

Seize Your Opportunities to Show Mercy to Others

Webster's Dictionary defines *mercy* as "kindness in excess of what might be expected or demanded of fairness."

Mercy is not fair, but it's godly. Not fair, but powerful. Not fair, but Christlike.

And when we do what God leads us to do, He always brings justice into our life. To honor God in this area, we need to learn to trust Him more fully. Every single one of us has opportunities to do that each day...with friends and family, coworkers and even the clerk at the grocery store.

Whenever people hurt or disappoint us, our human nature leads us to dislike them because of their shortcomings. But God's desire for us is to love all people, including our enemies (see Matt. 5:43-48).

If they can see love in your heart...instead of anger and judgment...that shows them "kindness in excess of what might be expected." More importantly, it gives them hard evidence that Christ is working in you! I believe one of the greatest privileges we have in life is to follow His example, and we can do that by being generous in spirit, giving mercy to others, as they need it.

Quit Keeping Score

When someone hurts or offends us, it's easy to make a list and keep count of everything they've ever done wrong. But God is asking us to be like *Him*.

Lamentations 3:22-23 tells us that God's mercies are new every morning. In Isaiah 43:25 He says, "I am He who blots out your transgressions...and remembers your sins no more"(NIV).

When my husband, Dave, and I were newly married, I was pretty good at keeping score. Every time we had an argument, I would bring up *every single thing* he ever did to me since the day I met him.

I'll never forget one day, after I recited my list, when Dave looked at me and said, "Where in the world do you keep all that stuff?"

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I've learned that the best thing we can do for ourselves is to let go of the hurt...to lose count of how others have wronged us...and leave the past in the past.

The "Why" Behind the "What"

I always say that mercy understands the "why" behind the "what." It cares about the person, not just what they've done to us.

Let's say you walk into a grocery store and the checkout clerk is grouchy with you and has a sour look? You have a choice...

You can say, "I don't appreciate your attitude. I am a customer here and I don't like the way you're acting. I'm going to tell your manager."

Or you can be merciful and say, "It looks like you're having a hard day. I just want to say that God loves you and really cares about you." Choose to believe the best about that person and realize they are upset for a reason.

When someone hurts us, our first inclination is to think, "You're not going to treat *me* that way. And if you think you're going to get by with it, you have another thing coming!"

However, it helps to remember that everyone who acts badly is hurting in some way.

When I first met Dave, I had a lot of problems from the sexual and emotional abuse I endured growing up. I was wounded and hurting, and it seemed like every other day I was starting an argument or saying something I regretted.

Because Dave already had a strong relationship with the Lord, he continuously showed me mercy and loved me, in spite of my behavior. No matter how badly I acted the night before, he wasn't mad the next morning. He didn't let my behavior change *his* character.

You Reap What You Sow

Luke 6:36-37 says, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged...Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (NIV).

We reap what we sow, and whatever we give away to others is what we'll receive in return. If you want mercy, then give (sow) mercy. If you need a friend, then sow friendliness. If you have financial needs, then look for ways to meet someone else's needs.

It's easy to judge. I cringe when I look back at the critical, judgmental person I used to be. In fact, before I was a serious Christian, judging others was one of my favorite things to do. I would sit at the mall and watch people walk by, sizing them up and thinking negative things about their clothes, hair, or the people around them.

But the Bible says, "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37 NKJV). I wasn't only sowing bad seed; I was making *myself* miserable by not walking in love and believing the best of others.

The truth is, when we sow mercy, we reap a harvest of peace, joy and healthy relationships. We also take a giant step

forward spiritually. Because choosing to do what's right—even when it hurts—causes us to grow and mature in an amazing way.

So...who will you give new mercies to today?

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