



# ***THE PRAYER CLOSET***

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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## **Blessed Are the Merciful**

In the beatitudes, Jesus challenges the attitudes of the society that we live in. He especially does this in **Matthew 5:7**, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” You may ask, “How does this challenge our culture? Doesn’t everyone want mercy? Doesn’t everybody think that mercy is a good thing?”

Mercy is something that we want, but we often demonstrate contempt for it. Many people live by the slogan, “Don’t get mad; get even.” Instead of offering forgiveness, they seek to get revenge. Sometimes people will only seek reconciliation until the other person shows how truly sorry that he or she is.

Another way we show contempt for mercy is by believing that people get what they deserve. For example, when someone’s sin comes home to roost, we inwardly think, “He’s only getting what he deserves.” Now it may be that someone is suffering the consequences of his sin. Yet, all of our sins have consequences and some of the consequences can be pretty awful. When we feel this way, we show contempt for mercy.

Yet, Jesus is merciful. He treasures mercy. He extends it to sinful people. In addition, He calls on those who believe in Him

to manifest this to others. The Christian is to be different from others. We are to challenge the thinking and feeling of modern society. Our standard is not the standard of the world. It is the

Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. We especially do this when we are merciful in a merciless world.

What does it mean to be merciful? In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine what it means to be merciful and how this applies to believers, the church, and the lost. We will offer suggestions on what to do when it’s hard to show mercy. We will also look at what it means for our prayer lives. May God deepen our experience of and extending mercy to others!

### **What Does It Mean To Be Merciful?**

Mercy means seeing people in the misery of their sin and then doing something about it. Sin has made us miserable and God rescues us from our present and inevitable future misery. God has compassion on us and acts to deliver us from sin’s misery and consequences. We made the bed we lie in and God knows it. God hates to see us in this misery and He acts with mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of God tells us that the coming of Jesus is an expression of “the tender mercy of God” (**Luke 1:78**).

When we experience this mercy through Jesus Christ, we are to extend it to others. We are to respond to people in their sin and their misery. The world responds with unforgiveness, indifference, and delight over sin’s consequences

in people's lives. Christ calls us to a different standard – to be merciful.

What does a merciful person look like? The following are some characteristics of a merciful person:

- *The merciful remember the mercy of God to them.*

The reason that we exercise mercy to others is because we have experienced mercy first from God. God had compassion on us; He was moved to act concerning our sinful, miserable condition. God determined to have mercy on sinners. This determination would lead to the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus went through the most difficult ordeal ever conceived to bring about salvation – deliverance from our sin and our misery.

On the cross, Jesus Christ experienced in His body the punishment that all sinners deserve – all of God's holy, furious, merciless hatred for all our sin, self-absorption, self-reliance, and self-pity. When Jesus was delivered to the Father's wrath, he experienced a form of abandonment that He had never known before. When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46**), He expressed unparalleled abandonment like no one else ever has or ever will.

He and His Father enjoyed the closest possible intimacy because they had existed from eternity as Father and Son. When this relationship was interrupted, the loss was devastating. However, Jesus voluntarily drank the cup of God's wrath that we might bathe in God's mercy.

You may not want to think you're as bad as all that, thinking that Jesus went to more trouble than was necessary. However, it was worse than you or I can know. We are sinners and God is holy. His wrath had to be quenched and Jesus paid that price. He accepted that wrath on the cross that we might experience mercy. Only Jesus knew how bitter that cup was and He sweat blood just thinking about it.

What is more, Jesus did this willingly. He chose to go to the cross. He submitted Himself to the Father's plan to show mercy. He had our sins placed on Him. He received the burning wrath of God in our behalf. He gladly endured God's

wrath for our sin (**Hebrews 12:2**). This is the mercy of the Christian God.

The merciful remember the mercy that God has shown them. The merciful regularly preach the gospel to themselves – that Christ died in our place, suffering our penalty and wrath that we might be forgiven. When you experience that mercy, you are willing to offer it to others. The foundation of our being merciful is the realization and remembrance of God's mercy to us.

This is illustrated to us in the parable of the unforgiving servant (**Matthew 18:23-27**). This is a story about a man who owed his master an enormous amount of money. However, this servant fell at his master's feet and begged for mercy. The master took pity on him and forgave him the debt.

We are like the man in the parable. We owe a debt that we could not pay in a thousand lifetimes. We deserve to go to hell and to experience God's pitiless, unrelenting wrath forever. Yet, God sent Christ to pay our debt. Christ came to deal with our sin and misery by His life, death, and resurrection.

The point of this parable is not just that the servant received mercy that he did not deserve. It is also that he should have shown that same mercy to others (**Matthew 18:28:35**). He should have shown a similar depth of mercy to his fellow servant that owed him a trifling debt.

When we are wronged, we respond with mercy because God has forgiven us. When we see others in the grips of sin's consequences, we are to respond with intentional compassion because God did the same for us. When we see people in misery, we act because God responded to our misery.

The merciful keep in mind the mercy of God. We contemplate the riches of His mercy to us. We remember how God has responded to us. We focus on the fact that we were undeserving and God still had compassion.

This is the only way that we can show mercy to all. Sure, it's easy to be merciful to those you care about. It's easy to have compassion to those who you think deserve it. The world can and does that. Yet, we are called to a higher standard.

We are called to have mercy on *the undeserving, the unworthy*. The only way that we can do this is to be ever mindful of and

contemplate the mercy of God to us. We can never forget the vastness of God's mercy in reaching down to us to save us, rescue us, and forgive us. Our hearts are moved to mercy only to the extent that we ponder the depth and richness of God's mercy to us.

- *The merciful offer unlimited forgiveness to others.*

The merciful absorb the cost of what someone owes them. Think about a towel that you use to wipe up a spill. If the towel does its job, the counter appears completely dry as if nothing ever happened. Mercy is like a towel that absorbs sin so completely, it's as though no one ever committed it.

The merciful are willing to offer this unlimited forgiveness. God has not set a limit on how much sin that He will forgive. God did not determine to forgive sin to a point and then stop. He is willing and able to forgive any sinner. His forgiving grace is not limited to "small" or infrequent sins. He is ready to forgive freely to any who confess and repent of any sin (**Micah 7:18-19**).

Now, if this is true of God's forgiveness, then it must also be true of our forgiveness. No matter how great the sin against us or how frequently a person sins against us, we must still forgive as God has forgiven (**Ephesians 4:32**). We've already dealt with the parable of the unforgiving servant. What prompted Jesus to tell this story. It was a question that Peter asked Jesus. The Word of God says, "Then Peter came to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times" (**Matthew 18:21**).

What was Jesus' answer? The Word of God says, "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (**Matthew 18:22**). Jesus does not mean 490 times (I don't doubt that some people would keep up with how many times they've been sinned against). Jesus refers here to forgiveness with no limits.

Our hearts want to revolt against such reckless and incomprehensible forgiveness. It makes far more sense that those who sin against us should have to pay for what they have done wrong. We have to work hard to have

Jesus' words in **Matthew 18** die the death of a thousand qualifications.

Jesus Christ allows no qualifications, "And when you stand praying, forgive" (**Mark 11:21**). No qualifications. No "If he really grovels" or "If I sense that he/she will be good from now on." Jesus refers to unlimited forgiveness. Christians are not to keep score; we are to forgive without limit.

Unfortunately, all of us limit our forgiveness. We say either aloud or under our breath, "I'll forgive you this time, but you had better not do it again." Yet, the merciful offer forgiveness all the time. The merciful do not restrain their forgiveness; they offer it to the undeserving, the unworthy. No matter how often you are wronged, and no matter what the character of the person who wronged you is like, the Christian is to keep on forgiving.

- *The merciful seek to practice intentional kindness.*

Being merciful has an inward component. We are willing and practice forgiveness. We freely absorb the cost that others owe us when they sin against us. Yet, there is also an outward component. It is practicing intentional kindness. What I mean is that you bless and carry out acts of compassion to the undeserving, the unworthy.

We can see this in the life of Jesus Christ. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks often of mercy (**5:43-48, 9:13, 12:7, 18:21-35, 23:23, 25:31-46**). Yet, we also see this in what Jesus does (**9:27-31, 15:21-28, 17:14-18, 20:29-34**). In the life of Jesus, we see that mercy is an inward feeling that leads to an outward action.

What does this mean for us? It means that mercy requires both forgiveness and charity. We are to forgive others. Yet, we are also exercise charity toward others. When we see people in misery, we are to take tangible steps to alleviate that misery.

We are to have intentional compassion for them. This is illustrated in the life of Jesus. Jesus would look at the crowds and have compassion for them. Then He would heal them. He would feed them. He would teach them. His inward mercy led to tangible ministry to alleviate their suffering and misery. When

Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful,” He calls us to exercise this same charity to people in need. When we see their suffering, we are to act intentionally in tangible ways to meet their need.

I’ve had people ask, “Why should I help someone who is getting what they deserve?” I understand that many times people suffer because of bad choices – the consequences of sin. We all do. However, that’s why it’s “mercy.” Without the recognition of the wrongdoing, there can be no mercy. If we didn’t acknowledge sin, we can’t be “merciful.” The merciful have their eyes wide open – and they go ahead and show compassion. It should be our goal and aim to help people see their wrong choices through our compassionate ministry. Being merciful doesn’t mean you’re soft on sin; it means loving and showing compassion to people in their sin and misery.

- *The merciful know that their need for mercy never ends.*

What does Jesus promise to the merciful? He declares that they will “obtain mercy.” Jesus promises that they will receive mercy. Does He mean that by showing mercy I then can earn it from God? That can’t be. We can’t earn mercy. By its very nature, mercy is for the undeserving. It’s for those who can’t earn it.

So what does Jesus mean? First, He means that we can only be truly merciful when we have received God’s mercy for ourselves. Jesus assumes that your mercy toward others is an infallible sign that you have “already” experienced the mercy of God in your life. Jesus is saying that merciful people show by their attitude and acts that God’s mercy is upon them.

Second, this phrase reveals that the merciful know that they continue to need mercy – that they will never get to the place where they will not need God’s mercy. As we walk with Christ, we grow in our understanding of how undeserving we are. We grow in the knowledge how great God’s mercy is in light of how unworthy that we are.

If we go out in the world and attempt to show mercy – real mercy, not just helping family and friends and those you think deserve it – then we will rapidly come face to face with our own self-centeredness, hard-heartedness, and

indifference. We’ll be challenged by how like the unforgiving servant we really are – who found it easy to accept forgiveness and hard to give even a little forgiveness in turn. Those who are merciful know better than anyone else their own need of mercy. Nothing sharpens our awareness of the need for mercy than showing mercy to others.

## How Do We Apply This Beatitude?

This beatitude speaks to a variety of groups:

### Believers

*This beatitude challenges believers to pray for help to be merciful.*

As I have studied this beatitude, it has driven me to my knees. Being merciful is incredibly difficult. It goes against my natural inclination. It stirs me to pray and seek for the power to say no to my self-centeredness, indifference, and hardness of heart. It motivates me to ask God to make me a conduit of His mercy.

*This beatitude calls believers to stand against the culture.*

This is one of the great differences between Christ’s followers and the world (or at least it should be). Christ followers are to show mercy to the undeserving, the unworthy. The world has mercy for those it thinks are worthy of it. Yet, Christ calls us to extend mercy to the least, the marginalized, the suffering, and the sinful. It’s a reminder of how different we are to be from the world.

*This beatitude reminds us to preach the gospel to ourselves regularly.*

For the Christian, the practice of mercy is rooted in the gospel. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ came, died on the cross for sinners, and was raised from the dead. When He died on the cross, He bore the sin of sinners and received the rightful wrath of God as the penalty and punishment for sin. Anyone who turns from their sin to trust solely in Christ and His death and resurrection is freely forgiven. The good news of the gospel is that we have not got what we deserved. We have been shown mercy through

Christ. We must remind ourselves of this truth regularly. We must preach it to ourselves on a regular basis. As we do this, it reminds us that we were unworthy and undeserving but God had mercy and saved us. Reflecting on this, remembering this, helps us extend mercy to others.

## **Unbelievers**

It may be that you do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You may be considering giving your life to Jesus Christ. Alternatively, you may be wondering, "How can God forgive someone like me?" This beatitude is like a flashing neon sign that you can't miss. These words of Jesus declare that God is full of mercy. He is ready and willing to forgive.

Think about it. If God calls His people to be merciful, what do you think that says about God? God cannot make it clearer – He who calls on His people to be merciful is merciful. Search all the other religions; what other deity calls on its followers to be merciful – to have mercy on those who don't deserve it, to forgive those who are guilty, to bless those who are needy. Search all the philosophies and ideologies of the world. Where do you find unlimited forgiveness and freedom from sin and guilt?

The God of the Bible, the living and only true God, calls on His people to be merciful because He abounds in mercy. He delights in forgiving the guilty. He rejoices in rescuing those who are lost and in misery. He acts in compassion with those who are in need.

You may be saying, "I have all kinds of problems. I've had all kinds of suffering in my life. Why hasn't God helped me?" You have to admit that you have sinned – that you have chosen to go your own way. Mercy is given to the undeserving, the unworthy. First, you have to see that you have sinned against God. You have determined to live apart from Him in your own wisdom and power. There can be no mercy apart from acknowledging one's personal sinfulness and unworthiness. Without the recognition of wrongdoing, there can be no mercy.

Once you recognize and admit this, ask God for mercy. He will manifest that mercy to you. If you are wondering, "Will God have mercy on me?" the answer is "Yes!" The words of Jesus

should encourage your heart and move you to turn to God by faith in Him. Seek God now; confess your sin to Him. Confess that You believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. Express your trust in His Son as your only Savior and Lord. Even now, cry out to God, trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection and asking for His mercy. You will find that He is full of mercy.

## **The Church**

This beatitude has a powerful message for the church. Wherever God's people gather, that place has to be a place of mercy. Jesus calls on His people to be merciful. That must mean at least that among His people, mercy is shown and experienced. The church is to be a refuge of mercy. It is to be a place where the undeserving and unworthy find forgiveness and help.

A person cannot find this in the world. The world is filled with envy, spite, and hatred. The world exalts self-centeredness, indifference, and hardness of heart. True mercy is a precious commodity that one cannot find in the world. Yet, it ought to abound in the church. Mercy and compassion ought to characterize every church where people confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Unfortunately, the church is often no different than the world. Many times the church is self-centered, indifferent, and hardhearted. The great need of the church is to repent of these things and to seek God for the grace and power to be merciful. When we pray for our churches, we must plead with God to help us forsake a lack of mercy and unforgiveness that we might be a conduit of His mercy to those around us.

## **When It's Difficult To Forgive**

As I've prepared this newsletter, I'm well aware of the fact that it's hard to forgive. It is a challenge to respond in mercy when our first inclination is anger and revenge. In no way do I want to downplay the difficulty of being merciful and forgiving in an angry, spiteful world. It is difficult, but it is also our calling as followers of Jesus.

How do you forgive when you don't want to? How do you show mercy when you've been

crushed? The following are some suggestions you might consider in maintaining a forgiving, merciful spirit.

### **Meditate on the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

We've already dealt with this in a previous section. Nevertheless, it applies here. The only way to maintain a merciful heart is to remember and reflect on God's mercy to you. The gospel is a message of God's mercy. It is the fact that God reached down to us and saved us even though we were undeserving and unworthy. If God has done this for us, we must also offer that same mercy to others. When you struggle to forgive, look to Calvary. When you find it difficult to be merciful, remember Jesus hanging on a cross saying, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**). By looking at Jesus and the gospel, it gives us the strength and the courage to be merciful and forgiving.

### **You are a sinner too.**

I'm sure that you don't want to hear that. The reason that I know is that I don't want to hear it either – especially when I've been done wrong. However, it is true nonetheless. We have to remember that we have hurt others. We have sinned against others. We live in a fallen world. It's inevitable. Yet, we have to puncture our pride and admit, "I've done similar things to others." Why is this important? It enables us to deal with others in humility. Rather than being arrogant and condescending, we realize that others have the same sin problem that we do. It helps us deal with the pride that is often a hindrance to offering mercy and forgiveness to others.

### **Your Father knows what has been said and done.**

Many people have confessed to me, "If I forgive, that person will get away with what they have done." I can understand that. Yet, we have to remember that God does know what has been said and done. He is well aware of what has happened. We must not take matters into our own hands but commit them to God's hands, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (**Romans 12:19**). When Paul writes to give place to wrath, it literally means, "make room" for

wrath. We to get out of the way and let God do what He will. God sees and knows that has happened. He will do what is just and right. Commit the situation and the person(s) to Him.

### **There is blessing in forgiving others.**

Forgiving is hard work. It is draining to offer mercy and forgiveness to others. Yet, we have to remember that there is great blessing in forgiving others. What are some of the blessings that come to those who forgive, to those who offer mercy to others? The following are some of these blessings:

- You delight your Father's heart who had mercy on you;
- You have evidence of true salvation – you offer the mercy you have experienced;
- You give a powerful testimony to the good news of Jesus;
- You do not give Satan an opportunity to work in your life or the life of others;
- You participate in God's work of dealing with those who have done you wrong (**Romans 12:20-21**);
- You save yourself from hours and days of grief, pain, and frustration;
- You cultivate the ability to forgive and show mercy; the more you do these things, the more you grow in the ability to exercise them;
- You grow in your conformity to Christ and His Word;
- You pave the way for the possible restoration of the relationship.

### **Praying Romans 12:9-21**

In this issue, we have looked at what it means to be merciful and how it applies to us. Finally, I want to examine what it means for our praying. There is an intimate connection between mercy and prayer. In fact, without mercy, it is useless to pray (**Mark 11:25**). To maintain a clear line of communication with the Father, we must walk in forgiveness and mercy toward others.

One of the best passages I know of to help us pray concerning this issue is **Romans 12:9-21**. The following is a prayer guide that can help you to pray for yourself and for your church. This text reveals how to cultivate and maintain a merciful,

forgiving spirit in spite of the culture's attempt to force us into its unforgiving character.

Father, I plead that my love will be sincere; deliver me from any hypocrisy (12:9).

Father, I pray that I will hate what is evil. Enable me to cling to what is good (12:9).

Lord God, I ask that I will be devoted in brotherly love to my brothers and sisters in Christ. Let that same love flow out to those I come into contact with (12:10).

Father, I plead that I will honor others above myself. Deliver me from a spirit of self-exaltation in my words and actions (12:10).

Father, guard me against lacking in zeal for You, Your Word, and for others. I plead that You will renew and stir my spiritual life, empowering me to serve and glorify You (12:11).

Father, help me to rejoice in hope. Renew my hope and let me walk daily in the hope that I have in You (12:12).

Father, I ask that You will unleash Your strength in me that I might endure tribulation. I especially pray that You will help me to endure when people sin against me (12:12).

Father, by the power of Your Spirit, I plead that I will be faithful and effective in prayer. I especially ask that I will pray powerfully for others. Help me persevere in prayer (12:12).

I plead in Jesus' name that You would energize me to share with God's people. I ask that I would be hospitable to both believers and those who don't know Jesus Christ (12:13).

Father, when I'm persecuted, I plead that I will bless. I ask that I would extend mercy. Deliver me from anger and cursing others. Strengthen my faith to do this and to glorify Your name in this (12:14).

Father, I pray that I will rejoice with those who rejoice. Set me free from envy and self-centeredness that would prevent me from doing

this. I ask that I will mourn with those who mourn. Rescue me from the hardness of heart that would hinder me from doing this. I pray that I will be a conduit of Your mercy to those who rejoice and those who mourn (12:15).

Father, I plead that I would not be proud and condescending. Cleanse me and root out of my life the arrogance that would keep me from blessing and showing mercy to others. O God, save me from being wise in my own eyes (12:16).

Father, I pray in Jesus' name that I will not repay evil with evil. Help me to do what is right. Strengthen me to show mercy and to extend compassion (12:17).

Father, grant me the grace and help to live peaceably with others. When that's not possible, endue me with power to show kindness and compassion (12:18).

Father, I ask that I will not take revenge but will make room for You to do Your work. I commit those who do me wrong into your hands, believing that You will take care of me and do what is right (12:19).

Father, help me to intentionally bless those who sin against me. I pray that You would give me the wisdom and help to take tangible steps to show mercy to them (12:20).

Father I pray that I would not be overcome by the evil of others but that I would overcome evil by doing good. Help me, Father, to do this (12:21).

## Prayer Closet News

We continue to move forward on completing the ministry center. We still have to get gravel around the facility, insulate the building, and have the floor sealed and stained. After these things, we hope to move in. We are praying for the financial provision to complete these things and pay off the note.

I am in the process of developing a "Praying For Your Church Daily Devotional." It offers a Scripture prayer each day of the year for your local church. At the same time, I'm

developing new prayer rings. One will focus on praying in a crisis and praying for your child. I'm also working on prayerwalking and evangelistic materials.

Please continue to pray for this ministry and for me. I covet your prayers more than I can express. I need your prayers. Our goal at The Prayer Closet is to glorify God and to transform lives with God's Word and prayer. Please prayerfully consider giving to help this ministry fulfill that purpose. Your donations go straight to ministry. Your gift will make a difference in the lives of people across the world. This is a faith ministry; we trust God to meet our needs through the giving of His people.

I thank God for you and pray that as you read this newsletter and use our materials God will speak to you, touch you, and transform your life. God richly bless and keep you!

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