

DOORS
OF
MERCY

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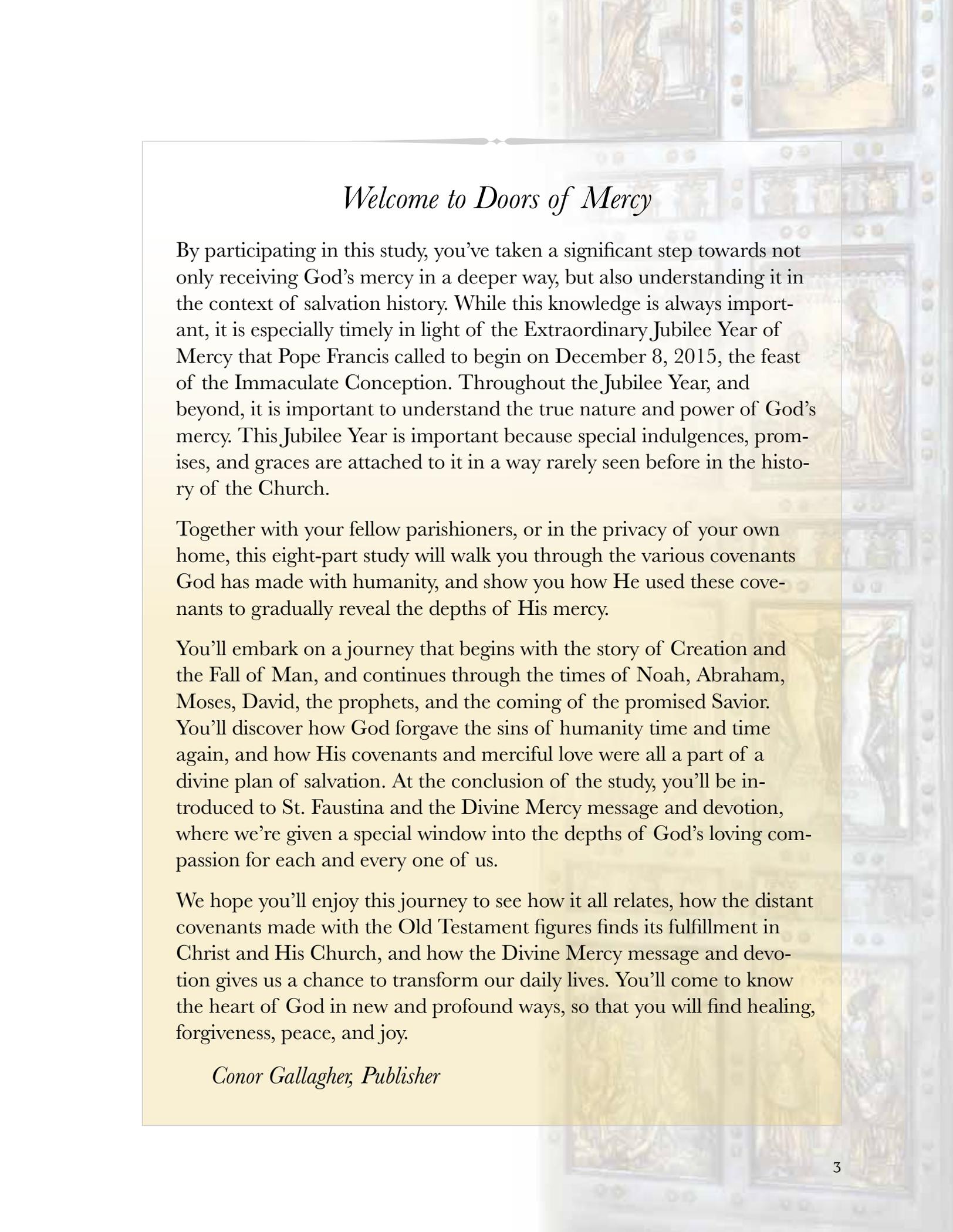
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Welcome to Doors of Mercy

By participating in this study, you've taken a significant step towards not only receiving God's mercy in a deeper way, but also understanding it in the context of salvation history. While this knowledge is always important, it is especially timely in light of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy that Pope Francis called to begin on December 8, 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Throughout the Jubilee Year, and beyond, it is important to understand the true nature and power of God's mercy. This Jubilee Year is important because special indulgences, promises, and graces are attached to it in a way rarely seen before in the history of the Church.

Together with your fellow parishioners, or in the privacy of your own home, this eight-part study will walk you through the various covenants God has made with humanity, and show you how He used these covenants to gradually reveal the depths of His mercy.

You'll embark on a journey that begins with the story of Creation and the Fall of Man, and continues through the times of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and the coming of the promised Savior. You'll discover how God forgave the sins of humanity time and time again, and how His covenants and merciful love were all a part of a divine plan of salvation. At the conclusion of the study, you'll be introduced to St. Faustina and the Divine Mercy message and devotion, where we're given a special window into the depths of God's loving compassion for each and every one of us.

We hope you'll enjoy this journey to see how it all relates, how the distant covenants made with the Old Testament figures finds its fulfillment in Christ and His Church, and how the Divine Mercy message and devotion gives us a chance to transform our daily lives. You'll come to know the heart of God in new and profound ways, so that you will find healing, forgiveness, peace, and joy.

Conor Gallagher, Publisher



**PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY**

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

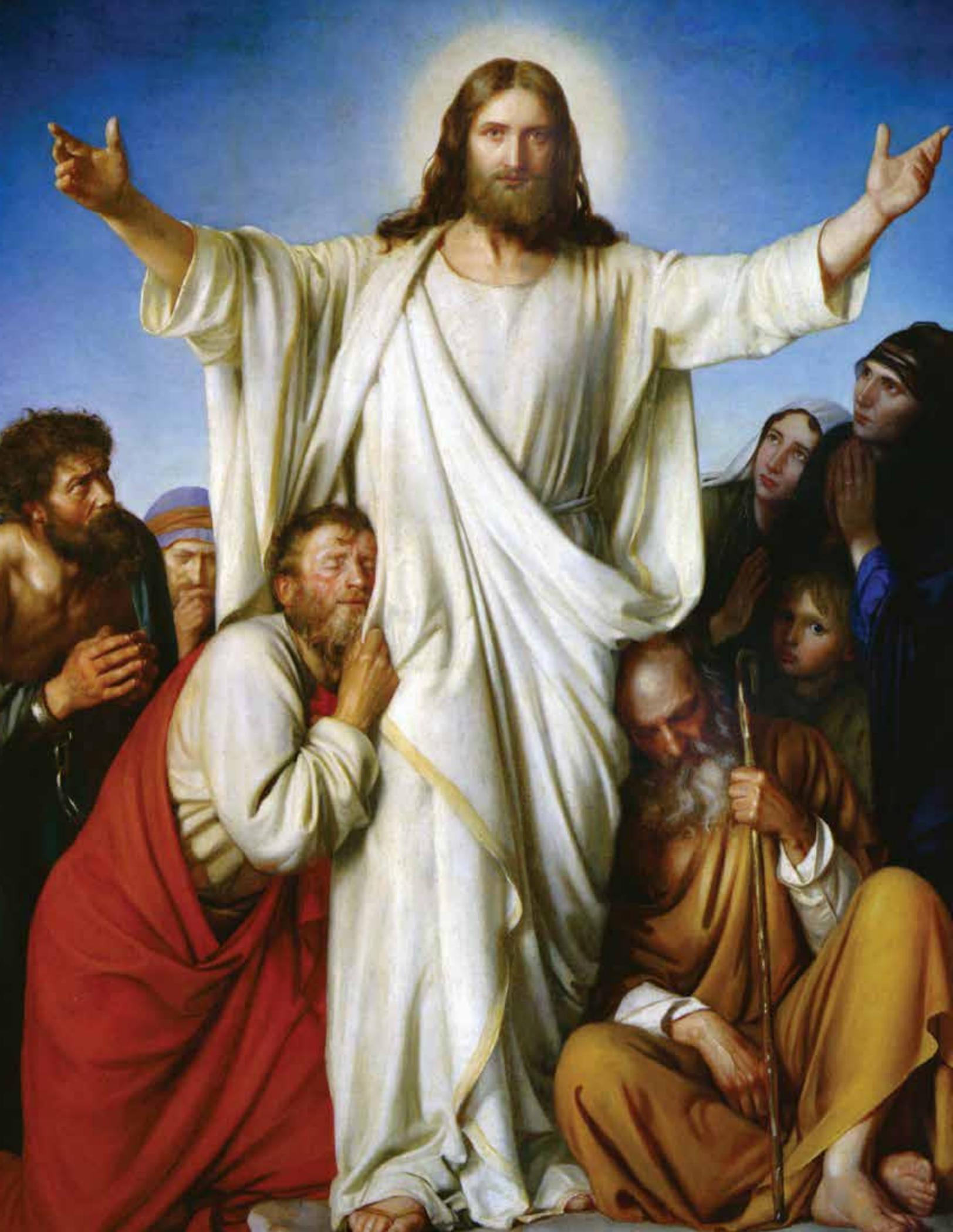
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke
to the Samaritan woman: “If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen.



DOORS OF MERCY

Exploring God's Covenant with You

CONTENTS

Prayer for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year	5
Understanding Your Guide	8
Session Plan.....	11
An Introduction to Doors of Mercy	13
Lesson 1	17
Adam and Eve: Promise	
Lesson 2	29
Noah: Restoration	
Lesson 3	41
Abraham: Faith	
Lesson 4	53
Moses: Inheritance	
Lesson 5	65
David: Dynasty	
Lesson 6	77
The Prophets: Renewal	
Lesson 7	89
Jesus: Salvation	
Lesson 8	101
St. Faustina: Divine Mercy	
Supplemental Material	113
<i>A Guide to the Covenants</i>	114
<i>The Message of Divine Mercy</i>	116
<i>The Devotion to the Divine Mercy</i>	122
<i>How to Recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy</i>	126
<i>How to Pray the Divine Mercy Novena</i>	128
<i>A Short Biography of St. Faustina</i>	134
<i>Hymn of the Jubilee of Mercy</i>	136

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GUIDE

LESSON INTRODUCTION

A short passage introduces each lesson. This passage is also a part of the video lecture.

LESSON READINGS

Each lesson is drawn from specific Scripture passages and portions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Reading these before each lesson is optional, but can help you better understand and prepare for the lessons. The Scriptural texts come from the RSV-CE translation (verses may vary with other translations). Lesson 8 is drawn from the *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*.

OPENING & CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer is an integral part of every aspect of our lives, especially when embarking on a study like this. It helps to pray for the wisdom, energy, knowledge, and inspiration to understand God's mercy, including the grace needed to change our lives by applying what we've learned. Before each session, pray the Opening Prayer to ready your mind, heart, and soul. When completing each session, close with Pope Francis's prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy (found on page 5).

VIDEO LESSON

Embark on the first Video Lessons with host Fr. Jeffrey Kirby, where he will walk you through the covenants of the Old Testament and show you how salvation and redemption can only be achieved through God's mercy. Key highlights are provided with room to take notes, which will help you with the group discussion that follows.

WORDS TO KNOW

Each lesson contains several key terms that would be helpful to know.

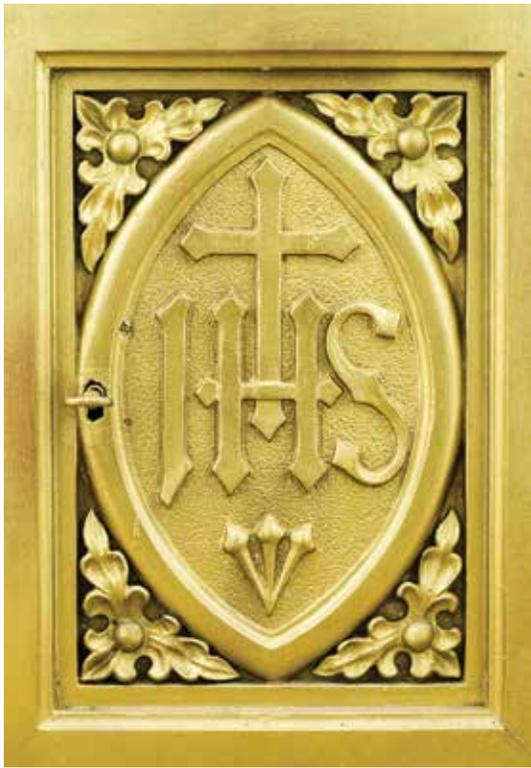
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

PART I: LESSON REVIEW

These questions are to be discussed with your group to help you gather deeper insights and ensure that you understand the key points from each lesson.

PART II: LIFE APPLICATION

These questions are posed to help you consider your own life and how the key points from each lesson apply to you.



LIFE APPLICATION VIDEO

In the Life Application Videos, various well-known Catholic scholars and personalities give their own insights and reflections to these deep and enriching questions.

HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

These brief passages help you to identify areas in your life where you can open doors of mercy for yourself and others.

LIVING IT OUT

This section provides a brief period to pray about, discern, and write down the specific ways God is asking you to make changes in your life.

GOD'S PLAN OF MERCY

Each lesson contains a short summary noting how God's actions in that particular time period moved His plan of salvation forward.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Spread throughout each lesson are various quotations and excerpts to help you understand the lesson and God's mercy. These include:

- ✦ **God's Word** – Scripture passages from the key moments of each session
- ✦ **From the Catechism** – Supporting passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- ✦ **Saints on Mercy** – Quotes from these holy men and women of the Church to help us understand the Lord's abundant mercy
- ✦ **The Popes Teach** – Helpful insights and inspirational messages from encyclicals, homilies, and books written by holy fathers throughout the ages

SUGGESTED READING & SOURCES

Each lesson contains a list of other titles and Scripture passages that you can read to further your knowledge of God's mercy and His various covenants.



SESSION PLAN

BEFORE THE SESSION

- Review your **Living It Out** section from the prior lesson to consider ways you gave and received newfound mercy.
- Review the optional **Lesson Readings** section.
- Read the **Lesson Introduction**.

SESSION

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Video Lesson** – with host Fr. Jeffrey Kirby
- **Small Group Discussion**
 - ✦ Part I: **Lesson Review**
 - ✦ Part II: **Life Application**

Break

- **Life Application Video** – interviews with Catholic scholars and experts
- **How Then Shall We Live?**
- **Living It Out**
- **God's Plan Of Mercy**
- **Closing Prayer**

AFTER THE SESSION

Review the self-study material, including **Words to Know**, **Suggested Readings**, and **Words of Wisdom**.

In describing mercy, the books of the Old Testament use two expressions . . . First there is the term *hesed*, which indicates a profound attitude of “goodness.” . . . When in the Old Testament the word *hesed* is used of the Lord, this always occurs in connection with the covenant that God established with Israel . . . The juridical commitment on God’s part ceased to oblige whenever Israel broke the covenant and did not respect its conditions. But precisely at this point, *hesed*, in ceasing to be a juridical obligation, revealed its deeper aspect: it showed itself as what it was at the beginning, that is, as love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin.

—St. John Paul II,
Dives in Misericordia

An Introduction to **DOORS OF MERCY**

Mercy. How deeply we need it. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask for it when we say, "forgive us our trespasses," and in that same prayer, we promise to extend it to others, to all "who trespass against us."

Without mercy, our homes—and our hearts—quickly become cold, dark places. But mercy brings peace and solace and mends wounded or broken relationships. It opens a door back to friendship with our family, with our friends, and with God.

God's mercy is closer than we can imagine. The great Catholic writer, George Bernanos, spoke about God's mercy this way: "scarcely has our sin gone out of us, and one look, a sign, a dumb appeal suffices for grace and pardon to swoop down, as an eagle from topmost skies."

Bernanos is right. God's mercy is as close as prayer. It's as close as the sacraments. Baptism cleanses us of sin and makes us children of God; the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, nourishes and restores our souls; and Reconciliation ensures His mercy is as close as the door to the confessional.

God's mercy is the overflowing of His loving kindness, beyond anything we deserve. It is His love bending down to meet our suffering and needs. Above all, it is the forgiveness of sin.



The Bible speaks of God's mercy and loving kindness, and His steadfast goodness to all who call upon Him. As we'll see, the Bible itself is the story of God extending mercy, from Adam and Noah, to Abraham and Moses, to David and Israel, to all His people.

But what is God's mercy? God's mercy is the overflowing of His loving kindness, beyond anything we deserve. It is His love bending down to meet our suffering and needs. Above all, it is the forgiveness of sin. As St. Thomas Aquinas tells us, "forgiving men, taking pity on them, is a greater work than the creation of the world."

Bringing us this mercy was not easy; it required a plan, a rescue plan, if you will. It was a rescue plan set in motion at the very dawn of creation, one that has unfolded over countless generations and thousands of years.



obedience, choosing themselves over God. It was the single greatest disaster in human history, bringing, as the poet Milton said, “death into the world, and all our woe.”

But at that very moment God’s plan of mercy began. At its heart was another man, a new Adam, who would not fail the test of friendship. A man who would be obedient no matter the price, and whose obedience would bring not death to the world, but life.

At His side would be another woman, a new Eve. A woman who would never for a single instant listen to the serpent, and whose Son would crush the serpent’s head.

God promised Adam and Eve that man’s relationship with Him would be restored. He promised a new Adam—a Savior and King of Mercy—who would bring His Kingdom to the very ends of the earth, and who would smash the very gates of hell.

But the serpent also heard this promise, and he would not let God’s plan of mercy be enacted without a fight. The devil continued to tempt and attack the descendants of Adam and Eve. He corrupted the world to such an extent that finally only one righteous man, Noah, and his family remained.

As the devil pressed his attack against this last beleaguered family, God acted powerfully to bring His plan forward. God brought Noah and his family to the safety of the ark, then wiped the world clean in the Flood.

Over the next eight sessions, we’re going to explore this rescue plan in depth. But let’s spend a few minutes now on an overview of God’s plan of mercy.

* * *

When God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, it wasn’t because He was lonely. It wasn’t because He needed servants. God needed nothing. In His inner life, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, God Himself is the fullness of life and love. But goodness desires to share itself, and fullness overflows; so God created man to share in His happiness.

He created us for friendship. Yet because of His great love, He does not force that friendship upon us, but gives us free will to accept or reject it. Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, lost that friendship. They lost it through dis-

*God’s plan of mercy
was definitively won
by the death and
Resurrection of Jesus.*

After the Flood, the devil would again corrupt the world. He led it into idolatry, away from the knowledge of God. But again God rescued a just man, Abraham, and his household. God would make Abraham the father of His people, and the land He gave Abraham would become the seat of His kingdom.

Years and centuries followed as God's plan of mercy still awaited fulfillment. Abraham's descendants were not yet safe, with threats that included slavery and persecution in Egypt, a generation of wandering in a lifeless desert, war with tribes and peoples who defied God's covenants, captivity in Babylon, and finally, oppression by Rome.

But none of these threats and attacks were able to overcome God's plan, and at the very moment when the devil thought he had claimed his final victory, when he thought he had nailed shut the doors of mercy forever, God's plan of mercy was fulfilled.

The new Adam had passed the test of obedience and brought life and mercy to the world. Though questions still remain.

Will we ask for and accept His mercy? Will we extend it to others? Will we work with Him, or against Him, in bringing His plan of mercy to the ends of the earth? Will we leave behind our sins and burdens, our anxieties and frustrations, our temptations and fears, and walk with Him?

This is what we must consider in the coming sessions as we prepare to walk through *Doors of Mercy*.





LESSON 1

ADAM & EVE: **Promise**



So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

LESSON INTRODUCTION

The story of God’s covenant is the story of His love for us. He created Adam and Eve out of His abundant love. He made them a beautiful home, and offered them an intimate union with Him. In the Garden, there was no pain, sadness, or death—there was love and harmony, beauty and grace. It was a place that possessed such perfection we can scarcely imagine it today.

But Adam and Eve fell to the temptations of the serpent; they allowed their minds to be clouded by doubt and suspicion, and chose themselves over God. This Fall from grace led humanity astray, and we lost our way in the darkness.

God could have abandoned us to sin and chaos. But instead He entered into the chaos and offered mercy. Even though His children had turned away from Him, He continued to love them and gave them a promise—a Savior would come to reconcile humanity to Himself.

LESSON READINGS

Reading these before each lesson is optional, but can help you better understand and prepare for the lessons.

- Genesis 1–3
- CCC 279–421



OPENING PRAYER

Good and gracious God,
You created us in your loving kindness,
and have called us to yourself.
You desire to be with us and lead us out of darkness
and sin into your own wonderful light.
Forgive us our sins and open your doors of mercy to us.
Help us always to live joyfully in your life of grace
and to seek you above all things.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



VIDEO LESSON 1: Adam & Eve

It is now time to embark on the Video Lesson, hosted by Fr. Jeffrey Kirby. Key highlights of his talk are below, with room to take notes for assisting with group discussion.

✚ **God offers the first covenant to Adam and Eve**

✚ **The Sabbath is the sacred sign of the covenant**

✚ **The Fall from grace**

Saints on Mercy

O God, who [is] happiness in Your very self, and [has] no need of creatures to make You happy, because of Yourself You are the fullness of love; yet, out of Your fathomless mercy You call creatures into being, and grant them a share in Your eternal happiness and in Your life.

—*Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska:
Divine Mercy in My Soul, 1741*



‡ Consequences of the Fall

‡ The promise of a Savior



WORDS TO KNOW

Concupiscence – an inclination to sin caused by the Fall in which the passions no longer obey reason and are attracted by the allure of evil

Covenant – a solemn, family-forming agreement between God and His people in which God offers His people promises and calls them to live according to His law

Homo Pontifex – the term used for humanity, indicating the human person's role as mediator between creation and God

Original Justice – the innocent state of humanity before the Fall from grace

Sabbath – In the Bible, this refers to the day of rest that God established after His six days of creation. The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word *sabat*, which means “to stop, cease, or to keep.”

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**PART I: LESSON REVIEW**

1. Describe the first covenant God made with humanity. For Adam and Eve, the mediators, what was the work they were given as a part of the covenant? What was the sacred sign of the covenant?

2. How was humanity different before the Fall from grace?

3. What were some of the consequences of the Fall?

4. What was the merciful response God made to Adam and Eve's disobedience?

From the Catechism

After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. This passage in Genesis is called the *Protoevangelium* (“first gospel”): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers.

—CCC, 410

PART II: LIFE APPLICATION

1. Where can we see consequences of the Fall in our own lives and the world around us?

2. Where and how has our human fallenness brought tension or darkness into marriage or other close relationships?

3. What lessons can we learn and live from God's action—His mercy—to our first parents?

LIFE APPLICATION VIDEO

After breaking from your Small Group Discussion, return to watch the second video where well-known Catholic scholars and personalities answer the very same questions you just discussed with your groups.



HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

Read with your group to assist in the Living It Out portion of the lesson.

The story of our first parents mirrors our own. Day after day we listen to the unseen serpent hanging from the branch just above our head, believing his lies that we can become gods. Once we eat the forbidden fruit, we, like Adam and Eve, attempt to hide from what we have done; and when our wrongs are discovered we turn to blame others.

Thankfully, the fact that we stumble and fall is not the only way that we are like our first parents; we also share with Adam and Eve in God's merciful promise of a Savior. Through Christ, God offers us salvation and eternal life. This is the foundation of the theological virtue of hope, which is the desire for, and expectation of, receiving eternal life in God's kingdom.

The virtue of hope has many fruits in our lives. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that hope "keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity" (1818).

By preserving us from selfishness, hope allows us to sustain and heal relationships that are wounded, hurting, stretched, or near collapse. These relationships might include those with our children, siblings, extended family, coworkers, fellow parishioners, neighbors, and perhaps most importantly, our spouses. The bond between man and woman was compromised after the Fall, but we can rise above the tension and turmoil often found in marriages by cultivating the virtue of hope.

Let us commit from today onward that we will cultivate the virtue of hope in our lives, allowing it to shield us from despair and carry us through times of pain. Let it lift us up above our own selfish desires so that we can mend our broken relationships and extend mercy to others.

LIVING IT OUT

On your own, spend 3–5 minutes praying, discerning, and writing down the specific ways God might be calling you to make changes in your life. Share and discuss afterwards only if you feel comfortable doing so.

Consider this week how God is calling you to...

✦ **Give and receive mercy**

✦ **Increase hope in the lives of those around you**

✦ **Alleviate bitterness and tension in your close relationships**

The Popes Teach

In this way, in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in His mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as “mercy.” Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God’s mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does He speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all He Himself makes it incarnate and personifies it. He Himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in Him—and finds it in Him—God becomes “visible” in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.

—St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*

GOD'S PLAN OF MERCY

In these first chapters of Genesis, God laid the groundwork for His plan of mercy, promising a Savior who would one day come to make right the error of our first parents. From here, God's plan will play itself out through the ages. In the centuries following Adam and Eve, humanity spiraled into darkness and sin, and God's plan required a washing of the earth. But before the flood waters overtook the land, He saved a righteous man named Noah, setting him and his descendants apart so that the promised Savior could come.





God's Word

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

—Genesis 3:15

CLOSING PRAYER

When completing each session, close with Pope Francis's prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy (found on page 5).

SOURCES

Genesis 1–3

Romans 5:12–21

1 Corinthians 15:45–49

Revelation 22:1–3

Catechism of the Catholic Church 279–421

SUGGESTED READING

Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, Cincinnati: Servant Books, 1998.

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