

# (1 Samuel) Measure for Measure

by David Guzik

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*David shows mercy and forgiveness towards Saul, even when Saul has broken his promises and tried to kill him, demonstrating God's sovereignty and David's trust in Him.*

**Duration:** 32:43

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 26:17-26, Matthew 7:1

**Topics:** "Mercy And Forgiveness", "Godly Leadership"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of David and Saul from the Bible. He focuses on the scene where David spares Saul's life in the wilderness. The preacher emphasizes David's mercy and forgiveness towards Saul, despite Saul's repeated attempts to kill him. David pleads with Saul to change his heart and stop pursuing him. Saul eventually admits his wrongdoing and promises not to harm David anymore. The preacher highlights the pain and frustration David feels as he constantly evades Saul's pursuit, comparing it to hunting a partridge in the mountains.

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## Transcript

Let's pick it up here, 1 Samuel, chapter 26, verse 1. Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is David not hiding in the hill of Haculah, which is opposite Jeshimon? Then Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped in the hill of Haculah, which is opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness.

David therefore sent out spies and understood that Saul had indeed come. We've been here before, haven't we? As we made our way through the book of 1 Samuel, it seems like we've been in chapter after chapter of occurrences where Saul is out after David. You see, years before this, at this time, maybe as many as ten years before this time, David was anointed to be the next king of Israel.

He knew that he wasn't to take the throne right away. The throne wasn't vacant. And God was only going to move David into a throne that was vacant.

But he knew that he was destined to be the king of Israel one day. Well, if there's anybody in a kingdom who doesn't like the idea of someone else being destined to be the next king, it's the present king. And the present king, a man named Saul, who was the first king over Israel, had a murderous jealousy and rage against David.

And he wanted to do everything he could to eliminate David. And so we find in chapter after chapter, Saul, determined with all of his heart to kill David. And David has his life spared by the miraculous hand of God again and again.

But now we find another situation. The situation where David is hiding out in the hill of Haculah. And then these people known as the Ziphites.

These are people from the city of Ziph. They betray David to King Saul. And so Saul sends out 3,000 chosen men.

And Saul, at the front of this army of men, they have one purpose. Not to defend the people of Israel, not to fight the enemies of God. They have one purpose, and that's to kill this man David.

And as David and his men were sitting there in reconnaissance positions up in the hills of this wilderness, as they saw the great cloud of dust from 3,000 men coming at them, you know, David's heart sank again. Here they come again. And something else must have crossed the heart and the mind of David.

He remembered his last encounter with King Saul. David's last encounter with King Saul was a time when David had it within his power to kill Saul, but he didn't. David and his men were hiding out in a cave in the hills near En Gedi.

And as they were hiding out in that cave, Saul came into that cave all by himself to go to the bathroom. And as Saul came into that cave to attend to his needs, David had the opportunity as he crept towards him with his sword drawn to plunge that sword into Saul's neck and kill him. But David didn't do it because David knew that it was not by his hand that Saul was to die.

Saul was put on the throne by God. And if anybody was going to take him off of that throne, it would be God. It would not be the hand of David.

And so David didn't kill Saul. He just cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And so when Saul came out of the cave, David came out after him and he showed him the corner of the robe and he said, I have the chance to kill you, but I didn't.

And when he did that, Saul's heart broke. Saul wept. He was greatly grieved.

He was disturbed. He said, David, you've been better to me than I've ever been to you. I've been so wrong.

David, forgive me. Let's set it right. You can come home.

Saul repented and said he was going to stop doing what he was doing. And that was going out and trying to kill David. Well, as David looked down from the hills of Hekulah and saw a great cloud of dust from 3000 men coming out to kill him, you know, he had to say in his heart, Yeah, Saul, you were really sincere about that promise you made before, weren't you? That lasted a long time, didn't it? Here you are again, going back on your word.

It's like somebody who can't resist chocolate. You swear it off for a day, a few days, maybe a week. You know, it's just a matter of time until you write back at it again.

And there's Saul. He can't get away from David. He's going out after him.

He's going to kill David. And David's thinking, Saul, you liar. You promised.

You said you were different. I saw the tears roll down your face. I heard the quiver in your voice as you said how wrong you had been.

Here you are again. As much as that, David knew that he had to preserve his own life. So Saul's troops came out and as they encamped, take a look here.

Verse five. So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay and Abner, the son of Ner, the commander of his army.

Now Saul lay within the camp and with all the people encamped around him. You get the picture, don't you? David again, looking down from another reconnaissance position. And as he and a few trusted men are around him, they look down and they see the entire camp of Israel spread before them.

There's three thousand men with all their equipment, all their horses, all their stuff. And they're sort of arranged in a circle. And there at the center of the circle is Saul.

Beside Saul is this trusted bodyguard and advisor. There he is, Abner, right next to Saul. Everything looks so safe.

Saul's right there. Who can get to him? Who can get to Saul from that kind of position? You've got to walk through, oh, a thousand troops before you get to the middle of the circle and get to Saul. And there's Saul right there with his commander of his army sleeping next to him.

He's invulnerable. Nobody can get to him. But God can get to him, can't he? Nobody's safe from God.

God can get to anybody at any time, at any place. And David had a sense of this. And as he looked out upon the scene, look what he says in verse six.

And David answered and said to Ahimelech, the Hittite, and to Abishai, the son of Zariah, the brother of Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul and the camp? And Abishai said, I'll go down with you. So David and Abishai came to the people by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the camp with his spear stuck in the ground by his head.

And Abner and all the people lay around him. What, David, are you nuts? There's three thousand men out there. And those three thousand men have one purpose, and that's to kill you.

They want to get the job over and go home. And you're going to walk right in the midst of that camp? Yes, David says. It's not foolishness, my friends.

It was a holy courage, a holy boldness. By the way, might I add that David could have sent another man on this errand. There's 600 men with David.

He could have sent any one of those 600 in his place. But no, David himself went. By military strategy, that's nuts.

You don't send the commander of your army on such a suicidal mission. But David did it. And there he is, him and Abishai.

And they go down and they're surprised to find that nobody's waking up. The guards are asleep. The sentries are asleep.

They're walking into the middle later on in the chapter. We're going to find out that God put a supernatural sleep over all of those people. And there they are.

They're just asleep. And David walks in the midst and he finally gets to the middle. And he's in the midst of three thousand troops of Israel.

And who's there right in the middle? Saul and Abner. And they're all asleep. Again, this was a deep sleep, a supernatural sleep.

You could probably hear them snoring. Probably Saul was asleep with his mouth open the way people sleep when they're really tired. Maybe a little bit of drool coming out of his mouth.

He's just out. How vulnerable. You can't protect yourself when you're like that, can you? Somebody come and hit you upside the head.

And what can you do? There's nothing you can do about it. There's Saul completely vulnerable before David, completely at his mercy. Everybody else is asleep.

David sees the situation. There he is. There's Saul asleep.

Everybody else is asleep. I could just go. I could I could kick him.

I could poke him. I could cut him. I could do anything.

But then he sees one other thing. What's at the top of it by Saul's head? A spear stuck in the ground. Last time David got a good look at that spear was when it was going by his head because Saul had thrown it at him.

You see, on several occasions before this, Saul had tried to kill David with that very spear. So David sees a spear. He fears Saul.

He thinks of how Saul had gone back on his word. He thinks about all these things. Before David can think more, look what Abishai says to him in verse 8. Then Abishai said to David, God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day.

Now, therefore, please let me strike him at once with the spear right to the earth, and I will not have to strike him a second time. You know what Abishai says to David? David, praise the Lord. This is it.

God is so good. We've been waiting and praying for the opportunity to get out of this cycle of running from Saul for so long. This is it, David.

Isn't God good? Now, all we have to do is, David, you don't have to do a thing. Just let me do it. Now, I'll go over, and I'll take that spear, and I'll pull it up out of the ground, and it won't take me two.

I'll just use one thrust of that spear, and he's dead. All our problems are over. Praise the Lord, David.

This is from the hand of God. This was a great temptation for David, wasn't it? David had had opportunity to strike out against Saul before, and he didn't take it. But I think that if it's possible, this instance was even

more of a temptation, even more of a trial, because in this situation, David could look back on Saul's broken promises, and it would have made him feel all the more justified in killing him.

After all, you can imagine what's running through David's head. Saul, you lied to me. I let you off the hook before.

I showed you mercy before, and now you're just throwing it back in my face. I gave you your chance. Now, it's time for justice.

You abused my mercy, now you're going to get my justice, and here it is. You can imagine David thinking, you know, Saul, if you fool me once, shame on you. If you fool me twice, shame on me.

I may be full of love. I may be full of mercy, but I'm not stupid. I'm not going to let this go again.

David wouldn't do that. I think it was also a great temptation, not because just of David remembering what Saul had promised and broken in the past. It was also a great temptation because Abishai was offering to do the dirty work, right? Abishai was saying, let me do it.

David, you don't have to do a thing. You don't have to say it. David, don't say anything.

I'll just do it. David could have just kept his expression stone cold blank, not said anything one way or the other, or maybe just a tiny nod of his head, and Abishai would have done it. And then David could have gone around saying, hey, I didn't kill Saul.

Abishai did it. Whoops. I was just standing there and whoa, all of a sudden he was dead.

I just couldn't stop him. David knew that would be just a word game, a mind game. Then on the other hand, I think there's a third thing that made this temptation severe.

And that was the spear stuck in the ground. Did you see what Abishai said in verse eight? He said, now, therefore, please let me strike him at once with the spear. Wouldn't that be it? Abishai standing above Saul, David standing on the other side, Abishai lifts up that spear and he thrusts it down into Saul's chest.

And Saul opens up his eyes in shock and pain and horror. In the last few beats of his heart before his life is extinguished, he looks up and he sees David and he sees Abishai and he sees his own spear, the spear that he had used to attack David before. The same spear is in his chest.

And you think, oh, man, that's sweet, isn't it? That's poetic justice. Yeah, yeah. Take that, Saul.

That'll teach you to throw around your spear. How about that, mister? You know, David must have thought about that and it must have hit his heart. And it was all a great temptation.

David withstood the temptation to take vengeance. Look at what he says in verse nine. David said to Abishai, do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? David said, furthermore, as the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him or his day shall come to die or he shall go out to battle and perish.

The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. David has the same godly attitude that he had before. I'm not going to stretch out my hands against God's anointed.

God puts Saul on that throne. It's going to have to be God that takes him off. I'm not going to do it.

I'm not going to have a king's blood on my hands. No, God, you are more than capable of taking Saul out. I don't need to do it.

Did you see what David said there in verse eight or verse ten? Excuse me. He says, as the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him or his day shall come to die or he'll go out to battle and perish. David says, I can think of any number of ways that God can take Saul's life from him.

The Lord could just strike him down. David knew that every beat that Saul's heart beat, it did at the pleasure of God. Every breath that Saul drew within his lungs.

It was because God allowed it. God could have cut it off just like that. David knew that somebody else could have killed Saul.

God could have sent an assassin or made the battle turn the wrong way so that Saul's life is over. And, friends, do you understand? It was not hard for God to kill Saul if God wanted him dead. It's not like God is pacing the halls of heaven saying, I really wish I could figure out a way to kill Saul.

I wish David would help me out. No, David understood that God was more than able to do it. That he should have nothing to do with this vengeance of the Lord.

That he should let the Lord do it through whichever means he chose. You notice also here that David has the heart that says this. This time, as he had said it so many times before.

You know, it's one thing to meet the challenge of a temptation once or twice, but to meet that challenge again and again and again and again. It gets wearying, doesn't it? It can wear you out. But David's doing it.

David's resisting the temptation again. Now, notice how it continues here in verse 11. David says in the middle of the verse, but please take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head and let us go.

So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head and they got away. No man saw it or knew it or awoke, for they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them. God was blessing all this.

God had a plan for this. God had a plan for that spear and that jug of water by their hand. And so David runs away to a safe place.

They escape. You can imagine how his heart's beating as he escaped the whole company of Israel there, the army and camp there. And he makes his way perhaps down a little valley and up a hill and from a place of safe shelter.

Look at what he does in verse 13. Then David went over to the other side, stood on top of a hill, a far off, a great distance being between them. And David called out to the people and to Abner, the son of Ner saying, do you not answer Abner? Then Abner answered and said, who are you calling out to the king? You get the picture, don't you? David standing up on top of the hill starts calling out Abner.

Hey, Abner, wake up. They've all been under this deep sleep from the Lord. And finally they begin to wake up.

And Abner wipes the sleep from his eyes. And he's still kind of fuzzy in his head. Who's calling out to me? Who's doing this? And he calls out and he turns and he looks and he sees David.

You see, who are you? What are you doing calling out? And then all of a sudden, verse 17, then David said to Abner, are you not a man? Wow, that's kind of a tough way to begin to this man who is the general of all of Saul's armies. Are you not a man? And who's like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your Lord, the king? Well, one of the people came in to destroy your Lord, the king. The thing that you have done is not good.

As the Lord lives, you are worthy to die because you have not guarded your master, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jug of water that was by his head. So Abner, he's, you know, who are you calling out, giving me these insults? You have no right to talk to me that way.

Doubting my manhood, saying I'm doing a poor job. And of course, the other soldiers are awake now and they're listening to all this. And Abner's like, shut up.

Shut up. Don't you know, don't say that. I don't want everybody else to hear this.

I don't want the king to hear it. And then David holds up the spear and the jug of water. And Abner looks and he looks by Saul, no spear, no jug of water.

And he knows this man had the capability to kill Saul and that's forgiveness, isn't it? That's the mercy of God shown from David to Saul. It's a strange phenomenon in our culture today where in some ways we are too forgiving and in other ways we're not forgiving enough. I think in some ways we're too forgiving as a culture.

Let me tell you how I think this happens. You know, you see somebody and some great tragedy that happens, say the whole tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, where these terrible young men went and they murdered so many people. And then you'll have people putting up signs or placards or this or that.

We forgive you to the people. Now, I think that's a pretty cheap forgiveness, don't you think? I'm always ready to forgive somebody for what they did to you. I'm always ready to forgive somebody if they killed somebody else or somebody else from somebody else's family.

That's a cheap forgiveness, isn't it? I am probably too quick to go out and to do that. It gives those people who have done those terrible things a sense of refuge, a sense of comfort. So in that sense, in our society, we're probably too quick to forgive.

But where forgiveness really comes down to, we're often far too slow to forgive. And that's where you really have done something against me. Where it's you and me.

Then all of a sudden, I have a hard time forgiving. Oh, it's really easy for me to forgive in the abstract, for me to forgive in the third person, for me to forgive somebody in the distance. But how about the person right in front of me who has hurt me? The person right in front of me who's wronged me.

That's where forgiveness has to be given. That's where love needs to be shown. And friends, this is where it mattered in David's life.

David had the opportunity to kill Saul and he didn't do it because his heart was filled with mercy. His heart was filled with forgiveness. Why? We're going to see why as we get down to the end of the chapter.

But friends, we just have to stand back and say, this is a man of God who can show this kind of mercy. So now everybody's waking up. Verse 17.

Then Saul knew David's voice and said, is that your voice? My son, David. And David said, it's my voice. My Lord, O King.

And he said, why does my Lord thus pursue a servant? For what have I done or what evil is in my hand? Now, therefore, please let my Lord, the king, hear the words of his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let him accept and offer it. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, go serve other gods.

And therefore, do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains. Friends, when we understand what David is saying here in these verses, his cry out to King Saul is filled with a lot of pain and emotional turmoil. You sense it when he says in verse 20.

Now, therefore, do not let my blood fall to the earth. Saul, please don't kill me. I'm getting tired of this, Saul.

Now, in the midst of this pain, in the midst of this turmoil going on in David, I think that we have to say that he shows an amazing amount of love and compassion towards Saul. Do you see how humble he was before Saul? He doesn't call out, hey, mister. No, it's my Lord.

He refers to himself as Saul's servant. He says, you're my king. He shows a lot of submission and humility to Saul when he speaks to him.

He doesn't say, well, listen, I'm so right and you're so wrong. So that gives me the right to consider myself superior to you. No submission, humility.

That's what David shows before Saul. But I want you to notice something else in these words. David is revealing something in his heart that I think is very precious.

It's very, very revealing. He says towards the end of verse 19, for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, go serve other gods. David's saying, Saul, I'm feeling the pressure to leave the inheritance of the Lord.

That's the land of Israel. I'm feeling the pressure to leave the land of Israel and to go live among people who worship other gods. Saul, I want to live a normal life.

I want to worship God with the fellowship of his people. I want to go in and out among God's people again. I want to enjoy normal life again.

And you're pushing me out to the extremities. You're pushing me out to the place where I'm going to turn my back on the land of Israel altogether and go live among the ungodly. David's tired of this.

Now, you need to know this for when we get into chapter 27 next week, because you're going to see how David dealt with this temptation to just chuck it all and leave Israel and go live among the ungodly. But if you want to see the pain in David's heart, look at what he says at the end of verse 20. It says, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains.

You know, so much of the Bible, as we read it and as we go through it, you read it and say, yeah, as one hunts a partridge in the mountains, right? I mean, what, like with a shotgun and a bird dog? I mean, what does that mean? Well, if you know how they would hunt a partridge in the mountains, it makes a lot of sense and it really makes the picture very vivid. You see, partridges are not flying animals, really. They can fly, but they don't fly around and soar.

They fly only to escape a predator. And so they fly in short bursts of flight. They'll take off very quickly in a burst of flight, escape the predator and then land again.

Now, if you want to hunt a partridge, it's really not that tough. You go up to it and it'll see you, it'll notice you and it'll fly away from you real quickly, but it won't fly very far. So what you do is you just keep chasing it.

And since partridges aren't made for flight, they get tired pretty quick. So after four or five of these short burst takeoffs and landings, after you keep chasing it, the partridge is so exhausted that you can just take out a stick and pop it on the head and it's yours. They've been saying to Saul, that's how I feel.

You keep coming out after me and I keep flying away and I'm flying away and flying away. And Saul, I can't take much more of this. I'm the partridge that's about to be exhausted and disaster is going to befall me.

Saul, please take this as evidence that I'm not out to get you. Look at the spear. Look at the jug of water.

Please change your heart towards me. Look at what Saul says in verse 21. Then Saul said, I have sinned.

Return my son, David, for I will harm you no more because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed, I have played the fool and erred exceedingly. And let me ask you a question this morning.

Anything wrong with what Saul said there? Not at all. Man, that's great. That's beautiful.

Do you believe it? No. No, we don't, do we? It's like we say, we've seen this from Saul before. He knows the right words to say, but his heart isn't really behind them.

Now, that's a difficult thing, isn't it? Where people are just saying the right words, but their heart isn't really behind it. Matter of fact, the last time David had spared Saul's life, Saul was crying when he said these words. At least there was an emotional stirring there.

This time there's no tears. He just says it almost seems cold and mechanical. Matter of fact, how's David supposed to deal with this? How do you deal with it when somebody hurts you and they say, well, I'm sorry, please forgive me.

But you don't think they're really sincere. No, Jesus dealt with that. He said that if a person sins against you seven times in a day and each time comes back and says, I'm sorry, Jesus said that you should forgive them.

You and I, after five or six times, we begin to think, I don't think they really mean it. I'm going to hold this one against him. He said, no, you keep forgiving them.

You see, we can't judge their heart, really, can we? We can try, we can do the best we can, so we do the best we can. What do you do if you're the one who, when you look in your heart, you see, you know what?

Your heart isn't really there. You're just saying the words.

What do you do? I think more than anything, you pray and ask God to make your heart match your words. I mean, it's fine to say the right words. You just need the right heart behind them, too.

So you call out to God and say, make my heart like this. But David had the sense. David knew that Saul's heart wasn't really changed in this.

David knew that because Saul's eyes were so dry because he had been down this road before that these were just words. And so verse 22, David answered and said, here is the king's fear. Let one of the young men come over and get it.

May the Lord repay every man for his righteousness and faithfulness for the Lord valued, excuse me, for the Lord delivered you into my hand today. But I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the Lord and let him deliver me out of all tribulation.

Then Saul said to David, may you be blessed, my son, David. You shall both do great things and also still prevail. So David went on his way and Saul returned to his place.

That's the last time they ever saw each other. Last meeting between David and Saul. You see how the rest of it shakes out in the book of first Samuel.

And we'll get there as we make our way through it here on Sunday mornings. But I'm very struck at the reason David gives why he spared Saul's life. He spared Saul's life because he wanted God to treat him that way.

Did you notice it? I'll read it again to you in verse 24. And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the Lord and let him deliver me out of all tribulation. Saul, I want the Lord to be as merciful and as kind to me as I'm being to you right now.

If I want God's blessing when I'm the king, I'm going to bless the person who's the king right now. And we'll see what the Lord does. Did you know that David's heart was the same heart that Jesus expressed in one of his most wonderful teachings? And that's in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in one of the sections, Judge not, lest you be judged. Now, isn't that kind of the national memory verse of the United States of America? People who don't know a line of scripture know that. They know it frontwards and backwards.

Judge not, lest you be judged. And the way people take to mean that is that, you know, don't ever criticize me for what I do or for what I think. Judge not, lest you be judged.

But Jesus didn't mean it that way. Jesus rebuked people. Jesus criticized people.

Could you imagine one of the scribes or the Pharisees after Jesus is just laid into them for their sin and hypocrisy? One of the scribes and Pharisees folding their arms and answering back to Jesus. Now, Jesus, judge not, lest you be judged. It's ridiculous.

By the same token, Jesus meant something there, didn't he? And what he meant is continued on in the next few verses. Jesus said, for the same measure that you measure to others, God will measure to you.

You know, David knew that principle.

David said, Saul, I want God to be merciful to me. So I'm going to be merciful to you. And God uses the same measuring stick, if you will.

Right now, how are you measuring mercy out to other people? How are you measuring compassion and love and forgiveness? With a teaspoon? Is that how you want God to measure to you? No, you say, I want God to give it to me by the dump truck load. That's how I want it. Well, you know what? Get out the dump truck and you're dealing with other people.

Mercy and love and compassion and forgiveness. You want it from the Lord in a big way, then you give it to other people in a big way. And later on, we look at the life of David and we scratch our heads and we say, Lord, you weren't really being fair with David.

I mean, we see later on, look at what David did. He committed sexual immorality. He murdered a man.

He covered it up. He did all these things and God just seemed to forgive him. God, what are you doing? I think God at that time looked back and he said, you know what? I remember how merciful and compassionate David was to Saul.

That's the kind of measure of mercy and compassion I'm going to give to him. So how much mercy? How much compassion? How much forgiveness do you want from the Lord? All of us want the extra big measure, don't we? Well, then may the Lord God equip us to give other people the extra big measure. And he'll do that.

That's what he wants to do. He did it in the life of David. This was almost a supernatural trial that David was going through.

But God gave him the ability to show that kind of love and forgiveness to Saul. And the same God that worked in the life of David works in your life. So may God help us to go through the cupboard of our heart this morning and take a look at the measuring cups that we're using.

Throw out all those small measures and just use the big ones in giving mercy and grace and compassion. Because you'll get more of it from the Lord as you give more of it to others.

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