



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Session 8: Mercy Extended

Suggested Week of Use: January 25, 2026

Core Passage: Matthew 9:10-19, 23-26

News Story Summary

Country singer Jelly Roll (whose real name is Jason DeFord) received a special Christmas gift from Tennessee Governor Bill Lee: a pardon for all the crimes the singer committed. Jelly Roll's offenses, which began when he was about 14 years old, included shoplifting, drug possession, drug distribution, and aggravated robbery. For the robbery charge, he spent two years in prison. Tennessee's Board of Parole unanimously recommended the pardon.

Looking back, Jelly Roll describes himself as a horrible person. However, while in prison he found out that he had a daughter. In one interview, he called that revelation his Damascus Road experience. From then on, he began turning his life around. He earned his high school diploma and decided to focus on a music career, beginning the long road to stardom that has included being named the Country Music Association's New Artist of the Year in 2023 and multiple Grammy nominations.

Jelly Roll has said the pardon will make international travel easier and will help with his Christian missionary work. While he had been baptized as a teenager, Jelly Roll reconnected with his faith around the age of 40.

For more about this story, search "Jelly Roll Pardon."

Engage

To supplement the Engage activities, encourage the group to recall a time when they were shown mercy. Allow a few volunteers to share their experiences. Lead a brief discussion on why mercy can be so meaningful to us. Say: *One high profile celebrity recently received mercy for his past crimes.* Share information about the pardon country music star Jelly Roll received from the state of Tennessee. Ask: *Why do you think Jelly Roll was granted a pardon?* Discuss responses. Say: *We may not be drug dealers or guilty of armed robbery, but we are sinners all the same. So, we need mercy, and we need to extend that mercy to others in need. As we study this session, we'll see how Jesus set the ultimate example by extending mercy to sinners.*

Challenge

To supplement the Challenge activities, refer to Jelly Roll's pardon. Discuss how Jelly Roll's story might compare with some of the people Jesus helped in today's session. Remind adults that we are called to show mercy in a way that imitates Jesus. Encourage them to suggest individuals or groups who might be considered "tax collectors and sinners" today. Ask: *How can we show mercy to these individuals?* Close the session in prayer, asking God to transform each person's heart so they can see people as He sees them and to show mercy where He would show mercy.