

Spirit Driven

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.
2 Timothy 1:7

Power to show mercy

School was out for the summer and I had three months until I had to face the sixth grade. I rode my bicycle to Skip's house for a day of fun and adventure. When Skip's Dad offered to take us along with him to Chicago to deliver beer to bars, we were in guy heaven!

There was one drawback, he wanted me to call my Mother and get her permission. I called, she said, "No."

Skip's Dad asked, "What did she say?" "Have fun," I responded.

And fun I had, we drove in a beer truck, had burgers and came home in time for supper. Mom asked about my day and I told her how I had fun with Skip.

That night I couldn't sleep, for I had lied – I had willfully disobeyed my mom. I got out of bed and tearfully confessed my lies to mom. She smiled at me and said, "I know all about it. You are forgiven. I love you. Did you learn a lesson?"

That was mercy.

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'^[b]

²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. – Luke 15: 11-24

How many times have you heard this parable and thought, "The son that left shouldn't have been rewarded, and he certainly shouldn't have been restored as a son!"

We would probably have lots of support for that position, after all, the son treated his father as if he had already passed away, asking for his inheritance. The son squandered all of his money on poor choices. Nobody forced him to throw parties, live the wild life, selfishly lavishing indulging himself, he got what he deserved. Shouldn't there be consequences for poor choices?

Yet, the father showed mercy on his son, restoring him to his family position, giving him gifts he didn't deserve.

Can you remember a time when you received mercy?

²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷"Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound."

²⁸"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " - Luke 15: 23-32

How many times are we like the older son, seething because we see scoundrels receiving gifts and treatment they do not deserve? We can relate to the older son, for he was the one who stayed home, doing his familial duty, taking care of dad and the property. Then along comes his wicked brother, getting mercy! At least dad should have housed the brother in the servant's quarters, not in the house.

Can you remember a time when you resented someone who received mercy?

⁹As 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. ¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'^[a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9: 9-12

The Pharisees judged the woman with their laws, Jesus judged her with His mercy.

Jesus desires us to show mercy.

Is it easier to show mercy to those we know and love than to those who are different from us?

Is it easier to offer mercy to someone who finds themselves in a hard situation through no fault of their own than to someone who caused their own downfall?

How many times a day do we receive God's mercy?

Does God give mercy based on our own righteousness?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
You open Your hands and give to us all we need for this life – Thank You. You also give to us mercy, giving to us not that which we deserve, but that which we do not – Thank You. Through the gift of Christ You have given to us that which gives eternal life, not by our works, but by His – Thank You.

Father, Thank You for giving us the power through the Holy Spirit to model Your gifts of mercy as we give to others. Give us the eyes to see the people, the wisdom to discern the gifts and the strength to act.

In Your name we pray – Amen.