

SERIES: THE DAY OF MERCY
PART 2: GOD CAN USE ANYONE

Hello, everyone. Have I told you that I love you lately? Well I do. Here at CVCHURCH we are an intergenerational and multicultural church family. I want you to feel like you're family with us, whether this is your first time with us, or your 2nd, 3rd 4th, or you have been for 5, 10, 15, or 100 years. Last Monday at our weekly small group after our group was over we celebrated two people's birthdays, and I was listening to two of the guys in our group talk. All of a sudden, one of the men addressing the other male said, "I walk out this home and after church on Sundays--I say to myself, I am so grateful for my CVCHURCH FAMILY." My other friend said, "I do the same thing. My life would not be the same without my CVCHURCH family." Loved ones, that is the power of the local church family. God calls us His forever family.

There is no greater joy in life than the thrill of being used by God for a purpose greater than you. Nothing else comes close. If you have not experienced this feeling, I am excited for you to commit yourself to Jesus and to His purpose and plan for your life, so you can experience the joy and ecstasy that you get from God using you to impact, change and see His transformation in another person because of your influence on them by pointing them to Jesus. When you experience allowing God to use you for His purposes, you go, "I get it now. I understand what my purpose is. This is my identity. This is my niche in life. I know why I'm here. I know why I was made."

Friends, you were made for far more than just living for yourself. If you just live for yourself you're going to live a very frustrated and unfulfilled life, and, eventually, you will become very bored. You must have something bigger than yourself that pulls you out of yourself, that makes you bigger than yourself, greater than yourself.

If you thought life was about having as much fun and adventure as you can, getting an education, getting a job, finding your soulmate, starting a family, and amassing as many material possessions as you can, then retire and die, you

could not be more mistaken. You are made by God for far more than that. Your life is far more significant than your career--far more significant. You were created to live a life that has eternal consequences. God wants to use you for His glory and honor because you are shaped to serve God, and serving your Father and Jesus and His Kingdom is what will bring you true satisfaction, significance and value, because human beings are eternal creations. This life is not all there is. You will live forever. God has created you and given you gifts, talents, skills, intellect, passion, and desires to make the biggest impact you can on others choosing to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ and becoming a part of His forever family.

As we continue our series that we started last week, THE DAY OF MERCY, I want to look at with you the biblical idea that God can and desires to use anyone for His eternal purposes. It is because of His mercy, as we will see. Would you read with me Romans 6:13. Let's begin, **“Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.”** Listen to how the Message translation puts this verse: **“That means you must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives. Don't give it the time of day. Don't even run little errands that are connected with that old way of life. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time--remember, you've been raised from the dead!--into God's way of doing things.”**

Here is the problem, church. A lot of people secretly fear that God could never use them. “God can use others, but He won't or can't use me.” They either feel disqualified or they feel unqualified. Disqualified because you might say to yourself, “I know my past. I know my failures and mistakes. I know the sins I have committed.” Guess what, friend, you're dead wrong. Some people feel unqualified. “I don't have her talents. I don't have that guys gifts. I don't have this or that ability. I don't have the education, the background”-- and the list goes on. When you go through history, no one has been used quite like Paul who wrote just over half the N.T. He personally almost single handedly spread Christianity all over the Roman Empire. He planted churches all over the known

world. It would be very difficult to argue that anyone has ever been used more by God than this man named Paul. Yet Paul had an amazing past that wasn't very good. In one of the books he wrote, 2 Corinthians, chapter 4--which was written to Christians that lived in the city of Corinth--he gives us **FIVE SECRETS TO REMAINING AVAILABLE TO GOD** so that He can use us for His purposes, plans and glory. If you want God's abiding blessing on your life, and you want His power to flow through you and that your life truly does matter for eternity, then you want to understand these five secrets and build them into the core of your life.

I. Never forget it's all because of God's mercy

Mercy can be defined as: Undeserved forgiveness and unearned kindness

Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Grace is God giving us something we do not deserve. When someone forgives, you don't deserve it. It cost them to cancel your debt against them. That is mercy in its most practical demonstration. I have seen a trend in the last 30-plus years. As our culture has decided that Jesus and Christianity does more harm than good, and in the counseling profession the ethic of forgiving people has all but disappeared. When demonstrating mercy is no longer important, our culture has become meaner, angrier, crass and crude. When someone shows you kindness and you can't pay them back, that's mercy. God treats you with mercy every second of your life. The first thing we must remember is that everything that God does in us and through us is because of His mercy. Everything God does through you to make a contribution to the world, He does by mercy. We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. It is because of His compassion and love. God's mercy and compassion is one of His leading traits and characteristics. Many people think the God of the O.T. is different than the N.T. God, but nothing could be further from the truth. You might be surprised to see, feel and hear how God describes Himself in the O.T. When Moses asked God to show him His glorious presence, let's look at what God did. Exodus 34:6 says this: **"The Lord passed in front of Moses, calling out, 'Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.'"** Mercy in the O.T., according to Dr. William Mounce, **"...is one of the richest,**

most theologically insightful terms in the OT. It denotes ‘Kindness, love and loyalty.’” In the N.T. the GK word *Eleeo* describes the emotional response that results in action towards a person who has experienced suffering or affliction. God’s leading approach towards you is one of mercy, kindness, loyalty and patience. In 2 Corinthians 4:1 Paul writes, **“Since God in His mercy has given us this ministry or work to do, we never give up.”** Ministry is a word that has been misunderstood, and even abused, in the church and our culture. Ministry simply means when you use your gifts, talents, skills and finances to serve someone else. It’s not something you do when we meet like this only, but your ministry is what you do in the world when you meet other people. Every one of you has a ministry, and every one of you is a minister. Not everyone will be a lead pastor like I am, but every one of you is a minister. Another term is servant. We are all created by God to serve everyone we come in contact with. Whatever career you’re in, that is part of your ministry. And God says your ministry is His mercy to you, and He wants to flow His mercy, kindness, love, and loyalty through you to others. Loved ones, you were created to make a contribution with your life. You were not created to live for yourself or to take up space. God shaped and designed you to serve Him by serving others. When you understand God’s mercy, you don’t have to prove your worth to Him. This frees us from having to perform for God and others. You belong to Jesus. This gives you worth, value and significance. Also because of God’s mercy, I don’t have to wallow in my mistakes. We all make mistakes. We all sin. We all blow it. Because of God’s mercy I can repent, but I don’t have to wallow or swallow my mistakes. I can confess them and turn from them and be who Jesus has created me to be. Paul is a great example of this principle. Though he made one of the greatest impacts in the world in his day, before he surrendered his life to Jesus he was the equivalent of a modern day terrorist. He hunted down Christians and beat them, killed some and imprisoned others. 1 Timothy 1:12-16 says, **“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him, 13 even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. 14 Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus. 15 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it:**

‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’--and I am the worst of them all. 16 But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of His great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life.” It doesn’t matter what you have done in your past. God says, “If you will surrender your life to Me, I forgive and cleanse you and then give you the power to overcome your past so you can be present in the now and impact people with the love, acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.” Any ability you have to see people’s lives transformed is simply and only because of God’s mercy. This is Paul’s first secret to remaining available to be used by God to fulfill His purposes and plans for your life. Please write this down in your notes. **EVERY SAINT HAS A PAST AND EVERY SINNER HAS A FUTURE!**

II. Be genuine and real

This is the commitment you make to living a life of integrity and character. You learn to be consistent and to become a person of your word. Genuine and real people understand how important it is to make commitments and then fulfill them. You see, God can only use you to your fullest when you are ruthlessly you. We all start off as originals, and we end up as being carbon copies. We too often try to be like other people so we can earn their love and affection. This just doesn’t work, loved friends. Many people think in order for God to use them they have to become someone different. You don’t have to be anyone different than who you are, because you can’t become anyone but who God made you to be. As you continue to commit yourself everyday to becoming more and more like Jesus, the changes that are made in you are because of His Holy Spirit who lives in you. The changes you make are for Jesus. As you do that, you become more real and genuine. God only wants you to be you. He wants you to take off any masks that you’re using and just be you. God does want you to be a fake. A phony. A poser. A pretender. The mask you might be wearing today blocks the image of Jesus from flowing through you. He made you to be you. Hear me, loved ones. God’s love is not based on how you act. If my thinking and behavior need to change, it isn’t so God will love me more, but it is so I will be able to thoroughly enjoy who He has made me to be. I will have a greater impact on those around me when I am true to who He has made me to be. If you try to be

someone that you're not, thinking that's going to please God or your spouse or anyone else, three things are going to happen in your life. 1) You will always be under the stress of pretending to be someone you're not. 2) You will struggle with the fear of being exposed. What if people find out who I really am and what I'm really like? 3) You will end up manipulating other people because you're fearful of being who God made you to be. 2 Corinthians 4:2 says, **"We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don't try to trick anyone or distort the Word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this."**

Often times the leading barrier that keeps people from being used by God, and experiencing His power and His presence and love in their lives, is the fear of being real. If I live out of who I really am, people won't like me. I'm afraid to let you see the real me because I believe you will reject me. So we live behind walls, and we fake it, and we wear these masks, and we live lives of insecurity. The antidote is to allow God's Spirit of mercy to have His way in your life. When the Holy Spirit enters your life you will begin to learn that He loves you unconditionally. That He will never stop loving you. His mercy will always be with you regardless of what you do. He will forgive you when you confess your faults. As you become convinced of God's love for you, then you're free to truly live out your life as His son and as His daughter. Romans 8:15 says, **"So you have not a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, 'Abba, Father.'"** In other words you can live under the bondage of fear, or you can live in the freedom of being God's son and daughter. This is how we remain free to serve God over the entirety of our lives.

III. Remember it's not about me

Every time you forget this, you're going to either become bitter from the problems in your life, or you're going to become proud from God's blessings in your life. When you forget life is not about you it's easy to take things so personally. In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul gives us his third key on how to remain available to God to use you for His purposes and His Kingdom. **"Our message is not about ourselves. It is about Jesus Christ as the Lord. We are merely**

your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul uses this phrase, "for Jesus' sake," twice in this chapter. He says it's not about us. It's all about Jesus. It's not about you. It's not about me. This is the most counter-cultural statement you can possibly make in today's culture. It's not about you. It's the exact opposite of everything you're taught. Because everything else in our society says it's all about you. Jesus Christ came to give us the greatest news we could ever hear. Hey humans, it's not about you. It is about your Heavenly Father. Your God is the center of the universe, not you. When you live a self-centered life, you become frustrated, unfulfilled and, eventually, bored. You might have to say this 20, 30, 40 times a day. When you get an opportunity to do something great you get to say, "Jesus it's not about me but You." What do you say about this? When you face a huge problem you get to say, "It's not about me." When you are praised by someone, you get to say, "It's not about me." When someone gets angry at you or you get angry at them, you get to say, "It's not about me." Please hear me. Learning to follow Jesus and learning to let Jesus use you in an amazing way is all about motivation. God is far more interested in why you do what you do than what you actually do. God is most interested in why you do what you do, why you say what you say and why you think what you think. The question you want to ask yourself is, "Why am I doing this? Why am I thinking the way I am? Why am I feeling the way I am?" The only right motivation is that I know this will please Jesus and I know He is asking me to do this. This is what Jesus would do if He was here in the flesh. 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, "**We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.**" This is the miraculous thing--that God wants to and can use us to promote His purposes and plans. It is the light of Jesus that can shine out of us, but we are fragile, weak and inconsistent. But this is what makes it so clear that when God flows through us it is not about us, but it is about the power of God. It is important to **REMEMBER IT'S NOT ABOUT ME, IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.**

IV. Use my pain to help others

Friends, this is one of the most important secrets of being used by God. God will use my pain if I let Him to help others. This is one of the most selfless things

you can do, and it proves when you do this that you get that it's not all about you. If you do this, God will bless you in ways you cannot possibly imagine. Use the things you're ashamed of, use the things that have hurt you the most, use the things that have been problems in your life in order to help other people going through those same things. God wants you to use your pain to help others. 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 Paul writes, **"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. 9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we're not destroyed. 10 Through suffering our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies."** Paul was used in an enormous way because he allowed God to use his pain, because he truly believed that God loved him and that God could use his pain, problems and pangs to impact, influence and see God's transformation in other people. But one of the greatest benefits to our pain and suffering is that it allows God to break those things in our lives that blocks us from receiving all that He wants to do through us. Difficulties and afflictions have a way of digging away at the chips on our shoulders. The anger that is deep within us. I will never forget when I heard Pastor Rick Warren say one of the things that has happened to him after his son committed suicide is that he has processed so much pain, hurt and anger that the result is that he has become fearless. What Satan had planned for the defeat of the Warren family they have only let God's love and presence create a fearlessness that is allowing them to reach more people for Jesus. Loved ones, God wants to create a deeper love in you for those who don't know Jesus. For those who are flailing in their lives. He will use your pain if you let Him to point others to Jesus. I believe that is what God is doing in us as a CVCHURCH family in this season of receiving and then giving God's mercy away to others. If you are in a hard season I declare to you, you will want to declare to Jesus that it is well with your soul and that you trust Him in what you're going through and to help you share this with others. It takes a fearlessness to say I don't care what others think of me; I am going to surrender totally to Jesus and live my life for His purpose, His glory and His honor. God will use your pain to help others.

V. Stay focused on eternity

You get to maintain an eternal perspective. This is how you protect yourself from getting overwhelmed by your current problems. The bigger your picture of God, the smaller your problems are. The more you understand what's going to happen in eternity, the less you're bothered by the bad things that happen here on earth. When you keep your focus on eternity you not only remember it's not about you, but you realize it's not about now. Friends, there are only three motivations in life. You're going to live your life on one of these three motivations. The first kind of motivation is what I call internal motivation. This is where a person says I live my life to be happy. I want to be popular. I want to be rich. I want to be loved. I want to be famous. These are your internal motivations to get you through life. The 2nd motivation is external motivation. You're afraid of being fired. Or you want to get the promotion. It's external. The carrot and the stick. It's the reward or the penalty of other people around you. You're motivated by what other people think. That's external. The highest motivation is the 3rd motivation. It's not internal, or external but Eternal. It's understanding that you are motivated by the fact that this life is a test. It's the get ready stage for the real life which is going to go on for trillions and trillions of years in Heaven. Paul gives us the secret of how to maintain an eternal perspective, especially when life is painful. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 says, **“For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever.”** In other words, when you trust God with all of the negative and devastating things that happen with you and you trust that God can use them all, it produces a glory in you that creates a strength, weight and substance that--regardless what comes your way--you will not be moved. You will not waver. You will not sink. Are you ready to let God use you to advance His purposes, His plans and His agenda? Here are five secrets that will cause you to always be available to God's call on your life. Never forget it's all because of God's mercy that you can serve Him. Be genuine and real. He uses people who are genuine and authentic. Our culture hates counterfeits, fakes and phonies. Remember it's not about you. God wants you to commit to using your pain to help others. Stay focused on eternity.

Let's pray: If you're ready to be all in, you will want to pray this prayer with me. “Father God, we say we're all in. I don't want to be a casual Christian any

longer. So God, we say thank You for Your mercy. Help us to fully understand what You have done for us in forgiving us our sin. Forgiving our faults and our failures. For having compassion and pity on us in our powerlessness. I choose to stop living for myself, and I want to start being used by You for the purpose that You created me for. I admit I've been afraid to go all in with You in the past, but I'm not going to listen to my fears any longer. I will not let my past hold me back. I'm all in, Jesus. It is in Your name I pray."