

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is sitting in a field of tall grass. He is holding an open Bible with both hands, looking down at the pages. The background is a soft-focus landscape with rolling hills under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

THE BEATITUDES
BEAUTIFUL CHARACTER
FORMED BY CHRIST

PT. 5:
BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

MERCY

Mercy doesn't sound like fun. If you have to be merciful, it means you likely have the occasion for it, and nobody really wants an occasion to be merciful. Unfortunately the only people who don't have the occasion are hermits. And no one is called to be a hermit. Everyone, is called to be merciful. When I was in high school, the opportunities to show mercy were constant. Catching a folded hard piece of paper to the back of the head when the teacher wasn't looking deserved a good smack back. In fact, the amount of times I had to show mercy made me wish I wasn't called to be merciful to others, because some people's rottenness never left me alone. It was in that context that I learned mercy. But I learned it from God. It was in high school that I really began to see how imperfect I was. How filled with sin I was. How my "goodie-two-shoes" self wasn't really all that good, even if my life was marked by patience made possible by the Holy Spirit.



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




I had to recognize my need for mercy to really grasp what Jesus called me to, otherwise, I didn't really understand how to deal with the pain of rejection and mistreatment. I found in the Psalms of Lament comfort- I could pray my real thoughts to God, and I could live in the power of the Holy Spirit - but not without realizing that when I showed mercy, I was living close to God's heart. I needed to internalize how God was rich in mercy toward me. Ephesians 2:4-5 says "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—it is by grace you have been saved." I was dead, and God made me alive. God was not calling me to some foreign thing, He was calling me to something that He made possible by the power of His Holy Spirit, and by the love He had poured out on me. I needed to sense the brokenness of my own spirit to grasp God's mercy and the mercy in which I was to live.

//BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL//

Growing closer and closer to God is really the only way to begin to have His heart for the world around us, especially when the world around us is bringing its worst to the table consistently. When Paul was on trial before the Jewish leaders and Romans (near the end of Acts) he was being carried along by God in a world full of chaos. And he didn't respond perfectly and people weren't exactly following the law very well. As I read and reflected on Paul's story, it's a pretty accurate description of the chaotic world of sin where we called to show mercy. Bad things are happening to us, and they aren't right. And in all honesty, the temptation to preserve myself in the midst of it is pretty strong. But God had called Paul to these kinds of situations to be a *witness* for Him. And He calls us to do the same. Trying to be in power only makes showing mercy impossible. The Pharisees and religious leaders in Jesus' day are a perfect example. They just wanted to win, not witness. Win the argument, win the case. Win, win, win. But we are called to witness. And we do this by showing mercy where mercy is hard. Jesus, talking to the Pharisees who wanted to win, said this:

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" But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus desires mercy, an extending of God's love to the undeserving. An open invitation to receive God's grace rather than a doling out the punishment deserving of their sin. Mercy is not simply withholding something, it also involves giving something. God is said to be "compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love." God's mercy doesn't just sit idle, but gives room for His unfailing love to touch the heart of a dirty sinner, and he calls us to go out into the world - not merely to make sacrifices - like going to church, tithing our money, or giving stuff to the poor, but to reflect His heart and His mercy. To bear fruit - like the fruit of the Spirit, and the Beatitudes. To reflect God's love to the world and to join God by proclaiming His mercy. He is full of mercy. When God reveals His name in Exodus 34:6-7, he says that He is compassionate and gracious, showing mercy to the thousandth generation but punishing the sin to the third and fourth. He does not leave sin unpunished - and for those who trust in Christ it is He who took our punishment on Himself! But He is SO MERCIFUL - to an enormous degree! So let's reflect that mercy to those we find undeserving of our mercy, forgiving as God in Jesus Christ forgave us - even while we were still enemies!



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REFLECT. PRAY. ACT

Reflect: Read Psalm 103. Praise God for His mercy toward you, and for Who He Is. This is the first place we need to be if we want to be merciful, God's mercy toward us is so great! Take some time to write down some of the images and thoughts that come as you reflect on this Psalm.

Pray: Pray for someone that has wronged you. Right down their name on a note card, and then pray for them. Pray that they would experience what is talked about in Psalm 103. That Psalm 103 would reflect their character and that they would know God like that. If you find it difficult to pray that for the person who is cruel to you, pray that your heart would be able to reflect God's mercy.

Act: 1. Go out of your way to do something extra kind for someone who wronged you. My uncle Zach once told me: "Build bridges, don't dig ditches." Try to build a bridge when you really want to dig a deeper ditch. Maybe get a gift for someone you are mad at. Maybe go out of your way to clean something for someone or to do something the person will appreciate - even if they might treat you ungratefully for having done it.