



## Excerpt...What Is Our Ministry?

*"The work of the ministry, as we have seen, is directed toward a suffering and desperate world. It requires every member of the body of Christ to accomplish it effectively, as God intended it to be done. It also requires that the members of the body shall be spiritually healthy, vibrant with the life of Christ who indwells them through His Spirit.*

*The supreme task of every Christian's life is to discover his gift and put it to work. If any one does not do this the whole body will suffer . . . In focusing on the gifts of the Spirit and the power in which they are operative, we must not lose sight of the two-fold reason for the manifestation of these gifts . . . the world and the church. We must continually remember that the work of the ministry is to the world. The church exists as God's instrument to reach the world."*

*Roy C. Steadman[1]*

Did you know that we are closer to Jesus than many who rubbed shoulders with Him in Galilee? Every believer has His Holy Spirit dwelling within making Christ's presence and power real. We know not only His love, but His power, which exhilarates and energizes us to accomplish things we didn't dream possible. At this very moment we are being challenged to capture a vision of our future ministry and to receive all the gifts for service God wants us to have. And with the gifts, He gives us the opportunities to exercise them. We are the body of Christ in the world; His voice, His hands and His feet to do His tasks. Each of us is gifted to do something that is important.

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1[1] *Body Life*, Gospel Light Publications. Used by permission.

There is a difference between a natural talent and a spiritual gift. A talent is a special ability which is inherited at our physical birth for our enjoyment or for employment. A spiritual gift is given at the time of spiritual birth to serve God and help bring about His kingdom. Talents come naturally and are for everyone. Spiritual gifts are bestowed by God upon disciples of Jesus Christ.

Consider Christ's parable of the talents (the word "talent" in Scripture means a coin, a sum of money). 2[2] A man called his servants together and gave each of them some money according to each man's ability. To one he gave the sum of five talents, to another two and to another one. After a period of time, the man who received five talents returned to his master ten; the man with two talents returned four, but the man with one talent was afraid and hid it. The first two men were praised for their work and were told they would be given more responsibility. The man who was afraid and hid his talent was told to give it to one of the other men. This parable teaches us that those who hide their gifts and refuse to use them because they are afraid, will surely lose them.

Many of us think we are in the "one talent" category. We are afraid and hide our gifts. We excuse ourselves from ministry because we are lazy or we think we don't have enough ability or enough time. We build walls of busyness around ourselves and have dozens of reasons which we use to protect ourselves. Perhaps we feel inferior in challenging situations and are sure someone else could do better. We forget that everyone is thrust into situations which make them feel inadequate.

Perhaps it is because we live in a success-oriented society. Most of us want to know that what we are going to do will be successful. We won't begin an activity until we are fairly sure we won't fail. We don't want to be criticized or rejected. If we are perfectionists, we won't risk very much because we are afraid of making a mistake. Perfectionism does not allow us the creative room to make mistakes and it is just another form of fear. God doesn't ask us to handle things perfectly. He simply wants us to be willing to serve. People need to see that we are not perfect and that we depend on God to overcome our weaknesses.

All forms of fear paralyze us, especially fear of the unknown. There will always be a sense of the unknown in life. If we are seeking to serve God, we will often be moving toward something unfamiliar. It will mean giving up something familiar and comfortable and this is often painful, a kind of death prior to rebirth. If we have hesitations about our capabilities, we can remember Paul's own feelings of weakness. Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians after many years as an apostle: "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and

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2[2] Matthew 25:14-30

persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power."<sup>3</sup>[3]

How do we begin our ministry? The followers of Jesus asked Him a similar question, "What must we do to be doing the work of God?" Jesus answered them, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent."<sup>4</sup>[4] What God is asking of us, first and foremost, is not our works but our faith in Him and our love for Him. Then these will compel us to serve, and a fruitful ministry is the natural result.

You might ask, "How do I step out in faith?" There is a story about a saintly man that was once approached by a disciple who said to him, "Sir, you speak so much about the love of God, but you never tell us how to achieve it. Won't you tell me how one comes to love God?" The man replied, "You begin by trusting and love will be born, and you go on loving, and loving teaches you how to love, and the more you love, the more you learn to love." It is the same with ministry. We begin by trusting God to give us gifts for serving. Then, as we begin to serve others, God will teach us how to serve. The more we serve, the more we will learn to serve.

Next to our trust and love of God, we are to seek His best. We can ask ourselves, "What would I most love to do? If I was gifted, had the opportunity to serve, and knew that God could use even my mistakes, what would I do for Him?" What we would most love to do is often a strong indication of what we have the potential to achieve. It is through dreams, yearnings and promptings that come from within that God uses to guide us into creative service. We are to listen to our deepest desires and to what God is saying to us. If we are afraid, the noise of our fear will drown out the still, small voice of God.

We can pray that God will increase our trust and our ability to listen to Him. Quietly, in our stillness within, God energizes our desires until they become visions of service for Him. As ideas are born, we are to protect the mysterious spark of life that is growing, for God is at work in us creating something great. It may not be what we expected, but it will be beautiful. Considerable responsibility comes with the ministry God gives us. We begin to make important decisions and we proceed carefully without comparing our ministry to others. If we see others doing more than we are, we don't need to feel guilty. It is more important to do one thing well for God than many things just because we feel we should be doing them.

Not every good cause has to have our input and not every request is necessarily a request from God. To become a faithful servant, we pray our way to our decisions and discipline our time and activities. We spend less time in unnecessary extras so our creative idea will

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<sup>3</sup>[3] 1 Corinthians 2:3-5

<sup>4</sup>[4] John 6:28-29

grow. We try to maintain a balance between our obligations and our free time. This means we will not neglect our loved ones. I think it was Carl Sandburg who said, "Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you."

If we decide to do something only because we feel obligated, we may eventually feel resentful. If we make our decision because we believe God is calling us, we will enjoy what we are doing. We can be totally committed to our task, not partially committed because of mixed emotions. We need the strength of our convictions so we are not discouraged when others do not understand or support us.

The apostle Paul was a goal-setter. In his letter to the Philippians he said, "My brothers, I do not consider myself to have grasped it fully even now. But I do concentrate on this: I forget all that lies behind me and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go straight for the goal -- my reward the honor of my high calling by God in Christ Jesus."<sup>5</sup>[5] Goal-setting strengthens our motivation. All our decisions will move us toward our goal because we will be interpreting our circumstances in relation to our goal.

Each of us is going to play a different part in God's work. Sometimes we will be the seed-planters, sometimes we are asked to water the plant that has started to grow, and sometimes we are to harvest what others have sown. But it is always God who makes our service bear fruit. So let us not be afraid to risk. Let us eagerly seek the gifts God wants us to have. They are like seeds yearning to germinate.

*Are you ready to receive the gifts of God, and then again for new ones? Will you look beyond your gifts in wonder and gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ?*

Christ is our Awakener. He came to live and to die and live again so we may become all that He promises. He touches us with His power. We receive His gifts for service and we enjoy His blessings in the abundance He promises. Through the freedom we have in Him, we learn to create and to love as never before.

Consider these words of Paul: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."<sup>6</sup>[6]

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<sup>5</sup>[5] Philippians 3:13-14 - Phillips

<sup>6</sup>[6] Ephesians 3:20-21 - KJV

## **Questions for Personal Study and Group Discussion**

1. Jesus is "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). What is your understanding of the body of Christ and how do you see yourself as a part of this body?

**I Corinthians 12:12-26** \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How has Christ provided for the continuing work of the church?

**Ephesians 4:11-13** \_\_\_\_\_

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**John 16:7-8**

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**John 14:12**

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How is it possible that Christians today will do greater things than Jesus did in His lifetime?

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- 3.** What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit to every believer?

**I Corinthians 12:7-11**

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How do we identify our gift(s)?

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***Question for private reflection:***

*What gift would you like the Holy Spirit to grant you?*

- 4.** What work of the Holy Spirit did Paul recognize in the service of the apostles?

**II Corinthians 3:4-6** \_\_\_\_\_

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**I Thessalonians 1:4-6** \_\_\_\_\_

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***Question for private reflection:***

*How will you rely on the Holy Spirit  
in your service for Christ?*

- 5.** What care must we take in assuming our ministry for Christ?

**Romans 12:3-8** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**I Corinthians 13:1-3** \_\_\_\_\_  
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How can you be sure you are offering your service in love?

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6. What is to be our attitude toward our responsibility?

**Galatians 5:25-26** \_\_\_\_\_

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**I Peter 5:1-4** \_\_\_\_\_

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7. From reading the following verses, summarize how you feel about your gift(s), how they should be used, and for what purpose.

**I Peter 4:10-11** \_\_\_\_\_

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What is wrong if you find yourself wishing you had someone else's gift?

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### *A Personal Word*

*Each time I attempt something new for Christ, I feel incapable, but this is what keeps me dependent on Him as He wants me to be. When He asks me to do something, He will give me the ability and prepare the way.*

*All Christians are gifted to minister to others, and this is simply what the word "ministry" means. But sometimes my gifts lie latent or hidden within me. God waits for me to truly desire them so that, when I discover my new abilities, I will have no doubt from whom they came.*

*These gifts from God are to be honored with my humility and reverence, and God's perfect love will cast out my fears of failing or rejection. The questions I must occasionally ask myself are, "Am I remaining open to receive more and more of God's love?" "What service am I doing which is possible only because of the indwelling Holy Spirit? This is what I call adventurous living!"*