

3 Ways to Show God's Mercy

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

An old man was walking the beach early one morning, bending down to pick up starfish and throwing them out into the ocean. A teenager came by and asked, "Old man, what are you doing?"

"These starfish will die of dehydration once the sun comes up high," he said. "I'm throwing them back into the ocean so they will live."

"Ha!" the young man spat sarcastically. "The beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish. What does it matter what you do?"

The old man looked at the starfish in his hand and then flipped it to safety in the waves. "It matters to this one," he said.

What you do for others does make a difference. Your acts of mercy matter. Are you a person of mercy?

Jesus, Our Model of Mercy

Whatever Jesus asks of us, He Himself demonstrates.

People turned to Him for mercy. Blind men, parents with demon-possessed children, lepers—all came pleading for mercy (Matt. 9:27, 15:22, 17:15; Luke 17:13). Why were they drawn to Jesus? Because He had a reputation for being merciful. Jesus responded with compassion—whether it be the crowds who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36), individuals with terminal diseases (Mark 1:40-44), or a widow accompanying the body of her only son to the cemetery (Luke 7:13).

As with all the Beatitudes, Jesus lived the principles He

taught. And teach mercy, He did.

A man was condemned when his own huge debt was forgiven, but he then refused to show mercy to another who owed him only a few cents (Matt. 18:21-35). The rich man who ignored the needs of the beggar Lazarus is condemned (Luke 16). Those who show mercy by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned—they are rewarded by the Lord (Matt. 25:31-46).

Practical Steps Toward Being Merciful

The parable of the good Samaritan represents the essence of Jesus' teaching on mercy. Some live with the attitude, "What's mine is mine, and you can't have it." That's the perspective of the priest and Levite who pass by the wounded man. Others have the attitude of the robbers, "What's yours is mine if I can get it"; they don't care what happens to people so long as they get what they want. The attitude of Jesus is that of the good Samaritan, "What's mine is yours if you need it."

The good Samaritan lays out for us the steps to becoming a compassionate person. First, if you desire to show mercy, you must see the one who needs mercy. The priest and Levite saw and passed by on the other side. They saw but did not truly see. The Samaritan saw him—not just another statistic of violence or one among many victims—but the person. You must pray that God will give you eyes to see the person who needs your help.

Second, if you desire to show mercy, you must let your feelings play a significant role. The good Samaritan "took pity on him" (Luke 10:33). He could have played it safe by rationalizing that as a member of another race, religion or culture, he was the wrong person to help. But he let the emotion of compassion influence his behavior.

Third, a person of compassion doesn't just think about doing something—he or she takes action. The good Samaritan "went to

him." The merciful person moves outside of his or her own hurt to alleviate the hurt in another. The good Samaritan had experienced plenty of pain, rejection and discrimination against him, which he could have used as justification for doing nothing for anyone else. But the merciful person spends his resources to make someone else's life better. The good Samaritan used his first-aid kit, his animal, his money for room and board, and his time in helping the half-dead man regain his well-being.

Sometimes we may justify our failure to show mercy by saying, "Well, I just can't help everybody." That's true. But God has put people in your life whom you can help. Do you see them? Do you feel for them? Are you doing anything on their behalf? Those who give mercy will also receive it ... from God.

George O. Wood *is the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God.*