

“The Son of Man has come to seek
and to save what was lost.”

Luke 19:10

Mercy

One Church, Encountering Jesus,
Equipping Disciples, and **Living Mercy**

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Objectives

1. Draw hearts to a greater participation in the Mercy of God.

The theme for each week centers around Jesus' mission to reveal the merciful heart of his Father.

2. Facilitate an encounter with God through Scripture.

This series does not primarily provide an *education* in faith, but *life transformation* through an encounter with the living God.

3. Engage hearts through an experience of beauty.

The Psalm and painting for each week help engage the emotions and arouse the imagination as aids to prayer.

4. Form authentic friendships.

Make time for casual conversation and the sharing of life together outside of the weekly meetings.

5. Send out witnesses to share the Good News.

As Pope Francis said in *The Joy of the Gospel*, "anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love." We expect that many who complete the series as a participant will go on to lead their own group with encouragement and minimal coaching.

Who do I invite?

Those most likely to benefit from the *Mercy Bible* study are those who:

- Already have a personal relationship with Jesus
- Desire to follow Jesus more faithfully
- Are seeking a deeper experience of God's mercy in their life and relationships

Note: These characteristics refer to internal dispositions and attitudes that are best discovered through personal conversations where individuals feel heard and respected.

Disclaimers

1. *This is not group counseling.* If someone is experiencing strong emotion (particularly if it is a negative emotion), some in the group may be tempted to step in to comfort in a way that could be distracting for the rest of the group. Do your best to redirect the conversation and allow Jesus to finish what he has started in their heart.
2. *This is more that intellectual discussion.* We are not primarily seeking intellectual understanding, but prayer – a heart to heart conversation with God. As such, historical background, language, and other intellectual insights are best left to another time.

Suggested Meeting Outline

20 Minutes	Casual Conversation	Provide your group members an opportunity to build relationships – it will allow them to be more honest in later group discussions.
10 Minutes	Psalm & Conversation Starters	Read the Psalm aloud and check in on last week's group action.
45 Minutes	WRAP with the Gospel	Ask for a volunteer to read the Gospel passage aloud; then follow the process for WRAP as outlined in the guide.
10 Minutes	Going Deeper	Read the Scripture verses and ask the "going deeper questions" to guide your group's discussion.
5 Minutes	Group Action & Psalm	Introduce the group action and encourage your group to take the challenge. Then read the Psalm aloud as a closing prayer.
Total Time: 90 Minutes	End on Time	Everyone is free to leave at this point, but the leader should be prepared to stick around for anyone would like to continue the discussion.

1. Pray to the Holy Spirit for open hearts and the gift of prayer. Draw your group members' attention to any particular graces they are seeking in this time.
2. **WRITE**
 - a. **Read the Passage Aloud.** It is best to have a consistent reader, as some people get distracted as reading styles change.
 - b. Guide your group members to notice where the Lord draws their attention and **write** it down. This could be a word, phrase, or image. Give them permission to re-read the passage silently.
 - c. Invite anyone in your group who feels comfortable to share what the Lord is bringing to their attention. Acknowledge their contributions with a simple smile while encouraging silence rather than conversation at this point.
3. **REFLECT**
 - a. Read it aloud again
 - b. Invite your group members to deeper reflection on the scripture passage, saying something like, "Let the Lord draw your mind back to what initially grabbed your attention and use your imagination and intellect to **reflect** on what is going on in the passage."
 - c. Allow your group members time to write, then invite them to share as they feel comfortable.
4. **APPLY**
 - a. Read the passage aloud a final time.
 - b. Invite your group members to see the personal application of the Gospel passage, saying something like, "This time make it personal as you **apply** the passage to yourself. Where are you in the story?"
 - c. Allow time for writing, then invite people to share.
5. **PRAY**
 - a. Allow time for each member of your group to write a personal **prayer** in response to God.
 - b. Close with an Our Father.

The WRAP Method

*WRAP is an acronym and method for Lectio Divina from the book WRAP Yourself In Scripture © by Karen & Lawrence Dwyer published by The Institute for Priestly Formation (2011, 2018). The WRAP Method involves four steps: Write, Reflect, Apply, and Pray with Scripture.

Keys for Success

1. Complete the *Small Group Action Plan* (on the next pages).

The Bible Study Action Plan will guide you through all of the logistical considerations of beginning a Bible Study.

2. Pray for your group members daily.

God is the one who changes hearts. Ask him every day to supply the grace needed for deep and lasting conversion of hearts.

3. Read the participant guide ahead of time.

Pray through the Gospel passage for the upcoming week ahead of time, and think through how you might answer the discussion questions.

4. Meet Weekly.

We recommend your group meet weekly through the initial study for consistency and maximum impact. However, if your group continues to meet, you might consider adjusting your meeting frequency to bi-weekly.

5. Meet Seasonally.

Some seasons of life are busier than others. It is a good idea to take periodic breaks, asking for commitments of around 5-8 weeks at a time.

6. Facilitate discussion instead of teaching.

Setting yourself up as the "teacher" can discourage participation from group members who are unsure of what they believe or who already feel like they don't belong. Trust that Jesus is revealing himself to them through their prayer with the scriptures, in just the way they need.

7. Build relationships with your group members.

Disciples are made in the context of authentic friendships. So, your effectiveness as a group leader and disciple-maker requires that you maximize the amount of time you spend together with your group outside the formal group time.

8. Cast vision for multiplying groups.

As you near the end of the series, begin encouraging your group members to look beyond your group to other people in their lives who might be ready to hear the Good News of Jesus. It is important to avoid an insular mentality - sharing the love of Jesus should be a natural overflow of our own encounter.



Small Group Action Plan

Questions for Reflection

Stepping Out in Faith

“Jesus said to them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’” What “loaves” do you have that the Lord can bless and multiply? (e.g., hospitality, listening ears, gift of gab, etc.).

List any fears about leading a small group that might be holding you back (e.g., lack of knowledge, fear of making invitations, disqualifying past, etc).

Help from the Lord

Who might help you co-lead as your “wingman” if you asked them?

Who will you ask to keep you accountable to this Action Plan, through both encouragement and practical coaching?

Logistics

Choose Day of the Week:

Sun
Mon
Tues
Wed
Thurs
Fri
Sat

Choose Location:

My home
Conference room at work
Someone else's home
Zoom
Coffee shop
Park
Other location: _____

Choose Time:

Before work
Over lunch
After weekend Mass
In the evening
After parish/school event
Other time

Target Start Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Make Invitations By: ____ / ____ / ____

Childcare Options:

No childcare
Grandparents
Split cost of a sitter
Other: _____

Possible Roles to Delegate to Other Members of the Group:

Provide drinks
Icebreaker
Provide snacks
Opening prayer
Other: _____

Set Time:

Start: ____:____ am/pm
End: ____:____ am/pm

Identifying your Mission Field

List the different affinity groups in which you consider yourself an “insider” (e.g., school parents, soccer moms, co-workers, neighborhood friends, etc). Consider others who belong to these groups as potential small group participants.

Use the table on the next page to plan your invitations:

1. Begin listing the names of people you could invite to your small group (6-10 attendees is ideal)
2. Ask the Lord why he wants that person to come, and write that down (use this reason when you make your invitation)
3. Think about when you will see the person and have an opportunity for a face-to-face conversation (if at all possible) – when and how will you strike up a conversation?
4. Pray for these people by name, both now and throughout your small groups



Mercy Study



Week One: Love of Enemies

Psalm 145:8-10

℟ The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. ℟

The Lord is good to all, compassionate toward all your works. ℟

All your works give you thanks, Lord and your faithful bless you. ℟

Conversation Starter

1. For what in your life are you most grateful?
2. If you could change anything about how you were raised, what would it be?



The Crucifixion, seen from the Cross, c.1890 (James Tissot)

Week One:
Love of Enemies

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 6:27-36

[Jesus said to his disciples] "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful."

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

Week One:
Love of Enemies

Going Deeper Questions

1. Who is someone you consider a very merciful person?
2. What inspires you about the way they live mercy?

Group Action

Think of a person you have a broken or strained relationship with. This week, spend extra time in prayer asking the Lord to show his kindness to that person.

Psalm 145:8-10

✠ The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. **R**

The Lord is good to all, compassionate toward all your works. R

All your works give you thanks, Lord and your faithful bless you. R

Week Two: To Seek and To Save

Psalm 145:17-19

✠ The Lord is gracious and merciful.

The Lord is just in all his ways, merciful in all his works. ✠

The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. ✠

He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. ✠

Conversation Starter

1. What is your most treasured memory?
2. What is your most terrible memory?



Zacchaeus in the Tree, (Greek Orthodox Icon)

Week Two:
To Seek and To Save

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 19:1-10

Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

1. *Journal of Management Studies*, 1997, 34, 1, 1-14.

1. What can we learn from this passage about forgiveness, reconciliation, and restitution for sin?
2. Jesus says that his mission is “to seek and to save what was lost”. What does this mean to you?

Spend time this week praying with the Examination of Conscience on the back of this page. Those who are Catholic should commit to receiving the sacrament of reconciliation in the next week. As a group, identify confession times in your parish or a neighboring parish.

℟ The Lord is gracious and merciful.

The Lord is just in all his ways, merciful in all his works. R
The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. R
He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. R



Welcome home

The Light is On For You

Examination of Conscience

Confession can seem intimidating for a lot of people, but with some simple preparation, it can be a healing encounter with Christ that fills us with peace. Pray that God will give you peace and help you make a good confession.

Reflect on ways you have harmed your relationship with God, yourself & others using the question below.

- + Do I pray to God every day? Have I thanked God for His gifts to me?
- + Did I put my faith in danger through readings contrary to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm-reading or fortune-telling?
- + Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath?
- + Did I miss Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation through my own fault? Am I attentive at Mass? Did I keep fast and abstinence on the prescribed days?
- + Did I disobey my parents and lawful superiors in important matters?
- + Did I hate or quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Did I refuse to forgive? Was I disrespectful?
- + Did I get drunk? Did I take illicit drugs?
- + Did I consent to, recommend, advise or actively take part in an abortion?
- + Did I willfully look at pornography, entertain impure thoughts or engage in impure conversations or actions? Did I use artificial means to prevent conception?
- + Was I unfaithful to my spouse? Did I engage in sexual activity outside of marriage?
- + Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I been honest and just in my business relations?
- + Have I been responsive to the needs of the poor and respected the dignity of others?
- + Did I tell lies? Did I sin by calumny, or detraction, of others? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters?
- + Have I envied other people?



How do I go to Confession?

Confess your sins aloud to the priest, who listens lovingly on behalf of Christ and the Church.

Receive Penance, the prayers or good deeds the priest gives you to begin healing the relationships hurt by your sins.

Pray an Act of Contrition, a simple expression to God that you are sorry for your sins and that you resolve to leave sin behind and live in the light!

Receive Absolution, the words the priest speaks which reconcile you to God and the Church.

An Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

Week Three: The Prodigal Son

Psalm 103:8-9, 13-14

R O bless the Lord, my soul!

Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
He will not always chide, nor does he keep his wrath forever. **R**

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him,
For he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust. **R**

Conversation Starter

1. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most?
2. How do you feel about your relationship with your father?



Return of the Prodigal Son, c.1661-1669 (Rembrandt)

Week Three: **The Prodigal Son**

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 15:11-24

Jesus said, “A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’ So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

Week Three: **The Prodigal Son**

Going Deeper Questions

1. Why do you think the father was so quick to see his son coming from a long way off?
2. What does this tell us about God's disposition toward us when we have sinned and turned our backs to him?

Group Action

Some time in the next couple days, return to this Gospel passage and pray with it alone. Talk to the Father about where you see yourself in this story.

Psalm 103:8-9, 13-14

R O bless the Lord, my soul!

Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. He will not always chide, nor does he keep his wrath forever. **R**

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him,
For he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust. **R**

Week Four: **Pardon of the Sinful Woman**

Psalm 33:20-22

℞ Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

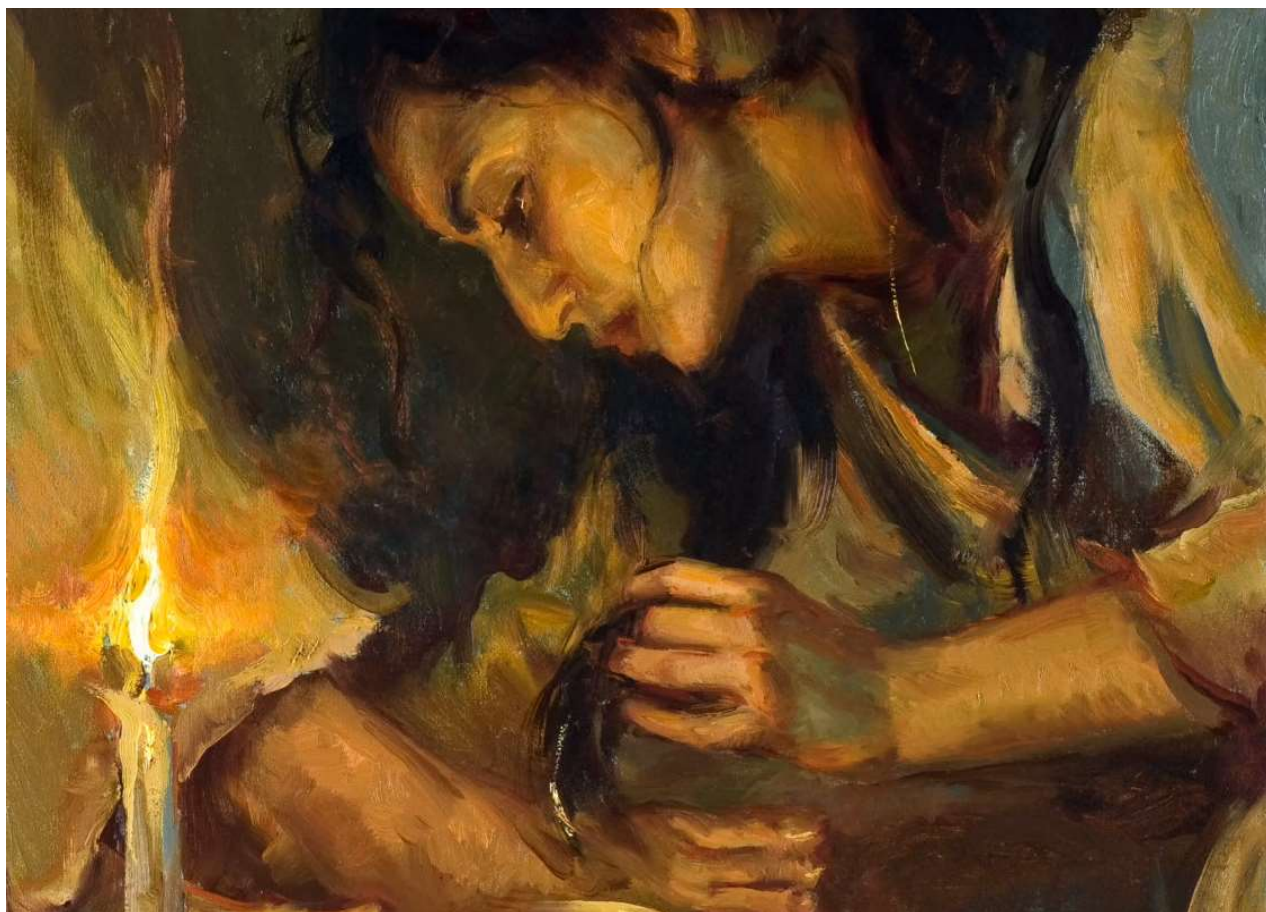
Our soul waits for the Lord, he is our help and shield. ℞

For in him our hearts rejoice; in his holy name we trust. ℞

May your mercy, Lord, be upon us; as we put our hope in you. ℞

Conversation Starter

1. What is one thing you are most grateful for this past week?
2. What has been the hardest era of your life?



Forgiven, c. 1965 (Daniel Gerhartz)

Week Four: **Pardon of the Sinful Woman**

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him... Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears... When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

Week Four:
Pardon of the Sinful Woman

Going Deeper Questions

1. What would you say is the connection between mercy and gratitude in your life?
2. How does gratitude typically show up in your life?

Group Action

Spend 5 minutes looking at an image of Jesus hanging on the cross, considering how he sacrificed himself out of love for *you*.

Psalm 33:20-22

R Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Our soul waits for the Lord, he is our help and shield. R

For in him our hearts rejoice; in his holy name we trust. **R**

May your mercy, Lord, be upon us; as we put our hope in you. **R**

Week Five: The Rich Man and Lazarus

Psalm 103:1-4

R The Lord's kindness is everlasting to those who fear him.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits. **R**

He pardons all your iniquities, he heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction, he crowns you with kindness and compassion. **R**

Conversation Starter

1. Your house, containing all you own, catches fire. After saving loved ones and pets, you have time to make a final dash to save one item. What would it be, and why?
2. Tell about a time you were forgotten or overlooked. How did you feel?



The Rich Man and the Poor Lazarus, c. 1625 (Hendrick ter Brugghen)

Week Five:
The Rich Man and Lazarus

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 16:19-31

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table... When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’ Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.’ He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ He said, ‘Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

1. In your experience, what makes showing mercy easy and joyful?
2. In your experience, what makes showing mercy challenging?

Schedule a one-on-one meeting with your group leader to pray WRAP together and talk about what you are taking away from this small group study so far.

℞ The Lord's kindness is everlasting to those who fear him.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits. **R**

He pardons all your iniquities, he heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction, he crowns you with kindness and compassion. **R**

Week Six: The Good Samaritan

1 Sam 2:6-8

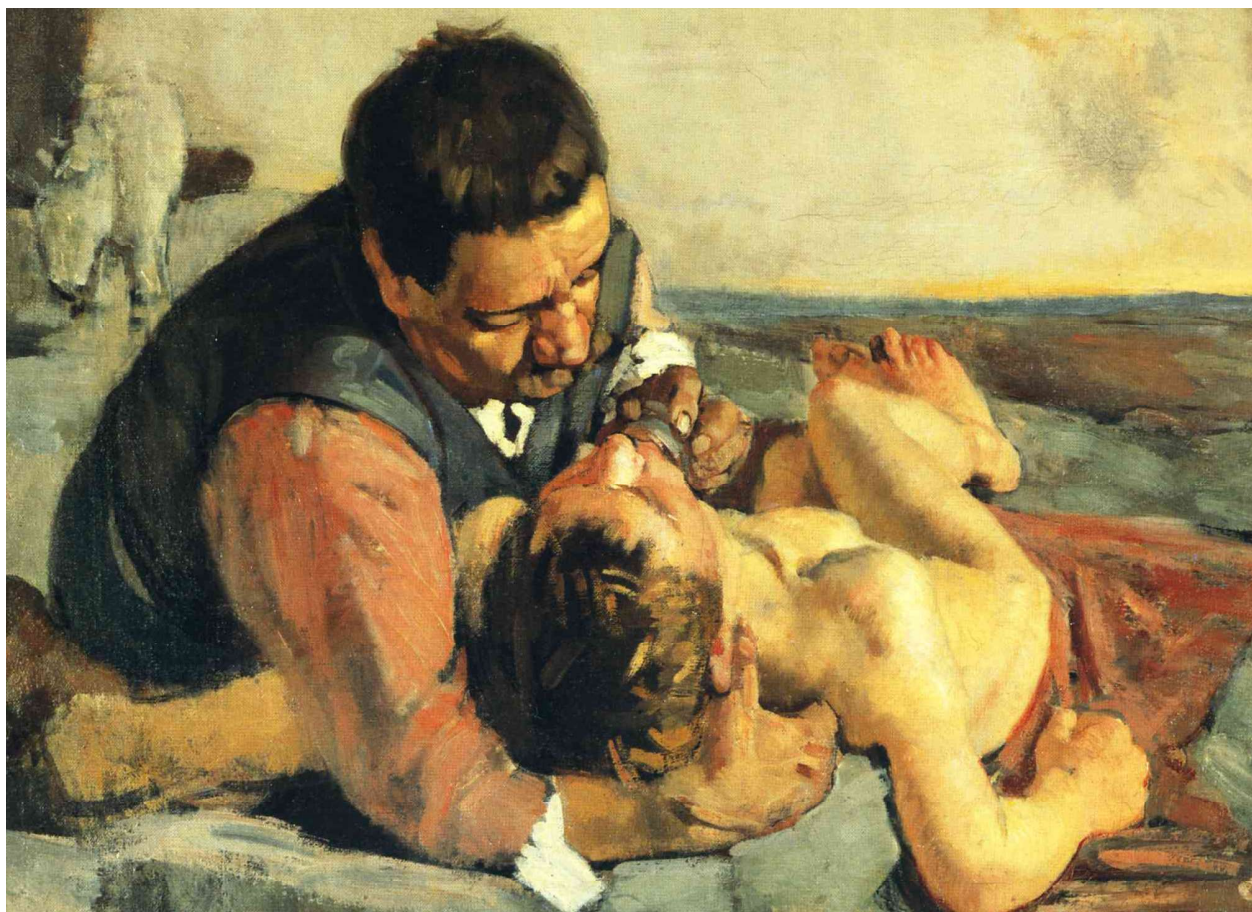
℟ My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior!

The Lord puts to death and gives life; he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich, he humbles, and also exalts. **℟**

He raises the needy from the dust; from the dung heap he lifts up the poor,
To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage. **℟**

Conversation Starter

1. If you were going to become good friends with the group, what do they need to know about you?
2. Share something you appreciate about each member of the group.



The Good Samaritan, c. 1885 (Ferdinand Hodler)

Week Six:
The Good Samaritan

WRAP with the Gospel - Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” The Parable of the Good Samaritan. But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Write

Reflect

Apply

Pray

Week Six:
The Good Samaritan

Going Deeper Questions

1. What does it mean to be a good neighbor according to the Jesus?
2. What do you think enabled the good Samaritan to respond so readily and with such generosity when he encountered suffering?

Group Action

This week, tell someone (a friend, family member, co-worker, etc) about how you have encountered Jesus and the difference that encounter has made in your life.

1 Sam 2:6-8

℟ My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior!

The Lord puts to death and gives life; he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again. The Lord makes poor and makes rich, he humbles, and also exalts. **R**

He raises the needy from the dust; from the dung heap he lifts up the poor,
To seat them with nobles and make a glorious throne their heritage. R



Archdiocese *of* Omaha