

THE HEART OF MERCY

6-WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

This Care Group study guide aims to encourage us to live out our calling as people of God who have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10)—to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27).

This study, inspired by and adapted from Tim Keller's book *Ministries of Mercy*, will provide a biblical understanding of why, as people of God, we should care for and serve our community, and why extending mercy to the poor and powerless is essential evidence of our faith.

In this study, you will encounter hard-hitting truths intended to make you feel uncomfortable and challenged if you have not fully embraced your calling as God's people to love and serve the poor and powerless in your community. Whether or not you embrace this call is clearly reflected in how you spend your time and resources. How much time do you dedicate to serving your community? How much money do you give to those who need it most?

We hope that by studying this material with your care group, your hearts will be stirred and that as a group, you will consider serving the city as part of your spiritual discipline and be encouraged to take action in loving your neighbors as yourselves.

Topics Covered

- 1. Motivation for Mercy** • Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 2 Corinthians 8:9
- 2. True Faith Demands Mercy** • Matthew 25:31-46; Isaiah 58:6-10
- 3. Holistic Nature of Mercy** • James 1:22-27; Isaiah 1:10-17
- 4. Church's Response to Mercy** • Acts 2:44-47; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15
- 5. Personal Response to Mercy** • 1 Peter 4:7-11; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:22-27
- 6. Living Out Mercy** • Luke 10:25-37

Key Verses

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Isaiah 1:17

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

James 2:17

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 John 3:17-18

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Isaiah 58:6-7

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Luke 10:36-37

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

WEEK 01 • MOTIVATION FOR MERCY

A true understanding of God's grace in light of our spiritual poverty should compel us to be gracious and merciful to others, especially those in poverty.

Preface

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 2 Corinthians 8:9

This week, we will explore the true and enduring motivation for living a life of mercy as an outpouring of superabounding love—a sacrifice of praise in response to our experience of God's grace. None of us are deserving of God's grace, and only by recognizing our spiritual poverty can we truly value it, placing us on equal ground with everyone else. As a result, we should feel compelled to be open and generous, even toward the outcasts and the unlovely.

Warm-up question: Have you ever received something you did not expect or deserve? How did you feel, and how did you respond?

Study

The world was originally created in perfect harmony to reflect God's glory. It was created to submit to His rule, and God has given human beings the authority to become His co-rulers. All creations, including humans, were designed to depend on God; however, when humans rebelled against Him, we became separated from Him and fell under a curse. Hence, we experience unfulfilled needs that bring us emptiness, frustration, and pain.

In his book, Tim Keller defined the four aspects of alienation that humans experience as a result of sin: alienation from God, self, others, and nature. This multidimensional condition of alienation can only be reconciled by God Himself, who has given us salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God can be entered now through repentance and faith, the new birth; it is also present in power through the Holy Spirit in us.

Read Romans 5:1-11 to answer the following questions.

1. How did Paul describe our conditions for which God demonstrated His love? (Rom 5:6-10)

Key ideas: We were described as (1) “**helpless/powerless**” (Greek: *asthenon*), which means we were incapable of working out any righteousness for ourselves, (2) **ungodly**—neglectful of God, (3) **sinner**—neither “righteous” nor “good”, and (4) **enemies**.

2. How has God demonstrated His love for us? What makes it *special*? (Rom 5:6-11)

3. What are the outcomes of our justification by faith? (Rom 5:1-11)

Key ideas: (1) **Justification** (*having been declared* righteous), (2) **peace** with God, (3) **access** into God's grace (continuing relationship with God), (4) **hope** of the glorious future and in the assurance of our salvation which enables us to continue to rejoice amid sufferings and interpersonal conflicts (5) **indwelling of the Holy Spirit**, (6) **deliverance** from future condemnation, and (7) **reconciliation** with God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 to answer the following questions.

4. What did God give us and what does it entail? (2 Cor 5:16-19)

Key ideas: **Ministry of reconciliation**. God reconciled **us and the world** to himself through **Christ**, not counting our sins against us.

5. How did God accomplish and grant us this ministry of reconciliation? (2 Cor 5:18, 21)

Notes: There are three ways to explain how Jesus Christ became "sin": (1) God treated Him **as if He were a sinner**, pouring out His wrath and making Him bear the guilt and penalty for all sins; (2) Jesus became the **perfect and final sin offering**; and (3) Christ became the **focal point of sin under God's judgment**, where sin was **judged in time and space**.

6. What are the implications of this ministry of reconciliation for us? (2 Cor 5:16-21)

Key ideas: (1) We become "**a new creation**" in that our viewpoints and certain old conditions and relationships (such as enslavement to sin) change; and (2) we become **Christ's ambassadors**—messengers and representatives who not only convey a message but also take action.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." - 2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV

7. Considering **Romans 5:1-11**, **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**, and **2 Corinthians 8:9**, how would you summarize the gospel of grace in one sentence?

*"Though we are all lying in our own blood, spiritually bankrupt and lost, yet God has provided spiritual wealth for us. He impoverished his Son so that his spiritual riches, his righteousness, could be given to those who believe. Though poor, we have been made rich **through the mercy of God**." - Tim Keller*

Application

1. In what ways were you an enemy of God? How might recognizing our spiritual poverty inform the heart posture we should have toward those in physical, social, and spiritual need?

2. What makes it difficult for you to be motivated to live out mercy?

3. How have you been living as a new creation and Christ's ambassador, especially to the outcasts and the unlovely? How have you been involved in ministries of mercy in the past?

Follow-up Exercise: Fasting or Abstaining from Certain Activities

Fasting is a spiritual practice that has historically held the same significance as reading the Bible or attending weekly gatherings in the Church. It plays a crucial role in reconnecting our minds and bodies, allowing us to fully surrender ourselves to God. Additionally, fasting serves as a means of promoting biblical justice, highlighting the needs of our neighbors both near and far. It urges us to address those needs, opposing evil while supporting God's Kingdom.

This week, we challenge you to fast for one meal and spend that time praying for the poor, sharing the money you would have spent on food with those in need. Alternatively, you may choose to abstain from social media and use that time to educate yourselves and pray for the poor, or use the time you typically spend on recreation to volunteer at a local NGO.