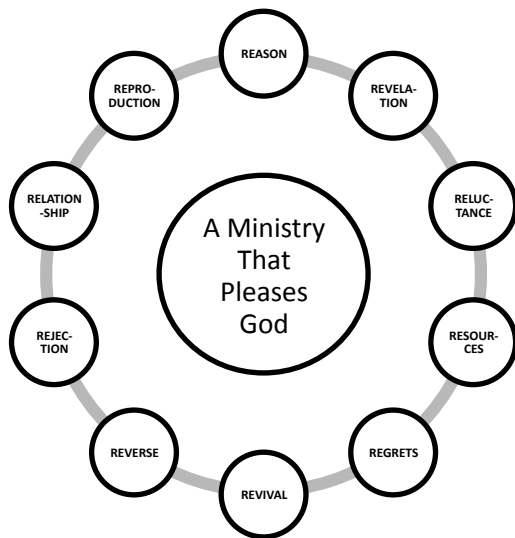


## SECTION 7

### We Must REVERSE Traditional Thinking about Ministry





### **Shifting Paradigms**

Sometimes we just need to change the way we think.

Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells the story of riding on a New York City subway one Sunday morning. He was alone, except for a father with three young children. Covey was trying to get some work done as he traveled, but the children were so wild that he simply could not concentrate. The father just sat there, looking into space, while his children ran uncontrolled up-and-down the subway car.

Finally, in exasperation, Covey turned to him and asked if he would please control his children. The father looked at Covey and said, “*Oh, I am so sorry. Their mother – my wife – just died and I guess I was simply lost in my grief.*”

At those words, Covey’s response went from frustration and anger, to compassion and understanding. He experienced a *paradigm shift* – because of “new information,” he thought differently about the situation.

The Church in the twenty-first century needs a paradigm shift in the way we think about and approach ministry. More accurately, we need a *paradigm return* – a return to a Biblical understanding of ministry. That’s what Section Seven is all about.

## Every Believer Is a Minister

Every believer is called to ministry. Some are called to specific ministries. And a few are called to be pastors and teachers. It takes more than sensing God has called you to ministry. God also begins a process to better prepare us for ministry. Paul talks about that process:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:1-5).*

Salvation is God's free gift and is received immediately. However, building character, knowledge and experience for ministry takes time.

Moses knew he was called by God much earlier in his life when he made his first failed-attempt at delivering Israel. But he needed God to build his character to make him faithful in ministry.

### How Moses Changed His Thinking about Ministry

Moses was in for a rude awakening. He thought the people would respond with gratitude and joy at his attempt to deliver them. *"For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand"* (Acts 7:25). Instead, they rejected him and his leadership: *"Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?"* (Acts 7:27). Disillusioned, he fled to the desert.

Forty years later, things were different. God had clearly sent and enabled him, and the timing was correct. Certainly this time Israel would understand. And, to an extent, they did, *"The people believed ... and they bowed their heads and worshipped"* (Exodus 4:31).

But Moses had to learn an important principle: ***Ministry is first seeking God, then, and only then, is it about serving people.*** Though we are ultimately sent to people, we must first sit before God. We must seek His face. We must learn from Him. This is so important that it is worth repeating: ***Ministry is first seeking God, not serving people.*** Let me say it another way...our ministry is first to God and then to people. If we seek to first please people, then we fail to please God.

In the training of the twelve disciples, Jesus called them with distinct priorities in mind: *"Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach"* (Mark 3:14). Do you notice the two priorities? One is definitely "ministry to people" – He was going to *"send them out to preach."* But before that ever occurred, there was a training period where they would be developed into the men of God He wanted them to be.

He said, *“that they might be with Him.”* *With Him* to do what? To learn the very lessons you and I must learn:

- To learn that our relationship with God comes before our ministry to people.
- To learn to depend on the Holy Spirit for power in ministry.
- To learn that you cannot base your success in ministry by the response of people – but on your obedience to God.

People are like sheep and are easily influenced by changing circumstances. Good times? They will follow God. Bad times? They will begin to look elsewhere.

But God is eternal. He does not change. Moses had to learn to find his joy, not in the applause of the people, but in the approval of God.

### **The Challenge of Leadership**

Moses was obedient to deliver God’s message to Pharaoh. He did his duty – but ministry is not done in a vacuum, and circumstances change quickly. The day before, Moses was basking in the sunshine of the people’s acceptance (Exodus 4:31), but today the dark storm clouds of adversity surrounded him as the people reacted to the edicts of Pharaoh.

*Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.” So they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days’ journey into the desert and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” Then the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.” And Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!” So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’ Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words” (Exodus 5:1-9).*

And what was the people’s response? *“Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us”* (Exodus 5:21).

The challenge of leadership is always to maintain perspective in the midst of adversity. This time, instead of running away to the desert in fear, Moses ran to God.

*So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all” (Exodus 5:22-23).*

What a change! Moses had learned a great lesson. The source of our sufficiency cannot be based on people and how they respond to our message. It must be based on our relationship with Jesus Christ.

If our ministry is primarily to please people and make them happy, we will never please God – and we will never do what is best for people in the long run. Remember Paul’s words: *“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10, ESV).*

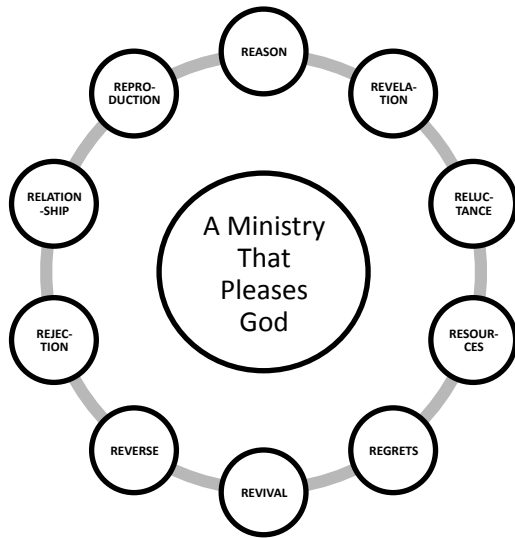
We expect opposition from Satan and this world. We, like Moses, must also be prepared, at times, to be misunderstood by God’s own people that we seek to serve. In Exodus 5:14, some of the Hebrew officers were beaten because the normal workload was not met. We may be falsely accused or become discouraged because of the lack of fruit. What will you do? Go to Jesus. He *“will never leave us or forsake us;”* He is *“the same yesterday, today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:5, 8).

## Bible Study

Read Mark 3:14.

1. Why was it so important for the disciples to be “*with (Jesus)*”? What would they learn?
2. It appears that the natural result of being “*with Him*” was that Jesus would then send them out to preach. Why is that the natural result?
3. If people claim to walk with Jesus, but are never motivated to minister to others, what should we conclude?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to sit at your feet. I want to learn from You. I want You to be the source of my sufficiency. When dark times come, I want to look to You, not to others, for the smile of acceptance.



### Understanding the Burden

I wonder if Moses thought that since God sent Him that there would be no opposition or pressure associated with his ministry. It is easy to expect opposition from Satan and the world as we proclaim the truth of the Gospel – but we rarely expect it from God's people. Yet the reality of ministry is that problems *within the church* are more serious and dangerous than *problems outside the church*.

Paul faced his share of troubles. And they weren't just the pressures from the culture – it was often the challenges within the church:

*(I was) in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? (2 Corinthians 11:23-29).*

The Jews were angry with Moses (and God) about the extra burdens that were placed on them. They complained and revolted. When the Gospel is proclaimed, it will bring its own burdens to people: they may be rejected by friends and family, faced with persecutions, and faced with the internal battles of the flesh as they try to live out their new faith.

One of the hardest things in ministry is when your faithful message adds on top of the heavy burdens people are already carrying. The Hebrew people were stressed to the max with their daily lives – and now Moses’ message had resulted in extra burdens.

Rejection ... hurt ... pain ... and failure. It’s all around us. Do you know how many times many pastors want to quit? *Every Monday morning!* Ministry is hard and exhausting. It is draining and discouraging.

Our ministry is to point people to Jesus who will lighten their load: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30).

But please notice: **there is a big difference between a light burden and the easy way out.** Most people will opt for the easy way out of a situation. That’s why couples divorce, churches split, and conflicts go unresolved. People choose the easy way out. They don’t want to expend the effort it takes to do the right thing.

God’s pattern in ministry is the same for all of us. God does not try to make us happy in life by removing the pressures of life. *His goal is not to make us happy, but to make us holy.* He uses pressures to bring us to the point where we know we cannot do it on our own. The burdens are part of the process. We cannot stay in the *spiritual nursery* all of our lives, asking people to meet our needs. We must grow *beyond ourselves* – and begin to look at how we can *serve others*. Instead of complaining about our circumstances, we must view our circumstances as that which God will use for the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul understood that:

*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (Philippians 1:12-14).*

Paul was in prison. The church at Philippi was facing persecution. But, inspired by Paul’s example, they stepped up to the plate and ministered in Jesus’ name to their city. ***Just because something is going wrong doesn’t mean God isn’t in it!***

## **Implications for Modern Ministry**



Our ministry is to present Jesus as Lord and us as servants. The Christian life is not a means to happiness; it is a call to die. Too many ministers think that they must draw a crowd – and the best way they know how to do that is to entertain people:

- Student ministries are too often built on a little devotion and a lot of fun and games. Instead of seeking to produce mature disciples of Christ and give them a Biblical foundation before going off to college or into their careers, many student-ministry-pastors focus on drawing a crowd and meeting temporary needs.
- Twenty-first century attraction ministries are often “*an inch deep and a mile wide.*” In other words, they are great at getting people in the front door; they just don’t know what to do once they are there. This is especially true in North America, where large churches are popping up all over the landscape. Unfortunately, when a “better show” comes into town, many run over there to the “newest and greatest.”
- People today are looking for authentic spirituality. In the 1990s in the United States, evangelical young adults were exposed to seeker-sensitive worship services where they discovered that the church had borrowed from the world of MTV, shopping malls, and sitcom laugh tracks to keep them coming back. This realization led them to be skeptical toward the whole Christian program, as if Jesus were just one more product. Many left the faith, while those who remained insisted on something more real, more authentic, from their Christian spirituality.

**The question, “*Why did God send me?*” must be answered by every pastor, student ministries leader, small group facilitator, parent and anyone who claims the title of servant-leader in the church today.** Did God send you to glamorize the Christian life so that you would draw a bigger crowd? Or did He send you to build maturing disciples of Christ who will be able to stand the test in the midst of the fires of adversity?

So why did He send you? What’s your message? Here is what Jesus said to the growing crowds:

*Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:23-26).*

“*Deny yourself.*” That doesn’t sound too entertaining. “*Take up your cross daily.*” The cross was not a piece of cheap jewelry – it was an instrument of death ... like our modern electric chair. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves and follow Him. He is the Commander-in-Chief who makes the rules. He defines what ministry is all about.

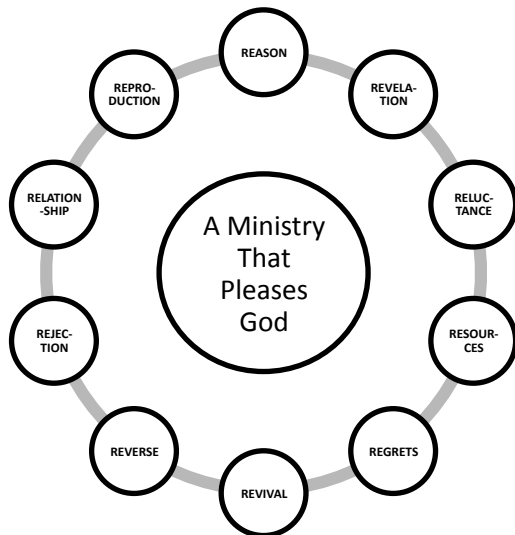
Ministry doesn't mean entertaining people. To be sure, as Christians, we ought to laugh a lot. The only people who can truly laugh are those whose eternal destiny is secure. However, ministry is *not* fun-and-games. It's pursuing Jesus – and then reaching out to others in His name.

## Bible Study

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-11. Listed below are a series of observations and applications from this passage. Underneath each principle, write how you are attempting to live that out in your life and ministry.

- My ministry is to present Jesus as the Lord – and that life and ministry is all about Him, not my personal happiness.
- My goal is not personal success but to be a servant who patterns his/her life after Jesus.
- The “treasure” is not about fulfilling selfish and fleshly desires, but the reality of Jesus in my life.
- Ministry is not a demonstration of human power, entertainment and personality. It is the power of God working in and through me.
- To preach a message of self-help, seeking to motivate people to be better or successful from a temporal view, is to preach “*myself and not Christ.*”
- God uses troubles and pressures in my life to move me to fully surrender to the manifest life of Jesus on the inside.
- God is always moving me to the cross and death-to-self, rather than away from the cross and to a religion that focuses on self-satisfaction.

- I should not expect a Christian life without troubles, questions, disappointments and persecutions. I should not resist during those times, but submit to the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit in my life.
- Dying-to-self is always followed by the resurrection life of Jesus being manifested in my life.
- Humbling myself precedes God exalting me.



### The Sobering Truth

I remember the words my pastor told me when I was first called to the ministry: *“If you can do anything else than being a pastor, do it.”* I was shocked! Wasn’t ministry great? Weren’t you serving Jesus? Don’t you get to see lives changed? The answer is *yes* to all those questions – but there was something I was missing.

Ministry is also filled with trials, misunderstandings, disappointments, people-conflicts, pettiness, carnality, hardships, family pressures, and personal attacks – and, in some parts of the world, great persecution.

According to the New York Times (August 1, 2010), *“Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”*

- *13% of active pastors are divorced.*
- *23% have been fired or pressured to resign at least once in their careers.*
- *25% don't know where to turn when they have a family, personal conflict or issue.*
- *25% of pastors' wives see their husband's work schedule as a source of conflict.*
- *33% felt burned out within their first five years of ministry.*
- *33% say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family.*
- *40% of pastors and 47% of spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations.*

- 45% of pastors' wives say the greatest danger to them and their family is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual burnout.
- 45% of pastors say that they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.
- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 52% of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's well-being and health.
- 56% of pastors' wives say that they have no close friends.
- 57% would leave the pastorate if they had somewhere else to go or some other vocation they could do.
- 70% don't have any close friends.
- 75% report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.
- 80% of pastors say they have insufficient time with their spouse.
- 80% believe that pastoral ministry affects their families negatively.
- 90% feel unqualified or poorly prepared for ministry.
- 90% work more than 50 hours a week.
- 94% feel under pressure to have a perfect family.
- 1,500 pastors leave their ministries each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure.
- Doctors, lawyers and clergy have the most problems with drug abuse, alcoholism and suicide.<sup>8</sup>

Forty-five years later, I understand what my pastor was saying. Ministry is impossible to handle without the power of the Holy Spirit and a servant's heart. It takes an individual who is fully committed to Jesus Christ – and is willing to trust Him to be faithful to every one of His promises. Ministry is not a profession you choose. It is a calling from God. If God calls, He will enable us to do His will.

## **Ministry Impossible**

The question is, *“Can God be trusted even when we experience the opposite of what we expected God to do?”* That question gets to the heart of how much trust you and I have in the character of God.

Moses faced that same challenge ...

*And they said to them, “Let the LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all” (Exodus 5:21-23).*

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<sup>8</sup> From [www.pastorburnout.com](http://www.pastorburnout.com)

Pharaoh couldn't be trusted. He did what he did to satisfy his own selfish whims and desires. He was irrational and erratic, moody and unpredictable. He decreed that all Hebrew male babies be executed, simply to pacify his selfish fears. He made unreasonable demands on the Hebrew slaves to produce more and more bricks, even though he refused to supply the needed straw to make them.

God was *not* like Pharaoh. He was faithful to His promises to their forefathers. He never once violated His covenant to them.

But let's be honest ... every one of us at times has taken our eyes off Jesus and put them on our circumstances. We've all gone through those dark nights of the soul where God seems distant and we didn't know if we can trust Him.

Remember this principle: Satan will "H.I.T." you with temptation when you are ***Hungry, Isolated, or Tired***. The solution is always found in the character of God. We *can* trust Him. He will bring spiritual nourishment, encouragement from friends in the body of Christ, and spiritual rest so that we might live to face another day.

In the midst of the battle, He is near. In ministry, we must believe that God loves His people and that He is *for* His people. We must believe that God is good and that all things work together for the good of those who love God. The source of evil lays with Satan, not God. God has never done evil to His people – and never will.

### **Questioning God's Timing**

Moses was quick to question God's timing: "*Why haven't You delivered Your people at all?*" We have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story, Moses didn't. From the very beginning, it was God's plan to deliver His people. He was simply using the timing and circumstances to develop their faith.

And He does the same thing for us. He puts us in positions where the situation seems desperate and we are faced with a faith-challenge. Will we give up – or will we continue to trust Him? If that is your situation right now, cheer up ... you're right where He wants you.

God was at work and would certainly deliver His people – but he had a greater plan yet to fulfill. His answer to Moses comes in Exodus 6:1. "*Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.*"

Notice the word "*now*." God is patient, even with Pharaoh, but "*now*" indicates that God has cause to judge Pharaoh. He has not only defied Moses, he has defied God Himself by his refusal to obey God's command to let His people go. And God will deliver His people "*with a strong hand.*"

God has a purpose when He delays. God would judge the gods of the Egyptians through plagues. Each of the ten plagues was a judgment on the many gods that they worshiped. God would harden Pharaoh's heart after Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He would build the faith of His people in the process, testing them to prepare them for the greater tests in the journey ahead. And God would prepare the hearts of the Egyptians to give their treasures to the Israelites so they would leave with Egypt's riches.

We must also trust the timing of God in ministry. He is at work. A wise preacher said, "***And even when we can't see His hand, we can trust His heart.***"



## Bible Study

Read John 11:17-44.

1. Remember the death of Lazarus in John 11? Mary and Martha were distraught. They both questioned Jesus: *“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died”* (see verses 21 and 32).

Why was it natural for them to respond this way?

If they had been responding in faith, how do you suppose they would have supernaturally responded?

2. In verse 40, Jesus told Martha *“you will see the glory of God if you believe.”*

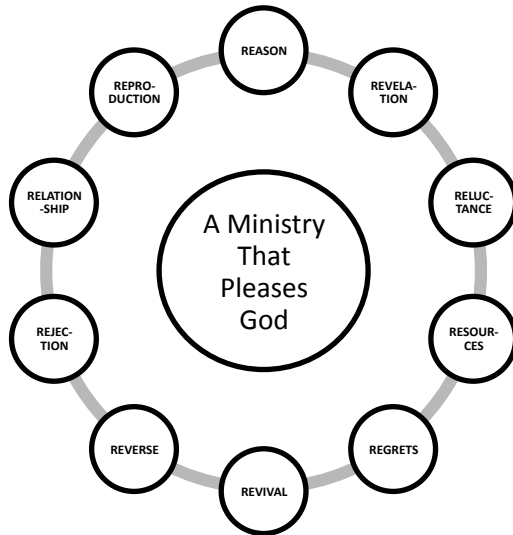
What did Jesus intend to do?

Did He intend to do that all along?

3. What was Jesus trying to teach Mary and Martha?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me to live by faith. When I cannot see Your hand, help me to trust Your heart. Teach me to wait on You.

## **Chapter 29 – Reversal #4: Don't Put Your Trust in People – They Always Disappoint**



### **Shifting People**

Moses learned early in his ministry that people are fickle, filled with fears, and unstable in their faith. The Bible often refers to followers of Jesus as “*sheep*.” That’s not a compliment! Sheep are dumb, stubborn, shortsighted, and always follow the crowd. “*So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage* (Exodus 6:9).

A few days before this, the people received his message with joy. But now they don’t believe him, because of the pain they suffered. This will not be a one-time-experience in ministry for Moses. He will face their disobedience and stubbornness many times to come. And it will be one of the most difficult things for Moses to face in ministry.

My guess is that you have already experienced that in your ministry – perhaps many times over. There have been the broken promises, the ones who left, the ones who simply abandoned the faith, and the ones who became your enemies. Welcome to the realities of ministry!

### **What Do You Do?**

You go to God. You go to the One who is unchanging and unaffected by the shifting sands of circumstances. That’s exactly what Moses did. He prayed to God:

*And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, “The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 6:12-13).*

We see a glimpse of Moses’ ministry here: Pharaoh will not listen to him; Israel will not listen to him; and there were times he even felt that God would not listen to him. But God was constant in His encouragement and strength for Moses in the midst of rejection. ***God may seem silent to us when we experience rejection in ministry, but He is always there for us. He is silent to test us and strengthen us.***

When people you lead become discouraged, they will often rebel. They won’t follow, and they won’t understand what you are trying to do in ministry. I have seen young Christians in their early ministry attempts experience apathy, rejection and even ridicule from those they were trying to minister to. Some of them became so disillusioned they ultimately quit their ministry.

Every time we mentor future leaders, we need to help them understand that their ministry is first to seek the heart of God, ***then*** to serve people. And it is when they seek God’s heart they will develop strong convictions that will help them face the battles of ministry. When we reverse that order, we will fail in ministry.

### **Welcome to the Wonderful World of Immaturity in the Church**

I’ve kept a list of some of the things I’ve seen along the way. I’ve changed the circumstances for the sake of anonymity, but the same spiritual battles have been repeated over and over. Here’s a small sampling:

- A leader in our women’s ministry quit because she had a personality clash with another woman.
- A Sunday School teacher quit because someone else in the class thought he was a poor teacher.
- A deacon stumbled when he saw his pastor telling jokes at a church social and thought the pastor was not spiritual enough. (Humor is good for the soul.)
- A new believer quit the church because he saw other Christians disagreeing in a church business meeting. (Imagine that ... probably the first time anyone ever disagreed in a church business meeting!)
- A pastor quit because he got tired of trying to live up to the unreasonable expectations of the church.
- A singer quit because she felt she did not get to sing enough solos.

- I've heard Christians say they could not come to worship God as long as a certain person was in the church. My response? I asked them if they came to worship God or man!

Every one of these incidences of immaturity and carnality is abhorrent to God. As leaders, we must be ready to trust Jesus, no matter *how* people respond.

Moses was to be faithful to God regardless of the response of the people. I confess I have struggled with the temptation to please everyone. I want people to like me and yet in ministry that is not possible. We must have the conviction that the Word of God is our final authority in ministry, not the opinions of people. We can lead like Aaron, hearing first the voices of people or like Moses – hearing the voice of God. Remember, **our ministry is first to God and then to people**. Whenever we reverse that order we will fail in ministry.

### **Leading the Sheep**

Many have said, “The body of Christ is the only army that shoots its wounded.” So how do we lead such a group? Let me offer a few suggestions.

1. **Lead With A Higher Motive.** By that I mean don't get involved in the petty arguments and disagreements. Put out the fires quickly and keep people focused on the Lord and the mission at hand.
2. **Lead From Character.** Lead with integrity and maturity. Set the bar in terms of what is expected of a Christ-follower and model for the people you lead what it means to be a godly man or woman.
3. **Lead By Equipping.** Don't just tell people to stop fighting. Teach them *how* to resolve conflicts. Practice church discipline (see Matthew 18:15-20 for Jesus' teaching on this important subject). Work hard at maintaining unity within the body of Christ.

## Bible Study

Let's look today at a couple of practical commands in the Bible that relate to preserving unity.

1. Read Ephesians 4:3.

How can we be *diligent* to preserve the unity of the Spirit?

2. Read Colossians 3:14.

What does it mean to "*put on love*"?

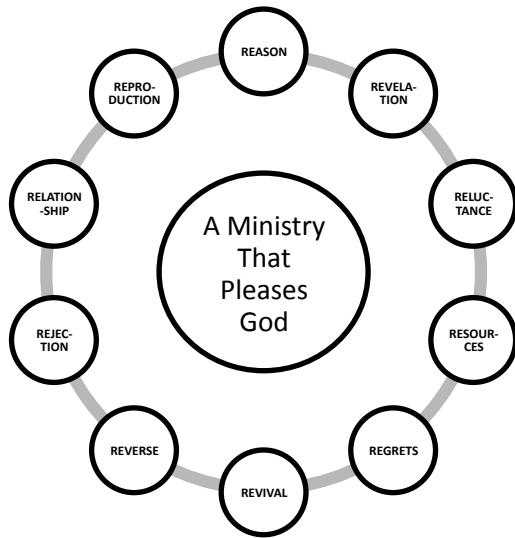
In what way is brotherly love in the body of Christ "*the perfect bond of unity*"?

3. Read John 17:23.

What did Jesus pray for?

Why is *unity in the body* such a powerful witness to the world? In what ways does it demonstrate the reality of Jesus?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me to lead Your people. Even when they are hard to lead, give me love and patience, and help me keep my eyes on You, the author and perfecter of my faith.



### Identifying a Counterfeit

When the United States Department of the Treasury trains to spot counterfeit money, they don't do it by focusing on the fakes. They study the originals – the real stuff. They know that when you know the way true money looks you'll easily spot the counterfeit. The same is true in ministry. It's easy to spot false (or incomplete) ministries if we simply take the Word of God and study it to find out what type of ministry pleases God.

Moses saw first-hand Satan's counterfeits to God's power. In obedience to God, Moses had cast his rod before Pharaoh and it became a serpent. *"But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods"* (Exodus 7:11-12).

Satan didn't give up without a fight just because God had sent Moses. But the challenge of counterfeits ultimately led to God's greater glory as the Rod of God swallowed up the sorcerers' rods. Even today Satan seeks to confuse people with counterfeits to hinder the work of God. In ministry we find that the enemy sometimes counterfeits even the gifts of the Spirit. I have been grieved to see God's people led astray with counterfeits, all in the name of the work of God and the Holy Spirit.

Some think that if something is done in the name of God it is automatically of God. Just because something is *supernatural* doesn't mean it is of God. Here are a few examples from the Bible of Satan's counterfeits:

- God warns Israel to be aware of false prophets that seek to lead them astray even if these signs come to pass (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).
- There are false apostles and false prophets who are disguised as ministers of Christ. Satan even transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-14).
- Satan can deceive us through preaching that uses the name of Jesus but represents a very different Jesus from the One portrayed in the Bible (2 Corinthians 11:3). There is “another gospel” and a receiving of a spirit that is not the Holy Spirit.
- Satan will one day manifest great power, signs and lying wonders to deceive God’s people (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

There are three types of counterfeits I want us to take a look at. The first is a false or counterfeit Gospel.

### A Counterfeit Gospel – Truth Matters!

There are many today who seek to spread a very wide banner over the Church, saying that it really doesn’t matter what people believe about Jesus ... as long as they love one another. ***Nothing could be further from the truth!*** It matters who you believe Jesus is – and it matters what kind of message we proclaim!

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ (Galatians 1:6-10).*

Cult groups abound around the world. Various perversions of Christianity distort the Gospel. Both the Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and the Jehovah’s Witnesses preach false gospels where they say that Jesus is not fully God and that He is not God come in the flesh. Their counterfeit gospel is not a Gospel of grace but adds human works to the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

One of the most serious perversions of the Gospel is the Prosperity Gospel, which appeals to our base desires to be rich, powerful and in control. This Prosperity Gospel has become very popular around the world, especially in Africa and Asia. I would warn all of you who serve in areas where this false gospel is gaining ground to stand firm and speak against its perversion.

Multitudes followed Jesus for His miracles and healings. But when He spoke the truth of the Gospel, many deserted Him. The “hard sayings” of Jesus had a way of separating those who knew the truth and because of it were converted to Jesus, and those who were simply there for the “show” (see John 6:60-66). It is discouraging to see many who are easily led astray by those willing to attract through the sensual or to false supernatural manifestation.

When God chooses to heal or work supernaturally, the focus is on the glory of the Lord Jesus and the salvation of the lost. It is not to build the ministry and the funds of a man. Our ministry is to win, disciple, and build churches, not the ministry of a man.

We see extra-biblical revelation that comes from a supposedly specially gifted servant. Often that revelation is in direct contrast to the clear teachings of the Bible.

Test the spirits (1 John 4:1-3). Do not believe everything people say, even if they say it in the name of Jesus. Listen with discernment to *know the truth*.

### **Counterfeit Responses to the Gospel**

Moses must have been very confused as he looked at the responses of the people to the work of God. First Pharaoh said the Israelites could leave. Then he changed his mind. The Jews rejoiced at the work of God. Then they complained about their hardships. They liked Moses. Then they didn't like Moses.

I am sure many of you can relate to this. The world of ministry can be so up and down emotionally. Jesus prepared His disciples for the fickle responses of people when He explained the parable of the Sower and the seeds.

*Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13:18-23).*

Some heard but didn't care. Some heard and responded with you, but were never truly born again and therefore never truly changed. Some heard, but the Gospel was choked out by the cares of this world. Finally some heard, understood, and bore great amounts of fruit.

In ministry we can expect to see all four types of responses. Don't be discouraged. Don't quit. Salvation is a work of God. It is *His* responsibility to change a person's nature, not *ours*. I've seen some people respond to the Gospel with great emotion, only to fade away a couple of weeks later. I've seen others who didn't have such an outward display of emotion, but truly understood why Jesus had died for him. Those people have remained faithful – and have brought great joy to me as I've seen them progress in the faith.



## Counterfeits to Success

The world tells me that success is based on response: *the greater people's response is, the greater the work of God.* God's definition of success is entirely different. ***He defines success based on my obedience, not people's response.*** You and I are to start with God. We are to wait before Him, hear His word, then go to people with God's message, knowing that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God and not our words to change people.

If we base our ministry on the applause and praise that people give us, we'll always be disappointed. If we measure our ministry success on how many people responded, we'll fall into the comparison trap and always feel like we don't measure up. The Bible is full of stories of men who had faithful ministries but disappointing results:

- Noah preached for 120 years to a mocking world. There were no converts except his family.
- Ezekiel was sent to a people that God said would not hear him because they would not hear God.
- Jeremiah wept for his nation but they rejected his message.

Often we get discouraged because we see others who have numerically greater ministries. We feel there must be something wrong with *us* ... we've tried to be faithful, we've worked hard to be clear in our teaching ... but somehow we just don't see the results others are seeing. As a result, we're never the ones invited to speak at conferences ... we don't get our name mentioned among the "*successful*" ... and we are tempted to take it personally.

To those who are discouraged because of the lack of fruit that they see, may I suggest a few thoughts?

- Different harvest fields reap different results. Even in Jesus' parable, some saw 30%, some saw 60%, and some saw 100% increase. That's up to God – not you.
- We cannot judge the harvest by numbers, for there are many tares among the wheat. The Great White Throne Judgment will reveal the truth about the harvest ... but not until then. Some ministries gather a crowd but never produce lasting disciples.
- There are some who seek to justify their few results as "faithfulness to God" when it may be laziness and a lack of faith.
- Others justify their many results as proof of their faithfulness and the blessing of God, when it may be simply compromising the message and giving people what they want. Does the means always justify the end? Some feel if the message is popular and draws a crowd, they are doing things right. If the message is unpopular and they lose a crowd, then they must change their strategy to keep the crowd.

## **It's Your Choice**

How are you going to build your ministry? Will it be by seeking to give people what they want? Will it be built around meeting people's felt-needs and striving to attract a great number of people? Ministry is certainly identifying with people's needs – but that is not our first calling. Many people can be drawn to a ministry that preaches the love and forgiveness of God, but does not also preach that we must die to self and follow Jesus into fruitful discipleship. Our greatest problem is our self-life in the flesh. Rather than preaching "*self-fulfillment*," we need to proclaim "*self-sacrifice*" in serving Jesus and meeting the needs of others.

## Bible Study

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-13.

1. Paul uses three analogies in verses 3-6. What do these tell you about a good and faithful servant of Christ Jesus?

v. 3-4 – *The good soldier ...*

v. 5 – *The disciplined athlete ...*

v. 6 – *The hardworking farmer ...*

2. In this chapter we talked about three counterfeits. In what ways have you seen those evidenced in ministry today?

*A counterfeit Gospel ...*

*Counterfeit responses ...*

*Counterfeit views of success ...*