

REACH OUT



FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY

Week 2: Mercy

Human beings have a strong desire for the world to be fair and just. As children, we are taught that if we follow the rules, we will be happy, and we quickly discover that other people break the rules, so why shouldn't we. If you've ever spent any time with young children, you've probably had one of them come up to you, complaining of the misdeeds of another. "She took my toy." "He pinched me." These children desire that the offender be punished, but is their reasoning because it will bring balance back to the world through the justice of discipline? Probably not; they just like to see someone else get in trouble. Showing mercy is fighting the natural desire to see another person receive punishment in exchange for providing unjustified forgiveness.

Mercy is not holding a grudge; it's letting the annoying actions of another go without need for retribution. The amazing thing about mercy is that the more you show it, the more you receive it. Mercy doesn't just benefit the one who has done the misdeed, it frees us from needing to be the judge, jury, and executioner. The need for revenge is destructive; if we constantly seek justice, we will never find it, and we will end up ruining ourselves. If we let the little injustices go and provide mercy, we will receive that same mercy when we make little mistakes.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice." Practice a little mercy in your life, and you may be surprised the fruits your life will yield.

Challenge: Mercy

Think of a person in your life who has done you an injustice - big or small. First, consider the ways that "strict justice" could be achieved - does justice require the other person to do something? Now, think about what *you* could do to make the situation right - how could you show mercy to that person? Discuss with your partner what effects could come from showing mercy to that person. Try doing it, and see what happens. Remember that even if the other person doesn't reap the benefits of your mercy, you will reap the benefits of no longer requiring that justice be served.