

**Living a Life of Love: Part II**  
***Making God Visible Through Love***  
**CSLI Urban Plunge | November 7, 2015**

# 1. WHAT IS BIBLICAL MERCY MINISTRY?

## **DOING MINISTRY IN WORD AND DEED.**

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*“Preach the gospel at all times, using words if necessary.”*

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- St. Francis didn't say that. What's wrong with that statement?
- Does the Red Cross preach the gospel?

God's people are called to do ministry in both Word and deed.

- Jesus did both. (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 24:19) *Shouldn't His church do both?*
- Both are critical, but they are frequently kept apart. Why?

 Are you more inclined to Word or deed ministry?

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*Suffering is God's "megaphone to rouse a deaf world." (C.S. Lewis)*

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- What did Lewis mean?
- This world is a mess. Oppressed people oppressing one another. Cancer, slavery, starvation, prejudice and pain.
- But why? Why is everything such a mess?

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*All human suffering results from  
a broken relationship with God.*

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Therefore, the ministry of the church should always seek to combine the demonstration and declaration of the Good News.

God Himself practiced the *apologetic of mercy*:

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*The Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then ... (Exodus 16:11-12)*

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What would you naturally expect to come after "Then..."? Instead we read:

"Then \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_."

God helps people with their material and physical problems, and the result is knowledge of God.  
(See also: Joel 3:16-17; Ezekiel 37:6)

The father of a refugee that our church helped wrote to us:

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*"I live in a country which has been torn apart by wars and violence on a horrifying scale. The unspeakable atrocities I have witnessed pushed me to draw the conclusion that God had quit our planet and was no longer mindful of our collective plight. Ladies and gentlemen of Alexandria Presbyterian Church, you have proved me otherwise. And, hand on heart, I confess that I have been mistaken and that my pessimistic conclusion has been hasty. Definitely, God is still very much around and is overseeing every human undertaking. **Your church is a visible sign of the divine presence in the world.**"*

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**Key question:**

How can you be a “divine presence” wherever God has placed you?

**Summary:**

- There’s a deep connection between physical and spiritual problems, and the solution offered by Jesus Christ.
- The Body of Christ (including you and your church) is God’s chosen instrument to address earthly *and* eternal suffering.
- Word & Deed address two sides of same problem.
- The pain in the world is real, but so is the Body of Christ.
- You have the incredible privilege of being the hands and feet of Jesus.

## 2. SMALL-GROUP EXERCISE

### ***INTRODUCING CLIFF JOHNSON***

Cliff lives down the hall from a member of your church—John. Cliff attended the Christmas Concert a few months ago, and has been present for Sunday worship several times since.

Cliff mentions to John that his van is having lots of mechanical problems, and he cannot work without it because he has a carpet cleaning business. John recommends that Cliff contact the church to see if they might be able to help. John and Cliff approach one of the deacons on Sunday during the fellowship time, and Cliff asks if the church could help with his van repairs.

A deacon found the members of your team during fellowship time, and asked you to meet with Cliff during the Sunday School hour. The following are your notes from the meeting:

Cliff appears to be in his early 40s, is a little overweight. Dresses casually but neatly.

#### Religious Affiliation

Cliff grew up in a Mormon home, stopped attending as a teenager, before he was old enough to go on his “mission” away. Parents told him if he didn’t go on the mission he’d have to go to college or join the military.

#### Family Background

His biological parents divorced when he was 8. Mom remarried, and his stepfather was a Mormon so they began attending that church. Cliff doesn’t seem to have fond memories of his stepfather. No family in the immediate area.

#### Education

Finished high school in Charlottesville. Started a college class while in the Army, but didn’t complete it. Still has a small student loan to pay. (\$1500)

#### Employment

Cliff joined the Army in the early 1990s. Served in the Army for about a year and a half. Now he has a business cleaning residential and commercial carpets. Finds his customers through putting up flyers on the bulletin boards at apartment buildings, the grocery and library.

Also mentioned something about having been a restaurant cook and having landscaping experience in the past.

### Financial Situation

Cliff is two months behind on rent. (Rents a room in a house with others.) Says it is because he isn't getting as much business now due to the economy, and with his van broken down he can't work at all. Doesn't have much food, but does have a cell phone.

Your team and the deacons ask Cliff to take his van to Yates Automotive, a Christian-owned company that the church uses for all its vehicles, to be evaluated.

Cliff is given a bag of groceries. You end the meeting in prayer.

### Questions to Discuss

Choose a spokesperson from your group to share with the larger group your thoughts about the following questions:

1. What should your team's next steps be?
2. What are some things you want to ask Cliff at your next meeting?
3. How can you begin to build more of a relationship with him?

### **NOTES**

### 3. KEEPING WORD & DEED TOGETHER

#### **THE APOLOGETIC OF MERCY**

If we merely tell hurting people: “Jesus loves you!” and “God is Good!” our words are as two-dimensional as a bumper sticker. What we say about God’s love will often be intangible and unbelievable until we make it tangible through loving actions.



**Jesus Loves You!**  
*(But I'm too busy)*

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*“The heart’s distrust is greater than the mind’s blindness.” (John Calvin)*

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When we make an apologetic argument, what part of the other person are we targeting?

But, where is a suffering person more likely focused themselves?

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*The ministry of the church should always seek to combine the  
**demonstration** and **declaration** of the Good News.*

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We must **Show** and **Tell**. Offer **Word** and **Deed**. That’s the *apologetic of mercy*.

Which is harder for you?

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*“Jesus went about doing good. And we are trying to imitate him now because I believe that God loves the world through us. Just as he sent Jesus to be his love, his presence in the world, so today he is sending us.”*  
*(Mother Teresa)*

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Jesus’ deeds are called signs throughout John’s Gospel.

- Pointing where?
- To Himself. We must do the same.
- Jesus’ signs pointed people back to Himself. His deeds of mercy were self-referential.
- Our deeds of mercy must be Christ-referential... tangible evidence of God’s love.

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*“To be a Christian is to move toward need not comfort.” (John Piper)*

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- What do you think of that quote? Does it make you uncomfortable?
- Consider how Jesus moved from comfort to our need.
- Jesus calls us to a *proactive presence* in the lives of those around us.



## HELPLESSNESS IN MINISTRY IS GOOD!

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Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said,  
"This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away  
to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus said, "They need not go away;  
**you give them something to eat.**" (Matt 14:15-16)

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What other impossible commands has Jesus given?

How can we do impossible things?

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They said to him, "We have **only five loaves** here and **two fish**." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. (Matt 14:17-19)

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The disciples were counting their resources:

$$5 \text{  + 2 \text{  = \underline{\quad}}$$

But what happens when disciples learn to count to \_\_\_\_ ?



### Key question:

Are you helpless enough to be used by Jesus, for His glory alone? Has He rescued you, so that you can be His instrument in ministry?

## 4. APPLICATION

### ***WHO ARE YOU GOING TO SERVE IN WORD AND DEED?***

God's people are called to respond to the needs around us, in Word and deed. Everyone can do this—hurting people are already in your circle of influence.

We are called to be a *Proactive Presence*, finding and responding to needs among:

- Your congregation;
- Co-workers;
- Family members;
- People in your community.

List 3-5 people you know with significant needs:

	Name(s)	Need(s)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Then, prayerfully consider how God will use your *Head, Heart & Hands* to:

- 1) **See** what is really going on in their lives.
- 2) **Feel** compassion for them, and God's concern.
- 3) **Act** in ways that address their needs and build relationship.
- 4) **Point** them to Christ through prayer, sharing your testimony, scripture, etc.