

Russell Kelfer

The Purpose of Mercy

534-B

Series: The Beatitudes



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

The Purpose of Mercy

This is the study of the fifth Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” The last lesson touched on three parts of the study: 1) the divine law of mercy; 2) the divine quality of mercy; and 3) the divine ingredients of mercy.

THE DIVINE LAW OF MERCY

The divine law of mercy was outlined in Matthew 5:7 and can also be divided into three parts.

Principle 1- To be merciful is a commandment. In Luke 6:36 we read,

Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.
(Luke 6:36 NKJV)

In Luke 10 when the men asked who was their neighbor, Jesus replied,

And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.”
(Luke 10:37 NKJV)

It is a commandment. It is not an accessory that can be ordered from the factory if the need arises. It is not an expression of those who have a particular spiritual gift. It is a divine imperative to every Christian. Be merciful.

Principle 2- “Boomerang Principle” In the last lesson, we discussed the fact that the boomerang principle means that there are general, basic laws in nature and basic laws in Scripture. Some are called cause and effect. If rain falls, crops can grow. If there is no rain, crops don’t grow. This is cause and effect. Scripturally, the Word says,

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. (Cause and effect.) (Psalm 119:11 NKJV)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; (Cause and effect.) (Matthew 7:7 NKJV)

Then there is the same principle carried on in the negative realm of reaping and sowing. We looked at the Scripture:

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For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption,
(Galatians 6:8a NKJV)

So the principle is that when we sow sinful acts and attitudes, we will of the flesh reap the results of it. But there are in addition to that, specific laws in Scripture. These laws say that in certain areas of life you will receive directly in proportion to the measure of your attitudes and actions. We listed four of them.

Law 1- Judging - The Scripture says,

Judge not, that you be not judged. (Matthew 7:1 NKJV)

The measure with which you judge is the measure by which you shall be judged. The Spirit of condemnation you have will reap from others bitter judgment.

Law 2- Giving - We don't fully understand it, but the Scripture does say that proportionate to your cheerful, sacrificial giving, God will give back to you in some special way to meet your needs.

Law 3- Forgiveness - The Scripture specifically teaches us that we will be forgiven in proportion to that which we forgive others, and that your offenses will go unforgiven if you hold grudges toward others. We may not fully understand the manner in which this is manifested, but we do know that the Word doesn't lie.

Law 4- Exercising Mercy - This is where we begin this lesson. The degree to which we express mercy to others is the degree to which mercy will be shown to us.

Principle 3- It produces self-contained joy. Oh what joy, what bliss for the merciful. So it is a commandment, a boomerang, and a joy. It means that by being merciful, you honor God who in turn blesses you, which in turn changes you. You can't lose there. We see:

The merciful man does good for his own soul,
(Proverbs 11:17 NKJV)

DIVINE QUALITY OF MERCY

If that is how it works, how can we define it? We will complete our review by reminding ourselves that mercy, M-E-R-C-Y can stand for Ministering Empathy Resulting from Christ in You. Experientially, this is love with hands attached. This is the love that says, "I understand and I care, because God understands and God cares." Theologically, the Greek word is eleao which means "actively compassionate, not merely unhappy for the ills of others, but desiring to relieve them". It is not merely pity, but

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beneficent aid promptly applied. It means love with feet attached. Mercy.

In the last lesson, we looked at the merciful Samaritan. I don't like to call him the Good Samaritan, because it indicates that within himself he possessed that which was good. Jesus concludes this story with the question, "Which of these was his neighbor?" The disciples replied, "He that showed mercy." Jesus then told them, "Go and do likewise." Jesus wanted them to learn that if they wanted to know about mercy, they could remember the story of the Merciful Samaritan.

DIVINE INGREDIENTS OF MERCY

As we discussed this story in the last lesson, we discovered seven basic ingredients of mercy.

1- Empathy of spirit. The Scripture says "he saw his brother lying beside the road, and he had compassion on him."

2- Empathy without condemnation. He didn't say, "Now you got what you deserved." He desired to meet the needs of a stranger.

3- Empathy of spirit without condescension. He was not too good to help.

4- Empathy by an act of the will. The Samaritan did something to help. The Scripture says, he went to him. That is the part most of us omit.

5- Empathy resulting in action to alleviate suffering. We see that the Samaritan picked up the injured man, put him on the donkey, followed him to town, met his needs, left him at the inn and took care of the financial needs to help him recover.

6- Empathy with cheerfulness. We looked at Romans 12:8 which encourages those who show mercy to do so with cheerfulness.

7- Empathy to completion. The Samaritan finished the job. He stayed with the injured man overnight to meet his needs. In the morning, he told the innkeeper he would take care of any financial needs until the man was recovered.

MERCY, THE PARALLEL

The best way to relate mercy is to look at Calvary. The best way to relate to anything is to look at Calvary. If you look at

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Calvary, you will see perfect mercy in action. We can parallel Jesus' actions with the Samaritan's.

Parallel 1- Jesus looked at us, and His heart went out to us. The Scripture says that He looked at Jerusalem and wept. He also looked at us with compassion, because we were like a sheep without a shepherd.

Parallel 2- Jesus, while we were yet sinners, died for us. He didn't come to judge us nor condemn us, He came to save us. He had empathy without condemnation.

Parallel 3- Jesus looked at us without condescension. Scripture teaches,

who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

but made Himself of no reputation, (made Himself nothing)
(Philippians 2:6,7 NKJV)

He laid aside His robes of righteousness to do it Himself on our behalf.

Parallel 4- By an act of the will, with His face like flint, He desired to do the will of God. Jesus said,

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

(Matthew 6:10 NKJV)

He was not an unwilling prisoner being dragged to the cross. By an act of His will He said, "I will go." On the cross Jesus said,

...into Your hands I commit My spirit... (Luke 23:46 NKJV)

Jesus willingly gave up His spirit and separated Himself from the Father for a time for our sake.

Parallel 5- This resulted in action to alleviate personal suffering. He bore our sins and separated Himself. He didn't talk about it. He didn't draw diagrams of it. He just did it.

Parallel 6- He did it with cheerfulness. Never was there uttered from the lips of Jesus a begrudging word.

Parallel 7- He did it to completion. He stayed there until He could say,

It is finished!

(John 19:30b)

He paid the price until there was no more to pay. Then He said,

I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV)

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In other words, “I will stay with you to make sure that you are always secure and safe.” That is mercy.

THE STEPS OF MERCY

Using this formula, suppose you meet a person with a problem. It may be someone who is grieving over their children, over their marriage, over their finances or over their job. Imagine in your mind’s eye these steps.

Step 1- Empathy. You ought to hurt nearly as much as they hurt. You need to weep with those who weep. You can’t hurt as much as they do. The Scripture says in Proverbs that no man fully know another’s hurts, but you can enter, to a large degree, into the hurt of that person. If they are having problems with their children, you can imagine in your mind’s eye going through what they have gone through. If you have already been through a similar situation, you can imagine it a lot more than the rest of us. The cost that God paid in giving His own Son gave us the ability to enter in emotionally, intellectually and spiritually into the thoughts of what they may be going through.

Step 2- You can do this without condemnation. They may be partially responsible. They may even be totally responsible for the problem in their life. Your responsibility may eventually be to counsel and help correct them, but at this point in time your responsibility is not to condemn. It is to minister to their needs. You may not have all the facts.

Step 3- We need to show mercy without condescension. It doesn’t matter who they are. It doesn’t matter where they live. It doesn’t matter how spiritual you think they are or aren’t. It doesn’t matter how dirty they may be. The key is that they have a need. They may not be impressed with your spirituality. They don’t need to be impressed with your spirituality to be attracted to your spirit.

Step 4- We need to do it as an act of our wills. Go where they are. Don’t say, “Call me if you need me.” Go to where their needs are and listen to them.

Step 5- To show mercy is to try to alleviate their suffering. Listen to what they have to say. Find what their greatest needs are and then be willing to pay the price to meet them. They may need a friend. Be a friend. They may need money. Give. They may need counsel. Help. They may need tangible help like someone

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to keep the children, someone to clean the house, someone to drive the car. They may need direction. They may need someone to help put the pieces in place and give them purpose. They may need encouragement. They may need someone to just tell them that God cares. Whatever they need, you are to be there to help alleviate their suffering. You are there to offer mercy.

Step 6- We need to do it joyfully. Stay on your knees until your heart tells you that this is good.

Step 7- Stick with it until the job is finished. We need to complete the job so that God can say, “Well done thy good and faithful servant.” Then the job is finished.

MERCY, THE PITFALS

So mercy is an active demonstration of love that moves into a life to help alleviate suffering. There are three dangerous pitfalls in following after any overt commandment of God.

Problem 1- To keep your heart attitude pure. We need to not get proud or do so out of the wrong motivation. I will remind you that Scripturally, you do not wait until your emotions say that your motives are right. You obey for the sake of obedience all the while pleading with God to change your heart.

Problem 2- As you obey any commandment of God, remember the source of your strength and your power.

Problem 3- We need to remember the objective and not get crosswise in the middle of fulfilling it and forget why God is having you do it.

Now remember that the source of all mercy is God. It begins with God, and it ends with God. He imparts mercy to you, so that you might express it to another, who will in turn give glory to God in order that He, in turn, can bless you with more mercy. You can't lose. This is the cycle of mercy as it comes from God.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

I want to give you some key points to remember. We will then conclude this lesson as we deal with the most important factor in this study.

Mercy is a divine attribute of God. You don't get it anywhere else. Exodus 34:6 is a passage in which Moses said, “God, I want to see Your face.” God said, “No, Moses, you can't handle it, but

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if you stand behind that rock, I will pass and will let you see My back. You will at least see a little bit of My glory, and I will tell you who I am.” Moses did that and God passed by in a cloud. God turned to Moses and said, “Here is My calling card. Put it in your file. For future reference you will want to know who I am. This is My name.”

The name in Scripture always means that these are the attributes of one’s character. God turned to Moses and said, “I am the Lord thy God, Mercy.” This is a divine attribute of God. God said, “Moses, do you want to know who I Am? My name is Mercy.” You can never take that quality away from God. You can never receive that quality from anyone but God. Psalm 106:1 says,

His mercy endures forever. (Psalm 106:1)

This is an eternal quality that can only come from an eternal God.

“I am the Lord and that is My name. My glory I will not give to another.” (Isaiah 42:8)

God alone owns mercy. Psalm 62:12 says,

Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; (Psalm 62:12a NKJV)

That is the source of it.

God’s mercy is over all of His creation. It is also available to all of His creation.

The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all of His works. (Psalm 145:11)

For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You. (that means anyone.) (Psalm 86:5 NKJV)

It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions never fail, they are new every morning, Great is Thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22)

God’s mercy can only be received by those who receive His Son. It is an attribute of His own character which cannot be received anywhere else. It is over all and available to all. The Scriptures say,

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those that fear Him. (Psalm 103:11 NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13 NKJV)

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In other words, the mercy of God is great.

Think about twelve people standing out in a rain storm. One of them has a bucket. The one with the bucket is going to get something. The others are just going to get wet. God's mercy is over all of His creation, but the only ones with buckets to receive it are those who are His children.

Only Christians can show true mercy. The world can exercise charity, but only Christians can show mercy. If you are not a Christian and haven't received mercy, you can't share mercy. Mercy originates from God and is given to the believer. The believer shares it with others, who in turn glorify God, which then gives Him the capacity to exercise more mercy. However, the natural man does not receive things of the Spirit, neither indeed can he, because they are spiritually discerned. So the natural man has the charity that originates with self, rather than the mercy which originates with God. The natural man shares the charity, which originates within himself, and the receiver of that charity in turn glorifies the giver, the originator of the charity. They glorify the natural man, and that brings no glory to God. Mercy then can only be shown by Christians, because only Christians have it.

Mercy is to be demonstrated in particular by priority, to some more than others. Now it is obviously impossible to live your entire life showing mercy to everyone. You have other responsibilities, although we are not nearly as limited as we think we are; but we need to remember that the Scripture teaches that there are some needs that are greater than others. There are four things to consider.

1- One primary reason for the showing of mercy is to be a witness to an unbelieving world. You are to show mercy to unbelievers for a particular reason that we will discuss later in this lesson.

2- You are to show mercy even more so to believers. Galatians 6:10 says,

Do good unto all men especially those of the household of faith.

As great as your responsibility is to the world, you have an even greater responsibility within the body of Christ. Why is this? We can turn to 1 Timothy and see why it is so terribly important that we exercise mercy properly within the body of Christ.

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This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, (patience) as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (I Timothy 1:15,16 NKJV)

One reason that mercy should be shown to the brethren is that the unbelieving world, seeing the mercy of God on behalf of His people, is amazed. So we are to show mercy especially to those in the household of faith.

3- We are to show mercy, first of all, to those with the greatest of needs. Hosea 14:3 says,

...for in You the fatherless find mercy. (Hosea 14:3 NKJV)

If you want to do a study on God's particular care for widows, orphans and prisoners, there are a number of Scriptures that instruct us in these areas. In other words, God takes special notice of special needs and issues forth special mercy. We are to do the same. Here we see:

For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy on His afflicted. (Isaiah 49:13 NKJV)

4- Not only are we to be especially merciful to those with a greater need, we are to also be especially merciful to those who understand that they have a need. We have to be sensitive, because some people don't want help. Some people aren't ready for help. Some people will resent help. If you crash your way in with both feet and say, "I'm going to be merciful to you buddy. Just sit down and be quiet, because I'm going to show mercy to you whether you like it or not." That is not God's way. God is quietly available, reaching, reaching, reaching. The minute a person's heart turns toward Him, He reaches and draws them to ever show them mercy. He takes the offensive when He knows man is ready to respond.

So many of us are insensitive. We want to get stars in our crowns. We want to get Brownie points. We want to be able to share with others that we have been merciful. We pick some poor, unsuspecting soul with a problem. They may not want any help, or we may not really be ready to help, but we are going to help them anyway. We call it mercy when it is not. We need to find those who have the greatest need and know it.

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In Matthew 9:10-13, Jesus says that those who are sick are the ones that need a doctor. He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came for those people who know that they have a problem. In Luke 15:18-20 is the story of the Prodigal Son. We see that the father showed great mercy and compassion, because the son admitted his sin against his father and against heaven. The son was open and ready. The moment was right and the father showed mercy.

5- Christians can and should ask God for mercy. Hebrews 4:16 says,

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace and find mercy and grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Go to God and say, "Help Lord, give me mercy and give me mercy to give to others." We can also look at I Timothy 1:2 to see one of many places where Paul prayed specifically, "Grace and mercy to you." He prayed for mercy for other believers.

6- How do we display mercy? Mercy can best be seen by finding Jesus in the same situation. That is what we will do in the next lesson. For the conclusion of this lesson, we need to understand that it is necessary to understand these principles. It is necessary to be constantly reminded that all of our mercy comes from God. The glory for it should always go back to God.

7- What is the reason behind mercy? Mercy begins with a need. A friend tries to meet that need in Christ. Why? You may have a neighbor who is not a Christian. He is hungry. He has a problem. You are going to meet that need in Christ. Why? What is the reason behind it? I want to remind you that mercy is not an end within itself. It is a means to an end. Man is sick. He needs a doctor. You can pick him up off the street and nurse his wounds without treating the disease. He could then be worse off than he was before. He might think that he is cured. He might think you are the doctor.

We need to complete our definition of mercy:

Mercy is the essence of God tangibly expressed through the people of God for the purpose of the glorifying of God.

It is meeting physical and emotional needs to give opportunity for the meeting of spiritual needs. God is the Great Physician. Man has two great problems. One is vascular, and one is cardiac. If we are honest with ourselves, even the vascular problem is from

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a messed up heart. Man has a heart that is deceitfully wicked, who can know it? It is pumping garbage to the brain. So man really has one basic problem. Our call is to become an assistant to the world's greatest heart specialist, Jesus Christ. We are his R.N.'s, Registered Neighbors, called alongside to be available. Our job description is to prepare them for surgery and nurse them back to health. That is it.

Ultimately, Jesus Christ did not come to clothe the world. He did not come to feed the world. He did not come to heal the world. He did not even come to save marriages. He delights to do all of those things, but He came to "seek and to save that which was lost". You can clothe someone, you can feed them, you can heal them and even help put their marriage back together, but if you do not show them Jesus, what shall it profit them? They can gain the whole world and have nothing. In fact, we need to remember that sometimes God makes us hungry and allows sickness and a troubled marriage to bring us to Himself.

This is where the church of Jesus Christ in some quarters has lost direction. We see Christian hospitals in Jesus' name healing the body and in many cases not seeking to reconcile the spirit. I believe that though their works may be good, they may be under greater condemnation than secular institutions for two reasons. First, people leave there thinking that their greatest needs have been met. That is a lie. Secondly, because it was done in Jesus' name, and they were never told who Jesus is. Do you see the responsibility?

You and I can be guilty of the same thing. We need to listen to Jesus when He healed. We need to listen to Jesus when He served. We need to listen to Jesus when He cared. We need to find out why he healed, why he served, why He cared. Matthew 1:21 says,

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, (why?) for He will save His people from (what?) their sins. (Matthew 1:21 NKJV)

We can also look at Matthew 9,

So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.

Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

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And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!”

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”

For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’

But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

And he arose and departed to his house.

Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

(Matthew 9:1-8 NKJV)

Let’s also turn to John 9. We see the story of the man who was born blind. Jesus then touched him and healed him. The man and his parents were confused as to why he had been born blind. They wondered if it was caused by sin in their lives. In verse 25 the man answered, “I don’t know if He is a sinner or not, but one thing I do know: I was blind, but now I can see.” Jesus had performed a miracle and had mercy on him. Then the people asked how Jesus did it. He answered them and said, “I told you already but you weren’t listening. Maybe you want to be one of His disciples.” They then reviled him and got angry. The man answered them,

Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.

Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind.

If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”

They answered and said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”

And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.”

Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.

(John 9:31-38 NKJV)

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This is why the man was healed. This is mercy. God met his physical need to make him aware that there was a God who could meet his spiritual needs. When his sins were forgiven, he was healed.

We can look at John 17 to see Jesus speaking to the Father.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent

(John 17:1-3 NKJV)

This is the reason that a cup of cold water "in His name" makes the difference. "In His name" means in harmony with His purpose which is to seek and to save that which is lost. For Christians, His purpose is to come to know Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering.

Do a study on the passages in the Old Testament that have tucked in the context of the verse, "that they might know that I am God." This phrase is repeated often. You will find out that is why they won wars, that they might know He is God. He stopped the mouths of lions that they might know that He was God. He parted the sea that they might know He was God. He destroyed through plagues, He healed the lepers, He raised the dead, He gave sight to the blind, He touched those who were grieving that they might know that He is God. That is mercy. It is an act of kindness that allows men to know that God is.

This is why giving to missions and giving to the United Fund is not the same thing. You can take boys off the street. You can heal the sick. You can do good to your fellow man, but if you leave him in his sins without a personal knowledge of God, you may have left him a little better equipped for certain things in life, but with no hope for eternity. You may have removed the very thing that would have led him to God, in the first place, and never lead him to God at all.

The goal of God is mercy. He wants you to heal. He wants you to help. He wants you to feed. He wants you to clothe. He wants you to love. He wants you to care. He wants you to counsel. This gets people to the doctor's office. All the while, you need to

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maintain that sensitive spirit that when the time is right, you show them The Doctor. The unbeliever needs to meet Him, or whatever else you do for him is useless. He needs to be born again. The believer needs to come to trust Him completely in ever increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another. You need to show him. As you do that, you are extending mercy.

In the next lesson, we will see how to do just that. We will only look at one example. His name is Jesus. You may ask, “How do I show mercy to a hungry man?” We are going to just look at Jesus to see how He did it. You may say, “How do I show mercy to a sick man?” We are going to see how Jesus did it. How do you show mercy to the grieving? Let’s see what Jesus did and said. We will see how Jesus showed mercy to the poor, to the rich, to an enemy, to a backslider, and to one who was lonely.

Ask God for a chance to express the mercy of God to someone else. Find someone with a real need. Put your shoes on, put your hat on, put your heart right and get ready to go. Enter into their hurt without condescension or condemnation. By an act of your will, help to alleviate their suffering. Do this cheerfully to completion, all the while pointing them to Jesus Christ. The promise is, Oh, what bliss will be yours.

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