



"O Lord, You alone are my hope . . ."
Psalm 71:5 NLT

FOCUS Online Newsletter

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Mercy Christmas!

No, this is not a typo! It is a new twist to an old greeting. Maybe a bit corny, but I've been thinking a lot about mercy during this time of year.

Mercy is the motivation in God's heart that sent Jesus into our world.

Mercy can be translated "**kindness**" from the Hebrew word *hesedh*, or "**compassion**" from the Greek word *oiktirmos*. In some translations, the word "**loving kindness**" can be interchanged with mercy.

There are two common meanings for mercy:

1. Forbearing punishment from a law-breaker or adversary (the way Jesus took the punishment I deserved upon himself)
2. Compassion which causes one to respond to help those who are weak, sick, or poor (compassion which results in action, not just empathy)

Mercy is one of God's attributes. See Exodus 34:6-7; 2 Kings 13:23; 2 Chronicles 7:3,6,14; Nehemiah 9:17,27-31; Psalm 103:3,8-14,17; Psalm 130:3-4,7-8; Lamentations 3:22-23, 31-33; Jonah 4:2,10-11

God is not stingy with his mercy. See 1 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 2:4-7.

Many times the words "**mercy**" and "**truth**" are used together in scripture. See Psalm 85:2,3,10; Psalm 89:2,14, 28; Psalm 138:2; Proverbs 3:3-4; Proverbs 14:21-22, 31; Proverbs 16:6; Jeremiah 9:24.

If the only aspect of God we experienced was His holiness, we would be consumed. His perfect law (truth) would crush every one of us. But in God's great love and mercy, He sent Jesus to be the perfect lamb who would sacrifice His own blood for our sins. Through Jesus, God provided a robe of righteousness for us which covers our sins, removes our transgressions as far as the east is from the west, and gives us access to the Father.

(Continued on page 2)

FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit organization (501c3) devoted to offering hope, encouragement, education, and assistance to women who are struggling in difficult circumstances, especially abusive relationships, dysfunctional marriages, separation, and divorce.

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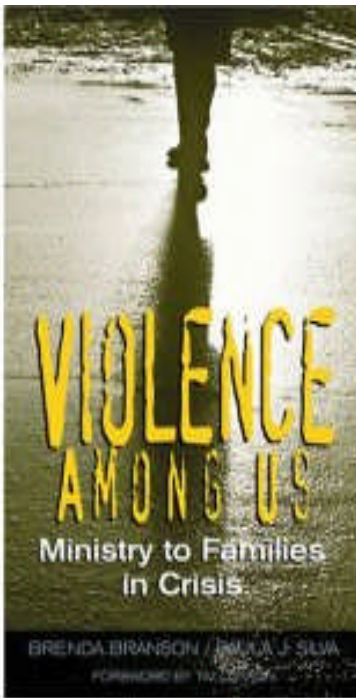
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The mission of FOCUS Ministries, Inc. is to encourage women who are struggling in difficult circumstances to find strength and hope in Jesus Christ.



This new book written by Brenda Branson and Paula Silva offers practical help in identifying abusive situations. It has strategic counseling tips, case studies and models of effective ministry to both the victim and the perpetrator. There are resource lists which include domestic violence hotlines and shelters, faith-based organizations, abuser treatment programs, and information on legal and safety issues.

Review by Lydia Lee:

“How sad that this book is so badly needed, especially in the Christian community. But it is. Every pastor, every counselor, every Sunday School teacher, and every parent should know and understand the content of this excellent, practical, and powerful book. I'm buying a copy for my pastor.”

***Violence Among Us* can be purchased online through our website at www.focusministries1.org.**

Dr. Henry Cloud describes truth like a concrete gymnasium wall. When an athlete runs into the wall, he is crushed and broken. Grace/mercy is the foam mat which is placed onto the wall to absorb the shock and keep the athlete from being crushed. We need both truth and grace.

Jesus modeled mercy and compassion. **God expects us to do the same.** See Micah 6:8; Luke 6:36; Colossians 3:12-13. It is not the law of God which draws people to Jesus--it is His kindness, mercy, and compassion.

Mercy and grace are two attributes of God for which I'm most thankful this Christmas because He has been so generous to me with His loving kindness.

What great life-giving gifts to give to others--compassion, kindness, abundant mercy, and truth! What does that look like? It means not looking down my nose at someone else when they screw up. Instead of passing judgment in my mind or verbally assaulting them with pious words, it means offering them compassion by sitting down with them and listening to their heart, extending mercy by not heaping harsh judgment on them and simply walking with them through the struggle as you tell them the truth about God's love and offer them hope by helping them see themselves as the person God loves. Sometimes mercy looks like a warm blanket, a gift card to a restaurant, or even a simple smile or listening ear.

Mercy is not a duty to be performed, but rather an overflowing of love from a heart who has been forgiven.

Maybe we should say "Mercy Christmas" this year instead of "Merry Christmas." But words are too easy. What would it look like if God's mercy was reflected in our words and actions toward others? His mercy in me! That's the gift the whole world needs.



—Article by Brenda Branson, Copyright © December 2007
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Boundaries: Problems and Symptoms

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” Psa. 139:23

As you become aware of how important healthy boundaries are in every relationship, it is imperative that you take a personal inventory of your own life.

What symptoms in your life indicate boundary problems?

- anger
- feeling manipulated or dominated and controlled by another
- depression
- resentment
- abusing alcohol or drugs
- crying spells
- staying in bed
- eating too much

Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, authors of *Boundaries*, list three categories of symptoms:

Clinical symptoms (*presence of pain*) include the following:

- depression—feeling like you are perpetually in a state of loss
- resentment—toxic feelings; feeling like a slave; loss of freedom
- rage or anger—feeling cornered; going ballistic; feeling out of control inside
- obsessive/compulsive behavior—trying to gain a sense of control (even over dirt or food)

Relational symptoms (*loss of freedom and/or love*) include the following:

- direct controller—someone who cannot hear your “no”, often with someone who can’t say “no”
- manipulative controller—likes to make the victim feel guilty; often lies about their motives
- fear of abandonment—walks on eggshells, doesn’t feel safe

Functional symptoms (*affecting daily tasks*) include the following:

- inability to complete a task or follow through
- chronic low energy level—feeling burned out, unable to say “no” to requests
- unable to concentrate—fogginess

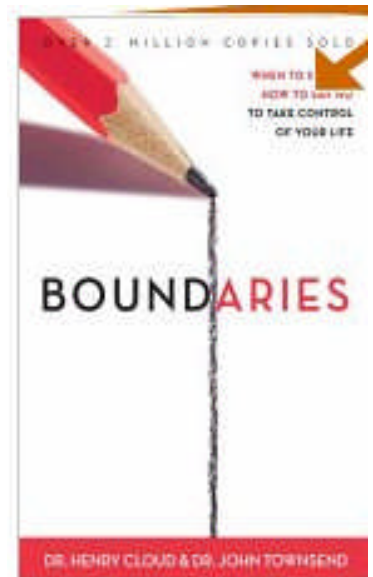
We have all had some of these symptoms at one time or another. Drs. Cloud and Townsend underscore that **the symptoms are not the problem**. Just as soon as we “fix” one symptom, another one pops up to take its place.

Problems exist when we fail to establish and communicate healthy boundaries in all of our relationships. **“The boundary victim always puts power into the boundary violator, and gives them power they don’t have or deserve.”**

Are you being manipulated by someone else? Do you empower that person to continue manipulating you and leave you with guilty feelings? Are you the one who manipulates others because you are too dishonest to be direct about your feelings?

Do you walk on eggshells—afraid to upset someone you love because of their angry response, or afraid that person will stop loving you?

It is important to frequently evaluate areas in your life where you need to set boundaries, as well as take a personal inventory to detect symptoms of boundary problems. Then humble yourself before God and ask Him to reveal your own heart issues that need healing. Take the next step to seek practical help through human resources God has placed around you.



To purchase this book and other great resources go to:

<http://cloudtownsend.com>

You’ll also enjoy free video clips on these topics:

- ◆ Dating
- ◆ Emotional Struggles
- ◆ Goals and Success
- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Marriage
- ◆ Parenting
- ◆ Relationships
- ◆ Spiritual Life

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Ways You Can Partner With Us!

▶ Pray!

- Pray for us to follow God's leading as we pursue new opportunities to help hurting people.
- Pray for the finances to provide free literature and books wherever needed.
- Pray for funding for full-time salaries for FOCUS employees.
- Pray for leaders of existing support groups, and for others to start new groups throughout the country.

▶ Volunteer

- ◆ Can you read and write *Spanish*? We need someone who will translate our current and future materials into Spanish using Microsoft Word.
- ◆ Are you a professional *grant writer*? We need several people who will research and write grant proposals.
- ◆ Are you creative and experienced in *fund raising* or *public relations*? We need people throughout the country who can represent FOCUS and help us raise funds.

▶ Donate Books, Audio tapes, Videos and DVDs

If you have *books, tapes, or videos* gathering dust on your bookshelves, we can use them in our Kentucky Women's Center library (for children, teens, and adults). We will provide you with a tax-deductible receipt.

▶ Wal-Mart Gift Cards

Your donation of Wal-Mart gift cards help women in need throughout the U.S. Please send gift cards to FOCUS Women's Center, P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413 or FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

▶ Donations

Donations can be made by mailing a check or money order to FOCUS, P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126. To use a credit card, log on to our website at www.focusministries1.org and make a one-time donation or sign up to contribute monthly through PayPal. With this option, you will be certain that FOCUS receives your support on a consistent basis. The PayPal shopping cart system will state "subscription" and your monthly donation will be charged to your credit card once a month.

▶ Matching Gifts

Does your employer have a matching gift program? If so, think about contributing to FOCUS Ministries and having your gift matched by your employer.

▶ Year-End Gift

The end of the year is a great time to consider giving a special gift to help FOCUS Ministries reach out to hurting women all over the world. All year-end donations must be post-marked by December 31.

*All gifts are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Tax-deductible receipts will be provided to all contributors. Contributions are solicited with the understanding that FOCUS Ministries has complete control over the use of all donated funds. Gifts designated for a specific project will be applied to that project. If we receive more contributions than can be wisely applied to that project, we will use the excess funds to meet a similar pressing need. **If it is not possible for you to make a contribution at this time, please lift us up before the Lord in prayer. He is our source and our resource. We rest in the assurance that our lives and this ministry are in His hands.***

