

1. Compassion in Action

Mike really challenged me with this beatitude. To paraphrase him, **“mercy is much more than just “not giving someone something they deserve.” That’s called forgiveness. Whie mercy incorporates forgiveness, it also touches so much more of the human experience; it is intentional “compassion in action”.**” – D. Mike Collins

Compassion in action. Let that sink in.

Pay it forward.

Discussion (5 minutes)

- What does compassion in action look like to me?
- How do I exhibit this behavior?
- Think of a time when someone showed me this kind of mercy.

2. Mercy with Limits?!

Mike walked us through 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 where Paul asked for God’s “mercy” to take away the thorn in his flesh and God said “No” to his request for mercy, but said “Yes” to his request for grace. Mike challenged us to consider the role misery might play in drawing us closer to God. Can our misery play a role in God’s greater plan? Let’s consider Joseph.

Genesis 50:15-21 (NIV)

¹⁵ When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Misery at work. 4 years plowing in the sun to get to where I am today.

Discussion (5 minutes)

- When did God allow misery in my life that worked out in a way I could not have imagined?
- Is it possible He is allowing misery in my life now that I can’t see could possibly work out for good?

3. What am I Prepared to do?

I have really been wrestling with this topic. The MacArthur quote, “Mercy says, “I pity you”; grace says, “I pardon you.”” Hit hard. Pity is mentioned 36 times in the Old Testament (at least in the NIV) and 6 in the New Testament.

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Ezekiel 7:1-9 (NIV)

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord says to the land of Israel:

“The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land! ³ The end is now upon you, and I will unleash my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. ⁴ I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will surely repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you.

“Then you will know that I am the Lord.” ⁵ “This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

“Disaster! Unheard-of disaster! See, it comes! ⁶ The end has come! The end has come! It has roused itself against you. See, it comes! ⁷ Doom has come upon you, upon you who dwell in the land. The time has come! The day is near! There is panic, not joy, on the mountains. ⁸ I am about to pour out my wrath on you and spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your conduct and repay you for all your detestable practices. ⁹ I will not look on you with pity; I will not spare you. I will repay you for your conduct and for the detestable practices among you.

“Then you will know that it is I the Lord who strikes you.

Praise God for His grace!

1 John 3:16-18

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Matthew 9:9-13

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

We do not have the power to save, but we do have the ability to show mercy.

What am I prepared to do? Untouchables

Discussion (5 minutes)

- Where do I struggle showing mercy?
- What can I do today to show mercy?
- Is there someone I need to show mercy to today?

4. Mercy attracts you. Grace keeps you.

I wrote this down and think Mike might have said it, or someone else did and it hit me. If not, praise God for writing it down! Either way, it is something to ponder and be challenged by. "Lead with mercy. Listen with grace." Listen...listen. Sometimes we show mercy by simply listening. I need to stop talking! It's not about me!

Zit / Surgeon

5. Weeds Among Us

In the parable of the weeds, Michael opened by asking us, "Why are there weeds?" Living in a wet and mild climate, I ask myself that almost every day. We learned how it is very hard to tell some weeds from wheat until they bear fruit. It is oftentimes very hard to tell the difference. Even being off by one degree might seem acceptable. Let's put that into perspective. If we were to find the center of Chris's barn and draw a line to the center of the other side and be off by one degree, we would be 8.376 inches off...and that is just 40 feet. Imaging that on a greater scale.

| Miles Traveled | Variance | |
|-------------------|------------|--------|
| | Feet | Miles |
| 1 | 92.20 | 0.02 |
| 10 | 922.00 | 0.18 |
| 100 | 9,220.00 | 1.77 |
| 1,000 | 92,200.00 | 17.73 |
| 10,000 | 922,000.00 | 177.31 |

We will return to this shortly.

6. Painting Grass

When Michael was teaching about the seed scattered on the road he commented on my back yard and how the soil is a thin layer on top of granite which makes it nearly impossible for the grass to grow. There was one summer where I was at my wits end with how bad it looked that I found yard paint (yes, there is such a thing) and I painted the brown grass. It looked surprisingly better as it was no longer brown, but it was nothing more than a cover-up. While I was spraying on the paint, I felt God telling me, "You know this isn't about the grass, right?" It was a perfect example of my life and made me pause and think about what else I was painting to make look more appealing. Kind of like the saying, "you can put lipstick on a pig, but it will still be a pig."

Discussion (5 minutes)

- What am I trying to cover up?
- Am I trying to make it look acceptable to God or those around me?

7. We are a Product of our Environment

Michael did a great job helping us visualize the parable by drawing the grid that had a quadrant for each of the four scenarios. This picture made it very easy to see that we are a product of our environment. There is a saying, "If you want to see what you will be and who you will become, take a look at your five closest friends." This is frighteningly accurate. Think about the saying, "if you want to boil a frog, you don't put it in boiling water, you put it in tepid water and slowly raise the temperature." We must be intentional about who we allow to speak into and be an influence in our lives. It's time to take a look around us.

Questions:

- Who are my closest people?
- Are they drawing me closer to the Lord or away from Him?

8. Pine vs. Oak

When Michael drew the image of the seed on good soil, he drew the root longer than the stalk. What a beautiful image as our roots need to run deep. We have experienced very strong winds this winter and some of us have been impacted by them causing trees to fall down. One of the prettiest trees I have seen is the Bradford Pear. It is beautifully full and has a nearly perfect shape. The problem is they have a weak core. Once the tree reaches 10-15 feet in height, it becomes very susceptible to wind and will split down the trunk. One of the problems in the PNW, is the trees are more susceptible to falling over when the soil is saturated. When we see pine trees fall, we oftentimes see the entire root ball come out of the ground as well. These trees can reach upwards of 50 feet, yet have a relatively shallow root structure. Compare that to an oak tree. Squirrels like to bury acorns in our yard. As soon as we see an oak seedling appear we must pull it out, or it will be too late. The taproot of an oak seedling can be 5-10 times longer than what is seen above ground. While I have seen countless pine trees fall over the past 13 years of living here, I have not seen any oaks fall.

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV)

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Questions:

- Where am I rooted?

- Where are those around me rooted? (Sometimes weak trees will knock down a stronger one when they fall)

9. Mountaintop Experiences

There are times in our life where “seeds” respond differently to the environment we are providing. I have heard people say (and felt this myself at times), “I really felt the Lord at Church this morning”, and other times say, “I really didn’t feel anything at Church this morning.” These are sometimes referred to as a “mountaintop experience”. While these can, and do happen throughout our lifetime, we need to be careful about seeking “mountaintop experiences”. Let the Holy Spirit move in us how He wants to. If I go to Church expecting “mountaintop experience” but do not “feel” one, that is OK. It is when my attitude shifts to thinking He wasn’t there, or He must not care that I have a problem. This is similar to the seed that falls on the rocky ground. Searching for that “spiritual high” every Sunday might mean whatever moved me last week might be wearing off so I need another dose.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Questions:

- What moves me?
- Am I savoring God’s Word, or am I simply scarfing it down?

10. Pullers and Planters

Michael talked about the weeds and how their seeds are oftentimes already in the ground waiting to spring up. What do seeds need to be able to germinate? Water, warmth, and sometimes sunlight. (Think about mushrooms, they are kept in the dark and fed manure to flourish). Sometimes we can inadvertently provide the right environment for weeds to grow. We need to be careful that we are not planting weeds, rather pulling them; in our life and the lives of those around us. Veggie Tales had a great visualization of this in the episode, *The Rumor Weed*.

Matthew 12:30-37 (NIV)

³⁰ “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Question: Am I pulling weeds or planting them?

11. Back to the Parable of the Weeds

I was really challenged by our role within the field. Am I the wheat? Am I the owner? Am I the servant? I tend to have a habit of overthinking things. One thing I do know is that I was once a weed and, but the grace of God, I became wheat.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.