

Ministry Basics

For Spirit Led Ministry

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CHAPTER 1: MINISTRY TO OTHERS

There are two great adventures to this new life in Christ: getting to know our God better and joining Him in the Rescue. We all get to play a part! Of course only Jesus can save people, as we have found out by our own experience. But He delights in gifting us, training us and going out with us to seek and save those who are lost or hurting in any way.

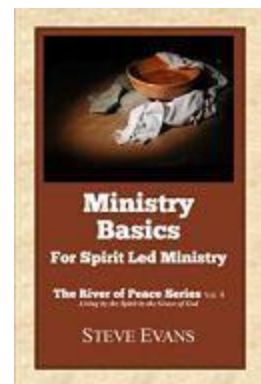
His intention was the perfecting and the full equipping of the saints (His consecrated people), [that they should do] the work of ministering toward building up Christ's body (the church).
Ephesians 4:12 AMP

Ministry to others is such great good fun (most of the time) that it can almost become addictive. There are so many outstanding things about it: cultivating the heart of a servant, participating in the camaraderie of good fellowship, discovering and developing your gifts for ministry, learning the art of divine guidance, working side by side with the Holy Spirit, and being uplifted by a wholesome sense of purpose. Best of all are those moments of spontaneous worship, when the work really hits the spot of blessing in someone's life and you both go flying up into praise. What's not to like about it? Well, it's not all peaches and cream, but for now let's take it in faith that you're going to love it so much that a caution is needed right at the starting gate.

Before You Even Start

Ministering to others is immensely rewarding and greatly needed, but it is our secondary calling. Unless this is clearly understood, the attempt to be of service will eventually lead to chaos, burn out, or hard feelings. Our primary purpose and our number one assignment is learning how to love the Lord with our whole heart in all our moments and in all our situations. The Lord packed a lot into the "first and greatest" command, but among other things it means that if we put loving and seeking Him first, the other things will fall into place.

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first



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commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-39

In practical terms the order of the two great commandments indicates that we have to stay under Jesus' leadership (the first command) while we are trying to be of service to others (the second command). In seeking to be under His leadership, our primary concern is to make sure that we are trusting Jesus with what He allows and following Him in what He asks. If this sounds difficult, then that should show just how much this on-the-job training is necessary.

There is almost a universal tendency to see the needs of the people we are serving as our primary concern, but the Lord always sees the condition of our heart as His primary concern for us: Are we trusting Him or stressing; are we enjoying the peace of His fellowship as we work; and are we letting the Spirit of love lead us? Few workplace bosses would care about the internal state of their workers, only the external results. Our Lord is radically different.

This difference has a lovely dimension to it for it means that results are not what we are being graded on as we seek to serve others. Love is. Our love for Him, and through Him, our love for others: Is it growing? Saint Teresa of Avila wrote that "God doesn't care nearly so much about the work we do as the love with which we do it." What this means is that the wide field of ministry to others is secretly God's great laboratory for cultivating in us listening ears, trusting hearts, willing spirits and loving ways. Knowing this up front gives us enhanced opportunities for cooperating with the lessons.

Now, Where to Begin?

This is the easy part. Pray, then jump right in. Almost always you will find open doors for service and people in leadership who are willing to give you a try, if you are willing to take the lowest place. Starting at the bottom makes great sense. It gives you time to learn the ropes—how things are done in that particular field of ministry. It also leaves you free of heavier responsibilities to learn how to pray as you work. Christian work always needs lots of prayer: for practical help, for heart attitudes, for inspired ideas, for breakthroughs, and for the leadership. Be particularly watchful in prayer over your own heart attitudes. Remember the two "golden rules" of service:

1) Kindness: You can't always help someone the way they want you to, but you can always BE KIND to them. Being kind helps everyone. Few things speak the love of God better than when we show patience and kindness to someone whose attitude doesn't deserve anything but reproach.

2) Respect: You will not always agree with the leadership, but you can always GIVE RESPECT to them. David was respectful of the wicked king Saul who was trying to kill him. Christian leaders won't try to kill you, but they definitely aren't all saints either. Make sure you don't stone them for their clay feet.

The great advantage in getting started with anything available is that the Lord can steer you better, if you have some forward movement going. Having a sense of peace about what you are doing is all that really matters in the beginning. As you go along God will begin to give you clues that will point you towards your future calling and assignment.

Notice what emerges in your heart. Are there aspects to the work that particularly energize or inspire you? Are there certain kinds of people or situations of need that tug on your heart more? The former give you insight into your ministry gift and the latter gives you vision for your field of ministry. In the beginning, while I was still folding tables and putting chairs away for others, I found myself thinking about what I would say if I had the opportunity to teach. I also noticed how much I wanted to help others with their emotional needs. Eventually, I entered into the reality I had been dreaming about.

Meditate on what people say to you, especially if it was unsolicited by you. Those you serve will often thank you in a way that emphasizes the kind of ministry they received from the Lord through you. That's a powerful indication of your ministry gift. Also, leaders may comment on the gifts that they see operating in you, especially when they are talking over what you might want to do next around the church.

As time goes on your sense of calling will deepen, or you will find questions stirring in you about what your purpose is and how to prepare for it. No one can fully teach you these things except the Lord, but fortunately He is with you. And He has had plenty of experience at training new recruits, so carry all of your questions to Him and watch as the answers begin to unfold. In the meantime, let the following chapters help you gain a general understanding of the key issues of calling and purpose, gifting and training. But first a final word of caution.

The Big Hurdle to Clear

Be on guard against offense. Never let it build up. Always go to work on your heart when offense comes and make no mistake about it, offense will come. What's more, it will most likely come in a way you least expect, causing you to feel entirely justified in holding on to it. You would still be wrong. You have an enemy who doesn't want you being of service to the Lord, but he especially doesn't want you to become a loving servant. We may have the best of hearts and the best of intentions, but watch out! The only way you and I can become truly loving is by learning how to forgive all manner of injury, mistreatment and wrong—just as Jesus does. That's why every would-be servant of Jesus has to be tried in the fire of offense.

What do you do? Forgive! Forgive until you are holding nothing but a desire for the other person's well-being. Forgive until you get your heart back for them. This will be relatively easy most of the time, but tough as nails sometimes, or you are not (yet) being seriously tested. Call vigorously on the Lord so that you can learn from Him how to release hurt or hard feelings and accept people as they are. Let Jesus be your model and your inspiration for how to respond to offense. This is the growth upwards into



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Christ that the Father desires to cultivate in you. We can be sure He practiced what He preached:

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11:25

As you learn to keep your heart free and clear of offense, you will discover that the Lord will always have something worthwhile for you to do. He only puts us on the shelf if our hearts get hard. That's not going to happen to you, now that you are on guard against it. So pray, look for an open door, and jump right in. The water's fine!

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR MINISTRY

Considering the Lord's high standards, you might think it takes a long time to get ready to do ministry. For some things, yes, a fair amount of training may be required, but for most things all you need is a heart and the willingness to jump into that sea of human need, lostness and misery which surrounds you. Nevertheless, you will be tested on the job concerning these basics, so be sure you know what they are and have them in play.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13

Ministry Basics: Love

Mastering the basics is crucial for success in any field of endeavor. Whether you want to be a ball player, a musician, or a farmer the most important thing is how well you do it and for that you have to be good at the basics. That's not the way it is with Christian ministry. Naturally, it matters that you learn to do your tasks well, but that is far from being the most important thing. Relationships are the main thing! That's because our number one task is love. Relationships are, therefore, "the basics" we have to master.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:2-3

Here are some examples taken from real life: If you fed a hundred hungry people, but treated one of them rudely, you set the work back in everyone's eyes. If you serve the people well enough, but harbor ill will towards a fellow minister you are a stumbling block to the rest of the team. If you are treating everyone with respect and efficiency, but are drifting from the peace of Christ into burnout, you have lost your first Love.

The Lord sets a top priority on love. He wants us to put loving others ahead of any work we are doing for them in His Name. He takes the lead in this for the whole time that we are serving others, He is at work loving and serving us. In fact He is so good at rewarding us that His peace and joy flow in our midst like living water. Nevertheless, if we don't do things His way, those same waters can quickly run dry. Go at Christian ministry pushing your own agenda or trusting in your own abilities and you can easily over-fill with stress. That's not His way. Imagine Jesus feeding the five thousand or healing the multitudes. Does He look worried or anxious? Not at all. The ones who lost their peace are the disciples, a name which means learners. That's us!

Learning how to live in His peace and joy while we serve Him is actually a major key to loving the ones we serve. Think over the many times you have been on the receiving end of someone else's service. If they were impatient, how did that make you feel? If they were in a sour mood, were you happy you walked into their shop? It is so easy to forget this when we are the ones trying to move mountains of difficulty for the sake of the Rescue, but the simple truth is only love ministers to others.

Three Primary Relationships

Christian ministry is, therefore, one of the best ways in which to grow a truly loving heart. There are three main relationships that the Lord wants to help us build as we seek to be of service. If we work on these relationships the right way (His way), we will grow in love and He will be able to build the work around us and do His best work through us. These three relationships are the people we serve, our fellow servants and the Lord Himself. The kind of love that is grown and the practical test of that love is different in each area.

I. The People We Serve

Love to cultivate: love as compassion.

The test of love: Are you being kind?

God's love is not primarily a squishy emotion that we feel in our hearts. Thank goodness He does give us feelings of immense affection for others at times. When we experience them it is always energizing and delightful, but they do not last. You simply cannot build a lifetime of ministry to people based on feelings that come and go. What we always have with us, however, is the Example of Jesus (who is love in action) and the definition of love He gives us in His Word. Please notice that not one of the following characteristics is a feeling. By God's own definition, you and I do not have to emote at all. He isn't asking us to feel love, but to do it!

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at



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wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Because love is not primarily a feeling, God can (and does) command us to love. We are to love "our neighbors" and that certainly includes the people we are seeking to serve. Nevertheless, you can breathe a sigh of relief that He does not expect you to feel love when you don't. At those times the best approach is to do what love would want you to do. Heidi Baker, a missionary in Mozambique, asks, "What would love look like in action?" God's love is practical. It is eminently doable.

Now let's turn this definition around. The people we serve won't care what we feel for them (in our better moments), if we are treating them with disrespect or impatience (in their moment). Kindness is our prime directive. You may not feel any love or have what they need, but if you are kind to them they will feel the love and be grateful. It remains true, however, that feelings of love bring an inner release of energy, power and delight. It is also true that God has placed His own love inside of us. Wouldn't it be great if we could learn how to tap into the vast reservoir of love and flow in its power? Indeed we can!

There are two tried and proven ways of "releasing the Spirit" for loving service.

1) Take out the garbage. Just as clear water will not flow through sludge-filled pipes, so the Holy Spirit requires us to keep our hearts cleansed of judgment and anger, fear and worry, doubt and depression. Otherwise, grace recedes and the joy killers take over. When that happens, negative emotions block love at the starting gate. Forgive, let go, and cast all accumulated cares on Jesus. As you empty out of what doesn't belong in you, the Holy Spirit will fill and lift you once again.

2) Focus on compassion. This is one of the great lessons we receive by watching Jesus doing ministry in the scriptures. Many times what moved His Heart to deeds of love was the compassion which welled up within Him at the sight of human distress. So it is with us. What moved the heart of Jesus will also move our own. Whenever you need to recover fresh strength, look deep into the ocean of suffering in front of you. Get your spiritual eyes off of everything else and refocus on what moved you in the first place: compassion.

II. Our Fellow Servants

Love to cultivate: love as acceptance.

The test of love: Are you forgiving?

In doing ministry we often have to work side by side with other believers. This is by the Lord's design and it gives us wonderful moments of close fellowship. It also gives us

unavoidable opportunities for being rubbed the wrong way! That is also by the Lord's doing. Jesus never causes offense to occur, or desires it to come, but He definitely will make good use of it when it shows up.

The first thing to notice about being offended with fellow workers is that it is harder to forgive them than the people we serve. In the latter's case we are well aware of their need and their struggles. That's why we volunteered to serve them. We don't expect good Christian behavior from them, either because they are lost to begin with, or because their suffering takes precedence. Our feelings of compassion for them are, therefore, much stronger, more readily moving us to forgive them and find excuses for their behavior.

None of this applies to our fellow servants, at least not in the same measure. We naturally hold them to a higher standard—the one we ourselves are trying to live by. Since they are professing to be Christians, we expect them to act like it. We don't want to excuse or forgive them. We want them corrected! We didn't get on the team with them because we felt compassion for them, so we have little compassion to give. To make matters worse, because we are working closely with them, we see their flaws repeatedly. We may even be wounded by their words or wrong ways: "Friction burns" sensitize us against further injury. All of this can make it harder to forgive and accept them as they are.

Now take these problems with fellow workers and compound them, if the ones who offend us are our leaders. They should know better and set a better example. Their weaknesses really do hinder the work. Yet, leaders are notoriously hard to correct from below and seem resistant to both words and prayers. You can sometimes speak with fellow workers and they will adjust their behavior; less frequently the leaders. To top it off, we tend to elevate leaders to pedestals of perfection no one could possibly occupy, and then are doubly dismayed when they fall from the heights. Take heart! All of this is part of the Lord's plan for training you in His ways.

For our love to be His love it has to pass through the fires of offense. We simply must learn how to forgive as He does, which is everyone at all times, including flawed fellow workers and failed Christian leaders. He has forgiven you for all that is wrong with you, past and present, hasn't He? He accepts you just as you are, doesn't He? He is willing to use you in ministry, despite your many weaknesses and failings, isn't He? Well, He is dead serious about you giving the same grace to others!

It is for our own good. Not only do we want to become great lovers of humanity like our merciful Lord, we also yearn to live in the "joy unspeakable" He makes available. You can't have joy and hold onto unforgiveness at the same time. To be a happy Pharisee is constitutionally impossible! So when offense comes (and it will), drag your heart to the cross (as He did) and do all the forgiving, releasing and accepting there that love requires. You will grow by leaps and bounds.

III. The Lord, Our Master

Love to cultivate: love as obedience.

The test of love: Are you trusting?

We serve a Leader we can't see. This has unique problems all its own. The One we are meant to follow in life and in ministry is invisible to us. We see Him by faith, but few of us see Him with our own two eyes. If we were walking with Peter and John on those Galilean roads, we would see Jesus turning to the left and immediately realize we have a decision to make: Will I follow Him there? If He sent us to the next village with instructions, everyone including ourselves would know if we obeyed His words: Did you buy the bread? It is not nearly so clear for us in this time and place.

With earthly leaders we can at least look at their expression and know if we are pleasing them or exasperating them. If we can't tell by their looks, they'll let us know. Good leaders give you feedback. They want to cultivate you as a follower. They want to develop your gifts for service. They want to make good use of your time. They try to give you clear directions. Jesus is the best Leader on the planet, but we can neither see Him visibly nor hear Him audibly (most of the time). How does He make up for this?

The short answer is that if you and I really want to know His will in any situation, He has ways of helping us find out. The long answer is that it takes time and trouble to learn how to trust, listen to, and follow a leader who keeps playing Hide and Seek with you! Ok, so why does He do it this way? To grow love in us. Whoa. That's an unexpected answer, but it has to be the right one, since His primary command to us is that we learn to love Him at all times and in all situations. That certainly includes ministry. In fact ministry is a great way to grow a genuine love for Him, because seeking to be His servant requires us to seek His will.

At every point of decision we have a choice: Will I seek His will to do things His way, or will I handle it my way? Love (in God) gives us that choice. Love (in us) takes that choice, turns from Self and seeks to obey Jesus. Our primary relationship in ministry is as a servant to a Master. This is the entry level—He will want to raise us into friendship eventually, but we must first learn to be disciples (followers). We draw close as servants by seeking to follow our Leader in all things. We not only want to do His will, we want to do it His way. This enables Him to work in us and through us whenever we are on track. If we want results, we have to seek Him. If we want to love Him, we must learn to obey Him. He calls obedience love.

We have three main ways in which our obedience to Him is enabled and tested.

1) His Word. Do you trust Him enough to obey His Word and live within its boundaries? His Word gives positive general directions and clearly marks out the moral boundaries we are to live within. Serving Him means bringing all of our ways into obedience to His Word.

2) His Spirit. Do you trust Him enough to allow His Spirit to lift, lead and guide you? The Lord will give you a sense of the next right thing to be done. That may not fit into your plans, but it does His. The Holy Spirit guides us by His peace. If we take the step He is pointing to there is peace; if we keep love and trust in our hearts there is peace. That's our "go" signal!

3) Earthly authorities. Do you trust Him enough to obey the ones He has placed over you? We are not to blindly follow people who are asking something immoral or illegal of us, but most Christian leaders operate within the wide boundaries of the law. Their way of going at things may not be your way, it may not even be God's best way, but we are still meant to give them the best measure of service that we can.

These three great loves—for the people we serve, the people we serve with, and for Jesus Himself—don't grow all by themselves. Or rather, they do grow by an effortless grace when conditions are right, but if we don't cultivate them in adverse circumstances, our harvest will be mostly weeds and rotten fruit! God starts us with a lot of grace, but we have to learn how to work with His love and mercy in order for things to keep growing in the right direction. So, be prepared to refresh your compassion, acceptance and obedience when the manure of unwanted events and difficult people gets added into the mix.

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