

RECEIVING WHAT YOU GIVE

In 1956, missionaries Jim Elliot, Nate Saint and three others were killed by the Waorani People in Ecuador. Jim's wife Elisabeth was left without a husband, his daughter left without a dad. Elisabeth would have been justified to be angry, bitter, even vengeful. But instead, she stayed in Ecuador and lived with the same tribe that killed her husband in order to reach them with the Gospel. Two women from the tribe taught Elisabeth and Rachel Saint, the sister of Nate Saint, their language and introduced them to the rest of the tribe. They were invited to live with the tribe.

Elisabeth showed mercy and forgave the people who killed her husband. And many from that tribe turned their lives to follow Jesus.

VIDEO: MISSIONARIES

She wrote many books about her husband Jim's life, about her time with the Waorani people, and about the suffering she endured. Her message taught others to love and show mercy to the most difficult

Her book "Through the Gates of Splendor" written in 1957 was later made into a documentary in 2002 called "Beyond the Gates of Splendor" and four years later a dramatized movie called "End of the Spear."

For many of us, a story like that seems impossible. How do you forgive someone who kills your spouse? Its easy to feel mercy for someone who's poor or going through a hard time. The pain is theirs to bear. But when the pain comes to us, when someone wrongs us, when they persecute us, and even when they take the life of someone we love, we have to decide whether we will embrace bitterness or mercy.

Jesus says in **Matthew 5:7**. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

What I hope you will see through this sermon is that while its not easy to be merciful its essential to those who follow Christ.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

It's one short sentence, and it's one of the most challenging things Jesus ever said.

1. What is mercy?

Mercy is not the same as niceness. Mercy isn't being easygoing or pretending nothing happened.

Mercy is **compassion that acts toward someone who doesn't deserve it**. In the Old Testament, the word behind mercy is *hesed*, God's loyal, covenant-keeping love, and the New Testament word, *eleos*, carries the same weight. It's what you show when you have the power to demand what's owed, or to walk away, and you choose to move toward the person instead.

Notice two things about how Jesus says it.

First, mercy sees need. The Good Samaritan didn't ask how the man ended up in the ditch. Luke tells us he had compassion and went to him. Mercy looks at suffering, even *self-inflicted* suffering, and refuses to look away.

Second, mercy acts. It isn't a feeling that stays in the chest. When the crowds were hungry, Jesus didn't just feel sorry for them; He fed them. When the leper came, He didn't just sympathize; He touched him.

Jesus didn't just say, "I know how it feels to be an outcast to be rejected, but back up, Bro. Stay over there, you're contagious."

So mercy has two parts: **the eyes to see** and **the hands to move**.

And it shows up in two directions. There is **mercy toward need**, which means caring for the hurting, the poor, and the forgotten. And there is **mercy toward offense**, which means forgiving the one who wronged you. Jesus has both in view. Most of us are better at one than the other. Some of us will give generously to a stranger and hold a grudge against our brother for twenty years. Some of us forgive easily but never lift a finger for anyone in need.

Which direction is harder for you? Hold on to that answer.

2. Why is mercy so hard?

Because mercy cuts against almost everything in us.

Mercy feels like losing. When someone wrongs me, justice says, "You owe me." Mercy says, "I'll let that go." In the moment, it feels like I'm the one paying the bill. And in a sense, I am. Every act of mercy absorbs a cost. Someone has to carry the debt, and mercy says, "Let it be me."

Mercy feels unfair. And Jesus never says it isn't. Mercy is, by definition, giving what *isn't* deserved. If the person deserved it, it would just be justice. That's what makes people uncomfortable with it. Remember the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. He stays outside the party, furious. His complaint is not that his father was cruel. It's that his father was *too generous* to the wrong person.

And mercy is hard because we're experts at excusing ourselves. Here's something I've noticed in my own heart: I read my own failures with generous context ("I was tired, I was stressed, I didn't mean it") and everyone else's failures with a harsh verdict ("That's just who they are. They're all like

that. Of course they did that, what else would you expect?"). I'm merciful to myself and strict with you.

Jesus knew this. Just two chapters later in the same sermon, He says, "Don't judge or you will be judged by the same standard you used on other people." We would rather be experts on other people's sins than on our own.

So if mercy were something we could generate on our own by trying harder, we would have run out of it a long time ago. Which brings us to the last question.

3. Where does mercy come from?

Look carefully at the verse again. "*Blessed are the merciful, **for they shall receive mercy.***"

It's tempting to read this as a transaction: Be merciful to others so that God will be merciful to you. As if mercy were a coin we spend to buy mercy back.

But that can't be the whole picture, because the Sermon on the Mount begins with the poor in spirit, those who come to God with empty hands. And the whole Bible tells us that God's mercy toward us is never earned.

So how do we read it? Jesus is describing the *kind of person* who belongs to the kingdom. The merciful are people who have already come to the end of themselves. They know they live on mercy. And people who know they live on mercy become people who give mercy.

Jesus makes this crystal clear in a parable in Matthew 18. A servant owes his king a staggering amount, a debt he could never repay in a thousand lifetimes. The king forgives it all. Then that same servant walks out, finds a fellow servant who owes him a few dollars, and grabs him by the throat. The king's response is devastating: *Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*

Do you see the order? Mercy received comes first. Mercy given is the fruit.

An unmerciful heart is often a heart that has never really grasped how much it has been forgiven. If I think my debt to God was small, I'll hold your debt to me tightly. But if I understand that I was the servant with the impossible debt, then I can't help but loosen my grip on the people who owe me.

And here is the good news at the center of it all. Where did mercy get its power? At the cross. God did not just *feel* compassion for us from a distance. He saw our need, and He moved. In Jesus, the One who had every right to demand payment *became* the payment. He absorbed the cost. Justice and mercy met, and mercy won, not by ignoring our sin, but by paying for it.

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That's why Paul can write in Ephesians 2 that God, being rich in mercy, made us alive when we were dead in our sins. We didn't qualify. We were just loved.

So what do we do with this? Let me make it practical and personal.

First, ask who is on your list. Is there someone you've been holding a debt over? A parent, a former friend, someone at church, an ex? Name them in your heart right now. You may not feel ready to forgive. But you can start by asking God to help you see that person the way He sees you.

Second, ask who you've been walking past. Mercy toward need is often inconvenient. It's the neighbor going through a hard season, the coworker who is struggling, the person at the edge of the room no one is talking to. Ask God to give you eyes to see one person this week, and then ask what He would have you *do*.

Third, and most important, go back to the cross. If you try to be merciful by willpower alone, you will burn out or become bitter. Mercy flows downhill from the cross. The more you sit in what you've been forgiven, the more room you have to forgive.

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The merciful are not the strong or the self-sufficient. They are the people who have looked honestly at their own need and found a God who met it.

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Matthew 5:1-12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. **2** And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Small Group Discussion Questions

Read Matthew 5:7 aloud. In your own words, how would you explain the difference between mercy and simply being nice or easygoing?

The sermon described two directions of mercy: toward need (caring for the hurting) and toward offense (forgiving those who wronged us). Which comes more naturally to you, and which is harder? Why do you think that is?

Mercy often feels unfair because it gives what isn't deserved. Read Luke 15:25-32 (the older brother). What was the older brother's real problem, and where do you see a bit of him in yourself?

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Why does Jesus place the servant's received mercy before his failure to give mercy? How does it change the way you think about forgiving someone when you remember what you've been forgiven?

Think of one person this week who either owes you something (an apology, patience, forgiveness) or is in need that you've been walking past. What is one specific step you could take toward them? How can the group pray for you or hold you accountable?