
Nathan Ivey

Week 1 – Who is My Neighbor?
Mercy 101

READING
- Sojourn Benevolence Policy

Students should commit to the following:

1. **Participation**: This kind of a class is especially dependent upon classroom attendance and participation. Come ready to contribute, based on your experience and the assigned reading for the week.

2. **Reading**: The books selected for this class cover the core concepts needed to handle the majority of benevolence cases. The reading is an essential part of the class.

3. **Observation**: Part of your participation will be to shadow Nathan or another benevolence evaluator through at least two benevolence sessions. These sessions will be scheduled at a later date, depending on the need and number of benevolence requests.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introductory Matters; Who is my neighbor?</td>
<td>Sojourn Benevolence Policy, Keller, 9-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>The Call, Character and Motivation of Mercy</td>
<td>Keller, 35-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Striking a Balance: Giving/Keeping, Church/World</td>
<td>Keller, 67-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Striking a Balance: Conditional/Unconditional Word/Deed</td>
<td>Keller, 93-122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE GOOD SAMARITAN
READ LUKE 10:25-37

1. What must I do to inherit eternal life (v.25)? A good question! The answer? To “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (v.27)” To love the Lord you God involves having faith in him and also delighting in him above all else. It includes the heart (emotions, will, and deepest convictions), soul (the immaterial part of a person’s being), the mind (reason) and strength (how a person uses the abilities and powers that he has), an indication of the total devotion of one’s entire being that is required. Love of God overflows into a love of neighbor.

2. Knowledge of “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” is insufficient. One must “do this.” Jesus is about to show the lawyer that he falls far short of following these commands.

3. Who is my Neighbor? Desiring to justify himself (i.e. desiring to declare himself “not guilty”), the lawyer reveals his insincerity. He wanted to show himself as righteous and redefine or limit God’s command. “Who is my Neighbor” is an improper question, because the lawyer was trying to exclude responsibility for others by making some people “non-neighbors.” A more appropriate question to be asked is, “How can I be a loving neighbor?”

4. Background – The route of the Jericho road included long stretches of rocky terrain that made it a useful base of operations for robbers and criminals. The road descended down about 3,200 feet from Jerusalem to Jericho along this 18-mile route. This is like one of the dark alleys in downtown Louisville through which one walks from the Kentucky Center, Brown Theater, or even Fourth Street Live to the car garage. Criminals can hide, strike and escape with ease.

5. “A man fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead (v.30).” A man is here naked, beaten and bruised, alone, half-dead, and in dire need of hospital care.

THE TWO WHO WALKED BY

1. Priest – A priest is a descendent of Aaron who had priestly responsibly in the Jerusalem temple. Leviticus 8-9 recounts the installation of the Priesthood – their role and responsibilities. Aaron and his sons were ordained “as the Lord commanded.” They were to present offerings and sacrifices to the Lord to make atonement on behalf of the people. These are significant religious duties!

2. Levite – A Levite was a member of the tribe of Levi, but not a descendant of Aaron and therefore was not a priest. The Levites assisted the priests.

3. Both very religious men walked by signifying an unwillingness to love his neighbor. What would motivate such a religious person to pass on by? After all, the priests and Levites are the very ones charged with helping the needy. Almsgiving to the poor was the Pharisees’ big thing. Taking care of the Samaritan was a priestly calling. What happened? Why did they not stop?
4. These two pit their schedule (full of ceremonies and other valid religious duties) against their purpose.

- We should not be too quick to scorn these two men (i.e. the priest and Levite), or we may discover we are convicting ourselves.

Imagine yourself walking from Brown Theater after a matinee on Sunday afternoon. The show ran behind half an hour and you scheduled to serve on the Connect Team in 15 minutes. You are also walking briskly to your car because you know you are in dangerous territory. You turn the corner and see that there is a man lying in the middle of the narrow alley. His clothes are torn, his shoes have been stolen, he is bruised and bleeding, he is not moving and is in dire need of care. You notice a Brown Theater bulletin next to his body and you realize this could have been you if you would have arrived just moments earlier. Stricken with fear that gang members may be watching, you question whether you should stop and help. After all you have to get to Sojourn for the 5pm service. You know you have committed to serve on the connecting team and serve communion. A significant religious duty! What do you do? Do you stop and help? Or do you justify inaction - out of fear and religious obligation – Do you pass by so to get to the church service on time?

- Rather than us stopping, rather than our extending mercy, rather than fulfilling our purpose as missionaries and servants, we pass by the needy. Moreover, we often excuse ourselves because of our busy religious schedules.

- For example, a woman stops you as you leave your office/home/school needing milk for her baby daughter -
  - “I've got to get to community group tonight. I don’t have time to waste. I’m sure someone else will help.”
  - “Man, I’m running late because of that meeting, and I’ve got to get to that prayer meeting in half an hour!”
  - I've got dinner with some Sojourn friends and don’t want to disappoint them. I told them I would prepare the appetizer and be there early.

**Question for Reflection**

1. Can you think of a time where you pit your schedule against your purpose? How about at home, at work, at the park on a Saturday morning, at a party, while walking your neighborhood?

**THE ONE WHO SHOWED MERCY**

1. The Samaritan. After the two religious men passed by, a Samaritan arrived, an archenemy of the Jews. It’s kind of like how the Sunnis and the Shiites, or the crypts and the bloods are enemies. The Samaritan faced the same danger as the religious priest and Levite. In addition, all of the Samaritan’s education and experience should have led him to step on the victim, not just over him. Nevertheless, in opposition to all these forces, the Samaritan had “compassion” (v. 33).

   In our contemporary rendition of this parable, who would be considered the Samaritan? Who would have stopped to help the man in the alley? Who would be the neighbor?

2. The phrase “ministry of mercy,” which we will use throughout this class, comes from verse 37, where Jesus commands us to provide shelter, finances, medical care, and friendship to people who lack them. We have nothing less than an order from our Lord in the most categorical of terms. “Go and do likewise!” 11
QUESTIONS RAISED

1. The question of Necessity. There is the question of the necessity of mercy to our very existence as Christians. We must not miss the fact that this parable is an answer to the question “What must I do to inherit eternal life? It appears that Jesus sees care for the poor as part of the essence of being a Christian. 12

2. The question of Scope. Second, there is the question of the scope and dimension of the ministry of mercy. In the Samaritan himself, Jesus shows us that the neighbor to whom we must render aid is anyone at all in need, even an enemy. 12

3. The question of Motive. Third, there is the question of the motive or dynamic of the ministry of mercy. It is not enough to simply know one’s duty. The priest and the Levite had all the biblical knowledge, all the ethical principles, and all the ethnic affinity with the man in the road. The Samaritan had none of these things, but he had compassion. It was enough! 13

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

1. Though the law expert sought to limit the concept of “neighbor,” Jesus expands the concept by showing that anyone in need is our neighbor. Do we middle-class Sojourner’s recognize and know our needy neighbors?

2. Jesus calls us to look, listen, and learn. Let’s do that by looking at a “cross section” of people. Our goal is to look our neighbors in the faces, rather than walking in a wide circle around them.

THE GROWTH OF POVERTY

- National - One out of every eight North Americans is poor. The official poverty rate in 2007 was 12.5 percent. In 2007, 37.3 million people were in poverty, up from 36.5 million in 2006. The poverty rate increased for children under 18 years old (18.0 percent in 2007, up from 17.4 percent in 2006). Source: Current Population Survey (CPS), 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)

- Louisville Metro - Percentage of families in Louisville whose income fell below the poverty line over a 12-month period in 2007- 10.07% (almost 76,000 people). More than 20% of Louisville’s families with related children under five years old fell under poverty line in 2007. With a total population of 709,000 that comes to more than 142,000 people! (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey)

- Germantown – 15% or 625 residents are poor. (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Census. Census Tract 63 Block Group 1 Blocks 1003-1017, Block Group 2; CT 69, BG 1,2 Blocks 2000,2002,2003 BG 3; CT 83, BG 3. Block 3005)

- Shelby Park - 28% of families in Shelby Park live below the poverty line. That is 955 residents who are poor. (U.S. Census Bureau 2000 American FactFinder Fact Sheet of Census Tract 65 (Shelby Park))

THE HOMELESS

- Homelessness has increased considerably in the last decade owing primarily to two trends: 1) a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and 2) a simultaneous increase in poverty. And two factors account for the increasing poverty; 1) decreasing labor-market opportunities for large segments of the work force, and 2) the declining value and availability of public benefits. 17
These statistics and others suggest that the “new” average homeless person is an unemployed parent in his or her mid thirties looking for work, battling personal challenges as well as those of an entire system that seems to be working against him or her. 18

THE WORKING POOR

- A significant decline in wages, jobs, and public benefits along with the transformation of the industrialized labor market into a global computerized one all have contributed to increasingly difficult conditions for the working poor. 18
- One out of five homeless persons is employed in full- or part-time jobs. 19
- **Germantown** - Half of the 40 Germantown/Shelby Park families requesting financial assistance from Sojourn are employed. It is not uncommon for someone to work 37.5 hours and only bring home $700/mo. after taxes.

THE CHILDREN OF POVERTY

- In the United States, distinguished by its extraordinary wealth, there are six million poor individuals known to few other but their own families. They cannot vote, they cannot work, most do not even go to school. They are America’s youngest poor – children under 6. 19
- **National** - In 2007, 23% of all homeless people were members of families with children (National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet # 12, June 2008). Estimates of the number of homeless children range from 800,000 to 1.2 million, and in 1995, 4.2% of children under the age of one year were homeless (Urban Institute, 2000; Culhane & Metraux, 1999). At least half of homeless children are under the age of 5. (National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999). Homeless families are most commonly headed by single mothers in their late 20s with approximately two children (Rog & Buckner, 2007).
- **Louisville Metro** - Almost 43% of households with children under the age of 5 without a dad at home fell below the poverty line in 2007. Even without children present, if the householder was a female, the percentage was still high at 30.7%. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey)

THE YOUTHFUL POOR

- When welfare recipients start looking for jobs to replace their shrinking welfare benefits, they will most likely be competing with the working poor, who are barely surviving on what they make now. 20
- Why the huge growth in single-female headed families? The divorce revolution continues. The Census Bureau cited rising divorce rates and a growing tendency to have children first, then marry. In light of congressional cuts in basic assistance programs, it is likely that these young poor will not be helped as the elderly were. 21

THE NEW ETHNICS

- Many North Americans suffer from **two misconceptions about race and social problems**. 1) “Most of the poor are black,” many think. In fact, 25.3 million of the poor are white, 10.1 million are black, 8.4 million are Hispanic. Also, many of the new immigrants pouring into the country are falling swiftly into poverty. 2) “North Americans are typically white” is another common belief. But, while that is still true, our demographics are changing much faster than most of the country realizes. 22
- **National** - By 2050, minorities will be the majority in America, and the number of residents older than 65 will more than double, according to projections released (August 14, 2008) by the U.S. Census Bureau. Minorities, classified as those of any race other than non-Hispanic, single-race whites, currently constitute about a third of the U.S. population, according to Census figures.
- **Louisville Metro** - There are currently 198,520 Latino/Hispanics living in Louisville (2.8%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey). There are currently 127,620 (1.8%) Asian living in Louisville (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey)
Although some of the immigrants have good incomes, many of the new ethnic populations have serious economic problems. The growing ethnic population spells greatly increased demands for assistance, from either the government or the religious community. 22

THE BLUE COLLAR POOR
- The technological revolution has led to the severe shrinkage of these jobs. The “working class” job, which could once support a family comfortably, is disappearing. 22
- **Louisville Metro** - According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey, there are only 24,809 jobs in Louisville in the area of construction, extraction, maintenance, and repair. There are more jobs in Louisville for management, professional, or related occupations than any other line of work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey).
- In short, there is no such thing as “job security” anymore for the average worker. 23

GRAY AMERICA
- People over 85 will become the fastest growing segment of the population by the middle of the next century, carrying sweeping implications of the health care industry and Social Security. 23
- The enormous increase in the elderly during the next thirty years will make all current social support systems obsolete. The cost of supporting the enormous elderly population may cause a rebellion and a deadly economic combat with the next generation. 23

THE SICK
- The non-profit hospital that care for all, regardless of resources, is quickly disappearing. There are far fewer government dollars for such work, while medical costs and insurance rates keep skyrocketing. The hospitals of tomorrow will no longer be social service institutions. 24

THE PRISONERS
- In essence, crime rates (and the prison industry) have produced a crushing financial burden. 25

CONCLUSIONS
1. We do indeed live on the Jericho Road. The data show that there are many people in need, their needs are deepening, and the needy are a diverse group. 25-26

Sojourn is surrounded by growing numbers of the unemployed and underemployed, new immigrant populations, singles, divorced persons, unwed mothers, the elderly, prisoners, the dying sick, and disabled.

Do we want to reach these neighbors with the gospel? Then we must give our faith active expression through deeds of compassion coupled with evangelism and discipleship.

2. The church of Jesus Christ must squarely face its responsibility of the neighbors lying in the road.

Regardless of our political views, it is indisputable that millions of people who once looked to the government will now need service and aid from churches and other agencies.

The church will be forced by demographics to see what the Bible has always said. Love cannot be only expressed through talk, but through word and deed.

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Let us not love with words or tongue with actions and in truth.” – 1 John 3:17-18

Neither a simple redistribution of wealth nor simple economic growth and prosperity can mend broken families; nor can they turn low-skilled mothers into engineers or technicians.
Only the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ, and the millions of Christian homes throughout the country can attack the roots of social problems.

Only the church can minister to the whole person. Only Christians, armed with the Word and Spirit, planning and working to spread the kingdom and righteousness of Christ, can transform a nation as well as a neighborhood as well as a broken heart. That is what the rest of this class is about.

In other words, the Church is God's vehicle for social change.

**Question for Reflection**

1. The above statistics may be new to you. What aspects are the most surprising? How has your view of poverty in the neighborhood, city or nation changed after reading these results?

2. As you have been driving into the Germantown neighborhood to worship, have you been aware or alert to identifying any poverty or encountered any half dead men lying in the road? What can you or the church do to help?
Week 2 – The Call and Character of Mercy

THE CALL TO MERCY
Overview: Mercy to the full range of human needs is such an essential mark of being a Christian that it can be used as a test of truth faith. Mercy is not optional or an addition to being a Christian. Rather, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is the inevitable sign of true faith.

Mercy as the Essence of Love¹

1. The Law requires a heart and mind totally submitted to and absorbed in God alone.
   
   Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. – Deut 6:5

2. It requires that we must meet the needs of others, with all the speed, eagerness, the energy, and the joy with which we meet our own.
   
   Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. – Lev. 19:18

3. V.28 of the Good Samaritan parable says, “Do this and you will live”. When we look at the regulations of the Old Testament individually, we see many that are possible to keep. But if we look at the principles beneath the particulars and at the kind of life that the law is really after, then we see how we fail utterly to reach it. Jesus is pointing the lawyer to the perfect righteousness of the Law demanded so that he could see he is powerless to fulfill it. He was seeking to convict the law expert of sin.

The Riches and Poverty of God²

1. We must see that all of us are spiritually poor and bankrupt before God.
   
   Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. – Matt. 5:3

2. Even when we put on our best moral efforts for God, we appear as beggars clothed in filthy rags. All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. – Isa. 53:6

3. In Jesus Christ, God provided a righteousness for us (Rom. 3:21-22), a wealth straight from

¹ Keller, 35-37
² Ibid, 37-38
the account of the Son of God, who impoverished himself through suffering and death that we might receive it. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. – 2 Cor. 8:9

4. Jesus is NOT telling us that we can be saved by imitating the Good Samaritan, even through he is clearly charging us to follow his pattern. Rather, Jesus is seeking to humble us with the love God requires, so we will be willing to receive the love God offers.

**Mercy is not Optional**

1. One of the tests of Christian love is the ministry of mercy. Christian fellowship must be characterized by the meeting of physical needs. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth – 1 John 3:17-18. See also Proverbs 14:31, 19:17 and James 2:13-17.

2. Therefore, the poor and needy are a test. Our response to them tests the genuineness of our faith toward God. See Matt. 25:31-46. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.

3. God is angry when we have one face for him and another for the needy. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you…Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow – Isa. 1:15,17

4. So too, Jesus can say in effect, “I am the homeless person on your steps – how you treat her tells me what you are really like.” For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ – Matt. 25:35-36

**Mercy is not New**

1. Adam and Eve. The first act of mercy ministry immediately follows the Fall: God clothes Adam and Eve with animal skins (Gen 3:21). Many have pointed out that this action represents the covering of our sins by the work of Christ, but also this: man needs protection from a hostile environment. Social action could not have had an earlier or more exalted inauguration.

2. Job. Even before the giving of the law to Moses, God made his will known concerning the ministry of mercy. Job knew that the righteousness God requires includes providing food, shelter, and clothing to the needy (Job 24:1-21; 31:16-23). Job tells us, “I was a father to the needy; I took up the cause of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth – Job 29:16-17

3. People of Israel. When God gave the law to Moses, he was constructing a believing community in which social righteousness was also required as personal righteousness and morality. See Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

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3 Ibid, 39-40

4 Ibid, 41-42
4. The Law. God’s law required that the poor be given more than just a “handout,” but he had to be given grain or livestock that he could become economically self-sufficient (Deut. 15:12-15).

5. Mercy to the poor is an evidence of true heart commitment to God. Is this not this the kind of fasting I have chosen to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? – Isa 58:6-7  See also Isa 1:10-17; Amos 4:1-6; 5:21-24

6. The Prophets. The prophets are be characterized by mercy to the poor (Isa.11:1-4; 61:1-2).

The Gospel to the Poor

1. Our Lord, in becoming human, literally “moved-in” with the poor (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus lived with, ate with, and associated with lepers and outcasts, the lowest class of society. We should do good to our enemies (Luke 6:35).

2. We see the words of Jesus and the prophets reflected in the teaching and practice of the early church.

3. Christians are charged to remember

- The Poor. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do – Gal. 2:10
- The Widows and orphans. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world – James 1:27
- To practice hospitality to strangers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it – Heb 13:2, and
- To denounce materialism. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth…but to put their hope in God…Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. – 1 Tim 6:17-19).

4. Although believers are to give their first and greatest aid to the needy within the church, mercy must also be shown to all people. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers – Gal. 6:10

5. Not only do all believers have these responsibilities, but a special class of officers – deacons – is established to coordinate the church’s ministry of mercy (1 Tim. 1; Acts 6).

Christ, Our Model

How can we draw into sharp focus all the teaching of the Bible concerning the ministry of mercy? By looking at Jesus Christ!

1. He is the true Adam (Rom. 5:14-21) who is subduing all creation to God (Heb. 2:5-8; Eph 2:10).

2. He is the true High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16) who can give mercy to all in need.

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5 Ibid, 42
6 Ibid, 43
3. He is the great Deacon (Rom. 15:8) who identifies with the poor (2 Cor. 8:9) and pours himself out in costly service (Mark 10:45).
4. Because we are united in Christ, every believer is a deacon, who is to wash the feet of others in humble service (Matt. 20:26-28; Gal 6:10). Every believer is also a royal priest, whose sacrifices to God include deeds of mercy (Heb 13:13-16). Christians are now also a “new Adam,” seeking to bring all creation into subjection to the Lord (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 10:5).

Conclusion
Every Christian is to be a witness. Every Christian is to be a people-helper.

Most of us have not come to grips with the clear directive of Scripture that all Christians must have their own ministry of mercy. We must each be actively engaged in it ourselves.

Questions for Reflection
1. In what ways does our mercy need to reflect the love of Christ?
2. Before we are able to give mercy, what needs to happen in our lives? Do you see where change in your own life is needed? Describe that.
3. Why is it that we tend to think of mercy as an option?
4. In what ways is Christ our model for mercy?
5. What is keeping you from focusing on and addressing the needs of the poor?

THE CHARACTER OF MERCY
Overview: The ministry of mercy is the meeting of “felt” needs through deeds. As agent of the kingdom, the church seeks to bring substantial healing of the effects of sin in all areas of life, including psychological, social, and physical.

Definition of the Ministry of Mercy
Here is a working definition for the ministry of mercy: it is the meeting of 1) “felt” needs through 2) deeds.

Human Needs
1. God’s mercy is that aspect of his nature which moves him to relieve suffering and misery. “Mercy” is the impulse that makes us sensitive to hurts and lacks in others and makes us desire to alleviate them. These “hurts or lacks” we call needs.

2. What are human needs? Needs are dependencies. All human beings were created dependent beings. We are not self-sufficient; we are only adequate in God. If we had stayed in perfect fellowship with God, we would nevertheless have had needs. However, we would have known no pain, since all our needs would have been immediately and continuously met in him.

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7 Ibid, 46-52
3. The Fall. To better understand our needs, we need to look more closely at the fall of man, the root of our miseries. Gen. 3:7-19. From this passage, four different results of Adam’s sin, four different “separations,” can be discerned. Separation defined is “disintegration (or breakdown) which arises from using an object for a purpose other than that which it was designed.”

When man determined to be his own master, the immediate result was a multidimensional condition of alienation, breakdown and separation in all our relationships.

**Separation from our Relationship with God**

1. Problem. We became separated from God. Sinful people cannot dwell with a holy God.

2. God’s “center” is his own glory; he does everything because it is consistent with his own perfect nature. We however, “center” on our own comfort and happiness; we live for our own glory.

3. Therefore, there is an inevitable collision between God and man. Man is traumatized by and is hostile to the holy presence of God. Yet we were built for fellowship with God. We cannot live with God and we cannot live without God. This is the essence of man’s condition.

4. All our problems flow from it, and none can be understood apart from it.

6. Solution. It is only in Christ that we are reconciled in our relationship to God (2 Cor. 3:13-18, 18; 4:6)

**Separation from our Relationship with Self**

1. Problem. Where there was peace there is now shame, fear, and a tormenting self-conscience. Unhappiness, guilt, fear, loss of personal identity, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicide, sexual problems – all stem from our loss of fellowship with God.
2. If we reject God, our hearts must constantly manufacture *idols* – persons, relationships, objects, and conditions which we believe will give us fulfillment.

3. But no idol can fill the void in our heart. All idolatry leads to deep hunger pangs in the soul, because nothing but a relationship with God can fulfill us.

4. Solution. In Christ alone can we escape this inevitable mental and emotional breakdown and set right the relationship we are to have with ourselves. (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24)

**Separation from our Relationship with Others and Social Sin**

1. Problem. We are separated from other people. Rebels against God do not need to hide only from God, but also from each other.

2. There are two ways the human machine goes wrong. One is when individuals collide with one another and do damage... the other is when things go wrong inside the individual.

3. So we see, all our “social problems” all stem from sin. Those on the Right will blame them on family breakdown, crime, personal immorality, selfishness, and a lack of discipline (separation from self). Those on the Left will blame them on injustice, greed, racism, imperialism, war, oppression (separation from others). Both are right!

7. Solution. The gospel redeems our fallen social relationships with one another.

**Alienation from our Relationship with Nature**

1. Problem. God declares to Adam and Eve that they are cut off from nature. The natural world is now hostile to us. Natural disaster, famine, disease, decay, mental and physical disabilities, aging, and death itself are the results.

2. Nature is not only in decay, but it is no longer “under us” as before the fall.

3. Solution. In Christ, however, even the natural order will be redeemed. (Ps. 96:11-13). Christ came to bring the kingdom of God back to earth. The kingdom of God is the means for the renewal of the entire world and all the dimensions of life.

**REMEMBER:** Sin has impacted all our *relationships*. The gospel is the power to transform all things including our relationship with God, our relationship with each other within the church, our relationship with others outside the church, with the city and the world.
The Church, the Kingdom, and Holistic Ministry

1. The ministry of the kingdom (living under the reign and rule of God) is to heal all the results of sin in all the areas of life. If this is true, then the church must intentionally use its resources to minister in every area of life. We are not just do evangelism but must be a “full-service” body. We must apply the whole gospel to the whole person to the whole world.

2. ALREADY. The kingdom is the power of the king. The kingdom of God is entered now through repentance and faith, the new birth. It is present where the Holy Spirit is present in power (Matt. 12:28; Luke 12:32-33)

3. BUT NOT YET. Christ has not come back yet. Because the kingdom is present partially, but not fully, we must expect “substantial” healing, but not “total” healing in all areas of life.

4. Partial Healing. This healing is always partial, because the kingdom has not fully come, yet this healing is substantial, because the kingdom is already present.

5. Holistic Demonstration and Proclamation in the church. On the one hand, the church is a royal nation, a counter-culture. The church is to be a new society in which the world can see what family

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8 Ibid, 52-54
dynamics and relationships, business practices, race relations, and all of life can be under the kingship of Jesus Christ. God is out to heal all the effects of sin: mental, social and physical.

6. Holistic Demonstration and Proclamation in the world. On the other hand, the church is to be an agent of the kingdom. It is not only to model the healing of God's rule but it is to spread it. Spreading the kingdom involves winning people to Christ and ordering lives and relationships and institutions and communities according to God's authority to bring in the blessedness of the kingdom.

7. Holistic Ministry. God’s call to the church is to seek or work for the peace of the city (Jer. 29:4-11). We are to become God’s presence in our neighborhoods and city (Jer. 29:5-6), pray for the city (Jer. 29:7), and practice our faith through action (Jer. 29:7). We are to undertake ministries of mercy (Matt. 25:31-40), be advocates for the powerless (Jer. 22:13), engage in community development which works with and mobilizes the poor to provide needed community services for them (Isa. 65:19-25) and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

Human Deeds⁹

Felt Needs

1. As we move toward the outer circle of the below diagram, we notice that the needs become more visible to everyone. It takes the Holy Spirit to understand that the deepest need is fellowship with God. But anyone can recognize “felt” needs.

2. It is crucial to understand that these “felt” needs are the door to core needs.

3. The unbeliever is not necessarily moved by seeing Christians serving the theological and psychological needs of others. They cannot understand the action because they do not feel the need themselves. But unbelievers do feel physical needs. When they see Christians feeding the hungry, comforting the suffering, supporting the financially and physically weak, unbelievers see our service. Through this, hearts can be softened to Christ.

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⁹ Ibid, 55-56
**Deed Ministry**

1. Another characteristic of “outer circle” needs is that they are met more through deeds than words.

2. There are “word-gifts” which are exercised primarily through verbal skills, and “deed gifts” which are exercised primarily through active service. Jesus himself was mighty in word and deed (Luke 24:19).

3. Luke 22:24-27: *Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? I am among you as one who serves."

4. John 3:17-18: John is boldly stating that love in word only is not really love at all. “Love” means giving one’s neighbor whatever he or she needs.

**The Whole Gospel to the Whole Person to the Whole World**

Luke 10:2,5-9

*And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’*

According to Luke 10, Kingdom ministry has several key dimensions...

1. God’s people are to **relate to people in the city in peace**.

2. God’s people are to **meet human need**.

3. God’s people are to **proclaim the gospel of the kingdom**.

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10 These concepts are derived from Dr. Eugene Bunkowske, Concordia Theological Seminary
Questions for Reflection

1. What are the four separations humans experience as a result of the Fall?

2. How will Christ's second coming change each of those?

3. How is ministering to another's physical needs a spiritual act?

4. How are you going to change the way you minister to those in need?
The Gospel of Grace

1. We are Spiritually Bankrupt. What does this mean? D.M. Lloyd-Jones says, “It means a complete absence of pride, a complete absence of self-assurance and self-reliance. It means a consciousness that we are nothing in the presence of God. It is nothing, then, that we can produce; it is nothing that we can do in ourselves. It is just this tremendous awareness of our utter nothingness as we come face to face with God. That is to be poor in spirit.”

2. We are poor. Jesus’ true goal was to show the law expert he was poor, and to prepare him to seek spiritual riches in the mercy of God… And perhaps Jesus himself was trying to show the law expert his own helpless condition by depicting him as the half-dead man lying in the road.

3. There is hope. Though we are all lying in our own blood, spiritually bankrupt and lost, yet God has provided spiritual wealth for us. He impoverished his Son so that his spiritual riches, his righteousness, could be given to those who believe. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. – 2 Cor 8:9

Grace and the Outcasts

Loving outcasts is one of two powerful effects that the gospel of grace has on a person who has been touched by it.

1. The person who knows that he received mercy while an undeserving enemy of God will have a heart of love for even (and especially!) the most ungrateful and difficult persons…He thinks: “Spiritually, I was just like these people, though physically and socially I never was where they are now. They are outcasts. I was an outcast.”

2. The “deserving” poor. We must be very careful about using the word “deserving” when it comes to mercy. Were we ever deserving of God’s mercy? If someone completely deserves our aid, then, really mercy?

3. Christ’s mercy was not based on worthiness; it was given to make us worthy. So also our mercy must not only be given to those who reach some standard of worthiness. If you love those who love

11 Keller, 59

12 ibid., 60-61
you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. - Luke 6:32-36

4. God gives mercy to the ungrateful and the wicked – that is what we were. So shall we be like our Father in heaven if we show mercy even to these. See the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matt. 18:21-35. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

5. The language of the Christian Heart. “I am only where I am by the sheer and unmerited mercy of God. I am completely equal with all other people.” That is the language of the Christian’s heart.

Grace and Generosity
The second major effect that the gospel of grace has on a person is that it creates spontaneous generosity.

1. One of the reasons that Jesus puts Samaritan in the story is that he, by virtue of his race and history, has no obligations at all to stop and give aid. Yet he stops. Why? Verse 33 tells us he was motivated by his compassion.

2. Mercy as a response to mercy. Mercy is commanded, but it must not be the response to a command, it is an overflowing generosity as a response to the mercy of God which we received.

3. Moralism fails to motivate. Often books and speakers tell Christians that they should help the needy because they have so much. Of course this is true. But this approach is very limited in its motivating power. Ultimately is produces guilt. The Bible does not use the guilt-producing motivation, yet it powerfully argues for the ministry of mercy.

4. Grace motivates. Mercy is spontaneous, superabounding love which comes from an experience of the grace of God. The deeper the experience of the free grace of God, the more generous we must become.

5. Put another way, the ministry of mercy is a sacrifice of praise to God’s grace. The risen Lord of our salvation is not here bodily for us to anoint his feet, but we have the poor to serve as a sacrifice to Christ of love and honor (see John 12:1-8; 2 Cor. 9:12-15; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16). The grace of God makes Christ precious to us, so that our possessions, our money, our time have all become eternally and utterly expendable.

The Gospel Self-Image
1. Jesus was the Word become flesh, truth made visible through action and deed ministry. And so, we must imitate him. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others - Phil. 2:3-4.
2. Pride in the form of self-consciousness (the “inferiority complex”) or in the form of self-confidence (the “superiority complex”) will make the incarnational lifestyle impossible. But in the gospel we discover that we are far more wicked than we ever dared to believe, yet more loved than we ever dared hope.

3. Liberation! Not self-conscious nor self-confident, a Christian is liberated to be self-forgetful. True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.

**Imitating the Incarnation**

1. We must go to the people of the world, listen to them, become deeply involved in their needs, doing justice and mercy as we communicate biblical truths.

2. “Self-sacrifice means... forgetfulness of self in others. It means entering into every man’s hopes and fears, longings and despairs: it means many sidedness of spirit, multiform activity, multiplicity of sympathies. It means richness of development. It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives – binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours.” – B.B. Warfield.

**Pushing the Button**

Though it may not be in evidence, a heart for the poor sleeps in all Christians until someone preaches grace in connection with the ministry of mercy. This “pushes a button” deep in our soul, and we begin to wake up.

**Conclusion**

1. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was humbling us with the mercy God requires so we can receive the mercy God offers.

2. All of us lie helpless and bankrupt, dying in the road. Jesus Christ, who is our natural enemy, who owes us nothing, nevertheless stops and gives us of his spiritual riches and saves us.

**Questions for Reflection**

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**GIVING AND KEEPING: A BALANCED LIFESTYLE**

Overview: Christians must give sacrificially, until their lifestyle is lowered. However, giving must be in accord with calling and ministry opportunities. Also, every believer must be a steward of possessions so as not to become a burden and liability to his or her family.

**Count the Cost**

1. The ministry of mercy is costly. The Bible repeatedly tells us that it is not enough simply to give to the poor. We must give bountifully. If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. 8 Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. – Deut 15:7-8.

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15 ibid., 64-65

16 ibid., 66

17 ibid., 68
2. God requires not only a significant expenditure of our substance on the needy. We are obligated to spend our hearts and minds as well. *Blessed is he who considers the poor.* - Ps. 41:1

3. We are to ponder the condition of the poor and seek ways to bring them to self-sufficiency. This takes a personal investment of time and of mental and emotional energy. *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* – 2 Cor. 9:7. 68

**Simple Living**

1. Modern Proponents. Many today call all Christians to “simple living.” i.e. Ron Sider. He advocates a “graduated tithe,” in which the percentage of a person’s tithe increases as his income increases. Sider urges families to radically lower their lifestyle so that they can give 20-50 percent of their income to the Lord and the needy.

2. Historical Proponents. This includes John Wesley, George Mueller, John Newton.

3. John Newton lays out his own two guidelines for the ministry of mercy.
   First, choose a standard of living which is “barely decent” – the plainest necessities of life, without (what he calls) “conveniences” and “elegancies.” Above that, we are to spend a penny on the poor for every penny we spend on ourselves. In other words, we should give away half of our disposable income.

   Secondly, Newton discourages the Christian from showing hospitality or entertaining for friends who are not poor. Newton believed that the Bible commanded us to feed and to house strangers and the poor in our own home. Finally, Newton concludes by saying, “I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words [Luke 14:12-14] do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.”

   Newton also urged a simple lifestyle where generosity to the poor was a higher priority than your savings and retirement.

**Biblical Contentment**

Christians differ widely over the issues we are discussing. What does the Bible say about simple living?

1. Be Moderate. There is no lack of passages which urge upon Christians a moderate lifestyle. *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have…* - Heb. 13:5; *Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it…* - 1 Tim 6:6-9

2. Be Content. We are told that we must be content, a word that means a genuine soul-satisfaction. There is no anxiety, gnawing regret, or resentment toward people who have.

3. Does that mean that Christians have no motive for making money and increasing their income? Not at all!

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18 ibid., 68-70

19 ibid., 71-72
4. Motive to make money. A Christian’s first motive is excellence in work for the glory of God. The Bible calls us to skillful hard work as a means of glorifying God and serving our neighbor (Prov. 18:9; 22:29; Eccl. 3:22). Hard work tends to increase income (Prov. 10:2-4; 12:1, 24) though that is not the primary aim in the believer’s vocation (Prov. 23:4 – “Do not toil to acquire wealth”; Col. 3:22-25).

5. A Christian’s second motive to increase income is to be fruitful in good works. Wealth is to be accumulated strictly for doing works of mercy and spreading the kingdom. Wealth is not to be stored up “for yourselves.” Matt. 6:19-21.

**Wealth and God’s Calling**

1. A calling. For Christians, their wealthy state becomes a “calling,” a kind “spiritual gift.” Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth... but to put their hope in God... Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share - 1 Tim 6:17-19

2. Theology. First, the rich are directed to develop a sound theology of wealth.

3. Wisdom. Secondly, the wealthy must use their money so as to be rich in good deeds. Disposable wealth not put to use in God’s work will threaten the very roots of one’s spiritual life (Matt 13:22).

3. We must conclude that, while there may be rich Christians, there should not be rich-living Christians. Middle-and-upper-income Christians are not required to give away all their capital, but they must invest in good deeds rather than in their own comfort. Wealth is wrong if spent on “yourselves” (Matt. 6:19).

4. Contentment for Rich and Poor. The affluent Christian must remember that the call to be content with a moderate lifestyle is written to them, as well as to those who have little. Paul’s appeal in 1 Tim. 6:6-8 instructs the poor not to resent their lack of riches, but to be satisfied with a modest economic state. Then this appeal instructs the rich not to be proud, but to voluntarily be satisfied with a more modest standard of living also.

**Guidelines for Justice Living**

1. Share the Burden. We must give so that we feel the burden of the needy ourselves. Jonathan Edwards says, “If we never obliged to relieve others’ burdens, but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens, when we bear no burden at all?

2. Discerning the Call. We may only keep whatever wealth we need for our calling and ministry opportunities. We must keep in view the “mercy,” “helps,” “service,” are listed as spiritual gifts. It is clear that some have special gifts and thus a calling to work with the poor, needy, elderly, handicapped, and so on.

3. We are all Called. However, every Christian must do deeds of mercy; but only some Christians have special gifts for mercy.

4. Discover the call through action. If we begin to reach out to the poor, we may discover we have a calling we had not perceived before. The way to determine if God calls you to a special ministry is to find an agreement of three issues. There will be a desire to do it, an ability to do it, and an opportunity to do it. Only when these three elements agree is there a call. It would be

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20 ibid., 73

21 ibid., 74-77
counterproductive for a family, apart from a specific calling to a ministry, to reduce its living standard suddenly and drastically out of a sense of guilt and conviction, even from a study of the Word.

5. Supporting Our Family. We must not be generous in such a way that we or our families become liabilities to others. In many ways, this is the most difficult balance of all to strike.

6. Worse than an unbeliever. Whoever does not provide for his relatives…he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8)

7. Matters of Conscience. The extent of savings is a matter to be left to a Christian’s own conscience. But, let’s remind or conscience that we will always have a tendency to rationalize too much investment in our family rather than in the poor.

8. Summary. Perhaps, in summary, we must call Christians not to “simple’ living but to “justice living.” “Simple living’ is a helpful term, but it connotes that such a lifestyle is an option. Also it can become an abstract exercise in self-denial, an end in itself, rather than a means to the end of direct ministry. The relief of the poor is not only an act of mercy, but also of justice.

Questions for Reflection

CHURCH AND WORLD: A BALANCED FOCUS
Overview: As a priority, we should give to needy Christians both intensively and extensively, until their need is gone. But we must also give generously to nonbelievers as part of our witness to the world.

Who are we to love in word and deed? The answer is anyone you find in need, anyone you find in the road.

The Priority of Covenant

1. A simple review of all biblical admonitions to help the poor reveals that most texts refer to poor brethren – to poor Christians. However, there should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. - Deut. 15:4-5

2. Covenantal blessing. We conclude that the ministry of mercy was primarily a covenantal blessing. That is, it was a healing ministry for those who entered into God’s covenant by promising to live under God’s kingship.

3. The Family and Church. God puts first responsibility for a poor man upon those in the very closest covenant relationship with him. But notice that this covenantal obligation for mercy extends beyond the immediate family. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever - 1 Tim 5:8

4. Scripture commands. The church, the people of God, is repeatedly told to care for their needy members. Most of the OT admonitions say, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother - Deut. 15:9

22 ibid., 81-82
5. New Testament Concern. See Matt 25:35ff; 1 John 3:17; and James 2:15-17

6. The State. Another covenantal relationship is that of the citizen to his government. Even pagan kings were held responsible to see the needs of its poor and weak citizens.

7. Government Roles. The Bible tells us very little about the government’s role in caring for the needy. It does seem fair to infer that such a lack of information at least means that the work of mercy is given by God more primarily to the church and the family than to the state.

8. In Summary. The Christian’s first responsibility for mercy is to other believers, to those with whom he or she is in closest covenant. That covenantal responsibility is heavy. We are to give until the needy brother’s need is gone.

Mercy to the Outsider
1. Good to all People. Whereas we recognize that the primary responsibility of Christians is to the poor within the body of Christ, the Bible forbids us to neglect the poor outside of the church. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. - Gal. 6:10

2. Expression of the Church’s Mission. In other words, the ministry of mercy is not only an expression of the fellowship of the church, but also an expression of the mission of the church. Several theological principles demand that the Christian extend the ministry of mercy to nonbelievers.

3. Mercy to Neighbors. There is the biblical concept of loving our “neighbor” as ourselves. Luke 10:25-37. The good Samaritan clearly defines our “neighbor” as anyone at all – relative, friend, acquaintance, stranger, or enemy – whose need we see. Not all men are my brothers, but everyman is my neighbor.

2. Mercy to strangers in the OT. The Bible tells us to render service to strangers. Strangers were the recipients of mercy. Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. - Ex. 22:21

3. Mercy to strangers in the NT. What do the OT rules on charity to strangers say to us now? The NT assumes them. Matt 25:35,43; Heb 13:2

4. Mercy to Enemies. A third reason to give mercy to non-Christians is the pattern of God’s “common grace” given even to enemies. Common grace is a term theologians use to describe the general blessings God bestows on all people, regardless of their love for him. Matt 5:45 tells us God provides physical health and agricultural prosperity to everyone on earth. How generous he is!

5. We are particularly required to be kind to the unthankful and to the evil; and therein to follow the example of our heavenly Father, who caused his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. We are obligated, not only to be kind to them that are so to us, but to them that hate, and that despitefully use us. – Jonathan Edwards

God’s Mercy and Ours
1. The pattern of God’s own saving mercy. His salvation comes to the unworthy, the unexpected, the enemies of God (Rom 3:9-18).

23 ibid., 83-84

24 ibid., 85-87
2. The example of God’s grace. This indicates that we should not passively sit and wait for the needy to beg. Rather, we should study, find, and meet basic human needs. Did Christ sit in heaven and wait for us to beg for his mercy? No, Christ sought us and found us.

3. Definition of Love. We are commanded to “abound in love…towards all men” (1 Thess. 3:12 KJV). We are told that love must always be given with loving deeds (1 John 3:17-19) and not in word only.

4. The Deed Ministry of Christ. We are told that Jesus Christ was might in “word and deed” (Luke 24:19). These supernatural deeds visibly demonstrated the way in which the kingdom of God restores the entire creation, and how all the effects of sin are healed under his rule.

5. Mercy as a Sign of the Kingdom. Our own deeds of mercy also point forward to the promise of the new heaven and the new earth, but they also show that the promise of the kingdom is already being fulfilled in the pouring out of the love of Christ through the Spirit!

6. Miraculous deeds. Keller believes that the church cannot routinely do miraculous deed ministry, but we still are to demonstrate the kingdom by our deeds in the world.

7. Our ministry of mercy is not simply a way to validate our preaching. Our deed ministry must be motivated by compassion. When we move to meet a physical need out of compassion, though we do it without miraculous power, we demonstrate the renewing power of the kingdom of God.

The Great Commission
1. For the apostles to be sent into the world to minister in word and deed certainly means that the church is being sent as well. We go not just as individual Christians, but as an organized institution.

Questions for Reflection
Who Deserves Mercy?  

Many people divide the poor into two categories: there are the “deserving” poor, whose poverty is not their responsibility, and the “undeserving” poor whose poverty is due to their own sin and foolishness. Some think we should only aid the deserving poor.

The Case Against “Conditions”

1. What conclusions do we reach? First, it is quite difficult to speak biblically about the “deserving” poor. Our aid is called mercy, not a reward.

2. Secondly, mercy or deed ministry must be done for a particular purpose: to spread the kingdom of God. That means we seek to open hearts to God and bring rebellious wills under his lordship with our deeds, just as we do with our words.

3. Our mercy, then, must follow the pattern of God’s mercy. It comes without conditions.

The Case For “Conditions”

1. Scriptural Basis. Despite all we have seen, there are also very important scriptural bases for having “conditions” attached to our aid.

2. The Scripture teaches that all people must work…”six days you shall labor” (Ex. 34:21). We were built for work, and thus we cannot be fulfilled without it (Ecc. 3:22; 5:12). “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Paul’s term “will not” in a continuous tense probably means a habitual attitude.

3. Mercy as honor. It is important to notice that the economic support given to destitute widows is called “honor” or “recognition”. Poverty was not something to scorn! The poor need respect as well as resources.

4. Let’s summarize the scriptural conditions for aid.
   • First, our mercy must not make it easier for someone to disobey God.
   • Second, our mercy to the poor must be such as to make the poor merciful themselves. We must serve them with such wisdom and love that they become, not more selfish, but less!
   • They must become “well known for their good deeds.”
   • One writer puts it perfectly. “Serving the poor is a euphemism for destroying the poor unless it includes with it the intention of seeing the poor begin to serve others, and thereby validate the words of Jesus that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

The Two Sides of God’s Mercy

1. It is Unconditional. When God’s grace first comes to us, it comes unconditionally, regardless of our merits. His mercy is “unconditional” in that God calls us with the gospel before we show any interest or desire for him (Rom 3:9-18), while we are still enemies.

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26 Keller, 94-96

27 ibid., 96-98
2. It does not proceed without conditions. But through God’s mercy comes without conditions, it does not proceed without conditions! God demands our cooperation in sanctification. Why? Because he loves us, and we can only be happy if we are holy. God cannot leave us in the condition in which he originally found us. He therefore demands cooperation with his mercy. We must give ourselves to Bible study, to fellowship with God, to the practice of the truth. If we do not, we will not grow.

The Two Sides of our Mercy

1. It is Unconditional. So too, at first, we should show mercy to anyone in need, as we have opportunity and resources. We should not turn them away by analyzing them as “undeserving,” even if sin is part of the complex of their poverty.

2. It does not proceed without conditions. The goal of mercy is not simply to provide spot relief or to stop the suffering. Our real purpose must be to restore the poor person. We must carefully build up the individual until he or she is self-sufficient, and that means we must, in love, demand more and more cooperation.

3. The purpose of mercy. Mercy must have the purpose of seeing God’s lordship realized in the lives of those we help. We must not give aid so as to support rebellion against God… Mercy must have as its goal the rehabilitation of the whole person.

4. You can withdraw mercy. And though we must be extremely patient, eventually, aid must be withdrawn if it is abused.

5. The pattern. At first, we must witness to the free love of Christ in our mercy. But at some point, we must call the whole person to Christ. Very, very often it is the needy person himself who then removes himself from your aid.

Let Mercy Limit Mercy

1. When to set conditions. At what point, then, do we begin to set conditions? What is the guideline? It is this: We must let mercy limit mercy. We may cut off our aid only if it is unmerciful to continue it. It is unmerciful to bail out a person who needs to feel the full consequences of his own irresponsible behavior.

2. Let us into your life! Sometimes we may have to say: “Friend, we are not withdrawing our mercy, just changing its form. We will continue to pray for you and visit you, and the minute you are willing to cooperate with us and make the changes that we believe are needed, we will resume our aid. Please realize that it is only out of love that we are doing this!”

Three Causes of Poverty

It is critical to our whole discussion to distinguish among the biblical causes of poverty. Biblically, there are three answers to that question.

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28 ibid., 98

29 ibid., 100-102
1. Oppression or Injustice. Oppression is any social condition or unfair treatment that brings or keeps a person in poverty (see Ps 82:1-8; Prov. 14:31; Ex. 22:21-27). Delayed (Deut. 24:15) or unjustly low wages (Eph. 6:8-9), court and government systems weighed in favor of the great and wealthy (Lev. 19:15) and high-interest loans (Ex. 22:25-27) are examples of oppression.

2. Natural Disaster or Calamity. Examples about in scripture, including crop failures, disabling injury, victimization by criminals, floods, storms, and fires. This kind of poverty is caused by circumstances.

3. Personal Sin. A life of laziness (Prov. 6:6-7) and problems of self-discipline (Prov. 23:21) can bring about poverty. Expensive tastes and luxury-seeking can be a reason for economic trouble (Prov. 21:17).

4. Over-simplifying the Causes. The “liberal” tends to see all the poor as oppressed, and thus does not see the importance of conditions in mercy ministry. But the “conservative” tends to see all the poor as irresponsible, and thus overemphasizes conditions in mercy. Both sides oversimplify the complex causes of poverty.

5. Seek discernment. We must also distinguish these three causes if we are to give appropriate kinds of help. We must beware of becoming one-dimensional in our analysis. We should recognize that the roots of much poverty will not only be dealt with by an exhortation to “work,” but also with counseling, education, various sorts of aid, and with a display of respect and loving concern.

**Causes or Categories?**

1. It is a mistake to conclude that the three causes of poverty are always separate categories. Very often, all three causes of poverty are present – interrelating and interlocking.

2. Experience reveals that the three causes of poverty often exits simultaneously in a case of need. The person may have sinned, and have been sinned against, and have been the victim of natural calamity.

**Conclusion**
The adage “grace is free, but it is not cheap” applies to the ministry of mercy. Our love is active, and it longs to bring about healing and change in the lives of the recipient under the kingship of Jesus. Nothing less will satisfy it.

Questions for Reflection

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**WORD AND DEED: A BALANCED TESTIMONY**
Overview: the ministry of mercy is not just a means to the end of evangelism. Word and deed are equally necessary, mutually interdependent and inseparable ministries, each carried out with the single purpose the spread of the kingdom of God.
The Grand Apologetic

1. Mercy has an impact. It melts hearts. It removes objections. It forces respect out of even those hostile to the gospel. Our good deeds glorify God in the eyes of the world (Matt. 5:16). Our concrete deeds of love for one another are an apologetic for the validity of the Christian faith. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” - John 13:35

2. A visible display. The ministry of mercy within the Christian community is perhaps the most startling and visible display of our love for one another. It was probably the dynamic behind Acts 4:32-33. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

3. This was not some form of communism. Rather, verse 32 is telling us that when any Christian was in need the other brothers responded with great speed and generosity. In a sense, no Christian acted as if any of his possessions were his won for the using. This economic sharing had to be conspicuous and amazing to outsiders. Apparently it helped give the preaching of the apostles even more power. All the world could see how different the Christians were.

The Problem of Precedence

It is inappropriate to ask whether evangelism or social concern is more important. They constitute a whole that should not be divided.

Necessary Ministries

1. The first principle is that the ministry of word and the ministry of deed are equally necessary ministries… If both word and deed are commands, how can we decide which commands of God are more important? If word and deed are both imperative, then they are equally necessary for Christians and the church to do.

Means to an End?

1. Some teach that evangelism has primacy over mercy, meaning that mercy is a means to the end of evangelism. That is, we minister to people in deed as a way of bringing them to Christ… but deed ministry, like grace itself, is unmerited favor. Luke 6:35 and context warn us not to lend or to do good so as to expect anything in return.

2. Equal Footing. 1 John 3:17 tells us that the motive of any ministry is love… this puts evangelism and mercy on an equal footing motivationally.

3. Two Wings of the Airplane. On a personal (not abstract) level, it is unthinkable that we could truly love an individual and not want both to share the gospel as well as to meet the person's basic human needs. Word and deed are the proverbial “two wings of the airplane.” Which wing is more important? If you love a person, you recognize your friend’s most fundamental need is reconciliation to God. But you do not care for his illness or feed him just as a means to that end. You tend to your friend, because you love him.

ibid., 107-109

ibid., 109-110
An Option?

1. Some teach that evangelism has primacy over mercy, meaning that *mercy needs only to be done in certain circumstances.*

2. To fail to provide for the ministry of mercy is sin, since both are commands of God!

3. To cry that you can’t “afford” to be merciful is just a lame excuse. Can the local church actually “afford” to fulfill the evangelistic mandate to take the gospel to every creature? Neither can it “afford” to feed all the hungry. But we must use the resources we do have to obey all the mandates of God to his people.

Next on the Schedule?

1. Time Sequence. Still others teach that evangelism has the primacy over mercy, meaning that *there is a biblically ordained time sequence of word and deed.*

2. Christ’s Example. If we look at Jesus’ ministry, however, we see there is no set pattern of sequence between word and deed. Jesus healed a man born blind (John 9:1-7), but not until some time later (days perhaps) did he call the man to himself (vv. 35-41). At other times, he challenges or calls to discipleship before or immediately after he heals (cf. Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 5:21-43).

3. Equally Necessary. We see that the status of both the ministries of word and deed is an imperative, and the motive of both ministries is love. Thus they are equally necessary for the church to carry out.

Inseparable Ministries

1. Interdependent Relationship. A second principle is that word and deed, mercy and evangelism are inseparable, existing in a “symbiotic,” interdependent relationship. Word and deed are inextricably united and inseparable.

2. We must not make the error of those who *confuse* word and deed. Biblically the ministry of word and deed are distinct, but never separate.

The Two-Ends Model

1. To say that the ministry of mercy can stand on its own and is an end in itself may pave the way for social concern that is divorced from the preaching of the gospel. This must never happen.

The Single-End Model

1. The proper model. The proper model is not (1) to see mercy as the means to evangelism, or (2) to see mercy and evangelism as independent ends, but (3) to see both word and deed, evangelism and mercy, as means to the single end of the spread of the kingdom of God.

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32 ibid., 111-114
2. Any less comprehensive view will make it impossible to understand Jesus when he says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20), or when he says he is coming to bring the good news of the kingdom to the poor (Luke 4:18ff).

3. The whole Gospel to the whole person. The kingdom means bringing the kingship of Christ in both word and deed to broken lives. We have seen that poverty, sickness, injustice, emotional problems, and social problems are all the fruit of sin. We must minister to the whole person. We must reconcile people to God, counsel them to emotional wholeness, free them from structures of injustice, and meet physical needs. But we participate in these ministries all in conjunction with each other. We proclaim the gospel of the kingdom through word and deed.

Interdependent Relationships

1. Although we mentioned that mercy and evangelism do not need to be offered at the exact same time, yet they must be coupled, because they are interrelated. The preaching of the Word produces faith (Rom. 10:16-18) and faith always produces good works in general and deeds of mercy in particular (James 2:1-23). On the other hand, we have seen that deeds of mercy have an impact. God often uses them as a means to open hearts to the gospel (Acts 4:32-33; cf. John 13:35; 1 John 3:17-18).

Vain Offerings

1. Theologian Yamamori sees both the ministry of the word and of deed as relating symbiotically. “from the perspective of the prophets, to have an intimate, personal, loving relationship vertically with Yahweh…was one facet of Israel’s covenant responsibility; and to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream” in one’s horizontal relationships was another. To the prophets, the two were neither identical nor exclusive. They viewed the two relationships as involving two distinctly separate objects but at the same time as mutually inseparable and essential for the full realization of God’s kingdom…one could not live without the other; one without the other was a ‘vain offering’ in the words of Isaiah (Isa. 1:13-15, 17).”

2. God is saying through Isaiah: “Orthodoxy without social concern is not orthodoxy!” So, too, social concern without the ministry of the word would be a vain offering. Deed without word, word without deed – either is a vain sacrifice.
Parasitic Possibilities

1. Caution! Where constant care and self-examination are essential. This important caution alerts us to the constant tendency for churches either to engage in mercy at the expense of evangelism or to evangelize at the expense of social concern.

Radical Ministries\(^{33}\)

1. A third principle is that the ministry of the word, though it does not function properly apart from deed ministry, addresses the most radical and foundational roots of human need.

2. It is common to speak of “the priority of the spiritual,” but is this a biblical idea? God created both the material and the immaterial halves of reality (Gen. 2:4-7). Both the material and immaterial came under the disorder and decay of sin (Gen 3:14-19). Moreover, God plans to redeem both our spirits (Heb. 12:23) and our bodies (1 Cor. 15) – both the material and the immaterial. How, then, can we speak about the “physical” as being less important than the “spiritual”?

3. The ministry of the word is the most radical ministry. To be radical means to go to the root of a thing.

4. There is no more fundamental means to cut the root of sin and death than with the verbal message of the gospel.

Conclusion

1. Experience shows that, no matter how much we acknowledge the theological necessity of both ministries, it can be extremely difficult for a group of Christians to focus on the two equally at the same time. And that may not be inappropriate.

2. Yamamori says that either word or deed may be the priority in a given setting. He calls this the principle of contextual symbiosis. In other words, “the nature of needs, problems, opportunities, and available resources within a given context of the church’s ministry must determine which aspect of the ministry be underscored at any given time.”

3. Churches may have phases of ministry. There may be a period of several years in which one ministry has the priority over the other, even as both are maintained.

4. Mercy and evangelism are like smoke and fire – where one is, the other must be near. If we fail to provide for both the ministry of mercy and the ministry of the word, we may still have an active and successful-appearing church. But actual growth of the kingdom of God will not be occurring.

Questions for Reflection

THE CHANNELS OF MERCY\(^{34}\)

\(33\) ibid., 114

\(34\) ibid., 123-129
1. The Family. The first “channel” is the family itself. All individuals and families have a responsibility to develop their own ministries of mercy.

2. The Church. The second channel is the local church. Each congregation should develop programs and ministries of mercy that mobilize the gifts and resources of the congregation to aid the needy.

3. Non-Profit/Parachurch Organizations. Christian service can also be carried out through voluntary associations or “mission societies.” These are individuals and families who band together to form parachurch organizations that perform needed services.

4. The State. A fourth channel for the Christian’s ministry of mercy is the state. Many argue strenuously that the state has no biblical warrant for helping the needy. But we see that both pagan kings (Dan. 4:26-27) and Hebrew kings (Ps. 72:1-2; Prov. 29:14; 31:9) were called by God to render justice and mercy to the poor. Joseph, a believer who served as a civil officer in a pagan government, saved thousands through a hunger relief program (Gen. 47:13-17). Therefore, Christians can sometimes fulfill God’s call to mercy through their function as civil servants.

5. A Challenge from the State. Our ministry to the needy should go hand and hand with the ministry of the word, and many modern governments put obstacles in the way of doing so.

THE FAMILY AS MINISTRY BASE

1. Our Primary Responsibility. When God sees a person in need, he puts primary responsibility for aid on that person’s family. He who does not care for his own family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). But even beyond that, the Bible instructs each family to have a diaconal ministry to the community around it.

2. Each Family is to have a Mercy Ministry. In Israel, families were to take care to leave grain in their fields so as to provide for the poor through gleaning (Lev. 23:22). Also, each year, each family celebrated the Feast of Weeks, which the Lord commanded that each family include the Levites from the town, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows (Deut. 16:11).

3. Each Family is to Practice Hospitality. The Bible gives directives to take in the hungry and homeless poor for hospitality (Isa. 58:7). Hospitality, of course, is preeminently the work of the family. This is not to say that a single, unmarried person is without responsibility!

BEGINNING WHERE YOU ARE

1. The inmost circle is in the immediate family itself. Many a Christian family has found its primary mercy ministry in the care of disabled or elderly or chronically ill members. Far too many evangelical Christians today hide behind the high mobility and privatization of our society to screen themselves from duties of mercy to their kin.

2. The second circle is within the church. In the best churches, most of the mercy ministry is not done through official programs or by the officers. Rather, sensitive individuals watch for needs and meet them out of their own schedules, out of their own pockets, and out of their own hearts.

35 ibid., 126-129
3. The third circle is your neighborhood or nearby community. To begin, you can watch the immediate neighborhood the way you should watch your church. Do you see neighbors struggling with grief, loss, sickness, divorce, age, disability, personal problems?

4. What is the principle here? The family needs to “look in close” before it “looks afar.” You must be sure that there is no bleeding man right under your nose, in your family, church, or neighborhood.

**STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN**

Perhaps now we are beginning to see that we need to develop a whole new way of looking at our world, if we are to become ministers of mercy.

**BUILDING BRIDGES**

One of the reasons we do not “stop, look, and listen” is because we do know how many needs are out there, and we are afraid. Afraid of what? There appear to be two major fears.

1. First, we do not know how to make contact; we are afraid of “breaking the ice.”
2. Second, we do not think we have the resources to help; we are afraid of failure.

**Dealing with Fears**

1. Let’s look at the first fear. Your job is to initiate contact. You must turn strangers into contacts, contacts into acquaintances, and acquaintances into friends. A minister of mercy looks around his church and community and makes deliberate efforts to develop relationships in order to find needs to be met through word and deed.

**Neighboring**

1. On the most basic level, you must have a general demeanor of “neighborliness.” Smiles, waves, facial expressions must be open and warm, even (especially!) in chance meetings.
2. The most basic social gesture is hospitality. Invite neighbors and church members into your home. Make friendly phone calls, invite people to eat breakfast with you. If you have children, especially young ones, use your children as bridges for relationships. At church or in your neighborhood, you will find that the presence of your children lowers barriers. Put a child in a stroller and take a walking tour of your neighborhood to invite people to a backyard cookout. You will find people much quicker to talk to you than if you were alone.

**Loving**

1. You can also develop relationships through loving deeds. Little loving deeds for more obvious needs may help open people’s hearts to let you know of more extensive and deeper needs.
2. Watch especially for crisis situations and be there to help.
3. But, keep in mind, most people only work to cultivate relationships with people they like, with people they enjoy being with. Christian ministers of mercy are unique in that they intentionally and
systematically seek to build bridges with all the people around them at home, at work, and at church. They do this to discover needs and to create a climate in which others can share their weaknesses.

THE SPIRIT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Besides the contact, you will need to adopt a caring, encouraging, listening stance. Below are insightful principles on how to be a good listener and encourager:

1. All people hide out of a fear of rejection.

2. Encouragement occurs when we help out of love, not out of fear. Our mercy is truly love only if our efforts are a response to a desire to obey God and to help the person. But our mercy is really fear, if our efforts are responses to a desire to stay safe, to look good, and so on. A real minister risks anything – social awkwardness, a lounge-lashing, looking foolish – to respond in love.

3. Encouragement occurs when we speak to a person’s fear without rejecting him. Real encouragement seeks to expose and to speak to the fears that are driving a person even as we communicate acceptance and warmth. People hide because they believe that exposure will mean rejection.

4. Encouragement occurs as we communicate our encouragement nonverbally. Our heart may be motivated by love for a person, but the person cannot see our heart! Outsiders see our eyes and face and body and hear our voice. Try to smile with your eyes, as well as with your mouth.

Questions for Reflection

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36 ibid., 130-131