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## Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy



One morning I woke up feeling like a neglected wife. My husband was the pastor of a large church. The needs of our dear people sometimes seemed overwhelming. I decided I'd act. I phoned Walt's secretary and asked her if he had any important appointments that day. "None but a planning meeting with a staff member, which we could easily postpone."

So I marched into Walt's office and said, "Honey, I'm kidnapping you at noon today. So whatever you have to do, get it done by noon."

At 10:00 he announced, with a gleam in his eyes, "I'm all done with my work. What do you have in mind?"

"A drive up to the Blue Ridge Parkway."

"Let's go."

That set a pattern for times when the burdens of the ministry seemed too heavy. We'd drive up into the lovely, misty Smokey Mountains.

On one such day, we stopped for supper in Brevard at—don't laugh—a Wendy's hamburger place. We drove the curved mountain roads home in the dark, and pulled up in the garage. I reached for my purse. Uh-oh! It wasn't there.

Horrors! I'd left it at the Wendy's in Brevard. Such a stupid thing to do! What if someone had taken it, my social security card, American Express credit card, blank checks, the children's addresses and phone numbers—all the information a hacker needed to access every asset the

Handfords own, but jeopardizing our children's assets as well!

How very stupid, how dangerous! I felt so guilty.

I phoned the store. Yes, they had a purse. What color was it? Black. Come and get it, but bring identification with you. I told them I'd be there as soon as I could. It would be just before they closed.

Walt said, "I'm going to drive you."

"No, honey. Please no. It's all my fault. You're tired of driving. I'll go by myself."

"No. I'm going to drive you."

He drove just as carefully as ever, that hour and a half back up into the mountains. I recovered my purse, and we came home. I was still feeling so stupid, so careless.

But as we climbed out of the car, near midnight, Walt put his arm around me and said, "Libby, I enjoyed the second drive with you just as much as the first."

You may not feel like that's a very good example of mercy. But to my troubled heart, that dark night, how I needed, and received, unstinting mercy!

1. This world is toxic, as we learned in our study of "blessed are they that mourn."

That was brought home to us here in South Carolina so terribly recently when a man killed nine people after sitting with them in a Bible study in a church in Charleston. "They were so nice to me, I almost didn't go through with it," he said. But he killed them in cold blood.

But the truth is, we are all damaged; all sinners. That's why all of us need mercy.

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**Mercy: "The kind and compassionate treatment of a person under one's power, suggests reprieve from a fate**

**of considerable severity without further implication,”**  
says the dictionary.

Mercy acknowledges that one who breaks the law deserves full punishment, but instead is offered a reprieve, with no further consequences, not liable any more, not even to be reminded of it again.

2. Mercy tells us there is a moral standard, imbedded in every human heart.

There are human laws made to control behavior, true, but there are also moral laws written in our hearts. What are some of the taboos that people everywhere in the world, no matter how civilized, still value?

But, also, every individual, regardless of culture or background, acknowledges he believes these laws are good by the standards he judges others. He will be judged by the standard he himself holds.

A graphic picture of this is found in the Old Testament. King Ahab had released Benhadad, the king of Syria, instead of executing him. One of the prophets, pretending to be a servant, said to King Ahab: “Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and there, a man came over and brought a man to me, and said, 'Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.' While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” Then the king of Israel said to him, “So shall your judgment be; you yourself have

decided it.” How did the prophet apply the king's judgment to his own punishment? (First Kings 20:40-42).

In another Bible incident, what did King David say to the man he was about to execute? (2 Samuel 1:16).

What are we told in Psalm 64:8 that God will use to judge people?

“An evil man is **trapped by his sinful talk**, but a righteous man escapes trouble” (Proverbs 12:13).

The Scriptures tell us that even the heathen, though not Jews reared with the traditions of the law, have a standard of behavior: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the **work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them**" (Romans 2:14,15).

3. The Scriptures assert that there are severe consequences and penalties for breaking the moral law of God.

When a person refuses to acknowledge that God is God, and they refuse the evidence of His creation, then terrible things happen to the conscience. See this progression outlined in Romans chapter 1:18 through 2:1.

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a. What two things can everyone know about God, regardless of where and when they were born? (Romans 1:19,20)

b. What terrible things happen to the person who knows these two things about God, but refuses to accept Him as God? (Romans 1:22-27)

c. Since they “did not like to retain God in their knowledge,” what further degeneration happens to them? (Romans 1:28-32)

d. Why, then, do such people have no excuse for their sin? (Romans 2:1)

4. Mercy acknowledges that the authority, the person responsible for imposing the penalty, has every right to exact punishment on the law-breaker, but decides, for whatever reason, not to administer those penalties. The lawbreaker goes free without any further consequences. The record is “expunged,” in the language of law, which means “to erase or strike out, to obliterate completely.”

If someone is given mercy, does that mean the law itself is unjust? No, because the Bible says, "Therefore the

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law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. (Romans 7:12)

If the person in authority gives mercy, does that make him guilty of flouting the law? Or that he didn't care that the law was broken? No, the very terrible cost of the gift of mercy reveals that the behavior was sinful and deserved

punishment.

Does the command to be merciful mean that unethical behavior should always be forgiven? If so, the law doesn't mean anything. Mercy only highlights the severity of the punishment for breaking the law.

5. But mercy toward us is one of God's unchangeable, most precious attributes.

To help us picture His mercy, God gave Moses instructions to build the "ark of the covenant" and put it in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle. Inside the ark were the two tables of stone of the Ten Commandments, engraved by the finger of God Himself. The covenant, the promise, between God and the Israelites would be broken if they broke the rules.

Oh, but listen! Above Ark of the Covenant rested the mercy seat, made of pure gold, its two golden cherubim hovering above it. God promised that He Himself would



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dwell

above that mercy seat, and hear us in our need. The mercy seat intervenes between God and the law, promising God's mercy, though we certainly have broken the law!

You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I will give you.

And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony.

Exodus 25:21,22

The mercy of God is a theme throughout Scripture. What did David say about God's mercies? (Psalm 130:3,4)

What are the names God uses in Exodus 34:6,7 to describe His character?

To whom does God show His goodness and mercy? (Psalm 145:8,9)

Romans 11:32,33 describes it this way: "For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have

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mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:32,33).

This mercy of God encompasses more than we can possibly imagine, according to Psalm 103:8-14. Underline the characteristics of God you find most precious in your own life:

The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
    Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.  
He will not always strive with us,  
    Nor will He keep His anger forever.  
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
    Nor punished us according to our iniquities.  
For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great  
    is His mercy toward those who fear Him;  
As far as the east is from the west,  
    So far has He removed our transgressions from us.  
As a father pities his children,  
    So the LORD pities those who fear Him.  
For He knows our frame;  
    He remembers that we are dust.

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6. Because God offers us mercy, we must offer mercy to others.

Remember we must offer this mercy to those who have genuinely wronged us. This is not about a trivial slight, something you can laugh away. This is a serious offense.

This is, as our definition said, “The kind and compassionate treatment of a person under one’s power, suggesting reprieve from a fate of considerable severity.”

What, does James 2:10-14 say about the differences between mercy and judgment?

How does God deal with those who show mercy to others? (2 Samuel 22:26)

7. It is not humanly possible for us, in ourselves, to give mercy to others as we ought. We want justice! (But how we crave mercy for ourselves!)

Only as we have the mind of Christ can we show mercy to those who do not deserve it.

Ephesians 4:31,32; 5:1, 2 says: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us.”

Why, according to this Scripture, as we to forgive one another?

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And why must we “walk in love”?

Why are we to actually love our enemies and do good without expecting any return for it? (Luke 6:35-37).

8. And as you show mercy, point them to your merciful Savior. We will do this as we show mercy cheerfully, without grudging. (It isn't real mercy if you keep harping on how hard they are making it for you to show them mercy!) "He who shows mercy, do it with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8).

So our beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" promises that God will show us His lavish, unending mercy.

When we get to Heaven, enjoying for all eternity God's mercy to us, how glad we will be that we showed mercy, especially to people who didn't deserve it.

"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:32,33).

**I will be merciful to others,  
for God has been so merciful to me!**