

*Redeemer Presbyterian Church*  
**“Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road”**  
(A study of the book by Timothy J. Keller, P&R Publishing, 1997.)

**Session XII.**  
**EXPANDING YOUR VISION**

**“ One of the main reasons that many churches do not develop effective mercy ministries is American individualism. We must see the social dimensions of the gospel and develop ministries of relief, social transformation, and justice.” (Keller, p. 174)**

Once the church has planted mercy ministry, the church needs to be “watered” so that the seeds do not produce midget fruit and plants.

**Four basic reasons why mercy “stalls”**

1. Failure to build bridges to needy people
2. Reacting to needs instead of setting positive plans
3. Failure to recruit others to share the ministry
4. Failure to develop a vision for community transformation

**Three reasons Christians overlook social relief and transformation**

1. Class Captivity: we are mired in the middle class!
2. We often cannot grasp the concept of systemic evil (legal, administrative, and policy conditions and institutions which create and sustain needs among certain groups of people.) *We must change legal, social, and political systems as well as individuals.*
3. We are captive to ideological biases. Conservatives tend to be blind to systemic, corporate structures of greed which can create poverty. Liberals may put more faith in the function of government agencies- which may also create and/or sustain poverty.

**THREE DIMENSIONS OF MERCY MINISTRY**

- I. RELIEF:** alleviation of suffering caused by unmet basic needs
  - A. Direct Assistance:** food, clothing, free medical clinics, crisis counseling, transportation, home care services
  - B. Information and counseling:** counseling for stress, depression, marriage problems, drug and alcohol abuse; information about finding jobs, locating decent housing, utilizing existing clinics and food and nutrition centers, etc.
  - C. Advocacy:** Those in need often need someone to stand with them. (Prov. 31:8-9) This may involve confronting irresponsible landlords, legal assistance, etc.
  
- II. TRANSFORMATION:** restoring the needy person to self-sufficiency
  - A. Individual Transformation:** basic literacy and education (ESL, adult education, GED); housing ministries, vocational guidance, training in basic social skills and financial management skills
  - B. Community Transformation:** Bringing ownership into neighborhoods to strengthen communities for self-determination
    - i. **Small Businesses**
    - ii. **Cooperatives**

**III. REFORM:** seeking to change social conditions and structures which create the needs in I and II above. Historically, in times of reform Christians have sought changes in social structures in the interest of justice and mercy.

A. **Information for justice:** informing policy makers of the needs of the poor. This is a prophetic ministry- getting to know the policy-making leaders of the community and disseminating information to them

B. **Intervention for justice:** legal or political intervention, in which Christians introduce legislation, start boycotts, and bring pressure to bear to affect social structures and conditions.

**Two Guiding Principles in Political Intervention**

1. The church's work of transformation and relief will certainly change social structures. Relief leads to reform. It is mistaken to say that the church should not be seeking to change the shape of society
2. The church cannot present unnecessary barriers to the inquirer after Christ. Heavy investment in a certain political agenda or appearing to be captive to a certain political agenda may appear to supplant the lordship of Christ. For this reason much interventional social reform may be achieved through voluntary associations and parachurch groups.

**For further reflection and study:**

1. When is emergency relief inadequate??
2. Give some examples of *systemic evil* and of *ideological bias* in the U.S. today.
3. Are you drawn to one of the three dimensions or mercy ministry more than the others? Why?

Note: All of these study notes are drawn from *Ministries of Mercy- The Call of the Jericho Road*, written by Timothy J. Keller. P&R Publishing, Second edition 1997. (available on Amazon.com; also on cvbbs.com , the Cumberland Valley Bible Book Service)

Mark **August 27** on your calendars (PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE). Two deacons from Covenant PCA (Harrisonburg) will be with us to reflect on their experiences in mercy ministry.