

Okay guys...Our sermon time is going to be a little more interactive today so I want to make sure you have all “the things” so you can participate.

Each of you needs to have your target page, your communion packet, and either your worship guide to follow along and take notes, or the fill in outline open on your device. If you don’t have one of those raise your hand and our friends in the back will make sure you get what you need...target, communion elements, and worship guide. We all good?

For now, you can set your target and communion elements aside, but keep them handy. We are going to celebrate communion towards the end of the message because communion is the perfect response to our topic today. One of the central realities we remember in communion, and one of the most stunning truths we celebrate in communion is the mercy of God shown to us. And *mercy* is our attribute of God we’re focusing on today in our series, “What’s God Like?”

[**Transition**] – In my view, one of the most breath-taking attributes of God is his mercy shown to us. Here’s a few examples of how the Bible talks about God’s mercy.

### **Our God has great mercy!**

In Nehemiah 9 the prophet is acting as secretary taking minutes at a very significant worship service. He records a very long prayer that essentially contrasts God’s faithfulness with the ways the people have been unfaithful. And about halfway through in verse 31 you find this verse, “<sup>31</sup> But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!”

In a similar pattern, in Psalm 78:37-39 the Psalmist is cataloguing God’s greatness contrasted with the people’s failures. He writes, “*Their hearts were not loyal to him. They did not keep his covenant. <sup>38</sup>Yet he was merciful and forgave heir sins and didn’t destroy them all. Many a time he held back his anger and did not unleash his fury! <sup>39</sup>For he remembered that they were merely mortal, gone in a moment like a breath of wind, never to return.*”

Sometimes people get the idea that in the OT God is characterized by justice and judgment and that in the NT he is characterized by mercy and grace. The reality is

the Old Testament refers to the mercy and grace of God nearly four times as much as the New.

Now, here's what I want you to see. When you begin to analyze what the Bible says about God's mercy you can begin to form a more accurate understanding of God's mercy. A.W. Tozer examined the scriptures on mercy, and he came up with this definition: "*Mercy is an attribute of God, an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which disposes God to be actively compassionate*" (Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, p. 90).

When you begin to look deeper into the mercy of God, you find that the mercy of God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. It is not a temporary mood that rises and falls. It's not like the petals of a flower... "he loves me...he loves me not...he's merciful today...tomorrow not."

Since mercy is part of the essence of God, mercy never began to be...equally so... it will never cease to be. Nothing that has occurred or will occur in heaven or on earth, or in hell can change the mercy of our God.

Let me show you another important aspect to God's mercy:

*To be merciful means to actively show compassion and forbearance toward someone who you have the power to punish or harm. Mercy may involve such acts as pardon, forgiveness, or the mitigation of penalties.*

To be merciful requires the power or authority to punish or harm. God shows compassion and forbearance toward human beings even though they have not earned it or in any way deserve it.

In fact, God's mercy moves him to show compassion and forbearance to us in our sin when what we really deserve is punishment. What makes God's mercy so stunning is the recognition he has all authority and power and owes us nothing. But instead of treating us as our sins deserve, he has mercy on us and shows compassion to us.

**[Illustration]** – If you've ever seen the Broadway classic, Les Mis you'll remember the classic scene, and turning point in the whole story when the priest shows mercy toward Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean sought refuge at the monastery, but then decided to run away and grab up the monastery's silver eating utensils on his way out.

[**Transition**] – In that scene, the priest had every right, and all the authority to put Jean Valjean away in prison or worse. The officers deferred to the priest for what to do with Valjean. Instead of punishment, he shows him mercy. And even more, rather than penalize him, he shows him grace by giving him the silver lampstands too...much to the disapproval of the sour faced Nun. ☺ That's a discussion for another time, but too often the sour Nun's response is our response when those we don't deem worthy receive God's mercy.

Jean Valjean's experience of mercy by the Priest helps us move our understanding of God's mercy from our heads to an experience of God's mercy in our hearts. It helps us begin to really understand the true greatness of God's mercy for our lives.

[**Transition**] – I want you to stop for a moment and think about what the mercy of God means toward you. He who has the power to judge you and condemn you, chooses instead to show you compassion and forbearance, pardon, and forgiveness. Think for a few moments about how marvelous that is...

### **The marvelous thing about God's Mercy?**

Here's the thing: Fully appreciating God's mercy starts with fully admitting our sinfulness. The human heart is full of every kind of sinful rebellion from God...I mean Phil read a whole list off for us last week from Romans 8. Remember this text from last week?

*“Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.”* Romans 1:28-32

He's describing sinful human nature. It reads like the garbage dump of the Bible. When you contrast our sin and rebellion with God's holiness and majesty it makes perfect sense to ask, “How could things ever be reconciled?” “What is it that would motivate or cause such a holy and powerful and righteous God to even give a second thought to reconciling a conflict that was in no way his doing?”

What would move a God who could have just as easily squished any man or woman he wanted like a bug and with all justification just obliterate the whole lot of humanity and start over...what would move a God with that capability to

instead take the initiative and bear the cost necessary to reconcile the relationship between himself and humankind?

The answer is...God's mercy. Certainly, his goodness, grace, and love are all in play as well, but it is God's mercy that moves him to treat us with compassion and patience when we deserve only judgment.

**[Illustration]** - Now, I want you to take out the targets you got when you came in. Romans 2:5-6 says, *"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God 'will repay each person according to what they have done.'"*

Here's the stark reality friends. Because of your sin the target of God's wrath is squarely on your chest. {Put that target right on the center of your chest.} (Point lazer site from tazer on a few so they can get the added cringe of being in someone's sights).

The Bible is clear, the target of God's wrath is squarely on the chest of every person. (keep your targets on your chest) Here's how Paul describes this reality in his letter to the Ephesians:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." -Ephesians 2:1-3

But now...notice verses 4-5, "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."

Now...you can take your targets off...Here's a stunning truth I want everyone to see. Because of his great mercy God has chosen to take the target of his wrath off your chest and place it on the chest of his one and only Son, Jesus... who willingly bears the target and takes upon himself the target of all the wrath of God for your sin.

He says it this way in Titus 3: 3-7- *"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of*

*God our Savior appeared, 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, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. “*

[**Transition**] – These are the reasons why the mercy of God is so stunning. Without his mercy, we are literally hopeless. Now, let’s talk about how these truths about God’s mercy impacts our daily lives. With this understanding of God’s mercy in view, how shall we then live? In other words, how are you and I to respond to God’s marvelous mercy that has been, and continues to be extended to us? Let me share three responses.

## **Response to God’s Marvelous Mercy.**

### **1. Embrace the mercy of God.**

Guys...the mercy of God means nothing for you unless you recognize you need it and open your heart to it to embrace it.

The great prophet Isaiah teaches us this very thing: *“Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”* (Isaiah 55:7; NLT)

The New Testament echoes this reality in Hebrews 4:16... *“So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”* (Hebrews 4:16; NLT)

The repeated invitation of the Bible is to come, admit your need, and sink into the marvelous mercy of God. If you are here today and in some way at odds with God and you feel distance or separation or unfamiliarity with Him, then take advantage of God’s mercy and come to him.

His mercy is more than sufficient for your mess. In his great mercy he has offered to extend himself in love and compassion no matter where you have been or what you have done. You simply need to admit to him the sin in your heart and your need for his mercy and forgiveness. The moment you call out to him, he will extend forgiveness and love to you and become your most loyal and powerful friend. I’m going to tell you how you can do that at the end of my message today.

[**Transition**] – Once you have embraced God’s mercy and leaned into it for salvation, there is a second, very logical response that must follow.

## **2. Devote your life to serving our merciful God.**

The mercy of God extended to us must move us to make him our first priority in life. Like the loyalty we would show to someone who saved our lives from total annihilation and meaninglessness. When the full reality of God’s mercy hits you, committing to a life of service to him is your only reasonable response.

Romans 12:1... *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”* (NIV)

This passage calls us to make God your priority. Make his work in the world a top priority. Jesus said, if you’ll seek first...God and his ways in your life, then all the other things you need will be given to you (Matthew 6:33).

[**Transition**]- We respond to God’s mercy by embracing it, and by committing to serve him. Finally, we must respond to God’s mercy by being willing to show it to others.

## **3 – Let mercy received, be mercy passed on.**

[**Illustration**] - There is an old story of a Jewish rabbi who consented to take a weary traveler into his house for a night’s rest. After they ate, the rabbi asked the gentleman, “How old are you?” “Almost a century old,” the man replied. “Are you a religious man?” asked the rabbi. “No, I do not believe in God,” said the gentleman. The rabbi was infuriated. He opened the door and said, “I cannot keep an atheist in my house overnight.” The old man hobbled out to the cold darkness.

Later the Lord spoke to the rabbi. “Why did you let him go?” The rabbi replied, “I turned him out because he was an atheist, and I cannot endure him overnight.” God replied, “Son, I have endured him for almost one hundred years. Don’t you think you could endure him for one night?”

The mercy of God endured us. Sometimes Christians become self-righteous; we imagine that we are living wonderful lives. We begin to believe that God blesses us because we are good. That is never true. You know...we just never really have a right to be the sour Noun.

Mercy is what we have received from God and so it is mercy we are called to show. Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."<sup>1</sup> And he assures us; mercy practiced is mercy promised when said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion and transition to Communion:**

Which one of these three responses is the next step in your personal growth?

1. Embrace God's mercy.
2. Serve the merciful God.
3. Show mercy to others.

Which one of these three responses is God speaking to you about this morning?

>Have you realized for the first time the marvelous mercy of God extended to you and do you need to embrace that and begin a walk with Jesus today? Is there anyone in the room today who needs to open their heart to the mercy of God for the first time...or for the first time in a long time? Once you were close...but now things have gotten sideways in your life, and you want to change course and get back on track with God. Anyone feeling like they need to fall into the mercy of God today? [Fill out Green Connect Card]

>Maybe you've already said yes to Jesus, and you are already a Christian and your next step is making that choice to start living for him in all areas of your life. Maybe you are in a season of your relationship with Jesus where he's calling you to begin to serve him. It's time for you to begin giving back to the One who has given so much for you. Maybe today is the day when you commit to getting involved serving in a ministry somewhere around Foothills Church, or somewhere in our community to be a light in these foothills. Maybe today you sense God calling you to be a light in your workplace, your school, on your sports team, or at your gym.

You know most believers can recite John 3:16 but very few know 1 John 3:16. It says "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*" Maybe you realize that it's time to start shining brighter for God because of all the marvelous mercy of God has shown to you.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 6:36.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:7.

>Maybe you're feeling the third response is what God is wanting from you right now. That whole area of showing mercy to people who are tough to love. Is there a person in your life right now, a neighbor, a family member someone you see regularly in your daily life? And God is tapping you on the shoulder today and saying, "I want you to begin to show that person mercy."

The mercy of God is what we have received, so it is mercy we are called to show.

### **Communion:**

If you have come to the place in your life where recognize your desperate need for God's mercy, and you have opened your heart to him and embraced his mercy, then I can't think of a better way for us to respond together to this message of God's mercy than celebrating communion together.

Still got your targets? I want you to put them back on your chest as I read from Ephesians 2 again.

*2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."*

Now as I read verses 4-5, I want you to take off your targets. And when I finish reading...I want us all together to scrunch and wad them up like trash...then on your way out toss them in the trash because you don't need them anymore.

*"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."*

On a count of three...let's all wad our targets up together.

Now with the mercy of God fresh in our minds, let's celebrate communion together.