

What is Mercy?

Notes for the Leader:

Read the scripture passages and book ahead of the lesson—make sure you are familiar with the stories and their context. Choose places to stop and make sure the kids are following the story. The lesson to emphasize is that humans can never earn God's love and mercy, and that we should not make other humans try to earn love from us, but we should try to show mercy like God does.

Guided Questions/background:

Do you know what Mercy means?

Simplified working definition for kids: compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to ignore, punish, or harm.

*So it's compassion or forgiveness that's totally undeserved or unearned.



Suggested lesson order:

Ask the basic questions to set the stage for expectations

Read the scripture passage(s), stopping along the way to discuss as needed

Read one of the suggested books, stopping along the way to discuss as needed

Ask follow up/digging deeper questions

Optional: Choose an activity to help drive the lesson home

Pray with the kids (a repeat-after-me fashion may be appropriate, depending on context)

Scripture:

Genesis 32:22-32 (The Message)

While traveling, Jacob got all of his family safely across a brook along with all his possessions.

But Jacob stayed behind by himself, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he couldn't get the best of Jacob as they wrestled, he deliberately threw Jacob's hip out of joint.

The man said, "Let me go; it's daybreak."

Jacob said, "I'm not letting you go 'til you bless me."

The man said, "What's your name?"

He answered, "Jacob."

The man said, "But no longer. Your name is no longer Jacob. From now on it's Israel (which means God-Wrestler) for you have wrestled with God and you've come through."

Jacob asked, "And what's your name?"

The man said, "Why do you want to know my name?" And then, right then and there, he blessed him.

Jacob named the place Peniel (God's Face) because, he said, "I saw God face-to-face and lived to tell the story!"

Matthew 20:29-34 (The Message)

As they were leaving Jericho, a huge crowd followed. Suddenly they came upon two blind men sitting alongside the road. When they heard it was Jesus passing, they cried out, "Master, have mercy on us! Mercy, Son of David!" The crowd tried to hush them up, but they got all the louder, crying, "Master, have mercy on us! Mercy, Son of David!"

Jesus stopped and called over, "What do you want from me?"

They said, "Master, we want our eyes opened. We want to see!"

Deeply moved, Jesus touched their eyes. They had their sight back that very instant, and joined the procession.

Book Suggestions:

Four Feet, Two Sandals by Karen Lynn Williams, illustrated by Khadra Mohammed

Suggested questions:

Would Lina and Feroza have been able to become friends without mercy?

Ish by Peter H. Reynolds

Who shows Ramon more mercy, his little sister or himself?

Beatrice's Goat by Page McBrier, illustrated by Lori Lohstoeter OR

Boxes for Katje by Candace Fleming, illustrated by Stacey Dressen-McQueen

Why would you send presents to people you don't even know? What does that have to do with mercy?

Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have a Horse by Marcy Campbell, Illustrated by Corinna Luyken

Chloe has a choice to make. Does she make the merciful choice?

How would the book change if Chloe was trying to have mercy?

Who is My Neighbor? by Amy-Jill Levine & Sandy Eisenberg-Sasso

Who is mercy for? Who can practice mercy?

Digging in deeper:

-Where do you see mercy in the book we just read?

-Where do you see mercy in the scripture(s) we just read?

-Why is that mercy?

-Why do you think God's mercy is important?

-Can you think of a time when someone showed you mercy?

With older kids:

-Can you think of a time when you could have shown mercy and chose not to? How did that make you feel?

Activity Suggestions:

Knocking over the crayons

If you have a youth or adult available to play the role (so it's not one of the kids), have that person come in and make some kind of mess—knocking over crayons, throwing papers on the floor, etc., and storm out of the room. Ask the kids: Why do you think they just did that? What would be the fair thing to do? What would be the merciful thing to do? How can we help them maybe act better in the future?

This will hopefully lead to a discussion about how the fair thing—making them clean it up—is not necessarily merciful, and encourage that to see how asking why, using empathy, and helping would be a better response.

With Lots of Time:

Plan a mercy ministry

If you have lots of time with the same kids week to week, let them lead in planning a one-off ministry event that would show mercy. This might be a toy, food, or clothing drive. This might be signs to show solidarity in a cause happening in your community, something they could choose to ignore, but instead they will show mercy. Ask the kids: Who in our community needs mercy? Who could we help that we aren't forced to help? What could we do to help them?

Suggested Prayer:

God,

Thank you for showing us your mercy when we do things wrong and don't show mercy to others. Help us to see people the way you see them and love them the way you love all of us. Amen.