

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 XV.
Meeting Needs

When helping a needy family, adjust your expectations by determining whether they are “broke” or poor. Identify all problems and dependencies and outline a ministry plan which addresses them. Let only mercy limit mercy. (Keller, p. 225)

How do we help a family that has physical, emotional, and social needs?

A few guiding principles:

I. Distinguish between simple poverty and deeper poverty

- A. Sudden economic hardship may be brought on by physical disability, marital breakup, natural disaster, unexpected unemployment, etc.
- B. The “culture” of poverty can become a way of life, passing through the generations. Poor education, cynicism toward authority, lack of economic planning, and poverty-related behavior patterns may be factors.
- C. Another filter for distinguishing two kinds of poverty:
 - 1. Oppression
 - 2. Calamity
 - 3. Personal sin

II. Begin with few “strings;” add conditions as time passes

- A. Recall the paradigm for all mercy ministry: the undeserved grace of God. Grace is not *unconditional* acceptance but it is *underserved*.
- B. Request entrance into the whole life. Begin with few strings. But when the applicant returns, soon you will have to ask him to allow you to enter his life. Then you can assess financial management, family nurture, etc.
- C. Let mercy limit mercy. If continued aid shields an applicant from the consequences of a sinful life, continued support is not merciful

III. Set Priorities in helping both believers and unbelievers

- A. Set priorities (Gal. 6:10)
- B. None of our possessions are our own (Acts 4:32)
- C. Mercy goes out as indiscriminately as the gospel, but denial and hostility to the gospel will affect our ministry to a needy person
- D. Mark 2:5; John 5:14. Christ called those who were healed to repentance.
- E. A recipient who does not respond to the gospel will have less and less claim on the resources of the church.

How do we sit down with a family in need and work this out??

IV. Investigate the need

LISTEN !! Encourage the person to share problems and pains.

- A. Identify basic causes of the need
- B. Define the exact and full extent of financial need
- C. What is the spiritual condition of the family/individual?
- D. What subproblems are present?

V. Identify Dependencies

- A. Financial dependence: Income is insufficient to meet basic needs.
- B. Physical dependence: individual is unable to be self-sufficient physically
- C. Planning dependence: lack of economic planning yields financial dependence
- D. Emotional dependence: addictions, depression, anger, etc. or family and marital problems make it impossible for the individual to function independently
- E. Skill dependence: lack of basic occupational skills or literacy
- F. Relational dependence: few friends, no family, no supportive relationships.
This can be a serious challenge to successful social function!
- G. Social dependence: unfair lack of power- an individual may be in a position of being victimized

VI. Outline a Ministry Plan

- A. Set goals for each problem
 - 1. Both you and the applicant need to know where you are headed
e.g. *“To enable the family to maintain all payments without delinquency for six months”* or *“to see both children go one semester without tardiness, absenteeism, or other delinquency at school.”*
- B. Define sources of help available
 - 1. For the *financially dependent*: are family, friends, etc. available?
Have you defined vocational needs, job-seeking skills, etc?
 - 2. For the *physically dependent*: secure permanent income supplements and remember to look to community and governmental agencies
 - 3. For the emotionally dependent: confront them in love about their dependence. Secure counseling.
 - 4. For the socially dependent: act as or secure legal advocates
 - 5. For the relationally dependent: creative supportive network of friends.

Always ask the Lord to show you how/when to explain that the grace of God is the motivation for all help that you give and secure for the individual!

For further reflection and study:

- 1. Why is it important to distinguish between an individual being “poor” and “broke?”
- 2. How is the fact that “grace is not unconditional acceptance, but it is undeserved” significant to mercy ministry??
- 3. What are the ramifications and ministry opportunities of “entering into the life” of an individual requesting assistance?

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! Two deacons from Covenant PCA (Harrisonburg) will be with us to reflect on their experiences in mercy ministry.