

MERCY

What It Is, Why God Gives It, and How We Become Merciful

Introduction: The Other Side of the Coin

We talked about grace in the last book.

Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Favor. Blessing. Forgiveness. All the good things God pours out on you even though you didn't earn them.

But there's another word. Just as important. Just as beautiful.

Mercy.

If grace is getting what you don't deserve, mercy is *not* getting what you *do* deserve.

- You deserve punishment. Mercy withholds it.
- You deserve judgment. Mercy stays its hand.
- You deserve to be cast out. Mercy keeps you close.

Grace gives. Mercy withholds.

And together, they form the heart of God.

Why Mercy Matters

Here's why we need to talk about mercy.

Because most of us live with a quiet fear that God is angry at us. That He's keeping score. That He's waiting for us to mess up so He can finally lower the boom.

That's not mercy. That's not who God is.

The Bible says something different:

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 103:8)

Slow to anger. That's mercy. He doesn't want to punish you. He's looking for reasons to forgive you.

And once you understand that—once you really grasp His mercy—it changes everything.

It changes how you see God. It changes how you see yourself. And it changes how you treat others.

Because the merciful God calls us to become merciful people.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

Not the other way around. You don't earn mercy by being merciful. You become merciful because you've received mercy.

And that's what this book is about.

What This Book Covers

We'll explore:

- What mercy is (and what it's not)
- How God showed mercy throughout the Bible

- Why God gives mercy (spoiler: because He is merciful)
- How to receive mercy with a humble heart
- The danger of rejecting mercy
- What it looks like to become a merciful person
- How to show mercy to those who don't deserve it
- And finally, how to live as a mercy-giver every day

This book is not a theology textbook. It's a gentle, honest conversation with someone who has received far more mercy than they deserve—and who wants to help you do the same.

Let's begin.

Chapter 1: What Mercy Is Not

Before we can understand what mercy is, we need to clear away some confusion.

Because mercy gets misunderstood. Twisted. Turned into something it was never meant to be.

Let me name a few distortions.

Mercy is not ignoring sin.

Some people think mercy means God just pretends sin doesn't matter. He looks the other way. He gives everyone a participation trophy.

That's not mercy. That's denial.

God sees sin. He hates sin. Sin is what destroyed His creation, killed His Son, and separates people from Him.

Mercy doesn't pretend sin didn't happen. Mercy chooses to withhold the punishment that sin deserves.

There's a big difference.

Mercy is not weakness.

Some people think merciful people are pushovers. They have no backbone. They let people walk all over them.

But mercy is not weakness. Mercy is strength under control.

It takes strength to withhold punishment when you have the power to inflict it. It takes strength to forgive when you've been wronged. It takes strength to absorb an offense instead of passing it on.

God is merciful. But God is not weak. His mercy flows from His strength, not His inability to act.

Mercy is not "anything goes."

Some people think God's mercy means there are no consequences for sin. You can live however you want, and God will just keep forgiving.

But that's not mercy. That's presumption.

God's mercy is real. But it's not a blank check. The same Bible that tells us God is merciful also tells us that we will reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

Mercy doesn't remove consequences. It absorbs the ultimate consequence (eternal separation) while letting natural consequences do their work to wake us up.

Mercy is not earned.

You cannot earn mercy. You cannot deserve mercy. You cannot bargain for mercy.

If you could, it wouldn't be mercy. It would be a wage.

Mercy is a gift. Free. Unearned. Given to people who deserve the opposite.

That's what makes it mercy.

So what is mercy?

We'll get there.

But first, we had to clear the rubble.

If you've believed any of these distortions, you're not alone. Most of us have.

But now it's time to meet the real thing.

Chapter 2: What Mercy Actually Is

Now let me tell you what mercy really is.

Not the distortion. The real thing.

Mercy is not getting what you do deserve.

This is the simplest definition.

- Justice is getting what you *do* deserve.
- Mercy is *not* getting what you *do* deserve.
- Grace is getting what you *don't* deserve.

Justice says: "You sinned, so you get punishment."

Mercy says: "You sinned, but I'm withholding the punishment."

Grace says: "You sinned, and I'm giving you blessing instead."

Most of us understand justice. We get that.

But mercy? Mercy interrupts justice. It steps in and says, "Stop. Not today."

Mercy is compassion in action.

The Hebrew word for mercy is *hesed*. It's one of the most beautiful words in the Old Testament. It means loyal love, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness. It's not a feeling. It's a commitment to show kindness even when it's not deserved.

The Greek word for mercy is *eleos*. It means compassion expressed toward someone in need. Not just feeling bad for them. Doing something about it.

Mercy is not a passive emotion. It's an active choice.

When God shows mercy, He doesn't just feel sorry for you. He acts. He withholds the punishment you deserve. He reaches down to rescue you. He provides a way out.

That's mercy.

Mercy is God's relentless refusal to give you what you've earned.

Let me say that again.

Mercy is God's relentless refusal to give you what you've earned.

Think about that.

Every day you wake up, you have done something to deserve God's judgment. Every day you fall short. Every day you sin in thought, word, and deed.

And every day, God says: "Not today. I'm not giving you what you deserve."

Not because He's blind to your sin. Because He is merciful.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

New every morning. Every single day, fresh mercy. Not because you earned it. Because He is merciful.

Mercy is the reason you're still alive.

Let that sink in.

You are alive right now because God is merciful.

Not because you're good enough. Not because you've earned another day. Because God, in His mercy, has withheld the judgment you deserve and given you another chance to turn to Him.

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

His patience is mercy. His waiting is mercy. His giving you another breath is mercy.

Mercy is the heart of God.

Exodus 34:6-7 is one of the most quoted passages in the Bible. God reveals His character to Moses:

"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."

The first thing God says about Himself? Merciful.

Not "angry." Not "judgmental." Not "easily offended."

Merciful.

That's who He is at His core. That's His character. That's His heart.

Yes, He is also just. Yes, He does punish sin. But His first impulse, His deepest nature, His revealed character is mercy.

He is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

That's who you're dealing with when you come to God.

Mercy and grace go together.

You can't have one without the other.

Grace gives what you don't deserve. Mercy withholds what you do deserve.

Together, they form the full picture of God's love.

- Grace says: "Here's forgiveness you didn't earn."
- Mercy says: "I'm not giving you the punishment you earned."

One adds the positive. The other removes the negative.

And both flow from the same source: the heart of a God who loves you more than you can imagine.

A Simple Way to Remember

Mercy is
Exercising
Restraint from
Consequences
You've earned.

Mercy withholds. Mercy restrains. Mercy says "stop" when justice says "go."
And it's available to you. Right now. Today.

What Mercy Is (Summary)

- Not getting what you do deserve
 - Compassion in action
 - God's relentless refusal to give you what you've earned
 - The reason you're still alive
 - The heart of God
 - The partner of grace
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A Question for You

Have you ever really thanked God for His mercy?

Not for His grace—though that's wonderful too. But for His mercy. For withholding what you deserve.

For every morning you woke up and God didn't give you what you had coming.

For every time you sinned and God didn't strike you down.

For every moment of patience, every second chance, every "not today."

That's mercy. And it's surrounding you right now.

Take a moment. Thank Him.

Chapter 3: God's Mercy in the Old Testament

Sometimes people think the Old Testament is about God's anger and the New Testament is about God's love.

That's not true.

The Old Testament is filled with mercy. Page after page. Story after story.

Let me show you.

Adam and Eve: Mercy After the First Sin

The first sin. Adam and Eve ate the fruit. They disobeyed the one rule God gave them.

What did they deserve? Death. Immediately. Complete separation from the God who made them.

But look what God did.

He didn't strike them down. He called to them. *"Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9)

He didn't curse them without hope. He made them garments of skin to cover their shame (Genesis 3:21). Blood was shed—the first sacrifice—to cover their sin.

And He promised a Redeemer. One who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

That's mercy. Not getting what they deserved. Getting a promise instead.

Cain: Mercy After Murder

Cain killed his own brother. Out of jealousy. Cold-blooded murder.

What did he deserve? Death. Immediately.

But look what God did.

He confronted Cain, yes. He pronounced judgment—Cain would be a fugitive and wanderer. But when Cain cried out that his punishment was too great to bear, God put a mark on him to protect him. Anyone who killed Cain would suffer sevenfold vengeance (Genesis 4:15).

Mercy. A murderer received protection he didn't deserve.

Noah: Mercy Before the Flood

The world had become completely corrupt. Every thought of every person was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5).

What did humanity deserve? Total destruction.

And God brought judgment. The flood came.

But before the flood, God showed mercy. He saved Noah and his family. Eight people. Rescued from judgment.

And after the flood, God made a covenant. He put a rainbow in the sky as a sign that He would never again destroy the earth by flood (Genesis 9:12-17).

That's mercy. Judgment came, but mercy came first—and mercy came after.

Abraham: Mercy for a Liar

Abraham lied twice about his wife Sarah, saying she was his sister to protect himself. He put her at risk. He showed cowardice and faithlessness.

What did he deserve? God could have abandoned him. Left him to his own devices.

But God showed mercy. He protected Sarah anyway. He continued His covenant with Abraham. He didn't give up on him.

Mercy.

The Israelites in Egypt: Mercy for Slaves

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Crying out. Suffering. Forgotten.

But God heard them. He remembered His covenant. He sent Moses. He brought plagues. He parted the Red Sea. He set them free.

Not because they deserved it. They had done nothing to earn His favor. Many of them had adopted Egyptian idolatry.

But God showed mercy. He saw their misery. He acted.

"I have surely seen the affliction of my people... I have come down to deliver them." (Exodus 3:7-8)

That's mercy.

The Golden Calf: Mercy After Idolatry

This might be the clearest example.

The Israelites had just seen God part the Red Sea. Destroy the Egyptian army. Lead them with a pillar of cloud and fire. Feed them manna from heaven.

Then Moses went up the mountain to receive the law.

And the people got impatient. They made a golden calf. They worshiped it. They said, *"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."* (Exodus 32:4)

They deserved destruction. And God said as much: *"Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them."* (Exodus 32:10)

But Moses interceded. And God relented.

He didn't destroy them. He forgave them. He continued to lead them. He brought them into the Promised Land.

Mercy.

Jonah and Nineveh: Mercy for Enemies

Jonah was sent to Nineveh—the capital of Israel's worst enemy. The Assyrians were brutal, violent, cruel.

Jonah didn't want to go. He knew God was merciful. He said:

"That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah was angry that God was merciful to his enemies. But God said:
"Should I not pity Nineveh?" (Jonah 4:11)

God showed mercy to a violent, pagan empire because they repented. Even to their animals. Even to their livestock.

That's how merciful God is.

Hosea and Gomer: Mercy for the Unfaithful

God told the prophet Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. Her name was Gomer. She kept leaving. Kept sleeping with other men. Kept breaking Hosea's heart.

But God told Hosea to go after her. To buy her back. To love her still.

Why? To show Israel—and us—what God's mercy looks like.

We are Gomer. We run. We cheat. We break His heart.

And He keeps coming after us. He keeps buying us back. He keeps loving us still.

That's mercy.

David: Mercy After Adultery and Murder

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then he arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle to cover it up.

Two capital crimes. Adultery and murder.

What did he deserve? Death.

But when David repented—when Nathan the prophet confronted him and David cried out, *"I have sinned against the Lord"*—God showed mercy.

The child of the affair died. Consequences remained. But David was forgiven. He was not put to death. He remained king. God continued to love him.

And David wrote Psalm 51, a song of mercy:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." (Psalm 51:1)

That's mercy.

The People of Israel: Mercy Over and Over

The story of the Old Testament is a cycle:

- Israel sins
- God warns them
- They keep sinning
- God sends judgment
- They cry out
- God shows mercy
- Repeat.

Over and over and over.

Nehemiah prayed:

"They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them... But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." (Nehemiah 9:17)

Ready to forgive. That's God. Always ready. Always waiting. Always merciful.

What This Means for You

If God showed mercy to murderers, idolaters, adulterers, and enemies—He can show mercy to you.

No matter what you've done. No matter how many times you've failed. No matter how far you've run.

His mercy is bigger than your sin.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12)

Not just some. Not just the small ones. As far as the east is from the west. Infinite distance.

That's mercy.

Chapter 4: God's Mercy in the New Testament

The Old Testament is full of mercy. But the New Testament? It's mercy on full display.

In Jesus, mercy didn't just speak from heaven. It put on flesh and walked among us.

Let me show you.

Jesus: Mercy in Person

Everything Jesus did was mercy in motion.

He didn't come to condemn. He came to save.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

Not condemn. Save.

That's mercy.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

This is one of the most beautiful mercy stories in all of Scripture.

The religious leaders dragged a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. They threw her at His feet. They said, *"Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"* (John 8:4-5)

They weren't concerned about justice. They were trying to trap Jesus.

Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. Then He stood up and said:

"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

One by one, they walked away. The oldest first.

Jesus was left alone with the woman.

He said: *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

She said: *"No one, Lord."*

And Jesus said: *"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."* (John 8:10-11)

That's mercy.

She deserved death. The law was clear. But Jesus withheld what she deserved. He gave her another chance.

Not pretending her sin didn't matter. *"Go and sin no more."* But mercy first. Judgment withheld.

The Thief on the Cross

Two criminals were crucified next to Jesus.

One mocked Him. *"Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*

The other rebuked him: *"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."*

Then he turned to Jesus and said: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

And Jesus said: *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:39-43)

Think about that.

This man was a criminal. He admitted he deserved his punishment. He was being executed for his crimes.

And at the very last moment, he asked for mercy.

Jesus didn't say, "Sorry, too late." He didn't say, "You had your chance." He didn't say, "You should have thought about that earlier."

He said: *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

Mercy. At the last second. To a criminal who deserved death.

That's who Jesus is.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

We touched on this in the grace book, but it's also a mercy story.

The young man demanded his inheritance early. Effectively saying to his father, "I wish you were dead." He took the money and wasted it on wild living.

He ended up broke, hungry, desperate, feeding pigs.

He decided to go home and beg to be a servant.

But while he was still far off, his father saw him. The father ran to him. Embraced him. Kissed him.

Not "I told you so." Not "You've disgraced this family." Not "You'll have to earn your way back."

Mercy. Pure, undeserved, outrageous mercy.

The son didn't earn it. He didn't deserve it. He got it anyway.

That's mercy.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

A man was beaten, robbed, and left for dead.

A priest passed by on the other side. A Levite passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan—someone the Jews despised—had mercy.

He bandaged the man's wounds. He took him to an inn. He paid for his care. He promised to cover any additional expenses.

Jesus told this story to answer the question: *"Who is my neighbor?"*

But the deeper point is about mercy. Real mercy costs something. It's inconvenient. It's messy. It's expensive.

And it's what God calls us to.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

We covered this in the grace book, but it bears repeating here.

A servant owed an unpayable debt. The king forgave him completely.

But that same servant went out and choked a fellow servant over a small debt.

When the king found out, he was furious. He handed the unforgiving servant over to the torturers.

Then Jesus said: *"So also my heavenly Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."* (Matthew 18:35)

The point? You have received mercy. You must give mercy.

Mercy received becomes mercy given.

Paul: The Chief of Sinners

Before he was the apostle Paul, he was Saul of Tarsus. And Saul was a murderer.

He hunted Christians. He dragged them from their homes. He voted for their execution. He stood there holding coats while Stephen was stoned to death.

What did Saul deserve? Death. Judgment. Hell.

But on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to him. Mercy.

Saul became Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament. He planted churches. He suffered for the gospel. And at the end of his life, he wrote:

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

He received mercy. Not because he deserved it. So that others would know: if God can save Saul, He can save anyone.

That's mercy.

The Woman Who Anointed Jesus' Feet

A sinful woman came to Jesus while He was eating at a Pharisee's house. She wept. She washed His feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair. She anointed them with ointment.

The Pharisee thought: *"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is—that she is a sinner."*

Jesus knew. And He said to the woman: *"Your sins are forgiven."*

The other guests murmured: *"Who is this, who even forgives sins?"*

Jesus said to the woman: *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* (Luke 7:36-50)

She didn't earn forgiveness. She didn't clean up her life first. She came to Jesus as she was—sinful, broken, desperate.

And He showed her mercy.

Zacchaeus: The Tax Collector

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. He was rich—because he had cheated his own people. Tax collectors were despised as traitors and thieves.

Jesus came to his town. Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Him. And Jesus looked up and said: *"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."*

The crowd grumbled: *"He has gone in to be the guest of a sinner."*

But Zacchaeus was transformed by mercy. He said: *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."*

Jesus said: *"Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* (Luke 19:1-10)

Mercy found him. Mercy changed him.

Peter: The One Who Denied

Peter swore he would never leave Jesus. Hours later, he denied even knowing Him. Three times. With curses.

After the resurrection, Jesus sought Peter out. Not to shame him. To restore him.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

"Feed my lambs."

Three times Jesus asked. Three times Peter answered. Three times Jesus restored him. (John 21:15-17)

Mercy. Not what Peter deserved. What he needed.

You

And then there's you.

You have sinned. You have fallen short. You have done things you're ashamed of. You have neglected things you should have done.

And you deserve judgment.

But God has shown you mercy.

Not because you earned it. Because He is merciful.

Every morning you wake up is mercy.

Every breath you take is mercy.

Every time you sin and aren't struck down is mercy.

Every opportunity to repent is mercy.

You are the thief on the cross. You are the woman caught in adultery. You are Peter. You are Paul.

And Jesus says to you: *"Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more."*

That's mercy.

Chapter 5: Why God Shows Mercy

We've seen God's mercy throughout the Bible. From Adam and Eve to the thief on the cross. From David to Paul.

But now we need to ask the question:

Why?

Why does God show mercy? What's the reason behind His relentless refusal to give us what we deserve?

The answer might surprise you.

Not Because We Deserve It

Let's start with what mercy is *not* based on.

Mercy is not based on your goodness. It's not based on your performance. It's not based on how many times you've gone to church, how much you've given, or how hard you've tried.

If mercy were based on anything in you, it wouldn't be mercy. It would be a wage. Something earned.

"To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due."
(Romans 4:4)

Mercy is a gift. You can't earn it. You can't deserve it. You can't work for it.

So if not because of you, then why?

Because He Is Merciful

The simplest answer is also the deepest.

God shows mercy because He *is* merciful.

It's His nature. His character. His heart.

When God revealed Himself to Moses, He didn't say "I am powerful" or "I am mighty" or "I am terrifying."

He said:

"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Exodus 34:6)

Mercy is the first thing God says about Himself. Not an afterthought. Not something He does reluctantly. It's who He is.

A good tree bears good fruit. A merciful God shows mercy.

He doesn't show mercy because of something in you. He shows mercy because of something in Him.

Because He Is Slow to Anger

The Bible repeats this phrase over and over:

"Slow to anger."

God doesn't want to punish you. He's not looking for reasons to be angry. He's looking for reasons to forgive.

"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." (Psalm 103:10)

Why? Because He's slow to anger. His anger, when it comes, is reluctant. His mercy is eager.

Think about the difference between you and God.

When someone wrongs you, your first impulse might be revenge. Anger. Justice.

God's first impulse is mercy. He has to be pushed to judgment. He runs toward forgiveness.

That's who He is.

To Lead You to Repentance

Here's something important.

God's mercy has a purpose. It's not just to make you feel better. It's to change you.

"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

God's mercy is meant to lead you to repentance.

- His patience is meant to give you time to turn around.
- His kindness is meant to soften your heart.
- His forgiveness is meant to make you want to change.

If you've received mercy and you're exactly the same person you were before, you've missed the purpose of mercy.

Mercy isn't just a reprieve. It's an invitation. An invitation to turn from your sin and walk in a new direction.

To Display His Glory

Paul writes about this in Romans 9.

He's wrestling with hard questions about God's sovereignty and human responsibility. And in the middle of it, he says this:

"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory?" (Romans 9:22-23)

God shows mercy to display His glory.

When you are saved—when you receive mercy you don't deserve—it showcases who God is. His mercy becomes a billboard. A testament. A display of His character to the world and to the heavenly realms.

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7)

The riches of his grace. That's what's on display when you receive mercy. Not your goodness. His.

Because Judgment Is His "Strange Work"

Here's a beautiful phrase from Isaiah.

"The Lord will rise up... that he may do his deed—strange is his deed—and work his work—alien is his work!" (Isaiah 28:21)

Judgment is God's "strange work." It's foreign to Him. It's not what He wants to do.

Mercy is His natural work. Judgment is what He does when mercy has been exhausted. When repentance is no longer possible. When there's no other way.

Think about it.

God didn't create the world for judgment. He created it for relationship. He didn't make you to punish you. He made you to love you.

Judgment is Plan B. Plan A has always been mercy.

Because of the Cross

Ultimately, God can show mercy because of the cross.

Mercy doesn't mean justice is ignored. It means justice was served on Someone else.

Every sin deserves punishment. That's justice. And God is just. He can't simply pretend sin doesn't matter.

So how does He show mercy without violating justice?

The cross.

On the cross, Jesus took the punishment you deserved. The full weight of God's wrath against your sin fell on Him.

And because that debt was paid, God can now show you mercy. He can withhold what you deserve because He already poured it out on His Son.

"He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

Propitiation means the wrath-bearing sacrifice. Jesus bore God's wrath so you wouldn't have to.

That's why God can be both just and merciful. Justice was satisfied at the cross. Mercy flows from it.

Because He Loves You

And finally, the simplest answer of all.

God shows mercy because He loves you.

Not because of what you've done. Not because of who you are. Because of who *He* is.

Love shows mercy. Love withholds what is deserved. Love gives second chances. Love keeps no record of wrongs.

"Love keeps no record of wrongs." (1 Corinthians 13:5)

That's mercy. Not keeping score. Not holding your sins against you. Letting them go.

And that's what God does. Not reluctantly. Not begrudgingly. Joyfully. Freely. Completely.

Because He loves you.

A Summary of Why God Shows Mercy

- Because He is merciful (it's His nature)
- Because He is slow to anger (He doesn't want to punish)
- To lead you to repentance (mercy has a purpose)
- To display His glory (your salvation showcases Him)
- Because judgment is His strange work (mercy is what He wants)

- Because of the cross (justice was satisfied)
 - Because He loves you (love keeps no record of wrongs)
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A Question for You

Have you received God's mercy? Not just intellectually. Really. Deeply.

Have you let it change you?

Because mercy isn't just a pardon. It's a transformation.

The same mercy that forgives you also calls you to become merciful. The same love that withholds punishment from you calls you to withhold punishment from others.

We'll get to that in later chapters.

But first, receive it.

Let His mercy wash over you. Let it soften your heart. Let it lead you to repentance.

Then let it flow through you.

Chapter 6: Receiving Mercy – The Humble Posture

We've talked about what mercy is. We've seen it throughout the Bible. We've explored why God shows it.

Now we come to the personal question:

How do you actually receive it?

Because mercy is available. God is merciful. He's slow to anger, ready to forgive.

But mercy isn't automatic. It's not forced on you. You have to receive it.

And receiving mercy requires a certain posture of the heart.

You Can't Demand Mercy

Let's start with what receiving mercy is *not*.

You cannot demand mercy. You cannot negotiate for mercy. You cannot argue your way into mercy.

Mercy is a gift. Gifts can't be demanded. They can only be received.

If you come to God saying, "You owe me mercy," you've already missed the point. No one owes you mercy. Mercy is, by definition, what you don't deserve.

The posture of demanding is the opposite of the posture of receiving.

The Tax Collector and the Pharisee

Jesus told a story that captures the right posture perfectly.

Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee—religious, respected, moral. The other was a tax collector—despised, corrupt, a traitor.

The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself:

"God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."
(Luke 18:11-12)

He listed his credentials. His good works. His religious performance. He didn't ask for mercy because he didn't think he needed it.

The tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven. He beat his chest and said:

"God, be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13)

That's it. No credentials. No performance. No bargaining.

Just: *"Have mercy."*

Jesus said: *"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."* (Luke 18:14)

The tax collector received mercy. The Pharisee didn't.

Why? Because the tax collector came with empty hands. He knew he deserved nothing. He didn't argue. He didn't demand. He just asked.

That's the posture of receiving mercy.

Honesty About What You Deserve

You cannot receive mercy if you won't admit you need it.

The Pharisee didn't think he needed mercy. He thought he was good enough. He compared himself to others and came out ahead.

But the tax collector knew the truth. He knew he was a sinner. He knew he deserved judgment. He didn't make excuses. He didn't blame anyone else.

He was honest.

Receiving mercy starts with honesty. Honesty about your sin. Honesty about what you deserve. Honesty about your inability to save yourself.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

Confession is honesty. And honesty opens the door to mercy.

The Prodigal's Speech

Remember the prodigal son?

He was in the pig pen. Broke. Hungry. Desperate.

And he came to his senses. He said:

"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:18-19)

He rehearsed his confession. He didn't make excuses. He didn't blame his friends. He didn't say, "Well, Dad, you gave me the money, so it's partly your fault."

He said: *"I have sinned. I am not worthy."*

That's the posture of receiving mercy.

And what did the father do? He ran to him. He embraced him. He kissed him. He threw a party.

Mercy didn't come because the son earned it. It came because he humbled himself and asked.

Empty Hands, Open Heart

The posture of receiving mercy is empty hands and an open heart.

Empty hands mean you're not bringing anything to bargain with. No good works. No religious performance. No "but I did this so you owe me."

Just empty hands. Ready to receive.

An open heart means you're not resisting. You're not hardened. You're not saying "I don't need mercy" or "I'll handle this myself."

Just open. Ready. Willing.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

A broken spirit. A contrite heart. Not proud. Not self-sufficient. Not demanding.

Broken. Contrite. Empty. Open.

That's what God is looking for. Not because He enjoys your pain. Because that's the posture that can receive mercy.

The Danger of Pride

Pride is the enemy of mercy.

Pride says: "I don't need mercy. I'm good enough."

Pride says: "I can handle this myself."

Pride says: "God owes me better than this."

Pride closes the hand. It hardens the heart. It builds walls instead of doors.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Opposes the proud. Think about that. God actively resists the proud. Not because He's mean. Because the proud won't receive mercy. Their hands are full of their own righteousness. Their hearts are closed.

But the humble? God gives them grace. Mercy flows to the lowly.

A Simple Prayer

Receiving mercy doesn't require fancy words. It doesn't require a ritual. It doesn't require you to clean yourself up first.

Just come. Just ask.

Pray something like this:

"God, have mercy on me. I'm a sinner. I deserve judgment. I can't earn Your forgiveness. I can't bargain my way out. But I'm asking for mercy. Not because I deserve it. Because You are merciful. Have mercy on me."

That's it. That's the posture.

Empty hands. Open heart. Honest confession. Humble request.

And God, who is rich in mercy, will answer.

What Receiving Mercy Looks Like

Let me paint a picture.

Receiving mercy looks like:

- Stopping the excuses. No more "but I had a hard childhood" or "everyone else is doing it" or "it's not that bad."
- Admitting the truth. "I have sinned. I deserve judgment. I need mercy."
- Letting go of pride. Not comparing yourself to others. Not demanding fairness. Not defending your reputation.
- Trusting God's character. Believing that He is merciful. That He wants to forgive you. That He's not looking for reasons to condemn you.

- Accepting the gift. Not arguing. Not trying to pay it back. Just receiving.
- Walking in freedom. Not beating yourself up anymore. Not living in shame. Not carrying guilt that's already been lifted.

That's what it looks like to receive mercy.

A Question for You

Are you willing to come with empty hands?

Or are you still trying to earn what can only be received?

The Pharisee walked away empty because his hands were full of his own righteousness.

The tax collector walked away justified because his hands were empty.

Which one are you?

Chapter 7: The Danger of Rejecting Mercy

We've talked about receiving mercy. The posture of humility. Empty hands. Open heart.

But now we need to talk about something serious.

The danger of rejecting mercy.

Because mercy is available. God is merciful. He's slow to anger, ready to forgive.

But mercy can be rejected. And rejecting mercy has consequences.

What Rejecting Mercy Looks Like

Rejecting mercy doesn't usually look like someone saying, "No, God, I don't want Your forgiveness."

It's more subtle than that.

Rejecting mercy looks like:

- Hardening your heart. You keep sinning. You keep ignoring God's voice. You keep refusing to repent. And over time, your heart gets harder and harder.
- Making excuses. You blame others. You minimize your sin. You say "it's not that bad" or "everyone does it" or "God understands."
- Running away. You avoid God. You stop praying. You stop reading the Bible. You stop going to church. You hide, like Adam in the garden.
- Trusting in yourself. You think you don't need mercy. You think you're good enough on your own. You compare yourself to others and come out ahead.
- Presuming on mercy. You assume God will always forgive you, so you keep sinning without repentance. You treat mercy like a safety net instead of a gift.

All of these are forms of rejecting mercy. Not with your mouth, maybe. But with your life.

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

The clearest example in Scripture is Pharaoh.

God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh: "*Let my people go.*" Pharaoh refused. Plague after plague. Warning after warning.

And the Bible says Pharaoh hardened his heart.

The first few times, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He refused to humble himself. He refused to admit he was wrong. He refused to repent.

Later, God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Not because God was cruel. But because Pharaoh had so persistently rejected mercy that God gave him over to his own hardness.

There comes a point when rejection of mercy leads to a hard heart that can no longer receive mercy.

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 3:7-8)

Today. Now. While mercy is available.

Because there may come a day when it's not.

The Danger of Presumption

Presumption is assuming mercy will always be there.

"I'll repent later. God will forgive me. He's merciful."

And that's true. God is merciful. But His mercy is meant to lead you to repentance *now*. Not later.

"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4)

Presumption is dangerous because it delays repentance. And delayed repentance can become no repentance at all.

The Bible warns:

"Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness." (Hebrews 3:8)

The Israelites in the wilderness saw God's miracles. They experienced His mercy. But they kept rebelling. And eventually, God swore that generation would not enter His rest.

They rejected mercy. And mercy ran out.

The Unforgivable Sin

Jesus talked about a sin that would not be forgiven.

"Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:32)

What is the unforgivable sin?

It's not murder. David was forgiven.

It's not adultery. David was forgiven.

It's not denying Christ. Peter was forgiven.

It's not persecuting Christians. Paul was forgiven.

The unforgivable sin is the persistent, final rejection of the Holy Spirit's work. It's looking at the Spirit's testimony about Jesus and calling it evil. It's hardening your heart to the point where you can no longer repent.

The unforgivable sin isn't a single act. It's a state. A state of final, irreversible rejection of mercy.

And the warning is: don't go there.

Esau: Who Could Not Find Repentance

The writer of Hebrews gives another warning:

"See that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears." (Hebrews 12:16-17)

Esau rejected his birthright. He traded something precious for a moment's hunger.

Later, he wanted the blessing back. He sought it with tears. But he couldn't find repentance.

Not because God wouldn't forgive him. Because his heart was so hardened by his own choices that he could no longer truly repent.

That's the danger. Not that God is unwilling. That we become unable.

The Door Shuts

Jesus told a parable about ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom. Five were wise and brought oil. Five were foolish and didn't.

When the bridegroom came, the foolish ones went to buy oil. But while they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. The wise ones went in with him. And the door was shut.

Later, the foolish virgins came and said, *"Lord, lord, open to us."*

But he answered, *"Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."* (Matthew 25:1-13)

The door shut. Mercy had a window. They missed it.

Not because the bridegroom was cruel. Because they were not ready.

Today Is the Day

The writer of Hebrews pleads with his readers:

"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13)

Every day. As long as it's called today.

Because today, mercy is available. Today, the door is open. Today, you can repent.

But tomorrow? Tomorrow is not promised.

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." (Proverbs 27:1)

Not to Cause Fear, But to Inspire Urgency

I'm not telling you this to make you afraid.

I'm telling you this to wake you up.

Because God's mercy is real. It's available. It's abundant. But it can be rejected. And rejection has consequences.

If you're reading this and you've been putting off repentance, stop putting it off.

- Stop saying "I'll get right with God tomorrow."
- Stop saying "I'll deal with this sin later."
- Stop saying "God understands, He knows I'm not perfect."

Today is the day. Right now is the moment.

"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Not tomorrow. Now.

A Loving Warning

I'm not writing this to condemn you. I'm writing it to save you from hardening your heart.

The same sun that melts wax hardens clay. The same mercy that softens some hearts hardens others.

Don't let yours be hardened.

Don't reject mercy until it's too late.

Come to Him today. While the door is open. While mercy is available.

Because it won't be forever.

Chapter 8: Becoming Merciful – The Call

We've talked about receiving mercy. We've talked about the danger of rejecting it.

Now we come to the part that changes everything.

Becoming merciful.

Because here's the truth: You cannot receive mercy and stay the same. Mercy received becomes mercy given.

And Jesus made this clear:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

Not the other way around. You don't earn mercy by being merciful. You become merciful because you've received mercy.

And the same mercy that forgave you now calls you to become a mercy-giver.

Mercy Received Becomes Mercy Given

This is the rhythm of the Kingdom.

- You receive mercy. You're forgiven. You're given another chance. You're shown compassion you didn't deserve.
- Then you turn and extend that same mercy to others.

Not because you have to earn anything. Because mercy flows. It's like water. It can't be contained. It has to move.

If you've received mercy but you're not giving it, something is wrong. The flow is blocked. And a blocked flow becomes stagnant. Poisonous.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)

Not "forgive us *then* we will forgive." *As we have forgiven.*

The mercy you give is connected to the mercy you receive.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Again)

We've mentioned this story before, but it's the clearest teaching on becoming merciful.

A servant owed an unpayable debt. Millions. Billions. The king forgave him completely.

That same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a few dollars. He choked him. He threw him in prison.

When the king found out, he was furious.

"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:32-33)

Then the king handed him over to the torturers.

Jesus concluded:

"So also my heavenly Father will do to you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35)

This is terrifying not because God is cruel. Because it shows how serious mercy is.

You cannot receive mercy and withhold it. The two are incompatible.

Becoming Merciful Starts with Forgiveness

The most practical place to become merciful is forgiveness.

Someone wrongs you. They hurt you. They betray you.

Your flesh wants revenge. Wants justice. Wants them to pay.

But mercy says: *"I will not give you what you deserve."*

Not because they deserve forgiveness. Because you didn't either.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

As God in Christ forgave you.

- How did He forgive you? Completely.
- How did He forgive you? Freely.
- How did He forgive you? Without you earning it.
- How did He forgive you? Once and for all, not holding it over you.

That's how you forgive others.

Not "I forgive you, but I'll bring it up later."

Not "I forgive you, but I'll treat you differently."

Not "I forgive you, but I won't trust you again."

As God forgave you.

Becoming Merciful Means Withholding What Others Deserve

Mercy is not complicated. It's withholding what someone deserves.

- They deserve your anger. You withhold it.
- They deserve your revenge. You withhold it.
- They deserve to be cut off. You withhold it.
- They deserve to be shamed. You withhold it.

Not because they earned your mercy. Because you didn't earn God's.

And every time you withhold what someone deserves, you're practicing mercy. You're becoming merciful.

Mercy Is Not Weakness

Let me say this again because it's important.

Mercy is not weakness. It's strength under control.

- It takes strength to not retaliate when you've been wronged.
- It takes strength to forgive when you've been hurt.
- It takes strength to absorb an offense instead of passing it on.

Anyone can retaliate. Anyone can seek revenge. That's easy. That's natural.

Mercy is supernatural. It's hard. It's costly. It's the way of the cross.

But it's also the way of Jesus.

"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23)

Jesus had the power to call down legions of angels. He had the authority to destroy His enemies.

He chose mercy.

That's not weakness. That's strength beyond comprehension.

Mercy and Justice

Some people worry that mercy means ignoring justice.

It doesn't.

Mercy doesn't pretend sin didn't happen. Mercy chooses to absorb the cost of that sin instead of passing it on.

- When you forgive someone who hurt you, you're not saying what they did was okay. You're saying, "I'm not going to make you pay for it."
- When you show mercy to someone who wronged you, you're not denying justice. You're offering grace.

Mercy and justice met at the cross. God's justice was satisfied by Jesus's sacrifice. And God's mercy was extended to you.

When you show mercy, you're not ignoring justice. You're bearing the cost yourself.

The Freedom of Becoming Merciful

Here's what I've learned.

Holding onto anger, bitterness, and the desire for revenge doesn't hurt the other person. It hurts you.

- Unforgiveness is a prison you live in.
- Bitterness is poison you drink hoping the other person dies.
- Revenge is a weight you carry that never gets lighter.

Mercy sets you free.

- When you forgive, you're the one released.
- When you show mercy, you're the one who stops carrying the weight.
- When you let go of revenge, you're the one who can finally rest.

The person who wronged you may not deserve your mercy. But you deserve the freedom it brings.

Practical Steps to Becoming Merciful

Let me give you some practical ways to practice mercy.

1. Start with small offenses.

Don't wait for the big betrayals. Practice mercy on the small things. The rude driver. The thoughtless comment. The forgotten promise.

If you can't show mercy on the small things, you won't be able to show it on the big ones.

2. Pray for those who hurt you.

Jesus said: *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*
(Matthew 5:44)

It's hard to stay angry at someone you're praying for. Prayer softens your heart. Try it.

3. Remember what you've been forgiven.

Every time you're tempted to withhold mercy, think about your own debt. How much God has forgiven you.

Let that soften your heart.

4. Speak well of them.

Don't gossip. Don't tear them down. If you can't say something kind, say nothing at all.

5. Give them the benefit of the doubt.

Assume they didn't mean to hurt you. Assume there's more to the story. Assume they're struggling too.

6. Let it go.

Not because they deserve it. Because you need to be free.

A Portrait of a Merciful Person

Let me paint a picture.

A merciful person:

- Forgives quickly, even when it hurts
- Doesn't keep score of wrongs
- Assumes the best about others
- Speaks well of people, even their enemies
- Withholds the cutting word
- Gives second chances (and third, and fourth)
- Doesn't demand their rights
- Lets go of offenses like water off a duck's back
- Reflects the heart of God

That's who you're becoming. Not overnight. But progressively. As you receive mercy and extend it.

Chapter 9: Mercy in Conflict – How to Withhold What Someone Deserves

Conflict is where mercy gets tested.

Anyone can be merciful when everything is peaceful. When people are kind. When no one has wronged you.

But conflict? When someone has hurt you? When you've been betrayed, insulted, overlooked, or attacked?

That's where mercy proves whether it's real.

The Natural Response to Conflict

Let's be honest about what comes naturally.

When someone wrongs you, your flesh wants:

- Revenge. *"They need to pay for what they did."*
- Retaliation. *"I'll hurt them back."*
- Cold shoulder. *"I'll cut them off completely."*
- Gossip. *"I'll tell everyone what they did."*
- Scorekeeping. *"I'll remember this forever."*

None of these are mercy. They're the opposite. They're what the world does.

But you're not called to what's natural. You're called to what's supernatural.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21)

Overcome evil with good. That's mercy.

Mercy Withholds What Someone Deserves

In conflict, mercy looks like this:

- Withholding the cutting word. You want to say something sharp, something wounding. Mercy keeps your mouth shut.
- Withholding revenge. You want to make them pay. Mercy says, "I'll absorb the cost instead."
- Withholding the cold shoulder. You want to ice them out. Mercy keeps the door open.
- Withholding gossip. You want to tell your side of the story to everyone who will listen. Mercy keeps it between you and God (and maybe one wise counselor).
- Withholding permanent judgment. You want to write them off forever. Mercy leaves room for reconciliation.

None of this is easy. None of this is natural.

But this is the way of Jesus.

The Example of Jesus

When Jesus was wronged—and He was wronged more than any of us—He didn't retaliate.

- Betrayed by a friend? He washed his feet anyway.
- Denied by another friend? He restored him after the resurrection.
- Mocked by soldiers? He didn't call down angels.

- Nailed to a cross? He prayed: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34)

That's mercy in conflict. Not because the people deserved it. Because Jesus was merciful.

And He calls you to the same.

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Taking up your cross means dying to your right to revenge. Dying to your need to be right. Dying to your desire to make them pay.

That's the cost of mercy. But it's also the path to freedom.

Practical Steps for Showing Mercy in Conflict

Let me give you practical steps for when you're in the middle of conflict.

1. Pause before you respond.

The first words out of your mouth in anger are rarely merciful. Breathe. Count to ten. Walk away if you need to.

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." (James 1:19)

Slow to speak. Fast to listen. That's the path to mercy.

2. Pray before you act.

Ask God: *"How do You want me to respond to this?"* Ask for mercy in your own heart. Ask for wisdom.

3. Remember your own debt.

Think about how much God has forgiven you. Let that soften your heart toward the person who wronged you.

4. Ask: What do they deserve?

Be honest. They deserve anger. They deserve revenge. They deserve to be cut off.

Then ask: *"What would mercy look like here?"*

Mercy withholds what they deserve. It doesn't give them what they have coming.

5. Choose one merciful act.

You don't have to fix everything at once. Just choose one merciful response.

- Send a kind text instead of a cutting one.
- Bite your tongue instead of saying something you'll regret.
- Pray for them instead of gossiping about them.
- Forgive them in your heart, even if you don't say it to them yet.

One step at a time.

6. Give it time.

Deep wounds take time to heal. You may need to choose mercy daily for weeks or months. That's okay. Keep choosing.

7. Seek reconciliation when possible.

Not always possible. Sometimes the other person isn't willing. Sometimes reconciliation isn't safe.

But when it is possible, pursue it. Mercy doesn't just withhold punishment. It seeks restoration.

What Mercy Is Not in Conflict

Let me clarify some things.

Mercy does not mean:

- Pretending the wrong didn't happen. You can acknowledge the hurt while still withholding punishment.
- Staying in an abusive situation. Mercy does not require you to be a doormat. You can forgive someone and still set boundaries. You can show mercy and still protect yourself.
- Trusting automatically. Trust is earned. Mercy is given. You can forgive someone without trusting them again.
- Reconciling when it's not safe. Reconciliation requires repentance and change from the other person. You can be merciful without reconciling with someone who is still dangerous.

Mercy is not weakness. Mercy is wisdom.

The Difference Between Mercy and Enablement

This is important.

Mercy is withholding what someone deserves.

Enablement is protecting someone from the consequences they need to experience to change.

They look similar, but they're different.

- Mercy forgives the debt. Enablement lends more money.
- Mercy releases the offense. Enablement pretends the offense didn't happen.
- Mercy absorbs the cost. Enablement prevents growth.

You can show mercy without enabling sin. Forgive the person. But don't protect them from the natural consequences that might lead them to repentance.

A Story of Mercy in Conflict

Let me tell you a story.

Two brothers had a falling out. One wronged the other deeply. Betrayal. Financial loss. Public embarrassment.

The wounded brother had every right to be angry. Everyone would have understood if he cut his brother off forever.

But he chose mercy.

Not immediately. It took time. He had to work through the pain. He had to cry out to God. He had to forgive in his heart over and over.

Eventually, he reached out. He didn't pretend the wrong hadn't happened. He didn't minimize it. But he said: *"I forgive you. I'm not going to make you pay for this."*

The relationship wasn't restored overnight. Trust had to be rebuilt. But the door was open. Mercy had made a way.

That's what mercy in conflict looks like. Hard. Costly. But beautiful.

The Freedom of Showing Mercy

Here's what I've learned about showing mercy in conflict.

It doesn't just free the other person. It frees you.

- Unforgiveness chains you to the person who hurt you.

- Bitterness keeps you stuck in the past.
- Revenge keeps you focused on someone else instead of moving forward.

Mercy cuts the chain. It releases you. It lets you move on.

The person who wronged you may not deserve your mercy. But you deserve the freedom it brings.

"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."
(Hebrews 12:15)

Don't let the root of bitterness grow. It defiles you. Not them.

Mercy is the hoe that uproots bitterness before it can grow.

Chapter 10: Mercy for Your Enemies

We've talked about mercy in conflict. Now let's go deeper.

Because the hardest mercy isn't for your friends. It's not even for people who have wronged you but might still reconcile.

The hardest mercy is for your enemies.

The people who hate you. Who have set themselves against you. Who want to see you fail. Who have hurt you intentionally and repeatedly.

Mercy for your enemies. That's where the love of God gets real.

The Hardest Command

Jesus didn't suggest this. He commanded it.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:43-45)

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

Not just tolerate them. Not just avoid them.

Love them. *Pray* for them.

That's the hardest thing Jesus ever asked. And He didn't ask it as a suggestion. He gave it as a command.

Why? Because this is what makes you a child of your Father in heaven.

What Loving Your Enemy Looks Like

Let me be practical. What does it actually mean to love your enemy?

It doesn't mean you feel warm fuzzies toward them. That's not realistic. Love in the Bible is not primarily a feeling. It's action.

Loving your enemy means:

- Wishing them well. Not "I hope they get what's coming to them." Genuinely wanting good for them.
- Praying for them. Not "God, get them." But "God, bless them. Save them. Change them. Help them."
- Doing good to them when you can. If they're hungry, feed them. If they're in need, help them. (Romans 12:20)
- Speaking well of them. Not lying about them. Not exaggerating their faults. Not gossiping about them.

- Forgiving them. Releasing the debt. Letting go of revenge. Choosing not to make them pay.

None of this is natural. It's supernatural. It's only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Example of Jesus

Jesus didn't just teach this. He lived it.

He was betrayed by a friend. Denied by another. Arrested illegally. Beaten. Mocked. Stripped. Nailed to a cross.

And on that cross, He prayed:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

His enemies were killing Him. And He asked the Father to forgive them.

That's love for enemies. That's mercy for the merciless.

And He calls you to the same.

The Example of Stephen

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was dragged before the religious council. Falsely accused. Stoned to death.

And as the stones were crushing his body, he cried out:

"Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Acts 7:60)

Like his Lord. Mercy for his enemies. Even as they killed him.

That's what the Holy Spirit produces in a person who has truly received mercy.

Why Mercy for Enemies Is So Hard

Let me name why this is difficult.

1. It feels unfair. They hurt you. They don't deserve your mercy. And you're right. They don't. Neither did you.
2. It feels like losing. Our flesh wants to win. Wants to get even. Mercy feels like surrender. But it's actually victory. Victory over your own sinful nature.
3. It feels impossible. Some wounds are so deep, the idea of loving your enemy seems laughable. That's when you need the Holy Spirit. With man, this is impossible. With God, all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)
4. It's countercultural. The world says "get revenge." "Don't get mad, get even." "Cut them off." Mercy goes against everything our culture teaches.

But you're not of this world. You're a citizen of a different Kingdom. And in that Kingdom, mercy wins.

The Freedom of Mercy for Enemies

Here's what I've learned.

Holding hatred toward an enemy doesn't hurt them. It hurts you.

- You're the one losing sleep.
- You're the one replaying the offense.
- You're the one carrying the weight.
- You're the one becoming bitter.

Mercy for your enemy isn't just for them. It's for you. It sets you free from the prison of hatred.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21)

Overcome evil. Not by returning it. By doing good.

When you show mercy to an enemy, you break the cycle. You stop the escalation. You become the one who absorbs the offense instead of passing it on.

That's freedom.

The Story of Joseph

Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. They hated him. They betrayed him. They faked his death.

Years later, Joseph rose to power in Egypt. A famine came. His brothers came to beg for food.

They didn't recognize him. But he recognized them.

He had the power to destroy them. They were in his hands. He could have had them executed. Imprisoned. Tortured.

Instead, he wept. He forgave them. He said:

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." (Genesis 50:20)

That's mercy for enemies. Not pretending the evil didn't happen. Trusting that God can redeem it.

The Story of Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who hid Jews from the Nazis. She was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her sister Betsie died there.

After the war, Corrie spoke about forgiveness. One day, a man came up to her. She recognized him. He had been a guard at Ravensbrück. One of the cruelest.

He said: *"I have become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me. Can you forgive me?"*

Corrie later wrote: *"It was the most difficult thing I had ever been asked to do. The hatred for him rose within me. But I knew that forgiveness is an act of the will, not the feelings. I prayed, 'Jesus, help me!' I reached out my hand. And as I did, something happened. A current of love flowed through me. I forgave him."*

That's mercy for enemies. Not easy. Not natural. But possible with God.

Practical Steps for Showing Mercy to Enemies

1. Start with prayer.

You cannot do this in your own strength. Pray: "God, give me mercy for this person. I can't do it on my own."

2. Pray for them specifically.

Jesus said to pray for your enemies. Not generic prayers. Specific ones. "God, bless them. Save them. Help them." It's hard to hate someone you're praying for.

3. Write down the offense.

Get it out of your head and on paper. Be honest about what they did. Then pray: "God, I release this. I choose not to hold it against them anymore."

4. Do one kind thing.

It doesn't have to be big. A text. A prayer. Speaking well of them to someone else. One small act of mercy.

5. Let God be the judge.

You don't have to make them pay. That's God's job. *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* (Romans 12:19)

Trust Him to handle justice. Your job is mercy.

6. Take it one day at a time.

You may need to choose mercy every day for a long time. That's okay. Keep choosing.

A Warning and an Encouragement

Warning: Mercy for enemies is not the same as staying in an abusive situation. You can forgive someone and still set boundaries. You can pray for them and still protect yourself. Wisdom and mercy go together.

Encouragement: When you show mercy to an enemy, you are most like your Father in heaven. *"He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Matthew 5:45)

God shows mercy to His enemies every single day. And He calls you to do the same.

Chapter 11: Mercy and Justice – Do They Conflict?

This is a question that bothers a lot of people.

If God is merciful, how can He also be just?

If I show mercy to someone who wronged me, am I letting them off the hook?

Does mercy ignore justice?

These are good questions. And the answers matter.

The Apparent Conflict

At first glance, mercy and justice seem like opposites.

- Justice says: "You get what you deserve."
- Mercy says: "I'm not giving you what you deserve."

How can both be true? How can God be both just and merciful? How can you be both?

The answer is the cross.

The Cross: Where Mercy and Justice Meet

At the cross, mercy and justice didn't cancel each other out. They embraced.

- Justice demanded that sin be punished.
- Mercy wanted the sinner to be forgiven.

How could both happen?

Jesus.

On the cross, Jesus took the punishment that justice demanded. He absorbed the full weight of God's wrath against sin. Justice was satisfied. The debt was paid.

And because justice was satisfied, mercy could flow. God could forgive you without compromising His justice. The punishment was already served—on Jesus.

"He himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

Propitiation means the wrath-bearing sacrifice. Jesus bore God's wrath so you wouldn't have to.

At the cross, mercy and justice kissed. (Psalm 85:10)

God Is Both Just and Merciful

God doesn't have to choose between being just and being merciful. He is both. Fully. Completely. At the same time.

- He is just. He cannot ignore sin. He cannot pretend evil doesn't matter.
- He is merciful. He loves to forgive. He delights in showing compassion.

The cross is where both are displayed in full.

"God presented him as a propitiation through faith in his blood, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26)

Just and the justifier.

He is just. He doesn't sweep sin under the rug.
He is the justifier. He makes sinners right with Himself.

Both. At the same time. Through Jesus.

What This Means for You

Because God is both just and merciful, you can trust Him.

- You can trust that evil will eventually be punished. Justice will prevail. No one gets away with anything.
- You can trust that mercy is available to you. You don't have to fear His judgment if you're in Christ.

And because God is both just and merciful, you are called to be both just and merciful.

Not one or the other. Both.

You Are Called to Justice and Mercy

The Bible never pits justice against mercy. It calls for both.

The Pharisees were criticized for focusing on minor rules while neglecting "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness."
(Matthew 23:23)

Justice AND mercy. Not justice OR mercy.

So how do you live that out?

Justice Means Not Ignoring Wrong

Showing mercy does not mean pretending sin didn't happen.

- If someone hurts you, mercy doesn't require you to act like it was nothing.
- If someone commits a crime, mercy doesn't mean letting them off without consequences.
- If someone is abusive, mercy doesn't mean staying in harm's way.

Justice acknowledges wrong. Justice names sin. Justice holds people accountable.

You can do all of that and still be merciful.

Mercy Means Withholding What Someone Deserves

While justice names the wrong, mercy withholds the full punishment.

- You can acknowledge that someone hurt you without demanding revenge.
- You can press charges without demanding the maximum sentence.
- You can hold someone accountable without destroying them.

Justice says: "This is wrong."

Mercy says: "I will not make you pay the full price."

Both are needed.

Practical Examples

In relationships:

Someone betrays your trust. Justice says: "That was wrong. There are consequences." Mercy says: "I forgive you. I'm not going to hold this against you forever."

You can do both. You can acknowledge the wrong, set appropriate boundaries, and still forgive.

In parenting:

Your child disobeys. Justice says: "There needs to be a consequence."

Mercy says: "I will discipline in love, not in rage. And when the consequence is over, it's over. I won't hold it against you."

You can do both. Discipline is just. Forgiveness is merciful.

In the church:

A brother or sister sins. Justice says: "This must be addressed. There are steps to follow." Mercy says: "The goal is restoration, not destruction. We want to win our brother back."

You can do both. Church discipline is just. The heart behind it is merciful.

The Danger of Justice Without Mercy

Justice without mercy is harsh. It's legalism. It's the Pharisees who wanted to stone the adulterous woman.

Justice without mercy crushes people. It demands payment without offering grace. It forgets that we ourselves have been shown mercy.

"Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful." (James 2:13)

If you demand justice for others but want mercy for yourself, something is wrong.

The Danger of Mercy Without Justice

Mercy without justice is cheap grace. It's pretending sin doesn't matter. It's letting people off the hook without change.

Mercy without justice enables sin. It protects the offender while the victim suffers. It confuses love with permissiveness.

True mercy doesn't ignore justice. It absorbs the cost of justice.

That's what God did. He didn't pretend your sin didn't matter. He paid for it Himself.

Finding the Balance

How do you find the balance between justice and mercy?

1. Be honest about the wrong. Don't minimize it. Don't pretend it didn't happen.
2. Extend mercy as you've received it. Remember your own debt. Let that soften your heart.
3. Let God be the final judge. You don't have to make sure they get what they deserve. That's God's job.
4. Seek restoration, not destruction. The goal of both justice and mercy should be healing, not revenge.
5. Protect the vulnerable. Mercy to the offender doesn't mean abandoning the victim. Justice protects the innocent.

Chapter 12: Living as a Mercy-Giver

We've come to the end.

We've talked about what mercy is. What it's not. How God shows it. How to receive it. How to extend it to others, even enemies. How mercy and justice work together.

Now the only question left is the one that matters most:

Are you going to live as a mercy-giver?

Not just understand mercy. Not just receive mercy. Not just feel thankful for mercy.

Live it.

Because mercy is not a doctrine to be studied. It's a life to be lived.

The Mercy-Giver's Identity

Here's who you are now.

You are someone who has been shown mercy you didn't deserve. God has withheld what you had coming. He has given you another chance. He has forgiven your debt. He has been patient when you deserved judgment.

That's not just your history. That's your identity.

And because that's who you are, that's how you live.

- You show mercy because you've been shown mercy.
- You forgive because you've been forgiven.
- You withhold judgment because judgment was withheld from you.

Not out of obligation. Out of overflow.

A mercy-giver doesn't have to try to be merciful. Mercy flows out because it's what's inside.

The Mercy-Giver's Posture

The mercy-giver walks through life with open hands.

Not clenched fists, demanding their rights.

Not crossed arms, withholding forgiveness.

Not pointed fingers, accusing others.

Open hands. Receiving mercy. Giving mercy. Letting it flow.

The mercy-giver doesn't keep score. Not with God. Not with others. Not with themselves.

The mercy-giver doesn't demand justice. They've received mercy. They give mercy.

The mercy-giver doesn't hold grudges. They've been released. They release others.

This is not weakness. This is strength. The strength of someone who knows they have nothing to prove because everything has been given.

The Mercy-Giver in Action

Let me paint a picture of what a mercy-giver looks like in daily life.

At home:

- They forgive their spouse quickly, not keeping a list of wrongs.
- They give their children second chances (and third, and fourth).
- They don't bring up past failures in arguments.
- They assume the best about their family members.
- They speak words that heal, not words that wound.

At work:

- They don't gossip about coworkers who have wronged them.
- They give credit to others instead of taking it.
- They're patient with difficult people.
- They don't retaliate when they're treated unfairly.
- They offer grace when someone makes a mistake.

At church:

- They overlook small offenses.
- They speak well of others, especially when they're not in the room.
- They restore those who have fallen, gently.
- They don't gossip about church leaders they disagree with.
- They extend mercy to those who have hurt them.

In the world:

- They pray for their enemies.
- They do good to those who hate them.
- They're known more by their mercy than by their opinions.
- They don't demand their rights at every turn.
- They reflect the heart of a merciful God.

This is not perfection. This is direction. This is what it looks like to live as a mercy-giver.

The Mercy-Giver's Challenge

But let me be honest.

Living as a mercy-giver is hard.

- There will be days when you want revenge, not mercy.
- There will be people who take advantage of your mercy.
- There will be moments when you feel like you've been merciful long enough and it's time for justice.

- There will be situations where mercy feels impossible.

The mercy-giver's challenge is to keep extending mercy anyway.

Not because it's easy. Because it's true.

Not because people deserve it. Because you didn't either.

Not because you feel like it. Because you've been called to it.

The Mercy-Giver's Source

You cannot live as a mercy-giver in your own strength.

You'll run out. You'll get bitter. You'll give up.

The only way to live as a mercy-giver is to stay connected to the Source of mercy.

- Stay in the Word. Let mercy wash over you daily.
- Stay in prayer. Let mercy fill you up.
- Stay at the cross. Never forget how much mercy you've received.
- Stay in community. Let mercy flow through you to others and back to you.

The moment you forget the mercy you've received, you'll stop extending it.

The moment you stop extending mercy, you'll become bitter, judgmental, and hard.

The only way to stay soft is to stay soaked in mercy.

A Final Word

Mercy is the other side of the coin from grace. Grace gives what you don't deserve. Mercy withholds what you do deserve.

Together, they form the heart of God.

And that heart beats in you.

You have been shown mercy beyond measure. Mercy that cost the Father His Son and the Son His life.

Now He asks you to live as a mercy-giver.

- Withhold what others deserve.
- Forgive as you've been forgiven.
- Pray for your enemies.
- Do good to those who hate you.
- Let mercy flow through every part of your life.

Not to earn anything. Because everything has already been given.

This is the merciful life. It's not always easy. But it's always good.

And it's available to you. Right now. Today.