

TOOL: Introduction to Embodying Mercy in the Margin

Embodying mercy in the margin • Weekly



When we think of spiritual formation, we typically envision practices of prayer, solitude, or a daily quiet time. But true spiritual formation is more expansive than that. Following Jesus and becoming an apprentice to Jesus is more than a life of contemplation; it is also a life of action. To become a follower of Jesus means we go where Jesus went, serve as he served, befriend who he befriended, love as he loved. Spiritual formation that ends with mere self-improvement is a truncated vision of discipleship. The work of the Spirit never ends with the self, but extends to others.

One of the most shocking aspects of Jesus' life was his inclination to go to the margins of society – the places where the needy, hungry, afflicted, and discarded people remained. A main aspect of Jesus' ministry was to embody mercy in the margins.

Jesus gave his inaugural address in Luke 4. This was the first public message he shared. He used it to declare his intention. He quoted a prophecy from the writings of Isaiah.

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Notice what the Spirit was on Jesus to accomplish: Share good news with the poor, freedom for the imprisoned, healing for the blind, deliverance for those in oppression, and declaring that God is coming near. Jesus listed people who lived in the margins of society, and he declared that prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus.

Following Jesus is not only a journey inward – it is a journey outward, as we move toward the needs of others, the brokenness of our world, and the cries of justice. And as we draw near to those in need, we become more like our Savior. We are formed so we can go, and in our going, we continue to be formed.

This weekly practice of “embodying mercy in the margin” might be one of the most challenging out of the eight that we identified. Why? Going to the margins requires a measure of courage. It is easier to remain in our places of comfort and control. It is easier to attend small groups, serve inside church walls or with folks that look like you. But when we show up in the margin, we feel vulnerable. But it is often in our vulnerability that God shows up the most.

The tools in this toolkit will help you take steps towards embodying mercy in the margin. They will help you identify where Christ might be calling you, how you have been gifted, and hopefully help in giving you eyes to see the margin as Jesus does.

Reflect on these questions this week:

- What are the barriers you have to show up in the margin of our city to be an agent of love, mercy, and peace?
- As you look back on your life’s experience, have you ever had a meaningful experience serving those in need?
- If serving those in the margin was such a central part of Jesus’ life, why have we made it a minor part of the life of a Christian?

Social justice and embodying mercy is not a trend in the church. It is a deeply biblical concept, one that is directed from the heart of God. Read and journal on these passages that share God’s heart for mercy, compassion and justice.

Micah 6:6-8

Zechariah 7: 4-14

Isaiah 58:6-10

Exodus 10:17-21

Psalms 146:5-9

Matthew 23:23

Luke 10:25-37

What's next?

Dive into the tools provided! For each practice, you'll find a series of tools to help you explore and go deeper. Each tool will unpack a specific method or practical way to engage with that habit.

Within each tool you'll find three sections: (1) an introduction to the tool, (2) instructions on how to practice utilizing the tool, (3) a few questions to debrief your experience with your Praxis Group.

We encourage you to practice using a tool for at least one week before you debrief your experience. Remember, practicing isn't the same as accomplishing or perfecting! Practicing can be messy, imperfect, and a learning experience!