



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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GENESIS 26

Series: Understanding Your Roots

[PRAYER] Lord, we're eager to listen to you. We're grateful that you appear to us in different ways. You appear to us through your word primarily and then you reveal yourself to us through creation and through other experiences. So Father, today we're going to open your word. We ask that you'd use that in our lives to appear to us, to speak to us, to communicate direction or encouragement or conviction, whatever you need to do. Our hearts are open. We don't know exactly what you're going to do because the scriptures are living and active. But we want our hearts to be ready to receive from you today. So we ask you, Lord, to teach us, to grow us. Help us understand more about who you are and what you want for our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

There's much said about quality of life on a number of different planes. You can go to certain lists of states that have a better quality of life than others. But today I want to zero in on a truth that will increase your quality of life. In fact you know there are several different biblical truths that when you believe them and you recognize them and you understand them, they can increase your quality of life. Today we're going to look at one that I think is going to be particularly helpful for you. It's one that will guide you through your understanding of God and theology. When you understand the mercies of God (that's what we're going to talk about today), it changes you. It changes how you feel. It changes your ability to be grateful. It increases your hope. So something very important happens in our lives when we understand the mercies of God. Today we're going to zero in on one chapter in the Old Testament that illustrates the mercies of God as we look at Genesis 26 and the story of Isaac.

The interesting thing about Isaac is he only gets one chapter in the Bible. He doesn't get a lot of real estate. He was mentioned in the last chapter, but really as an introduction to the birth of his two sons, Jacob and Esau. He was mentioned in the story of Abraham and Isaac when he was sacrificed, but that's really a story about Abraham, and Isaac is incidental in the story. But in chapter 26 he gets the whole chapter. It's all about him. In the next chapter he'll be mentioned again because he's going to bless his son Jacob. But this is the one chapter where he gets his attention. It's interesting and there's a contrast really because Abraham, his father, gets fourteen chapters. His son Jacob gets eleven chapters. But he only gets one. Some have said he's an unremarkable son to a remarkable father and an unremarkable father to a remarkable son. I think we can identify with Isaac in his life because he's going to understand or he's going to get to experience the mercy of God in his life.

I like when I study the Bible, especially as I'm going to present it to you, to put myself into the story. If I can find myself in the story as Isaac and feel what he felt and I can think what he thought then I can experience God working in his life, and then I'll have something that I can

apply to my own heart and then something to present to you as well. But it's harder for me to do that with Isaac because his personality is very different than mine.

Isaac is the kind of guy that avoids conflict. Maybe you know someone who avoids conflict. I don't avoid conflict. I'm not afraid of conflict. There are some people who love conflict. They generate it. Maybe you know some people like that. They just generate conflict to get things done or to make trouble or whatever, and they like watching the explosion and everything that happens. I'm not that kind of a person. But I don't avoid conflict like Isaac seems to do, but I can deal with conflict when necessary. I think if Isaac were looking for a goal in his life it would be peace. Just give me some room with nobody around where I don't have to deal with people so that I can have some peace. We're going to see that God gives him that at least in his business relationships and his neighborhood where he lives in this passage. Well I'm kind of getting ahead of myself. So let me get into the passage itself and let's see what God has to say for us.

In Genesis 26:1 it says this: *Now there was a famine in the land.* You know we don't experience this same kind of geography or climate that was experienced in the promised land. So we don't really understand this idea of famine as much. Our rains come randomly. We never know when they're coming, so we look at the weather report to find out. But in Israel there are the former rains and the latter rains. The former rains come in about March for four to six weeks. They start about then. And then in October you have the latter rains. So if you're a farmer you want to get your seed planted before the former or latter rains because you only have a certain growing season. You want as much water going on those plants as possible. If for some reason it doesn't rain during the former rains, you will not see rain again until the latter rains. If it doesn't rain again in the latter rains, you've got a problem because you don't have any food to eat because you hadn't had the rains to produce the crops that you needed.

I didn't really understand this as much as I do now because I lived in Kenya for a while, which has the same kind of climate. There are the former rains and the latter rains. As I was teaching my students in Bible college there they were from nine different tribes, these African students. It was about October and all of a sudden outside the window we saw the rains started to come. It started to rain. Just a normal rainy day for me. I look out the window and I go, "Oh it's starting to rain." But my students are looking at each other and they're looking at me and they're looking out the window and I've lost them. I say to them, "What's going on?" They say, "We have to go out and dance in the rain." I said, "Okay, go." So I watched them. They went outside. These are African people. They go outside and when they dance, they really dance. So they're dancing up and down and they're just so excited because God has given His mercy to us and given us rain. They know the value of that rain in their lives and what it means to their people back at home and their families and how valuable that rain is to their culture. It is something they dance about because they're dancing in the mercies of God. I go, "Wow. I take rain for granted." In fact I wonder what other things do I take for granted in life that God has given that are really His mercies being poured out where I really should be dancing, but instead of dancing I'm just going along going, "Oh there's rain again."

There was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you."

There's a temptation for him to go down to Egypt. Why? Because Egypt has a different kind of a climate. It has a different kind of a weather. Because in Egypt, although it may have the same kind of rains, they have the Nile Delta. So when the Nile River that starts way back in Kenya, Tanzania, and Lake Victoria and so on, it comes way down to Egypt, it puts out this silt, this rich soil that produces great crops. So there's a temptation to go down to Egypt in order to get the solutions that Isaac needed. But God says don't go down to Egypt.

You see in the Bible often Egypt represents the world. Sometimes it represents just escape. Like Jesus' parents took Him to Egypt. It was an escape there. But many times it represents this bondage. It represents the escape that people try to find in life from what the promises that God has. God says, "Isaac, I want you to remember the promises. I want to give you the promises and I want you to stay here in Israel. Don't go down to Egypt. Don't go down to the world."

There is a temptation we have in our lives to go to the world for the solutions that we need. When we're experiencing the famine in our lives it might be the love that we wish we had that we're not experiencing right now. We're having a love famine. Or maybe we're having more bills than we have income, so we're experiencing a money famine. We experience those things in our lives, so sometimes we go down to the world to get the solutions for those. God is saying to Isaac don't do that. Don't go down to Egypt. Stay here and rely on the promise. He's going to explain the promise in just a moment to him.

A mom was telling me about her daughter who is now about twenty years old. This daughter started her interest in marijuana when she was in her mid-teens. It was recreational because when you smoke marijuana it makes you feel good and she liked the high that it gave her and she enjoyed how relaxed it made her feel. So she enjoyed that. But as life continued on for her, whenever she experienced stress then she would go and she would smoke marijuana. So what happened to her is it came about a time when she would experience stress and she had to go and smoke in order to recover from her stress. In other words she got to a place where she couldn't manage the stress anymore without the marijuana. It became something that she was addicted to in her life.

My statement to the mom was this. It's very important to talk to her about this because every time she smokes marijuana now, it weakens her. Every time she does that it weakens her. Why? It weakens her because now she is not able to deal with the stresses of life. She thinks the stresses of life at sixteen are difficult, at eighteen are difficult? Just wait till you get a job. Wait till you have kids. Wait till you're trying to be married to someone. Then you'll really experience stress. How are you going to deal with those stresses?

See now the problem is she's twenty years old and the marijuana isn't enough. Because it does relax her, she enjoys it, it helps her go to sleep at night because she's so stressed. But now she needs something to keep her going during the day. So now she's experimenting with cocaine. Because cocaine helps her with that energy to do what she needs to do. And now she's on a trek where she's in significant problems in her life. Every time she participates in this drug, whatever it might be, she's weakening herself because she's not relying, she's not able to deal with stress on her own. It's a problem. It's dangerous.

Now maybe you're not addicted to drugs, whether they be prescription or recreational drugs, but maybe there's other things in your life that you go to whenever stress or famine takes place in your life. God is saying to Isaac don't go down to Egypt, but rather rely on the promise.

It says in verse 2 that *the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt."* So here God is appearing, just as He is appearing to you today as you read God's word and you listen to what He has to say. He's making himself real to you and in an important way. God says to him, *"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."*

You see God wants to bless us. The idea of blessing is going to be very important here and God is going to bless Isaac. God makes this promise to him and wants him to understand that the promises of God are something you want to rely on instead of going down to the world. If you're tempted to go to the world for solutions in regards to your life, you need to know that the promises of God can help you and they can sustain you in the midst of the famine that you might be experiencing in your own personal life.

Well he doesn't go down to Egypt, but he does *settle in Gerar*. Which is as close to Egypt but still in the promised land that you can be. There are some people that are on the edge. They don't go down to the world, but they get as close to the world as they can get and that's what he does. *When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister."*

Now some of you are saying, "Wait a minute. Didn't we already read this story? Didn't this already happen?" Because the answer is yes. Not with Isaac but with Abraham. Twice. In Genesis 12 and in Genesis 21. Abraham lied and said that his wife was his sister. When he went to Egypt like this he went to Abimelech and Abimelech had this dream in the night and God says don't touch her because she is his wife. So Abimelech comes out and rebukes Abraham. That whole event took place. Now we're looking at this whole story 100 years later, a different Abimelech. Either Abimelech is a family name or it's a name like king. So it's the name of the leader.

So let's read the story. *"She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife.* I've got to define laughing for you here. Because the laughing that they were doing, the King James Version just says the word sporting. In essence the king looks out the window and he sees that they're playing around and this is something that a brother and sister don't do. This is a husband and wife thing and it becomes clear to him. He sees that whoa this is not brother and sister laughing.

So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" Abimelech said,

“What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

I find it interesting first of all that here we have a worldly or an unsaved man rebuking a believer. That’s always sad when that takes place. But it’s also interesting to me that here’s an unsaved person who has a conscience and recognizes sin. He recognizes guilt. He doesn’t want guilt to be upon us as in verse 10. He recognizes that. Even in our world today the Bible calls it adultery. The world calls it cheating. They know that it’s wrong. There's words for that. It’s looked down upon whether you’re a believer or not a believer.

I find it fascinating that Isaac is rebuked by this guy and he has to learn the hard way that he has to trust in the promises of God. Rely on God and what He’s doing. So this is a time in Isaac’s life where he really messes up. He fails. He sins. I’m sure you’ve experienced that. Because in our weakness we fail, we sin, and God sometimes uses life or other people to correct us. So you can imagine Isaac feeling the frustration in himself, the disappointment in himself. “Oh I shouldn’t have done that.” What’s interesting to me is when we turn the page we see that God blesses him.

Oh. Before I go there I want to talk about a problem that happens I think in Christendom. It's this idea that there are generational curses. I don’t think that’s a biblical concept, not for Christians. So I want to explain to you where it comes from and what I think is the truth regarding this so that you understand this. Because some people believe that if my father (as in Abraham) sinned, then I as Isaac have a built-in problem that’s part of who I am and that’s why I sin. It comes from this verse in Exodus 20:4-6. This is the Ten Commandments where it says – *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.* It’s the *those who hate me* that people don’t see. *But showing love to a thousand generations to those who love me and keep my commands.*

So which are you? Are you the one who hates God or are you the one who loves God? Well it depends. That’s going to determine what happens here. You can’t say to yourself, “Well because my parents or my grandparents sin I then have this curse on me and I also sin in the same way.” No. You don’t say that. Not if you’re a Christian. It is true that parents influence their children. We know that children are more susceptible to smoking as a habit if one of their parents smoked. We know that children are more prone to act out in anger if they have an angry parent. If you had a parent who dealt with their famine or their struggle or their stress in life by yelling and cursing, you have a more of a tendency to do the same thing.

But the beauty is that when you accept Jesus Christ into your life, when you love God, and you keep His commands, when you do that then God blesses a thousand generations. Notice that. *But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.* Because when you become a Christian God breaks the chains of bondage and He builds into you this beautiful freedom that you can have to move forward in your life. It's a beautiful thing that God wants to do in your heart and your life.

Abraham had an effect on his son. Many years later, of course, this takes place. But the story would have been told. Abraham told his story. It was passed on from generation to generation until Moses actually wrote it down. So Isaac heard the stories of what his dad did and he got into a tough situation here. The famine came, the stress points came. And when stress points come we go to solutions. Sometimes those solutions aren't the best.

Well Isaac made a mistake. He's feeling bad about that mistake. What's beautiful to me is we turn the page, we see that *Isaac settled in Gerar. And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold.* Do you see that? And here he sinned. He made a mistake. He's in Gerar. What happens to him? He gets all this blessing. Here's a guy who has been working with animals all of his life. He's a rancher or shepherd. They have cattle and sheep and donkeys and camels. But now he's in Gerar and he starts to try his hand at planting. So he sows in the land and reaps in the same year a hundredfold. God blessed him so much. That's what it says right there. *The Lord blessed him.* God has blessings waiting for us, yet oftentimes we don't earn them. It's not because we do things that we get the blessing. Sometimes God blesses us even when we sin. You ever notice that? When you feel like, "God, why are you doing these good things to me? I haven't been following you the way I should." That's what we call the mercy of God. And that's what we see in Isaac's life. The mercies of God are demonstrated in Isaac's life. Even though he sinned, God blessed him.

Notice it says – *The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him.*

Sometimes the blessing that you receive is a physical blessing like wealth or money. Sometimes the blessing is a family that you have that you enjoy. Some people say, "I wish I had a family like that." Maybe it's having a husband or a wife who have a good relationship together and somebody looks at that and says, "Wow, I wish I had a marriage like that." People look at that and sometimes they envy that. If you're in a job and you start doing well in the job and you get promoted, other people might be envious of you and they might then engage in some kind of a challenge to you or gossip or spreading rumors or creating conflict. Well that's what happens here in the story.

In parentheses just to prepare you for what's to come, the writer here helps us understand what's happening in the culture so we get it. So he says – *(Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.)* Okay back out of the parentheses now. *And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."* We don't want you around here. Get out of here. Okay? Leave your crops that you've grown here. Go and do whatever you're going to do, but get out of here. So the conflict is generated here.

So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. So he went to the valley because that seemed like a good place to be. *And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the*

death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. So he leaves that particular place and he starts digging these wells.

Now you have to understand when you dig a well the well is going to be maybe six feet or maybe eight feet if you're going to dig this well deep and then you start digging. When it gets to be a certain depth, when you get down to fifteen, twenty feet, it's hard to breathe down there. So they pull that guy up and they send another guy down. He's down there for a couple minutes because when it gets that deep the oxygen isn't replenished very much. So it's a lot of work to build a well. They're putting a guy down there, pulling him up. And then when you break through the water table somehow and the water starts to fill up the well, they pull that guy out really quick and of course they celebrate. They're just excited because we've done it. So just think when you dig a well it's not an easy thing to do. So he's working hard to dig the well, he's celebrating, he gives them a name. Ah wow, we're really happy with this well. So that's where we are now. He's got this well.

But notice what happens in this story as we go to the next page. It says there – *But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water...* This is not just water that stays down below where they have to stick a bucket down. This is a spring that gushes out. So now the water is coming out and it's much easier for them to obtain it. So this is a great well. This is a great find for them. When they found this, *the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours."* So what does Isaac do? *He called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him.* He changed the name of the well 'contended with him.' *Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah.* So he moved on from there and dug another one.

You see the pattern that exists in Isaac's life? What would you say about him and conflict? He wants to avoid it, right? So he says, "Okay, fine. I'm not going to stay here. If you're going to fight with me, I'm going to go somewhere else." So he leaves that situation and he goes to the next place, digs some more wells, gives them a name, and he goes on.

Verse 22 – *And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."* Rehoboth means there's room. There's room for us. You can imagine him saying, "Okay finally. Get these people away. I don't want to have people around. I just want to be by myself. I just want to be at peace here." So he gets to that place where there's not people around.

There's a pastor joke that pastors will sometimes say: "It's not the church that I have a problem with. I love the church. It's the people I have a hard time with." Although we as pastors love people, that's what we do. But that's kind of a joke that we sometimes say. But that's the feeling here. Just move the people out of the way, I'll be fine. I don't know if you experience that sometimes. But just give me my space. That's what Isaac is saying. I just want to have the people around. I don't want to have the conflict that's going on.

So the next page says – *From there he went up to Beersheba.* Now we're going to hear the story about Beersheba. So he's moving closer and closer to the center of Israel is what he's doing.

He's moving there, he's learning to follow the Lord more maybe. I don't know what all these experiences are taking him to. But he gets to Beersheba *and the Lord appeared to him the same night*. So here God appears to him again. I don't know whether he's having his devotions. I don't know what's going on, but God reveals the promise again. I think that's one of the reasons we come to God's word. "Lord, tell me the promise. Show me the promises that are available for me. I want to see what those look like."

And the Lord appeared to him that same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Okay so they're over there digging a well. They're doing what they do. You know when you get into a new place you have to dig a well because you have to have water. Well they're digging a well and Abimelech shows up again. Isaac's going oh no, not this guy again. Notice what he says. *When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?"* You just feel Isaac saying this. I thought I got rid of you! Why are you coming to me again?

They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. (I don't know if that's totally true, but the idea is let's create this pact.) You are now the blessed of the Lord." Have you heard the number of times the word 'blessing' is mentioned here about Isaac? He's blessed. Every turn around, even the promise that says I'm going to bless you.

So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. That is probably the goal of Isaac's life. This is the value that Isaac has. Just give me peace. I think we all value that. But I think you may have as a life goal something else. Maybe you want to be effective or productive or maybe you want to be well known or maybe you want to be joyful. I don't know. But he wanted peace and so God gives him that. And he says *they departed from him in peace*. So God gave him what he needed, his value, what he wanted.

That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

So God had done this amazing work in Jacob's life moving him. And it seems like he had a hard life, it seems to me. Maybe you feel like that. You know you're starting one thing and you're trying to work it out and it just doesn't work out. So you move to another thing. And you're trying to get that going and work it out. It seems to be going well but oh then it doesn't work out. So you go to another thing. So life is hard for some people. In this case it's hard for Isaac.

But one of the things I want you to see is that God has blessings out here waiting for Isaac and those blessings come because of the mercy of God. Not because of Isaac. They come because of the mercy of God. I think as believers sometimes we think it's the sinners who need mercy. It's the people who don't need Jesus. They need mercy. That is true. If you're listening today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, one of the motivations for you to trust Christ is the mercies of God. That God wants to give you blessings you do not deserve, that you do not earn. He wants to give you something that is not yours except that you get it because of Christ. So the mercies of God come to Isaac, not because of Isaac. They come to him because of God and who He is. That's the mercies of God.

There are spiritual laws that exist in the world. We know those as Christians because we're trying to learn them. I'm trying to learn them. You're trying to learn them. We're trying to apply them to life. But the assimilation of the spiritual laws doesn't happen fast enough for me to meet the demand of the blessings I need from God. You see I want more from God than what I've been able to learn and grow. The difference between that is mercy. My spiritual intelligence is not great enough yet to experience what I need in the blessing department and God wants to give me more. So God gives me the blessing and the blessings are the mercy of God in my life.

You see if I live my life the way I want to live then there are wages for that the Bible says. It pays. *The wages of sin is death.* But God overrides that principle by providing these spiritual blessings that we can enjoy in our lives. That's the mercy of God. We don't get what we deserve. What we get is something we don't deserve. All these blessings that God wants to provide for us come to us because of who God is. He wants to bless us. Do you know why He does that? He blesses us because He wants us to see His goodness. He wants us to be attracted to Him. He wants us to recognize that He is a good Father.

In the New Testament Jesus described it this way. He said the flowers are dressed by the heavenly Father. The birds find their food by the heavenly Father. If God takes care of them, can you imagine how much He wants to care for you? That's the mercies of God. They come to us not because we earn them, but because we need them. God has given us His mercies because Jesus Christ died to satisfy the wrath and the justice and the holiness of God (which we would experience if we did not know Jesus personally). That's the wages of sin. But because we know Christ, God overrides that penalty and He brings us mercies that we do not deserve and that we need. What that does for us is it increases our feelings of gratefulness. That we now don't take for granted the common things we see around us. It increases our hope, recognizing that God is in control and that He is giving us those beautiful mercies of God, those blessings that He wants to give to us in our own personal lives.

Isaac came to a place in his life where he experienced the blessing of God in his business, in his neighborhood, with people that he needed. There was a challenge that he ended up with that we see in the last verse. I want to read it to you and just draw an application there. It says in verse 34 – *When Esau (that's his son) was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.*

If you're a parent, you know what this is like. Your child does the wrong thing, they disobey, they get bad grades at school, they do the wrong thing in a relationship, and it hurts. It really hurts us as parents. I understand it made life bitter. I know what that feels like. We all do as parents because our children make mistakes and they do bad things sometimes. Whether they're young or old, it doesn't make a lot of difference. But the point is it hurts us when we see our kids doing the wrong thing.

An important point here to note is this. Fathers, you need to be really careful because the things that you do influence your children. They're watching you. But children, you need to be very careful about what you do because they influence your parents and they affect them. You never sin alone. Your sin is an influence on other people and they see you and they recognize that. It's very important for you to be demonstrating humility, demonstrating God's grace in your life. To be growing and sharing that with other people because God wants to bless you, He wants to do these big things in your life, He wants to give you by the mercy of God these powerful things that we all need. He wants to do that inside of our lives and other people are watching. Watching at work, watching in our families.

We all need the mercy of God. The mercies of God are the difference between us being good and getting a benefit from being good and the tremendous blessing that God wants to give to us. Because we can't be good enough to receive all the blessing that God wants to give. There's the mercies of God that fills up the difference and we are so grateful for that that we recognize that it's only by the grace of God, not by our goodness that allows us to experience the blessings that God has for us.

In fact this is such a powerful understanding, the mercies of God, that it increase our quality of life. It changes the way we think and the way we act. Paul knew that. That's why he wrote in Romans 12:1-2 these words: *I beseech you, brothers and sisters* (beseech means I urge you, I implore you), *by the mercies of God*. In other words, based on this foundation of the mercies of God, this theological truth that if you get it it is the key to your quality of life. If you understand the mercies of God, he says, *to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing and acceptable to God – this is your reasonable act of worship*.

See, worship is really this sense that I'm coming before God and saying, "God, I'm giving you all of myself." If we passed an offering plate (which we don't do anymore), it's not so much putting in a few dollars. It's putting your whole self in there. That's what we're talking about. Lord, I want to give you all of who I am. I'm giving you my whole self. That is our motivation. When we understand the mercies of God, it increases our quality of life and we say, "God, I'm yours. I want to dedicate myself to you." It's been said that the challenge with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar. So regularly we must continually come back to sacrifice ourselves, our lives as a living sacrifice before the Lord. The difference between my need and the blessings of God is what God calls mercy. We all need that and it changes our lives.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, we recognize that we need your mercy. Sometimes we look at ourselves and we just recognize our weakness and our lack of worthiness. We feel unworthy to receive from

you. So Lord, help us to realize it's not about us. It's about Jesus. That we receive from you because of the death of Jesus the sacrifice that we accept personally in our lives. Lord, give us that assurance that your mercies are new every morning. That yesterday is in the past and today we can look forward to your mercies. Because of your compassions in our lives we experience that mercy in amazing ways. Lord, we thank you that you're good and that you want to bless us. We want to receive that today and we want to be grateful for it. In Jesus' name, amen.