



The Gift of Mercy

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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September 4, 2011

AM Assembly



Introduction:

In Christ's church, we must learn to appreciate the differences. Think about the apostles for a moment. How different do you think Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot were? Or you have Thomas, a reluctant late-adopter who hung back and had to see for himself, contrasted with Peter, an impulsive front-man who consistently jumped out front to lead the way. How different were they? All four men made mistakes. They all had struggles. But were any of them bad? No. They were just different. Jesus brought these men with different backgrounds, different abilities, different strengths, and different struggles together. Why? Because He didn't simply want to use one type of person. He has room for everyone. He wants to use everyone. And when a group of different kinds of people work together, they can accomplish more together than they could accomplish individually.

Jesus has continued that approach in the church and in the local churches. According to **Romans 12:3-8**, God has given each of us a unique blending of gifts. Based on that blending of gifts, we can all fill different functions. As we work together, you laboring where I cannot, and vice versa, we build this body up by what every joint supplies (**Ephesians 4:15-16**). Over the past several lessons we have seen some of those gifts. We've examined the Server, the Teacher, the Exhorter, the Sharer, and the Leader. In this lesson, we want to examine the gift of mercy. Perhaps you are a Giver of Mercy. As you listen to this lesson and assess your own giftedness, ask yourself what you are doing with the gift God has given you.

Discussion:

I. Am I a Giver of Mercy?

- A. When Paul talks about those with the gift of mercy, he isn't simply speaking about offering forgiveness. While offering forgiveness is a form of mercy, it is not the equivalent of mercy. Mercy is helping those who are afflicted. Obviously, when I'm afflicted by sin, receiving forgiveness is a help, thus it is mercy. But when we feed the hungry and clothe the destitute, we are also offering mercy. When we give a shoulder to cry on and an ear to the sad, hurt, and lonely, we are offering mercy. When the Good Samaritan **Luke 10:29-37** helped the beaten Jew, he was showing him mercy (**Luke 10:37**).
- B. Certainly, when Jesus teaches the parable of the Good Samaritan and then says, "You go, and do likewise," we see that we all have responsibility in showing and giving mercy. However, based on what Paul says in **Romans 12:3-8**, we understand that some clearly have greater natural ability and giftedness in mercy. What does that look like? Let's examine the Good Samaritan and see some characteristic strengths for the Giver of Mercy. As we go through this list, you will see some significant similarities between the Server and the Giver of Mercy. Understand that the difference between the two is that the Server is more focused on the tasks. The Server sees work that needs to be done and does it. The Giver of Mercy is more focused on the people, their emotions, and need for support. They see people who need to be helped and they help them.
 1. *Givers of Mercy are drawn to hurting people:* Clearly, the Levite and the priest had "more important" things on their mind than the hurting man. They had duties to attend to. Taking time to help the beaten man would get in the way of that, possibly making them unclean and keeping them from their tasks. However, the Samaritan placed the hurt man above every other plan he had. We have no idea what tasks or business the Samaritan might have had, but he put that on hold to help the hurting. Givers of Mercy are often drawn to those who are hurting. They can sense the distress, depression, pain, loneliness. They are drawn to them and strive to help. Others of us, for whatever reason, often walk on the other side of the road. Perhaps we don't sense the need as much. Perhaps we are afraid to get involved. Perhaps we have other things we think are more important. The Giver of Mercy places a priority on the hurting and, therefore, are drawn to them.
 2. *Givers of Mercy take action to remove hurt and distress:* The Good Samaritan didn't simply feel sorry for the hurt man. For all we know, the Levite and the priest felt sorry for the man, but they didn't do anything. The Samaritan, however, did something. Mercy is not merely sympathy, recognizing someone's hurt. It is not merely empathy, hurting along with them. It is doing something to alleviate the pain. Givers of Mercy take action. This is a lot like the Server. However, the Server is more in tune to the task at hand. The Giver of Mercy sees the person in need often with a focus on the emotional and relational aspect of the need (even if the pain is in the physical realm). For instance, a heavy snow falls and a widow's drive needs to be shoveled. The Server sees a drive that needs to be shoveled and no one else who can do it. The Giver of Mercy sees a

woman who is saddened by her loss of ability and feels alone because the one who used to do it is no longer there. The Server wants to relieve the burden. The Giver of Mercy wants to relieve the pain.

3. *Givers of Mercy see value (the good) in others:* The story of the Good Samaritan is so jaw-dropping because it involves two people who saw each other as valueless. The Jews and the Samaritans were spiritual enemies. They looked down on each other. They did not value each other. However, this Samaritan saw a man worth helping. We might say it a different way, the Giver of Mercy sees the good in others. Givers of Mercy recognize that we are all sinners. We all need mercy. They look for reasons to love people and want to help them. When some look at people and start to list their faults, it is the Givers of Mercy who begin to remind everyone of their good qualities. There's a great story I once heard about a person who clearly must be a Giver of Mercy. The story is told about an office worker who simply would not get involved in the bad-mouthing of co-workers. When they bad mouthed the boss, she reminded them that the boss had given them a job. When they criticized one woman, she claimed that she always got her reports in on time. When they criticized another worker, she said that he held the door open for her the other day, he couldn't be all bad. They tried to think of someone who was just so bad that she couldn't possibly say something good about him. So, one day sitting around the break room table, one fellow brought up the devil. "Now there's someone not even you can say anything good about," he said to the woman. She tilted her head and said, "Well, all I know is if the rest of us worked as hard on our jobs as the devil does on his, we'd probably all get huge bonuses."
4. *Givers of Mercy are trusting and trustworthy:* Whenever someone preaches on the Good Samaritan, they always point out that with robbers on the road, this beaten man could have been merely a trap. Even if not a fake, the fact that a man had been beaten and robbed meant that the robbers might still be nearby. Perhaps the Levite and priest passed on because they didn't trust the situation. But the Samaritan was more trusting. He didn't assume it was a trap. He saw someone who needed help. Further, when at the inn, he trusted the innkeeper to be honest about the expenses of the hurt man. That is because the man was himself trustworthy. He claimed he would come back and make payment. The implication is that the innkeeper did exactly what was asked. That meant the innkeeper must have trusted the Samaritan. Because the Samaritan was trustworthy, he judged others as trustworthy. Givers of Mercy want to help people, so they tend to be trustworthy. If they commit to something, they do their dead level best to make sure it happens. Because that is how they live, they assume others will do the same. They would never want to hurt anyone and rarely enters their minds that others would want to hurt them. Others are often suspicious. With others, you might have to prove you mean good for them to trust you. With the Giver of Mercy, they assume you mean good until you prove you mean harm.
5. *Givers of Mercy follow the heart over the head:* Let's face it. The Samaritan's decision was hardly logical. As already stated, the presence of this beaten man meant there were robbers about. It could be a trap. The beaten man might even be in on it. The Samaritan clearly had business to attend to because he couldn't stay until the man was completely recovered. But helping this man at all put him behind at least an entire day. Not to mention it just isn't smart to leave an open-ended offer to an innkeeper to purchase whatever he needed. None of that makes much logical sense. But when we see that the man felt compassion (**Luke 10:33**) we see that this man was following his heart over his head, feelings over logic. The word translated "compassion" actually means "to be moved as to one's bowels." While we think of the heart as the seat of our emotions, the ancient Hebrews viewed the bowels as the seat of our feelings and emotions. The Samaritan was not moved by his thinking, but by his feelings. No doubt, those among us who are driven by logic think this is not a strength at all. But notice that the Levite and the priest who thought with their heads and not their hearts are the bad guys in this parable. Givers of Mercy are moved by feelings and emotions rather than thinking and logic. They act based on gut-feelings rather than pure head knowledge.

C. If these characteristics fit you, you have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. We need Givers of Mercy like you.

II. The struggles of the Giver of Mercy.

- A. As with all the gifts, while there are natural strengths, there are some natural struggles as well. Having these struggles does not mean you are a bad person. If you see yourself in these struggles, don't beat yourself up too much. Certainly, they demonstrate that you have room to grow and areas to work in. But having these struggles demonstrates that you have a place here. If you face these struggles, you may just be a Giver of Mercy. We need Givers of Mercy like you.
- B. I had the same problem with this gift as I did the gift of sharing. I am not aware of a good comprehensive example of a person with this gift and the struggles. Instead, we will have to look in several different places to understand the struggles that go along with this giftedness.

1. *Givers of Mercy often fear conflict (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-3)*: Abraham was certainly a Giver of Mercy. When turmoil arose between his servants and Lot's, he was the peacemaker and granted Lot the first choice of land (**Genesis 13**). When Lot was taken captive by the five kings, Abraham came to the rescue (**Genesis 14**). When God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, it was merciful Abraham that argued Him down to potentially saving the city if he found only ten righteous souls (**Genesis 18**). Interestingly, despite his willingness to step in and rescue Lot, we see an interesting fear in Abraham not once, but twice. Twice he feared conflict over his wife. He was afraid that both Pharaoh and Abimelech would want his wife and would kill him for her. He was afraid of the conflict and even risked his own wife out of that fear. This is clearly an extreme case, but Givers of Mercy don't ever want to cause pain and don't really want to feel it either, so they have a tendency to avoid even necessary conflict.
 2. *Givers of Mercy can be gullible (Genesis 16:1-6)*: Despite Abraham's faith in God, he allowed his wife to talk him into a crazy plan. Give her children through Hagar. Then when that plan backfired on Sarai, Abraham again simply fell in line with Sarai's plan. One of the Giver of Mercy's strength is that they are trusting. However, when that strength is carried to an extreme they can become gullible, being taken advantage of, submitting to bad planning, just wanting to please others.
 3. *Givers of Mercy can tend toward sadness and depression (Romans 12:8)*: When Paul encouraged the Givers of Mercy, he said they needed to give mercy with cheerfulness. That implies that Givers of Mercy can struggle with this cheerfulness. That makes perfect sense. Givers of Mercy are in tune with feelings and emotions. They want things to be good, but they so often see hurt. They want to see justice, but they so often see injustice. They want to see positive, but they so often see negative. Things don't measure up to the way they ought to be. This can lead to sadness and even depression for those who are gifted with mercy. They can get trapped in their melancholy. Paul encourages them to be cheerful. They need to be excited about the opportunities in which God is allowing them to help.
 4. *Givers of Mercy can be easily hurt by others (Job 12:4; 16:2)*: Job was another giver of mercy. In **Job 1:5**, he was the one who was offering sacrifices to atone for even his grown children. In **Job 29:12; 31:16-23**, Job demonstrated the mercy he bestowed on the poor, fatherless, and widowed. No doubt, Job was in pain because of his own suffering. Like Givers of Mercy often do, he opened himself up to his friends. He trusted them and they stomped on him. In **Job 12:4; 16:2**, we see a taste of his anguish and hurt from his friends. Because Givers of Mercy are so in tune with emotions and feelings, they are often very vulnerable with theirs. That is a good thing. However, it often makes their pain much greater than others when those friends hurt or betray them.
 5. *Givers of Mercy can allow feelings to override knowledge (Job 38:2-3)*: While it is good to be in touch with feelings and even to be guided by them, when that is taken to the extreme, the Giver of Mercy can completely ignore facts in favor of feelings. That is not a good thing. Job certainly felt deeply. With 18 chapters of poetry, we see Job's feelings laid bare. But in all that feeling, he "darkens counsel by words without knowledge." He lost sight of God's immense power and divine nature. He felt that everything was wrong and let that lead him to question even God's propriety. Even Job admitted this in **Job 42:2-6**.
- C. Again, if you have these struggles, that doesn't make you bad or not useful. Rather, it means you may well be a Giver of Mercy. Sure, you need to work on these struggles and continue to fight against them. But you can take comfort in knowing that we have a place for you here. We need Givers of Mercy.

III. Opportunities for the Giver of Mercy.

- A. There are many ways Givers of Mercy can be of use in God's kingdom and in this congregation. There is a place for you here. There is a job for you. If you've listened to these characteristics and struggles and seen yourself, you need to ask yourself, "What am I doing with my gift of mercy?" Here are some opportunities for you.
- B. Some opportunities to give mercy in the congregation as a whole.
 1. Prayer
 2. Prayer groups or chains
 3. Foreign mission gifts
 4. Teaching on mercy and grace
 5. Helping deacons with service work
 6. Involved with benevolence
- C. Some opportunities to give mercy in your relationship with other Christians.
 1. Prayer
 2. Hospitality
 3. Visiting the sick
 4. Visiting the shut-in
 5. Visiting elderly or widows
 6. Letters, cards, notes
 7. Listening ear
 8. Weep with those who weep
 9. Support and good counsel
 10. Benevolence
- D. Some opportunities to connect and evangelize.
 1. Prayer
 2. Hospital visitation

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| 3. Nursing home visitation | 6. Helping the beaten, broken, and battered |
| 4. Listen to neighbors and co-workers | 7. Assisting a Teacher (provide balance) |
| 5. Volunteer work | 8. Food pantries, shelters, etc. |

IV. Improving our Mercy (help for the non-Giver of Mercy)

- A. As we recognized, not all of us have our greatest giftedness as Givers of Mercy. However, we all have responsibility in this area (cf. **Luke 10:29-37**).
- B. So, let's wrap up with a little help for the rest of us. How can we grow in the gift of mercy?
1. *Become friends with a Giver of Mercy*: As with all the gifts, the best way to grow in one is to be around someone who is good at it. Listen, watch, and imitate.
 2. *Spend time in your feelings*: The rest of us are not as good with feelings as Givers of Mercy are. We often try to simply push through them or mask them. Some of us couldn't even really tell others how we felt if we wanted to. We've so ignored, masked, and tried to escape from our feelings that we don't even know the words to describe them. If you want to get better at recognizing emotions and feelings in others, spend some time in your own. If you're sad, sit there in your sadness. I know that sounds odd, but just sit there and be sad. Don't go get some ice cream. Don't watch a comedy on TV. Be sad. You might even call the Giver of Mercy that you are now friends with and talk to them about it. Journal about it. What caused it? Why is it affecting you this way? What does it feel like? What is a godly response to it?
 3. *Look for the good in others*: Givers of Mercy look for the good in others. Why not try to do the same? The next time you catch yourself criticizing someone in your mind, don't move on until you've thought of something praiseworthy as well.
 4. *Don't condemn the hurting*: Sadly, many of the rest of us tend to think if someone is hurting they must deserve it. Isn't that what Job's friends did? If they were more spiritual, more devoted to God, more like us they wouldn't be going through this. We see the poor and condemn them for not working hard enough. We see the oppressed and condemn them for not being aggressive enough. We see the spiritually struggling and condemn them for not being strong enough. The next time you see someone hurting, don't look for the reason that you can hold up in condemnation. Instead, look for a way to help understanding that but for the grace of God, you might just be there yourself.
 5. *Put yourself in others' shoes*: While mercy is not the same as empathy, you can hardly bestow mercy without feeling empathy. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. It is the ability to feel what they feel. Steven Covey wrote about a time when a great paradigm shift produced empathy in him. He was riding the bus when a man got on with two extremely rowdy kids. They were all over the place, in the faces of others, making noise, generally causing a nuisance. The man wasn't doing anything about it. Folks all around were grumbling about it, casting furtive, side-long glances at the oblivious man. Finally, someone had enough and went to the man and said, "Sir, you've got to do something about these kids." The man looked up as if from a fog and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I guess I'm not with it right now. We're on our way home from the hospital. Their mother just died and I guess they don't really know how to handle it. To tell you the truth, I don't think I do either." All grumbling ceased and empathy abounded. Try putting yourself in others' shoes. What kind of bad day might they have had? What kind of trouble might they be in? What kind of help might they need? How would you feel if you were in their shoes?

Conclusion:

We all have a place in the kingdom and this congregation. Is yours as a Giver of Mercy? What will you do about it? Where will you give mercy? Don't be embarrassed if you can't do what someone else does. Don't be ashamed to hang behind the scenes. But make sure you are pursuing the gift God has given you. We need the encouragement, edifying, and building up you can provide through your mercy. Like **Ephesians 4:15-16** says this congregation is held together by what every joint supplies. We need merciful people like you.