

Beliefs Matter

Discovery Starters

Prayer

We are called to **engage in intercessory prayer** for the people and causes on God's heart, including standing against evil in every form

[Gen 18:20-33](#); [Exo 32:1-16](#); [Jdg 3:9,15](#); [1Ki 8:22-61](#); [Eze 22:30-31](#);
[Eze 33:1-11](#); [Mat 6:5-15](#); [Mat 9:36-38](#); [Eph 3:14-21](#); [2Th 3:1-5](#)

Belief #4 – Prayer: A Tragic Day

Biblical Foundation:

"I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one. So now I will pour out my fury on them, consuming them with the fire of my anger. I will heap on their heads the full penalty for all their sins. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!" (Eze 22:30-31)

Discovery Starter:

The interplay of justice and mercy is one of the overarching themes of the Scriptures. Both are attributes of love. Therefore, a loving person will always be just. Injustice has no place in the life of a loving person. Similarly, a loving person will seek every opportunity to be merciful. A lack of mercy is contrary to love. Because "God is love" (1Jn 4:8), he does everything "in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy" (Hos 2:19 *ESV*). As a just God, equity is his standard, so he makes sure that no one gets less than they deserve. But as a merciful God, grace is his goal, so he looks for every opportunity to give us better than we deserve.

The prophets of old prophesied with this framework. They understood that the actions of a just and merciful God take our actions into account. Certain actions on our part require a response of justice on God's part. Other actions on our part make possible a merciful response on God's part. This principle is at the heart of Jeremiah's vision at the potter's house (Jer 18:1-11) and Ezekiel's description of God's heart (Eze 18:1-32). You can count on God always being just and yet always looking for an opportunity to show mercy. This is the story line behind the iconic events found in Exodus 32:7-14; Jonah 3:4-4:2; and 2 Kings 20:1-7. Prayer, fasting, repentance, intercession – freely undertaken by humans – gave God the just reason to replace expected punishment

with unexpected redemption. These stories climax in a grand finale as “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jam 2:13 NIV).

But not so in Eze 22:30-31. The situation merited divine judgement. But – as always – God would have preferred mercy over justice. He looked for someone who through their prayers would give him a just cause to stay judgment. But he found no one. Therefore, he could not justly extend mercy. He had to bring upon them the deserved punishment. With a broken heart God had to withhold the mercy he desired. Our actions are significant. Prayer does indeed change things. On this day there was none, so no change was possible. What a tragic day!

Keep Going:

Take time to read the book of Jonah through from beginning to end. It only takes about seven minutes. After this quick overview go back and consider the different prayers prayed in the book. Reflect on who prayed; what was the content of their prayer; what was the result of their prayer; what difference did those prayers make; and how was God’s justice and mercy reflected in his response to each prayer. Note particularly:

- The sailors’ prayers in Jon 1:14.
- Jonah’s prayer in Jon 2:2-9.
- The Ninevites’ prayers in Jon 3:6-9.
- Jonah’s prayer in Jon 4:3.

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