

## For Mercies Sake

One of life's noblest aspirations is to be like God. We can be like God in holiness, detesting the sin that took His Son to the cross. *"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy"* (I Peter 1:16). We can be like God in honoring the Bible, *"...for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name"* (Psalm 138:2).

Have you considered being like God in the matter of mercy? Jesus commanded us: *"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful"* (Luke 6:36). Our word mercy comes to us from a Latin root: *merces*: to reward with pity. A definition of mercy means a refraining from harming or punishing offenders, enemies, persons in one's power, etc.; kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion.

In the Scriptures, we see four discoveries of biblical mercy:

(1) God is merciful.

*"For the LORD thy God is a merciful God; he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them"* (Deuteronomy 4:31).

*"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"* (Psalm 103:8).

(2) God is willing to give mercy, to those willing to receive it.

*"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"* (Hebrews 8:12).

(3) God loves to extend mercy to His people.

*"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy"* (Micah 7:18).

(3) God gives mercy to those who give mercy.

*"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matthew 5:7).

He has been hailed as "The Greatest Coach of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." In high school he was selected twice as an All-State high school player and member of the Indiana state champion Martinsville basketball team. While attending Purdue University (graduating 19<sup>th</sup> his class), he starred as a three-time All-American at Purdue University and captain of the 1932 national championship team. Under his coaching, UCLA teams soared to heights that may never be reached again and set records that may stand forever: 110 national championships in twelve years (seven of them occurring in a row); an 88-game winning streak; 38 consecutive wins in NCAA March Madness tournaments; 4 perfect seasons. Overall, a lifetime winning percentage of more than .800 with only one losing season - his very first year.

I am speaking of the incomparable and inimitable John Wooden. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House. *Sports Illustrated's* Rick Reilly is blunt: "There has never been a finer coach in American sports than John Wooden. Nor finer man."

In a recent book entitled *My Personal Best, Life Lessons from an All-American Journey*, John Wooden tells of the impact of people like his father, teachers and coaches who changed his life. In a couple of rare incidents he tells of mistakes which he regretted as well as from which he learned. I believe often in our lives we can learn as much from a person's failures as you can from their successes. When someone of the caliber of John Wooden says he made a big mistake, I intensify my reading and listen in. As a young high school coach, John Wooden had some good rules. One of his players broke

one of his absolute rules. In Wooden's own words he relates the incident: "Any player who broke it [the rule] was automatically cut off from our team with no second chance, no excuses – 'Clean out your locker and don't come back.' One of our best players, I won't mention his name, broke the rule. This young man was on his way to an athletic scholarship and a good college education when I caught him smoking. In my mind, a rule was a rule - I dismissed him without remorse or a second thought. The effect on the youngster was traumatic, and it soon became apparent. He dropped out of South Bend Central without graduating, and never got the college education and a chance for a better future he deserved. Instead, I found out later, his life became a series of low-paying jobs when it could have been so much more. A reprimand or a suspension would have accomplished what I wanted, but in those days I lacked the maturity and experience – wisdom to do that."

Coach Wooden then reminisced of a time when one of his high school coaches caught him having an altercation with a fellow team mate and when the coach demanded that Johnny apologize, he (feeling misunderstood) tore his uniform off his body in protest and stormed off the gym floor. The coach addressed it, but had mercy on him and kept him on the team. Wooden would have easily gone another direction rather than basketball had the coach unmercifully dumped him as a player. Looking back at his failure to reclaim his fallen player, Wooden said that he made "no attempt to understand the bigger picture."

This is what showing mercy does, it sees the bigger picture. Yes, there is the possibility that we may show mercy and get burned. Usually, there is a pattern that those who refuse to do right follow. And after a while, you may not have any other choice, but to take action, even serious action against an offense. When you look into the Bible you see where, if someone is in the wrong, we are commanded to restore such an one (Galatians 6:1). If they won't hear us, we return with another to help, then we become more drastic, if we must, but we are to follow the long-suffering nature of God in dealing with those who have gone astray (Matthew 18:15-17).

Remember the name of the place where sins were atoned in the Old Testament? *"And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony..."* (Exodus 25:22). For mercies sake, let us be like God!

- Pastor Pope -

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