

## Blessed Are The Merciful

Matthew 5:7

March 24, 1989, was a cold night off the coast of Alaska. The captain of a tanker barked vague orders to a second mate. The night was black, and the collision was disastrous. The tanker ship Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef, dumping eleven million gallons of crude oil into one of the most scenic bodies of water in the world. Petroleum blackened everything from the surface of the sea, to beaches, to otters, to sea gulls. Alaska was infuriated, and Exxon, the company which owned the tanker, was humiliated.

The collision, terrible as it was, was mild compared to the ones that occur daily in our relationships. Someone doesn't meet your expectations. Promises go unfulfilled. The result? A collision of the hull of your heart against the reef of someone's actions. Hurt coats the surface of your soul with the deadly film of resentment. A black blanket of bitterness darkens your world, dims your sight, sours your outlook, and suffocates your joy.

Do you have a hole in your heart? Perhaps the wound is old. A parent abused you. A teacher slighted you. A mate betrayed you. A business partner bailed out, leaving you with bills and bankruptcy, and you are angry.

Then, to add insult to injury, the friend who owes you money just drove by in a new car. The boss who hired you with promises of promotions has forgotten your name. Your circle of friends escaped on a weekend getaway, and you weren't invited. The children you raised have forgotten you exist, and you are hurt.

Part of you is broken, and the other part is bitter. Part of you wants to cry, and part of you wants to fight. The tears you cry are hot because they come from your heart, and there is a fire burning in your heart.

You are left with a decision. Do I get over it or get even? Do I release it or resent it? Do I let my hurts heal, or do I let hurt turn into hate?

Resentment is when you let your hurt become hate. Resentment is when you allow what is eating you to eat you up. Resentment is the deliberate decision to nurse the offense until it becomes a grudge. Grudge is one of those words that defines itself. It's very sound betrays its meaning. It starts with a growl. Say it slowly: "Grr-uuuud-ge." Have you ever been near someone who is nursing a grudge?

How are you are coping with your hurts? Are you allowing your hurts to turn into hates? If so, ask yourself: "Is it working? Has your hatred done you any good? Has your resentment brought you any relief, any peace? Has it granted you any joy?"

Pretend you get even. Pretend you get them back. Pretend they get what they deserve. Pretend your fantasy of fury returns all your pain with interest. Imagine yourself standing over the corpse of the one you have hated. Will you now be free?

Resentment is like a drug of emotions. It causes our blood to pump and our energy level to rise. But, also like any drug, it demands increasingly larger and more frequent dosages. There is a dangerous point at which anger ceases to be an emotion and becomes a driving force. A person bent on revenge moves unknowingly further and further away from being able to forgive, for to be without anger is to be without a source of energy. That explains why the bitter complain to anyone who will listen. They want—they need—to have their fire.

Resentment is like a drug in another way. A drug can kill the addict, and anger can kill the angry. It can kill physically. Chronic anger has been linked with elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, and other deadly conditions. It can kill emotionally, in that it can raise anxiety levels and lead to depression. It can be spiritually fatal, too.

“Hatred is the rabid dog that turns on its owner. Revenge is the raging fire that consumes the arsonist. Bitterness is the trap that snares the hunter. And mercy is the choice that can set them all free.” —Max Lucado

Resentment turns us over to be tortured. Tortured by anger. Choked by bitterness. Consumed by revenge. But the one who tastes God’s grace and then gives it to others, the reward is a blessed liberation. The prison door is thrown open, and the prisoner set free is yourself.

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*” Matthew 5:7

In the greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus embedded eight principles for freedom, eight principles that are all about real change, eight principles that allow God to destroy the barriers and restore and transform our lives. 180 times the word for mercy appears in the Bible. 96 times, it's translated mercy; 38 times, it's translated kindness; 30 times it's translated loving-kindness, mercy, a second chance, forgiveness. Mercy is not some little watered-down word. It is a dynamic word, a forceful word, a piercing word.

Something powerful happens when I recognize I need forgiveness like everyone else.

### Myths About Forgiveness

- We tend to view forgiveness as a gift to the ones who offended us.

We see it as something that benefits them. Forgiveness is not a gift for others, it’s a gift that was designed for us. The one who benefits the most from forgiveness is the one who grants it, not the one who receives it.

- God will understand if I don’t forgive.

*"If you are not willing to forgive other people their trespasses against you, then your Father in heaven is going to be unwilling to forgive you your trespasses."* Matthew 6:15

Unforgiveness is poison to the soul. To refuse to forgive is to choose to self-destruct.

- I’ll just live with it.

I’ll just stuff it all inside and forget it.

Someone has said, “Love does not forgive and forget. It remembers and still forgives anyway.”

- I just can’t find it in me to forgive.

Ask God to help you to be able to forgive. Every time you think of something in your past that has caused you great hurt and pain, you stand at a fork in the road. Each time, you've got to choose which road you're going to go down. One road leads to just reliving all that trauma, all that heartache, and all that pain. The second road leads to God's mercy and God's grace.

Instead of your past hurts being painful memories, they will become trophies to remind you of just how much God helped you make it through.

### 1. **Mercy Is The Heart Of Who God Is.**

Mercy is God’s reaction to our misery.

*“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...” Exodus 34:6*

Mercy is one of the most beautiful characteristics of God, and when you're merciful, you're acting like God.

David declared, *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* Psalm 103:8

Lamentations 3:22 says, *“It is because of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”*

Every morning you wake up you are greeted by the mercy of God.

Ephesians 2:4 says, *"But because of God's 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."*

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*  
Ephesians 4:32

## **2. Choose Forgiveness Over Bitterness.**

Bitterness keeps me stuck in the past. Forgiveness goes against the grain. They don't come natural to us. We need God's supernatural power to do them. When someone hurts me, it's not natural for me to forgive. It feels natural for me to get even. But when I do that and hold onto the hurt, it keeps me chained to the past.

Hebrews 12:15 says, *"Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many."*

Look at that phrase *“the poisonous root of bitterness.”* Bitterness is a poison from the past that poisons your life and all your relationships in the present. It keeps me from breaking free. It may feel right, but it's poisonous.

It like the elderly lady who was looking for a parking place at the mall during the holiday season. She was really struggling trying to find a parking place, and then she saw a guy come out of the mall with all these bags, and so she started following him in her car and came to his parking place. He got in his car and she put her turn signal on to say that she was going to take his place after he pulled out, but as soon as the guy pulled out this young guy in a souped-up sports car just darted in the parking space before this elderly woman could even react. She was so mad. She rolled down the window and she said, “You can't do that, son.” And he said, “Oh you bet I can. That's just the way it is when you're young and fast.” Well, fortunately, this elderly woman showed a calmness about her, and she collected her thoughts and then she just put her car in reverse and she calmly backed up. Then she put her car in drive and calmly slammed her foot on the gas pedal, floored it and smashed into the back of his car and pretty much totaled his fancy sports car and her car and this young guy said, “Lady, what are you thinking? You can't do that.” And she said, “Oh you bet I can. That's just the way it is when you're old and rich. It felt good.”

Mercy sets you free, and that's through forgiveness. Bitterness is a barrier that keeps us stuck in the past. We think by holding on to a hurt that we're not letting that person off the hook. We think by holding on to a hurt we're getting back at the person that hurt us, and it's just the opposite. You keep letting the person that hurt you in the past hurt you in the present.

Some of us are holding on to a hurt that was a deep wound. Someone hurt you, wronged you terribly, and you're still holding on to that hurt. What you're doing is you're still allowing them to hurt you today. You're still

chained to that person who hurt you. You're still allowing them to keep hurting you over and over again, and that's why it's important to see that you experience forgiveness that leads to freedom.

Jesus told a convicting story about a person who has been forgiven an incredible debt.

*“Jesus told the story of a king who decided to close out all his accounts with those who worked for him. He called in his debtors and told them to pay. One man owed an amount too great to return—a debt that could never be repaid. But when the king saw the man and heard his story, his heart went out to him, and he erased the debt.*

*As the man was leaving the palace grounds, he encountered a fellow employee who owed him a small sum. He grabbed the debtor and choked him, demanding payment. When the fellow begged for mercy, no mercy was granted. Instead, the one who had just been forgiven had his debtor thrown into jail.*

*When word of this got to the king, he became livid. And Jesus says, ‘In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’” Matthew 8:23-24*

Could someone actually be forgiven a debt of millions and be unable to forgive a debt of hundreds? Could a person be set free and then imprison another?

You don't have to be a theologian to answer those questions. You only have to look in the mirror. Who among us has not begged God for mercy on Sunday and then demanded justice on Monday? Who hasn't served as a bottleneck instead of a conduit of God's love? Is there anyone who doesn't, at one time or the other, show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?

### **3. Forgiveness Leads To Freedom.**

Jesus said in Mark 11:25, *"But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you're holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."*

*“He who cannot forgive burns the very bridge over which he himself must walk.” —George Herbert*

Because I have received Christ, He's forgiven me of my sins. I'm going to heaven one day. He's in my life. I forgive others in the same way I have been forgiven. I forgive because I'll need forgiveness in the future. You forgive because you need freedom from your past, and you forgive because you'll need forgiveness in the future.

How Do I Take this Step?

- I Choose To Admit My Hurt.

It's hard for us to admit when we're hurt. We don't like to admit anyone can hurt us so we'll say, “That didn't hurt. It's no big deal. They can't hurt me.” Pride is a barrier that keeps us from experiencing freedom.

Colossians 3:13 says, *“Be gentle and ready to forgive, never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”*

If I don't admit what you did hurt me deeply, then I can never really forgive. You don't minimize the hurt.

□ Choose To Release The Offender.

A lot of people think if I release my offender then I'm letting them off the hook, and it's just the opposite of that. You release your offender to let yourself off the hook so you can move into the future. You release your offender so that you can be free from being hurt, and when you release your offender, it doesn't let them off the hook. You're releasing them to the hands of God.

Forgiveness is not something you ever feel like doing. You never have feelings of forgiveness. You act out of your will in spite of your feelings. When someone hurts me, I say, "Lord, I don't like what happened and I wish You would have stopped it. I don't understand it. But I choose to forgive them for my own good and because You command it."

*"Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" Matthew 18:21-22*

Peter came to Christ trying to impress Him.

Jesus was saying that every time the hurt comes to your mind, you have to choose to forgive. When someone hurts me, and I say, "Lord, I don't like it but I choose to forgive them. I want to be set free. I choose to forgive them." About five minutes later when that hurt comes back to my mind and the anger starts building up I repeat, "Lord, I choose to forgive them." Then about two minutes later I start thinking about how they hurt me again and I have to say, "Lord, I choose to forgive them." I have to do it as many times as it takes before the memory starts to fade, before the hurt starts to heal.

□ Pray For The Blessing On The One Who Offended Me.

That's how it heals. As an act of my will, I choose to forgive, and then I have to pray for them. To really release my offender and release myself to move into my future, I have to pray for them.

In Luke 6:28 Jesus said, *"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."*

I have to pray for those who mistreat me. I'm going to pray for something they really need. As I pray for them, I can move into my future and see the blessings God has for me rather than the pain of the past. I see the purpose and move forward, but I have to choose to forgive and then pray.

*"Never pay back evil for evil. ... never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it." Romans 12:17*

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Luke 4:16-22*