



Matthew 5:7

You Get Back What You Give

Matthew tells us in his Gospel that Jesus was going about in the cities and villages teaching and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. Jesus was "healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." As He looked over the multitudes that were gathering around Him ". . . He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus was putting into action those deep feelings of compassion for the sad and pitiful state in which He saw the people. The original word suggests strong emotion; it means, to feel deep sympathy. The related noun *splanchna*, means 'sympathy, affection, or inward feelings. It is the deep seat of compassionate feelings. He not only felt compassion but also He was reaching out with those deep feelings to touch people in their deepest needs. The Hebrew word *chesedh* for mercy communicates this same idea beautifully.

Let's face it, we live in a day when "winner-takes-all" and whoever dies with all the toys wins philosophy rebels at the idea of "mercy." People are treated like things where power is supreme and personal success is the chief end of man. If you practice mercy in our highly competitive society you are the real loser. How do you put into practice the words of Jesus when He said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"?

In our study of the Beatitudes of Jesus we have observed in Matthew's arrangement that the first four beatitudes express our total dependence upon God and the next three are the outworking in everyday life of that dependence and submission to Him.

THE PRINCIPLE SIMPLY STATED

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

A definition of merciful

The word "merciful," according to Thayer is defined as: "good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them." It not only means to feel deeply but is also a word of action. It is to recognize a need and then do something about it.

It is the outward demonstration of sympathy; it assumes a need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of the person who shows it.

the person who shows it.

The stress is on the feelings of empathy showing itself in action, and not just existing in thought only or feelings. Mercy in the abstract is absolutely meaningless to Jesus. I like to think of it as compassion in action.

The word for *merciful* has been variously translated merciful, pity, mercy, compassion, and feel compassion. Our word indicates being moved to pity and compassion by a tragedy and includes the fear that this could happen to me as well. There but for the grace of God, go I. But there is more to merciful because now that I see a situation I want to try to do something about it.

The person who is merciful is described as being "kind," or "forgiving," or "people who take pity on others," and "who show mercy to others."

Mercy is a commentary on our own lives. We are undeserving recipients of God's mercy. He reached down to us in our depravity and brought us to Himself and extended His mercy to us. "He lifted me out of the watery pit, out of the slimy mud. He placed my feet on a rock and gave me secure footing" (Psalm 40:2, NET).

A lifestyle

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7, NASB95). The NET Bible reads, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

The emphasis is on those who are of a mind to show mercy, not those who occasionally show mercy. It is a habitual action. The recipients of God's grace and mercy habitually live by that same grace and mercy.

In turn, they will receive mercy on the last day. The spiritually prosperous are those who show mercy to others; God will be merciful to them!

There is an eschatological application in this verse: People who show mercy to others will have mercy shown to them on judgment day. The person who does not show mercy cannot count on God's mercy. The emphasis in our text is "God will be merciful to them." That is the eschatological blessing in the beatitude. God will take pity on them, or will forgive them, or will show mercy on them. People will be shown mercy on the judgment day.

God will show mercy on them when He comes to judge the world.

A self-acting law

Robert Nicoll explains, "This Beatitude states a self-acting law of the moral world. The exercise of mercy, active pity, tends to elicit mercy from others - God and men."

THE PRINCIPLE ILLUSTRATED

God has shown mercy toward guilty sinners

God has the power and authority to deal with us in His righteousness. We deserve eternal punishment. God in His undeserved and unmerited grace gives us what we do not deserve. He cleanses, forgives, and gives us a new standing with Him. He does not give us what we deserve; we deserve eternal separation from him in hell. He treats us with mercy. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6, NET). "But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NET). There is no greater demonstration of mercy in action than that!

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ paid the price for our sin. "The wages of sin is death." Jesus in His love died for us paying our sin debt to the righteousness of God. God has demonstrated His mercy toward us on the basis of the vicarious substitutionary sacrifice of Christ for our sins. Now He demonstrates mercy to the guilty sinner.

Jesus showed mercy at the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). While they were stripping Him of His garments and nailing him to the crossbeam Jesus prayed for them asking His Father to forgive them. That is showing mercy. He could have called ten thousand angels down upon them.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 to a Jewish lawyer who was trying to justify himself. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and robbers assaulted him and stripped him of his clothing and possessions and beat him and left him half dead. As chance would have it a priest and a Levite each came down the road, saw the man lying there and they crossed on by the other side. Later a Samaritan on a journey came upon the bleeding man, and saw him and felt compassion. Instead of walking on by and doing nothing he took the poor man and bandaged him up put him on his own beast and took him to the inn and took care of him. When it came time for the businessman to go on his journey he told the innkeeper, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you" (v. 35). Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" His listener replied correctly, "The one who showed mercy toward him. And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same" (vv. 36-37).

Nothing proves that we have been forgiven better than our own readiness to forgive. What is the proper attitude of those who have been ground under by those who would be the greatest? Peter came up to Jesus asking, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter had been putting some hard thought into that question. Jesus responded to Peter, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). Grace is unlimited. Mercy continues to reach out in compassion to others expressing itself at our deepest needs.

Then Jesus told a parable about an unmerciful slave in 18:23-35. The unjust steward has the power to inflict injury and punishment. Should we not have mercy on others as the Lord has had mercy on us? We are the recipients of His great mercy and compassion. In our day of double standards we need to demonstrate unadulterated mercy before a watching world.

Jesus took upon Himself our flesh and died for our sins. We experience His mercy when we act on it by faith. 1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us."

I think of Helen, a beautiful Christian widow of a military general in one of the churches where I pastored. She had a fortune stolen from her, and as a result she was filled with hate for those who had taken her money and property. After Christ came into her life she would come into the church and her face would light up like the sun and tears of joy would flow down her lovely face and she would recount how she was the recipient of God's wonderful grace. She had been forgiven of all her sins and now she continues to forgive. It is a mercy growing out of her personal experience of the mercy of God. She could forgive because it was Christ in her

growing out of her personal experience of the mercy of God. She could forgive because it was Christ in her heart forgiving them.

Jesus made a practical application of this great principle in Luke 6:36-38. The context is talking about loving our enemies. He said, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to ungrateful and evil people" (Luke 6:35, NET). Then he said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (v. 36). Our heavenly Father has already set the example for us.

The exercise of showing mercy tends to elicit mercy from others. In the examples cited we see a principle in life: "You get back what you give."

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED TO OUR LIVES

We get back both negative and positive attitudes and behaviors

We see this in the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-2. "Do not judge (*krino*, meaning to separate, critic, criticize, criticism, discriminate) lest you be judged yourselves. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you."

This attitude produces bitterness, resentment, and anger on the part of others.

The opposite of mercy is hostility. It is a critical spirit, a critical attitude that expresses itself in stingy, unforgiveness, sour on life, condemning, judging, critical, selfish, greedy, faultfinding, castigating attitudes and behavior. Don't you just love to be around someone like that? We parrot back what we get. We also give people what they *expect* from us.

We tend to give back what we receive in life. Each person gets back what he gives. We get the kind of reaction back from others that we give out.

Yes, we give back what we get.

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure —pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return" (Luke 6:36-38).

What am I sowing and giving? Do I sow love, hostility, kindness, hate, goodness, revenge, or peace? People give back to us exactly what we give to them. They read our feelings and attitudes like a book.

One of the basic principles in marriage and family counseling is changing our attitudes and behaviors towards other people and in turn they change toward us. As they change their attitudes and behaviors we tend to respond in similar manner. One positive behavior reinforces another and it is almost as if a miracle is taking place before our eyes. We get back what we give to others.

We tend to criticize and despise in others what we despise and are critical in ourselves. We get back what we give out. Be merciful and you receive mercy. Be unmerciful and unforgiving and you will get that back, too. Rub salt in someone's emotional sores and they will fill yours full, too.

What about those to whom we show mercy, but we receive just the

What about those to whom we show mercy, but we receive just the opposite in return?

The mature Christian gives what others *need*, not what they *deserve*.

In the context of Luke 6:36-38 Jesus had just mentioned seven aspects of unconditional love. You cannot accomplish this with human nature. We by nature give back what we get; therefore all of these proactive behaviors require supernatural enabling.

- (1) Love your enemies.
- (2) Do good to those who hate you.
- (3) Bless those who curse you.
- (4) Pray for those who mistreat you.
- (5) Do not retaliate (v. 29a).
- (6) Give freely (vv. 29b-30).
- (7) Treat others the way you want to be treated (v. 31).

When you love like this you love like the heavenly Father.

Jesus then taught His followers a fundamental principle of the universe —what one sows he will reap (v. 36-38).

Let's suppose you do have the authority and power to retaliate. Let's suppose the person does deserve to be punished for what he has done to you. Because of God's love we choose to show mercy. We can choose not to give the person what he deserves, but what he needs. This means I must trust the offending person to God. It takes faith in a sovereign God to know what is best for both parties.

The Spirit-controlled person has the inner power to love the offender and demonstrate mercy. Remember, you become like God who is merciful. God chose to forgive us and show His mercy to us on the basis of the death of Christ, and now we can choose to demonstrate that same kind of mercy to those who "sin" against us. It is a gift of God.

What if you had gone through a situation like the ancient patriarch Joseph who was the victim of jealousy among his siblings, sold into slavery, thrown into prison and forced to live in a foreign country. If you had the power of the prime Minister of Egypt years later when his brothers arrived begging for food and they did to you what they had done to him, how would you have treated them? Ah, here is your chance to really stick it to them and let them know what it is like to rot in an Egyptian prison. How would you treat them? Would it be an act of mercy? Would it be a reaction of retaliation?

We cannot give mercy until we have first received mercy. It is not a quality of the natural man; it is received as a gift of God. It is something I experience in my heart. Because I am a forgiven sinner who has experienced God's mercy at Calvary, I can now choose to extend mercy to the unmerciful.

Paul stated the same principle while making an application on stewardship. "My point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Corinthians 9:6, NET).

Francis of Assisi expressed this principle beautifully in "Lord Make Me an Instrument":

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me show love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not
So much seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying
That we are born to eternal life.

How do you do it? It doesn't happen automatically. It comes about as we apply these great principles of the spiritually prosperous person.

Has the Holy Spirit put His finger on a need today? Do you have a sense of spiritual poverty? Has He brought you to the realization that I have a problem and it is a lot bigger than I ever thought? I have a need for God to work in my life in a new area of growth. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." May the Spirit not rest until He has brought us to a deep sense of that need where He wants to work in our lives.

Have you begun to mourn over it? Have you mourned and grieved over this spiritual poverty in your life? Have you mourned like one mourning for the dead? Does this spiritual poverty cause you to grieve? Do you feel the intense pain? Only God can comfort when we realize our spiritual poverty. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

The only resolve is through the inner work of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible for such a person to solve his own spiritual problems. He needs help beyond himself. Self-help books and pop-psychology won't give you that inner strength you need. You and I do not have the self-discipline to pull it off. It takes more than we have to offer to do what God wants to do in our lives. We must be willing to hand it over to God and let Him do His work in our lives through His Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit-controlled person can know the power of God in his life. "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."

How badly do I want it? Do I want it so badly that I am willing to "hunger and thirst for righteousness"? Do I want what God offers so badly that I am willing to sacrifice for it? Do I have an intense craving for what God wants in my life? "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

It is only then that we can take what people give to us and turn it around and give them what they *need*

It is only then that we can take what people give to us and turn it around and give them what they *need* instead of what they *deserve*. I can't do it. You can't do it in your own power. It has to be God at work in us. As we hand over to Him the hostility and hatred we receive from others we can give them what they need — unmerited love and grace. We can give mercy to those who treat us unmerciful. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." There is no other way.

1. I choose to forgive.
2. I choose to seek what is in the highest good in everyone I meet each day.
3. I choose to respect their choices in life even though I might disagree.
4. I realize it is not something I do out of our own strength, but God does it through me as I make myself available to Him.

Proverbs 15:1 reminds us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." We can put it into action by remembering that "every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19).

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

How can we show mercy to a Christian caught in some sin? What is my attitude toward those who are less fortunate than me? Who am I to judge another man's servant? Who am I to condemn another man? When I forgive someone, do I choose to forget? Do I have a tendency to treat people like things or objects? Do I walk all over people in order to be successful? Do I tend to give people what they deserve? Do I often feel I need to teach someone a "lesson?" Do I use the power or position that I have to hurt others who hurt me? Do I allow love to cover a multitude of sins? Do I use circumstances for growth instead of retaliation? Am I quick to condemn a believer caught in sin?

This beatitude of Jesus is revolutionary. It begins with the Lord's attitude toward us. "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). The LORD'S mercies (*cheched kheh*-sed) lovingkindness, compassions, indeed, mercy, never gives up on us. They are never cut or come to an end. They are never finished; they continue to work in us. He has great compassion on us. Every morning there is a fresh abundant supply of *cheched*. Because of the way He continues to treat us each day we can have that same attitude working out in our lives. Every day comes with its own set of challenges. It gives us fresh new opportunities to show compassion and mercy to everyone we meet. Great is Your faithfulness òh LORD God!

Let's demonstrate our faithfulness to Him in return by making ourselves available to Him. If we put this beatitude into daily practice we can change this world one person at a time.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).


[Series on the Beatitudes index](#)

Here are some more studies on justification by faith in Christ: [Romans Series](#) and our [Union with Christ](#).

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