DEVOTIONAL · 21 MAY 2026

Rooted in the God of Mercy

Church & Community, Prayer, Discipleship

Difficult seasons have a way of making God feel distant — as if our suffering disqualifies us from his attention, or our failures have finally exhausted his patience. This week we walk through a single scene from Luke 13, where Jesus encounters a woman who has suffered for eighteen years and heals her on the Sabbath. The story is simple; its implications are profound.

Over six days we will trace the mercy of God as it is revealed in Jesus — what it looks like, where it comes from, and how receiving it transforms us from the inside out. This is not a week of self-improvement strategies. It is an invitation to be planted more deeply in the only soil where grace and mercy can truly grow: a living relationship with the God who is mercy himself.

Day 1 — Seen in Your Suffering

Luke 13:10-11

> *One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman there had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was hunched over and could not stand up straight.*

Psalm 34:18

There is something quietly remarkable about a woman who, bent and broken for eighteen years, still makes her way to the synagogue to worship. She did not let her suffering become a reason to stay away from God. She hobbled forward — and that faithful, persistent act of showing up is its

own kind of testimony.

What is even more striking is what happens when she arrives. She does not push through the crowd demanding attention. She does not call out to Jesus. She simply appears — and Jesus sees her. In the middle of teaching, his eyes find her. Those words carry enormous weight: *Jesus saw her.* He saw not a burden, not a problem, not a cripple fading into the margins, but a human being made in the image of God, beloved and worth stopping for.

This is the God we are invited to know. He is not distant or distracted. He is not too busy with the important people in the room to notice the one who has suffered longest and been seen least. Whatever you are carrying today — chronic pain, quiet grief, a burden you have borne so long that others have stopped asking — the same eyes that found her in that synagogue are resting on you right now.

His provision begins with being *known.* Before the healing, there was the seeing. Let that sink in today: you are seen by the God of the universe, and what he sees moves him toward you with mercy.

Reflect: In what area of your life do you most need to believe that God genuinely sees you — and how might that change how you approach him today?

Day 2 — The Heart of Who God Is

Luke 13:12-13

> *When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your disability." Then He placed His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and began to glorify God.*

Hebrews 1:3

> *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, upholding all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Luke 4:18-19

> *"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

We can grow so accustomed to stories of Jesus healing and helping that they stop astonishing us. By the time we reach Luke 13, acts of mercy have become almost routine in the narrative. But routine for us is not the same as ordinary. True mercy — the kind that reaches past deserving, past convenience, past self-interest — is extraordinarily rare in the history of the world.

What Jesus does in this synagogue is not just a kind gesture. It is a self-revelation. It is God showing us, in the flesh, what he is actually like at the core of his being. Jesus did not come to heal a few people as a side project. Mercy *is* the mission. Back at the very beginning of his ministry, he opened the scroll and announced it: he had come to bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind. The healing of this woman is not an interruption to that mission — it is a perfect expression of it.

If you want to know what God thinks of you in your difficulty, look at Jesus reaching out and touching this woman. He did not heal her from a distance. He laid his hands on her. God incarnate made physical contact with suffering. That is the measure of his mercy — it closes every gap between heaven and need.

Whatever shame or distance you feel from God today, the picture of Jesus in this passage is the truest answer to it. Mercy is not a mood God occasionally falls into. It is who he is.

Reflect: How does seeing Jesus as the 'exact imprint' of God's nature change the way you picture God when you come to him with your struggles?

Day 3 — Mercy That Goes All the Way

Romans 5:8

> *But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Luke 9:51

> *As the day of His ascension approached, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*

Philippians 2:7-8

> *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross.*

It is one thing to show mercy to someone who stumbles into your path and needs a helping hand. It is quite another to lay down your life for people who despise you. The mercy Jesus shows in the synagogue is real and beautiful — but it is, as the sermon puts it, only a small drop in the ocean of what he came to do.

Even as Jesus placed his hands on the bent woman and healed her, he was already moving toward Jerusalem. His face was set. He knew what waited there. And remarkably, some of those who would benefit most from his mercy — including religious leaders like the one in this very story — would be among those who handed him over. He died for people who rejected him. He gave his life for the undeserving, the hostile, the ones who had earned only judgment.

This is the dimension of God's mercy that should unmoor every excuse we make for staying away from him. We might understand a God who helps those who deserve it. We might even understand a God who helps those who try hard. But the God of the Bible, the God revealed in Jesus, pours out

his mercy on those who are actively his enemies. That is a different kind of love altogether.

When the weight of your own sin or failure feels like it disqualifies you from grace, remember what Romans 5 says: God proved his love precisely *at the point of our sinfulness.* The cross is God's final, irrevocable word on what he thinks of people who need mercy.

Reflect: Is there a sin or failure you have been using as a reason to keep God at arm's length? How does the cross speak directly to that?

Day 4 — The Fruitlessness of Rules Without Roots

Luke 13:14-16

> *But the synagogue leader was indignant that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. "There are six days for work," he told the crowd. "So come and be healed on those days and not on the Sabbath." "You hypocrites!" the Lord replied. "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it to water? Then should not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be released from her bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

Luke 13:6-9

> *Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree that was planted in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the keeper of the vineyard, 'Look, for the past three years I have come to search for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Therefore cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone again this year, until I dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine. But if not, you can cut it down.'" Jesus Heals a Disabled Woman*

Matthew 23:23

> *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint, dill, and cumin. But you have disregarded the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced*

> *the latter, without neglecting the former.*

The synagogue ruler witnessed something extraordinary. A woman who had been bent double for eighteen years stood upright in front of him and praised God. And his response was anger. Not wonder. Not worship. Anger — because a rule had been broken.

This reaction is a window into something deeply important. The ruler was not a godless man. He was a devoted religious leader who knew the scriptures, maintained the traditions, and cared about faithfulness to God. And yet, in the moment when the mercy of God was displayed right before his eyes, he could not see it. He saw only a regulation violated. His religion had become disconnected from the God it claimed to honor — and the telltale sign of that disconnection was the absence of mercy.

Jesus had just told a parable about a fig tree that produced no fruit. This scene is the parable lived out in real time. A tree that looks like it should produce something good, but when you reach for fruit, there is nothing there. Religion without a living relationship with the God of mercy will always end up here — more generous to animals than to human beings, more protective of systems than of suffering people.

This is a searching question for all of us. It is possible to observe every outward form of faith while the heart grows cold toward the very mercy that faith is meant to produce. The warning is not against religious practice — it is against letting practice become a substitute for the living relationship that makes mercy grow.

Reflect: Are there ways your faith has become more about maintaining rules or appearances than about genuinely connecting with God and extending his mercy to others?

Day 5 — Mercy's Native Soil

John 15:4-5

> *Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who remains in Me, and I in him, will bear much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing.*

Galatians 5:22-23

> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

Luke 13:15-16

> *"You hypocrites!" the Lord replied. "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it to water? Then should not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be released from her bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

Some plants cannot survive when removed from their native soil. A Joshua Tree transplanted to a rainy coastal city will not thrive, no matter how much care is taken. The same is true of mercy. Mercy has a native soil — and outside of that soil, it will wither and produce nothing lasting.

That native soil is a living relationship with the God of mercy himself. This is why the religious leaders in Jesus' day, for all their knowledge of scripture and dedication to religious practice, produced no mercy when it mattered. They had been cut off from the very source of it. Like cut flowers, they may have looked impressive for a time, but they were no longer drawing life from the root.

Here is an honest observation most of us can recognize: we run out of mercy on our own. We find it genuinely hard to be consistently compassionate even toward our own families, let alone strangers, let alone those who have hurt us. The will to be merciful is one thing; the sustained, transformative capacity to actually live it out is another. That second kind of mercy does not come from trying harder. It comes from abiding more deeply.

The provision of God in hard times is not only healing or relief from external circumstances. It is the inner resource of his Spirit, given to those who remain close to him, enabling a kind of mercy that would be impossible any other way. When we draw near to the God of mercy — confessing our failures, remembering the gospel, asking for more of his Spirit — we are placing ourselves in exactly the soil where that fruit can grow.

Reflect: When you find yourself running out of patience or compassion for others, what does that reveal about where you are drawing your inner resources from?

Day 6 — Rejoicing Before the God of Mercy

Luke 13:17

> *When Jesus said this, all His adversaries were humiliated. And the whole crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things He was doing. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31–32|MAT 13:31-32 ; Mark 4:30–34|MRK 4:30-34)*

Philippians 2:9-11

> *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Lights in the World (Matthew 5:13–16|MAT 5:13-16)*

Lamentations 3:22-23

> *Because of the loving devotion of the LORD we are not consumed, for His mercies never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!*

The story ends with two contrasting responses. The adversaries of Jesus were put to shame — not by force, but simply by the undeniable rightness of what they had witnessed. And the people

rejoiced at all the glorious things that had been done. Mercy received does not leave us neutral. It moves us either toward God in worship, or away from him in shame.

There is a forward-looking dimension to this scene as well. One day Jesus will return, and when he does, the mercy he has been showing throughout history — in synagogues, at crosses, in quiet moments of grace given to ordinary struggling people — will be fully vindicated before everyone. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess. Those who have received his mercy will find themselves swept up in the same kind of joy that filled that synagogue, only immeasurably greater.

This future reality is not meant to be abstract comfort. It is meant to shape how we live right now. We are people who have already received mercy we did not deserve — forgiveness, adoption, the presence of the Spirit, the promise of resurrection. That reception of mercy is the engine of the transformed life. We grow in mercy toward others as we continually return to the mercy shown to us.

The practical path forward is simple but not easy: come frequently to God in honest confession, remember the gospel, ask for more of the Spirit, and then step into places where you will need to depend on him. When you find yourself in over your head in serving others, that is not a sign something has gone wrong — it is the very place where prayer deepens and God meets you with exactly what you need. His mercies are new every morning.

Reflect: How might regularly remembering and receiving God's mercy toward you — through confession, prayer, and scripture — actually change the way you treat the people around you?

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