

---

# 5 SHOWING MERCY

*Matthew 5:7; Matthew 18:21-35*

**L**ooking back, we can see that the first four beatitudes reveal a spiritual progression of relentless logic. To begin with, we are to be “poor in spirit,” acknowledging our complete and utter spiritual bankruptcy before God. Next we are to “mourn” over the cause of it, our sin, the corruption of our fallen nature and the reign of sin and death in the world. Third, we are to be “meek,” humble and gentle toward others, allowing our spiritual poverty to condition our behavior to them as well as to God. And fourth, we are to “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” for what is the use of confessing and lamenting our sin, of acknowledging the truth about ourselves to both God and others, if we leave it there?

In the second half of the beatitudes we turn even more from our attitude to God to our attitude to our fellow human beings, beginning with mercy.

## Open

---

■ What have been the effects of mercy in your life?

---

## Study

■ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

---

1. What cause and effect is presented in this beatitude?

---

2. How have you seen an act of mercy lead to more mercy? Give an example.

“Mercy” is compassion for people in need. Jesus does not specify the categories of people he has in mind to whom his disciples are to show mercy. He gives no indication whether he is thinking primarily of those overcome by disaster, like the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho whom robbers assaulted and to whom the good Samaritan “had mercy” (Luke 10:30-37), or of the hungry, the sick and the outcast on whom he himself regularly took pity, or of those who wrong us so that justice cries out for punishment but mercy for forgiveness. God’s mercy extends to all those people, and so must our mercy.

---

3. What risks have you taken in showing mercy to others?

4. What risks do you think others have taken in showing mercy to you?

---

5. Many merciful people are treated indifferently or even cruelly in return—Jesus Christ himself being the chief example. How do you reconcile that inescapable fact of life with Jesus' promise in this fifth beatitude?

Of course the world (at least when it is true to its own nature) is unmerciful, as indeed also the church in its worldliness has often been. The world prefers to insulate itself against people's pains and calamities. It finds revenge delicious, and forgiveness, by comparison, tame. But those who show mercy find it.

**Summary:** Our God is a merciful God and shows mercy continuously; the citizens of his kingdom must show mercy too.

After Jesus gave his disciples what we call "The Lord's Prayer," he said, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). To forgive and to be forgiven, to show mercy and to receive mercy: these belong indissolubly together, as Jesus illustrated in his parable of the unmerciful servant.

6. Read *Matthew 18:21-35*. What was Peter apparently looking for when he asked his question (v. 21)?

---

7. What effect would Jesus' answer have had on Peter (v. 22)?

---

8. In this parable what was the master willing to lose (vv. 23-27)?

---

9. How did the master display the character of God the Father?

---

10. How did the servant's behavior reveal his true attitude toward the master's forgiveness (vv. 28-34)?

11. Verse 35 seems cruel and hard to reconcile with a God of love. In what sense does this verse still reflect the character of a merciful God?

The point of this parable is not that we merit mercy by mercy or forgiveness by forgiveness. The point is that we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we repent, and we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are unmerciful toward the sins of others. Or, interpreted in the context of the beatitudes, it is "the meek" who are also "the merciful." For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for *they* are sinners too.

12. How does the outcome of the servant's actions confirm the truth of Jesus' beatitude (vv. 32-35)?

**Summary:** Nothing moves us to forgive like the wondering knowledge that we ourselves have been forgiven. Nothing proves more clearly that we have been forgiven than our own readiness to forgive.

### Apply

■ What difference has the mercy of other people made in your life?

When are you especially grateful for the mercy of God?

Who can you show mercy to this week?

### Pray

■ Taking the mercy of God and the mercy of other people as your example, pray that your life will continually reflect the mercy which has been shown to you. Thank God for his daily mercy which continues toward you even when other people's mercy is imperfect.