

#3: Being Merciful and Pure | Joe Wittwer | May 15, 2011

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes.)

Introduction: Jesus came to bring the change we all long for, starting with you and me. It's the Jesus Revolution. This week we're looking at two more ways He changes us: to become more merciful and pure in heart.

1. Being merciful.

Matthew 5:7 says "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*" Our God is a merciful God and He desires for this to be true of us. **Luke 6:36** states "*Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.*" God is full of mercy towards us, and He wants us to be full of mercy towards others. Jesus told the religious, in **Matthew 9:13** "*Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*" He was saying that God isn't interested in religious liturgies and ceremonies; God is interested in mercy. So what is mercy? Let's look at three things that mercy is made up of:

First, mercy is feeling sympathy or compassion for one who is suffering. It is something you feel. But it is much more than just feeling sorry for someone. The Bible word has the idea of getting inside someone's skin until you can see things with their eyes, think things with their mind, and feel things with their feelings. This kind of empathy comes only from a deliberate and conscious identification with the other person. You put yourself in their shoes and imagine what it must be like for them. This is not an accidental wave of emotion, but a deliberate attempt to understand another person's feelings. Mercy means that you make a deliberate decision to put yourself in the other person's shoes, that you try to understand what they did and why they did it. The greatest example of mercy is God himself. He literally stepped into our skin, into our shoes. God became a man in Jesus Christ, and experienced what we experience. [Read **Hebrews 4:15-16** together now.]

Second, mercy is doing what you can to relieve another's suffering. Your emotion results in action. In the Bible, people would cry out to Jesus, "Lord, have mercy on us." For example, there was blind Bartimaeus; or the lady whose daughter was tormented; or the man whose son had seizures. Each of these said, "Lord, have mercy on me!" They weren't asking Jesus just to feel bad; they were asking Him to do something! There is so much suffering and pain in the world that we have insulated ourselves from feeling too much, and are often confused about what we could do to make a difference. The numbness and confusion paralyze us and we end up doing nothing. That attitude is all too common; we feel overwhelmed by the sea of needs and suffering all around us, and our tendency is to pull the shade and enjoy our meal. We end up doing nothing. We walk by on the other side of the road. But we can't do that anymore. As followers of Jesus, our lives (like His) are characterized by mercy—mercy that not only feels, but acts to help. We can't do everything, but we can do something. So mercy is feeling compassion for the suffering of others and doing something to help them.

Third, mercy often involves forgiving others. So mercy includes these three things: feeling; doing, and forgiving. How do we become merciful? Here are two ideas. **First**, remember that God has been merciful to you. In **Luke 6:36** Jesus said, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*" Those who have received mercy are more likely to give it. There is a mercy cycle in this verse. We receive mercy from God, so that we can give it to others, and then we receive more mercy again. You only keep what you give away, and you can give only what you've received. So first, receive God's mercy. **Second**, make a deliberate attempt to understand others. Try to place yourself in the other person's shoes. Human decisions and actions are the result of an incredibly complex set of factors. You'll never completely understand anyone, but

the more you understand, the easier it is to forgive and the better you can help. When you don't understand, learn to give people the benefit of the doubt. Don't assume the worst; it is rarely true. Most folks don't deliberately set out to harm someone else; most offenses are unintentional; most people really want to do the right thing. Want to be more merciful? Receive and enjoy the mercy of God. And then make a deliberate effort to understand the other person and give them the benefit of the doubt.

2. Being pure in heart.

Matthew 5:8 says "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" What does Jesus mean by "pure in heart"? The words "in heart" indicate the kind of purity Jesus is talking about. This purity that Jesus says is blessed is not physical cleanliness. Jesus isn't saying, "Blessed are those who shower regularly and smell good." Jesus isn't saying, "Blessed are those who can keep all the rules and regulations of religion so that they are considered ritually clean." That was the kind of purity that was prized by the religious people of Jesus' day. If you touched a dead body, or hadn't washed your hands properly, or if a woman had her period, you were considered unclean, and you weren't able to worship God. This outward purity was very important to the religious, but Jesus called for purity of the heart. It is a clean heart that Jesus is talking about here. God's first concern is always your heart. The heart is the sum total of human personality. It includes your mind, emotions and will; what you think, what you feel, and the force of your will. **Matthew 12:34** says "*For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*" Your words are an expression of your heart. [Read **Matthew 15:19-20** together now.] Your actions are an expression of your heart. Your words and actions both come from the heart, from who you are inside. That is why God's first concern is the heart. If you change the heart, you change everything about a person. Our attempts to change ourselves and others often fail because they aren't radical enough, they don't go deep enough. We change the outside without addressing the inside, and God says that the heart is the issue. **First**, it means clean. Blessed are those with a clean heart. Why is it so important to have a clean heart? Because it is the only way to live a clean life. Everything you do and say comes from your heart; if your heart is dirty, your words and actions will be too. **Second**, pure means to be unalloyed, unmixed, or single. We would use the word "integrity". The pure in heart are the utterly sincere; those who are free from falsehood in their relations with God and man. Their whole life is transparent before God and men. The pure in heart have nothing to hide. Integrity is what you are when no one is looking. When we walk in the light, that is when we live in authentic relationship with Jesus day by day, He keeps us clean. He purifies us. And He does this by virtue of His death on the Cross. There is nothing like spending time with Jesus to keep you clean!

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. Are you merciful towards others? What types of circumstances do you find it hard to be merciful to others? Share an example of a time when you have deliberately tried to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Did this affect your ability to show them mercy?
2. Read **Luke 10:29-37** together. What set the Samaritan apart from the other two? Can you identify with the Samaritan or the other two men better? What prevents you from acting merciful towards others? How can we become merciful?
3. Why is it important to be able to forgive others so that you can become merciful? Is there anyone in your life that you are struggling to forgive? How can this affect your ability to be merciful? What steps could you take to be able to forgive?
4. What does it mean to have pure heart? How can you become pure in heart?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

Make deliberate attempts this week to feel sympathy for others, take action to relieve someone's suffering and be open to forgiving others, all through God's strength, and see how God will grow your ability to be merciful towards others.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Give thanks to God for His mercy towards us and ask for strength to be merciful to others.
- Ask God's help to create in you a clean heart. (**Psalm 51**)
- Bring for any other concerns brought up during the discussion.