

Discipleship Training Course

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- Some weights, measures and times have been replaced with easier to understand terms given in the footnotes using square brackets
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Chapter 14. Service and ministry

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1. Introduction

1.1 Key passage

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:1-7 (NASB1995)

1.2 Initial remarks

Ministry is service. The Greek verb used for serving tables (*diakoneō*), from which we derive the word **deacon**, has the same root as the verb used for ministry of the Word (*diakonia*). It is therefore fitting for ministers to have the heart of a servant, to be willing to serve in practical ways and to have passed through a practical training before they are entrusted with a spiritual training (Luke 16:11).

Workers are a type of minister: practical service is a form of ministry; one flows into the other. For example, Stephen was one of the seven deacons but also performed miracles and preached the gospel (Acts 6:8-10).

Being a worker requires:

- Being born again (although some churches allow unsaved people to serve in non-critical areas as a means of drawing them to Christ)
- Being Spirit-filled

- Having a basic Christian grounding
- Living an exemplary lifestyle
- Being chosen and set apart, often through the laying on of hands
- Passing through a period of apprenticeship

1.3 Ministry and the tabernacle

The Christian life can be viewed in terms of five stages of moving closer to the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, with becoming a worker being the final step:

Receiving new birth: entering the temple area and encountering the **bronze altar**, representing the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (John 3:1-21, Romans 10:9-10)

Receiving a new nature: encountering the **laver**, representing baptism in water, (Romans 6:1-14, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:19-21, 5:16-26, Ephesians 4:17-5:17, Colossians 3:1-17)

Receiving new power: passing through the curtain into the **Holy Place**, representing baptism in and continual filling with the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39, Acts 1:8, 4:23-31, Ephesians 5:18-20)

Having a vision for the Church, the Body of Christ: entering the Holy Place with the **table of showbread**, representing fellowship, the **lampstand**, representing the Bible, and the **altar of incense**, representing prayer and worship – see Chapter 7

Functioning within the Church, the Body of Christ: entering the **Most Holy Place** containing the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat representing the presence of God

1.4 The high calling of ministry

To claim to be a brother or sister, meaning that we testify to being born again, has with it a requirement that we walk uprightly:

But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

1 Corinthians 5:11-12 (NIVUK)

If this is the case then how much more is this true of becoming a church worker or minister? For example, James states that teachers will be judged more strictly than others:

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

James 3:1 (NIVUK)

Paul also encouraged the Corinthians to follow his example:

Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1 (AMP)

Becoming a minister is not an automatic process but it requires passing through a period of testing before being given a permanent office:

They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

1 Timothy 3:10 (NIVUK)

Anyone is welcome to come to church. We cannot change them – it is only God who can change them through His Word. However, making a confession of Christ and especially entering the ministry, are boundaries that we must guard so that younger believers and God-fearing non-believers do not lose confidence in salvation and the integrity of ministers and leaders. We therefore need to aim for holiness but also aim to serve others so that we can be an example.

Serving God is not futile: it will be a safeguard when it is time for God to judge others:

“Your words have been harsh against Me,”

says the LORD,

“yet you say,

‘what have we spoken against You?’

You have said,

‘it is useless to serve God;

what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance,

and that we have walked as mourners

before the LORD of hosts?

So now we call the proud blessed,

for those who do wickedness are raised up;

they even tempt God and go free.”

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,

and the LORD listened and heard them;

so a book of remembrance was written before Him

for those who fear the LORD

and who meditate on His Name.

“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts,

“on the day that I make them My jewels.

And I will spare them

as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

Then you shall again discern

between the righteous and the wicked,

between one who serves God

and one who does not serve Him.”

Malachi 3:13-18 (NKJV)

We should therefore never become weary of doing good:

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked [He will not allow Himself to be ridiculed, nor treated with contempt nor allow His precepts to be scornfully set aside]; for whatever a man sows, this and this only is what he will reap. For the one who sows to his flesh [his sinful capacity, his worldliness, his disgraceful impulses] will reap from the flesh ruin and destruction, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. **Let us not grow weary or become discouraged in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap, if we do not give in.** So then, while we [as individual believers] have the opportunity, let us do good to all people [not only being helpful, but also doing that which promotes their spiritual well-being], and especially [be a blessing] to those of the household of faith (born-again believers).*

Galatians 6:7-10 (AMP)

1.5 Workers need training

Workers need to be trained so that they may become like their trainers:

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Luke 6:40 (WEBPB)

Training is more than teaching: Jesus lived the whole time with His disciples for three years. Many times He often trained them and dealt with their attitudes outside of their outward ministry (e.g. Matthew 8:23-27, 10:1-42, 13:36-43, 14:22-32, 16:13-17:13, 17:19-23, 18:1-35, 19:23-30, 20:17-28, 21:18-22, 24:1-26:2, 26:17-46 and 28:16-20). In the end they denied and deserted Him, but even that did not disqualify them from being used.

True character only manifests when you live with someone, when you are given responsibility and when you are put under pressure. This is how maturity through service works: if we are truly looking to God when we make mistakes in service then we will humble ourselves and ask God to change us so that we may present ourselves as approved workmen:

Do your best to present yourself approved by God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NHEB)

Holiness is therefore a process in ministry training, not a prerequisite. The disciples made many mistakes, but this did not disqualify them (apart from Judas' betrayal).

Workers need to be loved, entrusted, observed, given feedback, allowed to fail, encouraged, praised, instructed and corrected. In essence, they need to be **fathered**.

Apprenticeship in ministry is therefore sometimes likened to sonship:

*I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, **you do not have many fathers**, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, **my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord**. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

1 Corinthians 4:14-17 (NIVUK)

*But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may also be encouraged by learning news about you. For I have no one else [like him who is] so kindred a spirit who will be genuinely concerned for your [spiritual] welfare. For the others [who deserted me after my arrest] all seek [to advance] their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. **But you know of Timothy's tested worth and his proven character, that he has served with me to advance the gospel like a son serving with his father.***

Philippians 2:19-22 (AMP)

2. Types of ministry

2.1 Introduction

Ministry needs grace: often the grace you have received is the grace you are challenged to use to serve others:

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28 (WEBPB)

When we view our past experiences as all working for good they no longer seem tragic but rather become opportunities for us to empathise with and encourage others who have passed through similar experiences. This means passing on and multiplying the grace we have received.

Grace comes in different forms therefore ministry comes in different forms:

Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God's multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God's unmerited favour].

1 Peter 4:10 (AMP)

We need eyes to see the grace of God: just because someone else's ministry is different from ours doesn't mean it is not from God:

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

*News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and **saw what the grace of God had done**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.*

Acts 11:19-23 (NIVUK)

Paul also described the Church as being members of **one body**:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (ESVUK)

This is especially true of ministers and workers as they can be likened to **functioning parts of the body**.

2.2 The five-fold ministry

Five ministries were distinguished by Paul as being higher than the others. They are known as the **five major ministries** or the **five-fold ministry**:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says:

*"When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
and gave gifts to men."*

(Now this, "He ascended" – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:7-13 (NKJV)

There is order in ministry. Paul gave an ordering to some ministries and spiritual gifts which is consistent with the above list:

Now you [collectively] are Christ's body, and individually [you are] members of it [each with his own special purpose and function]. So God has appointed and placed in the church [for

His own use]: first apostles [chosen by Christ], second prophets [those who foretell the future, those who speak a new message from God to the people], third teachers, then those who work miracles, then those with the gifts of healings, the helpers, the administrators, and speakers in various kinds of [unknown] tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire and strive for the greater gifts [if acquiring them is going to be your goal].

1 Corinthians 12:27-31a (AMP)

Paul also emphasised the close relationship between the first two five-fold ministries and the ministry of Christ:

*So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built on **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.*

Ephesians 2:19-20 (WEBPB)

The ministries of the apostle and prophet are therefore foundational as they receive their anointing directly from the ministry of Christ.

More generally, the five-fold ministry represents the ministry of Christ on earth. They are a gift from Christ to the Church when He ascended to heaven. Jesus operated in all five major ministries:

- Jesus is called as our Apostle and High Priest in Hebrews 3:1
- Jesus called Himself a Prophet in Matthew 13:57 and Luke 13:33 and was called a Prophet of the Most High in Luke 1:76
- Jesus evangelised the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1-26 and trained and sent out the twelve disciples (Matthew 10) then the seventy two as evangelists (Luke 10:1-24)
- Jesus is called the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls in 1 Peter 2:25 and the great Shepherd of the sheep in Hebrews 13:20
- He was often referred to as Teacher (e.g. Matthew 8:19, 12:28, 19:16 and 22:16)

Each of the five-fold ministries has a different motivation:

- Apostles are **master builders**. They are motivated by **stability** and **completing the work** they are called to build. An example is Paul:

*According to the grace of God which was given to me, **as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation**, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.*

1 Corinthians 3:10 (NKJV)

- Prophets are **architects**. They receive a detailed blueprint for the church and are motivated to **pass on the plans they have received to the church so that they are carried out accurately in order that God builds exactly what He intended**. An example is Moses:

Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

Exodus 25:8-9 (NIVUK)

God always reveals His will to His servants the prophets before He acts:

*Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing,
unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.*

Amos 3:7 (WEBPB)

- Evangelists are **soul winners**. They are motivated by **a burden for the lost to be saved**. An example is Philip:

Therefore those who were scattered abroad went around proclaiming the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Messiah. The crowds listened with one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many of those who had them. They came out, crying with a loud voice. Many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. There was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:4-8 (NHEB)

- Pastors are **shepherds**. They are motivated by **a burden for the church to be nurtured, fed (the word of God), protected and led**. An example is Paul's exhortation to the leaders of the church in Ephesus:

So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock – His church, purchased with His own blood – over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you – my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

Acts 20:28-31 (NLT)

- Teachers are **instructors** and **trainers**. They are motivated by **a desire to reproduce the word in others so that they are also motivated to study and understand it for themselves**. This can be seen in Paul's instruction to Timothy:

*You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and **what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

2 Timothy 2:1-2 (ESVUK)

Each of the five-fold ministries is **reproductive**. As we have already read in Ephesians 4:11, the purpose of Christ's gift of the five-fold ministry to the Church was to equip the body for works of service and to lead them towards maturity, not just for them to occupy the pulpit in church services in order to 'minister' to them without any consideration for the effect of their ministry.

Maturity in a five-fold minister can therefore be measured by the extent to which they have received and discharged **a burden to train others** who have a similar ministry motivation.

2.3 Other ministries

The New Testament mentions a number of other ministries:

- **Overseers**, referring either to bishops, responsible for the pastoral oversight of a group of churches, or elders, responsible for working with pastors to oversee a single church (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:7-9)
- **Deacons** and **deaconesses**, literally servants, but also requiring a godly character (Acts 6:1-6, Romans 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-10)
- **Intercessors**, those with a special calling to wrestle in prayer for others, such as Epaphras (Colossians 4:12-13) and Paul (Romans 1:9-10, 2 Corinthians 11:28-29, 2 Timothy 1:3), although we are all called to pray continually (Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

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- **Miracle workers**, the ministry of working miracles associated with this spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:28)
- **Administrators**, those with the ability to organise, plan, manage and coordinate (1 Corinthians 12:28,
- **Hospitality givers**, those who welcome guests into their homes and bless them, such as Gaius (Romans 16:23), although all believers are encouraged to be hospitable (Romans 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9), even to strangers (Hebrews 13:2)
- **Helpers**, providing assistance to others according to their needs, either by actions or material substance (Romans 12:8, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Philippians 2:25)
- **Mercy givers**, showing empathy, compassion, sensitivity and kindness towards the weak and vulnerable (Psalm 41:1-3, 2 Samuel 9, Romans 12:8)

Practical ministries, such as deacons and the last four ministries mentioned above should support higher ministries:

He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink because he is a disciple, truly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward.

Matthew 10:40-42 (NHEB)

All these other ministries also require godly character and training. We cannot claim to have a godly ambition for a major ministry if we are not first willing to serve in one of these other ministries.

3. Questions

1. How do you know what your ministry is?
2. How do you start in ministry?
3. What level of maturity (and consistent righteous living) do you need to have before you can start?
4. Can you operate in more than one ministry at once?
5. Are there different levels in the different ministries?
6. Do you sometimes need to operate in a ministry in which you are not fully comfortable? In what circumstances?
7. Should everyone have a trainer?
8. Is everyone called to a five-fold ministry?
9. Should you be ambitious in ministry?
10. How do you become a five-fold (or higher) minister?