

Compassion

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

Why do we do the things we do? What motivates us to act in certain ways or to react to others the way we do? When Socrates famously said that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” he was tapping into a Biblical concept. Living a life of joy requires that we be thoughtful about our heart and truthful about the underlying reasons we have for our outward behavior.

In the first four Beatitudes we discovered that the condition of our heart speaks to our personal relationship with God. Recognizing our poverty of spirit, we mourn and repent over our sin which leads us to salvation and a restored relationship with God. Recognizing our human tendency to arrogance leads us to humble ourselves before Him and to hunger for the power of His Word in our lives. All of these required an honest examination of our heart and a willingness to accept the change God demanded.

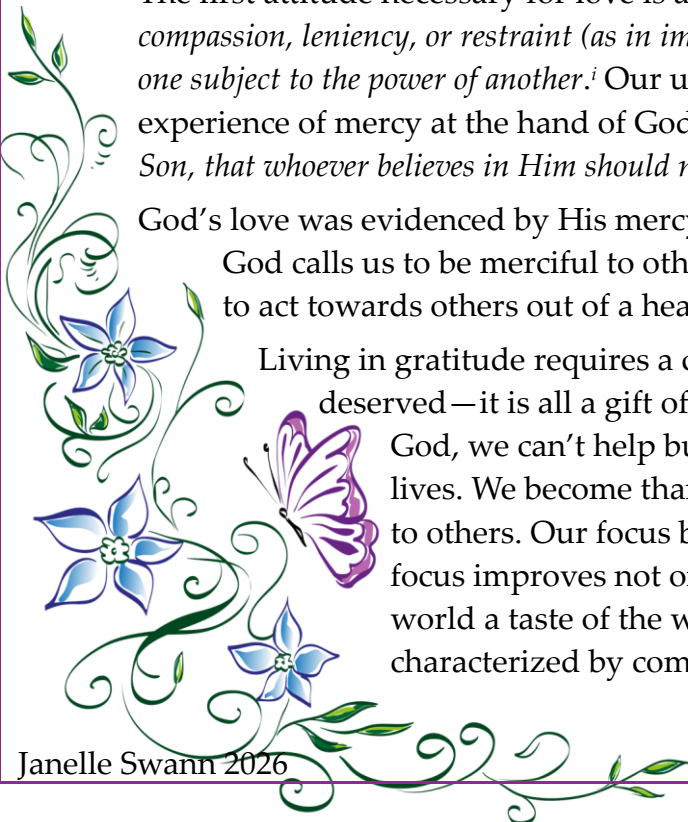
Now as we move to the second set of Beatitudes, we see this same emphasis on an examined heart. But at this point, the focus shifts from our heart’s relationship to God to our heart’s relationship with others. Just as we see in the Great Commandment—first we are to love God and then we are to love others. But what does it mean to love others? In these four Beatitudes, Jesus teaches us the real basis for love. It comes from hearts that are merciful, pure, peaceful, and sacrificial.

Hearts like this do not happen accidentally. They are like gardens—they must be maintained. Jesus explained, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). What we allow to grow in our hearts will affect the way we behave. If we fail to examine the condition of our heart on a regular basis, we will default to simply acting out of habit which will rarely be a good thing, “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

The first attitude necessary for love is a heart of mercy. Merriam Webster defines mercy as *compassion, leniency, or restraint (as in imposing punishment) shown especially to an offender or to one subject to the power of another.*ⁱ Our understanding of mercy is inextricably linked to our experience of mercy at the hand of God: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*

God’s love was evidenced by His mercy in sending His Son to pay the penalty for our sin. God calls us to be merciful to others in the same way that He was to us. And so we are to act towards others out of a heart of gratefulness for all that God has done for us.

Living in gratitude requires a constant reminder that nothing we have in life is deserved—it is all a gift of God to us. When we train our focus upon the mercy of God, we can’t help but be amazed at the goodness of God revealed in our lives. We become thankful for what we have and willing to give of ourselves to others. Our focus becomes outward rather than inward. This outward focus improves not only our life, but also the lives of others. It gives the world a taste of the wonder of heaven as we live in a world characterized by compassion and kindness.



The Joy of Gratitude

The freedom to see beyond ourselves.

Enjoying God's Mercy

Some things in Christianity are one and done. Salvation—once saved, always saved. Baptism—a one-time ritual of identifying with Christ as believer. But others require maintenance and upkeep.

Although we have experienced God's mercy in salvation, we also experience God's mercy in many other areas of our life as well. A large part of gratitude is recognizing God's gracious blessings in our life. As David reflected upon his relationship with God, he returned to his life as a shepherd and compared himself to a sheep. Read **Psalm 23**.

As we see in this passage, a shepherd has many roles in watching sheep, but what is the foundational one that David lays out in **verses 1-2**?

In **verse 3**, the Hebrew word translated *restores* has the meaning of "to turn back, to retreat, again." The imagery here is of sheep wandering away. What does God do when we get off track? Why?

The Christian life is not guaranteed to be problem free as we see in **verse 4**. Yet in what ways does God show His mercy towards us?

Verse 5 turns to the kindness we experience at the hand of God. How does God go above and beyond in caring for us?

What kind of assurance does God's goodness and mercy provide in our lives? (v. 6)

Responding to God's Abundance

In **Psalm 50:8-14** God expresses what He wants in return for the abundance He provides. Although He commanded Israel to offer sacrifices to Him, what does He say about them? (v. 8)

Why does He say this? (v. 10-13)



What does He desire instead? (v. 14)

We no longer are required to offer sacrifices to God. But what kind of rituals do we engage in? What does this passage tell us about how we are to view these rituals?

What curse would befall the Israelites if they did not acknowledge God's blessings in their lives according to **Deuteronomy 28:47-48,51**?

We are blessed to be the richest people who have ever lived. We never worry about famine. We live in homes that are almost impervious to most natural disasters. We are so far removed from the threat of total annihilation from famine, war, or disease that humanity subsisted under for millennia that we cannot comprehend the fear of it. Yet, we have become so comfortable with our abundance, so assured of it that our society has become fixated on the belief that we do not have enough. What happens when we become discontented with our lives and forget the abundance God has given us? (See **Proverbs 17:22.**)

What solutions does **Psalms 16:5-9** give to help us overcome our discontentment?

1. Acknowledge that God has _____ (v. 5)
2. _____ a positive attitude _____ (v. 6)
3. Recognize that God's abundance in our life is _____ (v. 7-8)
4. Set our hearts _____ and _____ that He will provide (v. 9)

Living in Contentment

Gratitude is the opposite of discontentment. When we are focused solely upon ourselves, our needs, our desires; we become ungrateful. And when we become ungrateful, our world narrows and becomes centered completely around ourselves. Rather than be a channel of God's mercy to others, we become unhappy, bitter, angry and unable to be a force for good in the lives of those around us. In **James 4:1-3**, why does it say that we often do not have the things we want in life?

How were Paul's needs met in **Philippians 4:10-13**?



Should we expect others to meet our needs according to this passage?

What happens when our needs are not being met according to Paul?

Ultimately, upon what was Paul's hope based?

What is the blessing of living for God seen in **Psalm 37:25-26**?

What is Solomon's conclusion about living a joyful life in **Ecclesiastes 5:18-20**?

1. Recognize _____ has been provided by God.
2. _____ what God gives us and recognize it _____.
3. _____ keeps us from worrying about the future.

Channeling God's Mercy

Reflecting God's Character

Why are we commanded to be merciful in Luke 6:36?

Just as God has treated us with mercy, so we are to treat others. What is to be the basis for the way we treat others according to **Matthew 7:12**?

How does **Galatians 6:7-10** explain receiving mercy when we give mercy?

What example does Paul use to explain the concept of sowing and reaping? (v. 8).

How does knowing our own heart keep us from mocking God?



How do we see sowing and reaping described in **Proverbs 11:17-19**?

Principles in the Bible are different from promises. God always fulfill His promises – salvation if we call on Him is an example of this. Principles are no less important, but do not always show immediate fulfillment in our lives and work for both the saved and the unsaved. Is *sowing and reaping* a promise or principle? What are the implications of that?

Compassion & Kindness

Meeting needs and going above and beyond

In **Acts 20:35**, what words of Jesus does Paul turn to as the motivation for his lifestyle of compassion?

How does this teaching support an attitude of gratitude?

Jesus taught that the second commandment is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). When challenged on the definition of the word *neighbor* in this command, Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:30-37**. According to this parable, who acted neighborly?

There are many layers to this story. Some are cultural – the Jews and Samaritans hated each other and therefore had nothing to do with each other. Some concern legalism – the priest and Levite feared touching a dead body and becoming unclean. But ultimately, how do these lessons point to what God says He desires in **Matthew 9:13**?

How does an emphasis on outward conformity undercut our ability to be compassionate and kind to others?



The Good Samaritan modeled showing mercy by:

1. _____ . (Matthew 9:36)
2. _____ . (John 4:3-4)
3. _____ . (James 2:15-16)
4. _____ . (2 Samuel 24:24)

Showing mercy begins with a heart of compassion but goes nowhere if it is not directly tied to our actions as the Good Samaritan demonstrated. We have to be willing to get out of our bubble and out of our comfort zone in order to engage in the lives of those in need. Jesus was willing to go through Samaria, a place Jews usually avoided, to witness to a Samaritan harlot. We too, must be willing to venture into places in our world that make us uncomfortable in order to find those God calls us to help.

And while, God calls us to tend to the spiritual needs of those around us, James 2:15-16 makes it clear that we must also be aware of people's physical needs. Two thousand years of Christian history is full of the many who cared for orphans, the sick, the outcasts (lepers), and the needy. As we saw during Covid, we cannot give up our place in offering to care for those in need to secular institutions who do not operate upon the mercy of God. Proverbs 12:10 warns us, *"the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."*

We also have to be willing to care for others through our own effort and means. The Samaritan was dependent upon the innkeeper to provide some level of care while he was gone. But he made it clear from the beginning that he alone was paying the cost. In the same way David recognized that offering a sacrifice without personally paying the cost of it was worthless. Charity makes a larger impact in people's lives when it is directly received from the giver rather than paid for by the taxpayer. We need to be helping people out of our own pockets, not connecting them to governmental programs.

This story speaks to the dedication of our whole lives in showing mercy to others. In gratitude to God, we view others with compassion, purposefully go to where there are needs, and then use our bodies and the blessings God has given us to care for the needs of others. These are actions that have eternal consequences as Jesus explained:

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"

And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:37-40).

Endnotes

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mercy>

