

HAVE MERCY!
AGAINST THE GRAIN - Part 6
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you today. Whether you are here in the room, or whether you are watching us online, it is always good to be able to gather together around the Word of God, and I hope you have come prepared to hear from the Lord and from His Word this morning.

Before we get into the study this morning from Matthew Chapter 5, I just want to catch you up on a couple of things. First of all I know that many of you have had questions about me, and by the way thank you so much for the cards, notes, emails, texts and for just stopping me here and there to ask how I am doing. I am doing really well. I had a heart attack about four weeks ago last week but I am doing okay, feeling good and trying to listen to the boss, and by boss I mean my wife. I have not had a steak in a month, so pray for me. That is hard for a Missouri farm boy not to have red meat every day. But I have not had a steak in a month and I am eating lots of fish. And I am doing what the doctor advised by trying to get my exercise in and so forth. And I do appreciate all your expressions of concern and I am glad to be back to work enjoying every day as a gift from the Lord.

I also just want to say that we had a great elder's retreat. I know Pastor Ben mentioned it a little bit last week. It was a week away gathered together and we are going to be talking about that on the first Sunday of March when Pastor Ben and I will be together doing kind of a table talk about some of the things that the Lord kind of laid upon all of our hearts collectively as elders, and things we would like to challenge the church on and to look to during 2021.

I just want to mention a couple of other things also because I know it is really easy to feel detached during this time. I have lost count of the number of times that I will be talking to someone and because we are both wearing masks I am not even sure who I am talking with. I have really bad facial identity on a good day, and put a mask on your face and I can be lost. So if I have ever acted confused when I am talking to you, trust me, it is just because of the mask.

It is really easy to be detached, isn't it? I know many of you who are watching this right now online, or maybe watching it later this week on YouTube or wherever will be glad when normal returns. And I want you to understand that there are a lot of normal things that are still occurring, and we are working hard at that trying to not let the work of the Lord be abated. Understand that we are looking for new and creative ways of doing that. And I just want to say thank you for your faithfulness in giving, in connecting and all the different aspects of that.

Last fall we raised a bunch of money with an emphasis on electronic Bibles, and those Bibles have now made it into the hands of the people. And do you realize that there are millions and millions of people, maybe billions of people, who do not own a copy of the Word of God. I probably have fifty Bibles of my own, but many people don't even have one. And for them to get a copy of the Bible in a format that they can carry with

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them because it is electronic, and they can look at it on their phone or on another device, is huge. And many of these are in parts of the world where to be a Christian invites unimaginable persecution and opposition. So we had 7,000 of those electronic Bibles that were distributed over the last several months, and I am just so excited about that.

Even last week we had something cool happen. Many of you know I am a professor for Liberty University and for fifteen years I have delivered my lectures online for distance learning, which is part of the largest school in the world that does that. But the cool thing is that other schools are also learning to do that now, and there is a Bible College in India located in a city in southeastern India where we are going to be planting five to ten thousand churches over the next two to three years. I have met some of their leadership there and have been really impressed with them. They told us recently that they are still two years away from being able to meet together again because of the pandemic.

We think of things in American terms, we think in terms of vaccines and distribution, and 330 million people. Can you imagine being part of 1.1 million in a third world country that does not have the vaccine yet and does not have a distribution system at all being able to go into villages? They are at least two years away from getting this under control and they know they are going to be shut down for two years so how can they train pastors in the nation that is rapidly shutting to the gospel? Well, they want to move online. And we were able to send a good chunk, eight thousand dollars, toward helping them get online so they can train national pastors to be able to go into the communities and the villages. So there are opportunities for us that we previously did not have that we now have in spite of the pandemic, and we as a church are getting involved in that which is very exciting.

Locally we have twenty-two kids that had Christmas up in Iredell County because some of you bought gifts, delivered them and spent time with them. I am so excited about how some of you have taken on the passion for working with kids who are in distress. This month we are doing our emphasis on safe families, so please stop by the table on your way out and learn about this. I know of two families that are taking in foster care kids right now and are going to make them part of their home. I know of two other people that are in the process of adopting foster kids that they had taken into their home and now they are going to become part of their forever home. We had the baby bottle boomerang offering that was taken to the three Crisis Pregnancy Centers we help support. These are all just cool things we have been a part of, and I am just thankful that even in the midst of a pandemic you all are finding ways to connect and engage with people.

One other thing is coming up on March 21st when we are going to be having a special missions emphasis day. We had to cancel it last year so I am excited that we are planning to have it this year on March 21st. David Nelms is the head and founder of The Timothy Initiative and he will be with us talking about church planting around the world.

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And we have something we are going to do that is possible because of you guys that we have never done before in the history of Life Fellowship. And I can't wait to tell you about it but I can't tell you this morning; you will just have to be here on March 21st. It will be a way that you can personally engage, see it, know it and be a part of it. I am really excited even in the midst of all of this.

I know we all feel disjointed, I know everyone wants to get back to normal, we are all so tired of social distancing and masks and so on, but don't give up hope because God is still working through us. I hear your stories every day of things you are doing in your Life Groups, things you are doing in your community, things you are doing to make a difference. I just want to say that we are a part of kingdom work so don't quit, don't give up because it is important.

In fact let's just pause a moment and ask the Lord to use each of us as part of kingdom work and as part of our community as well. *Father, we love you. Thank you so much that when the world sees darkness we can see hope, that when the world sees opposition we can see opportunity. Father, I pray that you will help each of us to go against the grain in the middle of a pandemic, go against the grain in the middle of social unrest, go against the grain in a culture that seems to have lost its way, and Father that we can live out your kingdom work for your glory. Thank you for Life Fellowship and thank you for the other churches that are doing their best to make a difference in the world for the gospel even in our own community. And Father we pray for those churches right now that are meeting all across our community.*

We pray for Lake Norman Baptist, for Grace Covenant, for The Cove Church, for Lake Forest, for First Baptist in Mooresville, for Peninsula Baptist, for the church at Denver and for all these churches all across our community where they are filled with brothers and sisters in Christ right now, and who are wanting to do their best in their community and their neighborhoods for the gospel. Help all of us to live out The Beatitudes. Help all of us to go against the grain. And Father even across this nation in time zone after time zone, for the churches in California who have been struggling to even be able to meet. I pray you will give them a great sense of unity today around your Word. Father around the globe in China, in Vietnam, in Albania, in France, in the Soviet Union, in Ukraine, in Kenya and Ghana and the Middle East, wherever your Word is open we pray the Holy Spirit would renew our hearts, draw people to salvation and help us to live out kingdom work in the week to come. For we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

We are in Matthew Chapter 5 and we are studying The Beatitudes. We are going against the grain and trying to live like Jesus in a broken world. You know as we look at verse 7 today, this is the fifth Beatitude so we are kind of past halfway now. We have crossed the big hump and we are on the back side. There are eight Beatitudes and the first four deal with the heart and the mind, those things that deal with our private thoughts and our attitudes of our inner man. We talked about blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek and blessed are those who hunger and thirst,

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who have a passion for righteousness. And those are all concerning how we view ourselves before a holy God.

But I want you to understand that the way these are written there are corresponding elements in the first half and in the second half that if we will pay attention to it will help us apply them. For example, in verse 3 when it says, “***Blessed are the poor in spirit,***” we see today in verse 7 what that does for us. If we are humble before the Lord, if we understand our absolute poverty before God, verse 7 tells us we will be merciful. And that is where we are today. “***Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.***”

And then you can look in verse 4 where it says if we mourn over sins then in verse 8 it talks about being pure in heart because sin is going to bother us and if we confess our sins it will bring purity in our life. Verse 5 says, “***Blessed are the meek,***” and in verse 9 it says, “***Blessed are the peacemakers,***” because you know if you are meek and humble and you seek reconciliation, you will want peace in your life and among others. And then finally if you are hungry and thirsting after righteousness in verse 10 you are going to be able to endure the persecution that comes with living righteously in an unrighteous world. We will be able to deal with the opposition that comes. So these parallels are really, really important in this passage.

But today we are focusing on mercy. And I will tell you that when I was in Sunday school, Kid Life and Awana classes, all those times when you had to memorize Scripture, this would be the kind of verses that I would like because they are very easy, very direct and very succinct. “***Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.***” All of us should be able to remember that this week. And all of us should be able to live that if we understand it.

Now let’s be honest, mercy is not necessarily a characteristic that we would use to describe our current society and generation. Right? We have to be honest, and for an example just look at the list of the top video games. We can just stop at ‘Grand Theft Auto.’ I mean when we think about what we look to for entertainment it is gross violence. I mean it is vulgar violence. It is extreme over the top ‘*shoot them up, kill them*’ violence. And yet we see that every time we turn on the TV, don’t we? We see it all the time in our culture, even on the news.

Our culture says a lot about tolerance, but even in our tolerance we seem to take this other step that says, ‘*and if you don’t think like I do, I will cancel you.*’ So is it tolerance or is it cancellation? What is going on in our culture seems like we want to take no enemies, we want to destroy our opponents, we are bent toward war, we are bent toward slaughter. And if we talk about abortion we have to talk about violence, and if we talk about violence we have to talk about abortion.

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And you know as horrible as this generation may seem, it is the story of mankind. Whether it was as in the days of Noah when God finally said, *'I have had enough of all of this violence,'* and He hit 'reset,' or whether it was in the day when Jesus stood before people and said, *'Let me talk to you about blessings and how to get them. You need to understand that blessings follow obedience, so let me tell you what you need to do.'*

And Jesus began addressing His audience that was largely Jews of the tradition of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the self-righteous, upright, uptight pious guys who were constantly looking for a way to make themselves look good and everyone else look bad. Like the ones who saw the woman taken in adultery and said, *'Let's just stone her,'* or the ones who walked around with their chest puffed out and stood on the street corners praying out loud saying, *'I thank God I am not like all these other sinners.'* They weren't exactly known for their grace and their compassion and their mercy. And Jesus said, *'Yeah, I am talking to you guys,'* because there were few who were harsher, more critical or more judgmental than the religious elites of Judaism in the days of Jesus.

If you are thirty, forty or fifty years old did you ever play this game, *'What would you tell your twenty year old self today if you could?'* If you could go back in time and talk to your twenty year old self, what would you tell them? Some of you are in the twenties so you would need to go back to tell your ten year old self, but even at twenty you have probably learned some things you would like to tell your ten year old self. I play that game sometimes. I am not forty, I am not even fifty anymore, but I think about if I could go back and talk to my twenty, or my thirty, or my forty year old self, and tell them a few things, one of the things that I would say is this – *'Understand the power of mercy.'*

Maybe you, like me, grew up in a generation and in a culture that even in my church it could be harsh. Where we were quick to judge, quick to condemn, quick to criticize and very quick to gossip. And we called ourselves redeemed and we would sing about the mercies of God. *'I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,'* was a chorus we would sing. And yet when it came down to us often we would refuse to extend even common mercy and common grace because we were so interested and wrapped up in our piety.

And these were the people Jesus was talking to. These were the people that Jesus looked at and said, *'Yeah you guys think you are so righteous, but I look at you and I see a grave with a corpse in the middle of it that is rotting. You think you are righteous but I see you for who you are.'* These are the people that Jesus was speaking to, and by the way, it hit them right between their eyes.

Let's look in Matthew Chapter 5 and drop down into the rest of the discourse there. This is what Jesus was saying that was so offensive to the Pharisees. Verse 43 says, ***"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"*** That was like common knowledge, they were supposed to love those who loved

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them and hate those who hated you. Isn't that pretty much the way everyone thinks? Jesus was going to say something different to them. ***“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*** What? That was absolutely the opposite of the way the world thinks. And that is the opposite way many spiritual religious people think.

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Jesus was saying we need to be like God. God gives mercy to the people who are righteous and to the people who are unrighteous. He sends rain to the people who might deserve it and even to the people who may not deserve it.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?” It is not noble if you love people that are easy to love; you are just like everyone else. ***“Do not even the Gentiles do the same,”*** even the people that you hate, the people that are different than you. Finally He said: ***“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*** And that word ‘perfect’ also means ‘mature, complete, full and whole.’ In other words part of growing up spiritually is thinking like God. He sees not our meager efforts of righteousness; He sees our sin and loves us in spite of it, and that is mercy.

Jesus was saying this to the Jews, but He also had a few words for the Romans who were the oppressors in that culture. And the Romans were an incredibly cruel lot. They were the dominant culture around the world at that time. It was their belief that mercy was not good; it was bad. In fact one Roman philosopher said this: ***“Mercy is the disease of the soul.”*** It was considered to be a huge weakness and that real men showed no mercy. The Romans believed in strict justice and firm discipline and absolute power. That is why they were so heavy handed.

Do you know that during much of Roman history there was a law called ‘The Law of Patria Potestas’ And Potestas meant ‘the power of a father.’ Remember the old movies like ‘Ben Hur’ and some other Roman movies where the Italians spoke with a British accent? Remember the big scenes where they would put their thumbs out either up or down? If the thumb pointed up you lived, and if it pointed down you died. There was a law in Rome that said that every father had the right to have every newborn that he had sired brought before him. And they would present the baby for the father to look at, and if for any reason he was displeased with that baby, maybe he didn't like the mother or he didn't like the gender, or there was a defect of some kind in the baby, then he would stick out his thumb and make a decision. If the father thought, *‘Oh well, I will put up with this one,’* or *‘I want this baby,’* he would point his thumb up.

And under Roman law the father had every authority. And it regularly occurred that if for some reason he did not like or want this baby, that it did not measure up to

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what he wanted, he could point his thumb down and the baby would be immediately taken out and drowned. He could cause that to be done immediately because this law allowed it. And by the way every Roman citizen who owned a slave could do that to their slave as well. They could kill them, bury them and there would be no consequence to them for that. In fact for a period of time in Rome if you were male you could do the same thing to your wife. The slightest provocation that your wife did toward you could have her executed and buried and there would never be charges filed against you. It was considered a right in those days.

Well a society that despises mercy is a society that glorifies brutality and we need to ask ourselves the question – what characterizes our life and our living? The appearance of Jesus and the example He publicly set was in stark contrast to what the Jews and the Romans were seeing in the streets. That is why this passage of Scripture, The Beatitudes, was so shocking during its day, and it is still shocking today. Because Jesus was the guy who instead of walking by the sick, He healed the sick; instead of ignoring the cripple He restored the cripple; instead of just passing by the blind guy He gave sight to him. He gave hearing to the deaf, and He gave life to the dead.

He spent time with prostitutes and tax collectors and adulterers and drunks and the dregs of society, people that others would have ignored or worse abused. Jesus instead offered love and forgiveness, grace and mercy. He noticed, He paid attention and He made a difference. The Lord Jesus showed mercy during what was going on. He was poking the religious hypocrites, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Roman overloads right in the eye. He was showing them up, and He was saying, ‘*This is the way to do it,*’ and it was shocking to them.

The word merciful that we have in this passage comes from the Greek word *eleemon*. And *eleemon* has a derivative of it which is *eleemosynary*. And *eleemosynary* is a word that is often used to describe Christ in the Scripture, and it means ‘beneficial or charitable. In Hebrews Chapter 2 and verse 17 where we see Jesus described as “***our merciful and faithful high priest,***” it is the word *eleemosynary*. He is benevolent, He is beneficial, and He is charitable to us. And we are told to be like Him. We are told to be *eleemosynary*, to have mercy, to be charitable and benevolent.

So I want us to look at some things that will steal our mercy, mercy thieves I want to call them, and see if we have any of these characteristics. And then I want us to get real practical and think about what we can do if we apply this passage of Scripture, this Beatitude in going against the grain. What are some things that steal mercy? Well first of all it is entitlement. And entitlement is a modern cool word that a lot of people talk about today, but do you know what that really is at a basic level? It is pride. It is thinking it is all about me.

Few sins will rob us of having mercy faster than a sense of entitlement because it is ‘me first’ thinking. And this ‘me first’ attitude blinds us to the needs around us until

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we have been satisfied. When we are unwilling to consider the needs around us, our own ability to do something for others, and when we live with ourselves as a focus of our thoughts and our actions and our priorities and how we allocate our resources, when it is all about us getting more, being first, having the best, when it is all about us, it develops an entitled spirit that forgets the fact that we live in a state of grace and mercy because of what God did for us.

And if you and I got what we deserved at this very moment, if we believe in total depravity, if we believe in the sin nature, if we believe in a righteous God who judges our actions, if we believe in all of these things then you and I need to recognize on a daily basis that what we have is one hundred percent because of God's mercy on us. And if we got what we deserved we would already be in hell today.

You know even saying that may cause a few people to think, *'How dare you. This is 2021 and we are talking about hell and damnation and we are talking about judgment and sin?'* Absolutely, because eternal values do not give respect to cultural norms, and today we need a strong dose of recognition that our best day of righteousness before God falls short of the mark. God calls them filthy rags. We are sinners. We are inclined toward evil. Left to our own devices we will choose wrong every time. But God in His mercy has redeemed us. When we were undeserving, when we were rebellious He has redeemed us. When we understand that it rips away the entitlement that easily seeps into our life.

But there is another thing and that is aloofness. Aloofness is a casualness of living that just dulls us. It can have a root in entitlement, but it also simply mean that we just lack awareness. I think there are a lot of people in the world today that aren't merciful because they don't even think about having mercy. They have grown up with the mentality that says, *'I have to get mine. I have to be first.'* This is our culture. It is American to have rugged individualists, isn't it? It is American to think that we are great and powerful and influential. But yet when we view our world that way, first of all we are viewing it disproportionately because there are only three hundred thirty million on a planet of seven billion, and do you think that God loves us because we were born in this country more than He loves the rest of the world?

The answer to that is a big 'NO.' God loves the person this morning who is living in a cardboard shack; God loves the person this morning who is in Africa living only in a bamboo hut; God loves the person this morning who is in a desperate situation in a ghetto in Romania who was born a gypsy; God loves the little Communist farmworker over in China somewhere who is facing hours and hours of working in a rice paddy; God loves the guy who is way up in the north who hasn't felt warm in twenty years living in squalor; and God loves each of them every bit as much as He loves the person who lives in your neighborhood and mine. And we have to remember that our sense of entitlement and our sense of aloofness and our sense of self-centeredness rob us of the mercy that God wants us to spill out on others.

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The third thing is cynicism and it is very easy to be overtaken by cynicism. I sometimes think that I may have a middle name that is 'cynic' that was assigned to me and I forgot about it, because I struggle with this. And maybe it is because I have this high sense of right and wrong and when I hear a story or experience someone taking advantage of someone it always really bugs me. And it makes me cynical.

I remember several years ago, probably about fifteen years ago, I was pastoring another church here in town. It was a big old church that had a huge campus and it had a lot of different ways you could get into the different places. On Sunday morning we would have Sunday school classes and Bible studies all over the campus. And you could get into those easily. We didn't really have security the way we do now as the world has changed a lot in the last fifteen years. We only had one or two security guards out in the parking lot and they weren't really able to monitor everything. Now we have a crack security team here. You probably don't even know who they are, but they are everywhere.

But in those days it was a little more lackadaisical, and one day a guy showed up and walked into a Bible study. And he started weeping and crying and he said, *'I am just in desperate shape and I didn't know who to go to, so I saw this church and I pulled in here. My sister got killed last night in a horrible car wreck in California. I can't get there to be at her funeral and the family is in desperate shape and I need to be with them. I looked up the ticket price, and it is three hundred and seventy one dollars and 68 cents and I don't have but twelve dollars to my name.'* And all the people in that room thought this was horrible and they got their wallets out and collected enough money to pay his plane ticket so he could go be with his family. And the man cried and thanked them and said, *'God bless you.'*

Then he went down the hall and hit the next Bible class with the same story. He hit three or four at our church, and then we heard that he went to another church and did the same thing there. The police eventually found out about it and he was caught and arrested. He had been hitting at least a dozen churches with the same story even down to the same amount for his ticket to the same city for his sister's funeral. And my first response was to send out a memo to all of our Bible study teachers to never take up an offering like that again. It really got me. And that is what injustice does to us sometimes.

Now please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I think we need to be responsible before we take up an offering. Before we take up offerings we try to double and triple check because we don't believe you should empower people who are crooked and bent. But here is what often happens in our hearts - because we got ripped off one time, we clamp down the rest of the time. Because it didn't work out this time, we are saying no next time. Because it was too hard, too difficult over here, then we are going to shut down over there. And folks we can't let that happen because if we do Satan wins, cynicism wins, and we lost our opportunity to have mercy and receive mercy.

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Compassion fatigue can sometimes also break us. If you have ever been overseas you know there are parts of the world where everywhere you turn there is a need. People are hungry and people are dying. There have been times when I have been in third world countries where I literally could not sleep at night. There have been times when I have been in those kinds of countries where I arrived with a suitcase full of my clothes and belongings and I would come home with nothing. They would open up my suitcase at customs and ask me where everything had gone. I couldn't bring the things back with me because the people's needs there were so great. But there is also a danger that we can have something called compassion fatigue where we see so many needs that eventually we just walk away because it is so overwhelming. And we have to be careful of that.

Sometimes it is greed. We can't afford to get to a point that says, '*I won't help you until I get all that I need. I have my own obligations and commitments too.*' and in doing so we rob ourselves of the privilege of having mercy for others. We need to be really, really careful that we don't accidentally adopt this issue that is 'me first' and only taking care of our own needs. Remember in Scripture the little lady who gave her last two little coins, the widow's mite, that she placed in the offering. She didn't give because she had all her needs met, she didn't give because she had extra to spare, she gave in her need because it was the right thing for her to do.

Sometimes in our judgmentalism we have to beware of our tendency to be dismissive. I have literally been with people who when they see someone on the side of the street with a 'We will work' sign say, '*I bet they won't.*' And they have rolled down their window and yelled, '*Get a job.*' And they think that is funny, and it isn't, because if we get to a point where we are judging people on their journey rather than joining them in their journey, then we have cut ourselves off from the command to be merciful.

And then sometimes it is simply insensitivity. Do we even care? Have we seen too much? Have we been through so much that our hearts have grown callous? Do we appreciate the mercy that we have been shown by others, and particularly by God? Have we allowed it to pool with us rather than to be distributed to others?

Well, let's make it real for just a moment and then we will be done. How do we make it real? First of all let's look at what we can learn from this passage. Number one the Scripture says to have mercy and receive mercy. Have mercy and receive mercy. The essence of this Beatitude is if we have mercy we will be rewarded with mercy. Now I don't want you to make a mistake on this, we have to keep in mind that it isn't '*I will do good to you so you will do good to me.*' And then we have a little Barney relationship here and it all works out really great. Some of you are not old enough to remember who Barney was, but Barney was a kids program and he sang, '*I love you and you love me.*' This is not meant to be the kind of mercy that is reciprocal and that is not why we should be merciful. We should be merciful because God was merciful to us. And as He has been merciful to us we are to be merciful to others and the realization of that is the demonstration of that.

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See God is the one who always keeps His deal. He is always the one who when He extends mercy extends it to us in love and compassion. You can extend it to others and sometimes in the response you may get an insult or abuse or manipulation or all kinds of negative responses. But the mercy that we receive from God is eternal.

Matthew Chapter 6 and verses 14 and 15 says this: ***“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*** Mercy to men does not mean that we will receive mercy from men, but rather mercy to men brings mercy from God. It makes us sensitive to our condition and available to receive what God has already given to us. We must receive it.

The second thing is this – receive mercy and extend mercy. So it is part of the continuum. So you have mercy, you receive mercy, but you receive mercy and then you extend mercy. And the fact that we have received mercy should motivate us and stir us to want us to be good to others, to want to extend kindness to others. Look real quickly to Matthew Chapter 18 as there is a story there that is very powerful. It is a parable, it is an illustration that Jesus gave us. Here is what it says: ***“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”*** And that was an incredible amount of money. ***“And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me.’”*** That word ‘patience’ is translated in other places as mercy.

“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii,” which is a whole lot less than a ten thousand talents. ***“And seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’”*** Notice that was the same words he had said to the king.

“He refused and went out put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” Part of the obligation we have having received mercy from God is that we be merciful to others. And it is an indication of the reality of our relationship with Christ as to whether or not we are merciful to others.

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The third thing is this - intentionally noticing the overlooked. Throughout Scripture Jesus took delight in noticing the overlooked, whether it was little short Zacchaeus or blind Bartimaeus, or the loose lady at the well where Jesus was resting, or the sick lady that touched his robe when He was walking through the crowd. Jesus noticed people that others would have just walked on by. And in doing so He made a difference in their lives.

A couple of years ago last January one of our very beloved church members, J. D. Gibbs went home to be with the Lord. There was a huge funeral for J. D. Gibbs. You are probably familiar with Gibbs NASCAR Racing. And his dad was also a former super bowl coach. When they had J. D. Gibbs funeral it was in Davidson at the Field House with thousands of people there. Now I have probably been to hundreds of funerals in my lifetime and there have been very few stories that stirred and made a difference to me more than when a man got up at J. D. Gibbs' funeral and gave a testimony. This man told a story about J. D. Gibbs, who by the way was one of our elders at this church.

This man said that J. D. was the cool guy in high school, he was the star quarterback, his dad had won the super bowl, so he was the big man on campus. And the man said he was a nobody, he was the guy who sat at the lunch table alone. Nobody knew him and nobody cared about him. But J. D. walked into the lunch room one day, saw him sitting by himself and he came and sat down and had lunch with him. And J. D. asked him his name, he talked to him, and later on he invited him to come to his house for a Bible study with a Young Life group. And now all these years later, this man was a Christ follower. He had come to know Christ because the school jock, the big guy on campus, noticed someone that most of us would have overlooked.

We probably would have been looking over at the cool table to see if there were any vacant chairs there so we could sit with the cool dudes. And I have to tell you that story has just lived over and over again in my life. Another cool story is that one of J. D. and Melissa's sons, Miller, is also a big man on campus at Appalachian State. Over the holidays he was at my small group, which is a group of college students, and this is what I saw him do. Every time someone would come into the room, Miller would get up and walk over and say, *'Hey, what's your name. I am glad you came. Have you got a place to sit?'* He was doing the same thing as his dad had done back in high school.

Now let me say this to you, there are a lot of lonely people sitting at lunch tables alone all over this planet right now. They think they have been forgotten and that no one cares. Particularly the cool people don't care, the ones who have all their stuff together. Do you understand the power of noticing the overlooked when you do it in Jesus' name? Whether it is the little orphan, the vagabond kid, the person on the side of the road, the person at work who is just a little hard to like, who sits at the edge of the cafeteria on their phone because no one really wants to be with them. Maybe it is the person in the neighborhood who might even be the neighborhood crank telling everybody to stay off

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their lawn. There are people everywhere you look who are dying for someone to show them a little mercy and they are overlooked.

We need to actively engage with the forgotten and look for those who are not obvious. We need to approach our persecutors. We need to send a note, give them a gift, and be kind even though they have been cruel. Return evil with good. Maybe you think they don't deserve it; neither did we. Have mercy.

And then we are to love the unlovable. Let's just face it some people are more lovable than others. It is just easier to love some people. Haters are going to hate and hurt people hurt people. Brokenness is everywhere we turn. Back in the days when I was a school principal I would challenge my teachers to look for the person who sat in the back of the classroom, who maybe hadn't combed their hair, or who had a complexion problem, the one who wouldn't look you in the eye. Don't just look at the perky one up front who is always going, *'Teacher, teacher, I did my homework. Can I turn it in now?'*

But look for the one in the back who may have forgotten their pencil, or who is not prepared for class because they may be the one whose mom and dad are having a divorce. They may be the one who last night slept in the back seat of their car. They may be the one struggling with a private addiction or being abused and no one knows it. Sometimes the person who needs our love the most is the one that people pass over the quickest. And they may be the person who will most quickly respond to the love of God that lives through you.

So if you ask people on the street what characteristic they think of when they hear the word Christian or evangelical or even a member of Life Fellowship, what would they say? Would they say, *'Oh yeah, they really feel strongly about their politics.'* Would they say, *'Oh yeah, they have a beautiful house and a boat and three cars. They are very well heeled?'* Would they say, *'Oh yeah, everybody wants to be friends with them?'* Or would they say, *'You know, they are merciful, kind, compassionate, grace filled?'*

What if our generation of believers could earn a reputation for being people of mercy, the first to kneel down, the first to speak, the first to invite, the first to comfort, the first to donate, the first to visit, the first to volunteer, the first to listen, the first to intervene, the first to sign up, the first to share, the first to show others what Christ would have done were He engaging them? What if they could say that about us? ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."*** Have mercy – receive mercy, it really does go against the grain.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.