

**Lesson 6 - Giving and Receiving Mercy**

***Lesson Notes:***

Welcome back! Have you noticed the teachings of Jesus seeping into your thoughts yet? Have you found yourself with more of a Kingdom mindset than when we started?

It’s difficult to study the Beatitudes and not see things differently.

This week, as we study verse 7, we’ll be talking about the significance of mercy.

Have someone read Matthew 5:7.

***Questions:***

1. In your own words, how would you describe or define mercy? Can you name a time in your life when you have shown mercy to someone or been shown mercy by someone else?
2. In the Bible, mercy is a huge concept that runs throughout both testaments. The Greek word used in Matthew 5:7 is *eleemon* (pronounced el-e-ee-mon) and it speaks of having pity or compassion for someone in trouble or need.

It’s what Jesus was talking about when he told the parable about the merciful king and the unmerciful slave (See Matthew 18:23-35).

But to understand the real meaning of mercy, we must go back to the Old Testament. There are many words that are translated *mercy* or *merciful* in the Old Testament, and God used one of them (*hannun*) to describe himself in Exodus 34:6.

But the most common word and the word that clearly influenced Jesus’ thinking the most was the word *chesedh* (pronounced ka-sed). It’s most often translated *loving kindness*, but it actually has a much weightier meaning than that.

Have someone read the following explanation of *chesedh* by William Barclay:

*The Hebrew word for mercy is chesedh; and it is an untranslatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. Chesedh, mercy, means the ability to get right inside other people until we can see things with their eyes, think things with their minds and feel things with their feelings. Clearly, this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly, this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from outside, but which comes from a deliberate identiﬁcation with other people, until we see things as they see them, and feel things as they feel them*.

1. To be merciful, therefore, is to show true empathy. It’s not a cheap or superficial sympathy, but rather it means to experience something *with* another person. It’s walking in someone else’s shoes. That’s why the spiritual gift of mercy is so powerful. It’s the God-given ability to experience what someone else is feeling or going through. It is that companionship in suffering that brings comfort.

Does anyone in your group have the gift of mercy? Have them talk about what’s it like to feel what someone else is feeling.

1. Now that we understand what mercy is, we can talk about the implications of the verse. Have someone read Matthew 5:7 again. Now, try to say it without using the word *mercy*. Instead, use as many words as necessary to insert the meaning of *chesedh* into the verse.
2. Notice that this the only Beatitude were the condition and the promise are the same. In every previous verse the thought has advanced from the condition to the promise. Jesus offered a condition (poor in spirit) and followed up with a promise (yours is the kingdom). That is thought advancement. However, in this verse, the condition and the promise are basically the same: give mercy and you’ll receive mercy. It’s circular. Mercy yields mercy.

Notice also that this is the first Beatitude that deals with our relationship with others. All the previous Beatitudes deal with our posture *before God* - poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, meekness and humility before God, and hungering for God’s righteousness. But Jesus’ call to be merciful, and those Beatitudes that follow, all deal with our posture and attitude *before others*. We’ve moved from a vertical to horizontal emphasis.

\*By the way, the Ten Commandments follow the same pattern as the Beatitudes. The first four deal with our posture before God and the last six, our posture before others. Did Jesus have the Ten Commandments in mind when he was giving the Beatitudes? Everybody say *Hmmmmmmm...*

Why do you think Jesus made mercy both the condition and the promise in this Beatitude? Why is this the only Beatitude where the condition and the promise are the same? What does that say about how Jesus viewed mercy?

1. OK, it’s time to stick this one to our everyday lives. Here are some questions to ponder: Given the weight the Scriptures put on mercy, how must Christians respond to Jesus’ call to be merciful? How should mercy play out for us on a daily basis? What are the implications of mercy in how we see and deal with business competitors, a teacher who is not a good fit for our child, nosey neighbors, rude drivers, politicians we can’t stand, etc.?

Can you think of a scenario in your life that might have played out differently if you had shown mercy?

How does mercy interact with our need to establish boundaries in our relationships? Is it possible to show mercy and still keep appropriate boundaries with difficult people?

Finally, how might practicing mercy impact how we view ourselves? Remember, mercy is the fruit of our hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness (the verse we discussed last week). How are the two related?

Wow, if you’ve answered all those questions, I’m very impressed. That’s some hard work. Next week we’ll talk about what it means to have a pure heart toward others. See you then!