



Counseling & The Church God's Word + Good Deeds

Track 1

I think it's fair to say that many of our attitudes toward the poor are mostly disdain and fear. Sometimes there is a suspicion that their condition is their own fault, that they are simply lazy or inferior. Some of us are more kind-hearted, but prefer not to look at the poor too closely, because it is depressing, and they are surely not fun people to be with.

These attitudes are a world away from God's attitudes, as described in the bible. Neediness arouses compassion in God-- and action. Ephesians 2:1-10 tells us that we were once dead in sin, but were made alive in Christ because of God's great mercy. God acted. Christ became poor so that we may become rich (2 Cor 8:9). Because God acted and raised us from the dead, we are now God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to act - to do good works. Therefore, may the neediness around us arouse in us a godly compassion for the poor and let us not shrink back from action.

But why a mercy track at a counseling conference? Isn't mercy simply meeting physical needs and providing material goods to those who lack? Isn't this what the good Samaritan did? Of course mercy includes the meeting of physical needs, but it is not limited to it.

Holistic Kingdom Ministry in the City¹

We find several key dimensions of mission and ministry in Luke 10. In this text, Jesus is sending out seventy-two missionaries to proclaim the good news. We read...

2 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..."

*5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 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.** 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 **Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'** - Luke 10:2,5-9*

¹ These concepts are derived from Dr. Eugene Bunkowske, Concordia Theological Seminary and Travis Vaughn.

Kingdom ministry in the city has several key dimensions...

a) God's people are to *relate to people in the city in peace*.

b) God's people are to *meet physical need*.

c) God's people are to *proclaim the gospel of the kingdom*.

Components of Holistic Ministry in the City



1) Relationships + Meeting Physical Need = Social Work.

Examples outside the church -

Examples inside the church -

2) Gospel Proclamation + Meeting Physical Need = Old School Missions

Examples outside the church -

Examples inside the church -

3) Gospel Proclamation + Relationships = Relational Evangelism

Examples outside the church –

Examples inside the church –

4) Gospel Proclamation + Relationships + Meeting Physical Need = Holistic Ministry

Examples inside the church –

Redemptive Relationships with Each Other and our Neighbors²

The overall biblical model is this: God transforms people's lives as people bring his Word to others. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the lives of others.

Mercy ministry is more than meeting needs through deeds. Biblical mercy includes a *personal or relational* aspect. Many churches have done well at accomplishing deeds of mercy, but we all have room to grow regarding the *relationships* we form with those we are serving.

God wants you and your people to experience the *joy* of bringing more than a heart of compassion, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to help bear someone's burden (deed driven). Though these are the sweet fruit of Christian love, God wants you and your people to offer *more*. God wants you to bring the heart-changing truths of *Scripture* to people in the midst of their situations and relationships. Biblical mercy is about people loving people with good deeds, but in a way includes bringing God's word. This is doing and speaking "truth in love."³

The Relational Nature of Poverty⁴

When you drove into Germantown, did you take note the poverty all around us? Or if you are like many, you have grown numb to this reality? Why do you think there is so much poverty?

Let's consider a biblical description of poverty:

Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom (peace) in all its meanings.

² This section is largely taken from *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp, 1-35

³ Ephesians 4:15

⁴ This section is taken mostly from *When Helping Hurts* by Corbett and Fikkert, Chapters 1-2. See also *Ministries of Mercy* by Tim Keller

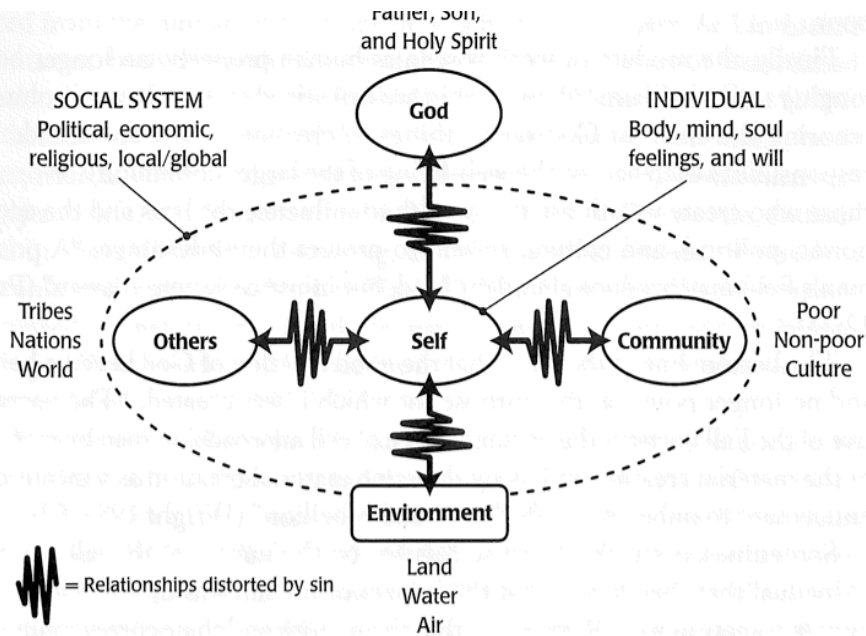


Figure 2-2: Impact of sin on all relationships.

As God’s ambassadors, representing God’s kingdom⁵ and all that it entails to a broken world, how are we as pastors to set the pace in addressing the poverty around us?⁶

To address poverty one must engage in the ministry of reconciliation⁷: moving people closer to glorifying God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.

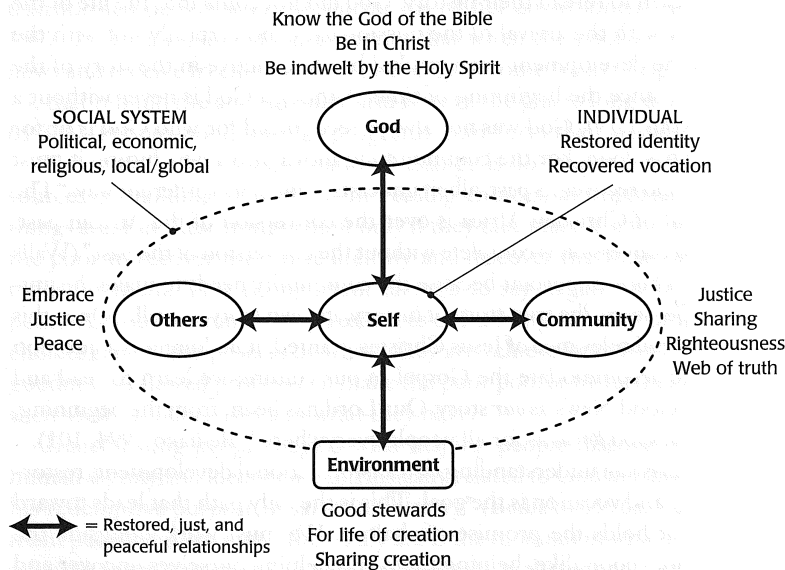


Figure 5-3: Transformed relationships.

⁵ 1 Peter 2:9-12; Ephesians 3:10

⁶ Charts taken from *Walking with the Poor* by Bryant Meyers.

⁷ 2 Cor 5:17

Therefore the *reconciliation of relationships* is the guiding compass for our mercy efforts, profoundly shaping both the goals that we pursue and the methods we use. We must engage the marginalized and poor with loving redemptive relationships that point them to Christ, who reconciles us to God.⁸

Our goals are **NOT**:

- To make the materially poor into *middle-to-upper-class North Americans*
- To make sure that the materially poor have enough *money*
- To complete *projects* and produce *products* for people

Rather, our goals **ARE**:

- To *restore people*, through the power of the gospel, to a full expression of humanness – a release from the bondage to sin into a right relationship with God.
- To *demonstrate* what a just, loving, peaceful relationship is as we point our neighbors to Christ.
- To *equip or develop* our neighbors to fulfill their callings of glorifying God by working and supporting themselves and their families with the fruit of that work.
- To genuinely *care* for those in our neighborhoods and invite them to share in our lives, even if it takes sacrifice.

Relationships and Processes, Not Projects and Products

Our goal is to see people restored to being what God created them to be: people who understand that they are created *in the image of God* with the gifts, abilities, and capacity to make decisions and to effect change in the world around them; and people who steward their lives, communities, resources, and relationships in order to *bring glory to God*.

These things tend to happen in highly relational, process-focused ministries more than in impersonal, product-focused ministries.

In other words, biblical mercy includes relationships combined with the proclamation/application of God's word with deeds that demonstrate God's provision and compassion. These relationships take time and do not happen over night.

Equipping Your People

I will be sharing more in the second track on how to mobilize the church for effective mercy ministry, but it is worth mentioning here that you must train your people for both Word and deed ministry. For example:

The Widow Across the Street

⁸ Romans 5:11

Deed Ministry

- How to make a home visit with the elderly widow across the street – when to visit, what to say, how long to say, etc.
- How to assess her physical needs – a ramp, rides to the grocery, cleaning her gutters, cutting her grass, etc.
- How to address and meet her needs as the church – how to organize and mobilize teams to care for her on an ongoing basis.

Word Ministry

- How God's Word calls us and Christ's work on the cross motivates us to love our neighbors.
- How to share the gospel in ways directly relevant to her situation.
- How to identify her hope, joy, fear and point her to Christ as her Lord and Savior.
- How to articulate your deeds in ways that make the gospel clear, credible and attractive.

Our Motivation⁹

The only true and enduring motivation for the ministry of mercy is an experience and grasp of the grace of God in the gospel. If we know we are sinners saved by grace alone¹⁰, we will be both open and generous to the outcasts and the unlovely.

There are two powerful effects that the gospel of grace has on a person who has been touched by it.

1. Grace and Loving Outcasts.

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 persons¹¹...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."

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.*

The language of the Christian Heart sounds like the following: "I am only where I am by the sheer and unmerited mercy of God. I am completely equal with all other people." This

⁹ This section is taken from *Ministries of Mercy* by Tim Keller

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:1-10

¹¹ Romans 5:8ff

understanding from the heart wells up compassion for all people who need the mercy of God.

2. Grace and Generosity

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

One of the reasons that Jesus puts the Samaritan in the parable is that he, by virtue of his race and history, has no obligations at all to stop and give aid. Yet he stops. Why? Luke 10:33 tells us he was motivated by his compassion.

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.

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 it produces guilt. The Bible does not use the guilt-producing motivation, yet it powerfully argues for the ministry of mercy.

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.

Counting the Cost

This will not always be *easy*. It will be challenging and at times it may prove *difficult*. However, the ministry of reconciliation is our clear calling and mission from God. Rest assured that he has given us all we need for life and godliness. His Spirit dwells in us! He will empower us, give us wisdom, and go before us.



Counseling & The Church Mobilizing the Church for Mercy Ministry

Track 2

I. Biblical Teaching

Mercy is commanded by God, but it cannot simply be the response to a demand. It must arise from hearts made gracious by the experience of God's mercy.

Mercy commanded. Christians are charged to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10) and widows and orphans (James 1:27), to practice hospitality to strangers (Heb 13:2), and to denounce materialism (1 Tim 6:17-19).

"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.

Mercy experienced. In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, 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.

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

It is therefore improper to simply impose mercy ministry programs on the congregation strictly "from the top." Instead, the congregation must be exposed to God's word concerning deed ministry and the dynamic of deed ministry.

The person who knows that he received mercy while an undeserving enemy of God will have a heart of love for even the most ungrateful and difficult persons. This will also result in acts of spontaneous generosity.

Preaching and teaching must carefully and thoroughly lay the foundation for mercy ministry in a church. Mercy is action with attitude.

Example: Second Sunday Feed and Seed. Every Second Sunday all Seed Leader (mercy leaders) gather together for an equipping lunch. We use this time to teach theology and to equip the team to visit homes, prepare for a disaster, minister to the poor, etc.

Example: Every Monday night, a team of deacons equips the body for face-to-face ministry by visiting homes, interviewing those who made benevolence requests, and prayer walking. We always open with brief teaching reminding the church of the below truths.

Ways Service Will Grow You

Individual Renewal...Hands-on service enriches us personally because:

1. It allows us to enter into God's heart of mourning for sin and brokenness.
2. It confronts us with areas in our own lives where we need to repent and seek God's transforming grace.
3. It yields new insights into Scripture, as we see it brought to life in the course of ministry.
4. It brings us closer to God's passion for justice.
5. It strengthens our faith by giving us tangible evidence of God's hand at work, while at the same time demanding a deeper level of trust.
6. It leads to greater dependence on God's grace and wisdom.
7. It drives us to draw closer to Christ.
8. It helps us discover and develop spiritual gifts we might not otherwise have known about.
9. It expands our understanding of God's providence.
10. It deepens our appreciation for our own salvation.
11. When we encounter Christians among those served, we learn important lessons from economically poor but spiritually rich fellow believers.

Corporate Renewal...Hands-on service enriches us as a church body because:

1. It helps us to think of the church as a community that lives out the gospel as opposed to an institution where programs are held.
2. It helps the church community begin to see and meet true need within the church community.
3. It forces us to face outwardly, seeing the needs of those outside the church community.
4. It drives the community to a deeper excitement and hunger for God's Word as we see it lived out in community life.
5. It enlivens our worship gathered on Sunday mornings because Sunday morning worship is seen rightly as one expression of worship that should flow from our lives of worship throughout the week.

Example: Sojourn Deacon Training

Assess (knowledge, character, skill) – Study – Shadow – Reflect – Release

Deacons must be anointed by the Spirit. They must be able to hold many things in tension when discerning how best to display God's mercy – church vs. world, giving vs. keeping, conditional vs. unconditional, word vs. deed. Training is essential.

II. Surveying

Be proactive. Many churches who seek to aid the poor and needy are more reactive than active. That is, deacons respond to cries for help from individuals or from existing social relief organizations. But deacons should also be seeking out needs and discovering the opportunities for mercy ministry in their community.

1. Congregational needs
2. Community needs
3. Demographics of the community
4. Create a databank of church widows, community widows, single parents, fatherless children
5. Access survey for the disabled – ramps, sidewalks, etc.

Conduct a survey of your community. There are two basic kinds: *Formal* and *Informal*. What are the top 5 needs of your community? A good survey will help you to determine your scope, intensity and depth of ministry.

Example: See Sojourn's *Mercy Reader* for how to conduct a community survey. You can find it under resources on the seed website – <http://seed.sojournchurch.com>. You can also read our formal community survey titled *Religious and Busy* on the same website.

III. Making Contact

Once you know your community you must meet and make contact with your neighbors. Many churches begin clothing closets or other such ministries to the needy but find that no one takes advantage of the provision since no contact has been made with the people in need. Make sure that your ministry meets an actual need in your community.

Some Methods:

1. Community Involvement. Serve those who are already serving in your community. Encourage members to become involved in private or secular social services and helping organizations. Also, identify every member of your church who is already involved in such work. Use these members as bridges to the needy they know and work with.

Example: Germantown Neighborhood Association
Volunteers of America
Project Warm

2. Directly contact the local welfare or social services department and communicate your interest in helping with persons in need. Try also your local councilmen and neighborhood associations. Community businessmen can also be of great help in identifying and making contact with those in need.

Example: Smoketown USA Bar-B-Q
GPNA
Seven Counties Social Workers (Donna)

3. Do regular diaconal visitation in needy neighborhoods. Prayer walk. Seek needs and offer help. Regular diaconal visitation in members' homes will also help deacons spot mercy needs. Keep your eyes open for dilapidated housing or unkempt yards.

Example: Sojourn deacons visit neighbors who are in need.
Sojourn prayer walks on a regular basis.
Sojourn often offers to clean up unkempt yards.

4. Place a card or sheet of paper in the pew, which provides a place for people to ask deacons for help or to inform deacons of mercy needs in the congregation or community.

Example: Sojourn Connect Card

5. Public listing. Place an advertisement and a phone number in a local paper offering mercy help to those who need it. You can even distribute flyers with church information and available services.

Example: Fall Festival Community Network board

IV. Organizing the Leadership

Mercy is the work of the whole church (as is the work of evangelism, discipleship, and worship), but the leadership of the church must be organized to facilitate the congregation's ministry.

Some Methods:

1. Specialization – teams that are designed for specific purposes only.

Example: Seed Leaders and Community Groups
Seed Coaches
Handy Man Team
Fall Festival Lead Team
Partnership Cultivation Team
Needs Coordination Team

2. Ministry Teams. Deacons must be trained to investigate and evaluate economic needs in teams of two. Whenever a need is referred to the deacons, it is assigned to a ministry team.

Example: Monday Night Deacon Teams each led by two deacons

3. Mercy committee. Some churches have a committee designed just for deacons.

V. Organizing the Congregation

When needs arise, deacons must know where to go for the resources to meet them. All the church's resources of money, gifts, man-hours, food, homes, etc. must be gathered and organized to be used in an orderly way at the word of the deacons.

Some Methods:

1. Mercy Fund and Policy.

Example: See Sojourn's Mercy policy and procedures.

2. Special networks. Enlist networks of families and individuals who agree to contribute money, provide hospitality, or give some other resource when a need arises.

Example: A business owner gives a job to those in need.
A mechanic fixes a car.
A Real Estate Manager provides shelter.

3. Community Groups

Example: See the Seed Overview document on how community groups are mobilized for action.

Resources cited/and/or helpful:

Ministries of Mercy by Tim Keller
When Helping Hurts by Steve Corbett
Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life by Robert Lupton
Churches that Make a Difference by Heidi Unruh and Ron Sider
Walking with the Poor by Bryant Meyers
To Live in Peace by Mark Gornik
Beyond Charity by John Perkins
Mercy Seminar by Randy Nabors
The Tragedy of American Compassion by Marvin Olasky
Externally Focused Church by Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw
To Transform a City by Eric Swanson
Global Church Advancement Church Planting Manual