

session 8 study guide

the open heart

the gift of mercy and
the gift of hospitality

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Mercy and hospitality are two of the spiritual gifts discussed in Romans. As with many of the spiritual gifts, these gifts have to do with how we treat and interact with others.

1. How would you define mercy?

2. How would you define hospitality?

the gift of mercy

“And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly . . . he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6,8 *NASB*).

The gift of mercy is a gift that gets little recognition yet has great personal rewards. To have mercy means to be kind or compassionate, and to relieve suffering, to forgive. The gift of mercy may be demonstrated by direct personal involvement with the sick, outcast, poor, aged, mentally ill, deformed, hungry, shut-in, disabled, deprived, widowed, sad, underprivileged, alcoholic or drug-addicted. A person with the gift of mercy understands and fervently wants to meet the needs of those who hurt.

The Pharisees and other masters of the Old Testament Law were always trying to test Jesus by scrutinizing His words and actions. In the following passage from Luke, Jesus talks about loving your neighbor. One of the teachers asks who we ought to consider our neighbor. Read Luke 10:30-37 to see Jesus’ response.

1. You may recognize this story as the parable of the Good Samaritan. What acts of mercy did the Samaritan perform?

This man not only felt sorry—he acted! He went further than feeling sympathy and went out of his way to help.

2. Read Matthew 18:21-35. In this passage, Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sins against him. Jesus says that he should forgive 77 times. Are we really supposed to forgive someone exactly 77 times? What is Jesus’ point here?

2. How does Jesus' parable in this passage relate to our relationship with God?

3. Are there certain groups that you feel are easier to be merciful to? Are there certain groups to whom it is more difficult to show mercy? Explain these answers.

4. What do you think are the areas of greatest need in your particular community?

5. What are the areas of greatest need in the world?

6. Do you struggle with showing mercy? Fill in the blanks in the following verses to learn some keys to developing your empathy and mercy.

For all have _____ and fall short of the _____ of God
(Romans 3:23).

Do not _____, or you too will be _____.
Why do you look at the _____ of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the _____ in your own eye? (Matthew 7:1,3).

But when the _____ and _____ of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of _____ things we had done, but because of his _____ (Titus 3:4-5).

Once you were not a people, but now you are the _____ of God; once you had not received _____, but now you have received _____ (1 Peter 2:10).

Be _____ and _____ to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God _____ you (Ephesians 4:32).

What does the LORD require of you? To act _____ and to love _____ and to walk _____ with your God (Micah 6:8).

Administer true _____; show _____ and _____ to one another. Do not _____ the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other (Zechariah 7:8-10).

the gift of hospitality

“Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13, *RSV*). If you enjoy organizing and hosting a party, making newcomers to a group feel welcome or sharing with those in need, you may have the gift of hospitality. Hospitality is demonstrating kindness in welcoming guests or strangers, and it requires finding ways to put others at ease and meet their needs.

1. Describe a time when someone made you feel comfortable or welcome in a new situation.

2. Read Luke 7:36-50. This story is about faith and forgiveness but also about hospitality. Even though it is not the woman’s house, how does she demonstrate hospitality to Jesus?

3. Why is it ironic that the Pharisee is upset that the woman is being hospitable to Jesus?

4. Read Matthew 25:34-40. According to these verses, why should we be generous with our hospitality?

In the days of Jesus and the Early Church, people were dependent on others for food and lodging as they traveled from city to city. When Jesus was preparing to send out His disciples on their first mission trip, He gave them these instructions: “Don’t take any money in your money belts—no gold, silver, or even copper coins. Don’t carry a traveler’s bag with a change of clothes and sandals or even a walking stick. Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve to be fed” (Matthew 10:5,9-10).

5. Do you think there is still a need for the gift of hospitality today with all the restaurants, motels and hotels that are available to travelers? Explain your thoughts.

6. Look up the verses below and list the name of the person who was hospitable and what he or she did to show hospitality.

Acts 9:43

Acts 16:15

Acts 16:34

7. What are some examples of how the gift of hospitality can be used in the Church?

8. How can you demonstrate hospitality in your own life?

9. Read 1 Peter 4:9. Why do you think Paul adds “ungrudgingly” (*RSV*) or “without grumbling” (*NIV*) when he speaks of being hospitable?

reflect

1. You may have heard the saying, “Grace is getting what we don’t deserve, and mercy is not getting what we do deserve.” Has someone ever shown you mercy? Explain.

2. Describe a time when someone showed hospitality to you. How did it make you feel?

3. God calls us to be merciful and hospitable even if these are not our spiritual gifts. What steps can you take to work on developing mercy and hospitality?

4. Read James 2:14-17. How are showing hospitality and mercy an important part of our faith in Jesus?

5. Who in your community needs your mercy and hospitality? How can you welcome them and meet their needs?

meditation



I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

MATTHEW 25:40