



You can read this testimony to your group to expose them to the kind of service we are espousing. This testimony took place during Mercy on Mondays. However, we hope all groups would get involved in mission whenever and wherever they are. Seed exists to make this happen.

Dispelling the Mercy Myth

A Testimony By Steve Leach

If you're anything like me, when you hear someone mention SEED you immediately think of Nathan Ivey. Suzanne Hoehne, who serves as the SEED coordinator for my community group also comes to mind, as do my accountability partners Josh Thomas and Jesse Moss. This is both good and bad. Good because the Lord has blessed this ministry and given these four a heart to serve in His Kingdom but bad because SEED is not just for the few, but also for all of us who are Christians. I want to share my experience with the newly started Mercy on Monday, which is one way SEED equips Sojourners for face-to-face mercy ministry in the city. I hope that readers will share in the blessing of what happened and, in case anyone is as fearful as I was, to dispel those fears and encourage participation.

The Scriptures command us to “love your neighbor as yourself” in both the Old and New Testaments (Lev 19:18, Mt 19:19, Mk 12:31, et al). Ultimately this love should reflect the love shown to us by the Father in sending Christ to die for us “while we were still sinners” (Rom 5:8). While there is no doubt that there are many in this sinful condition in our neighborhoods, I often struggle with how to love them—here's where SEED comes in.

As we gathered at the 930 on Monday, August 24th at 6:30pm, we were treated to an impromptu testimony by Austin, a Shelby Park resident who was prayer walking with us, who shared how Nathan and Josh had come along side him and built a relationship with his family. I was shocked to hear that they knew one another for over a year before Austin accepted the Gospel. Nathan and Josh not only shared the gospel with Austin during that first year, but also demonstrated God's love for Austin by spending time with him and his family, helping him move and by fixing some of his appliances. Austin shared that God used this relationship to soften his hardened heart until he was finally able to understand and accept the Gospel. Suddenly, my ideas of what loving my neighbor looks like began to change. Little did I know what God had in store for me that evening.

As we split off into groups, my fears cropped back up when I was assigned with Nathan and Jennifer Kramer to go on a prayer walk through Germantown and interact



with the residents. The problem is that I was focused on what R.B. Kuiper calls “man-centered Evangelism,” focusing on my own (in)abilities and on the type of reception I would receive from our neighbors. We were quickly reminded that the power lies in the Gospel, not the teller or the hearer. Each week, new Sojourners are teamed up with experienced leaders who guide them through—so I wasn’t being thrown to the wolves as I had imagined! Additionally, as Austin’s story showed, there wasn’t any sort of pressure to produce results, we simply were to engage those we met, be kind, and seek to make God known through our words and deeds. Well, as the hymn goes, “’twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” Not only were we able to make new friends, but there was absolutely nothing scary and no pressure whatsoever.

We moseyed on over to St. Catherine Street, one block from the 930, and promptly ran into Colleen, who was returning from doing some shopping. We spoke for a minute or so and as we were walking away, she called to us and suggested that we go see Bob. We should not underestimate the value of simply listening to what our neighbors have to say. I heard over the weekend on a Christian radio program that since 1986, the number of people who have no friends and nobody to confide in has more than tripled. I didn’t really pay much attention at the time, but on Monday night this lack of community really hit home.

We did listen to Colleen and made our way to Bob’s house and were given a hero’s welcome. Bob was already familiar with Sojourn because Sean Steadman, a member, had already built a much-needed handrail for him. Bob later told us he came outside because he saw us talking with Colleen. Bob invited us to pick vegetables from his garden and we spent a good 30-45 minutes just talking and picking and listening. Laughter abounded as Nathan and I accepted a challenge to eat one of Bob’s chili peppers, which he assured us were not very hot. As we began to sweat and our noses began to run, Bob and Jennifer shared a high-five and some hearty laughs. As we left, Bob shared that he needed to get back to church, intimating that he needed to get right with God before coming back. Nathan reminded him that what we all really need is repentance for our sins and faith in the accomplished work of Christ. We shared a prayer with Bob, set a time to pick him up for a service on Sunday and set off down the street with no less than three bags of produce. I couldn’t believe that God used me to draw Bob to Himself. God can and does use his children to advance his kingdom! I thought the night was over, but God still had more in store for us.

I figured that after meeting a few neighbors, we would be done for the night. But to my surprise, a few houses down we ran into Tony, who was excited to receive some of our bounty of fresh produce. Tony began to confide in us how he had gotten into some fights at work and how he had felt wronged and persecuted. When he later shared that all this happened in 1993, I couldn’t help but feel the hopelessness and



bitterness that accompanies those who are lonely and don't know Christ. Once again, just the simple act of stopping to say hi to someone and listen to what they have to say.

We didn't beat any of these three people over the head with the Gospel; we didn't hand out any tracts or call down hellfire and brimstone on them (the chili pepper notwithstanding). In fact, we only shared a prayer with Bob and that was because he accepted our request.

We have a sign in my office that says "Your actions are speaking so loudly, I can't hear what you're saying." While this sign is concerned with workplace safety, the message is apropos to our Christian lives as well. Just walking, talking and listening, not with a mission to produce converts and relieved of the fear of self-reliance, we simply formed redemptive relationships with our neighbors – all the while hoping and praying that we would make God known, through Word and deed, to the residents of Germantown. As both streetwalking groups (yes, the Lord can redeem streetwalking...AMEN!) returned, we reflected on our experiences and what we'd learned and offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

It turns out that as a group, we were able to talk to a total of eight families within one block of the 930 on Monday night. Jesse Moss's group was invited into a home to share the gospel and Andrew Coverdale's group shared a meal with a shut-in. Amazing! Rest assured that I will be visiting Bob again. This time I hope to share with him more about Jesus and his righteousness.

I want to encourage anyone (okay, *everyone*) to show up next Monday at the 930 at 6:30pm and be a part of this ministry. I was assured that if 200 people show up, there will be plenty to do and, in addition to a seasoned SEED veteran to lead, we have the assurance of Jesus Christ going with and before us. We are the Church in Germantown (or wherever you happen to live), if we don't preach the Gospel in "word and deed" then who will? Who will love the lost and listen to the lonely? The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states that "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." We do both when we are obedient to the command 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'" (Lk 10:27). Joining with brothers and sisters for SEED's Mercy Monday is a great way to obey the Lord and participate in His mission to redeem our city.

Every Monday night, join a team of deacons and get exposed to face-to-face mercy ministry. You will never go at it alone and will be guided every step of the way by an experienced minister of the gospel. On Monday evenings, from 6:30pm till 8:30pm you can shadow a deacon as he/she interviews a resident with a financial need or run an errand for a family in the neighborhood or enjoy a home visitation and share the gospel with the elderly, widows, and lonely in our surrounding neighborhoods. It will change the way you view and love your neighbors wherever you live. Contact Jesse Moss at jesse.moss@gmail.com for more info.