

MERCY

JUDITH MACNUTT

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

Jesus is the exact representation of the Father, so in Jesus, we see the full expression of the mercy of God. As Jesus did, we are meant to extend mercy to people, not judgment.

Several years ago, during a Lenten service in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Francis stated, "I am convinced that the whole church -- that has much need to receive mercy because we are sinners -- will find in this jubilee the joy to rediscover and render fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time."

In his message he expressed that a love which is cold and calculated (which he called "formal love") is an ugly thing that cannot be understood. Instead of passionless

formality, we need the living love of the presence of God in our lives and in our churches. It is up to the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sins. We are to show mercy.

Webster's dictionary defines "mercy" as *compassion or forbearance, shown especially to an offender; kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly*. The Latin root of mercy means *wages, or price paid*. As believers, we understand that Jesus paid the price for us on the cross.

People that don't show mercy can grow bitterness. Bitterness can be a temptation for young and old alike! Bitterness can be described as anger and disappointment at being treated unfairly, or excessive desire for vengeance that comes from deep resentment.



Our bitterness can often be traced back to our attitude about God. We think that because it seems God allowed something bad to happen to me or someone I love, it follows that He is to blame for my suffering. God is not to blame, but this is often what people feel and therefore believe to be true.

Bitterness can be fueled by resentment. Resentment is defined as *indignant displeasure at something regarded as a wrong, insult, or injury*. (Merriam-Webster.com) The Latin root of the word means to *feel again*. It is true that unfair treatment and

betrayal cause wounds. We tend to experience those feelings over and over again in our minds! It is often said that wallowing in resentment is like letting someone live inside our head rent free.

Mercy is essential to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Mercy, love, and forgiveness are the most important gifts we receive from the cross of Christ. Because we have been shown mercy, we can extend mercy and forgiveness to those who have hurt us.

Jesus came to demonstrate the love of the Father. This is why Jesus clashed with the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were religious legalists. The law meant more to them than the person standing in front of them—and that person was God's Son!

Jesus angered the religious leaders of the day because he broke their religious laws. His focus was not be a rulebreaker, but his priority was to demonstrate his love and mercy every day of the week!

Another reason the religious leaders became angry with Jesus is because he forgave sins. In Mark Chapter 2, we read that Jesus healed a paralyzed man:

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." (Mark 2: 6-10)

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another and you will be healed. (James 5:16)

This great promise links sin and healing. Healing often comes when we acknowledge our sin. The Bible says if we continue in sin, we become a slave to sin – it remains in control of us and gives an opening for the enemy. When we repent (change our mind and turn from sin), it is wiped clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Many people feel that forgiving is a sign of weakness, that the greater need is to satisfy the demands of justice. That demand was satisfied on the cross by Jesus himself! His gift of mercy and forgiveness flows freely to everyone.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

In light of all these truths, we need to ask ourselves: Is my God a God of mercy, forgiveness and love? Or is my image of God a God of retribution,

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condemnation, punishment, chastisement, wrath or vengeance? Our answer to that question makes all the difference.

When someone says to me, "I don't think I can forgive that person," I say, "Let me tell you a story! Let me remind you about God's great love and the mercy that entered the world. It is a pure gift. There is nothing we can do to earn it." When Jesus spoke the words, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing" a grace entered the world that has existed since that moment. His grace is all around us and in the air we breathe.

There are human arguments against forgiveness and love. Forgiveness offends my human sense of fairness. To that I say: "You will never feel like forgiving!" Life is not fair, and our fallen nature wants revenge. But when we forgive, we place the person in God's hands, and we are released.

Forgiveness seems to overlook justice. However, forgiveness and justice are very different animals. If you are a victim of a crime or abuse, it may be very appropriate to seek legal justice. Forgiveness does not mean you condone someone's bad behavior. Forgiveness is not a sign of weakness. It takes great courage and moral strength to forgive.

Forgiveness is never simple. It is not wise to flippantly say, *Forgive and forget!* Humans are much more complex than that. But in the power of the Holy Spirit and the anointing of his love, we can learn to forgive those that have wounded us and show them mercy. ✠



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