

Yesterday. Today. Forever.

Module: A Faith Learned

Lesson 3: Loving Mercy

Objectives:

- Students will understand that love comes from God and should flow through us to others.
- Students will learn how God's mercy and justice go hand in hand – they are not opposites!
- Students will identify how God's mercy enhances their picture of God's love for them and motivates them to love others.

Materials Needed

- ☐ Lengths of half pipe, enough for each student (Leader's note: If you're not able to get half pipe, allow students to use other objects around to create that path.)
- ☐ 2 large buckets per team
- ☐ Golf/tennis/bouncy balls, one per team (optional if not using water)
- ☐ optional: prizes
- ☐ Chart paper with John 3:17-18 written out
- ☐ 1 copy of Appendix 1 per group
- ☐ Blank chart paper

Minds On

Depending on the size of your group, this activity can be done competitively with multiple teams or co-operatively. The object is to create a channel for water to be transferred from one bucket to another. The distance between buckets can vary according to the length of half pipe or gutter pieces that you have and the total number of students. This activity works best as an illustration if you use water, but challenging your students to transport a golf/tennis/bouncy ball from one point to another is an alternative that can be done indoors without making a mess.

Establish a starting point with a set amount of water to be transported and let your students know where the water needs to go. The challenge could be to fill a cup of water first or to see which team can spill the least amount of water and fill up their end bucket the most. If you are using a ball instead of water you can increase the challenge by lengthening the distance or imposing obstacles. If the ball falls, the team has to begin again from the start point. You can repeat and/or modify this activity as many times as you wish.

Action

Gather your group together, award prizes if you wish and ask students what they thought of the opening activity, what they found challenging or most fun.

Prompt: Last week we talked about acting justly, and today we are going to tackle the next instruction from Micah 6:8, to love mercy. Even though the pipeline game was a fun way to test your patience and teamwork, it was also an illustration for how we as Christians should behave in the world. God has shown us amazing mercy and love by allowing Jesus to pay the debt of our sin, and our role is to pass that mercy and love on to others. I think we all know Christians are supposed to be loving people, but sometimes we forget that love and mercy aren't just feelings we muster up, they are gifts that God

gives us and we just need to pass it on. Think back to the game – the only way to win was to pass on what you received from the person before you. (If you chose not to use water, invite your students to imagine completing the challenge with water instead of a ball – while a ball can be balanced and held by one person while teammates make adjustments to the pipeline, flowing water can't be paused.) One difference between our activity and God's mercy is that His mercy is limitless. If we mess up passing it on there is always more available. It would be like doing the water challenge using a hose instead of a bucket.

Questions for discussion:

- What does mercy mean to you?
 - Some definitions include “an act of kindness, compassion, or favour”
 - Also, “showing compassion, pity or forbearance (restraint) toward an offender or enemy”
 - Some might also say “not getting the punishment you deserve”
- Do you think Christians are generally perceived by the world as being merciful? Why or why not?

Bring your students' attention to the chart paper with John 3:17-18 written on it. Have a volunteer read the verse out loud and ask your students:

- Does this passage talk about justice or mercy? [Both. Justice is described because nonbelievers are condemned for not meeting God's standard. Mercy is described because believers are not condemned – they are saved by trusting Jesus.]
- **How is this passage different from the passage we read last week about the final judgment?** (Matthew 25:31-46) [in the Matthew passage, everyone is judged based on their actions; in this passage only those who do not believe in Jesus are judged/condemned]
- **How do you think the concept of God's mercy relates to the concept of God's justice?**

- God's justice requires that judgment take place; however, his mercy allows us to be judged based on Christ's merit instead of our own. Accepting this mercy is left up to our free will.
- An illustration that might help is, imagine being pulled over for driving twice the speed limit. The police officer writes you a ticket because you have broken the law – that is justice. However, he then offers to pay the ticket for you; that is mercy. Mercy does not mean not writing the ticket; it means paying the price for justice to be fulfilled.
- Isaiah 51:5 says, "My mercy and justice are coming soon. My salvation is on the way." Although it can be tempting to consider mercy and justice as opposites, Scripture shows that God uses them together for our salvation. Like a balance scale needs equal measurements on both sides, we need to recognize both sides of God's character or we will have a skewed understanding of what he wants from us.

Prompt: It might seem like God's mercy and justice are opposites, but the Bible shows us how they work together. It's worth wrestling with this tension so that we are able to honour the full aspect of God's character, not to be judgmental but also not to be wishy-washy about what we believe. A passage that can help us understand the balance is 1 John 3:16-24.

Divide your students into small groups and give each group a handout with instructions to read the passage and answer the questions as a group.

Consolidate/Debrief

When the groups have finished, ask your students how they filled in the blanks for the final question and write the two phrases on a piece of chart paper everyone can see:

Mercy: God's love inspires our obedience.

Justice: Our right actions give us the confidence to approach God and ask for what we need.

Under these two phrases, divide the chart paper into three columns. Ask your students to brainstorm ways that God shows his love for us (first column); ways we can obey him, especially by showing love to others (second column); and prayer requests (third column). Close in prayer and thank God for his loving mercy, pray that your students will be inspired to pass on that love to others, and ask God to meet the needs of the prayer requests that have been shared.

Appendix 1

1 John 3:16-24 (NLT)

¹⁶ We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister^[a] in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?

¹⁸ Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

¹⁹ Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. ²⁰ Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

²¹ Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. ²² And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

²³ And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey God’s commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

Questions for Discussion:

- How does Jesus show God’s love to us?
- How can we show God’s love to others?
- According to vs. 18-20, what is most important out of:
 - Words
 - Actions
 - Feelings
- Which of the above 3 items best demonstrates what is true?
- There is a two-part commandment in verse 23 explaining how we have fellowship with God. What are the two parts? Do you notice the relationship between this verse and verse 16?
- How do all these things relate? Fill in the blanks:
 - Mercy: God’s _____ inspires our _____.
 - Justice: Our right _____ give us _____ to approach God and ask for what we _____.

[actions] [confidence] [love] [need] [obedience]