

Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13

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

Monday, Mar 11: Disciples Show Mercy Like Their Father

It is SO easy. TOO easy. It's so easy to withhold mercy from people who have hurt you, especially when you are in the throes of pain they've caused or brooding over such pain. It's easy to crave others getting what they deserve. What is not easy is showing mercy toward your enemies, even if they are only *enemies* temporarily. Yet that is what God asks of us, AND that is just what God does too, forgiving countless sins at the request of His only beloved Son Jesus who prayed that our sins not be held against us (and who continues to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father today). It is what He did for you. And it wasn't easy. Ask Jesus. It cost Him His life.



Do you know what else can be easy? Forgetting how merciful God has been toward us. This week is an encouragement for us to do hard things, something asked of us by God: Show mercy and act like our heavenly Father who shows mercy to people who don't deserve it. It is a week to pray for a deepening of a heart within us to become more like Him.



Prayer for the week: Father God, I am grateful that You do not remember my sins when You forgive. I don't want to remember my sin in such a way that holds me back. Nor do I want to forget my sinfulness when dealing with others who sin against me. Teach me how to forgive those who trespass against me as You forgive me my trespasses. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Micro-Group Connections: A Disciple's Lifestyle



Micro-Group Moment (MGM):
Considering a life of **VIGILANCE** as
a case for participating in Micro-Groups:



*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.
The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Matthew 26:41



Sean Parker, the first president of Facebook now calls himself a “conscientious objector” to social media. In an interview with Axios, he begrudgingly admitted, “God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains. The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them... was all about: *“How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?”* And that means that we need to give you, we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or post or whatever. That's going to get you to contribute more content and that's going to get you... more likes and more comments. It's a social-validation feedback loop, exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.

J.M. Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 38

Discuss with fellow MGers one or two of the following regarding the book quote:

- Have I settled for a mediocre version of faith and relationship with God?
- What consumes large amounts of time in your life?
- This notion: That which you give your mind to (what you let be its focus) will shape the trajectory of your character.

Vigilance

The quality of being
alert and watchful



Concluding Prayer prompt: Based on the bullet points above, offer a prayer that strenghtens the efforts your spirit working with the Holy Spirit or overcoming your flesh.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:3-6

Read vs.3-6 2x,

Mark the words or phrases that catch your attention.

Meditate: Talk with God about those words. Ask Him to impress things upon your heart and mind in response. Write them down.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time
my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness
even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom
in that secret place.



Pondering Point: King David had a strong conviction that God had a right to judge him (vs 4). But the first lines David penned here (vs. 1) are a cry for mercy from the One who had every right to deny him the very mercy he prayed for. What determines your attitude/stance toward God as you approach Him?

Tuesday, Mar 12: God's Mission Seen in Luke 6:35-46

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. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

~Jesus, Luke 6:35-36

Our story this week is the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7. Outside of Jesus dying for the sins of the world, his story is one that gets to the heart of this facet of God's mission: Love your enemies and do good to them. While being killed, he prayed that God would not hold this sin against his enemies. And God did not. A prime example is that of a young Pharisee overseeing Stephen's death, at whose

feet those doing the stoning laid their clothes. That young Pharisee would later become Apostle Paul, one of the greatest evangelists in history. Paul, who later would identify himself as “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), knew what it was like to not have his sin held against him. In gratitude he lived a life for this Jesus whom he originally persecuted. It is amazing what God can do through heartfelt testimony of people, particularly in dire circumstances.



Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me a heart of mercy like You have and like You instilled in Your follower Stephen. I pray that I may be also full of the Spirit and wisdom as he was – and that you can use me and my heart of forgiveness. Amen.

Follow up:

- Who do you need to release or forgive in your life?
- What sins do you need to let go of?

Ask God for help in doing so.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:3-6

Ps 51:3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Teaching or Command of God:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.



Romans 3:19

THE PROMISE

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



Pondering Point: Sit before God in silence for a moment.

Accept the principle that, as a sinner, you are by definition *poor in spirit*. Next, thank God for Jesus, whose death for your sin enables you to be blessed and inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Wednesday, Mar 13: Your Identity in Christ

- Even though we are sinners, God has been gracious to us; in Christ, we are children of the Most High and will be merciful, just as our Heavenly Father is merciful.

Remembering who you are in Christ is a great way to handle any temptation to not be merciful, to withhold grace, or to treat others poorly in return for being treated poorly. Let's learn to love our enemies and do good to them as we heard yesterday from Jesus in Luke 6:35. And take note of God's promise below under today's Micro-Meditations from Scripture: *God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*. How can you demonstrate God's love in your relationships when it comes to being merciful, gracious, and God-like?



Prayer Prompt: Ask God to make you more like Him, willing to forgive even before someone has asked. This will help your heart to be in the right “frame of mind” you might say.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:3-6

Ps 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

Teaching or Command of God:

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD,
I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked,
but rather that they turn from their ways and live.
Turn! Turn from your evil ways!



Ezekiel 33:11

THE PROMISE

Romans 5:8

God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.



Pondering Point: God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Do you? God loves sinners. Do you?

This week we zero in on having hearts of mercy. The hope is that we display hearts like our Heavenly Father who is willing to be merciful to those who don't deserve it. In light of this let's review ourselves, repent if necessary, and return to God and his ways:

R **Review:** Seek the Lord's face and ask whether you have withheld mercy from certain people in your life. Walk through your current and past relationships with family, co-workers, neighbors, church members and the like. Make a list:

Those I've shown mercy Those I've withheld mercy from

R **Repent...if necessary:** Do I need to repent in this area? If you've been withholding mercy, ask for forgiveness and then for the Lord to change your heart. Ask the Lord to remind you of the depths of His mercy toward you.

R **Return...as necessary.** Ask for the Lord to draw you close to Him, having His heart effect your heart so that you might truly become gracious and merciful as your Father in Heaven is gracious and merciful.



Pondering Point: Remember: choosing to be merciful toward others does not equate to saying that their wrongful behavior toward you is acceptable. Rather it keeps the behavior from defining the relationship, similar to God not allowing your sin to define the relationship between you and Him.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:3-6

Ps 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Teaching or Command of God:

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.



Romans 7:18

THE PROMISE

Genesis 8:21

Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.



Pondering Point: In God's word, there is no escaping that your human nature is sinful. But there is a way to escape that sinful human nature's control. Let the Holy Spirit, who gives birth to the human spirit, direct your life of faith in Jesus the Christ.

Friday, March 15: Discipleship Point from Luke 6:35-36

A valuable asset of healthy disciples is an ability to love and enjoy people. Jesus loves people and He enjoys people. Now, that does not mean that He didn't have enemies and people who wished Him harm. He did, but He learned deal with them as well without losing His kind heart for all people. Jesus also managed to do this loving and enjoying while dealing with lots of broken relationships. He managed to stay healthy in unhealthy arenas. In fact, He brought health to unhealthy people and unhealthy environments.



While we may not be able to change every unhealthy situation, we can bring our health to unhealthy environments and people. We can pray to *not* let other's ill-health affect us, but to instead allow our Spirit-led health to impact and influence them. More on that next week. For now, focus on loving enemies and doing good.



Discipleship Prayer: Jesus, You came as a healthy, whole human being into an unhealthy, sinful world. You allowed Yourself to be personified as a sinful human being in this world by sinful people for whom You died. Help me to know that You will be my defender and stand up for me, and that I don't need to exact vengeance. Rather let me witness of Your great mercy not just in my life, but of Your willingness to be merciful in the lives of all other people. Help me to be healthy regardless of the environment I'm in and by Your Holy Spirit to bring health to unhealthy environments. In Your name I pray. Amen.



Pondering Point: What might you be able to do to improve the health of your relationships with others? *My response:*

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:3-6

Ps 51:6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Teaching or Command of God:

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.



1 John 3:18-20

THE PROMISE

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.



Pondering Point: How can God's desire for faithfulness in you (Ps. 51:6) be experienced? Do you believe that, based on God loving you first, you can love Him – and others?

Saturday, March 16: Scripture's Story for the Week



Stephen is Martyred Acts 7:1-60

Stephen is one of the seven men "full of the Spirit and wisdom" selected to assist the original disciples. He himself was a strong disciple and proclaimer of the gospel, leading to his becoming the first martyr, someone killed for his/her faith. In the midst of dying, we find these momentous words of Stephen: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Not incidentally, this story introduces up-and-coming



Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, at whose feet the bible describes clothes being placed by those stoning Stephen. Saul, later to become the Apostle Paul, never forgot this moment, testifying about it years later in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:19,20). Identifying himself as chief of sinners, Paul is one who benefitted from the forgiveness Jesus died for and Stephen prayed for.



Prayer: Father God thank You from the bottom of my heart.

I am grateful for the forgiveness Jesus died to secure and that I receive in His name. I am grateful for the attitude of the Martyr Stephen and I desire to have that kind of heart myself. Out of those forgiven that day came one of the most powerful gospel teaching witnesses in the Apostle Paul. It does not surprise me that You would use such a witness in the life of Stephen to change the life of Paul. And that You would, in turn, use the life of Paul to change the lives of hundreds, thousands, even millions of other people. Help us never to underestimate our witness in big and small ways. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Sunday, Mar 17: Call to worship God, to gather together

I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalm 18:1-2

Regardless of the reaction of others, one thing is certain: True worship and devotion will make our lives fragrant and will perfume the environment around us. Our homes, our churches, even our places of work will bear the sweet scent of our devotion. Most important, the Lord Jesus will be pleased. And ultimately that is all that really matters.

~ Nancy Leigh DeMoss



Prayer prompt: Father God, may Your forgiveness and mercy permeate all that I am, every facet of my life: My emotional and physical health, my spiritual and mental condition. May they permeate all I think, say, and do; how I think, speak, and act. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.