

Preparing for Ministry

A New Life of Spirit Led Ministry to Others

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 ESV

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 ESV

Here are some examples taken from real life: If you fed a hundred hungry people, but treated five 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 the top priority on love. He really wants us to put loving others ahead of any work we are doing for them in His Name. Yet, God loves us too much to want us to ever lose His peace or His joy while serving Him. In fact, the very opposite can be our experience, because He is so good at rewarding us when we actually are doing things His way. Imagine Jesus feeding the 5000. Does He look stressed, worried or anxious? Not at all! The ones who lost their peace are the "disciples," a name which means learners. That's us!



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

Kindness Is Our Prime Directive

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 thing to do is what love would want you to do. Heidi Baker, 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



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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) Clear 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. 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 also is 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.

The Love Law Still Applies!

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



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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 it, 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 frequently elevate leaders to pedestals of perfection no one could possibly occupy, 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.

Love Purified by Fire

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, but we also want 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 directly nor hear Him audibly (most of the time). How does He make up for this?



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An Unexpected Answer

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 (John 14:15). 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.

Cultivating the Garden

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 around them, 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



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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.

More to Explore

Calling and Purpose Because He “calls” us we have not one, but two magnificent purposes to discover: 1) the joy of knowing Him intimately and 2) the unique way He designed us to be of loving service to others. These pursuits supply endless fascination! If our life is not characterized by discovery and adventure, we are probably missing the mark on both counts. As we enter more deeply into our purpose, “convergence” carries us ever closer to destiny.

The School of the Spirit There are lessons of the Lord which can be described in a classroom, but can only be imparted by the Spirit in the school of daily life. Being trained for ministry includes character development and spiritual growth, so expect “on the job” training to continue no matter what you are doing. That means leaning to survive trials and eventually thrive in the midst of them. Fortunately for all of us, our Teacher is also our Comforter and Best Friend!

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Scriptures on Ministry

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." John 14:15, 21 ESV

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. John 15:12-14 ESV

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Galatians 5:6 ESV

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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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