

Show Mercy Matthew 5:7

A 61-year-old grandmother stood at the self-checkout station of her local Walmart scanning the items from her cart. The remaining item was a package of steaks, something she had promised her family for dinner, but after counting the money in her wallet, she didn't have enough. She made a split-second decision and bagged them anyway.

A store employee stopped her as she was walking out the door of the shopping center. Per their policy the local police was dispatched. When the officer arrived, she was waiting in a room away from the other customers with her 18-year-old autistic daughter, who was in tears. She had been on her own for 15 years since the passing of her husband and was caring not only for this daughter but eight other children and grandchildren. It was obvious to the officer that this woman had a lot on her plate.

She told the officer that sometimes you get so overwhelmed that you do things without thinking. Running a background check, the officer found that she was clean with the exception of a couple speeding tickets. At that point the officer decided she needed help.

She left Walmart with a citation and drove home with her daughter. About an hour later the phone rang. It was the officer. Thoughts of being taken away in handcuffs filled her runaway imagination. But his call wasn't about coming to take her to jail. He had stopped at an emergency food pantry run by a local Christian ministry. They had filled boxes of food items and put them in the back seat of his squad car for him to drop off to her.

When he arrived at her home, she was overwhelmed with disbelief. In that moment she experienced a rush of guilt. She told the officer that she didn't deserve any of it and wanted the food returned because she had committed a crime. But the officer wouldn't hear it and put all the food in the kitchen.

In addition, he also told her that he had talked with Walmart and they had voided the citation.

That is mercy and the topic of our fifth beatitude.

But before we get to what mercy means and how it is to be lived out in our lives as Jesus followers, let's consider first the problem without mercy.

I. THE PROBLEM WITHOUT MERCY

There is a troubling trend in our society. We have all seen it. It's like a growing virus. It's found in many of our large urban centers, but rural communities are not immune to its contagion. Even churches and homes can be affected by its spread. It touches every walk of life regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

It's something that can't be controlled with personal protective equipment like masks or hand sanitizer, and neither can it be abated by vaccines. I am speaking about what our society and really any society is like without mercy.

Let me give you some words that aptly depict what we are seeing in our culture and then tell me if we are not witnessing a void of mercy. I'm sure we can all come up with recent events from the news that unfortunately point to this lack of mercy. This list is not exhaustive. The opposite of mercy are things like:

- Cruelty
- Harshness
- Vengeance
- Ruthlessness
- Callousness
- Heartlessness
- Brutality
- Intolerance
- Meanness
- Unkindness
- Spite
- Egoism
- Hatred
- Hostility
- Apathy
- Selfishness

We have seen these behaviors and attitudes in our schools, on basketball courts, at the office, in shopping centers, and on the streets of towns and cities all over the country and around the world. A lack of mercy is evident in the blatant lack of

disregard for others.
 Pushing people down instead of helping them up.
 Retaliation instead of reconciliation.
 Hostility instead of humility.
 Selfishness instead of selflessness.
 Cruelty instead of compassion.

John MacArthur states that **“a society that despises mercy is a society that glorifies brutality.”**

Pushing people onto subway tracks.
 Knocking people over just for fun.
 Shaming classmates on social media.
 We could add so many more incidents of a lack of mercy.

But it's not just brutal actions against someone that opposes mercy, a lack of mercy is also in the attitude of apathy shown when we see something that necessitates our help and we do nothing to aid the need, choosing instead not to get involved. It's like seeing someone get beat up and we casually walk by or stand there taking a video to share on social media.

It happened to me many years ago. I was minding my own business sitting in the mall, watching people move about like ants bobbing in and out of stores. A commotion caught my attention. As I turned toward the vicinity of where the noise was coming from, I noticed several teens chasing another teen through the crowded aisles of the mall. It wasn't just a casual jog, it was a all-out sprint. They were headed my way.

I don't know what sparked the foot race or why this guy was being chased with reckless abandon by his pursuers. It was evident something was amiss because I could see the expression of fear and panic on the face of the one being chased and the look of anger and rage and vengeance on the faces of those chasing him.

Maybe he stole their homework.
 Maybe he accidentally spilled a food tray on them.
 Maybe he slashed their tires.
 Maybe he got in a fight earlier after school.
 He could have done something that provoked this retaliation or maybe it was nothing but a youthful prank gone wrong. Whatever the case, these guys were looking to bust some heads and he was the target. I don't know. All I knew was what I saw.

He ran by me within about 10 feet. Now I could have chosen at that moment to stand up and casually walk in the path of those chasing him to delay their catching him thus giving him more time to get away. I could have said something to them like “Hey, no running in the Mall.” I could have hollered for Mall security. Maybe someone had done those things already but to no avail. But I did none of that. Instead, I chose the route of apathy, not wanting to get involved. It didn't concern me, so why try to intervene.

Being merciless allows things to happen when we have the power to do something to help, even when the other person may not deserve help.

There is a prevailing problem when there is no mercy in a society. **So what does mercy look like?** To answer that question, let's look at the profile of mercy.

II. THE PROFILE OF MERCY

I learned a very simple definition of mercy in my Bible doctrine class. It's this: *Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve.*

Webster's dictionary has several entries defining mercy: “a refraining from harming or punishing offenders, enemies, persons in one's power; kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion. “imprisonment rather than the death penalty imposed on those found guilty of capital crimes “a disposition to forgive, pity, or be kind.”

Mercy in a biblical sense goes beyond just the refraining of harming or punishing someone who has wrongly hurt us, someone we might consider as an enemy. True mercy not only withholds what is otherwise deserved, it also seeks to help that person on some way. Showing kindness beyond what is expected or demanded by fairness. Paul addresses that in his letter to the Romans. As you will see from this passage it is a demonstration of what mercy looks like.

Romans 12:17-20

In his Bible dictionary, Merrill Unger defines mercy as **“a form of love determined by the state or condition of its objects. Their state is one of suffering and need, while they may be unworthy or**

ill-deserving. Mercy is at once the disposition of love respecting such, and the kindly ministry of love for their relief.”

From his definition, I want to emphasize that word love, because it is that attribute which prompts our action of mercy to others, even to those who are “unworthy or ill-deserving.”

Our enemy may not deserve to be treated kindly, but if we are to take to heart the admonition of Jesus to love our neighbor, He doesn't mean just those who look like us, smell like us, or act like us. Our neighbor may be someone who we may think doesn't deserve mercy, but they are the very ones to whom mercy should be shown. Mercy from a Biblical sense does not withhold such basic needs from someone even if they have in some way caused us the pain we are now experiencing.

Why should I fix a meal for my neighbor after he returns from the hospital when he lets his dog dig up my petunia's?

Why should I help my boss fix his flat tire when he continues to berate me in front of others?

Why should I help the bully with his homework when he takes my lunch?

Why should God help me when all I have ever done is rebel against Him and treat Him with apathy or disdain?

Mercy doesn't just ask us to respond in loving kindness, it demands it as we understand Jesus' words and take them as commands to be acted on.

There are several words in the Old Testament that help us understand the root motivation of mercy. It is translated in the Old Testament with words like kindness, unfailing love, or devotion.

The New Testament adds additional insight to a workable definition and understanding of mercy when it is translated with words like compassion or pity toward someone in need. These words help convey the attitudes and actions that are associated with the kind of mercy we are to show others.

Of all the beatitudes in our passage, this one seems to be the most misunderstood and misapplied.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”

Some have incorrectly interpreted this verse to

mean that if I show mercy, I will get mercy as if it was conditional or something we merit. The correct way to look at it is that because we have been shown mercy by God, we are in turn, to show mercy to others. If mercy were somehow merited, then it isn't mercy at all.

Keep in mind that mercy is an attribute of God and that we have received God's mercy.

Mercy isn't just what God does, it is part of His character. We see from Scripture the many evidences of His mercy towards us.

Exodus 33:19 “And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’”

Deuteronomy 4:31 “For the Lord your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath.”

Psalm 23:6 “Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalm 86:5 “You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love (mercy) to all who call on You.”

Psalm 145:8-9 “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all: He has compassion on all He has made.”

Micah 7:18 “Who is God like You, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion of us; You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

I Peter 1:3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He

has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the death.”

II Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

These verses give us a greater sense of the nature of God’s mercy toward us.

Jonah understood and admitted that the reason he chose to ignore his commissioned trip to Nineveh to proclaim God’s message of repentance to that brutal people, was because he knew God was merciful. Why should he care about what happened to them? After all, it was the Assyrians who for centuries had attacked Israel and who had taken his people into captivity. You can read about it in **Jonah 3-4**, but of particular interest is what he knew to be true about God and in what he says we should be thankful.

Jonah 4:2 “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate (merciful) God, slow to anger and abounding in love (kindness), a God who relents from sending calamity.”

Jonah understood that God was full of mercy. Instead of receiving the just punishment for their sins against God and Israel by being obliterated as Jonah thought they deserved, God displayed mercy and compassion and withheld His judgment. Jonah wanted revenge not forgiveness. God wanted repentance. As we have seen from **II Peter 3:9**, God is patient and shows His mercy when it comes to our salvation.

We see the same in **Ezekiel 33:11** which implies God’s mercy. **“Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live? Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’”** What great mercy.

When I think of God’s mercy, **Lamentations 3:22-23** is a favorite. **“It is because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.”**

Psalm 136 echoes the sentiment of the faithfulness of God’s mercy when each verse tells us that **“His mercy endures forever.”** In other words, it cannot be changed and will last forever. It won’t ever become less than it is now and it does not ever need to get better. It does not change when we sin. Like every other characteristic of God, it will last for eternity unaltered. He always has been and always will be full of mercy. But where other attributes like love, omnipotence and omniscience have always been exhibited even before the creation of the universe, other attributes like grace, forgiveness, and mercy, while always a part of His nature, were not evident until the fall of mankind through the sin of Adam and Eve. Up until sin, they did not need to be displayed. From that point on, we needed those attributes.

For all our rebellion against Him, we deserve, and justly so, His judgment and yet in His faithfulness, because of His nature, He shows us His mercy.

God’s justice demands a payment for sin. We are all guilty and stand before Him condemned to death. That is our penalty. But He showed us His mercy when He didn’t give us what we deserve but instead, because of His love, He sent His Son, Jesus to take our place. Christ endured what He didn’t deserve so that we wouldn’t get what we deserved. His mercy kept us from what we deserved, and His grace gave us what we didn’t deserve.

Romans 11:30 “You who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy.”

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace are you saved through faith.”

God gave us a picture of His mercy toward us in one of the pieces of furniture found in the Tabernacle. It was Ark of the Covenant. It was a wooden box or chest encased in gold with two cherubim facing each other but both looking down toward the middle of the lid. Inside the chest was the two stone tablets on which were inscribed the 10 commandments, God’s laws of how His covenant people were to act toward Him and each other.

The lid itself was called the Mercy Seat. A cloud hovered over the lid depicting God’s divine presence. It symbolized God being seated there, judging over His people based on His commands. It

was there that God dispensed His mercy on them when the atoning blood of the sacrificial animal was sprinkled on the Ark.

Inside the Ark was God's law, a law that no one could keep in its entirety, a law by which they would be judged. Knowing that they couldn't keep the law, God provided a means of atonement so that His judgment for disobedience would not fall on them. Each year on what was called the Day of Atonement, the High Priest took the blood of the animal sacrifice and went into the Holy of holies and sprinkled the blood of the animal onto the Ark as an atonement for the sins of God's people. This blood was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat as a picture that only through the blood offering could the condemnation of the Law be taken away and the violations against God's laws be covered.

In the Greek, the word for mercy seat means that which makes expiation or propitiation. That simply refers to the removal of sin.

I John 2:1-2 "My little children, these things I wrote unto you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate (defense attorney) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Jesus' shed blood on the cross, wasn't just a picture of the covering of sin, it was the covering itself. His blood removes our sin. That is God's mercy to us depicted in **Hebrews 9:11-15**.

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh, precious is the flow,
That makes me white as snow.
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

The significance of the Mercy Seat is to point to Jesus, whose shed blood would atone for our sin, so that we, through faith in Christ, would not incur the justice of God. Without His sacrifice, there is no remission of sin. Without His sacrifice there is no mercy. Jesus made it possible for God to display His mercy.

I John 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

John continues by saying that because God loves us, we are to love others or because God has shown mercy to us, we are to show mercy to others.

I John 4:11 "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Mercy has something in common with forgiveness, but it is not forgiveness.

Titus 3:5

Mercy has something in common with love, but it is not love. Forgiveness flows from mercy, mercy flows from love.

Ephesians 2:4-5 "But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved."

John MacArthur helps us see the difference between love and mercy when he states "Mercy is the physician, love is the friend. Mercy acts because of need; love acts because of affection, whether there is a need or not. Mercy is reserved for times of trouble, love is constant. There is no mercy without love, but love can be apart from mercy."

In other words, mercy sees someone in need and then acts to meet that need, even if the person may not deserve what is given. God saw our great need and was moved to act on our behalf. We see that in a parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector found in **Luke 18:9-14**.

In that passage God showed the tax collector both His mercy and justification. In other words, God's mercy made it so that man was made right in relationship with God. It shows us the progression of the beatitudes. The man understood his spiritual bankruptcy, he grieved over his sin by admitting that he was a sinner hungering after what only God could provide. And Jesus said that man received what he longed for.

Jesus told another parable that shows us how mercy and forgiveness work together. This one is found in **Matthew 18:21-35** and is about a servant who owed his master a great sum of money that he

couldn't ever pay back. The master showed great mercy by forgiving the debt.

Did the servant who owed all that money deserve mercy? We would say he didn't, but the master extended it. That is, until the servant wouldn't show mercy to a fellow servant who owed a pittance compared to what he owed. Because he was unwilling to show mercy, the master rescinded his mercy and had the servant thrown into prison.

This stresses the point of our definition. To the degree to which God has shown us mercy, we are to also show that same degree of mercy to others, even when undeserving.

Mercy not only has something in common with forgiveness and love, it also has something in common with grace. Mercy deals with the symptoms of sin, grace deals with the source. Mercy offers relief from punishment; grace offers pardon for the sin. Mercy eliminates the pain; grace gives the cure for the disease.

In **Luke 10:25-37**, we have the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus told this story to help us see the difference between mercy and grace as well as to show us what being merciless looks like. In this parable we see how mercy gives aid to the afflicted and rescues the helpless. Mercy is simply meeting people's needs especially when they are incapable of doing anything for themselves, even if humanly speaking, they don't deserve it.

The story has four characters. The first character is a traveler who had been waylaid by bandits, robbed, beaten and left dead in a ditch. He is the one with the obvious need. Two of the other characters are religious by nature and occupation. They represent people who should have known what mercy was and how then to be merciful, but when they saw the injured man, they really showed a calloused heart when they refused to even help one of their own countryman in great suffering and need.

The fourth character is a foreigner. He was traveling through the area near Jerusalem when he found the injured man. It's important to understand that he was a Samaritan, considered by Jews to be an enemy. They were the first to be led into idolatry when Jeroboam made the golden calves to worship. They intermarried with non-Jews. They didn't

worship in Jerusalem. They were hated. And truth be told, the feeling was mutual. Yet, when he saw someone who was an enemy lying injured, he stopped and offered help. He showed mercy when he bandaged his wounds. He showed grace when he paid for his lodging and care.

When the expert in the law asked Jesus how a person should act in order to receive mercy at the judgment day, Jesus answered that the person who received the mercy of eternal life was someone who loved God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and loved their neighbor as themselves and told the man to go and demonstrate mercy.

To pair our beatitude with what Jesus is saying in this parable, we can read it this way: **"Blessed are those who are merciful now to their neighbor, for they shall receive the mercy of eternal life in the future."**

Here's what this parable teaches us about mercy and how we are to demonstrate it to others.

Mercy sees the distress. **Luke 10:33** – the Samaritan saw the man lying in the ditch in distress.

Mercy responds internally with a heart of compassion or pity toward the person in distress.

Luke 10:33 – **"when he saw him, he had compassion on him."**

It's the same compassion Jesus had when He looked at the lost people around Him. (**Matthew 9:36-37**)

Mercy responds externally with a desire to do something practically to relieve the distress. **Luke 10:33** **"He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him."**

Mercy acts even when the person in distress is an enemy. **Luke 10:33** – This half-breed Jew stopped to help someone who considered him as an enemy.

Until and unless we experience and understand the mercy of God toward us, we will be incapable of extending mercy to others. Once we grasp the mercy He showed us, we can then express mercy to others.

Deuteronomy 15:7-9

We see the parable of the Good Samaritan lived out

in something Jesus did. It's found in **John 4**. Jesus and His disciples are on their way to Jerusalem and find them passing through Samaria. Remember from the parable that the Samaritan man was in Jerusalem. Here Jesus is in Samaria. Instead of a Samaritan, we have a Jew. Instead of a Jew who was lying in a ditch in obvious, we find a Samaritan woman who is the one in need.

Jesus had every right to condemn her for her sin. Married and divorced five times and living with her boyfriend in sin, she is spiritually destitute. Instead of being religiously indifferent to her need like the other religious guys in the parable, He stopped and bandaged up her spiritual wounds and then offered to pay for her spiritual depravity by offering her the water of life.

We read in **Matthew 9:9-13** that the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice. In that passage Jesus quotes from **Hosea 6:6** where God accuses the Israelites of displaying love that is like the dew on the grass. Dew is the moisture that forms at night when the ground outside cools down by radiating or giving off heat. It's the result of water changing from a vapor to a liquid. When the sun comes up, the dew evaporates with the heat from the sun.

God was saying that their sacrifices, their religious activities were just like the dew. As soon as it was burned up, it was gone. All that was left was the empty form of their burnt offerings. What God wanted was love from His people for Him and mercy toward each other. He didn't want their love just to be empty rituals with no feeling. He didn't want it to be just a formality. To demonstrate their love for Him was to show mercy toward each other.

In **Matthew 9** when Jesus was questioned about why He hung out with sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes, He used this quote to show that it was the spiritually sick and miserable who needed a doctor not those who thought themselves to be religious thinking they didn't need help. All the Pharisees saw was Jesus being contaminated by spending time with those who were considered the scourge of society. What Jesus saw was their spiritual need and then showed them His mercy.

The prophet Micah tells us what God expects of those who are His people.

Micah 6:8 "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Your God."

Mercy chooses to look past what someone may deserve and instead seeks to help in some tangible way.

Mercy shows in our actions choosing to give the same kind of mercy to others that God has shown to us.

Mercy is shown in our attitudes.

It does not hold a grudge.

It does not harbor resentment.

It does not take advantage of someone else's misfortune.

When we choose to show mercy to others, mercy has come full circle. James tells us that the wisdom we receive from God is full of mercy. (**James 3:17**)

Jesus is calling on us to be merciful.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones sums it up this way: "If I am not merciful there is only one explanation; I have never understood the grace and mercy of God; I am outside Christ; I am yet in my sins, and I am unforgiven."

God's children reflect His mercy and are merciful toward others. When we are merciful it's because we have been shown mercy and Jesus says we are blessed knowing God's joy.

Let me leave you with this thought and then a question to ponder. Someone said that we can stop showing mercy to others only when Christ stops showing mercy to us.

Are you merciful?