

We are grateful for this opportunity to share some of our experience with you. We hope this notebook and disc will provide some information to spur you along in your efforts to show mercy, and to help the poor. We hope this material will get in the hands of leaders who will help to challenge others to do the work of mercy.

This presentation will work with Microsoft PowerPoint on your computer and all the notes and handouts can be accessed in PowerPoint. We do not claim to be experts, not in mercy ministry, and especially not in PowerPoint and print productions. Please forgive any mistakes or clumsiness of expression.

One good way to use this presentation is to use it to teach your Deacons, or other folks interested in mercy. We suggest you use the presentation and print out note pages, or slide pages, so others can follow along while you teach. Adding Scripture passages that deal with mercy ministry, or what the Christian's attitude should be to the poor, would be helpful.

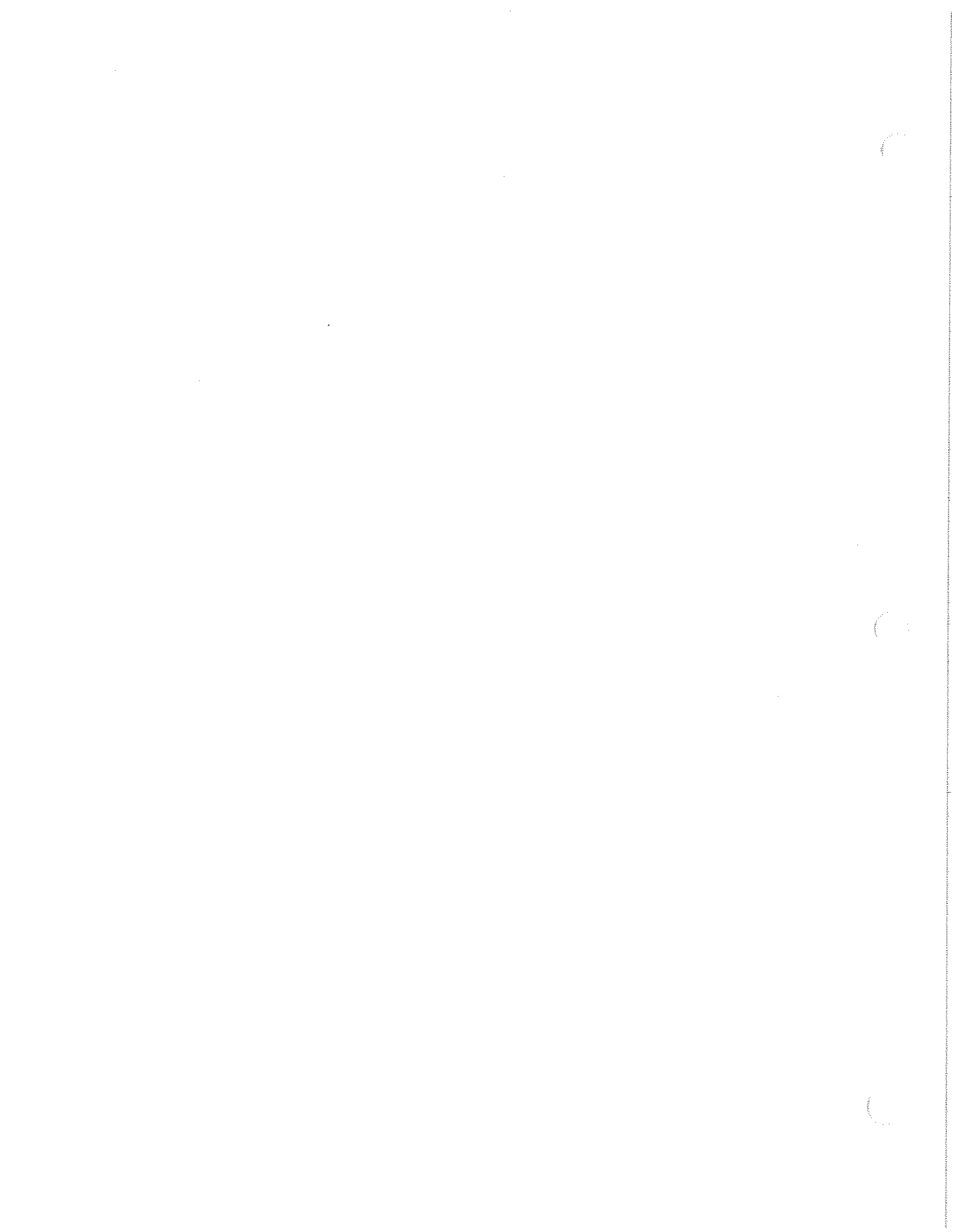
As you will notice, this presentation is focused on the local church. We hope that your local church will be an engine of mercy ministry. The local church has such great potential in blessing the poor.

We have not attempted to make you feel guilty in order to motivate you. If your love for Jesus doesn't compel you to action, there is not much that we can do to change you. It is to action though that we call you. We want to be effective in our attempts at mercy. Since helping the poor can so often simply be a way to make ourselves feel better about ourselves, we often do things which are ultimately ineffective, and not life changing for the poor.

May the Lord help you, encourage you, and give you results that honor and please him.

Randy Nabors

**Pastor at New City Fellowship
2412 East Fourth Street
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37404
423/629-1421**



Mercy

*Seminar by Randy Nabors
Pastor, New City Fellowship
Coordinator, Urban and Mercy Network
for Mission to North America*

2412 E. Fourth St, Chattanooga, TN 37404 (423) 629-1421

FOREWARD

I would like to thank the Deacons, and women with the gift of mercy ministry, whom I have known in my life. I am in debt to the ones who carried groceries to the door of my apartment in the projects of Newark, NJ. To the ones who had a phone installed in my mother's house so she could call for rides to church. To the ones who carried her to the doctor and hospital and helped us in our years of need. I am thankful for the ones who came and paid my rent when I was broke for a few months in seminary.

I am thankful and proud of the ones who have served with me at New City Fellowship. Thank you for going into scary places, into outrageous situations, and sitting with the desperate, the hungry, the sick, and the dying. Thanks for going under houses to fix broken pipes in the dead of winter, for washing and cutting the nails of a man with diseased feet, for paying for coffins and graves, for carrying groceries to more single moms in the projects.

Thanks for being on call, letting me stay home while you went. Thanks for leading people to Jesus as you prayed with them. Thanks for saying "no" to the crooks and deceivers, and after you were conned for being willing to take a risk again. Thanks for confronting the lazy, the wasteful, the foolish, yet loving them. Thanks for giving the ex-cons and recovering addicts another chance. I am so very proud of you for you have given meaning to the name Christian, and respect to the name of Christ's Church. Keep your hand to the plow!

Introduction

Mercy is compassion
toward those who are in need,
resulting in action
to alleviate that need,
through acts of charity
leading toward self-sustainment.

This is a working definition of mercy for our seminar. Obviously as we go through it we will discuss various aspects of mercy, and how it can and should be applied.

We realize there are acts of mercy that don't necessarily come from any emotion or passion, or even concern, for the poor. Someone may give money to help the Deacons and the poor for all the wrong reasons. On the other hand there are those who feel great compassion, and fail to give and do nothing.

Still others feel compassion, and act with mercy, but with un-merciful results. Some show mercy only as charity and never allow an individual to grow toward self sufficiency, and ultimately leave them crippled through dependency. Later on in the seminar you will hear a discussion about the difference between charity and development.

What Mercy Is Not...

- It is not enablement of bad behavior
- It is not the creation of dependency
- It is not paternalism and patronizing
- It is not sweet words without action
- It is not for later when help is needed now
- It is not merely good intentions
- It is not the circumvention of truth & justice

It is helpful by way of contrast to understand some things that mercy is not, or should not be. We are not showing mercy to people if we support their addictions, or excuse it. We are not showing mercy to people if they lose their dignity and personal initiative by having to depend on us. We may begin that way with people we are seeking to help but it must be our intention to move them to the place where they are helping themselves. Even the mentally challenged and physically disabled need to be encouraged as much as possible to do for themselves. We realize there are those who are so feeble, so disabled, and so poor, that they will always need help but then we must be very careful that we do not take a superior attitude and treat them in a condescending manner. This again robs people of their dignity.

To wish someone well and not help them when they are in desperate need is not mercy (James 2:14-17). Proverbs teaches us that we should not tell our neighbor to come back later when we already have what they need right there present with us. Many of us mean well, we really do mean to help, someday. Of course the hungry will starve by then, the homeless will freeze to death, those in debt will be evicted. You get the point.

Mercy is not trying to keep someone from getting arrested if they broke the law. Mercy is not lying to a landlord, or the IRS, or to anyone. Mercy helps people as it tells the truth, accepts consequences, and faces facts. We certainly can be advocates for people, but we must not use our integrity and status to cover up that some folks are not yet spiritual, not yet mature, and not yet trustworthy.

Mercy Is Needed

- The Mission of Jesus, Luke 4:14-21
- Love for Jesus, Matthew 25:31-46

- *For Whom will you go?*
- *To whom will you go?*
- *With whom will you live your life?*
- *And how will you live it?*
- *Who will you receive?*



What Really Helps the Poor?

By Randy Nabors

In strategies for helping the poor there is one central idea that I have tried to follow and that I think is right. When I say right I mean that in both a theological sense and a practical sense. *What really helps the poor?* Is the solution to poverty something that ought to be pursued by government policy? Should it be by personal mercy, both in terms of immediate charity and personally supported development? Is there another way?

My answers to those questions builds from an acceptance of both the necessity and reality of macro and micro solutions, but it is the space in between that I feel offers the best solution. ***That is the creation of a local church within the poor or needy community.*** A local church, and it must be the right kind of local church, is not macro in the sense of government solutions, or economic systems (or even foundations or institutions that might have large coffers of money), and neither is it simply and solely the micro solution of charity given from individual to individual.

Why is the church the right solution, and how is it the right solution? What kind of local church should it be? Is there any sense of reality to this solution and is it a substitute for government and for individual action? Let me try to answer some of these questions and I will work backward in the order I have asked the questions.

I don't want anyone to think that I am speaking against good government strategies, and I must emphasize the importance of the phrase "good government." Whether you are a large government or a small government ideologue I think we can all agree that, whether large or small, the quality of programs can be disparate. Obviously there are some who think that any government program is bound to be a failure, and other who think that without government no real change is possible. Both of these ideas I reject, and I don't think either of them stand either the Biblical or reality test.

There are some Christians who rail against government programs for the poor as if they had cheated the church of doing ministry among the poor. While there are certainly grounds for the indictment of government programs for sustaining people in poverty, and thus enabling them (or worse yet "disabling" them) to remain in poverty, Western governments have rarely prevented the churches from doing ministry among the poor.

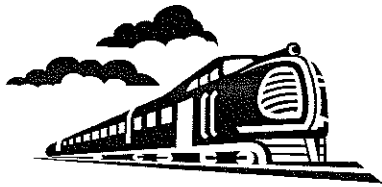
Unfortunately there are times when government has not been wise and has created unnecessary obstacles to both poor people and churches in coming up with strategic solutions. Government has sometimes deprived poor people of the hard realistic choices that would have made the mission of the church easier. Obviously if the church teaches that there is moral responsibility, and moral choice, and that there are and should be economic consequences for those choices, and then government removes those consequences so people can remain in destructive lifestyles, well then, poverty will continue subsidized by taxes.

Government also extends people into poverty not simply by welfare or direct economic programs, but by a retreat from dealing with things such as divorce laws, public begging, the care of the mentally ill, and the abandonment of policing unscrupulous lenders (everything from balloon payment mortgages, check into cash, and title loans).

My criticism of government is not that they have pursued a theological/ideological warfare against the ministry of the church to the poor, but rather they have often been a clumsy stupid giant, and without feeling it they have crushed the small people they claimed to be helping. I firmly believe that government was ordained by God, and I also believe that the Scriptures speak clearly to the "king" and thus to all kinds of government (whatever the system) that they must do justice for the poor. I think government bashing is often simply an agenda to complain about taxes, not an honest pursuit of effective help for the poor. There are some things only government can do, and we attack it sometimes to our own detriment. Good government policy does help keep people out of poverty, and good policy can help encourage, motivate, and even push people out of poverty.

Mobilizing Your Church Into Effective Mercy Ministry

This will require wisdom



Our goal in this presentation is to help you learn how to *mobilize* a congregation in the work of mercy ministry. This is always a challenge, when the leaders of congregations sense the will of God and want to move a church in a new direction, or renew a direction. Mobilization is energizing a group to pursue a certain goal and helping them to put into action people, plans, and resources to accomplish that goal.

It is important for the Pastor and the leadership of a congregation to know that their vision, desire, and ability to enthuse the congregation into the practice and ministry of mercy is crucial to success. If this is just another item on a long list of “should, ought to, and I hope we get to it someday” then it will not be something that changes the character of a congregation. We are writing with the expectation that love and mercy ought to be your character.

We want this mobilization to result in *effective* mercy ministry, and not just a new organizational chart, or new pamphlets, or new slogans. Effectiveness implies really solving a problem or meeting a need. Far too often we engage in producing repetitive activities that don’t seem to move us very far ahead in accomplishing anything. Mercy seeks to eliminate need, to heal the sick, to feed the poor, to house the homeless, to give hope to the hopeless, and not to keep people in perpetual need and make them dependent. This is tough, and it will require *wisdom* from God.

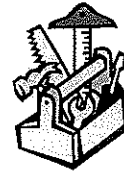
Wisdom in Mercy Requires...

The Development of...

- *PRINCIPLES*



- *METHODS*



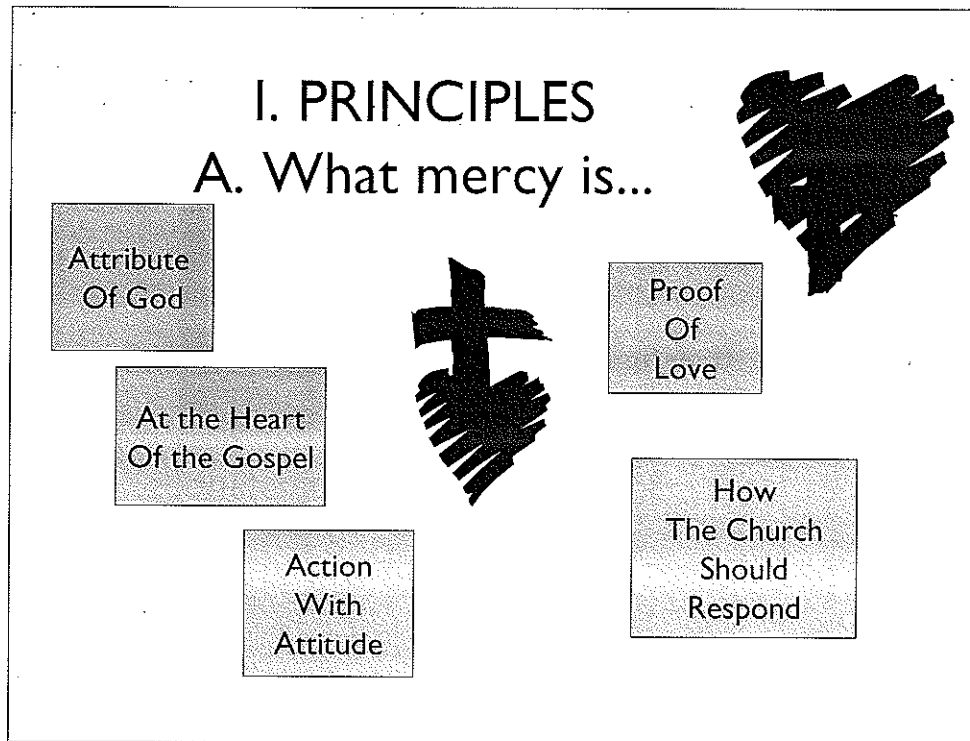
- *AND SKILLS*

Principles are the reasons you do things. Mercy ministry often exposes us to recurring or similar types of situations but which are presented to us as unique problems. We can develop policies and guidelines to help us. These need to be based on some set of principles that will help us to be consistent, and even handed. We also need principles that are in line with our congregation's beliefs, standards, and protect the welfare of the church.

We shouldn't have to face each new situation with panic and subjective emotional response. We shouldn't have to keep responding to requests as if we were starting from scratch.

Methods are the strategies and organization we can develop to solve problems. This moves us to pro-active or programmatic solutions.

Skills are what we need to develop in our officers and members so they can help people effectively, and not burn themselves out, or leave them feeling frustrated. There are spiritual gifts which are God given, but training and practice can make us become more and more effective in ministry.



God has many *attributes* which make up who and what He is. Mercy is one of those attributes of God for which all Christians ought to be grateful. It is what brought each of us into the Kingdom, and that which restores and heals us. Being a Christian means that we are to be imitators of God, that we are to be Christ-like, not initially in effort, but as a result of saving grace. Since mercy is one of God's attributes it ought to be one of our own.

Mercy is at the heart of the gospel. Each Christian is by definition someone who has needed forgiveness, and has received it. How dare we not give mercy to others? Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant, and in Matthew 25 the separation of the sheep from the goats? The reward to the sheep is based, in that passage, on a lifestyle of mercy which is directed to Christ.

Mercy is action, but *action with attitude*. You can't just feel mercy without showing it, or else it does no one any good. But acts of mercy without love profit you nothing, and leave the recipient cold. Romans 12:8 teaches us to show mercy with cheerfulness.

Mercy is a physical proof of love. Love is the mark of the Church, and mercy ought to be our consistent response to need.

What Mercy Does

1. Glorifies God

2. It calls out faith



3. Responds to circumstances

Mercy is valid in and of itself. It does not need to seek validation in accomplishing another goal. We don't show mercy, as it were, to bribe sinners into listening to our evangelism. Mercy in Jesus name, just a simple act of mercy like giving a cup of cold water, gives *glory to God*.

Mercy ought to seek *faith*, as ultimate benefits are impossible without faith. We never need to apologize for calling people to faith but we ought not to use mercy as a means of extorting faith or commitment. The poor need faith if they are to do the hard work necessary to improve their economic condition. They need faith to make it to heaven as well. There ought to be healthy tension between our concern to be merciful, and to be an evangelist. These things, the showing of love and the preaching of love, ought to always be in our minds and hearts.

Mercy needs to respond to real situations and actual *circumstances of need*. Our churches need to know where our mercy programs or activities are leading. What are we trying to accomplish or are we just doing things randomly, always reacting but never proactive?

Our goal is to help people be *self-sufficient*, not dependent. This ought to effect our methods and policies.