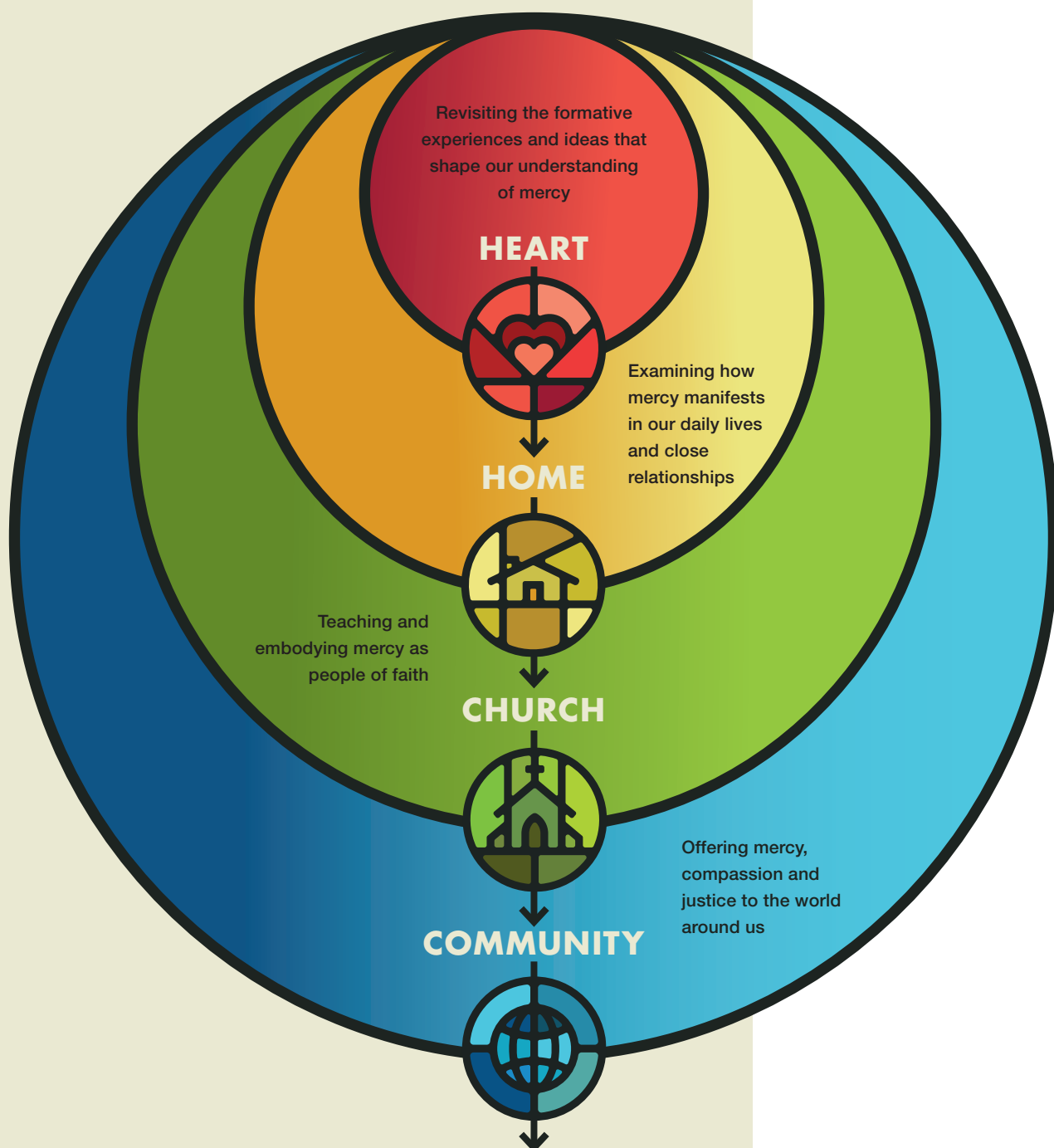


# **THE MERCY JOURNEY**

Bringing hope and healing  
to a broken world

This guide is part of *The Mercy Journey* collection, a data-driven exploration of the topic of mercy, based on Barna research conducted in partnership with The Reimagine Group. This resource is set up to first inspire reflection and then action, moving outward from our **hearts**, to our **homes**, to our **churches** and, finally, to our **communities**.

## THE MERCY JOURNEY MAP



## Introduction:

Leaders,

Thank you for committing to lead your group through *The Mercy Journey*. It is our prayer that this four-week study will propel your community into deep and meaningful discussions, resulting in heart and life transformation in each of you.

This group leader guide is intended to communicate the vision behind *The Mercy Journey*, highlight resources available to you and your group and offer recommendations to help you facilitate honest conversations and growth.

## The Vision:

*Tense. Divided. Broken. Hostile. Vitriolic. Isolated. Anxious. Unjust. Skeptical.* These words pop up often as Barna Group gauges atmospheres and attitudes in the U.S.—yes, even in the Church. Perhaps they ring true to your own experience, or at least call to mind recent headlines. In this contested climate, when it seems like the loudest voice often wins, it can be tempting to root faith expression in having the right ideas, the clearest doctrine, the best arguments. But, as representatives of the whole gospel, Christians have an opportunity to be not only messengers of truth but also ministers of mercy in their homes, workplaces, churches and communities.

By dictionary definition, mercy may sound simple—it's the extension of forgiveness or compassion toward another, typically by someone who has the authority to punish that person instead. For the Christ follower, mercy is so much more than this. It's a vital part of the gospel that's saved us and that we are charged to proclaim— as such, it's a calling, a perspective and a way of life that defines who we are as those who carry the name of Jesus. This world, now more than ever, needs the kind of mercy God calls his children to express in order to move forward and heal from the brokenness of sin, hatred and division.

This is what this four-part series is all about. It's designed to help us walk in our calling to be ministers of mercy, ambassadors of compassion and agents of forgiveness in a world that desperately needs it. In order to do so, we must experience and express mercy in our **hearts**, in our **homes**, in our **churches** and in our **communities**. When we do, the whole gospel is proclaimed, hearts are transformed, and lives are forever changed.

## Resources for The Mercy Journey:

To further equip you as you lead your group on the mercy journey, Barna, in partnership with The Reimagine Group, has produced a comprehensive suite of tools shaped by the insights of ministry experts and practitioners. These include:

- *The Mercy Journey* report containing brand new Barna data about prevailing attitudes and practices of mercy
- *The Mercy Journey* workbooks for business leaders and families
- Video interviews with key faith and business leaders around the expression and embrace of mercy

To access these tools and deepen your experience with the mercy journey, visit [www.barna.com/mercyjourney](http://www.barna.com/mercyjourney).

## Group Leader Tips:

1. **PRAY**—Let's never forget the importance of prayer as we endeavor to lead! If we don't invite the presence and power of God into the leadership of our groups, we risk leading out of our own knowledge and skills—as well as the biases and wounds that come from our own experiences. Here are a few prayer points to help center your heart as a leader:

- Pray that God would give you wisdom and discernment to facilitate great discussion, navigate deep and potentially difficult conversations and facilitate the study and application of God's Word.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit would do a deep work in your own heart and mind for each upcoming group discussion so you can lead from an authentic place, having already experienced and processed the journey you are leading others on.
- Pray for those in your group to be able to engage with the content and with each other, removing any barriers or distractions so that gospel-centered community and connection can take place.
- Pray for life transformation that leads to church and community impact. Pray that the study, discussion and prayer that takes place in the group may be a catalyst for the good news of the gospel to be advanced.

## 2. REFLECT

- As you read through the study before your group meets, put yourself in the place of a participant. Reflect deeply on your own journey of mercy using the questions provided, leading yourself before you set out to lead others.
- Consider the areas in your heart and life where you need to invite God to work. When the themes of mercy and forgiveness are considered, areas of bitterness or unforgiveness resulting from past wounds or underlying attitudes we didn't realize we had can emerge. You don't need to have it all together as a leader, but being aware of your own journey will help you lead others through theirs. Invite the Holy Spirit's leading, and if you feel compelled, follow any prompts toward forgiveness, repentance or healing.

## 3. PREPARE

- Study scripture.
  - \* Get a good study Bible and / or commentary and do a deeper dive into the selected Ephesians passage. Recommended resources are listed at the end of this guide.
  - \* Be sure to write down your own answers to the study questions before each group meeting. Don't use them to lecture, but instead to guide the discussion in case your group stalls or gets side-tracked.
- Read *The Mercy Journey* report.
  - \* Read through the section of *The Mercy Journey* report that corresponds with each part of the study: mercy in our **hearts**, our **homes**, our **churches** and our **communities**.
  - \* Highlight key findings and principles in the report to complement your discussion. This will give you a deeper understanding of the statistics and findings emphasized in the study.

## 4. LEAD

- Rely on the Holy Spirit as you lead.
  - \* Jesus promised his disciples in John 17 and Acts 1 that he would send a “counselor” or “helper,” the Holy Spirit, to guide them as they led the Church. That same Spirit lives inside of you as a Christ-following leader of a small group. Follow the Holy Spirit’s lead as you lead—go deeper with a question that provokes profound conversation, even if it means you skip over the next one.
  - \* If you feel led or prompted to pray for someone in the group, do so, even if you need to stop the discussion for that moment.
  - \* Don’t worry about having a perfect, well-polished discussion. As you’ve likely experienced, group discussions can get a little messy or seem choppy. That’s OK. The Holy Spirit works in any environment. The important thing is to create space for God to move, and seek to become more like him each time your group meets.
- Be transparent.
  - \* As the leader, it’s important to be genuine, honest and vulnerable. This is difficult and risky in some ways, but your leadership in this area will open up the rest of the group to do the same, resulting in deeper discussions, authentic community and life transformation.
- “Ask, listen and guide” instead of “ask, talk and teach.”
  - \* The small group guides were written to facilitate discussion and meaningful conversation. Your meetings are not meant to be lectures where the group leader teaches and the participants listen. If you see your role as a guide, someone who asks great questions, listens well and shepherds the group toward truth, you’ll have a vibrant and successful group!
- Know when to refer participants to other resources.
  - \* When you dive into a discussion on mercy and forgiveness, pain and trauma from the past may surface for some individuals. To simply gloss over these things in a group setting and leave that person stuck would be damaging for him or her. Equally damaging could be a group that, with good intentions, tries to do too much. Don’t try and take on problems you feel you’re not equipped to handle. Instead, be proactive to seek counsel and refer that person to a trusted church leader or a Christian counselor. Be sure to ask your pastor for names and contact info of recommended people who can help in areas of grief, abuse, anxiety, depression or thoughts of suicide.
  - \* When desired or necessary, look for a nearby recovery or support groups and consider attending the first meeting with your group member. Check with your pastor or care team to see if your church hosts support groups specific to your group member’s needs.
  - \* Referring someone does not mean abandoning them. In addition to professional help, your love and presence will be a vital part of their healing journey. Call them, email them, pray for them, meet for coffee or lunch, invite them back to your group and let them know they’re not alone.

## Closing Thoughts:

Again, thank you for playing such an important role in *The Mercy Journey*. Gospel impact happens in our world when people like you are willing to step up and step out, leading by example as you guide others to deeper levels and expressions of mercy and compassion. May God grant you wisdom, humility, courage and power as you lead.

## Recommended Bible Study Resources:

*ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, 2008.

*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, 2011.

Snodgrass, Klyne, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan, 1996.

Bruce, F.F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistles to Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1984.