

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 12:10

MERCY MAKES THE MESSED-UP MERCIFUL



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
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INTRODUCTION

The *Nonhuman Rights Project* is the only civil rights organization in the United States dedicated solely to securing rights for 'nonhuman animals'. They campaign for the right of 'nonhuman animals' (let's just call them 'animals' from now on) to be free from exploitation, domination, and abuse by humans. If animals have such rights, this means:

- No experiments on animals.
- No breeding and killing animals for food or clothes or medicine.
- No use of animals for hard labour.
- No selective breeding for any reason other than the benefit of the animal.
- No hunting.
- No zoos or use of animals in entertainment.

Andrew Linzey, the author of *Animal Theology* and *Animal Gospel*, and a professing Christian, argues "that we should give greater not equal consideration to animals."

Such people's care for animals is commendable. However, their extreme care for animals is often combined with support for abortion and support for violence against people and property who have a different view of animals. It's so messed up.

What's going on here? How can there be such care of animals and such carelessness when it comes to humans? Proverbs 12:10 supplies an answer in such a way that we learn about God and ourselves and the Gospel through it. Here's how I would sum up the message of this text: **Mercy makes the messed-up merciful.**

CONTEXT

Proverbs 12 begins with some general reflections on the difference between the wise and the foolish (1-8). This is followed by specific reflections on work: employees' work (9), animals work (10), personal work (11), rewarding work (12-14).

The questions we should be asking when we read the Proverbs are: "What does this tell me about God? What does this tell me about myself?"



What does this tell us about God?



1. GOD'S HEART BEATS FOR ALL HIS CREATURES

Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast (10).

The Picture

Christians pay close attention to animals in order to identify their needs, provide for them, and care for them. They watch their bodies, listen to their sounds, study their work, and get to know their characters.

The Principle

Although this proverb explains how the righteous relate to animals, it's really a proverb about God's character revealed in his direction to the righteous. **Our Creator cares so much for all his creatures that he commands us to manage them mercifully.** The biblical evidence for this principle can be seen in three stages:

Stage 1: Creation

1. **God made the animals** (Gen. 1:24-25)
2. **God said the animals were good** (Gen. 1:25)
3. **God gave his authority over the animals to humans** (Gen. 1:26-28)
4. **God gave the animals food** (Gen. 1:30)
5. **God brought the animals to humans for naming** (Gen 2:19-20)

Stage 2: Uncreation

1. **An animal was turned against humanity** (Gen. 3:1)
2. **Human sin damaged animals and us** (Gen. 3:14-15, 17-18).
3. **Animals were sacrificed for human sin** (Gen. 3:21)
4. **Animals were judged with the rest of the world** (Gen. 6:7, 17; 7:21-23)
5. **The animal kingdom was saved in the ark** (Gen. 6:20)
6. **God promised to protect the animals** (Gen. 8:21)
7. **God put a healthy fear of humanity in the animals** (Gen. 9:2)
8. **God gave the animals to humans for food** (9:3)
9. **God covenanted with the animals and sealed it with a rainbow** (9:8-17)
10. **God issued commands for stewarding animals** (Ex. 23:4-5; Deut. 5:14; 11:15; 22:10; Ps. 36:6b; 104:14, 17; 145: 9, 16; Jon. 4:11; Exod. 20:10; 23:11-12; Lev. 25:1-7).
11. **God is the ultimate owner of all animals** (Ps. 50:10-11)
12. **Jesus used animals to illustrate his person and work** (Matt. 23:37; John 10:7-16)
13. **Jesus taught care for animals** (Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:6; 13:15; 14:5;
14. **Jesus replaced all animal sacrifices with his sacrifice** (Hebrews 10)

Stage 3: Re-creation

1. **God promises a new world with a perfect animal kingdom** (Isa. 11:6-10; Hos. 2:18; Job 5:23). Although it's not clear if this is literal or symbolic, it still communicates God's comprehensive care for all his creatures.



Careful study of these passages teach us our Creator cares so much for all his creatures that he commands us to manage them mercifully. When we receive mercy from God, we become merciful like God.

The Practice

What spiritual lessons can we learn from this unusual and unexpected Proverb?

APPLICATION

A test of faith: If we've received mercy we become merciful. We treat weaker and lower creatures in ways they don't deserve. Therefore God uses the way we view, speak of, and treat the low and the weak to test the genuineness of our faith. Do you pass God's test?

An invitation to worship: We see who God is in his care for animals. As he lifts up animals, we lift him up in praise for his mercy to his creatures. We sing Psalm 104 with new understanding and passion as we discover the caring heart of God in his concern even for animals.

IF WE GOT MERCY
WE'LL GIVE MERCY

But why is this humanity marked as the feature of a righteous man? Because it is the image of our heavenly Father, who spreads his cherishing wings over his whole creation. As though the field of man was too small for his goodness, he regards the life of the beast....Must not then his children reflect his whole image of love? And is not the lack of any feature of this image a mark of doubtful relationship to him? **Charles Bridges**

If that's what we learn about God, what do we learn about ourselves?



2. THE HUMAN HEART IS A MERCILESS MESS

...but the mercy of the wicked is cruel (10)

The Picture

"Mercy" is the love of a superior for an inferior, the strong for the weak, rich for the poor. But this proverb pictures a scenario where someone who seems to be merciful is actually cruel.

The Principle

How can this be and what does this mean? There are probably three components to this:

- **Talk mercy:** The wicked talk a lot about mercy, but never show it. They may even use talk of mercy to cover up their cruelty, as Pilate did (Luke 23:16).
- **Selfish mercy:** The wicked may look merciful, but are never actually moved by mercy. Rather their actions are always selfish and for their own benefit primarily. They are only merciful when it suits their purposes. Their mercy is motivated by money, their kindness by cash, their provision for others by promotion of self.
- **Inconsistent mercy:** They are merciful to animals but not to human beings, as evidenced by some animal rights supporters attacking people and property of farmers and scientists. It's also seen in their support of abortion. For example, Daniel Bor, writing in Slate, says it would have been okay to have aborted his daughter even late in gestation, but he is a vegetarian because animals, he says, may be "conscious beings."

Summary: The human heart is a mixed-up merciless mess.

The Practice

APPLICATION

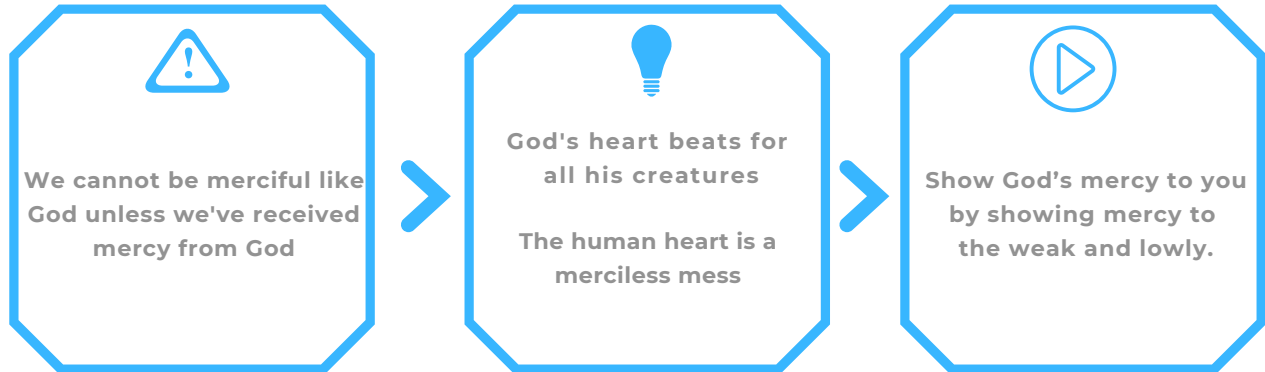
Pray for mercy. Confess your talk-mercy, selfish-mercy, and inconsistent-mercy. Pray that God would deal with you not as you deserve. Experiencing mercy will lighten up and straighten out your heart. It will clean out selfishness, cruelty, and inconsistency.

Practice mercy. Mercy makes the messed-up merciful. The more mercy you get, the more you will give. It will affect your family and your farm, your home, and your stable, your kids and your pets. The more mercy you show, the more God's mercy will be known

WITHOUT MERCY
WE'RE A MESS,



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Our merciful Creator, help us to request and receive your mercy so that we can show your mercy to all your creatures.

FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [Astronomical mercy](#).
- [Animal Lessons](#)
- [10 Biblical Truths about Animals](#)
- [Have mercy on me: Four Glimpses into the heart of God.](#)
- [Blessed are the Merciful](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What examples have you seen of extreme care for animals but extreme carelessness for people?
2. How can you show God's mercy to animals and people around you?
3. Look at some of the passages in the "Three Stages" Bible study about animals. What did you learn about God from them?
4. Who will you show mercy to today? A family member? A neighbor? A colleague? An enemy? What will you do to show God's mercy?
5. Study Psalm 104 and turn it into a song as you see God's provision for various creatures in your daily life.
6. How can you increase your capacity and appreciation for God's mercy?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net
www.whyamifeelinglikethis.com