

# Act. Love. Walk

MICAH 6:8

## ACT.LOVE.WALK: Love Mercy

### Large Group Talk 2

**Objective:** Mercy is one of those things that are easy to identify but hard to do. In this session, students will learn what it means to love mercy—to keep it with them at all times and to let it define their reactions. Students will also take a look into the supply closet of mercy that comes from the abundant mercy that God has given them. Students will then be confronted with the mercy-free zones in their lives and how they can love mercy enough to bring it into those places.

### Introduction

**Say Something Like:** *Last time we met, we talked about how God spoke to his people through Micah. We focused on Micah 6:8, looking specifically at God’s command to “act justly”:*

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

*In this session, we’re going to focus on the next “requirement” in this verse: to love mercy. Acting justly deals with how we act towards others. Loving mercy deals with how we respond to other people’s actions. In other words, God wants our reactions to be defined by mercy.*

**Illustration Option 1: The Mercy Rule.** In baseball or softball, if one team is beating the other so badly that the second team couldn’t possibly make a comeback, the umpires use the mercy rule to end the game prematurely. In the Ultimate Fighting Championship, when a person is in a hold they can’t get out of and the pain becomes unbearable, they can tap out to end the match. In both of these scenarios, one team or fighter is asking their opponent to show mercy instead of running the score up or inflicting even more pain. These opponents are forced to show mercy, but in everyday life, there is no mercy rule. No umpire or referee exists to tell us when to hold back or offer forgiveness. It’s up to us to obey the Holy Spirit when he tells us to show other people mercy.

**Illustration Option 2: I Can’t See.** In the movie Seabiscuit, a horse owner discovers that his jockey has been hiding something from him—something that kept him from winning his last race. The owner could have gotten furious and immediately fired the jockey. But his response is different. He decides to show the jockey mercy. Show this clip from the movie: ([www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/seabiscuit/i-cant-see](http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/seabiscuit/i-cant-see)).

**Say Something Like:** *We have to start by defining mercy the way God would because it's hard to love something if we don't even know what it is. And I don't know about you guys, but I don't think Micah is referring to a rule in a softball game or someone tapping out in a mixed martial arts competition. Sure, it can mean "to refrain from harming someone" or "not giving someone the punishment they deserve." But God's definition of mercy implies something more.*

## **Teaching: Love Mercy**

### **1: God's Mercy**

**Ask:** How would you define *mercy*? How do you think God defines *mercy*?

**Say Something Like:** *A really clear picture of God's mercy is found in the story of Hosea. He was another Old Testament prophet, like Micah. If you were to read the whole book of Hosea, you would discover that it is all about God's mercy and forgiveness of his people, lived out through the actions of Hosea. God called Hosea to marry a prostitute, a woman God knew would not be faithful to Hosea. And when Hosea's wife inevitably became unfaithful, God called Hosea to forgive her, to offer her mercy instead of judgment. Why would God ask Hosea to do such a difficult thing? God wanted to display his own mercy through Hosea's life. Hosea's forgiveness showed God's people the extreme love he had for them even though they were unfaithful to him.*

*In chapter 6, God says to his people through Hosea,*

*"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).*

*Does that sound familiar? Just like in Micah 6:8, God is urging the Israelites to stop making sacrifices out of a sense of obligation or as part of an empty ritual. God wanted the Israelites—and us—to know him. He wanted them to recognize the mercy he had shown them and to pass that mercy along to others.*

### **Illustration: We Can Only Give What We Have.**

Invite a student up to demonstrate how mercy is given. Ask the student to give you things you see that they have, one at a time (pen, glasses, hair band, watch, phone, wallet, shoes, socks, etc.). Take note of how willing (or unwillingly) the student gives up his or her stuff. Once the student has given you a bunch of things, start asking them for things they don't have (a ring, a hundred dollar bill, keys to their car, tickets to a game, etc.). Take note of how the student reacts to your requests. They can't give what they don't have, no matter how many times you've asked for it. Thankfully, God has given us plenty of mercy, so he never puts us in a situation where we have to give something we don't have. When God calls us to show other people mercy, he's asking a lot, and we react in all kinds of ways (like some of the reactions you saw here). But God has poured out his amazing

mercy on us in so many incredible ways. By keeping in mind the mercy God has shown us, we'll find the strength to pass that mercy on to other people.

## 2. Beyond Mercy?

**Say Something Like:** *Throughout the Bible, we see example after example of God being merciful—and calling his people to do the same. Jesus frequently challenged his followers to take care of widows and orphans, two of the most helpless groups of his day. Jesus also spoke out against the tax collectors who cheated people out of their money. Yet he showed mercy to those tax collectors.*

*We discover why Jesus was so concerned with the lowest of the low in Matthew 9. Jesus had just called Matthew, a tax collector, to be his disciple. Matthew then invited Jesus and the other disciples to dine at his house. But the guest list also included Matthew's fellow tax collectors and others who were considered "notorious sinners."*

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."  
Matthew 9:11-13

*Did you catch what Jesus just said? Do you recognize it? Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, the verse we just read. The Pharisees were supposed to be religious experts, but they totally miss the point. God doesn't want us to consider ourselves better than others. God sent his Son to die for our sins, and the Bible clearly says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). So God's mercy extends to everyone. No one is beyond mercy.*

**Illustration: Spa or Hospital?** What's the difference between a spa and a hospital? Both exist to make people feel better. Both have employees trained to treat people. So what's the biggest difference between these two places? The clients. Spas cater to healthy people. They exist to pamper their clients, not to heal them. In fact, if sick people showed up to a spa sneezing and coughing with a high fever, the spa workers would probably refuse to treat them. Hospitals, on the other hand, exist to treat sick people. They can't turn away someone for being "too sick"—that's why they exist! The Pharisees wanted their religious community to be like a spa, pampering only to spiritually healthy people. But ironically, by believing other sinners were beyond saving, the Pharisees proved just how unhealthy their spiritual lives actually were. They needed Jesus to be their doctor just as much as the people they looked down on!

**Say Something Like:** *The Pharisees thought the tax collectors and other sinners were beyond saving, so they refused to associate with them. But this wasn't Jesus' plan. Regardless of what these sinners had done, they were not beyond forgiveness. While others ostracized and condemned them, Jesus embraced them, demonstrating what it means to extend mercy.*

*Just to be clear, being merciful doesn't mean letting sin continue unchecked. When a woman was caught in adultery, a group of people wanted to stone her, but Jesus called them to forgive her. After her accusers had dropped their stones and left, Jesus said one final thing to the woman: "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). God does not approve of sin—far from it. But in the midst of our sin, he shows us mercy.*

### 3. Our First Response

**Say Something Like:** *God is also very serious about how he wants us to respond to the sins of others. He wants us to be merciful. But he doesn't want us to stop there. Anyone can begrudgingly show mercy to others: "I guess I'll be merciful if I have to." He doesn't just want us to extend mercy; he wants us to love it.*

*Jesus' brother James wrote about this in his letter to Christians in the first century:*

*If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ... Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:8-9, 12-13).*

**Say Something Like:** *It definitely sounds like God is serious about mercy, doesn't it? When you love something, you try to keep it with you at all times. Mercy should always be our first response, not anger or revenge. Mercy should be our natural response, flowing out of us to others.*

*And sometimes that can be easy. I mean, if we haven't been personally wronged or if the offense was something minor, then it's not hard to be merciful or to love mercy.*

*But what if someone hurts us in an extreme way? What if the pain is just too great? Could we still be merciful then? Would that change our view of mercy?*

**Illustration: Baseball Bat.** If you can find one, bring out a flimsy, plastic baseball bat for kids. This could also work with a tiny novelty bat or even a foam noodle. Take a few practice swings with this bat. Maybe demonstrate your skill by hitting a few whiffle balls or foam balls (as long as they won't hurt anyone). Then ask students what would happen if a professional baseball player walked up to the plate holding this kind of bat. How would the bat hold up against a 97 mph fastball? It may be useful for hitting lightweight balls, but an actual baseball in a real game would destroy this bat! Think about how you love mercy. Do you only love mercy enough to forgive people for the smallest of offenses? Or do you love mercy enough that you can forgive someone for huge things, for insults others would call "unforgivable"? A weak view of mercy is hardly even worth it, like a toy baseball bat in a professional baseball game. Thankfully, the mercy that God shows us and gives to us is more powerful than we could imagine.

**Putting it all together:**

**Say Something Like:** *It's easy to love mercy when we're the ones benefitting from it. Who wouldn't want some mercy if they screwed up on a difficult test or botched an important tryout? We're quick to ask for extra credit when our own grade is on the line.*

*Yet when someone else wrongs us in some way—by flaking on a commitment, stabbing us in the back, or just being rude—we're more hesitant about showing mercy. We say things like, "At least I'm not as bad as him," or, "I'd never do something as cruel as her." These become our excuses for not showing mercy, and they make us feel better about withholding forgiveness. But if we only love mercy when it's directed toward us, then we don't really love mercy at all. Do you think you could ever find joy in showing mercy to the person who has hurt you the most? That's a tough thing to ask, but it's exactly what Jesus did when he died for us, the people who rejected him, on the Cross.*

**[Speaker note:** The following questions will be discussed deeper in the small group lesson]

**Question 1:** Have you refused to give mercy to someone in your life? Why?

**Question 2:** What does it look like to "love mercy" on a daily basis?

**Looking Forward:** Let the students know that the next lesson will look at what it means to walk humbly with God. Be sure to give them any instructions they might need to go from here.

*\*LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not*

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*required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.*

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