

Be happy: Be merciful

Message for Sunday, November 3, 2019

Scripture: Matthew 5:7

Children's Message:

Proverbs 17:17, New Living Translation:

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.

Let's pretend that you've just moved to Stirling, and you would like to meet people and make some new friends. What would you look for in a friend? *Write down all their answers.*

There's an old saying, and it's very true: "If you want a friend, be a friend." In other words, instead of asking, "What can this person do for me?", ask "What can I do for this person?" I should focus on being this kind of person myself.

So look again at that list of all the things you look for in a friend. Are you that type of person?

Message: "Be happy: Be merciful"

We are reading through the Beatitudes, the blessings that Jesus spoke at the beginning of Matthew 5. We saw back at the beginning that the biblical word "blessed" means much the same as "happy." So today's verse is:

Matthew 5:7

Happy are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

This is one of the characteristics of God.

Psalm 145:8, Good News Bible:

The Lord is loving and merciful,
slow to become angry and full of constant love.

As we grow in mercy, we become more godly.

But what does "mercy" mean? Very simple: Mercy is love in action. It's not just a do-it-once-and-you're-done thing, but a consistent lifestyle.

Let's look at some ways to be merciful.

1) I'll be patient with problem people

Of course, the truth is that we're all problem people. So turn to someone near you and say, "I'll be patient with you." ☺

How do you handle these problem people? With mercy. With patience.

1 Thessalonians 5:14, Contemporary English Version:
Encourage anyone who feels left out, help all who are weak, and be patient with everyone.

Be patient with everyone. And extra patient with those who need it. As Jesus told us, we treat others the way we would like to be treated if we were having a bad day.

Any psychologist will tell you: all behaviour has a reason. If we knew that reason, it would be so much easier to understand and to sympathize and to forgive. That person may have been through troubles we know nothing about; may be worried, or in pain. There's a French proverb which says, "To know all is to forgive all."

One of the first steps in being patient is to learn the person's background. When you ask how someone is doing, you can be nosy and rude, or you can be caring. For example, instead of "What's wrong with you?", try this: "You seem upset today. Is there something wrong?"

Romans 15:7, New Living Translation:

So accept each other, just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.

Are you a problem person? Of course you are. Does Jesus accept you? Absolutely. So we do the same with others. Be patient with them. Merciful people are accepting people. They are not quick to criticize or judge.

2) I will forgive those who have fallen

When people make mistakes, how do you react? Do you rub it in, or do you rub it out? It's easy to hold a grudge. It even feels good to go back and remember what they did, and what you're going to do to them. But forgiveness feels even better. "Happy are the merciful." It feels good to forgive!

Besides, when you forgive, you're helping yourself as well as the other person.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to say, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." And then, after the end of the prayer, Jesus adds this warning:

Matthew 6:14-15, Good News Bible:

"If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done."

The message is repeated other places:

Colossians 3:13, Living Bible:

Be gentle and ready to forgive, never hold grudges. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Never hold grudges.

Sometimes, though, we don't want to be merciful. We want justice, not mercy! I had my photograph taken for a group that I belong to. There was a professional photographer, and all those fancy lights and background. But when the picture came in the mail, I said to Jane, "This picture doesn't do me justice." So when I was in Belleville I went to the photographer's studio, stuck the photo in his face and said, "This photo doesn't do me justice." He replied, "Bruce, with your face, you don't need justice; you need mercy."

He's right. We really don't want justice. Because if God treated me with justice for all the wrong things I've done—oh dear, I'd be in trouble! We need mercy, not justice.

3) I will help those who are hurting

Proverbs 3:27, Good News Bible:

Wherever you possibly can, do good to those who need it.

Mercy is love in action. There are people all around you who are hurting, in your workplace, there are people hurting at school. There are people in this room who are hurting.

When you feel sorry for a person who is hurting, you are not being like Christ. It's when you *do* something about that hurt that you are being like Christ. Suppose Jane, my wife, falls down at home and hurts her ankle. I see this and I come over to her

and say, "Oh honey, I'm sorry you hurt your ankle. I will be praying for you while I am watching television." I might be sleeping in the guest room for the next week. Mercy is love in action.

1 John 3:17-18, New Living Translation:

If someone who is supposed to be a Christian has enough money to live on and sees a brother in need, but won't help him, how can God's love be in him? Let's just stop saying we love people, let's show it by our actions.

Last week I told you about the journal that John Wesley kept of his ministry. Here's another insight in Wesley's character. One of his mottos was this:

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.

That's mercy! That's love in action!

Anyone remember comedian Flip Wilson? Someone once asked him, "What's your religion?" He answered, "I'm a Jehovah's bystander." He didn't want to get involved; he wanted to just watch others do the work. Being merciful means getting involved, not just standing by.

4) I'll do good to my enemies

Luke 6:33, 35, New Living Translation:

"If you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much!... Love your enemies! Do good to them!"

When we are dealing with difficult people, we have three choices in how to respond.

One is retribution: getting even. The second is be civil, be polite. That's good, but Jesus tells us to go further than mere politeness. Do good to them in return for evil.

Why would you do that? Because the best way to get rid of enemies is to turn them into friends, with mercy and kindness.

When you do that, it confuses people. Someone always criticizes you unfairly, and you compliment them. Someone is mean to you, and you do

something nice for them. You're no longer just reacting by instinct. You're leading the way.

There's a principle at work here: people who hurt others have themselves been hurt. So they go and hurt someone else. Then that person passes it on. But when you respond with mercy, you break the cycle of hurting. You can begin the process of healing. Mercy is love in action. Not just nice words. But showing that you really care.

I said earlier that it feels good to hold a grudge, to keep on remembering the hurt, and reliving it, and to imagine what you're going to do to that person. But in the end, that doesn't feel good at all.

Jesus said, "Happy are the merciful." The opposite is also true: "Unhappy are the unmerciful." The most miserable people in the world are those who are resentful, who won't forgive. It's like picking off the scab of a wound before it has a chance to heal.

Proverbs 11:17, New Living Translation:
Your own soul is nourished when you are kind. But you destroy yourself when you are cruel.

Far, far better to be merciful, and be happy!

How do you become a merciful person? You can't be merciful unless you first receive mercy. You can only be merciful to others in proportion to how much mercy you have received. And in Jesus, we receive the fullness of mercy for all the wrong we've ever done.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Receive Jesus' mercy. Ask him to forgive you for all the wrong you've done. Feel the weight lifted from your soul.
- Now pass that mercy on to others. Especially any problem people in your life, any hurting people, any enemies. Don't just talk love; *show* that you care.
- Forgive: is there someone against whom you hold a grudge? Now is the time to let go, to give it to God.

PRAYER

(for those who have never received Jesus' mercy, never put faith in him)

God, I don't deserve a relationship with you. I've put you aside and followed my own way. I thought I was "living the dream." Some dream! Now, God, I want to follow you and live your way. I need your mercy, and I'd like to be that kind of person myself. I ask you to forgive me for all the wrong things I've done. Please help me to even forgive myself.

(for everyone)

I want to live out your love and put it into action. This week, God, help me to offer mercy to others just as freely as you gave it to me today.

God, if there are people in my life or my past whom I need to forgive, please bring those people to mind. Help me to say, "I release them. I forgive them."

Not just them. Open my eyes, and open my ears, so that I may see and listen to people around me, and be aware of those who are hurting. Let me show mercy. Amen.