

Life-Changing Mercy

In Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables*, Jean Valjean served a 19-year sentence for stealing a loaf of bread in order to feed his sister's family.



Finally, he is set free. A bishop is the only one who will befriend the embittered man. Valjean rewards him by stealing some of his silver. He is caught red-handed by the police.

The bishop is called to the police station to proffer charges. Instead of doing that, he brings Valjean his silver candlestick holders in an effort to fool the police into thinking that Valjean had not stolen.

Valjean is forever changed. He extends grace to an orphan child and raises her as his own. He forgives the policeman who wanted to put him back in jail.

At last he dies, holding in his hand the two candlesticks that the bishop gave him.

What is it that so completely changed this bitter man? It was mercy.

He learned to extend mercy because mercy had been extended to him.

Mercy is defined as compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

Here is another example:

In the early days of his presidency, Calvin Coolidge awoke one morning in his hotel room to find a cat burglar going through his pockets. Coolidge spoke up, asking the burglar not to take his watch chain because it contained an engraved charm he wanted to keep.

Coolidge then engaged the thief in quiet conversation and discovered he was a college student who had no money to pay his hotel bill or buy a ticket back to campus. Coolidge counted out \$32 from his wallet, which he had persuaded the dazed young man to give back.

Coolidge then declared the money to be a loan, and advised the young man to leave the way he had come so as to avoid the Secret Service. And, yes, the loan was paid back.

(more)

No doubt, the mercy extended – as in the case of Jean Valjean – changed the life of this college student.

The Bible has much to say about mercy:

1. *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful* (Luke 6:36 ESV).
2. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy* (Matthew 5:7 ESV).
3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3 ESV).

As one who has received mercy on occasions in my life, it is incumbent upon me to grant it to others. What about you?

– Beecher Hunter

