

Before You Even Start

A New Life of Spirit Led Ministry to Others

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. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:37-39
ESV

Keep the First Command in First Place

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.

Clues to Watch For

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 gives 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 is the best Teacher on earth. So, carry all of



your questions to Him and watch as the answers begin to unfold. In the meantime, we have other articles posted to 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 being seriously tested (yet). Call vigorously on the Lord so that you can learn from Him how to let things go 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 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 ESV

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!

More to Explore

[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.

[Doing Ministry](#) There's nothing like doing the thing, especially when what we are doing is something we can be sure that Jesus is doing right along with us! The real Minister, the true Servant, is there on the inside wanting to get out into that hurting, lost world through us His chosen vessels. The secret to kingdom success is letting Him do ministry through you. Practice His presence as you learn "The Care of Souls," "The Art of Listening," "The Heart of a Servant," and "How to Give Talks and Lead Ministry."



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Scriptures on Ministry

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' Matthew 25:23 ESV

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Matthew 25:37-40 ESV

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45 ESV

"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" Luke 17:7-10 ESV

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them... I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 1 Corinthians 9:19, 22 ESV

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