

Developing a Personal Philosophy of Ministry

SAMPLES

My Personal Philosophy of Ministry by Tom Bartmer

For me, there is no higher calling in life than to have an on-going, deep, and loving relationship with God. I echo the apostle Paul who said, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..." (Phil 3:10). It is the deepest desire of my soul to know God in an intimate way, and I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who has made that desire possible. Having received His gift of salvation, by faith, I have come to understand that knowing and loving God is inextricably linked to following Him. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (Jn 14:15) Therefore, my desire to love Him should be equal to my desire to obey Him in all that I do. Having studied the Bible regarding this matter, it is clear to me that God has called each believer to serve Him in a special way, according to the gifts the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon those who are in Christ. Of many things I am convinced, but none as much as the fact that God has called me to be a pastor and to serve Him in that role. Of this calling, there are at least three driving values that I seek to maintain and which serve as a foundation for my philosophy of ministry:

First, as is true of any calling from God, I feel it incumbent upon me to be committed to the process of spiritual growth and growth as a pastor. To the extent that Christ seeks for me to grow and serve others in a pastoral role, I know, too, He seeks to conform me to His image. Again, I echo the thoughts of Paul who said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:12-14)

Secondly, I understand that my pastoral calling, though it is the joy of my life, does not supersede my calling as a husband to my wife and father to my children. The hierarchy of my priorities place a personal relationship to God as primary, secondly my family, and thirdly pastoral ministry. The qualifications of a pastor found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and other related passages demonstrate this measure of priorities to be biblical and sound.

Thirdly, I understand that I am foremost a servant. God has not called me to the pastorate so that I can benefit from a title, or be enamored by prestige, or climb a professional ladder. I have been called to serve. The extent as to the nature of pastoral servitude I will explain later in this paper. Suffice it to say for now, the synonym I believe is most closely associated with a pastor is the word shepherd. A pastor serves by shepherding his flock. A shepherd is basically a caretaker, one who looks after his sheep, leads them to green pastures, protects them, nurtures them, feeds them, and takes care of their needs. Obviously, a shepherd gives of himself for the health and betterment of his sheep. As a pastor, I seek to give of myself for the spiritual health and betterment of my church. To that end, I give God the praise and the glory, for He has, to my utter amazement, seen fit to place me in such a role. I am humbled to think that I, of all people, would be so greatly blessed. It is by God's grace alone that He has chosen me in this way; I cannot help but to respond with gratitude of heart and the desire to surrender my life to Him in His service. May grant me the strength to finish the race He has set before me, and finish it well.

Philosophy of Ministry Statement

Having now expounded upon the core values that serve as the foundation of my spiritual pilgrimage, I offer the following statement as a personal philosophy of ministry to which I will endeavor to adhere with regards to the pastoral call:

As a man who has been called of God to love and serve Him as a minister of the gospel, I recognize and affirm that I am foremost a servant of people. To that end, I commit my life to the spiritual success of others. I am a shepherd who will take care of his sheep. To those who need help, I will help. To those who are lost, I will lead. To those that hunger for truth, I will feed. To those who hurt, I will care. To those who need God, I will show them Christ.

The question now is, how will I accomplish this philosophy of ministry? To answer that question, I will disseminate the various concepts within the statement and make some practical applications for each:

"As a man who has been called of God to love and serve Him..."

As was stated earlier, of primary importance is my relationship with God. Cultivating that relationship, according to Scripture, is accomplished through the spiritual disciplines such as prayer, bible study, worship, meditation, times of solitude, fasting, and the like. Not only is my personal walk with God hindered by becoming lax in these disciplines, but the effectiveness of my ministry will be hindered as well. If my preaching is to remain fresh and my zeal for serving and loving others remains intact, I must have an avenue to be spiritually fed. How am I to give if I am not receiving? Therefore, I will make daily times set aside for communion with God through prayer and Bible study. I will also be devoted to read books and listen to other preachers expound the Word. In other words, I will try to saturate my life with spiritual input. I also have several leaders in our church to which I hold myself accountable for moral purity and godly living. I have asked them to regularly ask me the hard questions, to which they have wonderfully complied.

"...as a minister of the gospel..."

A wise man once told me that the call to preach is the call to prepare. I take James 3 very seriously, where he states that those who teach should seriously consider the implications of such a position. The understanding that a teacher is held accountable for what he teaches and that greater judgment is given him for teaching error has made me realize that I need a solid grounding of God's Word. If I am to impart His truth to others, I must be sure that I am prepared. This sense of responsibility has been one of the motivating factors of coming to Moody Bible Institute and enrolling in the Pastoral Studies Program. Having now completed my academic experience at Moody, I am much more confident in my ministerial tasks and I thank God for the opportunity He has given me to learn from some of the best teachers on the planet.

"...I recognize and affirm that I am foremost a servant of people..."

Having already shed some light on this topic, I will quickly jump to some of the ways I will apply this particular aspect of the statement. One of the defining characteristics of a servant is humility. And I believe that a spirit of humbleness will help keep my attitude of

servanthood alive and kicking. As long as I understand and recognize that I am only a pastor by God's grace, that I do not even remotely deserve what He has entrusted to me, then I can better see that everything I do is, in essence, a service project, engaging a perpetual gratitude for the privilege of doing anything for God. I found myself last week cleaning our church's restrooms and being struck with the fact that even doing that is a tremendous privilege, for I am serving God. I have asked my wife to stop me and let me know if there is ever a time where she senses that certain church tasks are too lowly for me to perform. Not that it should be the pastor's job to doing everything in the church, but that I not ever lose my attitude of servitude for God.

"To that end I commit my life to the spiritual success of others"

Since I am a servant, I serve to help others be a success in their spiritual lives. I see my role as an equipper, someone who can give others the tools they need to be vibrant and victorious Christians. And I will seek to do these things via the gifts that God has granted me to do. The remainder of the statement, then, is the vehicle in which this philosophy and commitment is fleshed out...

"...I am a shepherd who will take care of his sheep..."

God has entrusted me with a newly formed church that has brought a group of Christians together that I have a deep love and caring sense for. They are people who have expressed their love and care for me, and I am compelled to care for them, much as a shepherd would care for his flock. I interjected this analogy in my statement for I believe it beautifully describes what I do and wish to continue doing. It also gives me a graphic picture that will help me memorize this statement and keep it near and dear to my heart. The remaining "To those who..." sentences describe exactly how I am to be a shepherd of my sheep.

"To those who need help I will help"

This speaks to my commitment to do my best to meet any need that is brought before me. In some areas, I feel skilled to help in a direct and personal way. To those needs that are brought before me that I feel unqualified to help or that other people will be of greater help, I will endeavor to point them in the right direction. Again, this sentence affirms the priority of servanthood, whatever the situation may be.

"To those who are lost I will lead"

Spiritual leadership is the crux of pastoral ministry. It is an office that demands the responsibility of leading an entire congregation, of being accountable for the spiritual direction of the church. Such accountability staggers my imagination and puts serious implications on all I do and say, in and out of the pulpit. I must also recognize that others will invariably look to me for spiritual direction, to which I must not neglect the best of efforts.

For example, it is no secret that many look to a pastor for counseling, sometimes over dire circumstances in their life. I believe the pastor's role, by its nature, lends itself to counseling situations, and there has been many a time when people have come to me devastated and hopeless, having no answers to their problems. As a pastor, I seek to give biblical counseling and point people to the truths of scripture. When appropriate I will

lead them through various exercises and principled applications to help them deal with their problems. It is not as though I have the answers to all difficulties, but I know that God has provided His resources so that those in distress can find a way of handling their crisis. In and out of the pulpit, I serve to lead people to the biblical principles that will invariably and profoundly effect their lives. Hebrews 4:12 certainly attests to that truth.

"Those who hunger for truth I will feed"

Preaching is my love, and it is the opportunity for me to expound the Word of God to listening ears every weekly service. It is a part of pastoral ministry that I take very seriously, and I will commit a good part of my working week to Bible study and exegesis to be properly prepared to teach the Bible.

"Those who hurt, I will care"

I feel it is the duty of every pastor to give pastoral care to the sick and the dying. It is a minister's responsibility to offer their presence and their prayers to encourage and uplift the down-trodden. Therefore, visiting in peoples homes, hospital visitation, the laying on of hands, according to James 5, and praying with hurting people will encompass my job as a pastor.

"Those who need God, I will show them Christ"

Paul wrote to Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. No pastor's role is complete without the commitment to share the gospel of Christ to the lost. It is my goal to be active in the community in which I serve, to contact people who do not know Christ and seek opportunities to share God's love with them in any way possible. This is my response to the Great Commission given by Christ. Making disciples begins with leading people to a saving knowledge of Christ, and then urging them on to maturity. I would not be fulfilling the calling of God upon my life if I neglect this avenue of ministry.

On a more personal note, fulfilling the role of pastor gives me a deep sense of satisfaction and worth. Of all the pursuits of ministry, it is when I function as a pastor, in the above prescribed manner, that I receive a profound sense of joy and accomplishment. And it is personally fulfilling for me for others to recognize me as a pastor, not for the purpose of inflating an ego but for the privilege of being allowed and encouraged to fulfill a function that gives meaning and joy to my life. This joy, I believe, is the same joy that any believer would experience as they follow and fulfill God's specific calling upon their life. However, a caution must be placed regarding this role of pastor in that it is traditionally elevated above the callings of others within the church. Such attitudes are sometimes manifested in forms that create tyrannical pastoral "regimes". This ought never to be the case, and it shall not be in my ministry. Though I will lead the church, hold members accountable for godly lifestyles, and provide spiritual direction, this in no way implies some innate superiority over others who will serve and lead with me.

In conclusion, my philosophy of ministry has and will continue to define and shape the kind of pastor I am and will be. On occasion I will review it and make any pertinent changes, when having sensed God's leading to re-define or adjust it. It is according to His divine purpose that I seek to conform my life and ministry. As I have in the past seen God change me in many different ways, I know too that, in time, He may re-direct my philosophy of ministry, for His glory and honor.

SAMPLE

Today, I'd (Jeff Randleman) like to share with you my current philosophy of ministry. This is always open to change for me, because I want to make sure that my philosophy grows with me as I grow. Here is my most recent version:

Initiated Through Prayer

The church cannot exist without prayer. I pray for the congregation both as a whole and individually. Prayer is a necessity for any ministry to continue God's work effectively. Prayer needs to be focused in two major areas: ministry and personal life. Each aspect of ministry, each program and event needs to be bathed in prayer. Each and every person needs prayer regularly as a portion of ministry, as well.

The personal aspect of prayer is focused on building my relationship with God continually. I desire to continually grow closer to Christ, and the only way to achieve that closeness is through prayer. My prayer life consists of speaking as well as listening to God. My desire is to continually give him every portion of my life and myself. One of the greatest tools to accomplish this is the book of Psalms.

Lived Inside-Out

Our innermost being, that part of us that is closest to God, must be an area of our lives that is visible to others. Transparency and intimacy with God need to be the hallmarks of my life. My goal is to live this way as much as possible, and encourage others to do the same. This will be evident in the way I interact with others and consider all others ahead of myself. One of the best passages in the Bible explaining how to live a life inside out is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Other helpful texts are Matthew 23 (how not to live!) and Mark 1:35.

Oriented In Equipping Others

I feel that my strongest areas are found in serving teens, by befriending, encouraging, teaching, and discipling. I believe that God has also given me some discerning ability and some skills in organization and administration as well. A significant amount of my time needs to be focused on these strengths in order to be as effective in the Body of Christ as possible. Passages that support this are found in Ephesians 4:11-12; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12-14; and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Centered On Evangelism

Christ has charged his Church with the mission of evangelism. I feel that this is the Church's main mission as well as my own. Although I do not see myself as particularly gifted in this area, I do have a passion to see others come to know Christ and give him lordship over their lives. I strive to evangelize with my life, my actions, and my words. And we are called to teach and equip others to do the same. Classic texts on Christ's commission to the Church are found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8.

Making Disciples

One of the best and most effective ways to bring another person to maturity in Christ is through personalized one-on-one instruction. God has called me to do this and to equip others to do the same. Relationships are a primary vehicle God has given us to accomplish

discipling. It requires integrity and commitment. Yet out of this instruction come leaders with integrity that follow 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:6-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-3. Other passages that support this are found in Colossians 1:28-29 and 2 Timothy 2:2.

Pastorally Shaped

The pastoral aspect of ministry is sometimes very different from the teaching/equipping side of ministry. Love is a major part of pastoring. I have to love enough to forgive. I have to love enough to confront and discipline. I have to love enough to comfort. God desires us to rejoice when others rejoice, and to weep when they weep. I do not feel that my strengths lie in areas of in-depth counseling. But ministry requires some of that. I will do my best to recognize when it is time to refer a person in need to a professional, and to recognize what I am able to assist with. I do have a genuine love for people and a desire to pray for them and with them. Biblical texts that support this area of ministry are Acts 20:13-35; John 21:15-17; Matthew 18:15-20; and Galatians 6:1-5.

Youth Focused

The Word of God accomplishes what God wants it to accomplish. His Word will never return void. My task is now, and will be, as long as God allows me time, to bring out its full meaning with conviction, clarity, relevance, and love to teens and families of teens. This is my passion. God has given me the freedom to be who I am and to be creative in my approach to ministry, and to be wholly his. Passages that reveal and explain this desire to teach his Word are 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5; Romans 10:14-17; 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5; and Galatians 6:1-5.

Church Honoring

Jesus set the example by showing a very deep love for his Church, and I will strive to keep a strong love for it as well. I see evangelism, equipping, and edification as the main purposes of the Church. And because of my allegiance to Christ, I will continually strive to be faithful in my service to the Church. I believe that the Church is in constant need of renewal and restoration to keep people living for God. I will seek to encourage this in the Church and strive to encourage it in my family as well. Passages revealing Christ's love and commitment to his church, as well as his connection to it, include Matthew 16:13-20 and Ephesians 5:22-23.

I think this serves as a good example of a solid philosophy of ministry. Is it perfect? Of course not. Because I am not perfect. There is plenty of room for improvement and growth. But after over twenty years of development, I've been able to take my philosophy and tweak it into something that helps direct my the "why" behind my ministry. I hope it helps you as well.

Steve Baney – Personal Philosophy of Ministry

Introduction

The call to ministry is both a great honor and a tremendous responsibility. The honors are many. The pastor is invited into the most precious events of life, including birth, baptism, marriage, and death. He is respected in his community. And he has the privilege of speaking with authority.

Yet coupled with these honors is a list of tremendous responsibilities, to rebuke, to teach, and to equip others on their spiritual journey. Like the watchman described in Ezekiel 3.16-21, when God tells the pastor to warn someone about his sin, the pastor is responsible for the sin unless he warn them. Scripture says those who teach others will be judged more strictly than those who are taught.¹ Having tasted the goodness of the Lord, the pastor can no longer find ignorant bliss in sinful indulgence. And the pastor must act counter-culturally, even against the grain of the congregation at times, in order to powerfully enable others along their spiritual journey.

A personal philosophy of ministry is important because it manages much of the life and ministry of its author. It describes the purpose of my life, the values which are most important to me, life-long goals and obstacles that stand in their way.

God has called me to be his servant. I could easily pick a career that utilizes my skill or passion outside ministry. But God has called me to set my agenda under his. My desire is to worship him by responsibly responding to that call. As a sinful man, I

¹ James 3.

received God's grace and cleansing. Now he has asked me to walk alongside other people who are just like me along their journey toward God.

Unfortunately, the call to ministry isn't understood by most people, even those in the church. We live in a money-minded culture that prioritizes corporate business and career goals. So the idea of setting aside one's goals in surrender to God seems foolish to anyone who isn't making him their first priority.

In the midst of this misunderstood call are many men and women who think they know the best way to supervise and evaluate the pastor, especially one like myself who is young with little experience. These people operate on the assumptions that right belief, right behavior, and right service² qualify the pastor for ministry. The danger here is one's ability to fit those criteria yet remain far from Christ. Does attending seminary and assenting to moral and doctrinal beliefs make one a true follower of Christ? Does avoiding visible sins and performing religious rituals determine the condition of one's heart? Does humanitarian concern for others qualify a person for spiritual leadership? The answer to these questions is no.

The call to ministry comes from God and should not be taken lightly. Fulfilling my call cannot simply be done by pursuing the requests of other people, sometimes even people on the leadership board of a church. Faithful stewardship of my call cannot bow to every whim of the selfish church member. It cannot be dictated by money, agenda, special requests, assumptions, expectations, or even a written list of job responsibilities. It must be evaluated by God's Spirit. It must help the pastor to pursue the requests of God

² The ideas of right belief, right behavior, and right service were discussed in Terry Wardle's class, "Person in Ministry," during a lecture on "Centered Set" ministry.

by using careful discernment. It must help the pastor trust God to provide for his needs. It must advance based upon God's timeframe.

Since many spiritual leaders are far from Christ, the pastor must have a method of evaluating whether he or she is fulfilling this call. In the seven years of lay ministry and three years of pastoral ministry, I can see clearly that ministry is demanding. Without an end goal in mind, much of my ministry was haphazard, best-guess. Although often educated guesses, this approach left me frustrated for lack of clarity in direction, always wondering what to do next. In a class lecture, Dr. Terry Wardle said, "Life comes at you fast. If you don't have a way to evaluate it, then what comes at you will control you."

My philosophy of ministry will help me evaluate my call to ministry. It will greatly influence how I make decisions, how I prioritize time, where I place value, how I invest my resources, and more. The specific goals described in my philosophy of ministry, including steps toward achieving each goal, will make decisions easier.

Personal life statement

There are four desires in my heart that seek to respond to his call. I desire to live in intimacy with my God by constantly pursuing him, to be continually transformed by the Holy Spirit, and to steadily grow within the context of spiritual community. Only when these three desires are pursued can I continue with the fourth in integrity: to move forward in service to the world in which I live.

The first desire is to live in intimacy with my God, the one who created me and knows me better than anyone else, by constantly pursuing him. It is an unending task. One cannot maintain intimacy with God if he stops somewhere along the journey. Pursuing intimacy with him means he will be a part of everything I do. It means I will

rest in his care instead of depending on sin to satisfy my desires. It means seeking him will be the thing I desire most.³ It means I will find my identity in the one who created me rather than in what I do, which can change or be taken away.

The next desire of my life statement is to be continually transformed by the Holy Spirit that counsels, calls, comforts, communicates, cleanses, and commissions me with power. What a joy it would be to live alongside Jesus. He knew his followers would desire to spend every moment of their lives with him. So he sent his Spirit to live with and in us.

When I face difficulty, the Spirit is there to counsel me as the best listener with the best advice. It is the same Spirit that awakened my mind and filled my heart with a passion for God's call upon my life. He is the one who brings comfort in the midst of my deepest sorrow, my greatest pain, and my worst fear. The closer I am to him, the more I readily recognize the sound of his voice as he communicates on behalf of the Father. He reveals Scripture to me. And he prays on my behalf. It is God's Spirit that pours out cleansing grace upon me, changing me into a completely new person. And the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8.11) is the Spirit that commissions me with power to live a godly life against all odds.

The third desire is to steadily grow within the context of spiritual community that trains, stimulates, rebukes, and holds me accountable. The sermon presented to the congregation is a valuable avenue of teaching. But little dialogue happens in that setting. The smaller, spiritual community is a vital part of my life since God made me a part of it.

³ Deuteronomy 4.29.

No part can say it does not need another part.⁴ I need spiritual community as much as it needs me.

Along with spiritual training, this community stimulates both thought and action, as Hebrews 10.24 instructs us to spur each other toward love and good actions. It is difficult for me to accept criticism, especially from those I already hold at arms length. But when I permit it to come from the spiritual community that I trust, from the ones that unconditionally love me, from those that are just as broken along the same journey, I can better respond to rebuke. This spiritual community includes the select few who see me for more than my “false self.”⁵ I can accept their constructive criticism because I know they treat me completely with love and acceptance. In the safety of this intimate community, I can invite my Lord to work through my weakness and bring wholeness through confession.⁶ And my spiritual community helps to ensure that I do not fall back into sinful patterns, keeping me accountable, motivating me to press on.

The last desire is to move forward in service to the world in which I live. But it can only take place with integrity *after* the first three. The service I am describing comes in various forms of skills, talents, and passions. As a part of the body of Christ, I have a function. God has designed me in a way that my skills, talents, and passions are a part of my function within Christ’s body. Much like when a person’s liver fails and the rest of his or her body becomes ill, if I cease to perform my function as a part of the body of Christ, then the whole body suffers, including myself.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12

⁵ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 83.

⁶ The discipline of *Confession* is described in our class notes, page 19.

Core Values

If I am going to live by my personal life statement, there are certain things that are non-negotiable. These are commitments that I must act upon to fulfill my life statement. Core values are important because people constantly demand my time, energy, and attention. If I do not hold on tightly to my core values, then I'll end up going somewhere that I do not want to be. These values are essential to my ministry. I'll never be the man God wants me to be if I don't maintain the following:

Life-long learning

Having the value of life-long learning means loving my Lord with my entire mind.⁷ As I seek to represent God to other people, I must pursue being one of his most highly educated students. I desire to be an expert who “correctly handles the word of truth.”⁸ I must be able to accurately understand and interpret God's word. When I better understand God and his word, then I can better draw others toward him. Nehemiah 8 describes a day when a priest named Ezra read and explained God's word. In response the people worshipped the Lord. How can I be this kind of spiritual leader, one who rightly explains God's word and leads others to worship him? Before Ezra taught God's word, he first devoted himself to study and obey it. Without excellence in this area, I risk not only my own soul but the souls of those I lead.

Steps:

- I will complete my seminary education to earn a Masters of Divinity degree. This is a step towards excellence in loving God with my mind.

⁷ Matthew 22.37

⁸ 2 Timothy 2.15 NIV

- I will pursue the possibility of doctoral work later in life by identifying how such study could apply to my future ministry.
- I will attend no less than one leadership conference per year. This is a practice I have held for several years now.
- I will read weekly on topics related to pastoral ministry and Christian living.

Obstacles:

- This goal will require our money. In order to consider doctoral study, I must be financially prepared to invest in education rather than an expensive home, vehicle, or other material items or leisure activities.
- This goal can easily be neglected as other responsibilities are more readily visible. Others may not necessarily know whether I am continuing to read and study.
- My calendar and agenda will make setting aside time for an annual conference difficult. I will need to plan far in advance to ensure my other responsibilities are met and that other people can cover for me while I am away.
- I plan to have children in a few years. When I do, I will spend much of my free time with them. Many parents tell me that children take much time and drastically change one's life.

Healthy Family

I am committed to loving my wife the same way that Jesus Christ loves the church, giving myself up for her.⁹ I must lead her, serve her, prioritize her, and love her every day. Since we plan to have children some day, they will also hold an important

⁹ Ephesians 5

place of priority in my life and ministry. “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?”¹⁰

Steps:

- I will continue as I do now to set aside no less than one night per week to have a date with my wife.
- I will refuse to volunteer my wife for ministry responsibilities without her express consent.
- I will continue to ask my wife to complete an annual “Pastor’s Wife Review” evaluation form and process it together afterwards. I developed this evaluation a few years ago to ask her to list things I have done well and things I have done poorly. Then it asks her to identify the areas of my ministry, how she is connected or involved in each area, and how she would like those connections or involvements to change.

Obstacles:

- From time to time, the pressing responsibilities of work and ministry spill over into the night set aside for dating my wife.
- Some people have specific expectations of the pastor’s wife. Adrian might not meet those expectations.
- As responsibilities increase, leisure time becomes precious, especially in the evenings. Spending time specifically set aside for us to enjoy each other will take me away from my other responsibilities, which at times seem urgent and important.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 3

- My wife has a tendency of keeping quiet when others hurt her. I may have difficulty knowing when she is hurt by me or others.
- I have a hard time accepting criticism. I respond more to the feeling of being hurt than to improving my behavior and character. So I might even avoid helpful criticism that I request from my wife.¹¹

Spiritual formation

Most Christians would easily agree that spiritual growth is important. They believe it is the result of reading and studying Scripture, believing religious truths, and attempting to behave based upon its rules. For most of my Christian life, I approached spiritual formation in these ways. But I am convinced that there is a plethora of other ways to encounter God and so be changed by the experience. These practices of positioning myself will help me to focus less on solving the problems in my life and more on finding God amidst them.¹²

Steps:

- I will devote a half-hour of time no less than four days per week for silent waiting on the Lord. Just as David waited patiently for our Lord¹³ I will make my soul still before him.¹⁴ The focus here will be two-fold: to listen and to allow God to evaluate me so that the parts of me that still cling to control will surrender to the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ During these times, I will use a variety of disciplines such as communion, reflection on an icon or symbol, prayer, etc.

¹¹ Benner, David. *Surrender to Love*. Page 39.

¹² Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 17.

¹³ Psalm 40.1

¹⁴ Psalm 62.5

¹⁵ Wardle, Terry. *Draw Close to the Fire*. Page 51.

- I will reflect on Scripture by meditation, journaling (for myself) and writing (for others) with additional texts such as commentaries, devotions, and other books. This feasting on spiritual food will ensure that I am not inviting others to a meal when my own pantry is empty.¹⁶
- I will spend time alone playing guitar and singing to my Lord no less than once each week.
- I will walk with him around the nature trail near my house no less than once each week. These times have been the most refreshing experience with God that I have ever known, as his divine love does not depend on my faithfulness.¹⁷
- I will worship with a congregation outside my church denomination no less than four times each year.

Obstacles:

- Silence is quickly overcome by any number of noisy distractions surrounding me, including the computer, phone, radio, television, people, and the unexpected. I will need to develop the discipline of silent waiting.
- *Doing* for my Lord comes much easier than *being* with him.
- I grow tired of spiritual disciplines when used for lengthy periods of time. I will need to stretch myself to use each discipline longer while balancing variety at the same time.
- I have a tendency of always writing for others, seldom journaling for my own benefit. Some of my journaling must be kept private if I am to be completely honest about my feelings and thoughts.

¹⁶ Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 65.

¹⁷ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 48.

- I enjoy music so much that it can become my focus, rather than leading me to focus on my Lord.
- I prefer to stay indoors, even though I recognize the benefits of my outdoor walks with my Lord. I may need a scheduled time for my weekly walks in order to keep them consistent.
- My responsibilities of ministry to a church may make it difficult to worship with congregations outside my church denomination. People will expect me to be present at all ministry events.

Passionate Body-Part Ministry

Different people have their unique ministries because God has given them different gifts and passions (1 Corinthians 7). The small congregation that ministers to older, rural families is no better or worse than the large congregation that ministers to young, post-modern individuals. When each works together, God's kingdom grows.

In the same way, God has designed me with specific gifts, loves, and passions that should not be stifled by a need or mandate. Some have called this a gift-based ministry. There will be times when I am required or asked to do things that don't interest or excite me. But to prevent discouragement, low morale, and burn-out, I will focus 80% of my time and energy on the area of my greatest passions. As much as my passions contribute to my effective ministry, so my weaknesses and limitations contribute to my ineffective ministry.

When I first began ministry, I spent much time and energy trying to convince search committees that I could bend myself to fit the mold they were seeking to fill. Their needs and requests were dictating my ministry pursuits. A year later I was asked by a

pastor what I would love to do most in ministry if I could choose anything. I listed my three passions, not knowing that they would soon become my job description at that church! Ministering in the areas of my passion and giftedness brought liberty and joy.

Steps:

- I will, if at all possible, pursue an associate ministry position rather than a senior pastoral role. The senior pastor who I work with will share my value for passionate body-part ministry.
- I will trust God to present to me the opportunities to minister in the areas of my greatest passions, and remain willing to follow him in the areas of my weakness.
- I will build a team of coworkers that fill in the gaps where I fall short. I cannot (and should not) try to accomplish the tasks of every part of the body of Christ. The hand cannot be the ear. The foot cannot be the eye. God has arranged the parts just as he wants them to be.¹⁸ This team will work together, not micro-managed under my supervision, but in the freedom that comes from passionate body-part ministry.
- Since pastor's minister to people's vulnerabilities, I will be in a position to abuse power. I will use power to create, not destroy. This power brings the best out of people.¹⁹
- I will encourage the involvement of all members of the congregation, empowering them to minister, decentralizing my power as a pastor.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12

¹⁹ Foster's discussion of power is found on page 29 of our class notes.

Obstacles:

- The need to earn money to provide for my family's needs makes this kind of trust and patience difficult. I may desire to give in when an opportunity comes along if I think I could compromise or eventually change the job requirements.
- I will resist ministering in the areas outside my greatest passions, the things which should be done that I do not want to do.
- Most people in the church (and outside of it too) will have expectations of me and my job responsibilities. They will need to come to an understanding that I am not simply a hired-hand slave or a do-it-all expert.
- Many people do not want to participate in ministry. They like to be told what to do. They like to have a pastor to whom they can attribute far too much credit and blame. I will need to show that that finding their area of ministry will be an opportunity for great joy and fulfillment in their lives. As a means of serving the congregation, I will help them be good stewards of their spiritual gifts.²⁰
- I am a control freak and a perfectionist. The idea of decentralized power is not a difficult concept to imagine, but is easier said than done. I find myself turning to the people who always say yes, rather than helping each person find their place.

Evangelistic Ministry

The role of the chaplain is important, nurturing the saints with teaching and preaching, encouraging fellowship with social gatherings and meals, comforting those who have lost a loved one, etc. Unfortunately, many people in the church forget that our mission includes those outside the church's four walls: to preach good news, heal the sick,

²⁰ 1 Peter 4

and set captives free. The outward focus of my ministry is so important that I wanted to distinguish it from the passionate body-part ministry listed above.

God's grace touched my life; I will never be the same. I desire to see people experience grace much like Peter did when he experienced Jesus' loving forgiveness of his denial.²¹ My God "loves sinners, redeems failures, delights in second chances and fresh starts, and never tires of pursuing lost sheep, waiting for prodigal children, or rescuing those damaged by life or left on the sides of its paths."²² My ministry must follow his gracious character.

Steps:

- I will focus my ministry not inward on those who probably need it least, but outward, focused in grace to the non-members.
- I will attend community meetings, pastoral association meetings (between churches, and political meetings to stay informed and connected to the contemporary events of my community.
- I will lead weekly prayer meetings specifically for the community surrounding the church where I minister.
- I will "take work home with me" to my neighbors, those I meet at the store and the bank, etc.
- I will prayerfully and intentionally do everything I can to disciple one person to a relationship with Jesus Christ each year.
- I will use small group ministry as a means to encourage and participate in the evangelization of lost sinners.

²¹ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 29.

²² Benner, David. *Surrender to Love*. Page 45.

Obstacles:

- People in the church are often selfish, especially regarding the way their pastor spends his or her time. They may expect me to devote more of my time to them than to the community.
- It is easier to attend to the church member who speaks up than to the community that feels shut out of the church's member-only congregation.
- I may have difficulty identifying who the Spirit leads me to disciple.
- Sometimes people in Christian small groups are not ready to appropriately respond to a non-member attending the group. I will need to coach the Christian group members to make the group a place where non-Christians feel comfortable.

Accountability

I will need to do several things to ensure that I live by my life statement. I will re-write this reflection paper once every three years. Upon re-writing it, I will have at least two people read it to prayerfully help me evaluate my progress and my failure. One of these people will be my wife. The second will be my best friend.

Conclusion

When I reflect on how I experienced this exercise, I must be honest about how my attitudes changed. At first, I thought this would be another hoop to jump through. Certainly a significant hoop, one that would require much work and greatly impact my course grade. But all along I guess I knew there was more to it. The more I reflect, the more I want to spend time in reflection because I recognize the benefit. I don't think about my call often enough. But when I do, it almost scares me. I have to respond to my Master. I love him so much. I long for intimacy with him. But my weakness and sin keep

me from it. I must be continually cleansed and anointed by his Spirit. Then I will be able to truly enjoy worshipping and serving as a part of his body.

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