

Session 5: Matthew 5:7

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God meets us with mercy, not condemnation, and transforms us into people who extend mercy to others.

Head Change: To know that God lavishes mercy upon us, even though we are undeserving of such kindness.

Heart Change: To feel drawn to people on the fringes of our society to show them the mercy of God.

Life Change: To mimic Jesus's ministry of mercy to draw people into the kingdom of God.

OPEN

How do you feel when a character in a movie, TV show, or book doesn't get what they deserve?

It's sometimes difficult for us to reckon with the concept of mercy, the act of withholding punishment or consequences from someone who's done wrong. In a culture that is increasingly angry and anxious, mercy is seen as weakness or an excusing of bad behavior. But mercy is one of the most powerful ways we can love people.

Just as God was merciful to us when we didn't deserve it, we also can love people who have not earned our love. And, as we will see in this session, mercy reaches out to people who are forgotten by our society to show them the dignity and life-changing love of our savior.

READ

Read Matthew 5:1–12. Continue your effort to memorize the Beatitudes.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Matt’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

According to Matt, what activity was Jesus’s ministry built around?

How does Matt define the word “mercy”?

What is our natural response to having received mercy from God?

Show Session 5: *Matthew 5:7* (9 minutes).

DISCUSS

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

For the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the humble, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, there may be no sweeter words than these. Followers of Jesus are keenly aware of our need for mercy. But what is mercy, who receives it, and what do we do with it once we’ve received it? **How would you define mercy?**

Matt defined mercy as “the giving of undeserved acceptance and blessing.” Think about the word “undeserved.” **When have you been an undeserving recipient of kindness or mercy? What was your reaction to that kindness or mercy?**

Matt talked about “the fringes”—the edge of society filled with people who are “farthest from God imaginable.” **What does it look like for people to be “on the fringes” where you live?**

*[Note: For further prayer and reflection on people “on the fringes” today, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Read John 8:2–11.

In this passage, a group of “scribes and Pharisees” paraded a woman who was caught in the act of adultery in front of Jesus and a group of people he was teaching. They wanted to bring the full force of the law down upon this woman, but Jesus chose to be gentle and merciful. **If you’re honest, do you most often side with the scribes and Pharisees, condemning those who wrong you, or with Jesus, showing mercy?**

*[Note: For further study on the interplay between mercy and condemnation, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

Why do you think we can often behave as the scribes and Pharisees did in John 8?

Matt also referenced the story of Zacchaeus and the woman at the well in the video. Take a moment to read those stories in Luke 19:1–10 and John 4:1–30. **How did the onlookers respond to Jesus’s interaction with**

Zacchaeus? How did Jesus’s own disciples respond upon seeing him interact with the woman at the well?

What do the woman caught in adultery, Zacchaeus, and the woman at the well all have in common?

How do Zacchaeus and the woman at the well respond to the mercy that Jesus extends to them?

Some onlookers opposed Jesus’s mercy, others were amazed, while those who receive his mercy, like Zacchaeus and the woman at the well, were quick to go and share the mercy they had received with others. **How do stories like these confront us with the kindness of God and invite us into the blessed life that Jesus outlines in the Beatitudes?**

The fifth Beatitude forces us to reckon with the mercy of God. Have we received it, and if so, do we extend it to others? **How would you answer those questions? In what ways do you actively seek to extend the mercy of God to those whom you encounter in your day-to-day life?**

If the mercy of God is his “giving of undeserved acceptance and blessing,” then God’s mercy is an unspeakable kindness. And if “God’s kindness is intended to lead [people] to repentance” (Rom 2:4), then we would be wise to ask ourselves: **To what degree do our life and ministry imitate the kindness of God? What priority do you place on kindness in your interactions with strangers? With the “sinners and tax collectors” of our day? With those on the fringes?**

More than any other thus far, the fifth Beatitude is an occasion for self-reflection. Our instincts, or lack thereof, toward mercy provide us with a clear picture of whether we truly understand the great kindness God has shown in extending us mercy. When we, by the Spirit, properly comprehend the mercy of God, we will be quick to give it away to those we encounter—there’s plenty to go around.

In what ways can you practice extending the mercy of God to others today? To whom can you share God’s mercy today?

LAST WORD

The Bible pulls no punches. Before receiving the mercy of God, we were his enemies. We were all on the fringes! “But God, being *rich in mercy*, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:4–5, emphasis added).

We have been pulled from the fringes of our rebellion against God, the one who is “rich in mercy” and who will “show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4, 7). Blessed are those who have received this mercy and who extend this mercy, for they will get more of it.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where the following segment could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use this section as a short devotional to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider reading this section to deepen your study of the Beatitudes.

1. *Prayer for People on the Fringes*

Matt asserted that “the ministry of Jesus is built around drawing from the fringes”— the people who were considered outcasts in society, like the woman caught in adultery and Zacchaeus. Even after two thousand years, there are still outcasts in society who feel forgotten, unwanted, and unloved. These are the people Jesus calls us to show mercy. **Have you ever been on the fringes yourself? If so, what was life like for you then?**

Who are the people who are on the fringes around you today? What are a few ways that you can tangibly help the people you've identified as being on the fringes?

Matt also described the fringes as the people farthest from God. They may not be outcasts in society but are spiritually distant from God. **Who are the people on the spiritual fringes of our society? In what ways do you think the church has ministered to or forgotten those people?**

Now, take a few minutes as a group to pray for these groups or individuals. Use the following prompts to help guide your prayers.

- Pray that God would give you an opportunity to engage with, befriend, and minister to them.
- Pray that God would give you an opportunity to provide them with tangible help, either financially or through an act of service.
- Pray that God would use your interaction with them to communicate his presence and his love for them.

Commit to regular and frequent prayer for those who seem (and maybe feel) farthest from God. Watch for opportunities to serve the fringes and share the ways God answers your prayers with the rest of the group.

2. *Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment*

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul tells us two difficult truths: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23) and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). So, if all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death, then what hope do we have? Enter, the mercy of God.

While God’s mercy is littered throughout the entirety of the Scriptures, James 2 illustrates a particularly impactful concept of God’s mercy.

Read James 2:12–13.

What does James say is the relationship between judgment and mercy? How are those who have not shown mercy said to be judged? In what ways does this passage encourage you personally to be merciful to others?

The word that James uses for judgment in this passage is the Greek word *krisis*, which is where we get our English word “crisis.” We often find *krisis* translated in the New Testament as judgment, justice, or condemnation. **Have you ever thought of God’s judgment as a crisis? Why is God’s judgment a crisis for those who have sinned?**

In the second part of verse 13, James makes a startling statement. He says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” The mercy of God is superior to the judgment we’re owed in response to our sin. God delights to show us mercy and relieves the crisis of judgment. **In what ways do you think mercy is greater than judgment? What does James’s description of mercy teach you about the heart of God?**

If we are called to love others just as God has loved us, then we will need to see mercy as greater than judgment. Even when we want to judge someone or retaliate against them, we must also delight in mercy. **In what ways does the mercy of God encourage you to be merciful to others?**

Take a few minutes to meditate on the phrase, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Reflect on the kindness and the mercy and heart of God in restoring the hope that was once lost due to sin. And take a few moments to consider that, because you’re in Christ, you are called to show his mercy to others. **Is there someone in particular who needs your mercy instead of your judgment? How could you be merciful and kind to them this week?**