

Mercy in Action

Quarter 12 | Lesson 6 | Character Development

1. **Connecting:** Do an activity to understand mercy.
2. **Teaching:** Learn about mercy from examples of ministry to refugees and Jesus' parables (Matthew 5:7; 18:23–34; 20:1–16; Luke 15:11–24; Hebrews 13:16; Psalm 130:1–4; Micah 6:8).
3. **Responding:** Make a plan to show mercy to others.

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- An item of some value that can easily be hidden in a pocket or in someone's hand, such as a piece of jewellery or a small amount of money

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse Poster
- *The NIV Action Study Bible*
- Pencils
- Student Pages

Tear out the page of Bible passages at the end of the lesson and separate them on the lines. You will use them during the Teaching section of the lesson.

If possible contact a confident teen before class to help you with the Connecting activity. If you cannot contact the student before class, talk with her at the beginning of class. You will act out a scene with the teen where you pretend to have lost something and that teen will pretend to have taken it.

Teacher Devotion

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3:22–23, ESV

When you wake up in the morning, what is the very first thing you think of? Is it a celebration of praise that God has given you another day to enjoy? Or do you think first of the things you have to do and the challenges you face? We often carry heavy burdens of worry, sadness, and fear, and these may be the first thoughts in our minds. But imagine waking each day with the assurance that God's love for you never ceases and that His mercies are new each morning—that you are given a fresh start each day because of His compassionate love. How would your life be different?

Because God has given you the gift of mercy, you can share it with others. This kind of mercy is not simply an emotion. It is action. Your acts of mercy can bring peace, joy, and restoration to the lives of those around you. You can freely give the gift of mercy that God has given you—for His mercy is fresh for you

each day. So try a new way to start your day—begin each morning with the knowledge that you are loved endlessly by a merciful God. Then share that compassionate love with others.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Do an activity to understand mercy.

Greet the teens as they arrive. Ask them to share about opportunities they had to be courageous in big or little ways. Allow 2–3 teens to share their stories with the rest of the class.

When the teen you have chosen to help with the first activity arrives, take her aside and explain the scene she will act with you. Give her the item that she will pretend to have taken and hide it in her pocket or in her hand. Tell her not to tell the other teens about it.

When you are ready to begin, get the students' attention and act as though you are looking for something. Ask the teens to help you to look for your item. After a few minutes, pretend to find the item on the student who is helping you. That student should act as though she's done nothing wrong even though she took your item. Look upset as you ask the class the following questions. Allow 2–3 teens to answer each question.

- **What do you think I should do about the fact that** (student's name) **took something that belonged to me?**
- **Do you think** (student's name) **should face some consequences? Why or why not?**
- **Do you think it is okay for me to be angry or concerned about the item that belonged to me? Why or why not?**
- **Which of your ideas do you think will make me feel the best about my item being taken?**
- **Is this the best solution to this situation? Why or why not?**

Some of your ideas reflect a desire for justice—a desire to set things right. These solutions allow me to get my valuable item back and bring negative consequence for (student's name) **because she took the item from me.**

Some of your ideas reflect a desire for mercy. "Mercy" means showing kindness and compassion when someone deserves other consequences. It is kindness that is unexpected and has not been earned. Sometimes it is showing kindness when the person deserves punishment or harm. Mercy is more than just an emotion. It is an emotion followed by an action. The merciful ideas you shared are those that required me to show forgiveness and kindness to (student's name).

Let the students know this was all just pretend. Lead the students in clapping to thank the teen who acted with you.

Teacher Tip: The teens have learned about grace in previous lessons, which means receiving kindness we have not earned or do not deserve. If it is helpful, guide the teens to understand that mercy is similar to grace, but it is not quite the same. While "grace" means receiving kindness that we do not deserve, "mercy" means not receiving the punishment or harm that we do deserve.

- **What are some examples of mercy you can think of either from your own life or from the Bible?**

Though our natural feeling is most often to seek justice and to make sure that people receive the consequences they deserve, Christians are called to show mercy. Let's talk more about how we can do that.

2. Teaching: Learn about mercy from examples of ministry to refugees and Jesus' parables (Matthew 5:7; 18:23–34; 20:1–16; Luke 15:11–24; Hebrews 13:16; Psalm 130:1–4; Micah 6:8).

All around the world, people are forced from their homes and even their countries due to war, political unrest, drought, famine, persecution, and lack of opportunity. These people are called refugees. They often settle in other countries or live in refugee camps on the borders of nearby countries.

Refugees leave behind their families, friends, churches, and jobs. They often lose or are forced to abandon their homes and nearly all of their belongings and money.

Those who are given the opportunity to live in other countries often struggle with poverty and isolation. They may have trouble adjusting to their new communities because of language or cultural differences. They may have difficulty finding jobs because of prejudice and intolerance.

Those who live in refugee camps may suffer from health problems due to unclean water, overcrowding, and unsafe living conditions. They often depend entirely on the food, medical care, water, and shelter provided by relief agencies because there are few opportunities for employment nearby. They may wonder if they will ever be able to leave the camps and have a more secure life.

Though there are many refugees in the world today, there are many people who show mercy to these refugees. Relief organizations provide food, shelter, and even education for people living in refugee camps. Doctors and nurses care for the sick and injured in these camps. Neighbouring countries offer the opportunity for refugees to join their communities. Even refugees in these camps show mercy to others around them.

- How does learning what people are doing for refugees help us to understand mercy?

Allow students to offer their thoughts.

Let's learn what the Bible says about mercy by acting out Bible passages that teach us about mercy.

Teacher Tip: You may want to explain that each of these passages is a parable that Jesus used to teach His followers something about mercy and the kingdom of God. Remind them that a parable is a story that teaches a lesson.

Divide the class into 3 groups. Have the groups gather in different areas of the teaching space. Give each group 1 of the Bible passages from the end of the lesson. Each group will read their Bible passage and create a short drama to share with the rest of the class. Give the groups 10 minutes to do this. The Bible passages are printed here for your reference.

Parable 1:

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out,

he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Matthew 18:23–34

Parable 2:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first." The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Matthew 20:1–16

Parable 3:

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. 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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." So 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. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 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. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For 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

Give each group 2 minutes to present their parable to the class. After each presentation, ask the whole class the following questions.

- **Who showed mercy in this story?**
- **What did we learn about mercy from this parable?**

Mercy is kindness, compassion, or forgiveness that is not earned or deserved. Mercy is also action, not simply emotion.

- **Based on what we have learned, do you think we should show mercy to others? Why or why not?**

Allow 2–3 teens to share their answers. It is okay if they do not know the answer. They will learn more in the next part of the lesson.

The Bible tells us a few reasons we should be merciful to others. From the first parable, we learned that we should be merciful to others because we may need mercy ourselves. In the first parable, the master forgives the servant, but the servant does not forgive the person who owes him a debt. Because of this, the servant no longer receives mercy. We all make poor choices and do things we regret. If we are not merciful with others, they may choose not to be merciful with us. Listen to what the Bible tells us about this:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Matthew 5:7

Allow 2–3 teens to share their answers to all of the questions in this section of the lesson. Remind them that they should not use the names of others. Instead, they should describe the situations or actions to take.

- What are some areas where you need mercy?
- How can this knowledge help you to show mercy to others?

From the second parable, we learned that we should be merciful because it gives us an opportunity to help others. The owner of the vineyard hired all those he could find who did not have work. He paid each worker what he had promised, including those who had started late in the day. He showed mercy to all the people he could find who needed work through his generosity and kindness.

Listen to something else the Bible teaches us about being kind and generous with others:

*And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*
Hebrews 13:16

- What are some areas where you could help others by being merciful?
- How can this knowledge help you to show mercy to others?

Teacher Tip: Teens who have been hurt by others may have difficulty with the idea of showing mercy to others. They may think that bringing justice is the only way to heal from their hurt. Help them to understand that God is a powerful and just judge, and He will bring justice where it is needed.

From the third parable, we learned that we should be merciful because God is merciful with us. In this parable, the father forgives his son, much the same way God forgives us. When we ask God for forgiveness, He gives it freely—and He celebrates that we have come to Him!

*Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.*
Psalm 130:1–4

- How does it make you feel to know that God has been merciful with you?
- How can this knowledge help you to show mercy to others?

Showing mercy can be difficult. It is normal to want others to receive what we believe they deserve, especially when others have wronged us in some way. But God has called us to show mercy in all we do. Listen to what He says about mercy:

If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

*And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*
Micah 6:8

- **Why do you think God requires justice, mercy, and humility from those who follow Him?**

Allow 2–3 teens to share their ideas. Then guide them to understand that these things reflect God's character and the way He has called us to treat others.

Teacher Tip: It is important for the teens to understand that showing mercy does not mean remaining in or putting themselves in dangerous situations. Encourage them to show mercy in situations where they can do so safely.

The Bible teaches us that God does not require us to repay His kindness and mercy with gifts or even good works. He has called us to love Him and to treat others as He would. And because we have been blessed by His mercy, we should share that with others.

Optional: If you are using *The NIV Action Study Bible*, the teens can read about the importance of Jesus' parable teaching in the "Unlock It" section near Matthew 13.

3. Responding: Make a plan to show mercy to others.

Mercy is not usually our first reaction. But every day we have new opportunities to choose mercy instead of anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness. We can learn to be merciful with others because God has been so merciful with us. When we ask Him for help, He will change our hearts to be merciful.

Listen to what the Bible tells us about God's mercy:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*
Lamentations 3:22–23, NIV

- How does it make you feel to know that God's mercies are new every morning?
- Does that cause you to want to be merciful with others? Why or why not?

God's love and mercy never end. They are new every morning. We can never do anything that will cause God's mercy to stop. This is a wonderful gift—and it is a gift we should share with others. When we show mercy to others, it changes us.

Earlier we said that mercy is not just an emotion like pity or compassion. It is an action that we choose. Now think about a situation in your own life where mercy is needed. Think of 1 way you can show mercy in that situation. Here are some questions to ask yourself to decide if you are showing mercy:

- Will my action help the person or situation?
- Will my response show this other person more of who God is?
- Will my response please God?

A merciful response helps the other person and shows God's love. It also pleases God. Here are some examples of merciful responses:

Forgive someone
 Help someone
 Be kind to someone
 Talk to someone new
 Pray for someone who has made you angry
 What other ideas do you have?

Ask God to help you to be merciful, even when it is hard.

Give the teens a minute to think of how they can show mercy in their situations.

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, give the teens time to complete the activity on their pages.

Mercy transforms us to be more like God and brings glory to His name. It also makes the world a better place. When we choose to show mercy instead of acting on our negative emotions, we can make a difference in our own lives and the lives of others, and we honour God.

Close with a blessing based on Micah 6:8:

Blessing: May you recognize the never-ending mercies God has shown in your life, and may you see new opportunities to show mercy each day.

Family Connection: Encourage the teens to ask their family members, "What is the most merciful thing anyone has ever done for you? How did that make you feel?" They can then share that God's mercy never ends and that we should show mercy to others because of the mercy He has shown to us.

Lead the students in singing this quarter's song, if possible. "Mighty God" by Elevation Worship:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAhkYoWYxAY>