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CHRISTIAN
MINISTRY



THE FOCUS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Christian ministry is all about leadership. It is not just leadership in general. It is all about spiritual leadership. Churches more than anything else desire a minister who focuses on the spiritual. Regularly ask these questions: Am I growing spiritually? Am I helping Christ's church grow spiritually? You can do all kinds of ministry, but if spiritual growth is not at the heart of that ministry, very little will be accomplished for God. Churches desire that their ministers be spiritual leaders, but spirituality is the easiest area to squeeze out of a busy schedule.

Here are some ideas to help you grow spiritually as a minister in the church.

1. Focus your ministry, first and foremost, on Christ. Ephesians 4:15 presents a focal point for spiritual leadership: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." Spend some reflective time daily praying and determining what Christ has done in your life and the life of your congregation.
2. Focus your ministry on love. The heart of ministry is loving God and loving people. In 1 Thessalonians 3:12, Paul gives the challenge and prayer to love people. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you." There is a theme that applies here. "If there is someone in need, we are brothers indeed." Because you love people, find those needs and meet them.
3. Focus your ministry on the Word of God. Strong churches are churches that are built on God's Word. First Peter 2:2, 3 challenges the church, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." The writer of Hebrews affirms that some need more than mere milk, that those who are more mature need "solid food" (Hebrews 5:14). Make a serious commitment and allot the needed

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time to feed your congregation's members both the milk and the solid food that they need. And don't let it get stale!

4. Focus your ministry on your own growth. Ministers who stop growing are ministers who do not remain relevant in reaching people. Second Peter 1:5-8 insists that you "make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Growth develops character, and godly character attracts people to Christ.
5. Focus your ministry on grace and knowledge. The church is a place where grace happens. According to 2 Peter 3:18, that grace does not exist in a vacuum but is based on the knowledge of God's Word. "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen." People desire grace. The Christian minister can show that grace better than anybody else.
6. Focus your ministry on faithfulness. Ministry is a marathon, not a sprint. Second Corinthians 9:10 speaks of the way God multiplies our faithfulness to him. "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness."
7. Focus your ministry on lost people in your community and around the world. Ministers are Great Commission people. Matthew 28:18-20 states Jesus' vision for the church. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And

surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Making disciples counts enormously in God’s economy.

8. Focus your ministry on prayer. The New Testament has much to say about the role of prayer in the church. First, the church is to be known for prayer. “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2). The whole church, everyone who is a part of it, is to be involved in prayer. “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:8). The prayer is to be world focused. “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (1 Timothy 2:1). As a minister in the Lord’s church, do not neglect this all important ministry of prayer. Excel in it, and lead others to be involved as well.

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

Someone must lead the church. This is the responsibility of the elders. However, the minister often serves as the spokesman for the shepherds. His skills in effectively delivering messages make him the most likely candidate to deliver and explain the teachings and spiritual directions of the church leadership. Congregations can follow only one leadership strategy. The minister and elders need to be on the same page.

If the minister is to help lead, he must know where he is going. A good description of the minister as leader is the prime minister. He does not lead as a dictator but as a leader among leaders. He primes the pump and gets things going. Often he serves as a cheerleader encouraging the shepherds into action. The minister does not have all the answers, but he does know where the church should go and how to get there. He is not a power broker when it comes to his leadership. He simply has some power, some answers, and some giftedness. According to Ephesians 4:11 he, along with the pastors and teachers, prepares God’s people for works of service. His challenge, encouragement, and direction as a minister make the church leaders more effective.

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Ministers must work well with elders. Determine with the elders the priorities for the congregation. During the early years of ministry, it is essential that you get to know your congregation. You must also get to know the leadership procedures of the local congregation. Every church has its unique style of leadership organization. Work within the system to accomplish the most with approval.

During your first year keep change to a minimum. Improvements happen slowly in most churches. Memorize this idea. Repeat it to yourself regularly. Making wholesale changes too early can shorten your ministry in the church, and it can weaken or even split the church. First, get to know the people of the congregation. Then get to know the leadership structure. Improvements can be made later.

Servant leadership models Jesus. It is leadership with a towel to wash feet rather than a whip to drive people. This type of leadership is respected among followers.

MINISTRY AS A PROFESSIONAL CALLING

This is the time to be convinced that a professional call to ministry is a biblical concept. Paul stated the case well in Ephesians 4:11–13. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” God has gifted us to minister for Him. Throughout history He has used His leaders in ministry to serve Him. He chose Abraham to leave his homeland to go to a new land and to become a new people. Abraham’s ministry for God began in a small way but produced big benefits. He led the Hebrew people in performing God’s works of service. All ministry traces to this event in history.

God works in the lives of his men and women. He uses His leaders to affect history. Early on we find the first call of a person to separate himself from family, tribe, and clan and to lead another people for God (Genesis 11:27–12:7; Acts 7:2-8). Another example is Moses. Moses left his home (Pharaoh and Egypt) to lead God’s people out of Egypt, where they had suffered as slaves to ungodly people. He was a national hero for the people of God. His focus was not just leaving slavery, but also turning to deeper commitment to God. Exodus 13:21, 22; 14:19, 20 presents powerful statements of God’s hand of guidance and protection on Moses’ ministry through the pillar of cloud and fire by day and night.

Joshua led God’s people in destroying the walls of Jericho. He also led them in a spiritual pilgrimage that would mold their thinking even through today. Other leaders of God’s people included Elijah, Daniel, Ruth, Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, and Titus. There are two characteristics of these people who were called by God to lead His people. (1) They were willing to follow God’s leading anywhere. (2) They were willing to lead.

In the early days of ministry it is essential that you be convinced of your call by God to lead His people.

WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

Never overlook the importance of prayer. Pray first, not last. Paul emphasizes in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that even when we do not know or understand, God knows and understands. That is characteristic of our God. He always knows. Rod Huron states it best. “We must prepare ourselves, then our sermons. The very fact that we are ministers will work against our spiritual life if we are not careful. We study a Bible, but for a text; we pray, but in front of a group or beside a hospital bed.” Choose a specific time and place, preferably as soon as you get up. Hit the floor praying. Give praise to God for this day of service He has given you. Pray

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with your people. Pray alone. Pray throughout the day. Pray when God awakens you at night.

Go to the Bible for help. Read your Bible as more than a tool for study. I would recommend reading *Power for Today* or some similar devotional help on a daily basis.

Turn to your ministry colleagues. They are invaluable sources of information for planning, counsel, study, and encouragement. Ministerial associations are valuable tools to enhance your ministry.

Do not overlook the value of more education. There are Christian universities and graduate schools around the world. These can enhance your ability to minister more effectively.

The elders in the local church need to be seen as your best friends. They know the local church better than anybody else. It would be a mistake to overlook their wisdom.

Church members often minister to the minister. You are a leader in the church. Leaders need encouragement and support from the followers. Solicit the ministry of all believers from the congregation. Often members of the church know the needs within the congregation before you know them. They can share those needs with you so you can minister in a better way. The church needs to laugh together and cry together.

Professional Christian counselors can provide a major assistance to the local minister. Know these professionals well and be ready to call on them for referrals in counseling situations. It is not usually healthy for a minister to counsel with someone more than one or two times. Counseling can become very time-consuming and detract from your more primary duties. Also you are probably getting in way over your head in your counseling abilities. Safeguards should always be in place when counseling with women. Keep the door opened and be sure that another person is in the building at the time. Professional Christian counselors can also help when there is a special need in the minister's family. The counseling visit is confidential. You can be assured that whatever is discussed stays with the counselor.

Take time for rest. Ministry is demanding, and you will work extremely long hours. Sometimes your primary need is for rest. Every day spend time reading God's Word. Spend time in prayer. This can provide the daily resting in the Lord that you need. Every week take at least one day off. Make sure you make some time for monthly reflection. Taking a few days off quarterly for planning can provide rest in knowing a direction for the future. Take a yearly vacation just to get away from the grind of ministry. When you rest properly, you will be able to minister in a refreshing way. Nobody likes to be around someone who is always tired and fatigued. Rest can add energy to your ministry.

WHAT TO DO THE FIRST DAYS OF MINISTRY

1. Set up your office. As strange as it may sound it is very important that a minister set up an office that will meet his needs and the needs of the congregation. You will spend hours at the office in study, planning, prayer, Bible study, counseling, and meetings. If you take the time to set up your office early in your ministry, it will help with organization from the first day of your ministry. This will also show your congregation that you are serious about the profession of ministry.
2. Make your own personal spiritual life a priority. Spend time in prayer and Bible study through some setting of daily worship.
3. Get to know the people. Visit in their homes for 30-minute periods with a plan. It is amazing how this plan can jump-start any ministry.
4. Make hospital calls from the first day of your ministry. Make sure this is a priority. Make shut-in calls when needed. There are congregations today where the minister does not need to do much visitation, but in most churches it is still an essential for a successful ministry. Make sure you take a church member to make calls with you. This helps in discipling other people.

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5. The early days of ministry make a good time to visit Sunday school classes and to scan the halls and remote areas of the church building. Find the people and speak to them.
6. Call on the elderly people. One such visit may touch three or four generations.
7. Visit sports games and other activities of the youth in your congregation. Ministers should also spend time with youth and help set the direction for their eternity.
8. Walk through the aisles in the auditorium before services just to greet people. It is amazing how much ministry can take place at this time.
9. The opening days of ministry are days to develop relationships. Spend your time thinking relationships. Constantly ask this question: "How can I get to know these people better?" By knowing your congregation better, you will be able to minister better.
10. Size up the real influencers in the church. Work through the natural leaders, not around them. If you will work through the leadership, you can accomplish much in ministry.
11. These are days to listen, listen, and continue to listen. Learn the history and story of the congregation. Mold into the culture of the community. This will take time, but work at it. The time spent in this area helps you become relevant to the needs of the community and the congregation.
12. Meet the other staff members. Make it clear that you are a team, and show respect for each person on the team.
13. Keep confidences. Never spread information given to you in confidence.
14. Develop and share your core values, not your goals. Relate your core values with your dreams and share your dreams.
15. Speak well of your predecessor. This will help people speak well of you when you leave. It also develops a huge amount of trust knowing that you would not defame another minister. Cheap shots at another minister are easy to make, but they do not advance the cause of Christ.

WORKING WITH PEOPLE

As a minister you are in the people business. Work with people, rather than against them. Change is slow in most ministries. As new staff, realize that the church did not get to its present condition overnight. It will probably not change overnight. Listen to the people more than you present your ideas.

When you present your plans, dreams, goals, and programs, emphasize the big picture. Include young and old in your planning process. Effective ministers inspire people to action. In some ways you are in the cheerleading business.

Focus on the Word of God. Remember Luke 24:32: "They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'"

Live what you preach. Paul was right in 2 Corinthians 3:3: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." We are in the heart surgery business. Consistently I hear Christians emphasize their desire for ministers to teach them God's Word in a relevant way.

We are in the people business, but we must set serious boundaries. Follow these 10 commandments of ministry success.

1. Take special action in regard to purity. Repeated counseling sessions with a member of the opposite sex should be avoided. Never travel alone with a member of the opposite sex. Watch the innocent hugs and careless touches. Inappropriate behavior begins with an innocent look and touch. Do not have lunch meetings with a member of the opposite sex without including more people than just that one.
2. Never use pornography of any kind, and carefully monitor the use of the Internet for any inappropriate use by others.

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3. Focus your ministry on evangelism and discipleship. God loves lost people, and we need to love them too. This love leads them to become Christ followers.
4. Learn to say “no” early in your ministry.
5. Demand a ministry of all believers. Refuse to do ministry alone. If you do not insist on using the believers in ministry, they might just stand by and watch you burn out.
6. Follow the church leaders in every good and scriptural endeavor placed before you.
7. Set family boundaries in your ministry. If you save the world and lose your family, you have lost everything.
8. Protect your spiritual life! No one else can do that but you.
9. Go to a ministry seminar every year. Attending Christian lectureships and self-improvement seminars will also enhance your ministries.
10. Stretch yourself through education and missions.

ELDER/STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

Here are some serious issues to consider in elder/staff relationships.

Who is the boss?

- Honor that authority.
- Understand the lines of authority.
- Know which lines of authority are practical and which are authoritative.

Your job is to honor God and serve faithfully under an eldership. This will pay rich dividends in team success. Realize that as a minister you do not see the whole picture. The elders may see more of the picture, and you should depend on their guidance in many ministry issues.

Being a minister does not mean that your work is less important than the elders'. Once you settle this issue, your ministry is ready to succeed. Covenant to support the eldership and fellow ministers. Each person has a unique giftedness and personality. Thank goodness we are not all the same. If that were the case, the church would quickly become a boring place.

Have a clear understanding of vacation time, contracts, salary, lecturership time, youth camp involvement, education, preaching opportunities, and other such details before you take the job. Do not wait until after you take a new ministry to settle these issues. You may be disappointed if you wait.

Minister's spouses have one of the most difficult roles in the church.

- Watch out for jealousy.
- Keep strict confidences.
- Be aware of taking too heavy a leadership responsibility in the ministry.
- Be aware of taking special advantage of church people. Church people love you, but do not take advantage of the relationship.
- Avoid complaining and whining. It does not help your spouse's ministry.
- Always support the other ministers.

POTENTIAL STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Date: _____

1. General Information:

Full Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

e-Mail Address: _____

2. Academic Training:

Please list all educational and special training above high school, including dates, schools, degrees earned, and degrees you will pursue in the future.

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| Dates | Schools | Degrees |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| A. | | |
| B. | | |
| C. | | |
| D. | | |
| E. | | |

3. Marital Status:

Single Married If Married, for how long? _____

Have you or your spouse ever been divorced?

Spouse's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

4. Spouse's Academic Training:

Please list all educational and special training above high school, including dates, schools, degrees earned, and degrees you will pursue in the future.

| Dates | Schools | Degrees |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| A. | | |
| B. | | |
| C. | | |
| D. | | |
| E. | | |

5. Names and birth dates of all children:

6. Finances:

Do you have a good credit rating? Yes No Not Sure

a. Would you authorize a credit check? Yes No

b. Have you ever failed to pay a debt? Yes No

c. Your present debts (other than housing):

School \$ _____ Car \$ _____ Other \$ _____

d. What is your philosophy of giving financially to the church?

7. If you are married, please describe your marriage.

a. If you or your spouse has been divorced, please explain the circumstances.

b. If you have children, please describe your children and your relationship with them.

c. How does your family feel about your being involved in vocational ministry?

d. How do you envision your spouse supporting you in a role such as this?

8. Please briefly describe your spiritual pilgrimage.

(When and how were you converted to Christ? How has God matured your faith over the years? What has God been doing in your life the last year? etc.)

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- a. What do you consider your spiritual gifts? How have they been confirmed?
- b. What is your long-term goal in ministry?
- c. What is your view of the mission of the church, and how would your ministry relate to it?
- d. What is your philosophy of ministry?
- e. Describe how you have recruited and trained leaders in the past and how you anticipate doing it in the future. How would you develop a leadership culture?

9. Please respond to the following questions:

- a. How do you view the inspiration of Scripture?
- b. How do you view the role of women in the church?
- c. What is your understanding of spiritual gifts?

- d. How in the past have you worked in cooperation with leaders and ministers from other church traditions? Was this a positive or negative experience? Explain.

- e. Are there certain loyalties you have to particular educational institutions or missionary endeavors? If so, explain the nature of these loyalties.

- f. What are your views on worship, and how does it give focus to the life of the congregation, your own spiritual formation, and commitment to Christian daily living? How have you dealt with worship styles differences within the church, and how would you negotiate such differences in the future?

- g. What is your understanding of baptism?

- h. What is your understanding of the Lord's Supper?

10. How would you describe your personality? How do you handle conflict? How do you respond to stress? Describe a recent interpersonal conflict and how you resolved it. Would you and your spouse agree to attend a vocational ministry assessment center?

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- a. If married, how would you describe your spouse's personality?

- b. How does he/she handle conflict? How does he/she respond to stress?

11. What models of ministry and leadership do you see being relevant in a postmodern age? What is postmodernism?

12. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? What are the areas where you need the greatest improvement?

- a. As a leader?

- b. In interpersonal relationships?

- c. In your family?

13. How have you related to non-Christian and/or unchurched people in the past?

14. How do you view being a part of and/or leading a church staff-team?

15. Have you had serious problems that resulted in dismissal from a church? If so, please explain.

16. What are your hobbies or interests? What spiritually refreshes you?

17. What is the most unique ministry program or experience that you have created?

18. Please list the books you have read in the past year.

19. Please list periodicals that you regularly read.

20. Please list seminars that you have attended.

21. Please list the websites that you visit regularly.

22. If you were offered a position with this congregation, what obstacles would prevent you from accepting? Do you have a timeline?

23. What kind of compensation package are you looking for? What salary and benefits would you like to receive? What kind of housing do you anticipate needing? (Apartment or house; buy, rent, or church-provided house?) Vacation time? Sick Days? Continuing Education days and allowances? Other?

24. Are there other issues or concerns that you would like us to be aware of?

TIME MANAGEMENT

The ministry is a job where there are few restrictions on time. You will set your own schedule. Do so wisely! Have a starting time to begin your workday.

One prominent minister was asked about the most important part of his day. I will never forget his response. “The most important part of my day is shaving.” He was saying the most important part of any day for a minister is getting up and getting started. In ministry you seldom punch a time clock. You have to determine your schedule. Your day should include the following activities:

- Set time for prayer and Bible reading.
- Develop office hours and advertise them to the church. I would suggest starting your day no later than 9:00 AM.
- Do the toughest tasks first.
- Set daily priorities. Make a to do list at the end of each day of what you desire to accomplish the next day. This simple practice will help you get started quickly as you begin your new day.
- Set goals and track them. Goals must be observable, measurable, and attainable. Measure activity for those goals. What are you doing to accomplish what you desire to accomplish in ministry? Make goals for all areas of your life: personal, professional, family, financial, educational, and church goals.
- Set a schedule (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and beyond). Keep

that schedule. Schedule and keep a regular day off!

- Make time for developing leadership and new people. Develop training opportunities.
- Make time for evangelism opportunities. You must lead in this area for your congregation to follow. In order to evangelize people you must develop relationships with the unchurched.
- Exercise on a regular basis.
- When you think you have nothing to do, make a telephone call to a visitor or church member for encouragement.
- Read every worthwhile book you can obtain. Set a goal to read a specific number of books per year. Set a reading schedule. Specialize in leadership books. The church needs ministers who can lead not just manage. This takes skill that can be learned by reading and doing.

THE MINISTER'S FAMILY

Far too many ministers neglect their families in a challenge to save the world. The price of losing a family is not a good option for any minister. Surely Jesus never expected us to sacrifice those closest to us in order to save the world. Scripture places strong emphasis on the importance of building strong families. Strong families make strong churches. In fact, the true measure of the minister is evidenced in his family.

What can you do to encourage strong family relationships in the midst of a very busy schedule? It starts even before you are hired!

1. Discuss unwritten expectations of family with church leaders. These will help determine whether or not you decide to serve as staff at a particular congregation.
2. Make it clear to the church that they will be hiring you, not your family. Your family members will serve as volunteers just as you expect every member to serve as time and giftedness allow, but it will not be part of your job to have your wife and children do specific tasks.

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Once you are on the job, you need to be deliberate about guarding your family relationship. To avoid giving all your time and energy to your work and allowing your family to be neglected, practice a few common-sense safeguards.

1. Block time for family! Make appointments—times for family members that cannot be altered for any reason.
2. Develop an open door policy for family members to have access to you. This helps promote the boundaries you need to develop with church members.
3. Be cautious not to dump church problems on your family. Watch what you share with your family about church things.
4. Allow family members to serve as they choose, not as you choose or someone chooses for them.
5. Go to marriage and family seminars and retreats to help strengthen your home.
6. Perhaps consider a once-a-week date night for spouse and children.

The time you spend developing family is a model to others in the church. What better compliment could you hear than these words, “The proof is in their family”?