fear of the position on the other bind me steadfastly in His great mercy.

When we step into our spiritual authority we receive mercy afresh to stand against the attack. Here is another measure to strengthen us to live with integrity while challenging others to step into their own freedom. We also find God rewards service with an even greater return of mercy; a blessing for accepting the challenge.


Looking back, I see how the Enemy has fed me a steady

stream of lies, so I would never consider myself worthy to serve God in great capacities. God has used His body to break these lies, showing me I can serve while in His mercy.

I believe Moses saw God's great mercy for him as he served. I also believe each disciple, prophet, teacher, healer and administrator has access to God's unique provision of mercy as they step into the role He has called them to.

Why wouldn't God shower His mercy on those who choose to serve Him? He sent His very Son as a servant to the world. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

When Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, He replied that to look at Him was to see the Father. The heart of a servant is given from the Father. We are fashioned after His own heart.

Corina lives with her husband and son in Virginia where she leads a Living Waters in her local church. 

"Serving God is a step of faith and at times a giant leap. I am learning that God's mercy is limitless and He reserves a portion of His mercy to sustain those who choose to serve him."

Chosen FOR



Mercy

BY AMY VAN COTT



When I first entered Living Waters via Cross Current, my horrid sin—deceit, sexual sin, shame—was laid bare before trusted others. Ephesians 1:4 was the agent that reduced my soul.

But why would He choose me when He knew what sort of a sinful mess I'd get my life into?

I was the type that thought I had to get cleaned up to receive God's love, to come to Him fixed and ready to impress Him with my desire to be perfect for Him. However, being laid bare, my sin exposed to my small group, reduced me to the reality of His mercy: He loves me even when I am a mess. I drank readily of His love with words that challenged my perfectionism.

My perfectionism didn't die with this expression of love. Faithful leaders prayed truth into my inmost being, healing some of the brokenness that led me to sexual sin; now I was sure I had to prove I was worth choosing.

God, in His perfect mercy, commenced further reduction in my soul.

Shortly after moving into leadership with Living Waters, I went too far physically in a romantic relationship. I convinced myself it didn't count. I signed forms asserting that I was clean from immoral interpersonal contact.

Pressure rose, and my soul began to simmer the first night of our program. I could no longer deny my sin: physically crossing a boundary with a man, lying about it, and hiding. I confessed to the team later

that night and a flood of mercy overwhelmed my soul.

But not without pain, and not without a crucifixion of my deeply entrenched perfectionism. I stepped off the team and into the program as a participant. I attended the national Living Waters leadership training, feeling as though I had a scarlet "A" on my chest and a neon sign flashing "fallen leader" above me. My shame was ever before me. Mercy reduced me from an arrogant leader to a humbled receiver.

EPH. 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

I was further reduced to a weeping, snotty mess at the first ministry session . . . so much for looking put together and "perfect" in front of all. More mercy was released as my small group leaders ministered so kindly to me. Though rightly unable to release me to any level of leadership, they encouraged and supported my continued movement toward Christ in that season of healing. Their mercy poured integrity into my humbled and low state.

The final dissolution of my persistent perfectionism came in the overwhelming message of His love through the ministry of Living Waters. First, in worship with the beautiful hymn "Oh, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus." Second, through His voice in creation. The Chesapeake Bay



Being laid bare, my sin exposed to my small group, reduced me to the reality of His mercy: He loves me even when I am a mess. I drank readily of His love with words that challenged my perfectionism.

constantly symbolized the words of that hymn,

Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me. Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love. Leading onward, leading homeward to my glorious rest above.

Third, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, mediated by a ministry team member. As I raised my hands and cried out silently to God, saying, "This is all I am. This is all I have to offer you—sin, deception, and hiding." A hand was laid gently on my shoulder and the voice of

the Father spoke into my soul, "It is enough." I didn't have to be more.

Perfectionism reduced by mercy.

Amy lives with her husband in Indiana where is a regional coordinator for Living Waters USA. 🇺🇸

My personal journey has taken me from being

afraid of my brokenness and need of mercy, to a settled recognition that I need mercy and will always need mercy!

Mercy Moves Me

BY DON SCIORTINO



"He never condemned me, so I gave myself up." This line of a song reveals the intent and impact of mercy. Jesus comes to us again and again to invite us to receive mercy. My personal journey has taken me from being afraid of

my brokenness and need of mercy, to a settled recognition **THAT I NEED MERCY AND WILL ALWAYS NEED MERCY!**

I have watched the impact of mercy change me in so many ways and bring a wonderful freedom to my whole person. I love the story of the woman at the well. It really shows us the movement of mercy in a person's life. I identify with so many aspects of this story. Like the woman, I was doing life without God. Hungry for what I was made for, the pursuit of love was a dominant one. One that was never satisfied, but left me so confused and empty.

My hunger/journey for love prepared me. Then Jesus came and my eyes and heart were opened to the gift of mercy. Everything changed and continues to change as I allow the movement of mercy (the Father's

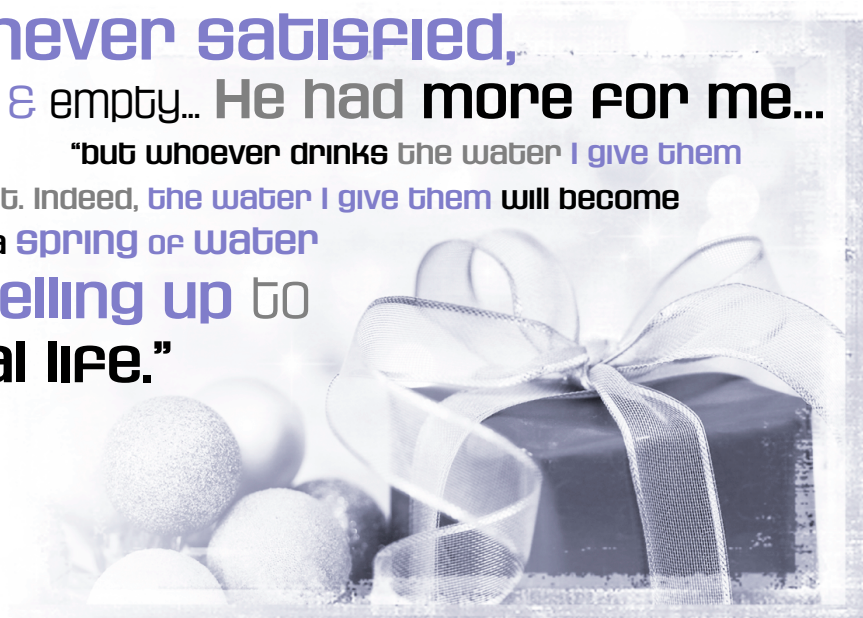
love) in my life. I realized and celebrated that my need for mercy qualified me for mercy. This revolutionized my life and commissioned me to be a "mercy evangelist" just like the woman at the well.

My wife Karen and I have been given a new assignment from

the Lord to plant a new church and establish Desert Stream groups in Laguna Beach, California. Mercy moves us every day to tell the many new friends in the city about Jesus.

Don and his wife Karen live in Laguna Beach, California. 🇺🇸

I was never satisfied,
confused & empty... He had more for me...
"but whoever drinks the water I give them
will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become
in them a spring of water
welling up to
eternal life."





FOR All

BY MELISSA & GARRY
INGRAHAM

We are especially thankful for the reminder of mercy extended & reaching out to meet us in our weakness; particularly as we approach Advent and the good news of God's mercy offered to all peoples through Christ.



As we reflect on the gift of mercy available in Jesus Christ, we are overwhelmed with gratitude! The Father's pursuit of us when we tend to pursue everything else, is so loving and kind.

Immanuel, "God with us," is a name for Jesus we often hear this time of year. The reality of God with us becomes tangible in the gathering of Living Waters. Jesus, in His mercy, comes into every area of sin, shame, and suffering that we offer to Him.

Listening prayer is a discipline of practicing His presence that we both learned through the ministry of Living Waters. It has been life changing! For example, in Melissa's first Living Waters over ten years ago, the Holy Spirit revealed deep vows of self-protection and distrust in her heart. Jesus patiently, mercifully waited while she struggled to lay these vows down at His cross. As soon as she did, He came into the place of fear to be her covering and protection. She could trust and rely on Him. This freed her to begin relating to others; especially men as they actually were, not as she perceived them!

During a Living Waters prayer time Garry saw himself walking through his grandmother's hay field to a place he explored as a child. Standing on a side

hill overlooking the valley, he felt Jesus lovingly put an arm around his shoulders, the edge of Jesus' robe blowing gently in the breeze beside him. Garry heard Christ say "the fields are white with harvest but the laborers are few". Somehow that familiar passage came alive with personal meaning through the word spoken by Jesus; it broke the deadening power of the very thing that brought Garry came to Living Water.

In prayer he finally found a label for what was increasingly troubling him—regret: feeling used up and believing that anything meaningful in life or ministry was lost. Somehow, sensing Jesus beside him, Garry knew that His calling was irrevocable and nothing had changed about God's purposes for him. In that time of listening prayer, Jesus strongly confirmed the childhood call on his life for ministry.

As we write this, we're aware of a deep and fresh need for mercy. Garry grew up in a Christianity that was more about tradition than relationship and life-transformation. Today he is more aware of a deep need for fresh mercy to rescue him from the false religious-self, and a gravitation toward tradition and function

rather than life and true knowing and intimacy.

It was one thing to be rescued from the obvious destruction defined by homosexuality and relational dependency, it is quite another to come to an awareness that the true-self can just as easily (maybe more so) be swallowed up by outward performance and a life-style of "ministry".

As a Pastor and Ministry Leader, Garry is especially thankful for the reminder of mercy extended and reaching out to meet us in our weakness; particularly as we approach Advent and the good news of God's mercy offered to all peoples through Christ.

Melissa and Garry live in Endicott, New York with their two children, where they serve as Living Waters Regional Coordinators.



Mercy



through the Love of the Father

BY CRISPIN DEBELLIS

I am the son of a man who was controlling, angry and abusive. I grew up to be a husband and father who was controlling, angry and abusive. It wasn't until Annelise and I had our first child and moved away from family and friends that the cracks began to show.

By the time we had three children, the facade had completely crumbled. I looked great on the outside: house in suburbia, successful professional, three above average children, an elder in my church and I had a quiet time every day. But inside I was angry: angry at my boss for not promoting me, angry at my pastor for not listening to me, angry at my wife and children.

Most days I came home and soon had my wife and children in tears. Annelise thought our marriage was irreparable.

Mostly I was angry at myself, that I couldn't do better.

Desperate for change I resigned as an elder and sought counseling. After a year I ended up at a Pastoral Care conference lead by Leanne Payne. In my brokenness and pain I surrendered to Jesus. I experienced His love for the first time. He loved me, the perpetrator. His mercy was transformational. Somehow I knew He could make all things new. I went home remorseful and repentant.


I asked my wife and children for forgiveness, which they mercifully gave. I attended Living Waters, where the Lord began to heal the deep roots of my anger and frustration. I took the pain of my father's rejection and abuse to the cross. I started to understand how his abuse resulted in my controlling behavior. I began to trust my heavenly Father and slowly release my grip on life, a grip that was strangling me and those I loved.



Slowly, by His mercy, He began to heal my relationship with Annelise and the kids. I continued to ask forgiveness when I sinned against them. Over time he restored us as a family. I am so grateful for His Mercy.

Annelise is now my best friend. She says our relationship is the safest place in the world. To my children I sowed anger where I should have sowed love. Yet God is healing my children's father wound. They have grown to forgive me and receive my love as well. My son says he knew God was real not because I had it together but because he saw God changing me. Thank you Father for your Mercy!

Now Annelise and I run Living Waters in our community, offering the same mercy to others. My oldest daughter is on our team and doing missions work in the city. My son is proclaiming Jesus through the arts. My youngest daughter is in a discipleship house at college. On the eve of Christmas I proclaim that His mercies are new every morning. And as the years go by they are accumulating to overflowing. I am so utterly grateful.

Cris lives with Annelise and their family in Ohio where they serves as Living Waters Regional Coordinators. 

"Successful professional, three above average children, an elder in my church and I had a quiet time every day. But inside I was angry: angry at my boss for not promoting me, angry at my pastor for not listening to me, angry at my wife and children."

REV. 21:4

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Undeserved

Mercy



BY ANNETTE COMISKEY

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions...For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." Psalm 51:1,3

"...But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies...But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God." Nehemiah 9:27, 31

For me, this year has been one marked by the mercy of God. Last spring the Lord called me to look at an area in my life where I had experienced significant wounding. In some situations, these areas of wounding left me feeling emotionally unprotected. In order to protect myself, I hid my emotions. I made decisions based on my need to protect myself, not trusting the Lord to keep me safe. These areas had also become places of sinful choices.


In facing my sin, I saw how I had allowed myself to become oppressed. In trusting myself and not the Lord, I opened myself up to the lies of the evil one. I believed I could only count on myself for protection.

When I saw the ways I had cut areas of my heart off from the Lord, I was reduced to tears of sadness and shame. I had no option but to call out to Him.

Before the Lord, I felt He had every right to say "Since you

enjoy taking care of yourself so much, keep at it; I'll leave you alone to deal with yourself." But He responded to me with mercy.

As Nehemiah wrote, He did not abandon me; but in His grace and mercy extended not only forgiveness but the very protection I had been seeking. Just as Nehemiah described rebuilding the walls of protection around Jerusalem, God is rebuilding the walls of protection around my heart.

As I trust and look to Him, the false protection of my wounding and sin is being replaced; the strength of a gracious and merciful God is becoming my true, complete defense. 

Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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