

The Difference Mercy Makes

by Brian Chesemore

The sermon emphasizes the importance of extending mercy at every opportunity and addressing sin within ourselves before judging others, in order to avoid sinful judgment and build healthy relationships.

Duration: 58:57

Scripture: Luke 6:36-42, John 1:18

Topics: "Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of showing mercy to others, just as God has shown mercy to us. He encourages the audience to pray for the harvest and to share the love of Christ with those in their neighborhoods. The speaker then focuses on the passage from Luke 6:36-38, where Jesus instructs his followers to be merciful, not to judge or condemn others, to forgive, and to give generously. He explains that extending mercy at every opportunity and addressing sin starting within ourselves are the two ways to be a living expression of God's mercy.

Transcript

If everyone can make their way into their seats, I am eager for us to get started. And I want to tell you why. I was on the phone with my dear friend, Kenneth Moresco, who oversees our church and several others, and just provides exceptional care for my soul.

And he was asking me about some reports that I turned in and some different ways that I run the church. And he asked me a question if the way that I did it was better than how Covenant Life does it. That wasn't supposed to be funny.

And in that moment, I sinfully judged him. I assumed that he was saying that because he thought it couldn't be possible. When I spoke to him the next week, I asked him about that, and he said, Oh, I absolutely wasn't thinking that at all.

If you were doing it in a better way than us, we wanted to learn from you. And I was obviously aggrieved. My friend was being humble, and I was judging him as being proud.

The reason I said I'm excited about this sermon is because it's on the topic of sinful judgment. When I think of weaknesses inherent to humanity, and certainly our church is not exempt from that, I think of sinful judgment. I think of the frequency in my own soul of how many times I assume the worst instead of

assuming the best.

How many times I ascribe conclusive opinions to the motives of another person and why they say certain things they do. So it has been a prayer of mine. It has been a burden of mine for many months.

I don't think it would even be wrong to say over a year that I've been eager for us to be better taught on this topic of sinful judgment, and in the kindness and the providence in the economy of God. Brian Chesmore is with us, and he just did a wonderful treatment on a passage from Luke that deals with this more authoritatively than any other Bible passage that I know of. Brian's been here before, but let me just tell you a tiny bit about him before he comes to serve us so effectively.

By the way, I have heard this sermon, and my heart is so poised because I think the truths he's about to communicate have the potential to change your relationships, to absolutely change the way you process things that are said to you, or things that are done, or actions of other people. It has the potential to make us more like Christ in a profound way with love and charity and mercy that has been given to us. So Brian is a dear friend of mine.

He is part of the Family Life ministry. In fact, he leads the Family Life ministry at Covenant Life Church. I know Brian better as the guy who went to Chicago.

He holds a special place in our heart because of his passion for church planning. He served a dear friend of mine, Tab Traynor, who has also been with us for five years without having enough money at that church to bring him on staff. He worked hard at a job and served that church.

My wife and I were recently there in the spring. How encouraging to see the effects of this man as he's been gone for some years now, but to hear the different men and individuals and families talk about the difference that Brian and his dear wife Kristen made, why they were at this church. So this man is no stranger to church planning.

He certainly is an effective pastor. He's a humble man. He applies everything he's going to teach to you, and that's what makes him so very qualified to serve us this morning.

So will you welcome our friend Brian Chesmore as he comes to bring God's Word to us. Thank you, buddy. Thank you, bro.

So very kind of you. Thank you, Bob, for those very kind words. If you would, please open your Bibles to Luke 6, verse 36.

That's where we're going to hang out this morning. I was here probably close to two years ago when you all were meeting in the elementary school. So to be here this morning in obviously a new and bigger facility and to see more people who have come into this local church and who have had their lives transformed by the fellowship they're experiencing here, it is just a joy to be here and to observe grace all around me, to see how the worship team has grown, and to see Kirk here and see him leading this morning.

It's just grace everywhere you look. And so I am so grateful to be here. I was thinking on the way here, if I could, and thinking about the pastoral team here, if I could have Bob's leadership gift and physique and Tito's smile and Zach's musical abilities and Mike's accent, what a combination that would be.

I mean, that would be the closest thing to the perfect man this side of heaven. So sorry, Mike, to only bring up the voice. I guess you didn't have anything to do with that.

It's a joy to be with you all. But I really do have a passion for church planning and a passion for what you all are doing here. And one of the things that Josh has sought to build into us as a pastoral team and as a local church at Covenant Life is we want to have a church planning mentality at Covenant Life.

We want to make sure that every one of us as members is viewing Covenant Life as a church plant. It's a church plant that's existed for many years now, but it's one where we're continuing to seek to feel the call to reach out to our community, to share the gospel, and to be mindful of the opportunities we may have to church plant. So even as we sent out the folks to Frederick to plant a church there, we're so excited.

And so as I come here this morning, I'm so excited to see how the gospel has been brought to Ashburn through a local church plant. So thank you to each one of you for the part you're playing. Even as Bob mentioned Alpha and the desire that they have to see more people there, I would just come alongside what he said and just want to repeat that and say pray.

Pray for the harvest. Pray that God would use you in your neighborhood. You don't have to be a skilled evangelist to share the gospel, to share the love of Christ.

Even as we talk about the topic of mercy today, think about those in your neighborhood who need to know the mercy and grace of God. So let us look at God's word as spoken in the gospel of Luke, verse 36 of chapter six. Be merciful, even as your father is merciful.

Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, press down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

He also told them a parable. Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite.

First, take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. Will you join me in prayer? Father, we marvel at your kindness to give us your authoritative word. We marvel that in light of our sin against you, in light of our rebellion, you would be so kind as to speak to us and to give to us the gift of your word.

God, no one has ever seen you, but the only Son who is at your side came and made you known. And in this passage of scripture, we get an opportunity to hear his voice, to hear his words, and to learn through his words more of your character and to learn through his words what it is you're calling to us to emulate about your character. So we pray, God, that we would submit ourselves to your authoritative word this morning.

We pray that right now, in each of our hearts, we would put ourselves under the authority of your word. God, help us, help us by your Spirit to be good soil for your word. Lord, as it is preached, and I pray you

would help me to preach it accurately and passionately and appropriately.

God, as it is preached, Lord, we pray that the full intended effect of this passage would reach our hearts and our minds and that we would be transformed by the words of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. And we give glory to you, God, for how you're going to use your word to further shape this local church, this community of believers, to transform our lives individually and corporately. And we pray in your Son's name, Jesus Christ, amen.

Amen. Well, the right information, carefully collected and appropriately applied, can make all the difference in a given day. The wrong information, prematurely acted upon, can also make quite a difference in your day.

Allow me to tell you about a painful personal experience that made clear for me the difference between those two types of days. Prior to having the honor of serving as a pastor in Covenant Life Church, as Bob mentioned, I lived near Chicago in the western suburbs and worked at a financial company that traded some significant amounts of stocks. Now, you need to understand how humorous it is that I got hired there.

I was a music major and a graduate of the first year of the pastor's college. That was the year that they allowed anybody in who wanted to come. So, in light of my career that I'd had prior to applying to this company, it is just marvelous and amazing mercy from God that I would get hired by them.

You need to understand, it's almost criminal that I worked for this company. Fast forward a year into that job and our company had been tracking a particular stock and so we had been accumulating for several weeks, if not months, large amounts of this one stock, waiting for the most opportune time to sell out of that stock. And so on a particular day, my boss had told me that we were going to, on this day, close out the position of that stock.

That just simply means to sell the shares we had. Now, my job, very simply, was to track the number of shares of any given stock that we had at any given time. And so, I was a novice, but this job was relatively straightforward.

Well, when my boss informed me that it was time to close out that position, I calculated the number of shares we had, confidently went to him and told him the number of shares we had, and he made the appropriate call and sold those shares. Now, I assumed that what I told him was accurate. The number of shares that I informed him that we had was accurate.

The deal was done, the money was made, and, as it seemed on the surface, all was well. As I walked back to my desk and sat down, I had this awful, sinking feeling. This question emerged from me.

Did I have the accurate number of shares? Did I calculate that correctly before I talked to him? And so I began to scramble and look at the numbers I had come up with. And, you know, I had heard of horror stories, of low-life trading clerks like me, who had calculated wrong numbers of shares and turned that information in, only to find out that a trade was made on the wrong number, and sometimes losing tens of thousands of dollars, and in some occasions, hundreds of thousands of dollars, based on wrong information. I sat there, as I scrambled, putting together this information, concerned that I had given wrong information.

I sat there wondering, am I going to read about myself tomorrow in the loser section of the Wall Street Journal? Fears were welling up in me, and, sure enough, it was true. I had been the victim of fuzzy math, and I was at least a few hundred shares off in the number that I had given to my boss. So, knowing at this point that the price of any given share is always changing, I quickly pushed myself back from the desk and walked over to my boss, and I told him the sad news.

You need to understand, my boss is a wonderful man. He is one of the pillars of the church there in Chicago, and so I go up to him and I tell him, I tell him, Tim, I have to inform you of something unfortunate. I gave you the wrong information on that stock.

It's actually this number of shares, and this guy just breathes mercy, and it was all he could do to not just hang his head and say, are you sure? And so I turned to him and I said, yes, I'm sure. Sadly, I was sure at this point, and so he made the appropriate trades to try to shore up my mistakes, and I went back to my desk wondering, how could this happen? Why did this happen? Well, it happened because I miscalculated how many shares we had, and I failed to confirm that number. It happened because of a faulty assumption on my part, a reliance on what I assumed to be the full picture rather than a confirmed objective information.

I made a major mistake. In that one mistake, I lost our company the equivalent of my yearly salary. Oh, it was painful.

And here's the good news. In the mercy of God, I no longer work with stocks. Oh.

But here's the scary reality for each of us. It's also possible to have faulty assumptions about people. It's possible to come to premature and inaccurate conclusions about those who are around us.

I've made major mistakes in this area as well. Can you relate? Such assumptions and conclusions when acted upon prematurely result only in relational damage, relational loss. Well, in today's text, the Savior addresses kindly for us our tendency to speak before we know, to conclude before we inquire, to, in a phrase, sinfully judge.

And in this passage, Jesus calls us to be merciful towards others. Jesus calls objects of great mercy to be living expressions of mercy. Are you and I responding to that call? How can we know when our relationships with others display the Father's mercy that He's shown towards us? When these seven brief verses, the Savior makes very clear for us two ways that every object of mercy is to be a living expression of mercy.

Those two ways. Number one, extend mercy at every opportunity. Extend mercy at every opportunity.

And number two, address sin, but start within. First, extend mercy at every opportunity. Jesus begins this passage with four exhortations.

In verse 37, you see them. Judge not, condemn not, forgive, give. Four commands, but really just one charge.

Be merciful to others. It's like four quick jabs, but the effect is to deal one blow to our hearts and minds. Be merciful towards others.

Now, the Savior's command is not one that we can obey in relational isolation. His words assume relationship with others. This is, as you know, part of the Sermon on the Mount.

Our Lord had just concluded His stunning words about how we are to love our enemies. He's defining now how we are to love in a community of believers. His words also make this assumption.

The presence of sin. These commands assume that relational conflict really is inevitable, even in the church. Now, Jesus' words aren't impersonal.

He's addressing His church. He's addressing those that He is soon going to save through the shedding of His blood. And He knows that there's going to be challenges ahead for this group of believers.

His death will transform them, but it's not going to eradicate sin and its influence from their hearts. Sin will indeed cause conflict. So in our text this morning, our Savior prepares us for relational conflict.

And He provides the appropriate response when relational conflict occurs. Now, my wife, Kristen, and I, we love our home church. We love Covenant Life Church.

Evidences of grace abound there, as they do here. But we have brought our sin to Covenant Life. Now, you've brought yours, too, to Grace Community, don't forget.

And though you're going to experience great grace in this church, you will at times experience relational conflict as well. And that's because of the continuing presence of indwelling sin in each of our hearts. And when you do, when you do experience relational conflict, what should you do? Judge not, our Savior says.

Judge not. I think this is likely the most often quoted and yet least understood phrase in all of Scripture. The average man off the street knows less and less these days about the Bible, and yet, when issues regarding morality or his spiritual beliefs or practice are questioned or they might be challenged, this assertion is confidently made and tightly held.

Judge not. The Bible says, judge not. You could rightly say, hey, Brian, the words are clear.

They're right here in the text. Judge not. The Savior says them.

They're right there. But is the Savior categorically forbidding all judging? Well, we know from the entirety of Scripture and even from the book of Luke that Jesus is not making a categorical statement that forbids all need for discernment. We are commanded to discern between truth and error, between right and wrong.

Judge not. It has its specific limitations, and we need to be aware of that even as we study this text, which commands us to judge not. How are we to watch out for a false prophet unless we deem one as such? How are we to identify good fruit and bad fruit in people's lives unless we discern it? How are we to deem a man's character fit for ministry unless we observe his life, evaluate it over time, and in the end, make a judgment? How are we to obey the command in the verse to forgive? In this very verse, it calls us to forgive.

How are we to obey that command unless we first deem something has been a sin? So there are humble, discerning conclusions that the Savior calls us to be making, and these can be called wise judgments. But in this passage this morning, the Savior addresses the critical, the arrogant, the premature, the merciless conclusions which can be known as sinful judgments. There's a world of difference between the two, and to the latter, Jesus says emphatically, judge not.

Normally, where there is relational conflict, we're gonna find the reality of sinful judgment. When I'm in a conflict, I know that I'm often inclined to assume the other person is wrong. The scenario that Bob shared about a few moments ago, hey, that sounds very similar to scenarios I've found myself in.

That's the effect of the fall. Our tendency is to ignore our own sin, to ignore our own failings, and judge others, typically, in the wrong way. I'm all too quick to sinfully judge.

I experience this tendency and temptation daily. I experience it in a variety of ways. Let me just give you one illustration from a few weekends ago.

A few Saturdays ago, I left my townhouse early. It was a Saturday morning, so I'm off to meet with the guys who are in our discipleship group that we call INVEST. Now, I'm excited to meet with these guys.

I have some last-minute preparation, so I wanna get there early. But Saturday morning always means for me trash day. And so I need to take out the trash before I find my way to my car.

So I exit out the basement door of our townhouse, and it's a particularly heavy trash day. We've got the big blue can that's practically overflowing with trash, and then we've got three bags sitting beside it. Now, I do not wanna make two trips because it's around the back of the townhouse, up a hill, and into the front yard.

So I have my backpack going with my computer in it, 17 books, and then a trash can that's overflowing, and then three bags. So I have the backpack. I grab the three bags with this hand.

I start yanking. The trash can is clear. I'm not gonna be able to pick it up with one hand, so I'm dragging this thing through my backyard, open the fence door, drag it around the outside of my house, and begin to ascend up the hill.

Now, this thing is about... And it is filled with dirty diapers. So as you can imagine, it's not the most pleasant experience. My arms are burning.

I'm just praying, Lord, get me to the top of the hill. So as I get up there, and then I walk the long walk to where the trash cans go, I set the bags down, put the trash can there, make sure the lid is somewhat on the top, and go about my day trusting all will be well. Well, when I came home that afternoon, I pull up, delighted to see the trash bags gone, but then as I look closely, I see the trash can is still full.

I'm thinking, what did I do wrong? So I walk over. I'm not the most insightful guy on these things, so I lift off the lid, make sure I close the bags appropriately, and put the lid back on. Okay, all looks normal.

And I look around. Everybody else's trash has been removed. What in the world? Don't they realize how heavy this thing is? Don't they realize what it took to get this here? Now, you need to understand, these trash men who come through my neighborhood are some of the kindest trash collectors, sanitation workers in the universe.

I mean, my son, Liam, who is my middle son, he's almost four. When he hears the beep, beep, beep, beep of the trash truck, you know, coming backwards up to our house, the kid jumps out of his seat. He said, trash man's here, trash man's here, runs to the window, looks out, sees if he can see it, opens the front door, and then my other two sons follow right alongside, and they all just kind of stand together, and as soon as they see the trash guys, they just start waving.

And these trash men, I mean, they are diligent. They are diligent. This guy hops off the back of the trash truck and then runs down the side while grabbing trash cans, running them up to where the trash truck stops.

Not only does he grab the trash cans and start running, he looks to our door and then waves at my sons. So these guys are not only diligent, they are kind. Well, one time of not taking my trash, and that's all it took for me to judge these guys as incompetent, not caring about me.

I mean, as far as I was concerned, they were off the Christmas list for December. They were gone, never to be put on there again. One mistake, and that's all it took for the kindest, most diligent sanitation workers to be judged by me.

Servant-hearted, no, these guys are slackers. Kind, no, these guys don't even care about how hard I worked to get this thing up to the top of my hill. Next time I hear the beep, beep, beep, my kids start to jump down, no, sons, upstairs.

See, incompetent trash men pulling up again to our front yard. Do not dare wave to these guys. I am all too quick to sinfully judge.

Well, when the next Saturday came, I happened to be home that morning, and I just wanted to see, hey, you know, do they not like my trash can, or, you know, was this just an honest mistake? Sure enough, to my shame, these guys get the trash can, dump it in the garbage truck, all is well. It's a normal Saturday, trash is gone. That's all it took for me to sinfully judge one small mistake.

We don't just judge with the garbage men that we don't personally know, do we? Sadly enough, we do it with those that we know well. We have a tendency to judge those we should most love, those who are nearest to us, those whom we worship with. Sadly, we do this with people we're supposed to love the most.

Ever judged your care group leader for maybe not leading a meeting the way you'd hoped? Or not noticing that you were struggling that evening at care group? Ever judge him for not returning an email as quickly as you would have hoped in light of the content? He doesn't care about me. Ever judge someone for their sarcasm, thinking, well, you know, boy, I think that's a sinful response maybe to the observation I gave them last week. Joe didn't show up for the outreach.

This guy's not outwardly focused. This guy doesn't have a commitment to serving. Ever judge your pastor for not implementing that idea you thought was a great one and would make a significant difference in the life of the church? At times, I've judged my two-year-old for not, as defying me, for not responding the third time I called, only to find out that he couldn't hear my voice over Dora's.

I've judged my wife for not doing some laundry that I felt like I needed, only to find out that she was using that time that day to train and discipline a disobedient child. Sometimes we sinfully judge, then we find out that our judgment was accurate and we call it discernment and we excuse our sin. Well, the Savior confronts our sinful tendency to judge, and He provides us with the appropriate response to such sinful judgments.

He provides us the appropriate response when we think we've been wronged, when we're sure that we've been wronged. He forbids us. This is the response.

He forbids us from all sinful judgment. He commands us instead to forgive. We need to remember this morning the difference that mercy makes, the difference that it's made in our lives.

Can you think of a time when you were on the receiving end of mercy? Have you ever been in a situation where you just messed up, like I did for the company I worked for? Maybe it wasn't that serious, but you messed up or you sinned, and you know that you deserve to be laid into. You anticipate another's anger. Have you ever found yourself in that situation only to be on the receiving end of somebody's mercy? See, it's easy for me to read this passage and to think, oh, mercy.

I love receiving mercy. I love getting mercy. It's so much harder for me, though, when I am tempted to think I've been wronged to extend that mercy.

So I need to meditate on the sweet experience it is to be the recipient of another's mercy. In particular, if there's anybody who should have laid into me, who should have come down on me in light of my wrongs, is it not the holy God who we were singing to this morning? How I have wronged Him. How I have sinfully judged God time after time after time of not being good to me, of not giving me the circumstances that I deserve, of not showing the kindness to me that I think if I were in His place, I would script for my life.

How merciful God has been to me. Instead of pouring out wrath on me in light of my sin against Him, He sent His Son, Jesus, to go to the cross to bear the wrath that I deserve, to pay the price for the sins that I committed. Is this not mercy? Is this not kindness undeserved? Mercy upon mercy from the living God.

To extend mercy to other people, it's to imitate God. And that's why Jesus starts this section by saying, be merciful as the Father has been merciful to you. When I'm sinfully judging others, when I fail to show them mercy or to forgive them, I am not imitating my merciful Father.

I'm contradicting what God has been like to me for situations and sins far more serious, far more grievous than what another has done to me. Jesus calls objects of great mercy to be living expressions of mercy to others. Judge not, condemn not, forgive.

Give. God wants to enlarge our capacity to both understand mercy and to extend it to others. And that's what this passage is designed to do.

So He calls us to meditate upon mercy and to measure it out freely. Look again with me at verse 38. Give, and it will be given to you.

Give. Give what? Give mercy. How inviting is this? Good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.

For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. The measurement coming back to us when we show others mercy, the measurement coming back is divine mercy. So we show others kindness.

God shows us divine kindness. We extend forgiveness. God extends divine, holy expressions of forgiveness.

Those who show mercy, if this is your tendency, if this is the way you receive this passage, if you begin to show mercy in increasing measure, you're going to find yourself like a kid in a candy store being given a bag saying, fill it up with divine goodies, so to say, and enjoy them thoroughly. Those divine goodies from God will be spilling over in your life. A Christian motive for mercy is both sobering and inviting.

It's inviting in that we can demonstrate the mercy of God and find ourselves again and again and again on the receiving end of God's mercy in this life and in the life to come. With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. We can also, though, have opportunities to extend mercy and withhold it, can't we? I've done it.

We will be accountable before God for the way we have handled the opportunities given to us to show mercy. How can we extend mercy at every opportunity? Let me give you maybe three categories to consider in order to cultivate this heart of mercy. First, can I encourage you to meditate regularly, regularly on the mercy of God.

We sang this morning about the greatness of His love. Well, as we were singing, at one point I turned to Psalm 103, just thinking, you know, this God of glory that we're singing about, we're singing about how great and how high He is. Well, Psalm 103 says in verse 11, For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. Earlier it says that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to what? To anger and abounding in steadfast love. God is great, and one of the ways He shows His greatness is in His forgiveness.

The greatness of His forgiveness towards sinners, the consistency of His mercy, the slowness of His anger. Hasn't God been patient with us? Are there people in your life that are somewhat difficult for you? Think about the mercy, the patience that God has shown to you. Meditate on the mercy of God.

Meditate on Psalm 103. Number two, can I encourage you to have a conviction about exercising charitable judgments? Charitable judgments, that's a phrase that was much more common in years past amongst the church. It's a phrase that we should be quite familiar with.

Charitable judgments, this simply means that we should believe the best about other people until we have facts, nothing secondhand that would lead us to believe otherwise. Believe the best about other people. Believe the best about their responses until we have facts, nothing secondhand that would lead us to believe otherwise.

Third thing that we can do even as we sit here this morning, we can ask the Spirit of God to reveal to us anyone from whom we have withheld forgiveness. Is it a parent? Is it a child? Is it a friend, a coworker, somebody in your care group, somebody in this church with whom you, as you think about it honestly before the Lord right now, you know you have withheld mercy at opportunities given to you by God. Secondly, we address sin, but we start within.

So we extend mercy at every opportunity and now as the passage tells us, we address sin, but we start within. Notice that the passage doesn't conclude with the inspiring promise of verse 38. It goes on to tell us in verse 39 that Jesus also told them a parable.

Here are his words. Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? Here's a rude reminder of the enemy within. Who is this blind man? Well, Jesus hasn't switched his audience and started talking all of a sudden to the Pharisees who were there that morning.

No, he's talking to the disciples and on any given day, I can find that the Savior is also addressing me. Because of my sin, all too often, I am the blind man described in this parable. I'm a walking blind man.

Early in my marriage, I became much more aware of the blinding effect of sin in my life. I received some very helpful words from my wife, Kristen. Words which, as I look back now, I realize I didn't fully comprehend the severity of what she was sharing with me, but they're words that have lingered with me and helped me even as I prepared this message.

She was expressing her desire to care for me, to pray for me at this season of our marriage, but she said that while she was very aware of my concerns regarding sin in her life and areas in which I was trying to help her, she was entirely unaware of any area of sin in my soul. She was unaware of any issues I was struggling with. In other words, here's the problem.

She knew my concerns for her, but she had no idea of how sin was functioning in my life. Sadly, I'm sure that in my attempts to care for her, that too often, she was on the receiving end of my sinful judgments. She was receiving care from a blind man.

I didn't perceive my blindness. I didn't see the log in my own eye. I had not started within.

So we need to address sin in our marriages. We need to help our spouses, but we need to start first within. So which is your spouse more aware of this morning? Your concerns, your corrections, your criticisms, or specific confessions about sin in your own life? When starting with your own heart, it's going to change entirely the way you seek to care for others and the effectiveness with which you do it.

You're not going to be bringing your self-righteousness to bear on your attempts to care or to correct. Starting with your own heart, you're going to come with humility. Your spouse will experience mercy and observe someone who first goes after their own heart.

Before we can effectively help anyone with the speck in their eye, we must first take out the log that is in our own eye. Jesus said it clearly, simply in verse 41. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite.

Are you aware, are you more aware this morning of anyone else's sin than you are your own? This is a tendency familiar to us as sinners. And it's self-righteousness, plain and simple. And if so, you've been blinded by sin.

And someone who is spiritually blind to their own sinful condition cannot effectively help another, can they? Carefully consider the following insightful, humbling words from William Law. William Law writes, we may justly condemn ourselves as the greatest sinners we know, because we know more of the folly of our own heart than we do of other people's. We may justly condemn ourselves as the greatest sinners we know, because, why? Because we know more of the folly, more of the sin that dwells within, more of the nuances of how we think and feel and how sin works and functions in our own lives.

If we're appropriately aware of how sin works in our lives, we should be regularly condemning ourselves as the greatest sinners we know. Now, when we're convinced of this, then we are able to effectively go and serve others. We're qualified at that point to bring correction.

Now, this passage can be a culture-shaping passage for Grace Community Church. Bob said it well, this can affect how we view all of our relationships. If we take this one passage, meditate on it, and apply it to our lives, it can shape the way that we view every relationship God has given us.

Every challenging conversation, every difficult circumstance with another individual can be shaped and changed and be described as one where mercy existed and was shown, because we're aware of sin, but we start by addressing it within, so that when we try to help a friend, we're seeing things accurately, we're coming humbly, we're qualified to care and to correct. Now, correcting one another has been a means of grace at Covenant Life Church. I'm sure it's a means of grace here, and we don't want that to change.

We need other people helping us. I'm so grateful for the many, many, many specks that have been removed from my eye through the faithful, careful help of those around me. But let our correction be done in love.

Let our correction be done humbly, not self-righteously. Jesus came and He breathed mercy into the air. This was a pharisaical environment.

It was a pharisaical atmosphere. And what did Jesus do? He came and He breathed into it mercy. How inviting these words must have been to the disciples.

How different and distinct these words must have been. Love our enemies, show mercy to those around us, forgive, judge not. Boy, this is a different message.

This is a different kind of God. Oh, that every home represented in this church, every dorm room represented in this church, oh, that it would be shaped by, characterized by, an atmosphere of mercy, where the mercy of God is the subject of meditation between parents and children, between spouses, between friends, where forgiveness flows readily from one another when we have sinned, which we will, where judging is restrained by mercy, where people share their concerns, but they share them humbly, most aware of their own sin. Where friends enter our homes and encounter that sweet atmosphere, that aroma of mercy.

Do you see what appears to be a speck in someone else's eye? After searching your own heart, dealing with your own sin before God, go point it out to your brother. Jesus doesn't say that there's not going to be specks in people's eyes. Actually, Jesus assumes that there's specks in all of our eyes.

We all have sin. We all need help from one another. But what does Jesus say? He tells us, He tells us first, take the log out of your own eye.

Then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. Is there a speck? Yeah, likely there is, but it's just a speck. It doesn't compare to the log that the Lord just showed you that exists in your own eye.

Deal with self-righteousness. Deal with sin that's been minimized in your life. And then go and care.

Don't go to be right. Don't go with your judgment. Go to care.

Go to come alongside that brother or sister, that child who inevitably needs your correction. Go in love. Go with mercy.

You know what we want to be? We want to be a log-excavating bunch of Christians. We want to be a log-excavating local church. That's what we want to be here.

We want to just be walking around mindful, hey, I got a whole lot of logs and I'm busy. I'm busy enough here taking care of these logs so that when we go to one another, we go with a distinct humility. We go

with kindness in our hearts.

We need to fight aggressively against the sin that wages within our own hearts. We need to address sin in this community, in this wonderful community that God has placed you in. You do need to address sin, but you start within.

Let's charitably point out the specks that we observe. Let's do so kindly, gently. We're objects of great mercy, aren't we? Hasn't God been kind to us? Hasn't God been patient with us? Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Be merciful, even as your Father has been merciful to you. Let's pray. Oh, how great is your love towards us, God, that you have shown us, demonstrated to us most clearly through your son, Jesus Christ.

Thank you for sending him into this world. Thank you for sending him to speak these messages of mercy to us and then to go and display mercy in its clearest, most powerful form. Thank you, Father, for not laying into us in light of the sin we've committed against you, but instead laying into your son, pouring upon him the wrath that we justly deserved.

Thank you, pouring out punishment on him, crucifying your beloved son, that we might not be the objects of your judgment, your just judgment, but that we might be the objects of mercy, amazing mercy. God, may we leave here amazed in a fresh way by the cross and committed to meditating on mercy and showing mercy to others. We pray.

Amen. Stand with us. ■ Thy mercy, my God, is the theme of my song, the joy of my heart and the boast in my tongue.

Thy free grace alone from the first to the last hath won my affection and bound my soul fast. ■ Sing that again. Thy mercy, my God, is the theme of my song, the joy of my heart and the boast in my tongue.

Thy free grace alone from the first to the last hath won my affection and bound my soul fast. ■ Without Thy sweet, without Thy sweet mercy I could not live here since it would reduce me to utter despair. But through Thy free goodness my spirit's revived and He that first made me still keeps me alive.

■ Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart, which wonders to feel its own hardness depart. Dissolved by Thy goodness I fall to the ground and weep for the praise of the mercy I've found. ■ Sing that again.

Verse three. Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart, which wonders to feel its own hardness depart. Dissolved by Thy goodness I fall to the ground and weep for the praise of the mercy I've found.

■ Great Father of mercies, Thy goodness I own and the covenant love of Thy crucified Son. All praise to the Spirit whose whisper divine seals mercy in part and righteousness in mind. All praise to the Spirit whose whisper divine seals mercy in part and righteousness in mind.

■ Hallelujah. Verse two of that psalm says, Without Thy sweet mercy I could not stand here. Sin soon would reduce me to utter despair.

And I just couldn't help as I sang that of thinking how my criticism and sinful judgments have reduced my wife at times to such despair. I want you to know I don't think those thoughts go with despair because I am far more aware of the mercy extended to me for my mercilessness to her and others. I also am grateful that this message of hope that Brian brings by his power has been resting my heart.

And I can say that this wasn't true at the beginning of the marriage. Currently in my marriage I view myself as a bigger sinner than Laurie. And what a difference it is making in the way I relate to her.

What joy it is to extend mercy that has so freely been given to me to this woman that I love. So listen, I don't want you to miss this unique opportunity where you have been convicted. It's not hard to discern that.

You're simply more aware as Brian said of the sins of others than you are of yourself. That's a gospel failure. So it makes the solution abundantly easy.

You just simply need to draw near to the cross and to believe what it says about you and your sin and the amazing love and compassion and justifying grace that has come through it to you. When you believe that no one can offend you. No one can sin against you in a way that will remove that heart of gratitude and a joy and a love to extend that where you've been wronged.

So listen, I'm going to ask all our care group leaders their wives and assistants to make their way forward where bitterness, where judgment, where criticalness, where you've lost respect for your roommate, for your spouse. Perhaps where there's this kind of tension between you and your children. God wants to restore that and the power of His mercy is here to do just that.

So as our leaders position themselves, will you please not hesitate. Please make your way forward and humble yourself. Acknowledge where there hasn't been mercy.

Acknowledge where criticism rules your heart. Acknowledge where this person annoys and I don't like being around them and everything they say, I take it the wrong way. They're like sand in my mouth.

Please come forward and ask God to show you His mercy towards you, which He delights to do and it will set you free in your attitudes towards others. These folks will be up here as long as necessary to care for you. So please make your way forward at this time.

We will be officially dismissed at this moment. For those of us who have children in children's ministry, please thank them for serving so heroically. Ask them if they have any observations of your children.

For our guests, thank you again for coming. We hope you'll stick around. We hope to get to know you better.

And again, anyone who would desire ministry in this area, please make your way forward as God wants to meet you. Thanks so much. ...Music playing...

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