

WEEK 02 • TRUE FAITH DEMANDS MERCY

True faith in God necessitates a life that is overflowing with love and acts of mercy to meet the needs of the poor as a reflection of His heart

Preface

Last week, we learned about the abounding grace of God that rescues us from spiritual bankruptcy and reframes our perspective toward those in need. Through this grace, we recognize that those in physical, social, psychological, and spiritual poverty stand on equal ground with us, enabling and compelling us to extend mercy.

This week, we will learn that our heart's condition and our response to the poor are tests of our genuine faith in God. Our view of God's grace shapes our view of worldly possessions and generosity. Therefore, we must cultivate a sensitive social conscience and the readiness to perform acts of mercy, reflecting our true faith and God's heart.

Warm-up question: Look at how you spend your time and resources; what are your priorities?

Study

Tim Keller defines the ministry of mercy as meeting “felt” needs through deeds. Before the fall, there was no need for this ministry, as everything existed in a state of *shalom* (peace), with no separation from God and all needs met in Him. Humanity's first mission was to subdue and have dominion over the earth in this harmonious state. However, since the fall, this mission has taken on new forms as alienation from God has created new needs.

In the Old Testament, God called the people of Israel to restore *shalom*. This is done by loving Him with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and by loving their neighbors as themselves. However, they failed to heed this call. In His grace, God provided restoration through Jesus, who reconciles us to Him and establishes His kingdom on earth. We are now invited once again to cultivate *shalom* by living out the command to love Him and our neighbors. This call reflects His heart, and as God's people, our lives should demonstrate it.

Read Matthew 25:31-46 to answer the following questions.

Matthew 25:31-46 contains the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, part of Jesus' teaching on the Mount of Olives about the end times, including His return and the final judgment. This teaching was a response to the hypocrisy of religious leaders. Jesus urged His disciples to stay alert, spread the good news of His Kingdom, and live out His teachings.

1. What will happen when the Son of Man comes? Who will be gathered, what are they referred to as, and how will they be separated? (Mat 25:31-33)
2. Compare and contrast how this passage describes those on the King's right and left in the following aspects: (1) what they are called, (2) what they did, and (3) their fate. (Mat 25:34-46)

3. What is one question that both the righteous and the unrighteous ask, and what answer is given to them? What does this reveal about how one's faith should influence one's actions?
4. What are the consequences for those who do not serve the least? What does this say about God's priorities and the ways we ought to express our love for Him? (Mat 25:41-46)

Read Isaiah 58:1-12 to answer the following questions.

Isaiah 58 confronts the people of Israel for performing empty rituals, such as fasting, instead of true worship through compassion and justice. It emphasizes that the essence of their religion should stem from a loving relationship with God, rooted in obedience and faith, rather than from seeking to influence Him or gain rewards.

5. Compare and contrast the fasting that pleases God with that which does not. (Isa 58:2-10)

Notes: **True fasting that pleases God** involves giving up wickedness and oppression for the sake of the needy, reflecting His nature of selflessness. **Fasting that does not please God** is when individuals fail to sacrifice their desires, treat others poorly, and attempt to manipulate Him for blessings.

6. What is God's promise to those who practice the true fasting that He desires? How does this offer a glimpse of God's ultimate restoration, which requires our participation? (Isa 58:8-12)

Application

1. What are your real motivations for serving the least? How can you take steps to express your love for God through service?
2. What is your genuine response to those who are poor and needy? What is hindering you from serving them?
3. In what ways might your religious practices be more about appearance than true devotion?
4. What specific injustices or needs in your community can you address to fulfill the call to help the oppressed?

Follow-up Exercise: Prayer Walk

A prayer walk is a form of intercessory prayer that involves walking through a specific area while praying for the people, places, and needs of that neighborhood. It is often described as "praying on site with insight". This practice helps us understand how to pray by engaging with the sights and sounds of the area, and its purpose is to seek divine guidance, intercede for others, and raise awareness of community issues.

This week, go on a prayer walk with your group. Below are some practical instructions to guide you. As you walk, be sure to meditate on the passages we are studying and remain sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is revealing in your heart.

- **Before the Walk:** Choose a neighborhood and start with prayer, asking God for guidance and insights.
- **During the Walk:** Observe your surroundings and the people, praying silently for their needs and for the land, while staying open to the Holy Spirit's leading.
- **After the Walk:** Share insights and observations with your group, and conclude with a corporate prayer of thanks and requests for future guidance.