



Wisdom from the Word

Love Mercy

Kindness beyond what someone expects; compassion; treating someone with kindness and the intent to relieve suffering. These are descriptions of mercy. Mercy is intertwined in the practice of nursing; in the past, nurses were called angels of mercy.

Compassion is a companion concept of mercy; the Oxford English Dictionary (2020) defines it as the “feeling or emotion when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it.” Compassion lets us place ourselves into another person’s shoes, empathizing with their suffering and wanting to relieve their pain. Mercy and compassion share the qualities of attentiveness and action.

*Jesus personified God’s mercy
as he restored health, sanity,
and life to people.*

Jesus personified God’s mercy as he restored health, sanity, and life to people who were disabled, insensible from mental disorders, and even dead. Jesus generously extended mercy to people of all sorts.

Although mercy is considered characteristic of nurses, we don’t always respond with mercy. When we’re overworked, stressed out, or upset, our responses can tend toward irritated or judgmental. We also can resist extending mercy due to our implicit biases or social pressure.

Through reflection and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, we can recognize our lack of mercy in our nursing and

our personal lives, and accept God’s help to restore our mercy-giving.

HEARING THE WORD

Read Matthew 15:21–28.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Yes, it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

- What is the woman asking for when she asks Jesus for mercy? What barriers is she facing? How did Jesus respond with compassion?
- How do the responses of Jesus and the disciples differ? Why do you think Jesus responds the way he does?
- If someone pestered and nagged you, would you be more inclined to show compassion or to continue to push the person away? What positives do you see from persistence?
- What can you do to try to understand a patient’s circumstances when that person is different from you?
- When, if ever, is it appropriate to not show mercy?

This Bible study and others are free at the NCF website: <https://ncf-jcn.org/resource/bible-study-materials>. Use on your own or with other nurses or students.

APPLICATION

At its core, mercy is showing compassion for everyone, especially for those who are suffering. Desiring mercy for every patient in our care is a quality that comes from God, though it may not always be easy to carry out.

In healthcare, you may see care prioritized based on whether someone “deserves” it. For example, you may hear that a patient addicted to alcohol doesn’t deserve a liver transplant, or someone doesn’t deserve a certain level of care because of their low income, ethnicity, or prognosis.

- How might you respond?
- Has your own experience of mercy being withheld or your feelings of unworthiness influenced your readiness to be merciful to patients?
- How does Jesus’ example of showing mercy challenge or inspire you as you care for patients?

Jesus reminds us (Matthew 18:33) why we should desire to be merciful. “Should you not have mercy on your fellow servant as I have had mercy on you?” Jesus is our mentor in showing mercy as we completely rely on his mercy toward us.

For a greater examination of mercy, read the JCN article, “Student Nurses’ Perceptions of Mercy: A Qualitative Study” https://journals.lww.com/journalofchristiannursing/Fulltext/2021/01000/Student_Nurses_Perceptions_of_Mercy_A.14.aspx#JCL-P-14.

Oxford English Dictionary. (2020). Mercy. In *Oxford English Dictionary*. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116713?rskey=aVfcCU&result=1#eid>