

LIVING ON THE EDGE OF DESPERATE

Week Six Notes

The Woman Caught in Adultery: Desperate for Mercy John 8:1-11

I. God of Mercy

A. A closer look at mercy.

Mercy is yet another characteristic of God that permeates every page of Scripture. It is never overshadowed or diminished by His sovereignty, holiness, righteous, or love. He is ALL God ALL the time. The Oxford definition of mercy is, “compassion or forgiveness shown to someone whom it is in one’s power to punish.” That is a good definition, but when we see mercy in terms of God’s nature, there is a fuller more encompassing definition.

God’s mercy is compassion in action. It is His tenderhearted approach to His people. It is not simply a feeling, but it is His kindness toward, recognizing our great need, and moving to meet that need. *Compassion, kindness, loving-kindness, goodness and good will* are all synonyms for the word *mercy*.

Somehow, we have the misconception that God is a God of wrath and Law in the Old testament and a God of Love and grace in the New Testament. God is the same from beginning to end. He never changes. His nature does not change between the Old and New Testaments. God is always good, always sovereign, always holy, always righteous, always merciful, always love.

The Old Testament is filled with verse about the mercy of God. The Psalms often use the Hebrew word *chesed*. Most translators have taken that very rich and meaningful word and come up with a combination of words, *lovingkindness*. It is a word that reflects the word *mercy*.

Read the antiphonal psalm, Psalm 136. Twenty-six times, every verse, the psalmist writes, *His mercy endures forever (His lovingkindness is everlasting)*. Like a hammer on a nail, the writer is driving into our hearts the greatest of God’s mercy. David Jeremiah says, “God’s mercy tank is never empty.” Certainly, the Psalms agree.

Additionally, the prophets use the word *mercy* describing God’s compassion even in the midst of severe discipline. (Isaiah 54:8, Lamentation 3:22-23, 32, Habakkuk 3:2). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all of the other prophets understood the heart of God is toward His people is always merciful.

Exodus also uses a particular word for mercy indicating the mercy seat (Exodus 25:22) The mercy seat was located in the holy of holies in the tabernacle (later in the temple). It was a seat made of pure gold with golden angels at both ends. Their wings point toward heaven and their faces looked down at the mercy seat. The mercy seat was placed on top of the Ark of the Covenant which held the Law of Moses. Once a year the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The blood of that sacrifice was to be sprinkled on the mercy seat. Exodus 25:22 God said, “*and there I will meet you, from above the mercy seat...and I will speak to you there.*” From the very beginning God has dealt with his people with mercy.

Everything about the temple and the Holy of Holies is a foreshadowing of Jesus. As the embodiment of God, God with skin on, Jesus is our mercy seat. While the Old Testament is spilling over with God’s mercy, the New Testament accounts of mercy are best seen through the words and actions of Jesus. God’s mercy is always intentional, purposeful. His mercy is always redemptive. He is not just fixing our problems, but he is drawing us to salvation with His kindness. Mercy is always the catalyst for forgiveness and right relationship with God. God’s mercy is not weak. It is not simply a feeling. It does not ignore sin or the consequences of sin. His mercy is not cheap, it comes to us at great cost. His mercy is not limited or exhaustible.

B. Mercy applied to sin and shame.

Read John 8:1-11. It is early morning and Jesus is already teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish religious leaders bring (not too gently, I imagine) a woman to Jesus. They have caught her in the very act of adultery. My mind tries to picture the scene. Is she barely clothed, grabbed unexpectedly from the bed? Is her hair a mess? Regardless of her appearance, certainly she is in a state of confusion and shock. Her adultery, which was supposed to be a pleasurable secret, has become a public humiliation. No dignity is given to her by the religious leaders. She is just a tool, a piece of carnage in the war with Jesus. They were so narrowly focused on bringing Jesus down, of disgracing Him as a false teacher, and discrediting His claims, they had no concern for this woman. The leaders try to pit Jesus against the Mosaic Law stating the Law says a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death. (Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22) Actually the Law says both parties are to be brought forward for judgement. Witnesses are not only required for the decision, but witnesses must cast the first stones.

Jesus does not answer their accusations about the Law and this woman. He stoops to write in the dirt. It seems He is allowing the weight of the accusation to hang in the air, to feel the weight of it not only by the accusatory leaders but also by the adulterous woman. Sin is serious, but so are accusations. The religious leaders persist. Jesus finally answers. His words dispel the crowd of men as they realize they too are guilty of sin—perhaps even THIS sin of adultery committed in the heart and mind, if not the body. Only the woman is left with Jesus. He responds to her with mercy. He does not condemn her, which means to pass judgment on her. In fact, He pardons her sin and invites her to live differently from now on. Notice the pardon came first, then the invitation to new life.

Some people say that Jesus ignored her sin. Far from it! Jesus would die for her sin. That pardon would cost Jesus His life. **Ephesians 2:1-8 explains.** We are born spiritually dead to God, BUT God, rich in MERCY, has compassion on our sinful, hopeless state and by grace through faith provides salvation. He did all of this at Calvary, where Jesus became our substitute. He bore our sin and He took the punishment for us. We are guilty (Romans 3:23), we deserve eternal death. BUT God is *merciful* towards us. He withholds what we deserve and gives us grace, which we do not deserve. God has been merciful to his people all along...in the Garden of Eden when he covered Adam and Eve after they sinned, with the skin of an animal; at the mercy seat where He met once a year with the High Priest to atone the sins of Israel; at Calvary where Christ gave His own blood to forgive our sins for eternity.

His mercy also deals with the shame of sin. The woman caught in adultery was wrapped in shame that morning. Surrounded by a host of angry men, overlooking her humanity, yet calling attention to her guilt. Shame is the result of sin, but it is never God's desire for us to remain in shame. Our enemy Satan however will do everything in his power to keep us in shame. He uses it to keep us from God, to threaten our peace and joy, to limit our ministry, and dim our testimony. Shame will drive us back to the very sin that created the shame as we look for relief from the shame. Shame works and Satan uses it. BUT God!

When Jesus pardons her guilt, He also lifts the shame from her. She is not condemned—no judgment against her. She is clean.... invited to live in a new way. When you and I experience shame as a result of our sin or someone else's sin toward us, look into the eyes of Jesus. You and I will always find mercy, loving kindness, compassion. **Luke 15** contains a familiar story about a son who takes his inheritance and leaves for the far country. He squanders it all and lives with pigs, starving to death. Finally, he comes to himself and decides to return home to his father. His plan is to work off his debt and somehow make it all up to the father. But verse 20 breaks my heart every time. Read it with fresh understanding of the mercy of God! (**Luke 15:20**). That compassionate father is our Heavenly Father. (Titus 3:5)

C. Mercy applied to sorrow, suffering and great need.

God's mercy is ongoing in our lives. The New Testament gospels give us dozens of accounts of Jesus demonstrating compassion. In fact, the most often made request of Jesus was, "*Have mercy on me!*" Interestingly, Jesus never said no. He responds with compassion, seeing the great need and meeting it—always offering a new way of living. Matthew 14:14, Matthew 15:22, Matthew 15:32, Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:40-41, Mark 5:19, Mark 6:34, Mark 8:12, Luke 17:13, Luke 18:39...and many more.

Jesus responds to the needs of His people. He is not simply fixing our problems rather he is moving to. Meet our greatest need...even if it is not the need we as we perceive it. Review the events of your life. Have you experienced the mercy of God for salvation? Have you experienced His mercy as he moves to meet your needs? Rehearse those events often and be drawn to Him in fresh surrender. If we have experienced the mercy of God, then we are called to be a People who demonstrate mercy to others.

II. A People of Mercy

Read Matthew 5:7 and Luke 6:36. God's people are to demonstrate God's compassion.

Luke 10 :30-37 is another familiar story. The Good Samaritan. Preceding the story, a lawyer has asked the question, *who is my neighbor?* At the end of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer, *who is the neighbor?* The reply is obvious-- *the one who showed mercy.* To the lawyer—and to us—Jesus says, "go and do likewise". Show compassion to people. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their lack of mercy even though they followed the law. (Matthew 23:23) God desires mercy rather than sacrifices. While we cannot do the work of salvation in a person's life, the Holy Spirit will use our acts of mercy to draw the lost to Jesus. Paul calls us *vessels of mercy* (Romans 9:28) and Paul also urges us, based on the mercy we have received, to live as a daily sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). **Ephesians 4:32** makes compassion very plain...*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven you.* The book of **Proverbs** is filled with instruction for showing mercy to others. (for example: Proverbs 14:21, 22 and 31)

A beautiful example of mercy is given in an often-overlooked account from Paul. A man named Onesiphorus refreshes Paul, shows compassion for Paul over and over while Paul is in prison (2 Timothy 1:16-18). Like this kind man, we

are to be refreshing to others, encouraging and merciful. Look around. The whole world is suffering. Yet God has not asked us to change the world or meet every need. He has asked us to love our neighbors and our families, offering kindness and compassion to everyone we meet. Oh, we are so afraid of being taken advantage of that we often resist being merciful. But Christ is our example. Jesus did not display mercy without wisdom. We too must use discernment and wisdom, but mercy must be the hallmark of our actions.

Verses to review as you soak in the mercy of God.

Exodus 15:13, Exodus 25:22, 2 Chronicles 20:21, Nehemiah 1:5, Job 37:13, Psalm 5:7, Psalm 13:5, Psalm 21:7, Psalm 23:6, Psalm 31:7, Psalm 32:10, Psalm 36:5, Psalm 52:8, Psalm 57:10, Psalm 59:10,16,and 17, Psalm 69:13, Psalm 86:13 and 16, Psalm 89:1, Psalm 94:18, Psalm 100:3, Psalm 103:8 and 17, Psalm 106:1, Psalm 115:1, Psalm 119:64, Psalm 130:7, Psalm 136..all of it, Psalm 143:8, Psalm 147:11, Isaiah 54:8 and 10, Isaiah 55:7, Jeremiah 30:18, Lamentations 3:22, 23, 32, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8, Habakkuk 3:2, And many more.

Do you get the picture? God has always been a God of compassion and mercy...even in the Old Testament. For New Testament references to mercy look at point C in your notes. Then find your own verses...there are hundreds of them throughout the Bible. Refer to the concordance in the back of your Bible, like a dictionary, find the word *mercy* and see the references for that word.

As you pray this week, thank God for His mercy and His great compassion. Present your needs to Him at the throne of grace and find mercy and help. (Hebrews 4:16)

Recommended reading: The Prodigal God by Timothy Keller