



## Unit 1: Who Is God?

*Learning to know and love God for who He is—His character, attributes, and being.*

### Lesson 2 God Is Mercy

#### **Day One** ***Mercy Defined***

In *Lesson 1: God Is Good*, we learned God has a perfect character—everything He does is right. Even when we do not see how God is working behind the scenes of our lives, we can be confident He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28–29). If wrongs are not made right in this life, they will be in the next. All people will stand before God, and all things will be brought to light (Romans 14:10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The second attribute we will study is mercy. Just as we say *God is Good*, we also say *God is Mercy*. Like all His other character traits, mercy is part of the very essence—the heart—of who God is. None of His attributes are more important or necessary than another.

**Definition:** *Mercy* is being good to people and helping them when they are in need, even though they do not deserve it.

Goodness and mercy are related. Since God is good, He has mercy on the people He has made. He cares deeply about our needs. Humanity has a sin problem, and God sent His Son to solve it. Mercy is more than feeling sad about one's condition—it is love that takes action to help.

1. Read Psalm 145:9 below and then fill in the blanks: The LORD is good to \_\_\_\_\_; He has \_\_\_\_\_ on all He has made.

*The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.* Psalm 145:9<sup>1</sup>

God's compassion extends to all He has made. Compassion, closely related to mercy, reveals God's deep concern for those enduring pain and hardship. He is not only aware of our suffering but also desires to ease our burdens and act on our behalf.

Another aspect of God's mercy is that He gives it freely. No one deserves God's mercy, and His help is not something we could ever deserve or demand. It is a pure gift.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.

A beautiful picture of God's mercy can be seen in Luke 15:11–24. This is the story of the Lost or Prodigal Son. The son asks his father for his share of the estate. The father gives him the money. Today, it would be the same as a son asking for his inheritance while his father was still alive.

**Definition:** *Prodigal* is an adjective describing those who spend money or resources freely and recklessly; they are wastefully extravagant.

In the parable told by Jesus, the son leaves his father for a distant place and spends all his money foolishly in wild living. Afterward, being alone and hungry, he took a job feeding pigs. However, this job did not provide enough for him to live on, so he was still hungry. He started to think about the goodness of his father. The men who worked for his father had plenty of food.

He made up his mind to go home and ask his father to forgive him. The son did not expect any kind of special treatment. He only hoped to work as a hired hand.

When the father saw his son walking toward home, he ran out to meet him. The young man admitted his sin against heaven and against his father. He told his father he was no longer worthy to be called his son. Instead of disowning his son, the father immediately had the servants bring a robe, a ring, and sandals. He then called for a feast to celebrate because “this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24).

The father in this story represents our heavenly Father. He allows us to go our own way, yet rejoices when we return to Him. The son did not deserve such a warm welcome when he returned to his father, and neither do we. But like the prodigal son, we receive our Father's mercy—and a celebration in heaven (Luke 15:7).

The parable of the prodigal son is not just a story from long ago—it reflects the lives of countless people today who run from God's love. Louis Zamperini (1917–2014) was one such “lost son.” He was a tough kid who started his own gang. The group would get even with anyone who even looked at them in a wrong way. They would steal, destroy property, and fight other gang members. Louis' nickname was “Lucky Louie” because he mostly got away with his rebellion.<sup>2</sup>

When he was 15, his whole class wanted to compete in an interclass track meet. He did not want to, but also did not want to seem weak so he agreed to run. He ended up finishing last and thought, “Never again. Never.”<sup>3</sup>

A week later his brother talked him into going to another meet. He did a little better and with his brother's encouragement decided to be a runner. He continued to smoke and drink, but as his running improved, so did his desire for a better life. However, his better life did not include God. He had not yet realized his need for the merciful God of the Bible.

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Zamperini and David Rensin, *Devil at My Heels* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

The Bible is divided between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament is about the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament tells us that Jesus, the Messiah or Savior, is coming.

The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. He always was, always is, and always will be. God is the everlasting One who does not change (Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). He is good to us and helps us, even though we do not deserve it. The one true and living God of the Bible is merciful—He is mercy itself.

God’s character traits cannot be separated. He is always good, always merciful, always righteous, and always just. At times it may seem that God’s mercy and justice conflict with one another—but they do not.

Still, we can speak of a kind of “holy tension” between certain truths in the Bible. This means that while it *appears* there are two opposing views, God keeps them in perfect balance. When we encounter truths that seem incompatible, we should ask God to help us understand how they fit together. There is always a divine solution for grasping and applying His Word. As we seek that understanding, we must keep praying for wisdom, trust His timing, and wait patiently for His answer.

**2.** Read Psalm 78:38. Then list below the four ways God is merciful.

*Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.* Psalm 78:38 (Iniquity is sin or wrongdoing.)

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 3. |
| 2. | 4. |

**Read Psalm 86:6–7 and answer questions 3–4:**

*Hear my prayer, LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. <sup>7</sup> When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me.* Psalm 86:6–7

**3.** Are you troubled and need to call out to God for mercy? Yes | No (Underline One)

**4.** If you answered “yes” in question 3, write out your request to God in the form of a prayer. If you answered “no,” write a prayer of thanksgiving for how God has shown you mercy.

**Accountability:** Be prepared to share your answers to #1–4 with your team next week.

—End Day One—

**Day Two**

***Old Testament Mercy***

God showed His mercy toward us from the beginning. As we learned in Lesson One, after Adam and Eve sinned and brought death into the world, God immediately promised to do something about it (Genesis 3:15). He planned to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the death penalty for sin.

**Definition:** *Justice* is the quality of being just, equitable, and morally right. Justice is the process of using laws to judge and punish wrongdoing fairly.

**5.** How does God's justice and mercy blend together perfectly in Christ's death on the cross? (Take time to reflect before answering.)

God's justice required that sin be punished, but His mercy longed to save sinners. Both met at the cross. Jesus took our punishment upon Himself, satisfying God's justice, while at the same time showing us His amazing mercy. Jesus' death shows how God can be both just and merciful—He punished sin, yet offers forgiveness to everyone who believes.

This plan of God's justice and mercy displayed in Jesus at the cross had been unfolding for centuries. God had determined that Jesus would be born into a specific nation at just the right time in history. More than 2,000 years before Jesus' birth (about 2086 BC), God called Abraham to be the father of that people group or nation. Abraham's children and their children became the Hebrews. Sometime later they were called the Jews. The people or nation God founded through Abraham is named Israel.

Abraham was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's three sons. After the earth was populated through Adam and Eve's children, wickedness increased (Genesis 6:5–8). God could have wiped out the entire human race, but He showed mercy and spared Noah and his family. The rainbow is a sign of God's promise never to flood the earth and destroy all life (Genesis 9:13–16). It reminds us that God is both *just* and *merciful*—always.

Adam and Eve had other children (Genesis 5:4) who most likely married each other. The Bible does not provide many details, but since there were no other people, it makes sense. At that time, there was no rule against marrying a sibling. Later, when God gave Moses laws and regulations for the Israelites, He forbade such unions (Leviticus 18:9). That law continues to reflect God's standard for holiness today.

**Read Acts 17:26–27 and answer questions 6–8:**

*From one man [Adam] he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so*

*that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. Acts 17:26–27*

6. From how many people did God create all the nations? (v. 26)?

7. Where did God want all people to live (v. 26)?

8. Why did God place people all over the earth and set the times and boundaries for each nation? (v. 27)?

God’s mercy and plan for humanity are seen not just in redemption, but in the way He created us. From Adam and Eve, the entire human race came into being, and God made each person unique. Even though we all share a common ancestor, He designed us with incredible variety — different features, traits, and abilities — as part of His good and ordered creation.

Remember, God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him (Genesis 2:7). Then God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and He took one of his ribs and closed the place with flesh. From this rib, God made Eve (Genesis 2:21–22). From one man, God created Eve—and from their union came all the nations. Adam and Eve became one, and through them, the whole earth was populated (Genesis 2:24).

Since all people have a common ancestor, it is interesting that people have unique physical characteristics. For example, why are there different skin colors? It has to do with genetics.

**Definition:** *Genetics* is the study of heredity—how the characteristics of living things are passed from one generation to the next. Inside each person’s body are tiny structures called DNA molecules. These DNA molecules contain genes, which act like instructions that determine how we grow, what we look like, and how our bodies function. Genes are passed from one generation to the next, like a blueprint for who we are.

Here’s a simple example using skin color. If Adam and Eve were a medium brown, their genes could combine to produce children with a range of skin tones. People with very dark or very light skin generally carry genes that produce only those colors.

When people with the same skin-color genes settled in different regions, the gene pool became smaller. This also affected other traits, like height, weight, and facial features. As people married within their own villages over generations, there were fewer variations in skin color and other characteristics.

The Bible tells us, and genetics confirms, that God created only one race—the human race. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. Despite our physical differences, we are one people. Just

as sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and death came through sin, death spread to all people because we all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Since we are one people, one race, and all sinners, we all need forgiveness. God, in His goodness and mercy provided the perfect solution: Christ Jesus. As the Bible says, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Our forgiveness is found in no one else (Acts 4:12).

**9.** Read and meditate on Lamentations 3:22–25. Think deeply: How is God’s mercy—His compassion, forgiveness, and goodness—new every morning in your life?

*Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.* Lamentations 3:22–25

(Note: “Portion” means God Himself is our inheritance—our hope and all we need, like the Promised Land was the inheritance of Israel.)

Just as God’s mercy is new every morning for us, He was faithful in Louie Zamperini’s life, guiding him and giving him strength in every season. Louie continued to run. He liked the recognition running brought him and did not want it to stop. Louie not only trained fanatically, but soon he began to apply himself to his schoolwork. He did not want poor grades to disqualify him from participating.

God was good to Louie. He helped him become a championship runner. Two times Louie was the NCAA mile champion record holder. When he was 19, he went to the 1936 Olympics.

On September 29, 1941, Louie joined the army. The United States fully entered World War II when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He trained and was assigned to a bomber crew on a B-24. After flying missions for a couple of years, his plane went down in the Pacific. Three men survived and Louie became the captain and leader of the life raft.

Another leader with even greater responsibility was Moses, whom God chose to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and into freedom. God used him to bring the Israelites out of captivity and guide them toward the Promised Land (around 1446–1406 BC). God’s mercy was evident to both Moses and the people throughout their journey.

God gave Moses rules and laws for the children of Israel (descendants of Jacob, whom God renamed Israel). These regulations were given to help them live holy lives. The word *holy* means being separated from sin and set apart for God’s purposes. Every person is called to be holy because we were all created for God’s purposes.

The law also revealed how difficult it is for humans to set themselves apart for God. It exposed our pride, selfishness, and sinfulness. Yet, at the same time, the law demonstrated God's continual favor and mercy.

Consider Adam and Eve—they had only one commandment, and still, they failed to keep it. Similarly, the Israelites, like the first humans, fell short of keeping God's law and sinned.

Because God knew they could not perfectly follow the law, He established a system of sacrifices to atone for their sins. Through Moses, God gave specific instructions for this sacrificial system and taught the people how it worked. Ultimately, these sacrifices pointed forward to Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross.

**Definitions:** In the Old Testament, a *sacrifice* was the offering of physical items to God through a priest to express loyalty, thanksgiving, or the need for forgiveness. *Priests* were those chosen by God to present the sacrifices and carry out other sacred duties.

When people offered sacrifices, they were to give their best—whether an animal, grain, or oil. These outward gifts symbolized their inward love and devotion to God. Each sacrifice represented the giving of one's whole self in surrender to Him.

**Read Isaiah 29:13 and answer questions 10–11:**

*The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught."* Isaiah 29:13 (Heart in this verse means mind, spirit, and emotions.)

**10.** What did God truly desire from the Israelite people in the Old Testament?

**11.** What do you think God desires from people today?

The sacrificial system God established was detailed and sacred, therefore, we will look at only one part—the burnt offering. This offering required the blood sacrifice of a perfect bull, ram, goat, lamb, dove, or pigeon. Blood is a symbol of life because "*the life of every creature is in its blood*" (Leviticus 17:14). When the blood is removed from any living being, it dies.

Animal sacrifices were offered to God even before the time of Moses, though not in an organized or prescribed way. Later, God established a specific sacrificial system so that sins could be forgiven and a person's relationship with Him restored. This system not only pointed ahead to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice but also provided a temporary solution for humanity's sin problem.

**12.** Read Leviticus 1:4. What outward sign showed a person's sins being transferred to the burnt offering?

*You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.* Leviticus 1:4 (“You” refers to the individual offering the sacrifice.)

Laying a hand on the animal’s head symbolized that the person’s sins were being transferred to the animal, which died in their place. This act pointed ahead to Jesus, who would take our sins upon Himself and die in our place so we could be made right with God. The word *atonement* in Leviticus 1:4 means “to bring together as one those who were enemies,” and that is exactly what Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection—bringing peace between us and God.

The penalty for sin is death, but God, in His mercy, provided a substitute. The animal died instead of the person. Yet this was not a permanent solution—animals could not remove sin forever or serve as a perfect substitute because they were not human.

**13.** Read Hebrews 10:1. Could the animal sacrifices take away a person’s sins forever and make them perfect? Yes | No (Underline One)

*The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.* Hebrews 10:1

Human sacrifices cannot take away sins either. We are sinful and not perfect, and an imperfect person cannot make full payment for the sins made against a holy and perfect God. Moreover, God set up rules against human sacrifice and killing other human beings (Genesis 9:6; Leviticus 24:17; Deuteronomy 12:31).

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). He is both human and divine. He alone could atone for the sins of individuals and the entire human race.

**14.** Read Hebrews 10:8–10. Who sacrificed His own body to take away sins once for all?

*First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. <sup>9</sup> Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* Hebrews 10:8–10

**Accountability:** Be prepared to share your answers to #5–14 with your discipleship team.

God did not force Jesus to give His life for you and me. Jesus went to the cross willingly because He loves the Father and He loves us. He desires for all sin to be forgiven and for our relationship with God to be reborn in His love—and for that same love to renew our relationships with others.

—End Day Two—



**Day Three**

***Nations and Individuals***

**15.** Read Micah 7:18. God does not stay angry forever but delights to show \_\_\_\_\_.

*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. Micah 7:18*

God is merciful to nations and to individuals. He is good to all people, even though we do not deserve it. God rules over all creation and decides who receives mercy and when it is given.

**16.** Read Exodus 33:19. Who does God have mercy on?

*And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Exodus 33:19*

God wanted to have mercy on an evil city named Nineveh (pronounced NIN-uh-vuh). He called the prophet Jonah to go to the city and preach against it because of its wickedness. Instead, Jonah ran off and jumped on a ship heading in the opposite direction. Jonah may have been afraid for his own safety with the Ninevites, but there was also another reason. In the final chapter of Jonah we learn the prophet's underlying motive for running away.

The Lord sent a great wind and everyone on the ship was in danger. Jonah knew this storm was from God and told the sailors to throw him overboard. They did. The people on the ship were saved and Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish, most likely a whale. From the belly of the fish, Jonah cries out to God for mercy and promises to do what the Lord has commanded. The fish vomited Jonah on the seashore.

Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh. For three days Jonah warned the people of God's judgment. They believed the message was from God and did not try to hide their sins. The king and the people urgently called on God and gave up their evil and violent ways. They hoped and prayed for His mercy.

**Read Proverbs 28:13 and answer questions 17–19:**

*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Proverbs 28:13 (To confess means to admit your sin honestly before God—to agree with Him about what you have done wrong with a sincere heart. To renounce means to give up that sin and turn away from it.)*

**17.** Are you trying to hide secret sins from God? Yes | No (Underline One)

18. If you replied yes in #17, will you confess and renounce your sins? Yes | No (Underline One)
19. If you answered no in #18, what is keeping you from confessing and giving up your sins?

The Lord saw how the Ninevites turned from their evil (repented) and He had mercy on them. He did not bring destruction on them. But Jonah was not pleased, and he became angry.

**Read Jonah 4:2 and answer questions 20–22:**

*He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Jonah 4:2*  
(In this context, relent means to change one’s mind or lessen a harsh intention. Calamity means great trouble, suffering, or disaster.)

20. What was the real reason Jonah did not want to preach against Nineveh?
21. How does Jonah describe God?
22. If there is someone or some group of people that you prefer would be judged and not receive mercy from God, please explain your situation.

Jonah did not want the Ninevites to be forgiven. Because of this, he disobeyed God and tried to go his own way.

Jonah knew God better than most people of his time—he was God’s prophet. God gave Jonah words to speak to others. Jonah knew that if the Ninevites repented (turned from sin), God would have mercy on them. So Jonah kept unforgiveness in his heart against the Ninevites, and disobeyed God.

The Lord showed mercy to Jonah in two ways. First, He had Jonah swallowed by a great fish. This saved Jonah from the storm and certain death, and it gave him time to repent of his disobedience. Afterward, Jonah went to Nineveh and preached against the people’s sin. Second, the Lord helped Jonah deal with his unforgiveness. Jonah did not want compassion for these cruel enemies—most likely he preferred revenge. Yet, God listened to Jonah and then explained how He had made this nation and cared for them (Jonah 4:7–11).

God made all people. Yes, He even made those people we consider enemies. He loves them and wants them to turn from their evil ways. God also desires for us to have a merciful heart. We cannot do it on our own. We need to ask God for a merciful heart. Ask Him now.

## Action Step

**23.** Who do you need to show mercy to?

**24.** What good act will you do for this person(s) you named in #23, even though that individual does not deserve it?

**25.** Explain what good act you did in #24, and how it worked out:

We now continue Louie Zamperini's story from Day Two. After he survived his plane crash into the Pacific, Louie noted the time and location. He then took an inventory of their supplies: six fortified chocolate bars, eight half-pint tins of water, and *no knife*. He was extremely upset about the survival kit *not* having this most important item.

Being in 65 million square miles of salt water gave Louie time to think. He considered the possibility of divine intervention in his surviving the crash. He did thank God for saving his life and prayed. He meant his prayers but did not really understand God or talking with Him. In fact, his prayers sounded more like bargaining with someone:

Answer my prayers now, and I promise if I get home through all this and whatever is to come, I'll serve You for the rest of my life.<sup>4</sup>

Drinking salt water is deadly, so instead the men caught rainwater in the canvas pump cover. In addition to water, they needed food. They were able to do some fishing, but this attracted the sharks. Many times they were in danger with the larger ones, but they were able to put the smaller ones on their own food chain. Louie used the screwdriver end of the pliers from their survival kit to kill the smaller sharks, eating only the liver. He knew from his survival course that eating raw shark meat could make them sick.

It was difficult to catch enough water and food, so most of the time they were thirsty and hungry. One day an albatross landed on Louie's head while he was asleep. He caught it and wrung its neck—though he received injuries to his hands from its sharp beak—it provided some food.

Finally, after 47 days adrift, they saw a group of islands. One island with two trees seemed to be moving toward them. But no, it was not an island. It was a boat with two masts.

They had drifted about two thousand miles and ended up in Japanese territory. One of the three original survivors had died and was buried at sea. So, the Japanese blindfolded Louie and Phil and took them ashore to prison cells.

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<sup>4</sup> Louis Zamperini and David Rensin, *Devil at My Heels* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2003), 99.

The Japanese had to carry their prisoners because after so much time at sea, they were unable to walk. Louie weighed 67 pounds. He had lost nearly 100 pounds.

At first the Japanese treated their prisoners well. They gave them generous portions of rice and soup. Of course, their stomachs were not ready for big portions. They could only digest a little at a time. The Japanese also asked a lot of questions and were amazed at their tale of survival. They showed an interest in Louie's running career, especially his time at the Olympics.

But the good treatment did not last. After a few days they were taken to another island and thrown into separate cells. Louie was seized with fear—a deep claustrophobia—as he landed in a cell the size of a dog kennel. He writes:

All my life I had kept my emotions tightly in check when it came to my own troubles, but I could no longer help myself. I broke down and cried.<sup>5</sup>

**Read Psalm 86: 3–5 and answer questions 26–29:**

*... have mercy on me, Lord, for I [David] call to you all day long. <sup>4</sup> Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you. <sup>5</sup> You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.* Psalm 86:3–5

**26.** How does David describe God (v. 5)?

**27.** Who does David put his trust in (v. 4b)?

**28.** In what area of your life do you need God's mercy?

**29.** Write a prayer to the Lord of mercy and ask for His help.

**Accountability:** Be prepared to share your answers to #25–29 with your discipleship team.

God shows mercy to both nations and individuals, especially to those who call on Him and turn from sin. When we seek the Lord, He helps us obey and repent. Though we do not deserve His help, He responds to our prayers because of His great mercy.

—End Day Three—

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 120.

**Day Four**

***New Testament Mercy***

Mercy is being good to people and helping them when they are in need, even though they do not deserve it. God is so good to undeserving people that He sent His perfect Son to die for our sins—He *is* mercy.

Jesus embodies God's mercy in a visible way. Through His perfect sacrifice, Jesus ushers us into the New Testament, the New Covenant. Animal sacrifices no longer pay for our sins—that was the old way. Jesus is the *new* way. He died on the cross for you and for me, delivering us from sin—Jesus *is* mercy.

**Read and meditate on Ephesians 2:1–7 and answer questions 30–35:**

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [Satan], the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.* Ephesians 2:1–7

**Definitions:** In Ephesians 2:5, *grace* is defined as God's love in action to undeserving people. The pinnacle of God's *grace* is Jesus Christ. *Heavenly realms* (v. 6), also be translated heavenly places or the heavenlies, refers to the whole spiritual world or sphere and its activities.

**30.** Were *you* dead in your wrongdoing and sins at one time (v. 1)? Yes | No (Underline One)

**31.** Who were you following when you were *not* following Jesus (v. 2)?

**32.** Like every sinner, what do we deserve from God (v. 3)?

**33.** What are some ways God has been merciful to you in Christ Jesus (vv. 1–7)?

**34.** God raises up believers with Christ. Where are believers seated—what is our spiritual position or place (v. 6)?

**35.** Why does God raise up believers and seat us with Christ in the heavenly realms (v. 7)?

The God of the Old Testament is the same God revealed in the New Testament. From the beginning, His mercy has been part of His nature. In His great compassion, God planned for Jesus to bear His wrath—the righteous anger, fury, and judgment—that we rightly deserve.

Because God has shown us such mercy, we are called to reflect that mercy toward others. The faster we train ourselves to see sin in our own hearts, the quicker we will be to extend grace to others. Self-righteous people focus on the sins of others while overlooking their own. But when we become aware of the wrong things we have done and how much we have been forgiven, we judge less and forgive more.

Sadly, people often fail to show mercy and can even act with great cruelty. Louie experienced this reality firsthand and described it in these words:

The rations were so horrible that I had constant diarrhea and dripped mucus from my rear end. Flies got into the mucus and laid their eggs. Some nights it was so bad that I had to curl up in the back of the cell with my naked butt over the hole, leaking. I'd think I had it under control, then five minutes later it would start again, making sleep impossible.

Most people never understand how bad life can be for prisoners of war because no survivor talks frankly and in detail about these horrible experiences from the banquet dais (platform).

I could tell from his groans that Phil suffered similarly two cells away, but the guards did not allow us to talk. Any attempt meant suffering a swift kick or poke with a sharp stick. They also beat us regularly. My new life was no new life at all. Better to starve me or send me out to sea again on the raft. At least dying that way would allow me some dignity.<sup>6</sup>

Louie lived with the constant uncertainty of whether he would survive another day. The torture from the guards was relentless, and life became unbearable. Whatever faith he had while on the raft began to fade, replaced by worry, doubt, and fear. What Louie needed was a faith strong enough to focus on God rather than his circumstances, no matter how horrific or heart-wrenching they were.

More than two years later the war ended. Japan officially surrendered on September 2, 1945. Louie and Phil had survived and were rescued by American forces. This was one way God showed them mercy— He delivered them from the hands of their captors.

God shows His mercy to us in countless ways. He comforts us, corrects us, delivers us, forgives our sins, guides our steps, heals our wounds, loves us unconditionally, provides for our needs, and much more. Because we have personally experienced God's mercy, we are called to let that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 120–121.

same mercy flow through us to others. Two practical ways we can do this are: (1) loving and forgiving our enemies, and (2) helping or providing for someone in need.

### **(1) Loving and Forgiving your Enemies**

Jesus performed the most merciful act in history when He died on the cross for our sins. This was a one-of-a-kind display of mercy by our all-merciful God—an act that can never be repeated. Yet the story of the cross and its meaning can and must be retold. We can share the message of Christ's sacrifice so that others may come to know Him, glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Not everyone will be glad to hear about Jesus. Some may reject the message, and others may even become your enemies. You may also face hostility or mistreatment for other reasons. Choosing to love and forgive your enemies is one of the clearest ways to show mercy.

Remember: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Jesus willingly died for His enemies—He died so that we could be forgiven. His example calls us to reflect the same mercy in our own lives.

In the verses that follow in Luke 6:27–29, Jesus gives us practical instructions for loving and forgiving those who oppose or mistreat us. As you read, consider how His words challenge your natural reactions and invite the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the kind of love only God can give.

#### **Read Luke 6:27–29 and answer questions 36–37:**

*But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.* Luke 6:27–29

**Definitions:** To *bless* another person means to speak well of them and to pray for their good. To *curse* another person means to speak badly of them, criticize, or insult them in anger.

During the time of Jesus, slapping a person on the cheek was a physical expression of insult, contempt, or curse. When Jesus commands us to offer the other cheek, He is teaching us not to retaliate or seek revenge. In the same way, when He says not to withhold your shirt, He is teaching us to respond with generosity instead of anger. However, He is not suggesting that anyone remain in a harmful or dangerous situation.

**36.** Jesus commands us to: \_\_\_\_\_ our enemies, do \_\_\_\_\_ to those who \_\_\_\_\_ you (v. 27).

**37.** Jesus commands us to: \_\_\_\_\_ those who \_\_\_\_\_ you, \_\_\_\_\_  
for those who \_\_\_\_\_ you (v. 28).

Jesus' teaching in Luke 6 gives us clear instructions for how to respond to those who oppose or mistreat us. We see the ultimate example of this love in Jesus Himself on the cross, where He forgave those who were putting Him to death.

**Read Luke 23:34 and answer questions 38–39:**

*Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34*

**38.** Jesus was nailed to the cross by His enemies and asked God the Father to \_\_\_\_\_ them.

**39.** Did Jesus practice what He preached about loving enemies? Yes | No (Underline One)

Loving and forgiving our enemies is not easy; it does not come naturally. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with supernatural love for those who insult or hurt us. Even praying for help can be difficult, as we may be tempted to cling to anger or resentment. Holding a grudge—persistent ill will—may feel natural in the flesh, but letting it go requires the Holy Spirit's supernatural love.

This is why Jesus calls us to a higher standard. Loving those who love us is easy, but loving our enemies reflects the heart of God. It shows that His love, not our own feelings, is at work in us. As we choose to obey, even when it is hard, we participate in God's mercy and bring His light into a world that often responds with hatred and selfishness.

**40.** Read and meditate on Luke 6:32–35. How will *you* apply these verses to your own life?

*"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."*  
Luke 6:32–35

In Day Five, we will continue our study of forgiveness and begin looking at practical ways to show mercy by helping those in need.

**Accountability:** Be prepared to share your answers to #30–40 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—



## **Day Five**

### ***Forgiving and Helping Others***

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus replied seventy-seven times (some translations say seventy times seven). In Scripture, the number seven often symbolizes completeness, showing that we are called to forgive fully and without limit.

Although we must forgive fully, Jesus does not mean for us to place ourselves in danger. He was not saying you should accept physical or emotional abuse. If you find yourself in a harmful situation, pray for God to lead you through it. If possible, you should remove yourself from the threat.

After Jesus told Peter to forgive without limit, He told His disciples a parable (a story with a moral lesson). He told them about a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. The parable was not referring to household servants or slaves, but to subordinate officials.

One man was brought to the king who owed him 10,000 talents (millions of dollars). The man did not have the money. In fact, he may never have been able to repay that amount of debt. The king ordered the man, his family, and all he had to be sold to repay the debt. The man begged for mercy. The master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

When he left, this servant found another servant who owed him a hundred denari (a few dollars). He demanded he pay the money owed. The servant also fell to his knees and begged for mercy. But the servant who had received mercy refused, and had his fellow servant thrown into prison.

### **Read Matthew 18:31–33 and answer questions 41–42:**

*When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. <sup>32</sup> “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’”* Matthew 18:31–33

**41.** Why did the master call the servant wicked (vv. 32–33)?

**42.** Is God like the merciful master who forgives our debts (sins)? Yes | No (Underline One)

The parable ends with the master sending the wicked servant to jail. He was to be tortured until he could pay back all he owed. Jesus then says, *“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart (Matthew 18:35).”*

Louie Zamperini had no interest in forgiving anyone. After the war and his release from his captors, he had recurring nightmares about prison camp and revenge. In order to control his anger and dull the pain and memories, he turned to alcohol.

Louie fell into depression and self-pity. He blamed God and yet, he also knew in his heart that he had not kept his promise on the raft. Although Louie had promised to serve God, he had not given God much thought in the prison camp or in the year after his rescue. When he did think about God, it was in a negative context; he hated religion and God.

Louie married but continued to struggle with drinking, which caused serious problems in the marriage. His wife, Cynthia, was pregnant with their second child when a new neighbor moved into their apartment building. In September 1946, the neighbor invited them to church and to a revival meeting with Billy Graham.<sup>7</sup>

Louie refused to attend, but Cynthia went and accepted Christ as her Savior. Finally, at her urging, Louie agreed to go. He did not trust Jesus as his Savior at the meeting. But now his anger was replaced by fear. His nightmare changed that night: Louie saw one of the prison guard's face and Satan's face as the same.

Remarkably, Cynthia talked him into going to hear Billy Graham the next night. Although he was fighting and making excuses throughout Dr. Graham's talk, at the end he decided to follow Christ. The next morning when he woke up, he realized he had not experienced any nightmares.

In his autobiography, Louie reminded new believers that God does not give out a *steady* diet of happiness. There can be difficult and trying times. Louie went through a period of sadness, doubt, and painful self-examination and explains:

The Christian life is not easy. You'll always get a guy who stands up and says, 'Ever since I became a Christian, my life's been a bowl of cherries.' I've always turned to that guy and said, 'You know what you need? You need Christ. Christian life isn't about a bowl of cherries. It's a struggle, and that struggle keeps you dependent on Him.'<sup>8</sup>

Although Louie had forgiven the Japanese, in 1950 he felt it was important to forgive his former captors, face-to-face. He knew they were imprisoned at Tokyo's Sugamo Prison and made plans to go. God provided the funds in a variety of ways. God even moved strangers to give for this trip of mercy and forgiveness.

When he arrived in Japan, Louie was allowed to tell his story to hundreds of war criminals in Sugamo Prison. Afterward, he invited them to become Christians. Close to sixty percent raised their hands. Finally, Louie's former guards were invited to speak with him. A group of them came forward. Not everyone decided to follow Christ. One who did said:

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<sup>7</sup> Billy Graham (11/7/1918–2/21/2018 ) was called "America's Pastor." He preached at live events to 215 million people with 2.2 million responding to accept Christ. It is estimated that 202 billion people heard his messages over various forms of media. He met with 13 presidents of the United States.

<<https://research.lifeway.com/2018/02/21/billy-grahams-life-ministry-by-the-numbers/>>(accessed 10/23/2022).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 246.

“I don’t understand how you can come back here and forgive us. Your Christianity must be real, but I don’t understand it.”<sup>9</sup>

Louie’s journey to Japan was itself an act of mercy. By taking the time to return, he not only forgave those who had wronged him but also helped meet their greatest need—the message of the gospel. His willingness to go to them shows that mercy often involves action, effort, and intentional care. This leads naturally to the second example of how we can show mercy: helping or supplying someone in need.

## **(2) Helping or Supplying Someone in Need**

Jesus taught valuable lessons through parables. As mentioned earlier, parables are simple stories that teach moral or spiritual lessons. Another valuable lesson appears in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which provides a clear example of helping someone in need.

In this parable Jesus told the story of a traveler who fell into the hands of robbers. They took all his possessions, stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and left him half dead. Later, two men passed by and did not stop to help. Both were religious leaders.

When a Samaritan (person from Samaria) came to the place and saw the man, he had pity on him. He bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey, and took him to an inn (lodging for travelers). He paid for the innkeeper to feed and care for him.

**Read Luke 10:36–37 answer questions 43–44:**

*“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”* <sup>37</sup> *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”* Luke 10:36–37

**43.** When Jesus said, *“Go and do likewise,”* what does He mean?

### **Action Step**

**44.** Pray and ask God to show you someone *you* can help. Write about *your* experience and how you were able to show mercy by meeting a need. It may be a few days for God to reveal both the person and the opportunity to help. Be prepared to share your experience with your team when it happens.

**45.** Memorize Luke 6:36: *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 264.

**46.** Read and meditate on 1 Peter 1:3–5. In what ways has God shown you mercy through Christ Jesus?

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3–5*

**Accountability:** Be prepared to share your answers to #41–44, 46 and #45 memory verse with your team next week.

God was merciful to Louie in many ways. He supplied needs, delivered, corrected, comforted, forgave, guided, and healed. After his Japanese trip of forgiveness, Louie wrote:

I knew that I had finally come full circle. Except for continuing to tell my story and spreading the Word, a great part of my life was over: the delinquency, the running, the war, the imprisonment, the drinking, the nightmares, the greediness, the desperation and the unhappiness. I was completely satisfied with my test of forgiveness and more than ready to move on.<sup>10</sup>

God was merciful to the cruel guards. Through Jesus they were offered forgiveness and a new life. In Jesus, the undeserving guards were supplied needs, delivered, corrected, comforted, forgiven, guided, and healed.

God is merciful to you and me. Through Jesus we are offered forgiveness and a new life. In Jesus, the undeserving (including you and me) are supplied needs, delivered, corrected, comforted, forgiven, guided, and healed.

Lastly, in God's great mercy He gives eternal life in Christ Jesus His Son. No one deserves such a perfect and joyful future. However, God in His goodness has made a way for us to be with Him forever in peace, comfort, and heavenly bliss.

—End of Day Five and Lesson Two—

**Next—Unit 1: Who Is God, Lesson 3: God Is Love**

Rev 10/23/2025

**Please read the following addendum on pages 21–22 regarding scripture memorization.**

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 266.

## Why Memorize Scripture?

**Definitions:** *Memory* is the process of taking in information, processing it, and bringing it back to remembrance. It is the act of or capacity of remembering. When we *memorize* Scripture, we learn it by heart—we commit it to memory so it can guide and strengthen us.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote, “I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture . . . . No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.” <sup>11</sup>

Memorizing scripture is a way of filling our minds with God’s Word so that we can be ready to use it at any moment of trial or temptation, just like Jesus did (Matthew 4:1–11). We not only want to hear God’s Word, we should place it in our hearts. The best way to do this is to commit it to memory. Scripture tells us why it is important to fill our minds and hearts with the Word.

*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* Psalm. 119:11  
(Keeping the Word in our hearts guide us in God’s ways so we stay on the right path.)

*My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. <sup>2</sup> Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. <sup>3</sup> Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.* Proverbs 7:1–3 (Storing up God’s commands for use now and in the future brings a powerful influence for pure, holy, and righteous living.)

*Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*  
Ephesians 6:17 (The Word of God is our weapon to fight against sin.)

Because scripture memorization is biblical and valuable to your success as a disciple of Christ, our lessons will continue to offer you this opportunity. Some of you may think you are not good at memorization, do not like it, or have not even tried. The truth is that memorization is a mental function or skill that can be learned and improved upon. A list of practical tips for memorizing Scripture follows.

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<sup>11</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 61.

### **Practical Tips for Memorizing Scripture**

Although you may not have formally memorized Bible verses, you have engaged in memorization. All people who can communicate have learned to speak—or use sign language—by memorizing thousands of words. The challenge is not that people cannot memorize, but that they do not give it the focused attention necessary for success. Memorization is like exercise—the more we do it, the easier it becomes; the less we do it, the harder it gets.

1. Pray for God’s help in memorizing each new verse you desire to commit to memory.
2. Read the verse carefully for clarity and understanding. You may need to read it several times, aloud or silently. If you are unsure of its meaning, study it further by consulting other Bible translations and considering the context—the verses before and after.
3. Apply and incorporate the verse’s meaning into your own life.
4. Concentrate. Be intentional and focused on the words you are going to commit to memory.
5. Print or write out the verse on a separate piece of paper or index card for easy access.
6. Break the verse into smaller sections or chunks. For example, to memorize Ephesians 6:17: *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*, focus first on “Take the helmet of salvation” and the citation. On the second day, focus “*and the sword of the Spirit*,” while still reviewing the first section. On the third day, focus on “*which is the word of God*,” continuing to review the whole verse.
7. Visualization can help you remember a verse. Images are often more memorable than words. For example, for Ephesians 6:17, imagine a helmet, a sword, and a Bible. You can also associate a word with a personal picture, such as a heart for “love.”
8. Writing the verse repeatedly can also deepen it in your memory.
9. If you are an auditory (audio, hearing) learner, record the verse and play it repeatedly until you have mastered it.
10. Organization. Give the verse a topic name like prayer, spiritual warfare, or salvation.
11. To prevent verses from fading from memory, review them regularly.

(End of Practical Tips for Memorizing Scripture.)