

Not Just a Soup Kitchen: How Mercy Ministry in the Local Church Transform Us All by Dr. David Apple: Christian Literature Crusade, Fort Washington, 2014. (15 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. The Nursing Home Ministry

One other life-changing event occurred after a worship service had ended. As the leader was leaving the dayroom, a resident called out to him from her room. She related how she had been unable to dress herself and did not attend the service. She asked if he had a few minutes to speak with her. He did not stay a few minutes, but stayed much longer and gave her his entire sermon message. Following this she asked to receive Christ as her Savior. They prayed together and the leader left her with the hope of meeting again soon.

Later that night she passed away into the arms of Jesus.

The Nursing Home Ministry is a way for Christmas to make themselves available to be used by God for a measurable amount of time with opportunities that can have eternal consequences. (Page 47)

2. Those Who Serve & Why They Do

Every person in the church can serve. No one is “useless.” Everyone has a gift to give. Seniors can serve and be models and mentors for others. I encourage those who are no longer employed to “retire to serve.” Empty nesters who suddenly have no children in the home and can serve should serve. Young marrieds, after appropriate time to themselves, should take advantage of opportunities to serve together. Single men and women have time to share for service. Teens should be encouraged to serve and youth groups should be involved in helping others together. Children too can serve. (Page 69)

3. Mercy Ministry for Your Church

If you have a vision for your church, make it known. Help others see what you see. Won't you respond by integrating mercy ministry in the structure of your church like these below?

New City Fellowship, St Louis: In response the response to the biblical mandate to meet human needs (Matthew 25:34-40, James 1:27) and in support of the NCF Pastors and Elders (Acts 6:1-6), the Deacons are to lead the congregation in demonstrating biblical stewardship and acts of mercy, justice and compassion to the family of believers (Galatians 6:9-10), strangers and prisoners (Hebrews 13:1-3), immigrants and refugees (Deuteronomy 10: 18-19), enemies (Luke 6:27-36) and anyone in need (Luke 10:25-27) (Page 70)

4. What Can One Person Do?

The leaders were also concerned about how their members would perceive volunteering with Community Dinners. One leader said, “People are fearful of the homeless.” “Many don’t have time,” said another, “They have too many priorities already.” I addressed this matter of fear, time and priority by answering a question I often hear, “What can one person do?” My answer to those who ask the question is that one person can do his or her best, no matter how large or small. If one man’s best is to volunteer one hour a week, it gives honor to God. If one woman’s best is one hour a month, it glorifies God. Practically everyone can give a little, and it all adds up to a lot. Ministry can be made convenient, specific and measurable so everyone can be involved, and, as a body working together, they can make a big difference. Training and dialogue about homeless people helped resolve most fears. Speaking with experienced volunteers calmed the rest. (Page 73)

5. We Must Speak about the Ugly, & Be Ready to Shine Christ’s Light

We cannot be afraid to speak about the dark and ugly. We must do so in order to know where to shine Christ’s light and show His beauty. We need to shine His light on sex trafficking, murder, urban and suburban evils, the rape and battering of women and children and the hidden physical abuse that occurs in marriages. There is suffering everywhere. God’s creation is ruined by suffering, despair, brokenness and darkness. (Page 81)

6. We Are to Follow Jesus & Help with the Abused, Victimized People in Darkness

Following Jesus means that we prayerfully walk into places of poverty, captivity, darkness and evil. Caring for the traumatized, we are called into partnership with Christ. We are called to obediently follow a Savior who was, Himself, traumatized for our sake (Isaiah 53:4-5). And the strength to do so can only be gathered through a relationship with Christ. We may sit across from a victimized friend or an abused wife or another victim of violence. We may be called to help with a national disaster recovery. Unless we are filled again and again with the Living Bread we will be of little use. (Page 81)

7. They Had a Distorted Image of God Because of Abuse

Years ago I conducted a survey with a group who attended Fellowship Bible Study. Over time, I noticed that when we ended with the Lord’s Prayer many remained silent. Thus, my survey—a follow-up consisting of only one question: “Why can’t you say “*Our Father?*”

What I discovered was that seven out of ten of these men and women had been raped or sexually abused as children by a father, uncle, older brother, teacher or pastor—some male authority figure. This prevented them from praying “Our Father” or go to our heavenly Father for help at any time. Because of their distorted image of God, they cringed when they thought of God as a Father. All they could think of was the one who abused them and crushed their spirit. It took years working with this particular group, peeling back the layers of pain and suffering, for them to gradually feel comfortable saying “Our Father, who art in heaven....” They all wanted to live in a healthy relationship with Christ, but were burdened with layers and layers of abusive memories and the darkness of their own tombs. It took me and others a long period of time to remove the graveclothes in which they were wrapped. Slowly and carefully we unwrapped the cloths that kept them trapped in death’s tomb. Slowly and carefully we brought God’s light and life to shine through. (Page 82)

8. We Can’t Change People, God Can

One of the most important lessons I have learned is we can’t change other people. We must wait and pray and trust God to do the changing. And what started as programs to others (with a clear separation of us and them), became a blend of hospitality ministries with our guests and for our guests. We get involved (show up), establish relationships and offer hope. We make it welcoming and safe for our guests as many have lost the support of churches, families and friends. Establishing personal relationships helps remove the stigma and the stranger-ness which our guests have felt in most churches. (Page 98)

9. Not Everything That Cries the Loudest Is the Most Urgent

Today I have learned to follow Jesus wisely and not be manipulated by guilt or the tyranny of the urgent. I have learned that *not everything that cries the loudest is the most urgent*. (Page 108)

10. The Role of the Deacon in the Reformation & Today

John Calvin sought to provide help to the citizens of his sixteenth-century day. The role of the deacon in today’s Reformed and Presbyterian churches was established by this Protestant Reformer. For Calvin, the international partnering of worship and ethics, and the love of God with love of neighbor was biblical and necessary. For Calvin, ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and Scripture was authoritative for faith and practice, regeneration and transformation.

Calvin believed that all the faithful should care for their neighbors, and the church should give specific leadership to the common Christian duty. In 1557 he wrote a letter

to the churches in Geneva. In it, he said, “Let us raise in each member of the Christian community the spiritual problem of his material life, of his goals, of his time, and of his capabilities, in view of freely putting them at the service of God and neighbor.” (Page 121)

11. Christians Are Stewards of Everything God Provides Them

Using God’s gift properly played a prominent part in Calvin’s thinking about service and love for others. He said, “All the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbor’s benefit.”

He believed that all Christians are stewards of everything God has provided them, and as such, are required to give an accounting of how we have loved our neighbors. (Page 123)

12. Christians Are Responsible to God for the Love of Their Neighbors

The Reformers taught that giving was the believer’s response of love to God and to their neighbor. Calvin said:

“For the Christian, the act of offering is an essential spiritual act, an act of worship in the highest degree. Indeed by his offering the believer certifies to God that Mammon has been dethroned. By concrete gifts the Christian expresses to God the real measure of his faith. By these gifts, the man confesses that his Lord is really to be acknowledged master of his entire life—moral, physical and material.”

Calvin believed that any task to glorify God and serve a neighbor is ministry. He stated, “It is clear . . . that love of neighbor is the most unmistakable evidence of our love for God, so it is essential that the Church have a diaconal office and not leave this religious duty only to individual Christians or civil authority.” (Page 124)

13. How the Unfortunate Were Cared For by the Hospital

The office of deacon fell right into the existing institution of hospitals. The *Hôpital-Général* was a religious mission as well as medical and social. Calvin ordained the hospital officers (procurers) and *hospitaliers* (deacons). The hospital united both the religious and the practical.

The largest numbers in the hospital were children who were orphans of the plague, abandoned or illegitimate. They received a basic education in reading and writing. Boys were apprenticed at thirteen years of age and also worked in the fields. Girls of thirteen years could become servants to respectable families and dowries were put up for girls intended for marriage. The next larger group was the aged and widows who

had no money or family. The hospital cared for those whose only option was to accept charity.

Those who were not sickly worked on the grounds, in fields, performed household duties, made repairs and cared for the sick. The third group consisted of the blind, crippled, weak, physically and mentally ill and pregnant women. Ordinances sought to outlaw begging. Healthy beggars had to work and those who could not were supported by the church without shame and the temptation to beg. (Page 126-127)

14. The Mercy Ministry of Jesus

Remember, we serve an audience of One, the God of all comfort. We serve Him who knows our grief and carries our sorrows. When we offer hope in a nursing home, hospital or to those who are differently-abled, God helps us alleviate loneliness, misery and despair. When we practice hospitality, we entertain angels unawares. When we extend a welcome to strangers, they become guests and see Jesus Christ in us. This is mercy ministry: through the power of the Holy Spirit, coming alongside people in need and showing the compassion and love of Jesus. (Page 173)

15. How do you put Mercy into Practice? What is your Philosophy?

I have four simple principles (plus using common sense): Be available, get involved (that is come alongside to help someone in need), establish relationships and offer hope. Ministry is really “just showing up” and letting God work through you. Seek to be faithful servant of our Lord. Seek to follow Jesus model of coming alongside people for a while (see John 1:14), visiting widows and orphans (see James 1:27) and helping the least of these (see Matthew 25:31-46). (Page 179)