



Small Group Discussion Guide



PREPARATION

❑ STUDY

Spend the week studying Matthew 25:31–40. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

❑ DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

❑ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

❑ LANDING POINT

Mercy is an action that shows others what Jesus is like.



GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

MERCIFUL CHARACTER

You see God's mercy all over the pages of the Bible. It is an essential quality of His character. Time and time again, God reveals that He is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." (Exodus 34:6). We see God's mercy most clearly in Jesus, who is God in human flesh. He came to show us what God is like. In Jesus we see mercy in action. Dan Parker explains, "No one embodies and personally illustrates the meaning of mercy as does Jesus. Like the Father, Jesus moved well beyond feeling compassion on the suffering. He always was 'moved with compassion' and 'showed mercy' when He encountered those hurting or down and out."¹

Jesus lived to show mercy and He calls us to do the same today. Mercy is an action that shows others what Jesus is like. Mercy is moved to respond in love and compassion towards others in need. This week your group will discuss how you can move from feeling compassion for those in need to acts of mercy.

Q: *How would you define mercy in your own words?*

Q: *Recall the last time that someone showed you mercy in a situation.*



LEARN

Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

THE KING IS COMING

Three days before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus talks with His disciples at the Mount of Olives about signs of His second coming and the end of the age. In teaching His disciples, Jesus uses two parables to illustrate how His followers need to be alert (parable of the ten virgins, Matthew 25:1–13) and active (parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14–30) as they wait for His return.

Then Jesus gives them a scene from the final judgement, when everyone from all nations will stand before Jesus, the King. How will Jesus judge the nations? He will separate them like a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

READ: *Matthew 25:31–40. What words come to mind as you imagine the scene of the final judgment?*

Q: *How does being alert and active relate to the final judgment?*

THE LEAST OF THESE

Jesus will welcome the righteous into God’s kingdom, but not the unrighteous. Why? Because the righteous showed themselves to be true disciples by their acts of mercy. They carried out Jesus’s example of mercy in action. They saw the needs of others and met them. They clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited those in prison. Jesus will tell them, “When I was in need, you helped me.” Surprised, the righteous will respond, “Lord, what do you mean? When did we do these things for you?” Then the Jesus will reply, “As you did it for one of the least of these you did it to me.”

Q: *What are some of the basic needs Jesus mentions in the passage? What are some practical ways you could meet those needs for others today?*

Q: *Why is showing mercy such a powerful testimony that you belong to Christ?*



Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL

Jesus is coming back, and He wants His followers to be alert and active as they wait for His return. What does it look like to be alert and active? Jesus teaches us that we are to be *faithful and fruitful*. We are to be faithful to His teaching and commands. We are to show others what He is like. We do that by being fruitful in doing acts of mercy for the “least of these” (v. 40).

When someone looks at your life, they should see the character of God that was evidenced in Jesus’s life. Jesus saw the needy and moved toward them with love and compassion. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, released people from bondage, and fed the hungry. All of these were acts of mercy done to reveal God’s merciful character. Of course, Jesus’s ultimate act of mercy was the cross, which showed how God made a way to forgive your sin by sending His Son to die in your place.

Q: *How does Jesus’s return in the future motivate you to be faithful and fruitful in your daily life?*

Q: *What can keep you from moving toward those in need with love and compassion?*

LEAVE A M.A.R.K.

God wants you to leave a mark on the lives of others around you. The Bible says He has already prepared good works for you to do (Ephesians 2:10). Look around and you will see opportunities to do those good works and show mercy to the “least of these.”

Showing mercy reveals a heart that has been transformed by God. A merciful heart that has been transformed is:

- **Motivated.** You desire to share Jesus with others through your life and words. Pleasing the Father—not out of duty, but out of delight in Him—motivates you to serve others.
- **Attentive.** You identify the “least of these” in your context and look for practical ways to serve them.
- **Responsive.** You let your compassion move you to act. You step off the sidelines and into the game as an

active participant.

- **Kind.** Your acts of mercy reflect God's kindness and love for others. You see those in need not as a charity case, but as made in God's image and worthy of your time and care.

Q: *Who are the "least of these" in your community?*

Q: *What's one thing you can do this week to see the "least of these" as Jesus sees them?*



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

THREE BASIC STEPS

To show mercy, Jesus calls you to take three basic steps. First, *pray*. Ask God to open your eyes and heart to the needs of others and where He wants you to go. Second, *leave* what's comfortable. Jesus left His Father's side to enter our world of sin and suffering to bring the good news of God's mercy. We are to do the same. Third, *go* to those in need. Engage with them in their world. That probably means sacrificing time and activities you normally enjoy for yourself so you can volunteer, meet with someone or serve others.

Q: *Why is it difficult to leave what's comfortable?*

GET INVOLVED

LOVEfirst is a movement to care for the people in our state who are loved by God, but who are often overlooked and forgotten. For LOVEfirst 2018, each of Pinelake's five campuses has adopted correctional facilities in effort to engage the Mississippi prison population and share the good news of God's love and mercy. In addition, there are other opportunities to serve in transitional ministries across the state.

The LOVEfirst initiative is a practical way you can get involved and give others a touch of mercy. Together, we can help men and women receive God's love and experience life change in Jesus Christ.

For more information about how you can join this ministry effort, visit our website at pinelake.org or download the Pinelake app.

 *What's one thing you will do this week to get involved in showing mercy?*



PRAY

Take the first basic step of praying for God to open your eyes and heart to the needs of others and where He wants you to go. Ask the Father to reveal anything that might be holding you back from leaving what's comfortable and engaging others in their world.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Psalm 103 and reflect on what this psalm says about God's merciful character.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



THE SON OF MAN Jesus refers to Himself as “the Son of Man” (v. 31) coming to judge the nations. This is a reference to Daniel 7:13–14, where God, the Ancient of Days, will give the kingdom to “one like a Son of Man.” For other references to Jesus’s second coming, see Matt. 16:27; 24:30; 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7.² For references to Jesus having all divine authority, see Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 12:2.³

SHEEP AND GOATS “In the countryside, sheep and goats mingled during the day. At night they were often separated. Sheep tolerate the cool air, but goats have to be herded together for warmth. In sparse grazing areas the animals might be separated during the day as well. But now these well-known, simple, pastoral details are freighted with symbolism. The right hand is the place of power and honor.”⁴

ACTS OF MERCY AS EVIDENCE Doing good works and showing mercy don’t save you. That’s not what Jesus taught His disciples. Rather, merciful acts are done in response to a righteousness given by God (an act of mercy itself), not a righteousness merited by good works. Good works and showing mercy are evidence of a transformed heart and mind that wants to see God’s kingdom advance through acts of mercy and compassion for others.

THE FRUITS OF WISDOM James tells us that wisdom from God “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:17). “This is mercy in action that moves beyond mere emotion and brings about healing, restoration, or whatever need that sparks the act of mercy.”⁵

ENDNOTES:

1. Dan Parker, “Mercy,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1106.
2. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 585.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Dan Parker, “Mercy,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1107.