WEEK 05 · PERSONAL RESPONSE TO MERCY

All believers are called to be united as living stones, being built into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, where everyone plays a role in serving God

Preface

Last week, we learned from the history of the early church how they responded to the good news of Jesus Christ with lavish generosity. They joyfully shared their wealth instead of accumulating it, sharing one another's burdens in a radical way. This countercultural communal lifestyle led to many being saved and added to their number daily.

This week, we will explore the calling of all believers to serve as God's priests, each with a unique role as we are built into the spiritual house of God. As recipients of His mercy, we are tasked with extending that mercy to those in need. Our study will also include a deep reflection on our individual callings, recognizing that each of us is created uniquely, equipped with specific burdens and gifts that we are called to steward responsibly.

Warm-up question: Share about a construction or craft that you have built. What was the most challenging part of that process?

Study

Read 1 Peter 2:1-12 to answer the following questions.

In this passage, Peter outlines Christians' duties as they joyfully endure trials, with Jesus Christ as the source of their sustenance and their spiritual foundation, or "living stone". He uses four images to describe the Christian life: (1) shedding harmful habits, (2) growing like infants, (3) being built up like a temple, and (4) serving as priests.

1. What are the negative and positive commands mentioned in 1 Peter 2:1-3? How do these verses explain the process of growing up in our salvation?

> Notes: Negative command: **putting away negative attitudes** (malice and deceit) **and evil actions** (hypocrisy, envy, and slander). Positive command: **crave or long for pure spiritual milk**. The word "long for" is written as an **imperative**, meaning that it is a command that can be translated as "**to develop an appetite for**".

2. What are some personal and communal roles of believers as we approach Jesus Christ, the living Stone? (1 Peter 2:4-5)

3. What are the consequences for those who believe and for those who do not? (1 Peter 2:6-8)

> Notes: These verses may suggest the concept of predestination. Depending on your group's maturity and available time, you can choose to discuss this topic in greater depth. Essentially, God has allowed those who stumble to do so because of their disobedience (lack of belief). While their disobedience is not ordained by God, the consequences—such as stumbling—are. It is worth noting that the Bible always places the responsibility for the destiny of the lost on them for not believing, rather than on God for foreordaining. (Source: Constable, Thomas L. Notes. http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm)

4. Based on 1 Peter 2:9-10, what is our new identity as Christians?

5. Based on 1 Peter 2:11-12, what are our duties as Christians living in this world?

> Notes: Some commentators believe that Peter's emphasis on doing good **extends beyond individual acts of kindness** to include **community efforts** aimed at improving societal structures. They argue that Christians should be at the forefront of social reform.

Application

1. In what areas of life or environments do you find it hard to let go of evil attitudes or actions? What biblical truths can you hold on to in order to help you overcome those challenges?

2. How do you see yourself being built together and contributing to the spiritual growth of your community? What might spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God look like today?

3. How can your new identity influence your actions and decisions? What are some ways to demonstrate your identity as a chosen people and a royal priesthood in your daily life?

4. What are some deeds of mercy you can do this week for others who have not received God's mercy?

Follow-up Exercise: Identifying Our Personal Gifts and Calling

Everyone is created uniquely, and all believers are called to be united as living stones, being built into a spiritual house and holy priesthood. This means that everyone has a role to play and should responsibly steward the gifts of grace that God has given them (1 Peter 4:10).

Tim Keller argues that every Christian family needs to have its own ministry of mercy. To take steps toward incorporating a ministry of mercy into our lives, we can begin by identifying our gifts and calling. This exercise is adapted from Tim Keller's book, *Ministries of Mercy*. A worksheet is available on the next two pages to assist your group with this reflection.

Instructions:

1. **Educate yourselves** about the specific struggles that each of these vulnerable groups faces, and **look for felt needs** that you can meet within your immediate community.
2. Individually, reflect on the ***five invitational questions*** and discuss them within your group.
3. Encourage one another to **get involved** in specific volunteering opportunities that align with your gifts and calling, and hold each other accountable to volunteer regularly.
4. Set up a time in the future to **reflect on and process the experience**. During this meeting, have your group complete a ***spiritual gifts inventory***.
5. Adopt a posture of humility to learn from one another and **evaluate the effectiveness** of your efforts to help clarify one's giftings.
6. **Make a commitment to continue serving** on a regular basis for an extended period of time, and hold each other accountable.

Worksheet

Below is a list of vulnerable people groups based on their socioeconomic conditions. Identify some specific struggles that each of these groups faces, and look for felt needs that you can meet or volunteering opportunities to get involved.

People Group	Specific Struggles / Needs	Immediate Felt Needs / Volunteering Opportunities
Poor (Gal. 2:10) • Homeless • Alcoholics / drug addicts • Migrant workers • Working poor / unemployed • Illiterate		
Disadvantaged Children (Ps. 68:5) • Abused and neglected • Juvenile delinquents • Special-education needs • Physically/mentally disabled • School dropouts		
Disabled (Lev. 19:14) • Blind • Deaf • Mentally disabled • Other disabilities		
Elderly (1 Tim. 5:9)		
Single Parent (Jam. 1:27) • Widows • Divorced • Unwed mothers		
Sick (Mat. 25:36) • Chronically ill • Terminally ill		
Prisoners (Heb. 13:3) • Inmates • Ex-convicts		
Resident Aliens (Lev. 19:33-34) • Refugees • New immigrants • International students		
Disaster Victims (Acts 11:28-29)		

Five Invitational Questions

1. Is there a particular human need that you "vibrate" to?

2. What personal, emotional, and spiritual resources do you have to meet the need?

3. Are there at least two or three others in the congregation (your small group or the church) who share your burden or with whom you can readily communicate your vision?

If the answer is **yes**, consider joining their ministries of mercy or starting something together.
If the answer is **no**, do not be discouraged. **One possibility** is that God has not moved the church or your group to begin the ministry. **Another possibility** is that God may want to use you to move others in the same way that you do. Perhaps you can consider pioneering something with your community, taking other factors into account.

4. Is there really an opening for the ministry for which you feel a burden?

Honestly evaluate whether a ministry is timely and needed. **Desire**, **ability**, and ***opportunity*** are all determinants of God's call. We may have great desire, manpower, and ability, but that does not mean God is calling. Can you identify ministry beneficiaries who have tangible needs that you can readily meet?

5. Before you begin, have you really "*counted the cost*"? What are some costs that this ministry may require? Are you (and your family) committed to making this investment?