



Discover God's Unique Design for Your
SPIRITUAL GIFT OF MERCY-SHOWING

YOUR GIFT:

MERCY-SHOWING



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**MERCY-
SHOWING**

by Dr. Douglas Porter



Church**Growth**.org
Timeless Tools for Christian Growth

HOW TO DEVELOP AND USE THE GIFT OF SHOWING MERCY
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Dedication

“Between the time I finished this book and it was ready for publication, my wife of almost 28 years, Shaaron, died suddenly. It was the toughest thing our family has ever faced, something we would have not survived apart from the grace of God and prayers of God’s people. Everyone who knew us knew she was the one gifted in showing mercy. In the two months following her death, I personally came to a deeper understanding of the value of this gift as literally hundreds of people surrounded me and my family to exercise this gift to meet needs in our life at a time when we were too numb to even recognize that we had needs. They allowed themselves to be channels by which God could pour out His grace into our lives, much as Shaaron had done for so many during our years of ministry together. In light our recent experience, I want to dedicate this book to the memory of my wife, Shaaron, in appreciation of what she did for so many and what so many have done for me and my family in these days.” –*Doug Porter*

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FOREWORD

The ministry of showing mercy has always been important in the life of the church. Every group includes hurting people who need a shoulder to cry on as well as rejoicing people who need someone to celebrate with. Gifted mercy-showers find their most significant opportunity for ministry among these people.

To help the church fulfill her ministry, God gave every Christian the challenge of being merciful (Luke 6:36) and some Christians the gift of showing mercy. Research shows that approximately ten percent of church members have this gift. They are typically soft-spoken, caring individuals who find themselves attracted to the stressed and distressed around them.

Mercy-showers tend to use their gift most effectively in a one-on-one setting such as an informal counseling session, fellowship time or special helping project.

If you have the gift of showing mercy, this book is a valuable tool that you should not be without. Written with the gifted yet inexperienced mercy-shower in mind, *How to Develop and Use The Gift of Showing Mercy* will help you become the most effective mercy-shower you can be as you serve the Lord and allow Him to impact others through your gift.

*Dr. Larry Gilbert
Ephesians Four Ministries*

INTRODUCTION

The very nature of the gift of empathy or mercy showing tends to draw people gifted in this area into the shadows away from the limelight. The New Testament abounds with hints of ministry done by mercy-showers, but these people were not those featured in the popular Bible stories. They were the women who ministered to Jesus, the Christians who worked with the widows in the early church, the individuals who found their way into prisons to encourage and comfort the persecuted saints. Many times their names are not even mentioned in Scripture, but without them others would have had great difficulty fulfilling the ministry to which God had called them.

Paul used the Greek word *eleeō* to describe this gift. This term is closely related to another Greek word, *eleos* most often translated "mercy." This term is most often used in Scripture to identify the attribute of God that describes His attitude toward us as we suffer the consequences of sin. In a very real sense, those gifted in showing mercy help us better understand how much God cares about us when we struggle through difficult situations.

Although the gift of showing mercy may be widely distributed by the Holy Spirit to the church, many churches are full of hurting people who feel no one cares enough about them to help. This suggests many gifted mercy-showers are not using their gift in significant ministry. Instead of experiencing the personal fulfillment that comes from using one's gift in ministry, they may be among those who are hurting deeply.

This book is written for laypeople to help resolve this apparent problem in the church of our day. It was planned with the gifted yet inexperienced mercy-shower in mind. Therefore, chapter one discusses what is involved in the ministry of showing mercy, or empathy, so the layperson who is a gifted mercy-shower can fulfill his or her ministry.

Appendix one is intended to help you determine if you are gifted in showing mercy, and if so, how you can express your gift in your church. The rest of the book addresses issues of primary importance to the mercy-shower committed to developing his or her God-given gift.

One reason people gifted in this area are so effective is because they have "been there." It is common for God to equip mercy-showers through painful experiences in their past. Chapter two describes this process and guides the reader through the process of building a ministry on the pain in the past.

The major ministry focus of gifted mercy-showers may be described as "ministry to the stressed and distressed." Chapters three through five deal with specific ministry skills gifted mercy-showers are most likely to use. These include being building bridges to the disenfranchised in society (chapter three), helping them cope with the pain and suffering in their life (chapter four), and the process of restoring broken people, helping them break free of their past and begin rebuilding their lives for the future (chapter five).

One of the biggest problems facing mercy-showers is the problem of ministry burnout. People working around people in need tend to always give of themselves without taking adequate time to replenish their own ministry resources. If this situation is not dealt with, those who could have an effective ministry to the stressed and distressed around them will

disqualify themselves from ministry. Therefore, chapter six deals with taking practical steps to avoid ministry burn out so as to allow you to continue to help those who need you most.

Although God gave gifts to His church to enhance its ministry effectiveness, various gift abuses abound in many evangelical churches. Chapter seven addresses this issue as it helps you recognize how other gifted individuals can also be involved in ministries to the stressed and distressed and how you can contribute to other aspects of your church's ministry as part of the ministry team.

This book was written to help you begin to develop your gift of showing mercy. Obviously, there is much more you can learn about empathy and incorporate into your ministry than could be contained in a book of this size. Therefore, chapter seven concludes with recommendations concerning how you can get started on a lifelong continuing education program designed to help you become the most effective gifted lay Mercy-shower you can be.

Mercy-showers are inclined to be empathetic toward people in need. That attitude reflects the way in which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the life of a mercy-shower. There are several action steps you can take to enhance your giftedness and accelerate growth in this area of your life. Therefore, this book concludes with an appendix outlining a two-year plan with practical steps to help you begin thinking like a mercy-shower.

The Lord bless you as you use your gift in ministry to His glory.

*Dr. Douglas Porter
Napanee, Ontario*

CHAPTER ONE

What Is Showing Mercy?

BBC reporter Alan Burgess really wasn't sure why he had been sent to interview the small British spinster sitting across from him. Gladys Aylward's responses to his questions didn't seem to clarify the matter. She claimed to be nothing more than a domestic servant who had saved some money and gone to China for mission work. Her life had been consumed for many years with caring for Chinese orphans. She insisted nothing of any real significance had happened in her life to warrant the attention of the BBC.

Noting the Japanese had placed a bounty on her during the Second World War, Burgess asked how she escaped capture.

"Oh that," she said. "I hiked over the mountains."

"I see," responded Burgess. "Did you have any help on your journey?" he asked.

"Yes. I had one helper who new the way."

"I see," the reporter continued. "So there were just the two of you then?"

"Yes," Gladys answered. "Just the two of us and the children."

"I see. And how many children were there?" he asked again.

"Just a hundred," she answered.

"I see," the Burgess responded. But even as he said the words, he realized how little he had really seen. He began asking more pointed questions and slowly uncovered the life story of a small women who served God by caring for orphans and others in need. The moving story of her adventures helping people in need became a best-selling book and major motion picture. By the time she died in 1970, Gladys Aylward was among the best known missionaries to China in the Twentieth Century.

Few Christians gifted in showing mercy are as well known as Gladys Aylward. That would be inconsistent with their personality type, one of soft-spoken love. As Burgess discovered when he first interviewed Aylward, mercy-showers are so concerned about the needs of others they tend to minimize their own accomplishments as insignificant or not worthy of special recognition. They are not concerned with rising to a place of wide recognition. Sometimes, public recognition tends to be de-motivating in their life even though others in the church may long for the attention. They would rather avoid the limelight and minister quietly in the shadows, meeting needs in the lives of hurting people.

That's the way Albert used his gift of showing mercy. Though he was only sixteen years old, he was upset to learn the other counselors in the camp where he served as a counselor in training had decided to send home a group of street kids because they were "uncontrollable." Before he realized what he was doing, Al found himself volunteering to be their counselor for the week. What was even more surprising was the camp director's decision to let him try for two days.

As he walked into his new cabin, Al was scared. He had heard the horror stories of the others who had tried to work with these boys. But he also knew this might be the only chance some of these boys had to get out of the city. Knowing many churches were leaving the inner city, he feared some in his cabin might never again have an opportunity to hear the gospel. His concern for their spiritual and emotional well-being helped him look beyond his fears to recognize opportunities to minister.

Al spent a lot of time listening to his boys the next two days. Behavior in the cabin began to improve. The two days grew into a week. By Friday night Al was still their counselor but that was about the only thing in the cabin that remained the same. In the course of the week, he had led each of eight boys in his cabin to Christ. As he sat by the campfire hearing his boys share their personal testimonies, Al found himself quietly shedding tears of joy.

Patricia found opportunity to use her gift in showing mercy through a crisis pregnancy center in her town. As a mother of two college-age daughters, she found it easy to identify with the pregnant coeds with whom she talked. The clinic had difficulty enlisting volunteers for the kind of work she was doing. Pat found that difficult to understand. There was something especially fulfilling working with these girls and being with them in the hospital when a new life was brought into the world. It had its challenges, but they were nothing compared to the joys on the other end.

A lot of crying together and hugging took place in Pat's counseling office, but the office was not a depressing place to be. Pinned to the bulletin board were pictures of babies born to mothers she had worked with. The upper right desk drawer was stuffed with thank-you notes and letters from new moms. Between interviews Pat would often take one or two out to read again and then pray for a half dozen girls she knew were facing a difficult decision.

People like Gladys Aylward, Albert and Patricia find deep personal fulfillment in working with the stressed and distressed in our world. Hurting people see in them a genuine empathy for others and open the doors of their lives to gifted mercy-showers. It is in that environment that mercy-showers can do what they do best. They become channels through which the rich mercy of God is poured out on the open wounds of people.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "A Christian is something before he does anything; and we have to be Christian before we can act as Christians."¹ That describes gifted mercy-showers. Mercy is a large part of who they are and the source of an effective ministry of showing mercy to others. Therefore, to understand the gift of showing mercy, we need to first look at the nature of mercy itself.

What Is Mercy?

When Paul described the gift of showing mercy, he used the Greek word *eleeō* meaning "to have or show mercy or kindness by assisting others." Included in this word is the idea of feeling empathy with others in misery. This feeling of empathy then becomes the basis of acts of kindness. Some people call this gift the gift of empathy, emphasizing the root feeling that motivates one's actions. Others call this gift the gift of showing mercy because the acts of kindness are most visible in exercising this gift.

The word Paul used to describe this gift is closely associated with the Greek noun *eleos* meaning "kindness or mercy." The New Testament uses this word to describe the attitude of God toward those who are stressed and distressed by their circumstances in life. It assumes the one who shows mercy is capable of doing so and the one who receives mercy is in need of it. This single Greek word is used to translate several Hebrew terms used to describe different aspects of mercy.

The most often used word for mercy in the Old Testament is the Hebrew term *chesedh*. This term is based on a root meaning "devotion" and is perhaps best translated "loving kindness." William Barclay described this term as "the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings."² In the midst of his deep despair over the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (Lam. 3:22). He then noted this mercy comes to us new and fresh from God each morning (Lam. 3: 23).

A second Hebrew word used to describe mercy is *rahamim*. This word shares a common root with the term "womb" and has been described as a "motherly attitude" or a "brotherly feeling." This was the word Nehemiah used when he prayed, "O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man" (Neh. 1:11). He wanted the king to have this attitude toward him as he planned a strategy to deal with the problems in Jerusalem. All Christians are called upon to have this attitude toward the poor whether gifted in showing mercy or not. "He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Prov. 14:21).

The third Hebrew word describing mercy is *hanan*. When this term is used, the context implies a gracious attitude of a superior person toward an inferior or undeserving person. It is used often in David's prayers to God for mercy. "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer" (Ps. 4:1). "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled" (Ps. 6:2). "Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death" (Ps. 9:13).

Two other words are also used in the Old Testament to describe mercy. The Hebrew word *hemlah* means "to have compassion." This word describes God's attitude toward Lot in rescuing him before destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:16). The Hebrew word *kaphar* means "to forgive" in the sense of covering something or hiding it from sight. Most often, this word is translated "atonement" in the Old Testament as it describes God's attitude toward His people in spite of their past sins and rebellion. Moses concluded a song celebrating God's relationship with Israel with the words, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people" (Deut. 32:43).

Together, these five words describe the empathy that characterizes people gifted in showing mercy. They tend to be deeply devoted to others (*chesedh*) expressing concern in a manner similar to that of a mother or brother (*rahamim*). Their ministry of compassion (*hemlah*) and forgiveness (*kaphar*) tends to extend across normal socioeconomic barriers

to effective ministry (*hanan*). They are the ones who are there to help the stressed and distressed in their time of need.

Jesus said, "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). While every Christian should reflect aspects of the character of God in their character, gifted mercy-showers model the merciful character of God by expressing it in a variety of very practical ways. It is not surprising that the Scriptures describe God Himself as the ultimate model of showing mercy.

How God Models Showing Mercy

Mercy cannot be understood apart from an understanding of the character and attitude of God toward His people. He is described as "a merciful God" (Deut. 4:31) and "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3). God declares mercy as one of His attributes (Ex. 34:6-7). Mercy belongs to God (Ps. 62:12). God is described as both abundant in mercy (Ps. 86:15) and rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4). Mercy is the object of God's delight (Mic. 7:18) and the Psalmist's trust (Ps. 52:8).

The Scriptures describe God's mercy in several ways. God's mercy is abundant (Ps. 86:5, 15) filling all the earth (Ps. 119:64). Twenty-six times in one Psalm we are told "His mercy endures forever" (Ps. 136). God's mercy is associated with justice (Ps. 101:1), faithfulness (Ps. 89:24) and truth (Ps. 85:10; 108:4; Prov. 3:3; 14:22). God's "tender mercies" extend to all people (Ps. 145:9) though experienced in their fullest measure only by those who enter into a relationship with Him (Deut. 7:2).

This attitude of God toward us is expressed in a variety of ways. God's mercy is described as the source of His help (Ezra 9:9), His desire to maintain His covenant with His people (1 Kings 8:23; Neh. 1:5), His eagerness to forgive us (Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Jon. 4:2) and His willingness to forbear with us (Ps. 145:8). The ultimate expression of God's merciful attitude toward us is the cross.

The biblical description of God's mercy demonstrated toward us requires that we demonstrate the same attitude toward others. The prophet Micah reminded his listeners "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). While it may be easy to understand something of God's mercy, the real challenge for mercy-showers is expressing God's mercy in practical ways in Christian life and ministry. What would God's mercy look like expressed in our life in this century?

Many Ways to Show Mercy

Much of the Christian life involves replicating our experience with God into our relationships with others. After discussing God's demonstration of love in sending Jesus to pay the price for our sins, John wrote, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). That same principle applies in processing the mercy we receive from God into our relationships with and ministry to others.

The most obvious experience of God's mercy in our life is the forgiveness of sin. Paul urged the Ephesians to apply this forgiveness in their relationships when he wrote, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He added, "For if

you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15). He later taught a parable emphasizing the principle that we ought to forgive those who offend us just as God has forgiven us for our many offenses to Him (Matt. 18:21-35).

Giving to others is another means by which we express mercy to others. “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives” (Ps. 37:21). Those who fail to show mercy toward others by being generous toward others in need are subject to judgment at the hand of God. The Psalmist wrote, “Let them be continually before the LORD, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth; because he did not remember to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart” (Ps. 109:15-16).

Demonstrating God’s mercy toward others often involves spiritual discernment, one of the enabling gifts of the Holy Spirit. This mercy God requires us to demonstrate to others grows out of His wisdom (James 3:17). This wisdom is available to those who study the Scriptures (Ps. 19:7) and ask for it in prayer (James 1:5).

There is only one biblical guideline given for those gifted in showing mercy. They are required to do so "with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:8). The Greek word used is *hilarotes* from which we get the English word "hilarious." The word is used on only one other occasion in the New Testament and also describes the attitude of those engaged in the ministry of giving (2 Cor. 9:7). While giving may be part of many gifted mercy-showers’ ministries, their involvement usually extends beyond the wallet.

This Greek word describes an attitude overflowing with joy that naturally motivates one to take action. Those gifted in showing mercy are called to do so simply for the joy of doing so. For many Christians, getting involved in that kind of ministry has no appeal at all. If they do it, it is often out of a guilt-motivated sense of duty or misguided understanding of moral responsibility. But when gifted mercy-showers see other people overcome by trouble, they see an opportunity to have a significant ministry in those lives. Perhaps their motivating joy is fueled by the anticipated celebration at the end of the process about to begin.

Mercy-showers tend to be drawn toward ministries involved with people in need. They minister to the abused, addicted, afflicted, alienated, blind, broken, confused, deaf, depressed, destitute, disadvantaged, elderly, frustrated, grieving, homebound, hospitalized, immigrant, institutionalized, jilted, kinky, lost, mentally retarded, migrant, molested, neglected, oppressed, persecuted, poor, prisoner, questioning, runaway, sick, suicidal, tired, terminally ill, troubled, underprivileged, victim, worried, excluded, young offenders and zonked.

As you look over the list in the previous paragraph, maybe you find yourself spending a lot of time around people like that. Most people gifted in showing mercy tend to become involved in ministries that focus on helping one or more of the kind of people described. If you are serious about using your gift of showing mercy in a significant ministry, begin looking for ministry opportunities that will bring you into contact with a particular need about which you are deeply concerned. You cannot help everybody in need, but if you focus on the group for which God has given you a particular burden, you

can help some people who really need your help. As you begin using your gift in ministry, there are some ministry skills you will want to develop to increase your effectiveness.

CHAPTER TWO

Building an Effective Ministry out of the Pain in Your Past

If God has gifted you in showing mercy it is because He wants you to have a significant ministry in the lives of stressed and distressed people he brings into your life. Even as God extends His mercy to us at the point of our deepest need in a condition in which we cannot help ourselves, so God wants you to be a channel of His mercy to others in their helpless and apparently hopeless condition. Mercy-showers have the wonderful privilege of walking people who others have given up as a lost cause through a process in which they resolve their problems, learn to help others resolve their problems, and mentor others to perform the same service in the lives of others. This process is more fully described in chapter five. That's the good news!

The bad news is there is probably a reason why you find it so easy to empathize with others in their time of greatest need and that reason is you have been there. Perhaps you are still there. And it is likely that in the years that lie ahead, you will be there again and again. While there are many reasons problems are part of our normal life experience (see chapter four), one reason God allows problems in our life is to allow the growth experience we need to gain the skills to effectively help others through their life challenges. Things don't always go wrong because we are wrong; sometimes things go wrong because we are right and trying to do the right thing.

Paul understood this principle and saw it as the key to his own effective ministry in the lives of others. Writing to the Corinthians, he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Paul's problems drew God's involvement in his life. That involvement by God then equipped Paul to have a similar ministry in the lives of others experiencing a similar situation.

Paul was not the only one who experienced the blessing of God through problems. In what may be the earliest of the New Testament epistles, James wrote, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Throughout his epistle James speaks with the authority of one who has been there, done that, and has the t-shirt to prove it. The persecution he experienced as the pastoral leader of the Church at Jerusalem enabled him to prepare others for the problems they too would face.

Even Jesus experienced problems throughout His life and ministry on this earth in part to equip Him for His present ministry in our lives. The writer to the Hebrews describes Christ as one "who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:7-8). The pain Jesus experienced was for our benefit, not as a consequence of any failure in Him. As a result, "we do not have a

High Priest which cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

The process by which God equipped Paul, James and even Jesus for their ministries is the same process God wants to use in your life. That is why the most effective marriage counselors are often those who have worked through their own struggles to fix an unhealthy marriage and the most effective addiction counselors once struggled themselves to break free of an addictive behavior in their own lives. As you begin building an effective ministry out of the pain in your past, it is important to first understand the nature of ministry itself. Once that is clear, there are several questions that will help you work through the issues in your life so you can help others in the midst of their problems.

What Is Ministry?

At its very core, the work ministry suggests the idea of serving others in some are of need in their life. As a concept, ministry is the communication of truth to people at their point of need through others God has called and qualified to serve. It involves finding a need and meeting it; finding a hurt and healing it; finding a hunger and feeding it. Ministry is what God does in our life when we need Him most, and what He calls us to do in the lives of others in need.

Evangelical Christians often fall into the trap of defining ministry in terms of “the spiritual things people do for God.” According to them, there is a ministry of teaching, a ministry of prayer, a ministry of worship, and a ministry of preaching. Most often, ministry is a Sunday thing; something paid and volunteer church staff members do at the church building Sunday morning. But ministry is far greater than that. It includes anything one might do as a service to God for the glory of God and the good of others.

One pastor challenged the church to become more outreach oriented and use their summer potluck luncheons as an outreach opportunity to the community. In anticipation of attracting a larger crowd, the men’s group met at the church one Saturday morning and built picnic tables so people would have a place to eat. The women agreed to bring salads and desserts instead of their usual casseroles. The churches musicians and singers prepared special music for the occasion and the pastor prepared a special message that made the gospel clear to all who attended. As the day approached, many committed themselves to pray for the outreach Sunday. On the designated Sunday, a few men slipped quietly out of the service to flip burgers and cook hot dogs so the food would be ready at the end of the service. Then for several hours after the service, church members spent time with visitors enjoying the summer afternoon and getting to know the community better. Every step in the process involved ministry, not just the preaching, prayer and singing.

Our definition of ministry claims God uses those He has called and qualified. Although you may not realize it, God has called and qualified you to be involved in ministry. The call of God to ministry is expressed in four ways in Scripture. First, God’s call begins as a desire to do something for God. “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). The psalmist wrote, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4). Second, as with the prophet Habakkuk, that desire grows into “the burden of the LORD” (Hab. 1:1). Then that burden grows so strong that it might be described as an irresistible burning within to do that thing

to which God has called you. Jeremiah confessed, “Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jer. 20:9).

Ultimately, when God calls us to serve Him, He produces fruit in our life. Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

God has not only called us into His service, He has and continues to qualify us to be effective in serving Him. That is why Paul could tell a group of Christians he had never met, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). God qualifies us in three areas of life. First, He produces spiritual character in our life, the fruit of the Spirit that includes goodness (Gal. 5:22-23). Second, He gives us knowledge and spiritual insight through His word (Col. 3:16). Then he brings us through various experiences in life to give us the skills we need to be able to meet the needs of others (2 Cor. 1:4).

If the goal of ministry is to meet the needs of others, it is important to be able to identify those needs. Often people in trouble look for help to get out of trouble not realizing there are deeper issues that if not resolved will only put them back into trouble again. Most problems people experience can be traced back to one of four core problems. First, there is the problem of sin. Sin describes our condition (Eph. 2:1, 5), our conduct (Rom. 3:23), and our character (Rom. 5:12). Then there are the problems of sight or more correctly our inability to see things as they really are. This may be the result of satanic deception (Gen. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:3), social deception (Matt. 24:2; Eph. 5:6), or self-deception (Jer. 37:9; 1 Cor. 3:18; James 1:26). Third, there are problems associated with our separation from God (Eph. 4:17-19). These include a lack of insight (Eph. 4:17-18), vision (Eph. 4:18), emotion (Eph. 4:19), and control (Eph. 4:19). Finally, there are problems associated with our self-centeredness. The Bible links our anxieties in life (Matt. 6:31-32) and struggle to find purpose and meaning in life (Eccl.) as consequences of narrowing our focus on ourselves rather than God.

Effective ministry takes place when we communicate the truth of God to people at their point of need. Communication takes place when others hear, understand and apply what we attempt to pass on. It is not just telling. And the process produces significant life change and other results when we pass on God’s advice, not just give good advice. There are a lot of advice givers in our world, most who are struggling with their own issues. Sometimes their advice works, and sometimes it does not. But the God who made us tells us how life is supposed to work in His owner’s manual (the Bible) and provides directions for making life work that always work, in every life under every circumstance of life.

As you think of the ministry to which God has called and equipped you, it is important to periodically evaluate your own progress. Three New Testament principles can help you evaluate your own ministry effectiveness. The “First-Things-First Principle” addresses the priority issue (Luke 17:10). You can apply this principle by asking the question, “Am I doing the right thing?” The “Faithfulness Principle” recognizes that effecting results in the lives of others often takes time (1 Cor. 4:2). The question that helps you apply this principle is, “Am I still doing the right thing?” The “Fruitfulness Principle” recognizes that

God eventually produces results in the lives of others He calls us to serve (John 15:16). The third question to ask is, “Am I seeing God work through my doing the right thing?”

Regardless of your background, God has a place for you on the ministry team. What He wants you to do will be so unique no one else can do it quite the same way or with the same results you will do it. That is one reason why it is so important every Christian be part of the ministry team in their church. To help you find your space for ministry, let's use that word as an acrostic.

The S in SPACE represents your spiritual gifts. Identify and develop your God-given spiritual gifts. Use this book to develop your gift for greater effectiveness. You will find more about how to discover and develop your spiritual gift in Appendix 1. Also, you can access a free Spiritual Gifts Analysis at <http://www.churchgrowth.org>.

The P in SPACE represents your passion. If you could do anything at all for God, and there were no limitations, what would you do? Many Christians never pursue the dreams and desires God gives them because they think of them as impossible. The God who gave you those dreams and desires “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20). He sent an angel to remind Mary, “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37). Perhaps He just sent this book to you to remind of the same thing!

The A in SPACE represents your abilities. These include both your learned abilities and acquired skill set. Some people are born with perfect pitch while others struggle through years of piano lessons to learn how to make music. However you acquired them, you can be sure God has given you those abilities to serve Him and others.

The C in SPACE represents the character traits that make up your unique personality. Your personality determines how you will respond in various life situations, with whom you tend to work well, with whom you are most likely to experience conflict, and the roles you are most likely to gravitate toward in groups and individual relationships. Various personality type inventories are available to help you identify your personal strengths and weaknesses. (Church Growth Institute offers the *L-E-A-D Personality Inventory* by Dr. Walt Lacey and the online SERVING GOD WHERE YOU FIT BEST Assessment through <http://www.churchgrowth.org>.)

The E in SPACE represents the experiences you have accumulated in life. Many people struggle with the pain of their past because they view their experiences, especially bad experiences, as what others have done to them. A better way to look at your experiences is to view them as what God has done for you. God is active in accomplishing His purposes in your life even when others act out of evil motives. Joseph told his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20). This perspective enabled Joseph to become better rather than bitter as he worked through the many difficult challenges in his life.

Understanding the nature of ministry and the role God has prepared for you ought to give you a perspective of how you can build an effective ministry out of the pain of your past. As you work through that process, there are several questions you need to ask to help you focus on what God is doing in your life so you can help others.

Who Is God?

God is always a good starting point in any life experience. That is where the Bible starts in its descriptions of the beginning of life itself (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1). A. W. Tozer claimed, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God."³ Therefore, the first question to ask in the process of turning the pain of your past into an effective ministry in your future is, "Who is God?"

Many Christians instinctively answer the question with a "seminary answer." As a student in seminary, I learned "God is Spirit, Infinite and Perfect, the Source, Support, and End of all things."⁴ While that is a good starting point, the question calls for an answer from the heart, not the head. Who have you discovered God to be in the various experiences He has brought you through?

Throughout the Scriptures, there are accounts of men and women who experienced God in the midst of their life experiences. In the process, they learned something new about who God is. That knowledge was most often preserved in a new name they began using to describe God. Did you know there are over a thousand different names of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Scripture? There is a name of God describing what God will do for you in every life challenge you face.

As you think back over your past, why not make a personal list of names that describe what God did for you. Like Hagar, you might describe Him as the God who saw you and your problem (Gen. 16:13). Like Job, you might describe Him as the God who was sufficient when you had nothing else (Job 37:23). Like David, you might describe Him as the Shepherd who guided you along the right path (Ps. 23:1-6). And in doing so, you will move beyond a seminary description of God and into an experiential knowledge of God.

What Is My Real Problem?

Once you know who God is, then you can begin to understand your real problem. From the beginning of time, it has been part of our fallen sin nature to blame others for our problem. Failure to accept responsibility for your personal problems prevents you from learning from them and effectively dealing with them. When we blame others and believe it, we also believe it is up to others to bail us out and fix our problems. That's one reason we have so many expensive government programs designed to fix problems for which no one will accept responsibility.

A second common way to describe problems is to deny you have a problem or minimize the extent of that problem. There are consequences to this approach also. A couple began gambling at an area casino as a recreational activity, a night they could spend together to have fun and maybe even win a little cash. It was not long until their gambling turned into an addictive behavior. Surprisingly, they were still minimizing the extent of their problem when they had lost their life savings, had to sell their home and found themselves in the midst of a messy separation that led to divorce.

A third defective way to deal with problems is the ostrich approach – ignore it. When an ostrich is panicked by danger on the horizon, it sticks its head in the sand assuming what is not seen does not exist. It is indeed surprising the species has survived this long.

Hiding from a problem and ignoring it will not stop the problem from finding and overwhelming you.

In contrast to these defective ways to describe your problem, six words can guide you along a better path: admit it; accept it; address it. First, admit you have a real problem and describe it as it really is. Second, accept responsibility for that problem. Even if others helped you get into trouble, accept responsibility for the part, a part that is probably larger than you want to admit. Third, address the problem and take steps to fix it. Perhaps you already know what you need to do. If not, it is time to seek the counsel of a spiritually mature Christian who can guide you through a rebuilding process.

How Did God Meet My Personal Need?

The Bible affirms “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Paul discovered God used problems in his life as an opportunity to replace the apostle’s weakness with God’s strength. His promise to Paul and us is, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). This unchanging God will meet your personal needs in your life just as He did for Paul and others throughout history. Have you noticed that yet?

In the midst of his greatest life crisis, Jeremiah wrote, “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). Let’s put that promise to the test this week. As you sit down for your mid-day meal each day this week, make a list of the specific new “mercies and compassions of God” you experienced that day. If you struggle to find one, understand that has more to do with our lack of insight than God’s lack of action. You might begin to discover how much you have been taking for granted for so long.

Once you are tuned into looking for those mercies and compassions of God, look back on the problems God has already brought you through. Ask yourself the question, “How did God meet my personal need in that problem(s)? Once again, begin making a list. Call this your “victory list” and include answers to prayer and evidence of His intervention in your life. Somewhere down the road, you will face another challenge, and you may need your victory list to remind you how faithful God has been as you look forward in anticipation to how faithful He will be.

Three More Questions

As you look back at what God has already done for you, you will discover you are a different person today than you were then. What resources do you now have that you can use to help others in need? You have learned some lessons others need to learn. You have acquired some skills others need to acquire. Perhaps there may have been significant changes in how you look at life or relate to others that will make you more effective helping others than you might have been otherwise.

Obviously, you are not a superhero with no needs and the ability to fix everyone’s problem. If you think you are, you need help. To get a perspective on what you can and cannot do ask yourself, “What are my boundaries and limitations?” There are some situations outside your safe zone that ought to be avoided. A recovering alcoholic knows that meeting someone in a bar during happy hour is not wise. There are also some

situations outside your abilities, situations you need to refer to others better qualified to help people in need.

There is one final question to ask as you work through the process of building an effective ministry out of the pain of your past. In light of all you have been through, all God has done for you, and all the problems hurting people all around you are enduring, what is stopping you from moving forward? Maybe it is time to set aside your personal agenda and begin pursuing the good plans God has for you (Jer. 29:11).

CHAPTER THREE

Building Bridges to Broken People in a Broken World

Sometimes it feels like ministry would be so much easier if it were not for people. But the very nature of the caring ministry in which mercy-showers are involved necessitates the presence of people in the process. First, there are people who minister. Then there are people who receive ministry. In many respects, people gifted in showing mercy tend to appear on the front lines of ministry building bridges to broken people in the midst of their broken world.

In most cases, people tend to resist the intervention of others at the time they need that help most. If they knew what was being offered was for their benefit, they might be more willing to engage in the process. Unfortunately, broken people tend to look at others through the pain they feel and assume the worst. At the moment you reach out to others who need you, they assume you are like everyone else they know looking for something from them. Often they have been abused by so many others they resist your overture assuming you are just another potential abuser.

The sad reality is you know what they need to know, but they are not ready to learn and not ready to learn from you. Someone put it this way, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care!" Simply caring about people is not enough. They must know you care, not because you say so, but because they interpret your actions as a demonstration of your concern. Only when you have laid that foundation can bridges of concern be built to help the broken people in your sphere of influence.

Am I Listening?

God gave us two ears but only one mouth, perhaps implying we would be better off listening twice as much as we talk. Listening is a learning activity. Talking is a teaching activity. Unfortunately, most of us find it easier to talk than listen. As a result, those who always talk and never listen tend to say things that are irrelevant to the subject at hand. They identify most readily with Peter who spoke "because he did not know what to say" (Mark 9:6).

When people speak, they often take time to get to the heart of what they really want to say. When people listen, they often hear what is said first and then formulate a mental response to that statement as the person continues talking. The natural result of this process is shallow conversations that never address the heart of what really concerns the participants. To become effective listeners, most of us have to overcome four barriers to effective listening.

The first barrier is our attitudes. Sometimes our attitudes toward certain types of people hinder our willingness to listen. When a caring wife addresses an area of concern in her husband's life, he may tune her out because "she sounds just like my mother." Any resentment he may have toward his mother because of her criticism of him may be transferred to any other woman who speaks negatively about anything in his life. This

common family problem is multiplied when you consider how this principle relates to our broader relationships.

Counselors use a variety of personality tests today to help people identify their natural strengths and weaknesses. While they have various origins and biases built into the tests, essentially each test identifies four primary personality types. Most people have personalities that are a blend of two of these primary types. While everyone is unique, broadly speaking each of us falls into one of sixteen personality profiles. When we have an unresolved conflict with one person, it is only human to carry our feelings toward that person to anyone else who reminds us of that person. That means one unresolved conflict will potentially hinder any relationship you try to develop with 6.25 percent of the people you meet in the future.

Our actions can also be a barrier to listening well. One reason communication breakdowns are common in family life is because we attempt to speak and listen in the midst of distractions. Does a husband really hear what his wife is saying at the breakfast table while he is reading the morning paper? Does a teenage son or daughter hear his or her parent's counsel while listening to music or chatting with friends on line? Some families believe they can talk while watching television, especially if they talk during the commercials, but they fail to understand companies invest a great deal of money in developing commercials to insure that is the one thing you hear and remember.

We live in a distracting world and we must work hard to insure those distractions don't hinder our ability to listen well. When you need to hear what someone is saying, set aside what you have been doing, putting it out of sight and out of mind. Look at the speaker, smile and nod occasionally encouraging the speaker to continue talking. Try to ignore the distractions around you and think about what is being said. If you need to turn off the radio or television, excuse yourself and do so. Do everything you can to make the speaker feel like he or she is the focus of your attention.

Some people are multi-taskers and have the rare ability to concentrate on several things at one time. One chess master would demonstrate his ability by playing ten chess games simultaneously and winning all ten. But even if you have that kind of mind, it is important that your actions demonstrate to others that they are the focus of your attention. As important as it is that you listen, it is just as important that others know you are listening.

Listening can also be hindered by our failure to understand what is being said. A person is considered fully functional in a language with a vocabulary of only 5,000 words. That kind of vocabulary will get you through most situations in life. But the English (and other) languages include far more than 5,000 words. Estimates indicate William Shakespeare used 25,000 different words in his writings; Winston Churchill used 50,000 different English words in his books. While most of the people we meet do not have that kind of extensive knowledge of the language, it is common to come across a word or two we do not know. When that happens, most people skip the word and ignore it or guess at its meaning from the context in which it was used. That is not always the best thing to do.

Guessing often means we guess wrong. When someone from Australia refers to a "barbie," he is not talking about a child's doll but a barbeque. When someone from England says they have something in their "boot," they don't mean they have a stone in

their shoe but rather a package in the trunk of their car. Even those of us who speak variations of English often use similar sounding words to mean different things. And English is not the only language with that problem. The Chinese phrase, “*ma ma ma ma ma*” means “Did your grandmother scold the horse?” provided you got all the accents right.

When it comes to understanding what you are hearing, or making sure you understand what is being said, the simple rule to follow is, “If in doubt, find out!” Take time to ask questions to clarify what you think you are hearing. Don’t be embarrassed about admitting you are not sure you heard right or are not sure what is meant by a certain statement. Asking the right questions to clarify what is being said will enhance the communication. After all, you really can’t help someone in need if you don’t know what the need is.

Finally, making premature judgments can be a barrier to listening. Each of us have certain core values that shape the ethical basis for our actions and judgments. An ideal goal in life is to adopt core values that are consistent with biblical principles and values, but our values are also shaped by the families in which we were raised and by the experiences of life. Naturally someone raised in a home destroyed by drugs and alcohol will have strong opinions about substance abuse, but if that person is trying to help an alcoholic he or she needs to work hard at not making premature judgments when the subject comes up in conversations.

That does not mean we need to change our values to adjust to others but rather that like Jesus, we seek to be full of grace and truth. As God in human flesh, Jesus must have abhorred the sin He witnessed all around Him, but He chose to look beyond the sin and love the sinner. That is what He did for us in our worst state, and what He expects us to do for others as we minister to broken people in a broken world.

Am I Making Myself Clear?

As important as listening is, it is only part of the communication. And contrary to popular belief, telling is not the other part. Communication takes place not when we tell people something but when they understand our message and make an appropriate response. In fact, most of the ways we send messages to others do not involve speaking.

Researchers in the field of communication have discovered the words spoken, tone and volume of the voice and speaking style of a speaker in a presentation account for only a small part of the message received by those attending the seminar. Other conclusions are formed on the basis of the speaker’s appearance, physical proximity to the audience, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture and physical contact during the process. The old adage is true, our actions do speak louder than our words.

As you build bridges to broken people in a broken world, you need to ask yourself, “Am I making myself clear?” The way to answer the question includes the language you use to some degree, but to a larger degree you need to evaluate the non-verbal messages you are sending to make sure they are compatible with the words you are speaking. When you say, “I am really concerned about you and your problem,” while looking at your watch and glancing around at others in a room, you are really saying “I am in a hurry and have a lot more pressing issues that are more important than you or your problems.” That may not be your intent, but people are more likely to remember your body language than your verbal language.

Fortunately, there are some physical things you can learn to do that will communicate your concern and build trust into a relationship. Your physical proximity to a person makes a difference between whether people view you with trust, suspicion or apathy. If you are too far away, the distance between you and others may be an accurate measure of the distance in your relationship. In contrast, getting too close invades one's personal space and results in one looking at you with suspicion. While that space varies with individuals and the work that has already been done in building a relationship, most people think of the ten square feet in which they stand as their space. The key to building trust is to be on the edge of that space (two to three feet between you), close enough to build trust but distant enough not to arouse suspicion.

A second way to communicate concern involves physical touch. We tend to remember people who touch us longer and in a positive context even when we have forgotten the touch. In one study, cashiers were instructed to make or not make physical contact with the customer when giving them their change. Then those customers were surveyed concerning their shopping experience. The results suggested those who were touched by the cashier had a more positive experience than those who were not. Another surprising result of the study was that most customers who were touched were unaware the cashier had made any physical contact, but identified the cashier as friendly.

Of course, social and cultural norms need to be observed when using touch, but in most places hold one's hand as you console that person tends to be appropriate. Many women may hug one another as an expression of friendship, but a pastor hugging a woman who is not his wife runs the risk of complications and innuendo. The head of a counseling ministry in a church was dismissed for inappropriate behavior for hugging a counselee in a session even though both the counselor's wife and counselee's husband were present and were of the opinion nothing inappropriate had taken place. One needs to exercise discernment in how to use physical touch and to do so in a way deemed appropriate by both parties involved and others who may witness or hear about it later.

Does It Show How Much I Care?

Ultimately, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Those gifted in showing mercy need to communicate empathy to others as an expression of their giftedness to be effective in ministry. Empathy involves demonstrating you understand and identify with others through both words and actions. Part of the way we do that is by developing our listening skills and applying them in our conversations with others. But there are other things we can do to enhance this aspect of our gift.

An old Indian proverb states, "You cannot understand a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins." When you talk with others, put yourself in their shoes and try to understand how they must feel in the situation overwhelming them at that moment. Then respond to others in a way that demonstrates you know what it likes to be there.

As you listen, listen not only to the words that are being said but the emotions of the voice. Empathy takes place when we laugh with those who laugh and cry with those who cry. Be slow to make judgments about a person's problems and quick to try to understand their situation. But don't be in a hurry to fix everything. Give other people the time they need to work through the process that will achieve lasting results. You also need time to

fully understand and appreciate what they are going through. Sometimes, the best thing you can say is nothing as you continue to listen to their problems.

Often the people God places in our life are experiencing the same kind of problems we have experienced previously (see chapter two). As it is appropriate, sometimes sharing how you felt in a similar experience in your own life may be effective in communicating to others you do understand exactly what they are going through. If you do share, be careful not to minimize the problem or your pain in the midst of that problem and by implication suggest to others they are not hurting as much as they think. Also, one of the purposes of sharing in that kind of situation is to communicate hope to others as they prepare to leave the pain of their past and move on (see chapter five).

Am I Getting Through At All?

As you use your giftedness building bridges to broken people in a broken world, your goal is to effect a significant and positive change in their life and situation. How you influence others to that end may be related to how others have influenced you to make significant positive changes in your life. As you think through this issue, ask yourself if others have influenced you through...

- a willingness to offer practical assistance to help you meet your need?
- a dream of a better option than the problem you were experiencing?
- a logical argument that helped you understand the consequences of your actions?
- an emotional appeal that touched your heart and made you want to change?
- a strategic plan that helped you climb out of the hole you were in?
- an interventional situation that forced you to confront your reality of the moment?
- a non-negotiable directive by someone in authority over them?
- a pattern of encouragement to take small steps forward?
- a pattern of praise for small victories that helped you face the next challenge?

If a dozen readers of the previous paragraph were to discuss the examples listed, most likely few of them would have been influenced in the same way. Some may even identify other ways they were influenced for their own good that are not on the list. But one thing that is highly probable is the way they were influenced is the way they will most effectively influence others. That is not to say everyone is influenced the same way but that we tend to have our greatest influence among people like ourselves.

Communicating a Sense of Worth to Unworthy People

Many people don't feel very good about themselves today. For years, family members and friends have told them they are dumb, fat or ugly. They may not be, but that really doesn't matter. They have begun to believe the often-repeated lie. The low view they have developed of themselves often has tragic consequences. They may cut themselves off from others or turn to drugs or alcohol to escape. Sometimes they despair to the point of suicide or behavior that will shorten their expected life span.

This problem is so widespread in our society that many have tapped into the lucrative market of self-help books and seminars. Unfortunately, many of the proposed solutions only complicate the existing problem. People are told to look deep within them to recognize their real value. But when many look within, they don't like what they see.

The real value of people grows out of our understanding of creation and redemption. God created people in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). Even when that valuable creation was marred, He redeemed us at the cost of "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). People are valuable because God made them valuable and confirmed their value in providing for their salvation.

Communicating value to people involves more than gentle affirmation. It involves real action. People tend to respond more positively toward those they value than they might toward those they regarded as more common or insignificant. The apostles intended believers to have a high regard for others. Believers are urged to (1) wash one another's feet (John 13:14), honor one another (Rom. 12:10), (3) live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16), (4) stop passing judgment on one another (Rom. 14:13), (5) accept one another (Rom. 15:7), (6) agree with one another (1 Cor. 1:10), (7) have equal concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:25), (8) greet one another (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14), (9) not envy each other (Gal. 5:26), (10) be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 5:15), (11) speak to one another (Eph. 5:19), (12) not lie to each other (Col. 3:9), (13) not slander one another (James 4:11), (14) not grumble against each other (James 5:9), (15) live in harmony with one another (1 Peter 3:8), (16) offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9), (17) clothe themselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5), and (18) have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). When treated in this manner, people cannot help but feel important.

This list identifies three vital aspects of communicating worth to worthy people. First, we must learn how to accept others for who they are. Only then can we communicate proper respect for others. Finally, we need to do this in a way that avoids a "holier-than-thou" attitude.

Embracing People You Don't Want to Embrace

Paul used the Greek word *proslambano* when he urged the Romans to "accept one another" (Rom. 15:7). This term describes more than a passive acceptance of a person's presence. Rather, it is a more active response to the individual so as to communicate the special interest one person had in another. It is an attitude that makes it easy to welcome them.

Three other apostolic commands emphasize this aspect of accepting others. First, we are to have equal concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:25). Second, we are not to envy each other (Gal. 5:26). Envy assumes someone has something of which they are not worthy. Also, we are to have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). This assumes equality in our relationships.

Sometimes it is easy to accept others. The character, personality and/or values of some people are attractive to us. It is easy to embrace another with whom there is a great deal of commonality. It is more difficult to accept another when other factors discourage any special interest we have in each other.

That was the situation in Rome when Paul called them to accept each other. Different views as to what was or was not an acceptable pattern of Christian behavior posed the potential of destroying the sense of community within that church. Paul made his appeal to accept others on the basis of God's acceptance of us. If God has received us, we have no right to reject others.

When we apply this principle, we avoid disputes over non-essentials in the Christian life (Rom. 14:1). Also, we will resist being critical of the lifestyle of others (Rom. 14:3). Further, we will know better than to insist upon our right to do what others consider offensive (Rom. 14:15-16).

Paul described seven principles to guide us in accepting one another. First, understand God's attitude toward others (Rom. 14:3). God has already accepted those we struggle to accept. Second, focus on God's ability on behalf of others (Rom. 14:4). Third, be confident in your own personal convictions (Rom. 14:5). Those most belligerent in the expression of their religious convictions are often those who are struggling in their faith. Fourth, honor God in whatever you do (Rom. 14:6). Also, make an effort not to offend others if at all possible (Rom. 14:13). Rather, work for peace in relationships with others (Rom. 14:19). Finally, look for ways to build the other person and invest in the life of another (Rom. 14:19).

Communicating Your Respect for Others

Sometimes the problem experienced in accepting others is a problem with communication. It is not enough to view others as special; they must be made to feel special. The barriers to effective communication must be overcome so that acceptance can be expressed to the end that others recognize they are appreciated. The New Testament suggests a number of ways to do this.

First, treat others as though you really believed they were valuable (Rom. 12:10). Something is wrong with our value system when personal possessions and/or privileges are considered more important than people. Yet that attitude is communicated to others far more often than we are willing to admit.

Second, as much as is possible, live in harmony with others (Rom. 12:16; 1 Peter 3:9). This involves agreeing with one another when possible (1 Cor. 1:10). People who always insist on their own way tell others their ideas are not important. Those who are most effective in using their gift of mercy communicate respect for others and their ideas.

A third way to communicate respect to others involves refusing to pass judgment on others (Rom. 14:13). While Christians should be discerning and exercise some discretion, we do not have the right to destructively criticize people. Children who are exposed to a steady diet of criticism and complaint from parents perceive they do not have their parents' respect and often develop a low view of themselves. The same process works within the church when Christians are critical of other believers.

The early Christians were encouraged to greet one another with a kiss (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14). In the Middle East culture, greetings are often accompanied by an embrace and/or kiss. In other cultures, greetings are expressed with a wave, a handshake, a bow or the presentation of a gift. Greeting one another expresses a sense of respect to the one greeted.

Expressing kindness is a fifth way to express one's respect for others (Eph. 4:32; 1 Thess. 5:15). Kindness tells others they are appreciated and thought of as valuable. When we are mean toward others or take them for granted, the opposite message is communicated.

The way we speak to others may also express respect (Eph. 5:19). Such things as lying (Col. 3:9), slander (James 4:11), and grumbling (James 5:9) are disrespectful and should be avoided. But simply avoiding negative speech patterns is not enough. We should affirm and encourage in our speech.

Finally, offering hospitality to one another is another way to communicate our respect for others (1 Peter 4:9). Home is the place where family and close friends are welcomed. When we invite others into our home, we tell others we value them as our friends. Sometimes, inviting one into a home may be the ultimate expression of accepting another.

Loosing that "Holier-Than-Thou" Attitude

It is important to maintain a spirit of humility in the development of relationships with others. That's why the early Christians were directed to be clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:5). Jesus expressed the same principle calling on His disciples to wash one another's feet (John 13:14). When humility is replaced with pride in the Christian life, others tend to perceive a "holier-than-thou" attitude.

But how can we win the battle with pride and maintain a spirit of humility? Humility is the result of recognizing God has given us everything. In light of this, we don't have to pretend to be important. We know better. John Wesley understood this when he saw a man drunk on the streets of London. Wesley observed, "But for the grace of God, there go I." It's hard to be proud when we realize all we have of value is a gift from God.

This spirit of meekness and humility is crucial to your effectiveness as a mercy-shower. When we honor others as Christ has honored us, the door to significant ministry opportunities opens. When this happens, we can use our gift of showing mercy to help others rebuild their lives and become productive again.

CHAPTER FOUR

Helping Broken People Cope with Pain and Suffering

The nature of ministry involves helping people cope with problems they experience in life. By their very nature, these problems tend to involve painful experiences. As one endures difficult times in life, that suffering tends to be expressed in various ways. Common expressions of pain and suffering include intense crying, grief, mental anguish, confusion and the feeling of being emotionally drained, experiencing a significant loss of energy. As the difficulties continue, deep discouragement and extended periods of depression may follow. “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (Prov. 15:13). Under the stress associated with these symptoms, even godly Christians are more likely to experience moral failure in their life. David described such a time in his own life when he wrote, “For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me” (Ps. 38:17).

Why Does Life Hurt So Much?

When problems come into our life, it is common to ask the “why questions”: Why me? Why this? Why now? Human nature seems to assume everything happens for a purpose. This is especially true when it comes to things that happen other than the way we would like them to happen. When problems come into your life, or the life of someone close to you, it is important to understand there are many possible answers to the why questions.

In the midst of his problems, Job understood some pain and suffering is simply a normal part of human experience. One of his friends reminded him, “Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). Job apparently agreed and later confessed, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). That may not be the most positive thought on which to focus, but we should not be surprised when bad things happen in life.

Sometimes, those bad things are the natural consequence of bad behavior. One of the physical laws of the universe affirms, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” That law also applies to the moral universe. We live with the consequences of the behavior and lifestyle we choose. One example of this principle is captured in the proverb, “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at wine, those who go in search of mixed wine” (Prov. 23:29-30).

God reserves the right to use pain and suffering as part of His judicial process in our life. Writing to the Corinthians about their abuses at the Lord’s Table, Paul noted, “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:30-31). When Jehoram succeeded his father Jehoshaphat as king in Judah, he strengthened his political position by killing his brothers and other rivals to the throne (2 Chron. 21:4). Further, he adopted an immoral political policy that was offensive to God (2 Chron. 21:6). God responded by sending the

Philistines and Arabians to invade Judah (2 Chron. 21:16-17). Ultimately, “the LORD struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease” (2 Chron. 21:18).

But not all pain and suffering in our life is tied to sin. Sometimes we suffer because we choose not to sin. Peter wrote to Christians about to be persecuted for their commitment to Christ reminding them, “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3:17). Paul warned Timothy of coming time when even wanting to live by moral principles could bring hardship into one’s life. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). It was because Job was a model citizen that he became the subject of Satan’s attack. The account of that spiritual warfare in the first two chapters of Job remind us even the Devil himself is subject to boundaries established by God when he brings problems into our life.

Sometimes we hurt in response to the things we hear which are contrary to what we want to hear. Jesus knew His disciples were struggling with this in the Upper Room when He said, “But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:6). When Paul was faced with a seriously ill friend, he told mutual friends, “For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27). For many mercy-showers, learning of other people’s problems may result in personal pain. Nehemiah learned of the problems in his homeland and “wept, and mourned for many days” (Neh. 1:4). Paul thought about the spiritual needs of his people and experienced “great sorrow and continual grief” (Rom. 9:2).

Ultimately, every aspect of our life, including our problems, should be lived with the intent of bringing glory to God. When asked whose sin was responsible for a child being born blind, “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him’” (John 9:2). When Moses complained about his inadequacy, God assumed responsibility for the apparent mistakes in life (Ex. 4:11), “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:29). By exchanging His strength for our weakness, the results in and through our life bring glory to God.

Where Is God in this Mess?

In the midst of a personal problem, it is common to feel abandoned and alone. This sense of alienation often extends beyond family and friends. There are times when it seems like even God is silent and has abandoned us in our greatest hour of need. This feeling is often expressed in the Psalms, but in reality, God is actively involved in our problems seeking to accomplish His purposes in our life. He has specific goals best accomplished during the difficult seasons of life and graciously seeks to help us through those difficulties if we will let Him.

There are several reasons God allows pain and suffering to be part of our life experience. Sometimes this is the best way to bring us to the place of repentance so we will come back to Him. Through the prophet Hosea, God said, “I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me” (Hosea 5:15).

On other occasions, God used significant life problems to demonstrate the futility of faith in the wrong things. During the dark age of the judges, a prophet mocked Israel with the words, “Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in

your time of distress” (Judges 10:14). Elijah also mocked the prophets of Baal when their God failed to rain down fire on their altar during a power encounter on Mount Carmel. “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27).

Pain and suffering is sometimes used as a tool to humble us in our walk with God as a first step in our spiritual growth. Moses reminded Israel, “And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:2-3).

God may use pain and suffering in our life to draw us into a more intimate relationship with Himself. Paul expressed his goal to know Christ more intimately with the words, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). We cannot know Christ in His resurrection power until we share in His passion and death.

God may also use pain and suffering in our life as part of His refining process. In the Old Testament we are reminded, “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10). The same principle was taught in the New Testament when Paul wrote, “And if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

The problems we experience in life are tools used by God to shape the unique ministry we have in the lives of others. God “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:4). Overcoming significant difficulties also results in greater personal credibility expanding our sphere of ministry influence. Peter described himself as “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1). John wrote as “your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9). Paul called himself “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (Phile. 1).

Problems are also the means by which God measures the quality and growth of our faith so it can be recognized by us and others. Peter wrote, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7).

There are other reasons God makes painful experiences a part of our life. David glorified God with his testimony, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19). Jesus claimed at least one man had been born blind “that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3). For some, problems are part of their learning style. The psalmist wrote, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Ps. 119:71). Paul taught that some problems in

this life prepare us for responsibilities we will assume in the life hereafter. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12).

Why Doesn't God Bail Me Out?

In the midst of their problems, the most common prayer most Christians pray is, “Lord, take this problem away.” Deliverance is always more attractive than discipline and freedom from stress is preferred over faithfulness in the struggle. David’s testimony becomes the foundational promise of their prayer to God. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19). After all, didn’t God deliver Israel from the affliction of the Egyptians (1 Sam. 10:19)?

While there are times when God might intervene to bail us out of the problems we face, more often He has a purpose in our problems that is more important than our comfort. Paul prayed three times for deliverance from a problem he described as “a thorn in the flesh” and God refused to grant that request. It would have been easy for him to conclude God did not care and had left him on his own, but nothing could be farther from the truth. God’s work in our life in the midst of our problems is often overlooked in the midst of our pain and suffering.

Some of our life problems are the consequences of bad decisions made on our part. Often, these problems could have been avoided had we looked to God for guidance in the decision-making process and applied biblical principles to the situations we face in life. God repeatedly warned Paul he would be imprisoned and afflicted if he went to Jerusalem (Acts 20:23), but Paul chose to go anyway rather than send funds for the poor with someone else. The Proverbs contain much practical wisdom to help us make good decisions, but when like Paul we choose our own way, we will face consequences we don’t want (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

Even when problems are the result of our own actions, God sets boundaries that limit the size of our problems to insure we are able to bear up under the most intense problems we face. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). He knows what we can handle and limits the size of our problems by that measure. Even when God allowed Job to be afflicted by the Devil, He established boundaries beyond which not even Satan can cross (Job 1:12; 2:6). In the midst of our most trying times, we can be confident that God is confident of our ability to handle what we face with His grace.

If we let Him and acknowledge His presence in the midst of our darkest hours, God can be our source of comfort and strength in the midst of our problems. The Father of Mercies and God of all Comfort “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:4). Our problems are part of His training program to equip us for significant ministry in the lives of others. Ultimately, He will turn our sorrow into joy through His presence. Jesus told His disciples, “you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

Even when we think He has abandoned us, God provides the grace we need to make it through and become what He wants us to be. God’s message to Paul in the midst of his

most difficult problem was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul’s response was to “take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). When Peter wrote to encourage Christians who were about to face intense persecution, he prayed, “may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

How Can I Continue in All this Chaos?

The good news is you don’t have to face your problems alone. “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33) and longs to bring you peace in the midst of your chaos. Jesus told His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). You can tap into “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7) in every situation you face in life.

A good place to begin dealing with your problems involves taking time for self-evaluation. While not every problem you face is the result of sin in your life, some may be. If that is the case, try praying David’s prayer. “Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins” (Ps. 25:18). Paul reminded the Corinthians, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

In every conflict, you can always expect an attack of the enemy when the enemy believes you are least able to handle it. Therefore, steadfastly resist the Devil in the midst of your pain and suffering. Peter urged, “Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world” (1 Peter 5:9). Listen to the warnings of God to minimize your pain and suffering, and remember suffering is part of the normal Christian experience, a tool in the hand of God shaping us to become all He intends us to be. “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12).

Learn the value of suffering in the Christian life if that is God’s will for you (1 Peter 3:17). Then make a conscious choice to be willing to experience pain and suffering for God’s glory. Paul urged Timothy, “do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). The faith of Moses began with such a decision; “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward” (Heb. 11:25-26).

Be aware of God’s full appreciation of your situation “for He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard” (Ps. 22:24). He knows experientially what you are facing because He has been there. “He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isa. 53:3).

Even when the problems we face are the result of the malice of others, understand God is at work in your situation. This principle helped Joseph avoid bitterness in the midst of his problems. He told his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

Let your ultimate hope balance your awareness of pain and suffering. “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:5-6). Jesus told His disciples, “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy” (John 16:20-21). Paul explained how he coped with significant challenges in life when he wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). To the Corinthians he added, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). As John witnessed conditions in the new Jerusalem, he noted, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

In the midst of your problems, it is good to remember how God delivered you from other significant problems in the past. One reason Israel failed to remain faithful to God was “they did not remember His power: the day when He redeemed them from the enemy” (Ps. 78:42). In contrast, Paul reminded Timothy, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. 3:10-11). Keeping a “victory list” of significant answers to prayer and times when God intervened in your life will help you get through more difficult times. Early Christians facing persecution were urged, “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated” (Heb. 10:32-33).

Though sometimes difficult to do, it is also important to remain conscious of God’s unconditional love for you even in the midst of your pain and suffering. Paul asked the question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8:35). Then he answered his own questions with the words, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:38-39).

It is important to stay faithful to God and resist the natural tendency to be overcome with fear in the midst of difficult times. As the church at Sardis faced an uncertain future, Jesus said, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Instead, let your pain and suffering humble you before your God. Manasseh learned this

lesson when it was almost too late in life. “Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers” (2 Chron. 33:12).

Throughout the Scriptures, problems have been the soil out of which rich seasons of prayer emerged. It is important to express your concerns and desires frankly to God in the midst of your suffering. Concerning Israel, Moses wrote, “Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression” (Deut. 26:7). Out of her personal pain Hannah prayed, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head” (1 Sam. 1:11). It is God’s desire that His people turn to Him in their problems and invite Him to intervene. “If disaster comes upon us – sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine – we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save” (2 Chron. 20:9). Many of David’s prayers to God were born in seasons of great difficulty. “Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death” (Ps. 9:13). “Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law” (Ps. 119:153).

Remain confident of God’s ability to deal with your difficulty in a way that is most likely to bring glory to Himself. Paul reminded Timothy, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1:12). If necessary, consciously commit yourself to God’s care in the midst of your difficult circumstances. “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19).

Be “patient in tribulation” (Rom. 12:12) and encouraged with the examples of others who have experienced significant pain and suffering in their lives (James 5:10). Be teachable (Ps. 119:71) and find comfort in the Scriptures in the midst of your difficulties (Ps. 119:50, 92). Learn to look beyond your own problems to find ways to minister to the needs of others (Eph. 3:13; 2 Cor. 8:2).

It is important to worship God in the midst of your pain and suffering (Ex. 4:31). God often uses music in the life of a believer to drive away personal sorrow (Isa. 51:11). This is one way Christians are enabled to rejoice and find joy in what God is accomplishing in your life through pain and suffering. Despite his problems, Paul testified, “I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation” (2 Cor. 7:4). James urged readers of his epistle, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2, 3). As First Century Christians faced persecution, Peter wrote, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled’” (1 Peter 3:14). That is also good advice for believers living in the Twenty-First Century.

What Can I Do to Help Hurting People?

When mercy-showers see people in the midst of personal problems, their hearts break and they are driven with a need to help. Sadly, there is often little you can do of lasting

value until the hurting person is ready to accept help. Indeed, hurting people often lash out at those who are trying to help them, especially when they become overwhelmed by fear and pain. Those who would be effective in meeting the needs of the stressed and distressed must be willing to suffer for the sake of having a significant ministry in the lives of others. Paul's ministry was marked "with all humility, with many tears and trials" (Acts 20:19). He reminded the Philippians, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29).

A good first step in the process of helping others involves identifying with others in the midst of their pain and suffering. This is part of what it means to be a Christian. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Early Christians were urged to "remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb. 13:3). When John wrote to churches facing difficult circumstances, he did so as "your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9).

Visit and interact with people in the midst of their pain and suffering. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). In your interaction with others, encourage them for their endurance (2 Thess. 1:4). Share in the affliction of others (Phil. 4:14). Be willing to help out in practical ways.

Someone has said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Though it can be a difficult ministry at times, helping broken people cope with their pain and suffering is often the key to breaking barriers that separate them from those who can help them most. God can use you to help them rebuild their lives, but only when they become convinced you are not a threat.

CHAPTER FIVE

Helping Broken People Leave the Past and Rebuild for the Future

By definition, mercy-showers have a heart for people in distress. That is essentially what empathy is. Like Jesus, they see people in the context of their problems and desire to do what they can to help them. But their desire to help goes beyond meeting a temporary need. They long to see people break free of the bondage that is holding them back and build a better life for themselves. While feeding hungry people is important, dealing with the hunger problem is a better long-term project.

That kind of ministry is not easy for several reasons. First, people in need face different kinds of problems demanding different kinds of responses. Second, those in greatest need have often been there so long they have lost the will to try. These broken people see insurmountable barriers when they think of changing their lives. As a result, even thinking their situation could be changed becomes an impossible dream in their thinking.

Broken people need caring people to help them leave their past and rebuild their future. Sadly, often the people who need the most help don't yet realize how important outside help is. Initially they may reject the efforts of mercy-showers in their life and even deny they need help. As a result, the process of helping people change may be long and tedious at times. It is easy to become discouraged in the process if we fail to look at the big picture. Paul encouraged the Galatians, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal. 6:9). You can make a difference in someone's life if you do the right things long enough to see significant life changes take place.

Three Kinds of Broken People

One of the big problems faced by people trying to help others is to know what to do to achieve the desired response. People to try to deal with everyone the same way often discover people respond differently to their actions and comments. Paul urged the Thessalonians, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thess. 5:14). In doing so, Paul identified three types of people with problems and noted different strategies work better with each type.

The first group Paul describes is the unruly. Some people have a defiant streak in them. They are fiercely independent and tend to challenge virtually anything you say to them. They are the rebels who reject authority over themselves. They respond best to a confrontational approach that warns them of the consequences associated with their present lifestyle. While such an approach may be difficult for someone gifted in showing mercy, if they really care for others they will be more concerned with the needs of others than their own personal comfort zone.

The second group is described as fainthearted. Their heart is in the right place, but their mind is often in another world. As you work with this group you will find they initially do what they need to do but quickly become discouraged and quit. They need your ongoing support to encourage (comfort) them. It can be frustrating to continually encourage someone to keep on the path they have started, but without your support they will not finish the course laid out before them.

The third group is described as “weak.” These are the people who have convinced themselves they do not have it in themselves to do anything. They need someone to lift them up constantly and uphold them each step of the way. Many who struggle with addictive behavior and dependency issues may fall into this group.

In the challenge of helping broken people rebuild their lives, Paul urges us to “be patient with all.” It takes time to turn a life around and there are no shortcuts on the road to recovery. As you begin helping broken people rebuild their lives, understand the process will take time. Begin by committing yourself to a long-term involvement in the lives of those you are trying to help.

Four Questions Broken People Ask

As an agent of change in the lives of broken people, mercy-showers seek behavioral change in the lives of those they are trying to help. Somebody defined insanity as “doing the same thing you’ve always done expecting different results.” We know the only way broken people can leave their past and rebuild their lives for the future is to change the attitudes and actions that got them into trouble in the first place. But when faced with the challenge of making significant life changes, there are four kinds of questions broken people ask before they agree to become involved. Even when the questions are not verbalized, they form part of the thinking process involved in deciding whether the challenge is worth the risk involved.

The first set of questions address informational concerns. People need to know exactly what they are looking at. It is one thing to talk about a “better life,” something much different when talking about breaking an addiction to drugs or alcohol. They need to know what is wrong with the behavior and attitudes that are a part of their life and what will replace these things.

Next, most people have questions which address personal concerns. They need to know how these changes will affect them. What will be involved in making the proposed changes? Do they have what it takes to complete the process and make it work?

The third set of questions address implementation concerns. These questions address the specific steps involved in the change strategy. What is the first thing they need to do? What comes next? They need to be assured there is a plan in place that will work in their life as they journey down the road to recovery.

The final questions they have relate to impact concerns. How will this change impact their life for good? The ultimate question asked by people raised in a consumer driven culture is, “What’s in it for me?” When they know what the issues are, are convinced they can make it work, understand the steps needed to make the desired changes, and are convinced they will receive value at the end of the process that makes the effort worthwhile, they are ready to begin a process of change in their life.

Five Barriers Broken People Face when Making Positive Change

As much as broken people want to fix their lives, several barriers must be overcome before they can make progress on the road to recovery. These barriers tend to be barriers of their own making. Originally the barriers were built to protect them from continued pain or justify their behavior by blaming it on others. Then the barriers grew into the walls that boxed them into their narrow worldview. By the time they realize they are in trouble and begin looking for a way out, the walls are so high they are unable to scale them without help. As you learn to identify these barriers and how to help broken people overcome them, you will become more effective in helping them make the positive changes they need to make.

Many broken people have a personal history of abuse by those who should have been their protectors. This abuse may have been expressed in various ways, but it robbed them of a safe place in which to mature. As a result, they have problems trusting others, even trusting God. As difficult as it is, the only way to overcome this barrier is to make peace with their past by understanding how God uses even the difficult circumstances of life to shape them for a special role in life. Joseph experienced such abuse at the hands of his brothers but was able to move beyond that abuse by changing his perspective. When he found himself in a place where he had the power to seek revenge upon his family, “Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God. But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Gen. 50:19-21).

Joseph’s insightful comment suggests seven principles that help us deal with the pain in our past so that we can move forward to accomplish all God has in store for us. Joseph began by remembering who was ultimately in charge. Second, he chose to acknowledge the reality of evil in his world rather than trying to excuse, minimize or deny it. In doing so, he also remembered the goodness of God in his life and chose to focus on God’s purpose at work in his life. Fifth, he chose to forgive those who had wronged him long before they were willing to admit they were wrong. Then, he demonstrated the reality of that forgiveness by treating his “enemies” as his “friends.” Finally, he reassured his brothers that he held no grudges and “spoke kindly to them.”

The personal choices we make represent the second barrier on the road to recovery. This choice involves the choice to forgive. As noted above, the choice to forgive others is essential to make peace with our past and move on to productive lives. But even some who have chosen to forgive others have difficulty forgiving themselves. Choosing not to forgive yourself can set in motion attitudes and actions that hinder personal growth.

Some people live with a sense of guilt for things that were done to them rather than things they have done. This false sense of guilt is the result of believing they were somehow responsible for the actions of others. Parents with a rebellious child may feel guilty their child is involved with drugs or chosen to run with a gang. Abused wives often accept responsibility for making their abusive spouse angry. They need to come to an understanding that it was not their fault. God created people with a personal will enabling them to make their own choices. They are responsible for their own actions and should be held accountable. Assuming guilt for the behavior of others does no one any good.

Others are plagued with guilt for some action in their past. In this case, they feel guilt because they are guilty of some wrong act. An unfaithful spouse may live with guilt over a previous affair even though their spouse has forgiven them and is working to rebuild their relationship. God is willing and able to forgive all sin when we come to Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Once God has forgiven our sin, it is rather egotistical to think we have the right not to forgive ourselves.

A third barrier to overcome on the road to recovery involves personal pain. Broken people are often hurting people. In many cases past experiences and present reality leaves them feeling discouraged and lonely. Any recovery that takes place in their lives needs to help them cope with these emotions.

There are many reasons why people become discouraged and depressed. Sometimes it is an emotional response to a physical problem such as poor nutrition, tiredness, chemical imbalances or drug reactions. When a person experiences long-term depression, it is always a good idea to contact a doctor and get a physical that includes tests for a physical cause for depression. At other times, depression is an emotional response to a life situation such as the loss of a loved one, job or home. Depression can also be the result of negative thinking. It is possible to talk yourself into being discouraged.

When the cause of depression is physical, physical treatments usually can correct the problem. But when the cause of depression is found in our thinking and feeling, that behavior needs to be corrected to break free of the blues. We need to find a different way of thinking and feeling about the challenges we face in life. The solution is not to deny reality but to identify ways to cope with the real problems we face. Remember, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Loneliness involves a breakdown in relationships. Sometimes that fractured relationship is the result of something over which we have no control as in the death of a loved one or job transfer that separates us from those we know best. Other fractured relationships are part of our normal life experience such as when adult children leave the family home for college or to begin a family of their own. A third cause of fractured relationships involves unresolved conflict. In each case, the way to address loneliness involves building and restoring relationships. Several relationship-building principles are listed in a previous chapter (see chapter 3).

Our personal responses to the challenges of life represent a fourth barrier to overcome on the road to recovery. This barrier usually takes one or more of two common conditions experienced by broken people. Some people respond to the challenges of life with anger and need to learn how to manage their anger so that it becomes a productive rather than destructive force in their life. Others become consumed with anxiety over their situation and need to learn how to establish the right priorities in life.

Anger is an internal emotional response to a perceived threat, wrong or frustration that impacts our lives and often spills out in expressions of violence. While anger itself is not always wrong, it is often marked by bitterness toward others and can be harmful. There are a couple of things people with anger management problems can do to control their

anger. First, there is a lot of wisdom in counting to ten before speaking when angry, especially if you take the time to think through your situation as you count. “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression” (Prov. 19:11). Second, make a conscious choice not to raise your voice to express your anger. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

Anxiety or worry is a feeling of uncertainty concerning real or imaginary problems. The easy answer to solve the problem of anxiety is “don’t worry,” but that kind of advice alone is seldom helpful. Instead, people need a strategy to replace worry with constructive action. Paul urged the Philippians, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). God can replace our anxiety with His peace through the spiritual disciplines of prayer and thanksgiving. When we pray, we make our problems His problems. When we give thanks, we remind ourselves how He has resolved other problems for us in the past and find it easier to trust Him to do it again.

A fifth barrier to overcome on the road to recovery involves one’s personal perspective on the future. This barrier began with lowering one’s expectations as a defense mechanism to avoid continued disappointment and failure. As it grows, it becomes a wall of doubt making it impossible to look ahead with hope. To help broken people overcome this barrier, each brick in the wall of doubt needs to be identified and carefully removed so broken people can begin looking beyond the wall to a better future. That hope will get them started on the road to recovery and keep them on the road when the way gets tough. In his book, *In Two Minds*, Os Guinness describes several reasons why people tend to doubt.⁵ His insights are helpful to those seeking to help others bridge this barrier.

Doubt is often the result of failing to realize just how much God does for us. For many people, everything bad that happens in their life is God’s fault and whatever good that takes place is the result of their own efforts or the kindness of others. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible teaches “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shadow or turning” (James 1:17). In the midst of his greatest personal life crisis, Jeremiah testified “through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23).

Sometimes doubt is the result of a diminished view of God. Even those who sing of the majesty and power of God may minimize that power as they focus on their problems. They assume God is not interested in or will not intervene on their behalf, so they do not look to Him for help. As a result, they do not see God working on their behalf, which only confirms their presupposition. In some cases this circular reasoning may reinforce their doubt until they become desperate enough to believe. When that happens, they experience what David experienced before Abimelech. He wrote, “This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles” (Ps. 34:6). Focusing on God’s intervention through answered prayer tends to initiate another kind of reasoning that replaces doubt with faith and hope. The psalmist testified, “I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live” (Ps. 116:1-2).

A third reason for doubt may be our own failure to build a solid foundation for faith in our life. We may find it easy to believe or have faith in the company of believers, but when faced with difficult challenges in an environment hostile to your Christian faith, a faith in God that lacks a solid foundation will crumble under the pressure. Paul urged Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Doubt may emerge out of an involvement in religious activities that is not accompanied by a personal commitment to Christ. While religious activities may be of some value, alone they are not enough to get people through tough times in their life. That is why Peter urged Christians facing difficult times to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

When people do not mature in their faith and continue growing in the Christian life, they may come to the place where they simply cease trusting God. This is the fifth cause of doubt, choosing not to believe. Jesus described a church that had begun to trust its own resources rather than believe God. He called on that church to repent of its self-reliance and invite Him back into their life (Rev. 3:19-20). When doubt emerges because of our failure to believe, the solution involves trusting God for something only He can do. We need to replace our independence with “in dependence upon God.”

Letting our emotions take over so that we fail to think rationally will also lead to doubt. Contrary to popular opinion, faith is a rational and reasonable response to all we know God to be. The facts upon which a healthy faith rests remain the same regardless of how one feels. While our emotions are an important part of life, they should never be the sole basis for making important decisions, especially important decisions about how we relate to God.

Finally, some people choose to doubt out of a fear of what might happen if they dare to believe. In this case, the cause of doubt is fear; fear of failure, fear of disillusionment, fear of being hurt, fear for being wrong, or fear of being opposed. Overcoming the doubt barrier built on fear involves making a choice. “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25). Hudson Taylor once said, “There can be no faith without risk.” Ultimately, replacing doubt with faith involves making a choice.

Four Stages Broken People Experience on the Road to Recovery

The process of helping people rebuild a new life is essentially a teaching-learning process, and as such broken people need to be guided through a process that normally includes four stages. Stage one is that of a novice, someone beginning in the process. Once initial life principles have been effectively communicated, the novice moves into the apprentice stage. During this stage, the apprentice begins applying lessons learned while still learning. At some point in the process, the apprentice becomes a worker, one who has mastered new knowledge in a practical way and is able to work independently. Some people involved in helping broken people rebuild their lives view this as the end of the process, but there is still one more stage to enter. The last stage in the learning process is that of the mentor, one who has so mastered the new knowledge and skills learned that he or she is able to help other hurting people recover to help others also.

Moving broken people from novice to mentor on the road to personal recovery was a goal Paul had in his own ministry. Recalling his ministry at the School of Tyrannus in Ephesus, he told Timothy, “And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). To effectively help people through this process, it is important to understand what people need at each stage in the process and what you can do to meet those needs.

At the initial or novice stage, broken people need help with everything. They need to know what to do, when to do it, where they should be, why they are making the effort to change and how to take each step in the process. You may find it emotionally draining working with broken people at this stage of their recovery. Understand they have been living with their problems so long that the way they feel, as bad as their situation may be, seems normal to them. It is easy for others to see why an addict needs to break his or her addiction, but the addict experiences dysfunction and feels threatened in the recovery process even though he or she thinks they are committed to the end result.

Because of the dysfunction being experienced by those who are novices, they need more than information. They need to know you know what you are talking about when you offer advice and guidance. Avoid sounding hesitant or reluctant when speaking with one at the novice stage. Instead, work hard at sounding confident. As you develop a track record of helping people, begin incorporating their success stories into your conversations to encourage those who need hope.

Novices also need emotional support as they work through the initial process of changing attitudes and behavior. A matter-of-fact approach to communicating the information needed can have a serious demotivating effect on novices. Be enthusiastic and communicate your enthusiasm over each little success in the process. Many parents are discovering the process of potty-training their children is more successful when they celebrate with the child each time the child makes it to the toilet on time. That may seem strange to you because nobody celebrates your success on the toilet, but then again, you are not a novice in that process.

As you work with broken people in this phase of their growth, set small goals that need to be achieved to reach the larger target of behavioral change. Then celebrate each success to encourage continued progress. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12).

Eventually novices move into the apprentice stage. At this point, they have acquired enough information and developed enough skill to begin assuming more responsibility for their recovery, but are still heavily dependent upon help from others. They have not yet mastered all the information they need to know or developed their skills well enough to work on their own. Throughout this phase they will attempt to apply the lessons they are learning, sometimes with success and sometimes not.

At this phase of development, your role changes slightly. As the apprentice begins to realize the progress that has been made, it becomes possible to confront problem areas to effect continued growth and development. Such confrontation in the novice stage would only confirm the false presupposition that change is not possible. But the initial success that brought a novice into the apprentice stage has begun to undermine that

presupposition. While the apprentice may not be confident of ultimate success, he or she is no longer convinced of ultimate failure.

During the apprentice stage of learning, encourage the broken people you work with to begin doing the things you know they can do and hold them accountable for their actions. When failures occur, use those opportunities to further encourage new learning. When we understand why we fail, we begin to understand how to overcome failure in the future. Failure need not be final. “The righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity” (Prov. 24:16). Eventually, the successes far exceed the failures and people move on to a third phase in their personal growth.

In the worker phase, broken people look like new people on the outside even though they periodically continue to struggle on the inside. Significant lifestyle changes have taken place. Self-destructive behavior has been replaced by constructive behavior that promotes continued growth. On the surface, it looks like they no longer need help but can move forward on their own. While it may be true that they can and are accomplishing much independent of help from others, God never designed anyone to live outside of a social support network.

All of us have moments when we get discouraged and are tempted to coast. It is at that point we need others to encourage us to move forward and hold us accountable to our own goals, dreams and ambitions. This becomes your primary role as you work with people in this phase of their continued growth and development. One way to accomplish this involves networking them to others in your church family with whom they can relate. The larger their social support network, the more likely they are to experience continued growth in their life. Solomon noted, “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:12).

The final stage of growth is that of a mentor. In the mentor stage, people have learned the important life lessons and developed the significant life skills they need to overcome the problems that once overcame them. Further, they have the confidence and motivation to produce results in their own life. Their personal growth is so obvious to outside observers that it becomes difficult to believe they were once broken people. In this phase of maturity, they need to rise to the challenge of helping others achieve what they have themselves achieved.

While others may have forgotten their past, recovered broken people usually remember the way things used to be. Even though they know they have made significant progress, they may still be reluctant to think they can help others. They may even feel a little unworthy or unqualified to be involved in people-helping ministries. Your role in this phase of their growth is to convince them otherwise. One of the best ways to do this is to encourage them with your own personal growth story. Also, you may want to partner with them initially as they begin helping others. As they become more confident, you can become less involved and celebrate your success in reproducing yourself in the life of another. After all, isn't that what the Great Commission is all about?

CHAPTER SIX

Recognizing and Dealing with Ministry Burnout

When Tom first began working in the kitchen of the inner city rescue mission on weekends, he was excited about the opportunity to help others in need. God had been good to him. This was his way of giving something back to his community and helping others. Knowing people were being fed who might otherwise go hungry motivated him to the point he often raced downtown after work to cover for another volunteer who was unable to make it. But that was then.

More recently, Tom found himself less fulfilled and more frustrated with his work at the rescue mission. He had come to realize those he was feeding were never going to become productive members in society again. He was beginning to have serious questions about the value of his involvement in the mission. After all, anyone could scoop food onto a plate and hand it to a hungry man. He seemed to lack the energy and enthusiasm he had once had for this ministry and that lack of energy and enthusiasm seemed to spill over into other areas of his life.

He had thought of talking with the director of the rescue mission about the way he felt, but Brother James' zeal for the work never seemed to wane and made Tom feel guilty for even thinking of quitting. So Tom kept on serving food at the rescue mission, whenever he could not find an excuse for missing a night. But each time he missed a night at the rescue mission, he felt bad, like he had let himself and others at the mission down. Tom wasn't sure what he was going to do, but it was becoming apparent there were an increasing number of conflicts coming up in schedule on the nights he was supposed to be at the rescue mission.

Tom's situation is like that experienced by many gifted mercy-showers who become involved in long-term caring ministries. The task they begin with great zeal and enthusiasm gradually becomes a major source of frustration in their life. In recent years, psychologists have begun using the term "burnout" to describe this condition. Understanding the symptoms and causes of burnout will help us deal with burnout in our own life and the lives of others we are called to help.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Ministry Burnout

The term "burnout" is used to describe a condition where people feel like their enthusiasm and energy for life has been depleted. Burned out people find themselves physically and mentally exhausted, often at the beginning of the day. Often it is the result of a prolonged lifestyle of stretching oneself beyond reasonable expectations without making significant input into one's own life. The symptoms of burnout are evident in attitudes in several areas of our life.

For many people, the symptoms begin to appear in their attitude toward ministry. They begin to find their ministry emotionally draining and frustrating. They find even thinking about doing ministry is irritating and spend time thinking of ways out. In extreme cases, they may even consider death as a way of escaping the drudgery of life.

Before long, one's attitude toward family and friends also begins to change. It becomes easier to blame others for personal problems and failures. People who experience burnout tend to be more easily irritated and callous toward others. Secretly, they enjoy seeing others enduring hardships around them. Sometimes, they are not so secret in their enjoyment of the problems of others.

Burnout also affects one's attitude toward life. Gone are the dreams with which they began their ministry. It becomes easier to blame others for their lack of success than to look for new ways to make progress. An attitude of boredom and even cynicism tends to characterize their general outlook.

Ultimately, burnout will even affect one's attitude toward one's self. They feel like others don't appreciate their contributions and may even fear their co-workers are out to get them. As a result, they often cut themselves off from others and become loners. Victims of burnout tend to neglect eating healthy and getting sufficient rest because they just don't care about themselves any more.

Identifying the Causes of Ministry Burnout

Many students of emotional burnout have noted a significant higher concentration of burnout among professionals involved in helping professions than other demographic groups. Dr. Herbert Freudenberger, the psychoanalyst who first used the term burnout to describe this condition, claims the dedicated and committed are most likely to experience burnout. In his book, *Ministry Burnout*, John Sanford suggests nine aspects of ministry which tend to contribute to burnout among dedicated and committed ministers. This list suggests reasons why those gifted in showing mercy who use their gifts in caring ministries may face burnout from time to time in the course of their ministry.⁶

First, the ministry of those gifted in showing mercy never seems to finish. There are always more people with problems than there is time to help them. Also, for every person you help through a distressing situation, it seems you find two or three others in even worse shape. There is no end to helping heal hurting people.

Second, mercy-showers are not always able to determine if their ministry is achieving the desired results. People who work with alcoholics know that problem can only be conquered one day at a time. An alcoholic can go years without a drink only to stumble back into alcoholism at a weak moment. This situation is similar to many faced by those involved in caring ministries.

Third, much of the work involved in caring ministries is repetitive in nature. There are only so many things one can say or do while visiting in the hospital or nursing home. Those who care for shut-ins often find themselves unconsciously falling into a routine of house cleaning, grocery shopping, and visiting. A youth counselor may give the same advice to a dozen or more teens each month who come to him or her with a similar problem. After a while, the constant routine of ministry begins to wear all of us down.

A fourth problem faced by those involved in caring ministry is the expectations of those coming for help. When people come to a gifted mercy-shower for help, they expect that mercy-shower both knows what to do and is able to do it. Sometimes, neither assumption is true. Rather, the expectation of the hurting person tugs at the heart of an empathetic

Christian until he or she falls into the trap of trying to help out of a position of weakness. If this situation becomes habitual, burnout is not far behind.

Often, mercy-showers who serve in caring ministries work with the same people over long periods of time. The youth worker working with runaways sees the same kids on the streets from month to month. Workers in a pregnancy counseling center may work with the same girls throughout their term. A reading monitor in a Christian school or tutor in a church-based English as a Second Language School may work one-on-one with the same students each day for several months at a time. These kinds of situations tend to reinforce the repetitive nature of this kind of ministry and raise the potential for a significant boredom factor in ministry.

Because people involved in caring for other people tend to work with the stressed and distressed people in our world, there is a significant drain on the mercy-shower's personal energy. This situation deals directly with one of the root causes of burnout. In a fireplace, the fire burns out when the fuel is consumed and there is nothing left to fuel the flame. The same is true in life. Burnout happens when energy is drained faster than it is replenished and there is no more energy to use in ministry.

A seventh problem facing Christians who are involved in caring ministries also focuses on those who come for help. Many are really not interested in that which can help them solve their problem. They are not prepared to accept responsibility for their problems and discipline themselves to apply biblical principles that will help them out of their problems. Rather, they come to the gifted mercy-shower to feel good. As long as the caring Christian gives them the psychological strokes they are looking for, they will continue coming.

Mercy-showers involved in helping others often tend to develop a semi-professional image out of which they minister. People come to them looking for help so often the gifted mercy-shower sometimes begins to feel like a miniature Superman or Wonder Woman. If this goes unchecked, this ministry image can become one's self-perception. Having to live up to such an image when one knows down deep inside he or she really is not that way creates additional stress for those already involved in a highly stressful lifestyle and ministry.

Personal exhaustion, the result of perceived or actual ministry failure, is the final contributing factor to burnout. Mercy-showers should understand they can not help everyone, but their strong emotional empathy with people in need often blinds them to this reality. Many of us have been culturally conditioned to cut ourselves off from people in pain, but that is difficult for those gifted in showing mercy. As a result, they experience the same exhausting emotional pain others feel as they fail and fall deeper into personal bondage.

Before leaving this aspect of the problem of burnout, let's put things in context. While the nature of caring ministries tends to encourage personal ministry burnout, not everyone involved in caring ministries necessarily burns out in ministry. Therefore, the key to addressing this problem is not withdrawal from ministry. Indeed, that action may be interpreted as a symptom of the problem. Rather, gifted mercy-showers need to learn how to resolve their personal burnout crisis and develop ministry coping skills designed to refuel the fire before the flame burns out.

Resolving Your Personal Burnout Crisis

So how do you deal with ministry burnout when it happens and refuel for an effective caring ministry to others? The simple answer is to put more logs on the fire. As the flame in the fireplace begins to burn low, the addition of more fuel creates a situation in which the fire can once again burn brighter and cast heat into the room. Let's take a closer look at twelve logs you can add to your burning out flame. These steps will help insure your fire continues to burn and you will be able to continue in caring ministries and avoid ministry burnout.

First, take inventory and recognize the amount of stress that is already a part of your life. You cannot really begin to deal with a problem until you recognize it and understand its source. As you take inventory in this area, answer the following questions which are part of a stress test developed by Rosalind Forbes.⁷ The more often you answer yes to these questions, the higher the level of stress in your life.

1. Do you try to do as much as possible in the least amount of time?
2. Are you impatient with delays, interruptions?
3. Do you have to win at games to enjoy yourself?
4. Are you unlikely to ask for help with a problem?
5. Do you constantly strive to better your position or achievements?
6. Do you constantly seek the respect and admiration of others?
7. Are you overly critical of the way others do their work?
8. Do you have the habit of often looking at your watch?
9. Do you spread yourself too thin in terms of time?
10. Do you have the habit of doing more than one thing at a time?
11. Do you ever get angry or irritable?
12. Do you have a tendency to talk quickly or hasten conversation?
13. Do you consider yourself hard-driving?
14. Do your friends or relatives consider you hard-driving?
15. Do you have a tendency to get involved in multiple projects?
16. Do you have a lot of deadlines in your work?
17. Do you feel vaguely guilty if you relax or go out of the office at lunchtime?
18. Do you take on too many responsibilities?

A second step in dealing with burnout is to refocus your expectations. Many people expect more of themselves than they can possibly accomplish. They try to pile a week's worth of work into a day. But Jesus warned, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own troubles" (Matt. 6:34). Part of dealing with a burnout crisis is to recognize and accept your limitations. Paul urged the Romans "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

The third step in dealing with burnout is to identify your personal priorities. Sometimes, this is more difficult than one might imagine. Unfortunately, what many people claim are priorities prove not to be the real priorities of their life upon closer examination. To identify your real priorities in life, ask yourself three questions. First, "What do you find time to do?" Second, "What do you spend your money on?" Third, "What kind of things do you allow to interrupt you?" These are the things that are really important in your life.

Many people are dealing with stress in their life and avoiding burnout by developing the discipline of meditation. Meditating on the Scriptures is identified with success (Josh. 1:8) and the blessing of God (Ps. 1:1-3) in the Christian life. Some Christians find it easier to meditate by listening to classical music or praise choruses. The biblical guidelines for teaching children "(1) when you sit in your house, (2) when you walk by the way, (3) when you lie down, and (4) when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7) identify the four times of the day when meditation can be most easily practiced.

A fifth approach to dealing with burnout is to get physical. There is a clear relationship between one's personal fitness level and the likelihood of that person being overcome by burnout. Developing a healthy lifestyle that balances exercise and rest with good nutrition and personal hygiene helps us deal with stress better. This means we can handle more stress without suffering burnout when we are physically healthy than when we are unfit.

Sixth, laugh hard and begin enjoying each day. "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22). Laughter has been demonstrated to be a healthy way to relieve stress and tension. Some medical research has suggested five to ten minutes of laughter daily may be effective in preventing stroke and heart attacks in some people. Paul focused on the joy of the Lord to get through difficult situations in his life and ministry (Acts 16:25; Phil. 4:4).

Learn to say thank you often and encourage others in your conversations. We tend to reap what we sow and encouragement from others is one key to avoiding personal burnout. "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Prov. 16:24). By adopting a lifestyle of treating others right, we set in motion a chain reaction which bears good fruit in our own life.

A seventh step to take in dealing with burnout involves nurturing creative relationships. After many years of ministry in a variety of capacities, I am convinced one of the reasons God has brought my wife and children in my life is to help me face a variety of stressful situations I have encountered. Often without knowing it, their cheerful attitude and warm welcome home has helped balance the anguish felt by ministry-related problems. I have become convinced the time we invest in nurturing relationships with friends and family members is really an investment in our own life and expands our ministry potential.

As we develop relationships, it is important to give someone permission to hold you accountable in your Christian life. This person should be someone you can also talk to honestly about the concerns you face in life. Each of us involved in caring ministries needs a caregiver in our life who knows enough about us to recognize problems as they begin to develop and feels free to challenge us in these areas as necessary. Some people are threatened with the idea of opening up to someone else in this way. Sadly, those are the people who probably need a strong accountability relationship most.

Many people find that the discipline of journaling helps in coping with stress and avoiding burnout. Take time to write your thoughts and feelings on paper each day as a safe emotional outlet to express the things which concern you most. Sometimes, forcing yourself to put your feelings on paper helps you clarify a situation and put it in a more manageable perspective. At other times, reviewing your journal entries over a period of weeks or months will alert you to a problem you may need to talk to someone else about. Often, your journal becomes a personal record and reminder of how God has intervened in the past and a source of hope as you face your present challenges.

As difficult as it seems for many of us involved in caring ministries, it is very important to take time for yourself. When I began in ministry, Christian leaders were not encouraged to take time off away from their ministries. Being in the pulpit twice each Sunday and never missing a service year by year was the evidence of your commitment to God. Unfortunately, many of my seminary classmates trained who adopted this approach to ministry are no longer engaged in ministry. Taking time off periodically to engage in recreational activities with my family makes me more effective in ministry than I may have been otherwise.

Finally, start dreaming again. Nothing will help you overcome stress and other burnout factors in your life as having a clear mental image of God's vision for your life and ministry. As you begin to see God accomplish His purposes in your life and ministry, it will serve to energize you in other areas. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life" (Prov. 13:12).

Helping Others Cope with Burnout

Many of the stressed and distressed people you use your gift of showing mercy to help will be victims of burnout. As you talk to them about their problems, they will feel like there is nothing they can do to recover what has been lost and live a personally fulfilling life once again. They are wrong in their conclusion, but it won't be easy convincing them otherwise.

Paul used the metaphor of a nursing mother to describe his caring ministry among the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:7). Perhaps that metaphor can also help us in understanding our role in helping burnout victims. A good mother recognizes a young child cannot do many things for himself or herself and therefore invests significant energy helping her child. As she feeds and cares for her child, that child will grow stronger and mature. Eventually, the child will do for himself or herself the kinds of things he or she once depended upon mother to do. Ultimately, this will produce an adult who as a parent will be involved in parenting his or her own children.

As you begin to work with burnout victims, you may find yourself doing things for others they should be doing for themselves. Like a wise mother, your goal is to slowly help them come to the place where they can do these things for themselves. This will involve discerning when to help and when to force others to help themselves. It may be a long and frustrating process, but take heart. You too were once a helpless child. It is possible for those who have burned out in life to refuel and find personal fulfillment in life once again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Finding Your Place on the Ministry Team

As the evangelical church in North America transitioned to ministry at the dawn of the Twentieth-First Century, she began to return to the biblical practice of team ministry. Some view this change as a result of the Boomer Generation's influence in the leadership of the church. While that may be the stimulus that brought about this much needed change, there is a valid biblical precedent for a team approach to ministry.

Team ministry was practiced throughout the New Testament beginning with Jesus. While no one would dispute the ability of our Lord to meet needs in the lives of others without the assistance of others, He chose to gather disciples (first the twelve, later seventy others) to assist Him in His ministry objectives. The fact that these others were so unqualified for ministry only serves to emphasize the importance Jesus must have placed on the ministry team concept.

In light of Jesus' use of the ministry team, it is not surprising the apostles continued ministering as a team in the early days of the church. They were recognized as a distinct group within the church and together were involved in the ministries of evangelism (Acts 2:14; 5:42), teaching (Acts 2:42; 5:25), miracles (Acts 2:43; 5:12), prayer (Acts 3:1; 4:24) and administration (Acts 4:37; 6:2). They chose to appoint ministry teams to solve problems whether those problems were as simple as feeding widows (Acts 6:3) or as complex as confirming the authenticity of a reported new ministry (Acts 8:14).

The Apostle Paul also used team ministry effectively throughout his ministry, particularly on his second missionary journey. Before engaging on this mission that brought the gospel to Europe, he gathered a team that included Silas, Timothy and Luke. At times, various members or groups within his ministry team were sent off on special assignments and on at least one occasion Paul found himself involved in ministry alone (cf. Acts 17:16-18:4). But his preference was apparently ministry as a team. Twelve of the thirteen New Testament epistles that bear his name in the introduction also include a reference to others with him at the time he wrote that epistle. The only exception is his first epistle to Timothy, a long-standing member of his ministry team.

There are two approaches to forming a ministry team depending upon what that ministry team is trying to accomplish. Some establish highly specialized teams that tend to resemble a colony of similarly gifted individuals. This may be planned or result as gifted individuals naturally gravitating toward each other. The resulting team tends to prove extremely effective in a particular area of ministry and less effective in other areas. While this plan has inherent long-term problems, churches may elect to take this approach in forming a team to initiate a new ministry and get it established.

A second approach to team ministry recognizes the strength of pluralism and blends various individuals with differing gifts into a ministry team. Just as the more highly specialized team may be established to initiate a new ministry, this alternative approach may be better utilized to build greater stability in existing ministries. A team that has

different spiritual gifts means various perspectives are applied to the ministry. This helps insure a more balanced approach to ministry.

Knowing our spiritual gift and how it can be utilized in various aspects of ministry is the key to finding our place on the ministry team. As we come to understand how God can uniquely use us in ministry, our desire grows toward our own gift(s) and away from someone else's gift(s). Also, as we identify our own God-given gifts and develop our understanding of spiritual gifts, we recognize how others gifted differently can also be involved in ministry without imposing our gifts upon them.

Spiritual Gifts and Ministry Potential

Some people confuse the gifts that only certain people have with the ministry in which every Christian should be involved. Each of the nine task-oriented spiritual gifts is apparently related to a particular ministry in which all Christians should be involved. There is a natural tendency for Christians gifted in a certain area to also be deeply committed to a particular ministry pattern because they are most effective in exercising their gift in that area. It is important that we understand where the ministry bias of each member of the ministry team lies as we work with those who are gifted differently.

If you gathered nine people, each gifted in one of the nine task-oriented gifts, and ask them the question, "What is the most important ministry in our church?" you most likely would get nine completely different responses.

The person gifted in evangelism would claim ministries that result in people coming to Christ as Savior represent the most important ministries.

The person gifted in prophecy with a strong desire to make a statement for righteousness would probably identify the church's involvement in political and social action as the most important ministry.

The person gifted in teaching would tend to identify ministries that effectively communicate biblical truth to people as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in exhortation would tend to identify people-helping ministries that effectively motivate others in their Christian life as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in pastoring-shepherding would tend to identify ministries that are effective in assimilating others into the church family as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in showing mercy would tend to identify ministries which best express the church's concern for hurting people as the most important ministries.

The person gifted in serving would tend to point to ministries that most effectively meet the practical needs of others as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in giving might identify the most cost-effective ministries that release funds for other aspects of the church's ministry as the most important ministries in the church.

The person gifted in administration would tend to look at areas of the church's total ministry that help insure the efficient management of church affairs as the most important aspect of the church's total ministry.

So who answered the question correctly? The correct answer is, "All of the above!" Each person identified an aspect of the church's ministry in which he or she is likely to be most effective. Of course, they can also use their gifts effectively as part of a ministry team in any of the other eight ministry areas, but like us, they prefer to use their gift in the ministry that suggests their greatest potential for growth and effectiveness. In light of our team approach to ministry, it is important that we understand both (1) how other gifts can be used effectively in Team Caring and (2) how we can use our gift of showing mercy in other ministry areas.

Spiritual Gifts and Team Caring

While each person is uniquely gifted in such a way as to make him or her most effective in a particular ministry area, every Christian can use their gift(s) in a caring ministry. Few would dispute a role in caring ministries for mercy-showers, but as one understands ministry more fully, it becomes clear that certain other gifts fill a vital role if team caring is going to be most effective.

Team caring ministries include ministries primarily concerned with meeting the felt needs of the stressed and distressed people of our societies. These ministries tend to focus on those who apparently are unlikely to ever make any significant contribution to the life of the church, especially as long as they remain in their present condition. While mercy-showers are most likely to be attracted to and effective in these ministries, all Christians can and should be involved in the team caring ministries of their church.

When we understand how different people minister according to their unique giftedness, it will be easier to recognize the ministry potential in others. Gifted evangelists tend to have a strong commitment to reaching people for Christ and will be involved in these ministries as they recognize the evangelistic potential in meeting the felt needs of others. Prophets tend to have a strong commitment to biblical truth and may be effective in helping stressed and distressed persons identify and apply biblical principles as part of the recovery process. Teachers tend to have a strong commitment to research and may be helpful in diagnosing real problems and finding alternate solutions to those problems. Exhorters tend to have a strong commitment to helping others and will tend to develop strategies to help people move toward recovery. Pastor-Shepherds tend to have a strong commitment to people and may be helpful in guiding shepherding groups when and where appropriate. Servers tend to have a strong commitment to offering hands-on help and may be helpful in a wide variety of caring ministries designed to help people in practical ways. Givers tend to have a strong commitment to finances and may be helpful in raising and managing financial resources that enable caring ministries. Administrators tend to have a strong commitment to organization and may be helpful in providing necessary administrative guidance in caring ministries. There is a place for each member of the ministry team in demonstrating Christian concern and compassion to others in need.

The Gift of Showing Mercy and Team Ministries

Your gift of showing mercy colors the way you look at other ministries. When you understand this principle, you can utilize it to your advantage to become an effective member of the ministry team serving outside your preferred ministry area. If you realize your different perspective on the ministry is the result of a God-given gift, you do not need to be intimidated by others who may appear more effective in that ministry area because

of their unique gift(s). God will use someone gifted in an area which is most complementary to a particular ministry emphasis to make a good ministry better. But He will also use the rest of us to make that better ministry best.

When an evangelist involves you in *Team Evangelism*, you can open closed doors by demonstrating Christian compassion to hurting people.

When a prophet involves you in social action, you can be a listening ear and a shoulder on which victims of social injustice can cry.

When a teacher involves you in team teaching, you can model biblical truth in your life and attitude toward others.

When the exhorter involves you in team building, you can be sensitive to stresses within the ministry team and work to resolve them before they become unmanageable.

When the pastor-shepherd involves you in team nurturing, you can quickly identify needs in others and use your gift to help.

When the server involves you in practical aspects of team ministry, you can use your sensitivity to others to find places where this ministry would be most effective.

When the giver involves you in financial aspects of the ministry, you may be able to help keep budgets and financial reports focused on the ministries they are designed to finance.

When the administrator involves you in administrative aspects of the ministry, you can help keep a people orientation before others who may be more project oriented in their approach to ministry.

Part of what God expects of us as stewards of the resources He has entrusted to us involves knowing how to use our spiritual(s) as part of a ministry team. At times, you may be part of a highly specialized team caring for people in the midst of a personal crisis. At other times, your perspective as a Mercy-shower may be needed on a more balanced ministry team. Regardless of the situation we find ourselves in, it is important that we continue developing and using our giftedness in ministry to the glory of God.

Where Do I Go From Here?

This book addressed several issues that are important to mercy-showers who want to be good stewards of the spiritual gift God has entrusted to them. While I hope you have learned something that has enhanced your understanding of the gift of showing mercy, it was never my intent nor that of the publisher simply to produce a book to add to the sum total of knowledge on this subject. Rather, this book was produced as a tool to help you develop your gift of showing mercy. Before you put this book on the shelf along side of others you may own, let's talk about making this book work for you!

You Can Become More Effective in Showing Mercy

One of the objectives of this book was to describe ways you can become more effective in exercising your spiritual gift. Using chapter two as your guide, take time to evaluate your own empathy toward others in need. Remember, people don't care how

much we know until they know how much we care. Mercy-showers who forget this principle significantly limit their ministry potential.

Most of the people you will work with as you use your gift in ministry will have a low view of their own value in God's eyes. Sometimes, that attitude rubs off on those trying to help. Take time to review chapter three for yourself and appreciate how much value God has placed on you. Then make a list of others you are working with who need to learn these principles. Next, take time to evaluate how well you are doing at demonstrating God's love for others in your own life and ministry.

Some of the things discussed in this book can only be practiced in the context of caring ministry. As you begin to use your gift in ministry, review the principles outlined in chapters five and six periodically. The guidelines in chapter five are designed to help you effectively help broken people become productive again. Use chapter six as a tool to help you detect symptoms of ministry burnout early and take steps to prevent this condition from destroying your ministry potential.

While the study of your gift is important, ultimately your effectiveness in ministry will only be realized as you begin to use your gift in ministry. If you are not currently involved in a ministry where you can effectively use your giftedness in showing mercy, take steps this week to find such a ministry opportunity. It may be that God could use you as part of a new ministry team in your church.

Additional Caring Ministry Resources Available

Part of this book has described specific ways of doing ministry to meet the needs of hurting people. No attempt has been made to exhaust the subject here. Many aspects of ministry have only been alluded to in these pages, while others have had to be overlooked completely. Ministries not specifically mentioned are in no way inferior to those discussed. The book is intended to serve as an introduction to a vast field, a guide to get you started in your personal ministry as a gifted mercy-shower.

Many churches and parachurch ministries are actively involved in a variety of unique ministries for people in need ranging from food banks to housing projects. These ministries have produced training materials to equip their volunteer staff. These publications represent a rich resource for gifted mercy-showers eager to learn new ministry skills and enhance their own effectiveness in ministry.

The publisher of this book is committed to helping people develop their spiritual gifts and build growing churches and has published and distributed several books designed to guide churches in establishing new ministries to meet felt needs in their community. As you prepare a personal growth plan by which you can further develop your giftedness in showing mercy, you will want to check their web site (<http://www.ChurchGrowth.org>) to learn what specific resources are available.

APPENDIX ONE

Identifying Your Giftedness in Showing Mercy

Among the various Team Ministry gifts, showing mercy may be among the most widely distributed and critically needed gifts within the church. Too often people look at the church as indifferent to the felt needs of the community. While all Christians are called on to demonstrate the merciful heart of God in their life and ministry, Mercy-showers tend to spot hurting people faster and respond to their needs more effectively than others. They are spiritual magnets that naturally draw the stressed and distressed toward them, and then hold them until the need is met. One does not have to look far to discover hurting people in need of a practical expression God's mercy.

How can I know if I am indeed gifted in showing mercy? Many people attracted to emotional support ministries are in fact people who are most in need of emotional support. But that is not always the case. How can I determine if I am attracted to these kinds of ministries because of a personal need in my life or because of the unique spiritual gift God has given me?

There are at least three ways to evaluate your giftedness to determine if you have the gift of showing mercy. First, complete a *Spiritual Gifts Survey* to help you identify your dominant areas of giftedness. Second, look at your own ministry passion (what you would prefer doing) as an indicator of probable giftedness in that area. Third, compare yourself with a standard profile of a gifted mercy-shower to note important areas of similarity or difference.

Using the Spiritual Gifts Survey

Your dominant area of giftedness will tend to impact the way you think and feel about things much as other influences such as family or educational background also contribute to the person you are. The *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory* (revised and updated edition: *Your Gifts Survey*) has helped many people discover their spiritual gift(s) by matching certain attitudinal statements to probable areas of giftedness. Those gifted in showing mercy tend to identify closely with the following statements:⁸

1. I am usually soft spoken.
2. I am patient, but am willing to respond to others' needs quickly.
3. I find it very easy to express my feelings.
4. I have a real burden to comfort others.
5. I am sympathetic and sensitive with others.
6. Other people think I am weak because of my lack of firmness.
7. I try to always appear loving.
8. I act on emotions rather than logic.
9. My heart goes out to the poor, the aged, the ill, the underprivileged, etc.

10. I seem to attract people who are hurting or rejoicing.
11. I am an emotional person, I cry easily.
12. I identify emotionally and mentally with others.

Confirming Your Survey Results

While the *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory* has proved an effective tool in helping people identify their dominant area of giftedness, be careful about coming to conclusions too quickly on the basis of a single test. In the Old Testament, a matter could not be legally confirmed without two or three witnesses who agreed. When you evaluate your response to the *Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Inventory*, apply this *Law of Two or Three Witnesses* to your test results by asking the following questions:

1. Is this conclusion consistent with what I know about this gift? Something in your background or even the way you felt as you completed the inventory may have colored your answers slightly, resulting in a false conclusion.
2. Do other Christians who know me see evidence of this gift in me? If you possess this gift, it should be apparent at least in embryonic form to more mature and spiritual Christians who know you.
3. Is the exercise of this gift effective in ministry? When you use your spiritual gift, you will tend to experience maximum effectiveness with minimum effort.

Gifts, Passions and Learned Abilities

Some Christians confuse their spiritual giftedness with a passion for ministry and/or learned abilities they have acquired. Normally, God also gives His people a passion to serve Him in some area in which they are uniquely gifted. Also, as Christians begin using their gifts in ministry, they tend to find other learned abilities they have acquired over the years can be used to open ministry doors or enhance the effectiveness of their gifts. Therefore, the challenge of gift stewardship involves determining how to use your gifts and learned abilities in a ministry for which you have a passion. When this balance is achieved, you will realize your maximum effectiveness in ministry and greatest sense of personal fulfillment.

As you look for an opportunity to use your giftedness in ministry, ask yourself, "If I could serve in any ministry in my church, which would I choose?" This will help you identify your passion for ministry. If you have difficulty deciding between several options, determine what these ministries have in common that make them attractive to you. For example, the Christian that has difficulty choosing between a summer day camp ministry to children or accompanying the youth group on their winter retreat may have a passion for a camping ministry rather than children's or youth ministry.

Once you have identified your ministry passion, begin investigating opportunities within that ministry area that would enable you to use your gift(s). This will probably involve talking with others currently involved in that ministry. In some cases, you may need to do some creative thinking to help others see how your unique giftedness could contribute to the effectiveness of the ministry team. In other situations, God may give you a passion to use your giftedness in a ministry that is not yet established in your church. Many pastors

and church leaders are waiting for people like that to begin much-needed new ministries in the church.

Having determined a role for your gift(s) in the area of your passion, the third step in gift stewardship involves using your learned abilities to enhance your ministry effectiveness. Some of our learned abilities (perhaps most of them) may not readily lend themselves to the ministry we have chosen. Others may only contribute slightly to enhancing your effectiveness. Still others may open significant doors of ministry that might have otherwise remained closed.

Practicing Gift Stewardship

God has uniquely gifted each of us for effective ministry in our church. He is the giver of the gifts, but as the recipients of His gifts we have a stewardship responsibility (1) to discover our unique giftedness, then (2) to demonstrate that giftedness in ministry, and finally (3) to develop the potential of our spiritual giftedness. The Lord bless you as you are found faithful as a steward of the gift(s) He has entrusted to your keeping.

A Profile of the Mercy-Shower⁹

The gifted mercy-shower has the Spirit-given capacity and desire to serve God by identifying with and comforting those who are in distress. Christians gifted in this area tend to be people who understand others easily and are eager to comfort others passing through difficult times.

Because of their strong sense of empathy, gifted mercy-showers tend to struggle with others who appear less concerned and willing to get involved in meeting the needs of hurting people. They may try to impose their gift on others by expecting them to commit to ministries in areas where they feel uncomfortable. It is not hard for them to find appropriate Scriptures that seem to advocate their passion for those less fortunate members of society. The Scriptures have much to say about the care of the poor, stranger, widow and other needy people in society. If mercy-showers fail to remember God gifts people differently according to His will and purpose for the church, they may put undue pressure on others to live up to their standards, to impose their gift on others. A balanced understanding of spiritual gifts should eliminate this problem of gift imposing.

I. Characteristics of the Mercy-Shower

- A. He/she is usually soft-spoken, though talkative.
- B. He/she is outgoing with a low-key inoffensive personality.
- C. He/she finds it very easy to express himself/herself.
- D. He/she always appears to be loving.
- E. He/she is usually good-natured, wants people to like him/her.
- F. He/she talks easily with people and is easy to talk to.
- G. He/she is responsive to people, is a good listener.
- H. He/she is more subjective than objective, decisions are made on feelings more than fact, impulsive.

- I. He/she is peaceable and agreeable, does not overpower others.
- J. He/she does not analyze the details.

II. Burdens, Desires and Strengths of the Mercy-Shower

- A. He/she has a burden to comfort others.
- B. He/she is sympathetic and sensitive.
- C. He/she likes to fellowship with other sympathetic people.
- D. He/she heart goes out to the poor, the aged, the ill, the underprivileged, etc.
- E. He/she is patient, but responds to others' needs quickly.
- F. He/she attracts people who are hurting or rejoicing.
- G. He/she is non-condemning, not a griper (sometimes can be when with other mercy-showers).
- H. He/she identifies emotionally and mentally with others.
- I. He/she is patient, sincere, responsive, tolerant.
- J. He/she can become insecure, withdrawn and somewhat remote.
- K. He/she remembers people's names and faces.
- L. He/she is self-sacrificing.
- M. He/she likes to think about things for a while before making decisions.

III. Special Needs and Weaknesses of the Mercy-Shower

- A. He/she makes a poor counselor without additional discipline.
- B. He/she resents others who are not as understanding as he/she.
- C. He/she is not always logical, but sometimes emotional.
- D. He/she lets others use him/her.
- E. He/she often has a low self-image.
- F. He/she can be indecisive.
- G. He/she can become a gossip, especially around other mercy-showers.
- H. He/she gets depressed easily.
- I. He/she is controlled by his circumstances.
- J. He/she is pessimistic.

IV. How the Mercy-Shower Is Misunderstood by Others

- A. Others think he/she is weak.
- B. Others think he/she is a compromiser.

- C. Others accuse him/her of “taking up” for people.
- D. Others think he/she is a “softy”.
- E. Others think he/she is too emotional, cries too easily.

V. How Satan Attacks this Gift

- A. Causes pride because of his/her ability to relate to others.
- B. Causes disregard for rules and authority.
- C. Causes lack of discipline because of strong feeling for those who hurt due to disobedience and sin.
- D. Causes him/her to complain and gripe.

VI. Where to Use this Gift

- A. As a hospital, nursing home, shut-in worker.
- B. As a funeral coordinator and visitor.
- C. As a poverty center worker (if properly disciplined).
- D. As an usher or greeter, welcome center worker.
- E. As a CD/DVD worker/visitor for shut-ins.
- F. As a hospitality person.
- G. As a telephone center worker.
- H. As a member of newcomer team, visiting and telephoning.
- I. As a missions worker, committee member, correspondence, furlough assistance.
- J. As a worker with abused people, mentally ill, nursing, blind, deaf, migrant ministry, released offender ministry.
- K. As a Big Brother/Big Sister mentor for children.

APPENDIX TWO

A Two-Year Plan to Begin Thinking Like a Mercy-Shower

One of the things Jesus accomplished when He ascended into heaven to grant spiritual gifts to all Christians to use in the ministry (Eph. 4:8). Specific spiritual gifts are identified by different names in Scripture. When the various biblical lists of spiritual gifts are examined, there appear to be three kinds of spiritual gifts. One group may be described as miraculous gifts or “signs and wonders.” This group includes gifts such as speaking in tongues and gifts of healing. Then there are four enabling gifts that each Christian appears to have to some degree. These include spiritual discernment, faith, knowledge, and wisdom. These four gifts enhance a third group, the task-oriented spiritual gifts (TEAM gifts). These task-oriented gifts are tools for effectiveness as part of the ministry team. Each of these nine tools for ministry is the subject of one of the books in this series on spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are given to Christians for several reasons. They equip Christians with tools for effective outreach ministries (Eph. 4:12). These same tools equip Christians with the ability to edify, encourage, and care for fellow believers (Eph. 4:12). They also enable each Christian to contribute practically to the unity of the church (Eph. 4:13). Spiritual gifts provide the means by which Christians can experience their greatest personal fulfillment, that which comes from using their gifts in ministry to others (Rom. 12:4-8).

While the focus of this and other books in this series is spiritual gifts, it is important to remember that all gifts are given by the same Giver who distributes those gifts “to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). When churches develop a gift-orientation to ministry, they recognize Christ’s authority as the head of their church to determine the nature of their ministry. Ultimately, the key to an effective gift-oriented ministry is not the gift, but the Giver. He determines who gets which gift and in doing so, He also designs the unique gift mix within each congregation to accomplish the specific ministry He intends for that church. That is why, despite the failings of the Corinthian church in many respects, Paul could affirm with confidence that they came “short in no gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). God gave them and us every gift we need to accomplish the ministry He wants us to accomplish.

Looking at Spiritual Gifts from the Perspective of the Mercy-Shower

When Paul addressed the Corinthians on the subject of spiritual gifts, he used five different Greek words to describe the nature of these gifts (1 Cor. 12:1-7). Each term tends to emphasize a different aspect of our spiritual giftedness. Paul used the word *pneumatikon* that is translated “spiritual” (1 Cor. 12:1). This adjective describes the character of these gifts as spiritual. The second Greek word used was *charismata* that is usually translated “gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4). This term emphasizes gifts as God’s free and gracious gifts. The word *diakonia* is the third term used to describe gifts. This word is translated “ministries” (1 Cor. 12:5) and reveals gifts as opportunities for ministry. Fourth, the word *energema*, translated “activities” (1 Cor. 12:6), suggests that gifts are an

endowment of God's power or energy. The fifth the word used by Paul, *phanerosis*, translated "manifestation" (1 Cor. 12:7), means that gifts are evidence of God working through us.

That last word creates a problem for many Christians. If my spiritual gift is a manifestation of God working through me, it will be frustrated unless I get out of the way. God and the people He made have two different ways of thinking. Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa. 55:8-9). At some point in the development of our spiritual gifts, we need to begin thinking like the Giver of our gifts.

Paul understood this principle. Just before discussing spiritual gifts in his epistle to the Romans, he wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). The key to that renewing of our mind is found in saturating your mind with God's Word. Paul urged the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). The psalmist wrote, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:9-11).

A Two-Year Strategy to Begin Thinking Like God about Your Gift

In our hurry-up world many people look for quick solutions to fix problems, but learning to think like the mercy-shower is a challenge bigger than can be accomplished in a weekend seminar or by reading a book or taking a course. The gap between our way of thinking and God's way of thinking is so great it could take a lifetime to bridge. Even then we may discover we still have more to learn. But the more we allow God's word to saturate our thinking process, the more inclined we will be to begin thinking like Him.

As you strive to begin thinking like God about your spiritual gift two spiritual disciplines will help you accomplish that goal. The first is the discipline of reading through the Bible. Christians who depend exclusively on the ministry of their pastor to teach them the Scriptures often end up with a piece-meal understanding of the Scriptures. If a pastor preached on a different chapter each week, it would take him 1189 weeks to preach through the Bible (about twenty-three years and five months). Of course some chapters might take several weeks to preach through and sometimes the pastor may choose to preach on some doctrine, problem, social issue or other topic. Most people don't stay in the same church long enough to understand their Bible using this approach exclusively. But despite the size and scope of the Bible, you can read it through your self in a year by devoting fifteen minutes daily to personal Bible reading. There are many "through the Bible" Bible reading guides published as tracts or special edition Bibles to help you accomplish this goal.

The second spiritual discipline to help you begin thinking about your gift from God's perspective is Scripture memory. While most people believe they cannot memorize,

throughout history, this has been the most often used means of teaching the Scriptures. Even those who cannot read can memorize the Scriptures because it involves only two steps, repetition and review. To learn a new verse, continually repeat the verse until you can say it without error. Then to remember the verse, review it often on a regular basis. In the Old Testament, parents were encouraged to review the principles of the law they memorized with their children four times each day, “when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:7). Regardless of our lifestyle we can still find time to repeat and review the Scriptures during our wait time and commute time and when we go to sleep and wake up each day.

One Hundred and Four Key Verses on Mercy and Empathy

To help you get started in your own personal spiritual gift development plan, the following list identifies one hundred and four key verses on empathy and mercy. Don't let the list overwhelm you and don't try to memorize them all this evening. Instead, take the first verse and read it over until it becomes familiar. Set a goal to memorize that verse this week and begin thinking about how that verse relates to your mercy-showing ministry. Then review that verse daily for the next month, even as you begin learning the next verse on the list next week. At the end of the month, set the verse aside to be reviewed monthly so you don't forget it.

The following list does not include every verse related to your gift, but it will help you get started and develop this discipline over the next two years. You may come across other verses to add to the list as you read your Bible daily. In addition to changing the way you think about your gift, this plan will also help you experience accelerated spiritual growth. Peter understood the link between the Scriptures and spiritual growth when he wrote, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). As you mature in Christ and begin to think like God about your spiritual gifts, you will find yourself using your gift with greater effectiveness in ministry. In doing so you will also experience a greater sense of personal fulfillment as you serve God the way He designed you to serve Him.

1. He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he (Prov. 14:21).
2. The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; teach me Your statutes (Ps. 119:64).
3. He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:8).
4. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).
5. “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” says your God (Isa. 40:1).
6. Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins (Psalm 25:18).

7. The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives (Ps. 37:21).
8. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world (1 Peter 5:9).
9. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works (Ps. 145:8-9).
10. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all (Ps. 34:19).
11. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-23).
12. Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:12-13).
13. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).
14. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (Heb. 11:25-26).
15. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).
16. I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises (Ps. 101:1).
17. And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40).
18. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard (Ps. 22:24).
19. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:17).
20. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Ps. 126:5-6).
21. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a

merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them (Deut. 4:30-31).

22. But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated (Heb. 10:32-33).
23. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4).
24. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers (2 Chron. 33:12).
25. Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at wine, those who go in search of mixed wine (Prov. 23:29-30).
26. Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law (Ps. 119:153).
27. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker. But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy (Prov. 14:31).
28. Let your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight (Ps. 119:77).
29. My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18).
30. Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory (Eph. 3:13).
31. Also to You, O LORD, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work (Ps. 62:12).
32. So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness; sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isa. 51:11).
33. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32).
34. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Phil. 1:29).
35. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

36. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (James 1:2-3).
37. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Eph. 2:4-5).
38. Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction (Ps. 119:92).
39. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken (Prov. 15:13).
40. Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).
41. But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth (Ps. 86:15).
42. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).
43. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matt. 5:6).
44. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do (Gal. 2:10).
45. Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy (John 16:20).
46. But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted (Ps. 89:24).
47. I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me (Matt. 25:36).
48. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).
49. The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh (Prov. 11:17).
50. Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:3).

51. Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities (Mic. 7:18-19).
52. Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man (Prov. 3:3-4).
53. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death (2 Cor. 7:10).
54. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God (2 Tim. 1:8).
55. But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isa. 40:31).
56. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life (Prov. 13:12).
57. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also (Heb. 13:3).
58. Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter (Ps. 44:22).
59. “No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the LORD (Isa. 54:17).
60. And if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Rom. 8:17).
61. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever (Ps. 52:8).
62. And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deut. 8:2-3).
63. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7).

64. I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me (Hosea 5:15).
65. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).
66. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).
67. Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression (Deut. 26:7).
68. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress (Judges 10:14).
69. The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to those who are bound (Isa. 61:1).
70. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20).
71. For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You (Ps. 86:5).
72. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).
73. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8).
74. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:26).
75. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (1 Cor. 11:30-31).
76. For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds (Ps. 108:4).
77. A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul, but it is an abomination of fools to depart from evil (Prov. 13:19).
78. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7).

79. I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of a man who will be made like grass (Isa. 51:12).
80. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (Isa. 48:10).
81. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).
82. The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy (Prov. 14:10).
83. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (Matt. 5:9).
84. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).
85. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).
86. A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken (Prov. 15:13).
87. If disaster comes upon us – sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine – we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save (2 Chron. 20:9).
88. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life (Ps. 119:50).
89. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished (Prov. 17:5).
90. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you (Isa. 43:2).
91. So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD (Exod. 4:11).
92. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress (Phil. 4:14).

93. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10).
94. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you (John 16:22).
95. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).
96. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you (1 Peter 5:10).
97. Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry (Ps. 106:44).
98. But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14).
99. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15).
100. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:17).
101. But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassions, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth (Ps. 86:15).
102. Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death (Ps. 9:13).
103. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:11-12).
104. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:36).

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- ¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 96.
- ² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Toronto: G. R. Welch Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 103.
- ³ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1961) p. 1.
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- ⁴ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1970), p. 248.
- ⁵ The seven causes of doubt discussed in this book are drawn from Os Guinness, *In Two Minds* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976).
- ⁶ John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982). This section is adapted from Sanford's insights on clergy burnout.
- ⁷ Rosalind Forbes, *Corporate Stress and Life Stress* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979), pp. 136-138.
- ⁸ Attitudinal statements taken from the Classic *Spiritual Gifts* Inventory, now available in a new, revised edition: *YOUR GIFTS Spiritual Gifts Survey* published by ChurchGrowth.org. This diagnostic tool is available through <http://www.ChurchGrowth.org>.
- ⁹ Gift profile based on *How to Find Meaning and Fulfillment through Understanding the Spiritual Gifts within You*, which was revised and updated to *YOUR GIFTS: Discover God's Unique Design for You* by Larry Gilbert (for individuals/small groups) and *TEAM MINISTRY: Gifted to Serve* (for pastors/church leaders), Forest, Virginia: ChurchGrowth.org, 2015.