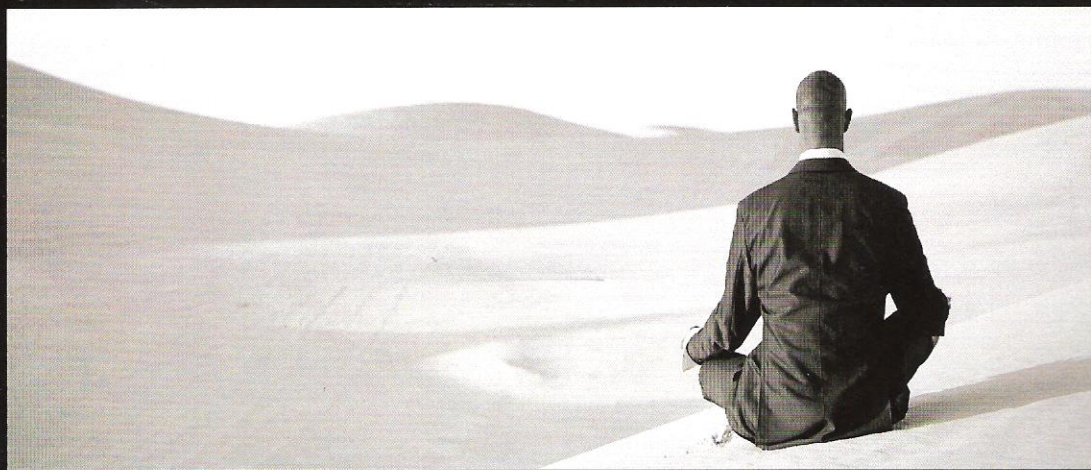


Our Ministry



Jerry D. Ousley

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Ephesians 4:11-12

“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...”

*“Where there is no revelation,
the people cast off restraint...”*

Proverbs 29:18

“I can’t stop!” In desperation the man cried unto God. He had been cursed with a drinking problem for many years. He had made a miserable life for his wife and children, and for himself.

But one day he did stop. The power of a mighty God grabbed his mind and he entirely and completely gave his life to God. Prayer and the Church became a regular part of his life. It seemed that the nightmare was over for this family.

But something else happened. It was just a mere passing thought at first. But it began to grow and the dryness in his mouth seemed to drag him to the package store where he bought another case of beer. “I’ll just take a taste,” he thought. But before he knew it the case had almost disappeared. He was drunk.

As soon as his wife discovered what he had done the arguments began. She was hurt, disappointed, and probably a little frightened. So, she lashed out in the only way she knew. She left the kitchen where he had been sitting at the table.

As she did, a shot rang out. In a drunken stupor he had often threatened to shoot her and the kids. So, in terror, she rounded up the children and fled to the neighbor’s house where they called the police.

The report soon came. The officers had found him face down on the table in a pool of blood with the revolver lying beside him. He had disappointed himself by yielding to the temptation of the devil. He felt as if he couldn’t make it. His hopes and dreams, his vision of a happy family had in a moment of temptation slipped through his fingers. It seemed that it was gone and there was no way to recover it. The second temptation was easy to submit to under these circumstances, and so it was over.

God made man to need a mission in life - A vision - A goal to reach for and attain. We all have goals we are driven towards. These are desires that have deep roots within us. We are extremely disappointed if we can't reach those desires and feel as if we have failed in life.

Many have taken their very lives because they have failed to reach those desires found deep within. Possibly they have never shared these desires with anyone else, but, because they remain unfulfilled, all seems hopeless that they will ever find contentment, and so they decide to "end it all."

The Call

A seventeen-year-old boy struggled with a feeling, a knowing deep down inside his inner being. There were doubts by those around him, and there was this question that kept popping in his mind; *"Is this the thing God wants or just my own fantasy?"* After all, as a high school student, he had just refused a promised "A" for giving a composition orally and took an automatic "C" for turning it in written because of the fear of standing in front of his fellow students and speaking publicly. How could this young man even think it possible that God would want him to preach the gospel?

Still, he knew God wanted him to do something more. But there was this hesitation because he had heard several other ministers suggest that the call to preach the gospel wasn't their choice but God put them in a position where they had no choice but to heed to the call. It left the impression on him that it wasn't a desirable thing to do and perhaps he wasn't called after all.

Everything within him wanted to do it. It wasn't something that he dreaded but wanted with all his heart. And so, he began to feel as if maybe he wasn't called, or he was weird or something. The day that he fully accepted the call and made it public knowledge was one of those "happiest days of his life" experiences. The minister of the meager congregation where his family attended asked him to bring the message one Wednesday night. He prepared all week for that 10-minute message. He stumbled over his words and it just didn't come out like he had envisioned, but God let him do it.

To this day the butterflies arise when I step up to begin to speak to others. To this day, the inadequacies of my own self are pushed in my mind when I think of standing up to present the Word of God. But those very inadequacies become the driving forces that make me able to speak the message of God because I must depend on Him.

Each of us, despite our talents and interests, has been given a call from God; a ministry to fulfill utilizing those things God has allowed us to specialize in. It is like a burning vision within us that we know we must fulfill. It becomes a "do or die" type situation demanding that we fulfill it.

And so, we embark upon a journey of ministry, not to glorify ourselves, but to influence others to give up their lives for real life in Christ. We allow God to use us to aid other Christians in their walk with the Father.

God has given each of us a mission in life. When we fail to see it fulfilled then we are "*men most miserable*." People in this world who seem to have it all yet are still unsatisfied and bored with life aren't just spoiled individuals, but people who have not realized their mission and call from God.

God saves no one to sit idle. God has called each and every believer to a life of ministry. "Pew warming" is not a ministry. Our Divine Maker has placed in each of us at birth, desires and talents that are unique only to us. No one else can do what you can do. God put that talent there to bring glory to His Name. Unfortunately, not everyone recognizes this and so winds up using their God-given talent for wrong purposes.

What is this vision you keep talking about?

The vision is basically the same for everyone. God has one mission for us all. That mission is to see souls saved and won to Christ. To keep others from going to hell and show how that Christ made the way so each and every soul on this planet can come to Him and not perish. The overall calling is the same for each of us.

How we respond to that call and carry it out is entirely different. Each individual who answers that call is equipped with special tools and talents that God has placed to carry out a specific goal. He begins to prepare us from the moment we first breathe the breath of life. He has laid out a blue print for us before we were even conceived.

We have within us notions and ideals that have come from years of bad training. I use the term "bad training" because someone carries out God's mission one way, and we are taught (either by others or by our own notions) that this is the way it's done. What works for one doesn't necessarily work for all.

David found that out. After he had made his claim that he wasn't afraid of Goliath, and that he trusted God enough to face this giant of a man, it didn't take long for word to reach King Saul. No one in the army of Israel was brave enough to face this man. Worse yet, if the guy who faced the giant failed, the deal was, that the entire nation would have to submit and serve the Philistines as slaves. Before we go off and call these men who made up the army of Israel cowards, let's think about that for a moment . . . would any of us put ourselves in the position of being blamed for the enslavement of our nation because of a failure? I think not.

Saul's response was to dress this young teenage boy in his own suit of armor. He was the king of Israel and a very tall man. The Bible had said of Saul that he stood "Head and shoulder above any man in Israel..." Naturally, his suit didn't fit David at all. Standing there with the sleeves hanging over his hands and the belt that held the sword falling down to his knees, he quickly surmised that "this just won't work!"

David quickly shed that “too big” suit and headed for the creek where he found five smooth stones to use in his familiar sling, and the rest is history! You see, it wasn’t in the weapons used, or in the methods, but in the fact that David had to feel comfortable in how he faced this beast of a man. He had to do it in the way God had called him.

When it comes to ministry, we don’t do it the way everyone else does it, nor do we do it “our way” but we use the tools God has blessed us with and do it HIS WAY!

What happens when we fail?

At some point, after being used of God for a time, after working in a congregation of people, after giving and giving of ourselves, we come to a time when we lose our focus. We fall into the “hum-drum” of routine and, often without even realizing what is going on, we become insensitive to the ministry and see only the job before us.

I came to this point. Between the responsibility, and the work, I found myself becoming insensitive to the actual gospel, focusing only on the things needing done to fulfill church work responsibilities.

Since then, there have been times that I let the vision slip. There have been times when I felt out of place because God didn’t use me like He did other ministers. And so, I tried things in my zeal that God hadn’t really called me to do. And, you guessed it, I failed and failed miserably.

I still fail God at times. I’m not proud of that, but it happens. My selfishness and stubbornness take over sometimes and I just belly flop. But if I’ve learned one thing in life, it’s this: To pick myself up when I fall, wipe the dirt and dust from my behind, and keep on going.

The tools of ministry

As we have already said, the prime purpose for ministry is to bring those who come into contact with us the message of the gospel - The Good News that Jesus died for our sin, and only asks that we accept this sacrifice by giving everything we are to Him. By doing so, we become “Christians” or Christ-like. We are still in this body of flesh that fails God but is covered by the blood of Christ and so when we ask forgiveness, He grants it. It is our ticket to Heaven.

Since we all have been called of God to bring forth this gospel message, what are the tools God has given us to carry forth His word? To answer this question, we must first clear our minds of all preconceived notions of what the ministry is. We must put traditional means aside and look where people are.

In His day, Jesus didn’t just go to the Synagogues or the Temple. He visited these places frequently, but when He did, more often than not, He wound up in a confrontation with the Jewish leaders on the issues of the day. Instead, Jesus performed His greatest miracles,

and spoke His most profound words in the streets, in the wilderness, at a well, with people in need and right smack dab in the middle of that need.

The idea of singing hymns of praise, and preaching the gospel from a pulpit will always be in form, but not in every instance or with every individual. We must first realize that the true purpose of meeting together as the Church is not to win souls to Christ. I'm not suggesting that if one who is not a believer comes to a service, listens to the word and is convicted to the point that they want to come to Christ, that we refuse them. No! By all means, when that time comes, it is always the right place and right moment. But the true purpose of gathering together is to worship God collectively, hear songs, testimonies, and messages that encourage us, inspire us for service, and just plain give us the "spiritual fuel" we need to do our ministry in the coming week.

Actual ministry is done on a daily basis, where we are, in our jobs and with the people we come into contact with. This includes members of our families (both sides), those we work with, those we enjoy our leisure time with, and even those who might be our enemies. The words we say outside our place of worship, and the actions that we take become more important than what we say or do when we collectively meet.

Jesus was always looking for opportunities to bring home a gospel point. It showed in the stories He told, and in those He had personal confrontation with. He didn't look down His nose at people, nor speak in judgmental terms. He put Himself on their level, listened with compassion, and looked past the outward, straight into the heart of those individuals, and spoke what they needed to hear.

Of course, He was the Son of God and this was much easier for Him than for us; but by His Holy Spirit, we too become sons of God. We must take on the nature of Christ and be sensitive to His leading within. It will probably take all our lives to do this, but it must be our goal.

We live in an ever-changing world. Most are not content with the "same old, same old." Music tastes change and vary from individual to individual. Appearances are constantly changing. Styles in hair and dress come and go. We must be willing to reach people where they are, with what they are interested in.

Don't misunderstand. The gospel is the same always. It never changes. But the tools we use to grab the attention of those we come into contact with must be current and in style. Sunday school, Morning Worship, Sunday Evening Service, and Wednesday night just don't "cut the mustard" any more. Today we live in a demanding world. We are discovering that the more conveniences we invent, the more complicated we make our lives.

"Rush, rush, busy, busy," is the way of the world today. Time has become our most important and valuable commodity. Therefore, it becomes more important to improve the quality of our services rather than the quantity. It becomes imperative that we reach out where people are.

We must become more open minded as to the methods we use to reach others instead of forcing them to only be able to come to Christ by our same old-fashioned methods. The “Old-Fashioned” gospel that was preached on the day of Pentecost will always be the standard, but the “old-fashioned” way of worship, and witness must be done away with and give place to reaching others where they are today.

This is where our talents come in. The man who is a construction worker may refuse to cut corners so as to avoid expenses. When confronted by this action his words might be “God told me to do everything I do just like I’m doing it for Him, because I really am.” This becomes a witness. You’d better believe that anyone who hears that testimony, regardless of what their immediate response might be, will remember it. The simple act of doing a good job as unto the Lord becomes a gospel seed planted. That seed may lie dormant for a time, but will one day come to a place where it encounters spiritual water and nutrients, and will then be given a chance to grow. Someone else may get the credit for winning that soul, but it was the words of the construction worker that planted the seed.

Don’t get me wrong; gospel preaching is Scriptural and will always be the plan of God until Jesus Christ returns. But we must not belittle the everyday witness of individuals as being the single greatest tool for winning souls and planting seeds.

Your witness, in your occupation, becomes the avenue in which God wants to work. Your daily confession, your daily action and reaction, and your talent becomes the legs of the gospel.

What are some ways that I can witness?

There are many ways that an individual believer can witness without having to go to Bible College or Seminary. Furthering our Christian education is very noble, and anyone preparing for a ministry which requires leading people needs to know something about what they are doing. But it is not a prerequisite to spreading the gospel. Homiletics 101 is not required to tell a fellow worker, student, or acquaintance about Jesus.

However, some of us want to do more than that. We want to reach out to people in a special way. Don’t be concerned. There are plenty of avenues still open in home-missions today. For instance, have you thought about visiting a nursing home on a weekly basis? Perhaps being kind to a patient who feels rejected and kicked out of society would really become open to the gospel when one takes time out of their daily lives to be there to read to them, sit with them, and just listen to what they have to say. It softens the heart and paves the way for the door to be opened a crack so you can tell them about Jesus. Maybe you have started a visitation outreach at the nursing home, and it seems that everyone you talk to is already a Christian. But we must realize that we are all social creatures. God made us that way. He put within each of us a need for human companionship. Your visit to Christians in the nursing home provides them a fellowship with other believers that they desperately need. You may be the answer to their prayer for God to send them someone they can talk to, and worship with.

What about giving? I don't just mean to your local congregation. It is important to support with your giving, but there is much need in the world. There are countries where people get up the next morning with no idea where they will get their next meal, or have no choice as to what they will wear that day, or even where they will sleep that night. They have no peace of mind about even living through the day. You may not be able to physically go to these people, but those whom God has placed in positions to be there need financial assistance. We have the means.

There are people right here in the United States who have no security about their needs. Maybe their parents are alcoholics, or drug addicts and they have no knowledge of a peaceful home. All they know is partying, crime, and fighting. They need financial assistance. I don't mean to just hand them cash money so that they or their parents can continue wasting it on riotous living, but there are ways we can buy food, or pay bills for shelter that become a ministry to others. It softens the heart to hear the gospel. Many congregations have needy programs for which they pay for such things. Usually, a responsible person is over the distribution of these funds and knows how to get the help to the ones truly in need. We can support those programs. If your local congregation does not have such a program, what crime is there in donating to one that does have a needy program?

But giving is more than just financial aid. Giving takes all shapes and forms. We have ourselves to give, we have time to give, and we have finances to give. Listen to the voice of God. Give as He directs. There's plenty of need. But to make it a ministry we must be obedient to the Master.

What about becoming involved with a special group in your congregation? The ladies may have a meeting of their own. From these meetings areas of ministry usually become available. Ladies reaching out to other ladies becomes very important as does men reaching out to other men, and teens reaching out to other teens. Getting involved in these groups provides directed ways of witnessing the gospel to a lost world. Take advantage of these opportunities.

What about teaching a Sunday school class? Again, most local congregations do not require special education for this ministry. If you love children and you have a talent to reach them, then you can become a great influence in their lives if you dedicate yourself to it. The kids must know that you are serious about it, faithful to them, and that you have authority from God. But if you seek Him in this, it could be just the place He would like to utilize your skills.

Other ministries for teens and children are greatly needed. Most teenagers are looking for someone to follow whether they want to admit it or not. There is constant talk of there not being anything for our teens to do. But teen groups that have good solid leadership, someone who is called and talented to work with them, who tries to think like they do, can become a source of leadership to them. If they know you really care and want the best for them, offer firm leadership, and they will follow. If God has called you to this ministry and equipped you for it, you will excel at it if you give it all you've got.

The same is true for children, except, for the most part, they don't have the "teen" rebelliousness as of yet. It takes a very special person to work with children. Not all adults have the patience to teach them. Not all adults have the ability to get on their level. Someone who can do this will become an influence that will affect their lives forever. Growing up in church, I affectionately remember the leaders I had as a child. I don't remember a lot of the classes, but I do remember the walks in the woods, the bike hikes, and that those adults took time to spend with me as a child. They will follow, and they will remember.

Children need illustrations to remember. Making and using puppets doesn't sound like much, but requires a lot of work. But it yields results that are uncanny. Children remember those funny puppet plays but most importantly the messages that are hidden in between the humor.

What about Christian advertisement? One lady in our congregation took it upon herself to pay for and make sure that the information was turned in for a monthly advertisement for our group in the local newspaper. What if you paid for a short article each month that appeared, not advertising a congregational body or local function, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified?

Another thing our congregation did was to purchase a changeable letter sign. Every couple of weeks we put a new message up. Sometimes one that was humorous, sometimes one that was a play on words. We received all kinds of comments from people who never darkened our door, nor ever intended to attend. But they enjoyed reading the sign and they received a gospel message from it each time they read it. It took about an hour to an hour and a half each time it was changed. Sometimes in cold weather, sometimes in extremely hot, but the effort was always well worth it. The person who devoted a couple of hours every two weeks to make sure it was changed, and attractive to read, touched the lives of people, some of which they would only know in Heaven.

What about simply stopping to help someone along the road who was broken down? If God has given you the talent of auto mechanics, well, there you go... Instant ministry. But what if you don't know much about fixing a car? You can always give them a lift to a service station where they can get help. By the way, don't forget to slip a gospel tape into the tape player, or begin singing a Christian tune, or simply ask them about Christ. These people are grateful for your help and they will listen.

These are but a few examples of outreach ministries that can be done by individuals who have a burden to do them. If any of these appeal to you, then you probably have been given the talent by God to make it happen. Pray using your imagination. God has put tools deep inside you that will work. He has given ideas that are unique only to you because it is your ministry.

Nothing pains a pastor more than to have people come to him or her and suggest that the congregation start a new outreach. In most cases the pastor is already stretched to his or her limit. To feel that the congregation is pressing him or her to take on a new responsibility fills the heart with dread and ill feelings. If God gave you an idea, He gave it for you to head up, not to bring it up to the pastor or congregational board for someone else to do. You must

put the legs behind it. Make sure it is okay with the pastor, but I'll bet if he knows you are going to do the work, he'll be behind you 100%!

The Burden

People who are regular attendees of a congregation, along with many of its leaders have a bad habit when they talk about a burden from God as being pained and heavy. Some of them act like they can hardly go on because of "such a great burden from God." They are either liars or deceived by the devil. Listen to the words of Jesus: "*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:30).

The burden refers to a load to carry. Jesus saves no one to just amble along in life. He gives each of us a burden. The yoke went around the neck of the horse or ox attached at the other end to a wagon or load of some type. The picture Jesus paints is that we are all workers in His kingdom. But don't worry, He won't work us too hard. He says that His yoke is not a strain that causes heavy slave type labor, but it is easy. His burden that you must carry upon your back isn't one that will make you fall under the strain, but it is light.

One of the main reasons that His yoke is easy and His burden is light is because He has already put within you the talents and desire to do what He has asked you to do. Did you ever wish that you could get a job doing exactly what you enjoyed doing and could get paid for doing it all day? That is what Jesus is asking you to do. He has put the talents and desires within you to do the ministry He has called you to do. The reason some who minister seem to carry such a heavy load and pull on such a hard yoke is because they have been conditioned to believe that's the way they must serve. But God calls each of us to serve within our talents and desires. Isn't that GREAT?!!!

Once again, I can't emphasize enough, that God hasn't put His work on the shoulders of just a few but on each and every individual that has come to Him in salvation. "Go ye" wasn't preached to just a few, but to every born-again believer in the entire world. "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel.*" (Mark 16:15). It is our call!

All Christians want to see souls saved. Salvation resulting in Eternal Life - To see one rescued from Eternal destruction - is the greatest miracle that could ever take place. It's great when souls are saved in congregational services. But it is better to see souls saved where they are, then bring them into the congregation for growth. That was Christ's original intention. Not that we keep preaching salvation in our services. If all we teach and preach in our services is salvation, then those who are already Christians will soon starve for lack of spiritual nourishment and either die (spiritually) or move on to where they can grow from the sincere milk and meat of the word. There are times and it has its place, but our services should be designed for Christian fellowship and nourishment for spiritual growth. When souls are saved on the battle field then brought into services for growth, it all makes for a spiritually healthy, well rounded diet and we will see people grow in Christ.

Pray for it, about it, and for God's direction on how you are to be part of it!

Salvation Page

This page is intended for those of you who may possibly be reading this booklet and have never had an experience with Jesus Christ. To become a Christian is not a hard thing to do. All you must do is believe that Jesus Christ died for your sin, enough to come to Him, ask forgiveness, and then dedicate your life to doing His will.

Romans 10:9-10 says *"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

Many people claim that they believe in Jesus Christ. But if we really believe, then we will act on that belief. We don't believe in something, then live as if it wasn't really true. When we believe, we live our lives according to that belief.

If you believe that Jesus Christ died for our sin, and then was raised from the dead so that we might have victory in Him then do these things and you will be saved:

Confess with your mouth: Confess to the guilt of sin. We are all guilty of sin because none of us can live beyond it. Admit it. Confess that you are a sinner.

Repent of sin. Repent means to make a conscious decision that you are going to change. We can't change without Christ, but if we confess to Him that we are a sinner, then repent to Him saying "Lord, I'm sorry that I'm a sinner. I can't do anything about it myself, but I know You can, so I repent of my sin" He will save us.

Then, the most important part is to believe. Believe that Christ will do this work in you. Know in your heart that if you confess and repent in honest true belief, not just going through the motions or saying the words, but believing them in your heart, then the word of God says you'll be saved from the guilt of sin and you will be justified (just as if you'd never sinned).

If you do these three simple things in honesty and sincerity, you will be saved. It's just the beginning. From there find a group where you feel like you can really grow in Christ, read the Bible daily, and seek out friends who are Christians. You will grow in Christ.

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