

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

A PERSONAL RATIONALE

A Personal Position Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Articulating one's philosophy of ministry must begin with a clarification of your definition of ministry. Merriam Webster's online dictionary reveals the difficulty of deciding whether ministry is a noun or a verb.

2 : the office, duties, or functions of a minister

3 : the body of ministers of religion: CLERGY

4 : a person or thing through which something is accomplished

While "the office, duties, or functions of a minister" is collectively a noun, clearly duties and functions are verbs. My definition and understanding of the word ministry for the purpose of this discourse are as follows: "The act of fulfilling God's calling on a person or group to carry out His divine purpose."

The driving force in my philosophy of ministry is ministry as an action, thus ministry as a verb.

PHILOSOPHY

With more and more churches failing to baptize any new believers in the span of a year, the need for revival within the faith community is obvious. Many of these churches have a congregation who has separated themselves from the world and refused to engage their community on any meaningful level. They worship with a justification that they gave it their best shot, they tried everything, they're tired, and they want to be comfortable. Then there's another group of churches. These congregations typically acknowledge they have a problem. They have tried to model the big churches in the best books. They have tried to do more, and more, and more . . . of the same thing they have always done. These frustrated churches are giving up because they don't know how to achieve different results. They are looking for someone to come and really look their hometown in the eye and assess their true spiritual needs; someone who will do more than recommend that they get a good band, and leave their ties at home. They need a person called by God to put a hand on their shoulders and show them how to engage their community on a meaningful level, with innovative methodology. I am one of those people whose calling is to revive the faithful.

This is primarily a ministry of reconciliation; reconciliation of the church to the vision God has for their Kingdom work, and reconciliation of the church to the community in which they are to make an impact. This balance of reverence and relevance is crucial to the success of the ministry. This balance and the desire to wholeheartedly embrace the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20) are encompassed in the mission statement. "Innovation Ministries exists to facilitate and encourage the relevant and reverent approach to introducing salvation through Jesus Christ to the human heart." The mission statement also serves as a reminder that we are witnesses and have no power in our own strength.

This ministry is not limited to work with churches. Just as a church must reach out to the secular community so must Innovation Ministries. This aspect of the calling is illustrated in the vision statement. "While maintaining a balance between relevance and

reverence Innovation Ministries will assist churches, ministries, and businesses in presenting their vision and mission to an ever-changing public. In an ongoing commitment to be Spirit led in all we do; we will seek the Lord's direction through prayer and Scripture, and ask for His attention to detail. Through the Lord's mercy we will make an impact on plateaued and declining churches. Through the Lord's grace we will make an impact on the business community.” Because we are transformed and no longer of this broken world Christians should be the most creative, insightful, and trustworthy business professionals. Our pre-believing family, friends and business associates need to see what a relationship with Jesus Christ and an indwelling of the Holy Spirit can do for an “Average Joe.”

With these broad elements communicated it is important to compile those finer points that the ministry will operate within, those values that as a member of this ministry you are willing to be bound to. The Core Values of Innovation Ministries are:

- I. We believe that dependence on God is an essential choice in the Christian life.
- II. We believe that evangelism is the purpose for all other spiritual disciplines.
- III. We believe that ministry is an action required by all those who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- IV. We believe the ordinances of Baptism and The Lord's Supper, although symbolic, are fundamental acknowledgements of God's authority and blessing in our lives.
- V. We value prayer as an open communication between our frailty and Christ's intercession.
- VI. We value godly leadership committed to Biblical exposition.
- VII. We value authentic community where meaningful relationships are developed through warm fellowship.
- VIII. We are committed to Christlike character and integrity.
- IX. We are committed to financial responsibility.
- X. We are committed to an effective, creative, and most importantly, innovative approach to cultural relevance.

Core Values are crucial to provide focus and accountability for new members as well as the leadership team of any ministry.

With a foundation of values, vision and mission the ministry must have a strategy. The Strategy of Innovation Ministries is underway with the following goals on the horizon. First I must complete my education. I chose New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary because it is an action oriented ministry with professors experienced in the local church. With each semester I learn valuable lessons from those who have gone before me. When the Lord leads I will begin a series of interim pastorships focusing on revitalization of plateaued and declining churches. Between lead pastors is the best time for a church to enter into a discovery period, embracing their culture and new direction. Only then are they prepared in heart and mind for a pastoral search. Maximum attention will be given to training a solid leadership team. The revival of the faith community is manifested in a network of “wounded healers” helping each other and others become the church God could see all along. Based on these experiences I would like to write a very

practical book on church revitalization. With Christ's return so imminent the dissemination of effective ministry principles is essential.

THEOLOGY

When considering theology within the context of philosophy the main issue is not proficiency, but mature application of Scripture. Knowledge of the Word becomes a necessary component of a life lived to share the gift of salvation to the world. Sound hermeneutics is a skill used in wielding the Sword so as not to carve up your own witness and paralyze the flock with confusion and conflict. Sadly, there will be many Bible scholars left behind upon Christ's return, those academics who engaged the Bible on a strictly literary level. Joyfully, there are those no one would consider intellectuals who are wise enough to faithfully read their Bible, storing Scripture in their hearts like treasure.

The qualifications for a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are spelled out in Titus 1:7-9. The way these requirements come together in a minister are as different as the men who accept the call. As a minister I would like to be considered a "warrior-poet", called out to take on the spiritual warfare of a fallen world with the finesse and grace of a poet. I believe we have too many "diplomat-administrators" in the pastorate today. These are men whose calling, or lack thereof, has been reduced to a ministry of appeasement, mired in corporate responsibilities. Men who have completely lost sight of the Lord's vision, and their mission therein, are no longer serving others. By definition they are no longer ministers regardless of their credentials and past works. Self proclamation is not enough to stand in the company of those who come to serve.

Theology becomes practical in ministry when used as the basis for decision making. Making good decisions involves four areas of the Christian's sphere.

First, how we view God effects every decision in our life. God is sovereign and unchanging. No matter what happens in our ministry, no matter what mistakes we make in our ministry, we cannot alter the Master's plan. For instance, if we were to believe that by witnessing to all the unreached people groups in the world we could summon the Lord's return through our successful actions, we would be in error. How we communicate with God has a profound effect on our ministry. When an aircraft takes off in New York on a non-stop flight to Los Angeles that plane will be off course over ninety percent of the time. If the pilot is not communicating in some way with a guidance system the plane will probably never get to Los Angeles. Small adjustments are constantly made, the more frequent the communication, the smaller the adjustment. For the same reason the Apostle Paul urges us to be in constant contact with the Good Shepherd for guidance. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (Thes. 5:16-18)"

Scripture is the second area of consideration. Scripture must be wholly authoritative. For a ministry to thrive everyone must believe that the Bible is completely trustworthy. If we place ourselves in the position of deciding what is truth and what is fiction we have removed the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from the center of our ministry. When the miraculous is gone from our ministry we will fail. On the other hand, when we believe that axe heads float, Peter walks on water, and Lazarus was raised from the dead, then we can communicate the truth of a risen Savior. As believers we are not

miraculous. We have been called to a miraculous realm, a place where we can introduce Heaven to the human heart, and watch miracles happen.

The third area in the life of a ministry that effects our decision making is tradition. Tradition has a way of binding us together. Unfortunately the lashes become so tight that pulling them away tears at our flesh. In a ministry of restoration the knowledge that we will wound good people by removing these confines must be respected. In a plateaued and declining church this bondage is usually anchored to a time of great revival and spiritual health in the ministry. We must encourage them to let go of a good thing in order to receive a fresh anointing from the Great Redeemer. Not all tradition is ineffective. Again, we should follow the teaching of Paul. “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (Thes. 5:19-22)”

Finally, consider the influence of our personal experiences. Well intentioned Christians profess using caution or eliminating personal experiences as a basis for decision making. Secular humanists would like you to believe that your feelings are authoritative. They have convinced too many that to rely on God is to surrender your intellect and individuality to a fictitious cosmic judge. Nothing could be further from the truth. With the tools, or “fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22,23)” we can paint from a palette of personal experiences that are vibrant with divine moments. We can draw from a valuable collection of trials, instances of forgiveness, personal revelation through prayer and Scripture reading, and those instances when who God is so completely envelopes your human weakness that you became His brush in the creation of someone else’s portrait of rebirth. Certainly we must walk by faith and not by sight. It is imperative that we test all things and hold fast to what is good. Just don’t hold so tight that you fade into the landscape of legalism.

I don’t think genuine pastors set out to chart a new course for Christianity. Heresy creeps in through as many little cracks as Satan can manifest in a ministry. There is, however, a deep chasm that pastors fall into that leads to heretical thinking. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (Pro. 16:18)” We stand at the edge of the chasm the moment we take possession of the ministry. I once had an interview with the pastor of the largest church in my hometown. Within the context of our discussion he said “it’s got to be my way or no way.” The statement gave me a jolt, on many levels, mainly because I realized he had not mentioned the Lord at all in our time together. About a year later over a hundred families left the church over an issue of heresy. Ironically, those who take their ministry from God will inevitably begin to question the Lord’s apportionment of blessings to which they feel they are owed. They have now initiated the fall.

We will all make mistakes in our efforts to represent Jesus Christ in this sinful world. I can only hope that my mistakes are a result of being over zealous in my attempts to glorify God. To avoid heretical errors I will strive to be completely open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I will commit myself to the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Scripture reading. And I will be open and transparent to ethical godly counsel.

METHODOLOGY

The best methodologies for reaching a lost and dying world are those that have not been tried yet. New and innovative ways to speak the truth in love must be embraced. We must be willing to meet people where they are, and be loving enough to address their needs no matter how uncomfortable it might be. A completely objective assessment of the ministry's mission field must be conducted. Then the ministry's innovators should be the group who's task it is to recommend how the community's need will be met. The goal is not to find a new subdivision to visit with tracts that were produced when gasoline was under a dollar. The command is to go and make disciples, to put the adventure back in outreach. The commission may play out by going to a laundry-mat and folding clothes for that tired mom, or delivering roast beef and watercress sandwiches to a busy office building where hurting workaholics don't take time for lunch. The only thing we cannot do is whatever we have already done, over, and over again.

There must also be caring follow through in the sound bite environment in which we live. Proper discipleship requires time and attention, the way Paul brought Timothy to service in the faith. This model has only become innovative because our churches have become so program driven that a new Christian may have to wait a month or more for the beginning of a thirteen week newcomers class. We must bring authentic community back to the church.

Finally, we must be culturally relevant. This element of methodology will most commonly be accomplished through worship style. We are all quick to applaud the missionary who learns to play a didgeridoo in order to worship with Aborigines in the Australian outback, but we are afraid to be culturally relevant in our own churches. This does not mean we must hire a contemporary praise team and teach our congregation the newest Big Daddy Weave hit. It may mean we worship in a country western, or hip hop, or jazz style. It may mean, "Praise God" that we sing hymns with a pipe organ. Relevancy must also be reflected in our sermon illustrations and use of available technology. More and more people are previewing a church or ministry online. Does this mean we must have a website? The answer depends on whether our mission field is Miami or Arctic Village Alaska. This ministry component will be challenged many times over the life of the ministry. We must be open to change. We must not force an irrelevant model on our mission field in the name of going and making disciples.

REFLECTION

Effectiveness in ministry requires transparency before God and those the Lord had entrusted as your accountability partners. Random reflection and evaluation is valuable, but insufficient in a fruitful ministry. An effective minister will seek out godly men and women who are willing to prayerfully evaluate the ministry and honestly communicate their praise and, more importantly, reproof. To be productive these evaluations should be regularly scheduled. A minister must be willing to accept criticism.

There will be some practical elements to these evaluations depending on the ministry, such as financial stewardship, and time management. The real issue of

transparency lies in the subjective review of the ministry. Ultimately a ministry's effectiveness is about karpos:

karpos - fruit

1. the fruit of the trees, vines, of the fields
2. to gather fruit (i.e. a reaped harvest) into life eternal (as into a granary), is used in fig. discourse of those who by their labours have fitted souls to obtain eternal life.

While there is a quantitative aspect to the soul harvest it is a mistake to focus on the numbers. Making disciples is what has been asked of us. We must focus on the transformation of those whose lives we are fortunate enough to be a part. Are the people entrusted to us for discipleship reaping a harvest? Are they surrounded with karpos?

A ministry's effectiveness is between God and the minister he has called to the task. We cannot compare ourselves to others as a point of reflection. "Be sure to do what you should, for then you will enjoy the personal satisfaction of having done your work well, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct.(Gal. 6:4,5)"

CONCLUSION

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Mat. 6:33)" Ministry is a privilege extended to the least likely among us. God is not capable of using the wrong tool for the job. We are called to boldness, and I believe we are called to be innovators. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12 NIV)