

The Gift of Mercy

A gifted story: They were traveling in Italy on a wonderful holiday from America. The children were in the back seat asleep as they sped down the road at night. Suddenly shots were fired into the car from highway bandits. They eluded the bandits, but their son, Nicholas, was dead. It was a story that shocked and outraged the world. But Christ had a story to tell through this family as they employed their gift of mercy. They donated their son's organs to save the lives of a number of Italian children, a hitherto rare practice in that country. They call it the Nicholas effect—all across Italy the reluctance to donate organs has been lifted as Italian people now see this as a good thing. Mercy has worked a miracle.

Biblical references:

Romans 12:8 - If it (our gift) is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully.

Matt. 5:7 - (Jesus began to teach the crowds).... "Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them!"

Acts 9:36 - In Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha, who was a believer. (Her name in Greek is Dorcas, meaning "a deer.") She spent all of her time doing good and helping the poor.

Definition and comment:

The gift of Mercy: the special gift whereby the Spirit enables certain Christians to feel exceptional empathy and compassion for those who are suffering so that they can devote large amounts of time and energy to alleviate it. This ability to empathize with hurting people manifests itself into cheerful acts of service. The believer feels deeply for those with physical, spiritual or emotional needs and is motivated to take action to meet the needs. The actions taken reflect Christ's love. The Greek word for "mercy" (eleos) means "to show compassion," or "to feel sympathy of heart." This gift is characterized by the ability to suffer alongside the person in pain, in a sense to feel the pain with them and to want to help them bear it. This extraordinary gift enables the believer to feel a deep compassion that transcends natural Christian caring and to minister to hurting people in a cheerful and sustained manner.

The person with the gift of mercy will be drawn to exercise it among the needy, ill, the mentally impaired, the handicapped, shut-ins, imprisoned, bereaved, lonely, and others in troubled situations. It is revealed in the person's being able to serve in the presence of human misery such as is so often seen among the poor, the sad, the afflicted and the abandoned.

Affirm that you have this gift; questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you enjoy visiting in hospitals and/or nursing homes and feel comfortable in these environments?
2. Are you able to turn compassion into cheerful deeds of kindness?
3. Would you enjoy spending time with a lonely, shut-in person or someone in prison?
4. Are you inclined to reach out to people who are ignored by the majority of those around them?
5. Do you sense when people are hurting in some way and feel moved to ease their pain somehow?
6. Is it fulfilling to you to work with people who suffer physical, mental, or emotional problems?
7. Does the sight of misery stir your heart to want to express God's love to the hurting person?

Areas for study and personal growth:

1. Study scriptural examples of mercy to see how the gift is exercised: James 2:15-16; Luke 10:30-37; Luke chapters 4 – 8 (examples of Jesus showing mercy); Luke 7: 12-15; Matt. 25:34-36.
2. Look into various caring ministries that are available to assist the sick or the imprisoned (Stephen Series, People Helper Clinics, Prison visitations, Amity Workshops).

3. Seek out materials that will expand your knowledge about suffering and caring, and build a library of these resources. Also become familiar with films (videos) that are available in the general subject area of caring (such as Peege, about relating to older people).
4. Learn what you can about death and dying and ministering at the various stages of grief.
5. Identify areas within the church where the gift of mercy should be employed to a greater degree, and outline how these needs could be met with a program of regular visitation by a core of people with the gift of mercy.
6. Spend time with experienced caregivers who seem to you to have strong giftedness in mercy, and consult with them to gain effectiveness in your ministry. Learn also by this means how to shoulder all the pain you take on in the caring process and how to recover from these experiences and “recharge your batteries” when needed. Gain an understanding of healthy ways to work interpersonally with others while holding them harmless from forming a dependency upon you.
7. Prayer will be essential as you exercise the gift of mercy as you will need God’s empowerment for full effectiveness when working with individuals in need. Insure that your prayer life is disciplined and that you depend upon it for inspiration and strength in your ministry.

General ways to use the gift of mercy:

- Personally: help a sick neighbor; send cheering cards and letters to people with special needs; offer transportation to elderly who cannot drive.
- Within the church: visit church members who are in the hospital or who are shut-in; help with clothing or food pantry drives (see more specific church service opportunities in the Booklet *Channels for Using the Gifts*).
- Within the wider community: work with various social ministries; become a foster parent to an impaired adult.

For reflection:

Jesus spent much of his time among the apostles displaying the quality of mercy - it was something he seemed to put above most other matters. His compassion for the unfortunate appears in scripture over and over. No matter what he was doing or where he was going, when he saw someone in need he would stop and help them. His way was to show mercy and to instruct us that we are to “*be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*” (Luke 6:36).

People who have this gift understand the value of facing pain with other persons, holding their hand and hearing what they have to say. Empathy requires no more response than a continual willingness to keep on listening. The expectation isn’t that you will find a way to change the unchangeable, but that you will simply be there through it all giving support. You will be the answer to the prayer, “If I am to suffer, Lord, please do not let me be alone.” You will provide the accompanying tears and the reassuring smile. You will find a way to bring cheer into fields of despair. It is a very blessed gift that lifts lonely souls and brings to them the love of Christ.

In the Prayer attributed to St. Francis, the author asks, “*Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy...*” Your spiritual gift of mercy is the gift that brings peace from God where it is needed - you are the instrument, the channel through which God will bring comfort to his beloved in need.