

compassion or dependency?

by Michael Webb

Question: Is providing water filtration to needy people a work of compassion or creating a dependency?

Answer: A work of Compassion. In Mark 6 we find Jesus concerned with the welfare of His disciples as they have exhausted themselves in His service, and as instructed, they found a lonely place to rest and recover. However, as it turns out the crowds seeking Jesus have all arrived as well. Jesus, then moved by compassion, begins to teach and instruct the crowd. As the hours click by, the disciples feel hungry and insist that the crowd be sent away. Jesus again moved by compassion and seizing a teaching moment, encourages his disciples to feed them. Jesus instructs his disciples to give them something to eat.

If Jesus were here today, he would, I believe, ensure that everyone who needed clean water to drink would have it. Since he is here today in the lives of his followers, and we come in his name, we therefore, must be obedient and do his work

Presently worldwide, there exists a serious lack of potable, clean water for human consumption. It is commonly known that over 1 billion people have no access to the drinkable water we so regularly take for granted. It is my conviction that Jesus' intention is that we seriously re-examine our role in providing drinkable water to those that share this planet. John writes in 1st John that we should not ignore the need for help if it is within our power to provide it. It is within our power and ability to begin answering this need for drinking water among the world's population of thirsty children.

As a result of these convictions, we offer a low-tech solution to the need for clean water. We freely give to that need. We encourage everyone that hears our voices to give to that need. It is a mission of compassion. It is Kingdom of God mission to meet the needs of the world's neediest people.

Giving a water filter to a family plagued by sickness, disease and even death associated with their inability to obtain clean water, is an act of Compassion to be sure. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive, so providing this gift is a privilege to us, the givers. We are called to continue to give to those that have need until our own existence ends. This is, and always will be, ministry of Compassion.

Question: Does this create a “dependency” and are there working models for what we are trying to accomplish?

Answer: “Dependency” is a common buzz word today describing the errant, parental behavior of generations of church-workers and missionaries. This model leaves the followers of agencies and mission societies immature and unable to function without their benefactor’s constant input, dollars or presence. This creates dependent churches and disciples that have not learned to trust God, but in actuality, they rely on their misguided leaders for provision.

Today, in our zeal to avoid problematic behaviors, We erroneously describe any work where the recipients receive anything free of charge as a “dependency.” We must not forget that we are ‘blessed to be a blessing’ (Genesis12), called to ‘freely give as we have received’.

If we were distributing Bibles (*also a good idea*) to those with no scriptures available to them it would not be considered to be a program of dependency. The manufacturers of Bibles would be the suppliers for our gifts. These business relationships would not be seen as dependencies but as simply a business.

Around the world, many churches give Bibles to anyone that requests one, yet this is not viewed to be a program of the church that creates dependency. In the same way our relationships with Cambodian suppliers of filters are not creating dependencies. Those suppliers are in truth only making it possible for us to provide the product (bio-sand filters) for distribution, and the necessary follow-up for assured success.

Question: Why are we establishing businesses and how is that helpful to our goals?

Answer: Defining our goals may be important, but we should always be open to discovering that there may be another set of criteria in God’s plans. If it is to provide drinkable water for those without access to potable water, then the goals would be different than in establishing businesses to bring about economic development. Cup of Hope is called to make safe water available to anyone in need. Read the following carefully to understand why business plays such an important part. Remember, establishing businesses is not the goal, it is only a means to reach the goal.

In establishing businesses in Cambodia, we create a number of beneficial scenarios; First, we equip a local business owner on-sight to guarantee the success of our product (bio-sand filters) through training in construction, the daily routine of operation and function of the filters. Our business owner has an interest in the continued reliability of the filters to assure his success, and to keep his good standing reputation in the community. This step also provides for regular check-ups with the recipients on the correct use and maintenance of the filters, once again assuring success.

Secondly, the business owner is connected with the local church. In Cambodia, he is an elder and utilizes the filters as a means to reach into the community with life-giving hope for the inhabitants. The businessman is in a position to provide a new level of physical health to the recipients of filters, and also to bring new ideas about spirituality through the introduction of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the regular check-ups with owners of filters, our businessman/church elder can speak into the life of the families, bringing the Hope of mankind, Jesus.

Thirdly, the church within the local community benefits as exposure to the church increases with every gift. The development and growth of the business encourages economic stability of the church through increased tithes and offerings, and additional employment for its members. We expect to see additional micro-business start-ups within the church family, providing the supplies for filter production, transportation and community health. This compassion project could also be used for church planting into other villages, as groups of believers move from their church home and start providing potable water for their neighbors, thus repeating the entire program.

Lastly, our business owner can sell (and has done so) bio-sand filters at a retail price to those that can afford them. Some of the present markets include area business owners, restaurant owners, small manufacturing companies, truck operators, hotels and inns.