

# **ANSWERING THE CALL**

**Understanding and Responding  
to the Call to Full-Time Ministry**



**Ron Lewis**

“Ron Lewis captures nearly every angle of what it means to serve God. This book will act as a mentor as you sift through your options and listen to what God is saying to you through your gifts and passions. I am sure you will hear His voice as you read.”

**Dr. Tim Elmore**, Founder, GrowingLeaders.com

“This book gives a seasoned interpretation for discerning God’s still, small voice and a clear roadmap for practically answering that call to ministry. I look forward to handing this book to countless individuals who are looking to lay hold of that for which Jesus laid hold of them.”

**Rollan Fisher**, Missions Director, Campus Harvest Missions;  
Youth Pastor, Kings Park International Church

“Pastor Ron Lewis has penned a practical, inspired, and easy to read occupational pathway for every student desiring to know the will of God for her or his life.”

**Brett Fuller**, Pastor, Grace Covenant Church;  
Chaplain, National Association of Basketball Coaches

“This down-to-earth guide is full of nuggets of wisdom from Ron’s years of hands-on ministry experience. By gleaning from his insights, you will undoubtedly gain clarity on how God desires to minister through you. A ‘must-read’ both for those in ministry and those seeking direction for their lives.”

**Robert Stearns**, Executive Director, Eagles’ Wings NY

“It has been my privilege to count Ron Lewis as a friend for many years. **Answering the Call** is a clear reflection of his evident passion for developing others. Both compassionate and challenging, Ron demonstrates a rare ability to recognize the gifts of others and reveal how those gifts fit into God’s creative and masterful plan. **Answering the Call** is a road map to discovery for any Christian who desires to find their true calling in Christ.”

**Joshua Chodniewicz**, Co-founder, Art.com

“**Answering the Call** is a down-to-earth book that will encourage and enlighten anyone looking at full-time ministry. Ron Lewis uses his personal life adventures and the stories of others to explore the call many feel on their lives. It is a great practical tool for anyone weighing the costs of full-time ministry.”

**Mart Green**, Producer, End of the Spear;  
Founder and CEO, Mardel Christian and Education Supply;  
Founder, Every Tribe Entertainment

“This book gives a refreshing view of the call to ministry that infuses us with both great hope and sobriety. May we all, with sobriety and optimism, consider God’s call and respond to it.”

**Reggie Roberson**, Campus Ministry Director,  
Cambridge Christian Fellowship, Duke University;  
Campus Pastor, North Carolina Central University

“Ron Lewis has devoted the last twenty-five years to fulfilling Jesus’ strategy of sending ministers into God’s harvest. **Answering the Call** is a biblically-based, practical guide for those who want to reach their world with the gospel.”

**Tom Jackson**, Founder, Centre for European Church Planting

“After being a pre-med student and philosophy major at Duke University, I identified with Pastor Ron God’s call to ministry in my life. This book is a practical how-to guide on responding to God’s call to full-time ministry and will bring the clarity you need to help make this critical decision.”

**Bryan Scott**, Campus Pastor, Columbia University  
and New York University

“After a long season of disappointment and seeming silence in my calling, Ron Lewis took me by the hand and suddenly walked me back to my burning bush. Whether you are just beginning to feel the rumblings of God’s call in your life or are deeply wading through life’s mush to resurrect it, Ron’s wisdom, discernment, and simplicity in **Answering the Call** will bring clarity to you, too, in discovering the sweet spot of your calling.”

**Veronica Karaman**, Golf Professional,  
Personal Leadership Coach, 1989 U.S. Open Participant



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to the Call to Full-Time Ministry**

**Ron Lewis**

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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to the rising army of the called, those entering a deep desire to follow the Lamb of God, surrendering all for His glory.

It is for those who know well they have been crucified with Christ, their life is not their own, they cannot escape this call anymore than they can escape life itself.

You are one whose heart has stirred you for some time. You have had moments where you felt His nearness. You have heard His voice and are yearning to do His will for fear of missing it!

You have been both blessed and bothered by the still small voice of God. You consider every earthly gain of no account—your degrees, your academic advances, your future career, your potential earning power, your club memberships. Your deepest longings in life have been eclipsed by your greater passion to follow Him and advance His kingdom.

You've abandoned all other measurements to be measured by one thing alone: Did you chase and grasp what your Father has called you to?

This book is dedicated to you.

Go forward and don't look back.

Press on to take hold of your calling.

Christ has taken hold of you, so that you will take hold of it.

Heaven and earth are waiting for you . . .

# Introduction

... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

• PHILIPPIANS 3:12

1982. A hot August day at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

It was my first day in full-time ministry. I did not have much to work with. I had no paycheck. No support team. No job description. No agenda or schedule to follow.

But what I had was enough. I had been apprehended by God. I had a vision and a mission.

All I owned including my recent rolled-up diploma was in the back seat of my broken down Pontiac Tempest. I could pick the lint off the back of my pants because of the rips in the padded driver's seat.

It was embarrassing, but I didn't care. I was on a mission from God.

I will never forget that first day. I was on campus as students were moving in to their dorms for the new school year. The task was massive and the opportunities were endless, but I had to start somewhere. Like anyone in this position, I wanted to give myself the best chance at some early success.

Another campus minister invited me to visit a “contact.” A contact is a technical term that typically means “someone who has showed at least a little interest in the things of God.” I thought they would welcome a young, energetic, vibrant campus evangelist who stopped by to visit.

It seemed like a safe way to start my new career as a campus missionary.

The “contact” turned out to be a passionate feminist from the North. She was passionate and persuasive. She loved to discuss all kinds of issues and ideas, including what it means to have a relationship with God.

Too bad we never got there. It turns out she had a Jewish upbringing. Initially, I thought that would help. But it didn't. Not even a little bit.

The problem was not that she was Jewish; the problem was that I was.

She was so offended that someone sharing her heritage would show up at her door wanting to talk about Jesus. She was infuriated. She didn't want to debate; she wanted to fight.

I was so repulsive to her that she couldn't help but unload on me. She cussed me out and dropped a number of "colorful" words. She said I was a traitor. She fumed and spouted until all I could do was silently pray for the Rapture to come.

It was a humble beginning, but it is what I remember most about that first day. No souls saved. No financial support raised. No new friends or contacts made.

Though it did not feel like it at the time, it was a fitting way to start my career as a minister. Obeying God and serving Him as a full-time minister will not save you from difficult days. In fact, it will probably lead you straight into them.

It happened to Jesus when He obeyed His Father and ministered to the people in His day. It happened to the twelve apostles who followed Jesus into a life of ministry. And it has happened to almost everyone else since, who has been willing to serve God with their career.

That day was a turning point for me. In my frustration and discouragement, I told God I believed in my calling.

I believed that this is what He wanted me to do. And I told Him that wherever this road would take me, I would tell the world.

“Okay God, whatever happens, good or bad, I’m going to tell everyone. If I go broke, I’ll tell everyone, I’ll shout it from the rooftops. If I die on the mission field of starvation, if I get cussed out every day, whatever it looks like, this is going to be our story together.”

So here I am today, twenty-five years later, sharing the story of God and I and what has happened since I answered His call.

After all these years, I want the world to know that the Lord has been faithful. Serving God as a full-time minister has been one of the greatest joys and privileges I have ever known.

I have served the world, served the poor, served the youth and served the church. And through it all, I have served the Lord. I have not been perfect, but I have been faithful to the call He so graciously has given me.

Now my passion is to help you sort through this same calling. It might mean that you decide God has not called you to this, turning your faith, and focus to another place where His calling is more sure.

Or, it could mean that the time has come for you to say yes, to step out in faith, through the fear and all of the reasons to say no, in order to join God in the great adventure He has waiting just for you.

The fact you are reading this today tells me you are in the process of discovering what He has in store for you. My prayer for you is whether you serve God in full-time ministry or from another profession, you realize He has called each of us to be ministers, regardless of our work.

This book is specifically written to bring greater understanding into what it means to do ministry professionally, as a career and full-time vocation. Along the way, most of us who have a relationship with Jesus wonder if this is for us. We wonder if He called us to do it, would we be willing to say “yes.”

It is definitely not for everyone, but if it is for you, I want to encourage you: God will come through for you! It will be challenging and at times deeply disappointing, but if you are doing this for Him, then you are in for the adventure of a lifetime!

By His grace, He will keep and preserve you, blessing you richly in every area of your life.





# 1

## What is Full-Time Ministry?

“Come follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

• MATTHEW 4:19,20

**W**hat do you think of when you hear the phrase, “full-time ministry?”

Maybe you think of a man in a collar or flowing robes, a preacher on TV, a missionary in Africa, or perhaps a young person on a college campus.

To a degree, these are all examples of full-time ministry. From here on, when I use this phrase, I am referring to a man or woman whose primary occupation is ministry. Yes, it is their job, it is their vocation and career, but as we will see in the next few chapters, it is so much more.

This subject is often misunderstood and usually brings with it a handful of questions:

*Does God want everyone to go into full-time ministry?*

*What is the real difference between a Christian who works a ‘secular job’ and a full-time minister?*

*Does it please God more if you are a full-time minister?*

*Is full-time ministry only for “super-Christians?”*

You may have more questions than the few listed here, but we will try to get to the bottom of this issue and understand how God wants us to think about all of these things. Let us start with the first one: “Does God want everyone to go into full-time ministry?”

After more than twenty-five years of asking and fielding this question, I have concluded that all believers in Christ should be ministers, but only those who are called and qualified should go into the ministry as a full-time vocation. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God saved us AND gave us a holy calling. This holy calling is different for all of us. But it can be summed up in one four-letter word: work.

The Bible has a lot to say about work. One of the first things it teaches about God is that He Himself works. And like in so many other ways, God calls us to be like Him. He created us to work, too.

Throughout Scripture, there is a clear sense that God created us with a specific plan in mind, but in most cases, the Bible talks more about how we should work than what our specific job should be.

Work is a part of how God orders everything. He said we are to work six days and rest one, not the other way around. (Wouldn't that have been nice?) Work was actually a part of life before sin entered the world. It is a facet of being like God.

The Apostle Paul (who wrote most of the New Testament) had a lot to say about this.

He wrote repeatedly of his own hard work.<sup>1</sup> He said that we are God's handiwork,<sup>2</sup> created for "good works" that He prepared for us in advance. He encouraged the early Christians to honor hard work.<sup>3</sup> He said that followers of Christ should not steal but should work so that they could share with others.<sup>4</sup> He even said that if you do not work, you should not eat.<sup>5</sup>

Paul really helps us value all work in his letter to the Colossians.

In Chapter 3, he writes instructions to servants who are doing hard work, difficult manual labor. They were struggling to discover how following Christ could transform their behavior on the job.



*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,  
as working for the Lord, not human masters,  
since you know that you will receive an inheritance  
from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ  
you are serving.*

Colossians 3:23,24

According to Paul, there is no such thing as a “secular job.” All work is sacred if it is done out of obedience and service to God.

Are you waiting tables or working an espresso machine? If you do it for God, it is holy. Perhaps you are doing data entry in a cubicle or building websites. With the right heart, it is a beautiful sacrifice that will receive a reward. It is the heart of the worker toward the One they are serving that makes a job holy.

Think of it this way, the Bible tells us that until He went to be baptized by John and started His ministry at age thirty, Jesus was a carpenter in His hometown of Nazareth. His Father loved Him. He was perfectly obedient. He was right where God wanted Him to be.

The same Jesus who experienced incredible intimacy and relationship with God as seen throughout the gospels was pounding nails and building things. Whether He was a carpenter or a full-time minister, the issue was His heart. He did what God called Him to do, whether

it was sawing wood or preaching and healing the sick. He served different roles at different times, but His heart longed to be close to God every step of the way.

Here is the point: God wants us all to obey, to work hard, and to do our job, whatever it is, as a service to Him. The kingdom of God has a unique place and role for every member of the body of Christ. All of us are responsible to be faithful with what God has called us to do, without comparing it to everyone else. This is our ministry. It is the way that all followers of Christ contribute to the mission of God.

What makes the calling of full-time ministry different is that responding in obedience can lead us to leave our current endeavor and assume the occupation of ministry full-time.

History and Scripture are replete with examples of people who “left their nets and followed Him.”

Moses was working the fields for his father-in-law Jethro when God called him to go to Pharaoh.<sup>6</sup> Elisha was driving oxen in the field when God called him to train under Elijah in order to become a prophet.<sup>7</sup> Amos was a shepherd.<sup>8</sup> Jesus was a carpenter.<sup>9</sup> Simon, Andrew, James and, John were fishermen.<sup>10</sup> Matthew was a tax collector.<sup>11</sup> Saul of Tarsus was a lawyer.<sup>12</sup>

God called all of them out of their vocation to follow Him into ministry.

**Full-time vocational ministry is a special calling that requires character and obedience to the Lord.**

Fortunately, He's still calling people today.

You may be working a job wondering how your day-to-day responsibilities have anything to do with God's redemptive plans for the world. As Paul wrote, you do not have to quit your job for it to be a service to God and contribute to His mission.

At the same time, what if God does call you as He called so many before, to leave your current job or career to serve Him full-time in the ministry?

What if today He calls you to leave your “nets” as Peter, James, and John did? How would a calling like this happen? How would you know?

Let us turn now to consider these critical questions.



# 2

## How do I Know if I'm Called?

But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by His marvelous grace. Then it pleased Him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus . . .

• GALATIANS 1:15,16 (NLT)

**N**ot every Christian can or should be a full-time minister, but all of us should be missionaries. In our homes, our jobs, at the grocery store, at the gym, in every area of our lives, we never let go of the mission of God. We are always contributing our part in fulfilling our role for God's mission on earth.

However, there is clear precedent in both the Old and New Testaments for full-time ministry.

When God set out to restore His relationship with all of mankind, He started with one man and his family.<sup>1</sup>



Over time, that man and his family grew, from a clan to a nation, to be the twelve tribes of Israel.

God chose the Israelites to be His people on earth. Out of His love and desire to have a special relationship with them, He gave the law and His promises so they would show to all the nations what it meant to be the people of God.

Part of His plan in setting them apart was to divide them into twelve distinct tribes. Each tribe was a part of the larger nation, but they also had their own unique role. You may recall that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, which is why He is called “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” That was His family heritage.<sup>2</sup>

The Levites were one of the twelve tribes given a unique role. God chose this tribe to be His priests, to serve in the temple, and to be responsible for all of the ministerial duties the law required.

Though the Levites were different than the other tribes, they were still just one of the twelve with their own strengths and weaknesses. God created special arrangements in order that their basic needs would be provided for and so they could give their full time and attention to the person of the Lord and the service of His people.

In the earliest days of the church, the apostles followed the spirit of this approach, though not the structure. Jesus chose His disciples; they were not all Levites and God did not choose them on the basis of their family line. He said they were given to Him by His Father.<sup>3</sup>

In Acts 6, through the preaching and ministry of “the twelve,” the church was experiencing explosive growth. So many disciples were being added that some of the responsibilities were being overlooked. They gathered as a group and divided the work so that the twelve could give themselves full-time to “prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

Today, God is still calling people to give their full time and attention to the work of the Lord, to prayer, and ministry of the Word.

It is not on the basis of your family line. The presence or lack of a full-time minister in your family does not determine your call. And unlike the original disciples, Jesus does not have to reveal Himself in person for you to follow Him into ministry.

It may not be as simple as knowing your family history. It may not be as crystal clear as the Son of God in human form showing up at your job, calling you to follow Him. But the calling does happen. The often mysterious nature of the call always carries with it the chance to draw closer to Him.

So how do you know if God is calling you into full-time ministry?

I have found the following four aspects of the calling to be incredibly helpful, although they often take place in no particular order.

## The Call

The moment of calling is not always clear-cut. It rarely answers all of the questions at once. Sometimes it does not answer any. Most of the time, it is as unique as the person being called.

As mentioned<sup>4</sup>, with salvation comes a holy calling. No two are alike, and in a broad sense, we all are given the same one based on His grace.

Once you experience the call to full-time ministry, you are never the same. Here is how it happened for me.

I will never forget my experience at Alexander Dorm at UNC in the early '80s. Michael Jordan was usually in the headlines in Chapel Hill, but God was moving and things were happening. Some of the students on my hall were giving their lives to Christ; some that I had written off as unreachable were inquiring about salvation and eternal life.

Those were amazing times.

I would regularly read the Bible for what seemed to be hours at a time. One particular month, all I could focus on in Scripture was how the disciples would go out and preach. In Mark 16, it says they went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus specifically called them to go out and preach. It was all I could see. It was as if every Scripture on preaching and teaching was speaking to me too. I felt that in the same way He had called them, Jesus was calling me. I was beginning to feel anxious about it. It was such a strange thought for me as a first-generation Christian<sup>6</sup> in my family.

It was not long thereafter that I had a life-defining moment.

I was on a Greyhound bus going from school in Chapel Hill to my hometown of Greensboro. In those days, it was common for students who wanted a quick trip home to jump on the bus line. It was quick and cheap, and you could study during the ride.

At that point in my life it was hard for me to study anything other than the Bible. So there on the bus I got out the Word and continued to ponder all the Lord had been saying to me. Suddenly something strange began

to emerge. I closed my eyes and really listened intently to the still, small voice.

Although the bus was filled with all kinds of people, it was as if it was only me and the Invisible One. He was there, and I could hear Him so clearly inside my heart saying, “Get up and tell these people your story.”

I could not believe it, or maybe more accurately, I did not want to believe it. Not me! Oh no, this could not be the Lord. Does He not know I have to keep my reputation of being a nice, normal college student?

Vivid pictures of what might happen were racing through my mind. They would probably stone me like Stephen. At the very least, they would want to tie me down. Or worse yet, they might tie me down and then throw me out the doors without slowing down. Maybe the bus driver would slam on the breaks, sending me flying out of his huge windshield in a bloody mess on Interstate 40.

So I then began to wonder if this whole thing could be the voice of the devil. Yet it quickly occurred to me that the devil is not interested in getting God’s kids out of their seats and onto the front of the bus in order to share the love of Christ.



So I devised a backup plan. I told the Lord that I would obey the bus driver's rules. This seemed like a safe way out. Certainly the driver would never allow anyone to get up and preach Christ on a Greyhound. So, my spontaneous and clever way out of the divine squeeze was to ask for his permission, get denied and then go quietly back to my seat.

I timidly walked to the front and said, "Excuse me sir. My name is Ron Lewis. I am sure that you have rules about not letting people talk on your bus, but I wanted to see if you would by chance let me share my story about how God changed my life and Jesus Christ became my Lord. I know you probably won't let me, but I thought I would just ask anyway."

As I waited, hoping he would reject me, I took a deep breath. What happened next would mark me forever. He smiled and said he had no objection. He then went on to explain he was "Penny-cost-ah"<sup>7</sup> and would be praying for me as I spoke. He then made it even easier by handing me his microphone so my voice could be amplified through the entire bus!

God called my bluff and led me straight out of my comfort zone. All I lacked was a choir because for the next twenty-five minutes we had a powerful church service. I preached while the bus driver silently prayed. And glory to God, the people responded!

I invited people to repent of their sins and give their lives to Christ, and they responded all over the bus. Some people requested counsel. Others smiled. Everyone prayed and was encouraged. To my surprise, not one person had any issue or objection.

As the bus arrived in Greensboro, I rushed forward so I could jump off first and stand at the bottom of the bus exit door. I was like the pastor at the greeting line of a church. They came off the bus, shook my hand, hugged my neck or sincerely thanked me. Everyone was smiling because the joy of the Lord took over that bus for the previous hour.

It was quite a moment. If I ever had any doubts about my call, they were now gone.

I was consumed with the knowledge that souls needed to be reached, the poor needed to be helped, new churches needed to be planted and all I could say was, “Yes, Lord!” The Scriptures on “preaching everywhere” were now in full revelation in my heart. My calling was being realized right in front of my eyes.

The call can come through unusual means in crazy places like it did for me. There are many, varied ways it comes.

God called Moses through a burning bush.<sup>8</sup>

Moses' brother Aaron was called through hearing about Moses' talk with God.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph was called through a series of mysterious dreams and the persecution of his brothers.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision and spoke in an audible voice on the road to Damascus.<sup>11</sup>

Timothy was called through prophetic words and the leadership and spiritual upbringing he received from Paul.<sup>12</sup>

Augustine<sup>13</sup> was called in a garden by the voice of an unseen child.

Martin Luther<sup>14</sup> was saved and called through a terrifying lightning storm.

John Wesley<sup>15</sup> was called during a storm at sea as he feared for his life.

All of these callings are unique, but they share a single characteristic. When God called, the call was answered and obeyed.



## Desire

At the risk of stating the obvious, at some point along the way, you need to want to do it.

Sometimes at a Christian conference or in a powerful moment where many of your friends are feeling called to ministry, it is easy to get an initial desire. The call sounds impressive. It makes you feel holy, maybe even spiritually strong.

In the long run, the desire to do full-time ministry will not be enough. But it can be a great place to start. Over time, the stress, pressure, adversity, and challenges of this assignment have a way of revealing motives and clarifying your call.

Keep in mind, there is nothing wrong with simply volunteering.

Andy Stanley, the lead pastor of one of the largest and most influential churches in America, says that as intently as he wanted to minister full-time early in his life, he never really felt called.<sup>16</sup> He asked his dad Charles Stanley (also pastor of a large church) if someone had to be called to go into ministry full-time, or is it enough just to volunteer?

His dad thought it was fine just to begin as a volunteer, so that is exactly what Andy did. Before long, God

confirmed his initial desire was truly a calling through the obvious gifts and ministry success that Andy experienced.

From the simple, small act of volunteering, his calling was confirmed and the kingdom of God has advanced powerfully through Andy with thousands of people's lives being changed.

We can see from this story that sometimes desire grows into calling.

Often God uses availability over ability. When you are willing to simply volunteer and obey Him, He will be faithful to reveal the unique spot He has designed specifically for you. A willing heart is filled with possibility because it is in motion and able to be led exactly where God leads.

This reminds me of my dear friends Jeff and Anna Bullock. Their story shows what can happen when you love God and are willing to follow His call.

While attending North Carolina State University, Jeff became a Christian and his life was never the same. After a few years of growing and maturing as a believer he had a dream from God.

In the dream he was boarding a plane to Russia to start a new church. Interestingly enough, that same night



his pastor also had a dream of starting churches in the former Soviet Union. The dreams made him wonder if this is what God wanted him to do.

Within four months, a good friend Mike Watkins was ministering in Lviv, Ukraine (a university town of a million people on the eastern border of Ukraine). A Campus Harvest short-term missions trip was soon to follow with Jeff leading the team and by the time the trip was over, a church had been birthed.

As he returned to the States with the rest of the team, Jeff had no idea that this trip had given him a glimpse of God's calling for his life. He wanted to lead other missions teams into Eastern Europe but never imagined moving there.

One afternoon, while lying on his sofa, he was overwhelmed by the presence of God. He had a deep sense that God was calling him to move to Ukraine, to serve God, love people, and build the church.

Immediately, he announced the "good news" to his wife, Ana. Good news to some isn't good news to all. She said, "Well . . . you can go without me!"

Until she had heard from God as well, they decided to wait. Jeff did not want to arrive in Ukraine and have Ana

angry with him for making her live in Eastern Europe. If she were to get mad, she would have to be mad at God.

A few months later, she realized this dream was not simply her husband's but rather God's purpose for their family. Today, in the wake of their calling, there are six churches in the Ukraine, one in Poland, and their most recent body of believers in Budapest, Hungary.

The team is growing, and it is clear that there is no end in sight.

The role of desire for Jeff and Ana has been like the caboose on a train. It has always been there, but it has never led way. For this "country boy" from North Carolina, going to the Ukraine and the rest of Eastern Europe is a long way from Mayberry.

Initially it was not their burning desire, but when God called, they went.

## Gifting Beyond the Ordinary

If God calls, He also gives the gifts for the calling.

When athletes compete for a team, they are given the shoes, uniforms, and equipment they need to play.

Soldiers are given a helmet, camouflage, armor, and a variety of weapons and tools necessary for success.

In the same way, God gives gifts to His people.<sup>17</sup> These gifts help us get the job done. I have a hard time believing that people are called to full-time ministry if they do not possess the appropriate gifts necessary to succeed. They may not be using them regularly early on, but it should be clear that the potential is there. With a call comes the grace and talents to fulfill it.

I have heard many young, passionate leaders assure me they are going to be the next Rick Warren.<sup>18</sup> Of course they have one minor hurdle to overcome; they have never actually led anyone to Christ or started a Bible study!

Or maybe they feel certain their compassionate service will have the same global impact achieved by Mother Teresa. This certainty looks ridiculous when you consider the fact they have never served in the nursery or wiped a single runny nose.

It is important to point out here that the need to demonstrate gifts is not the same thing as having talent. There are certain elements of ministry where someone with talent can be successful through their own abilities. A charismatic leader with excellent communication skills can draw a crowd and grow an organization. But God often builds His kingdom through His grace and the gifts He gives to us in our weakness.<sup>19</sup>



Moses struggled with a speech impediment, yet he led a congregation of several million through the Red Sea and the wilderness. The Apostle Thomas was beleaguered with doubt, yet he was one of the Twelve and eventually became an apostle to India. Though many of us may know him as “doubting Thomas,” he did not doubt for long.

Rahab may have been a prostitute, an unlikely candidate to be used of God. Yet through her faith, God used her to help the Israelites inherit the promise. She is honored for her faith in Hebrews 11 and is found in the lineage of Jesus.

Paul went so far as to call his weakness a gift, because it helped him not to confuse his role in the work of God. Though he was a significant leader who regularly performed miracles, was divinely inspired to write Scripture, and was the primary authority in discipline and conflict management in the early church, he was a servant above all.<sup>20</sup>

Although Paul had a great background with strong credentials and is considered by many to be one of the great minds of history, he did not lead on the basis of talent or intellect. When he considered his own shortcomings and the enormity of the task he was attempting, his only chance for success was to trust in God’s strength working in his weakness, and to be a good steward<sup>21</sup> of what God had entrusted to him.

In the long run, in order for lives to be transformed, the sick to be healed, the captive to be set free, the gospel to be preached in power and not just persuasion, it takes God's grace working through the gifts He has given those servants who have demonstrated great character and humility before the Lord.

If you think God has given you a gift in an area of ministry, volunteer to serve in that area. See if God's grace is there working on your behalf.

Do you enjoy it? Are you good at it? Has anyone ever commented on your gift in that area? If so, these can be helpful clues that will lead you to understand the gifts God has given you.

## Confirmation

When God is leading someone into full-time ministry through a powerful calling, a growing desire, and the evidence and operation of necessary gifts, the confirmation will always come.

Confirmation is a clear stamp of approval. It is God's endorsement. It is not always loud and dramatic, but it always acknowledges and honors God.

Every person in the Bible who received a call to serve the Lord full-time also received a confirmation of that calling.

For the Levites, it was without question. It had been their heritage from the time Jacob blessed his son Levi.

For the prophets, it was the moment when they obeyed and spoke the Word of the Lord. Their position as God's ministers was not always immediately obvious; sometimes God asked prophets to do crazy things that the people did not understand.<sup>22</sup> But when they obeyed, God confirmed them as His true prophets when their words came to pass.<sup>23</sup>

When Jesus first sent out His followers to do the work of the ministry, He gave them a serious challenge. Take nothing with you, preach the kingdom, heal the sick, and drive out demons. Though they had seen Him do it, they must have thought, "There is NO way we can do this ourselves."

But when they went, God removed the "no" and made the way. He confirmed their obedience with the demonstration of His power. They came back to Jesus and gave the glowing report of many breakthroughs: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name."<sup>24</sup> Jesus' authority was extended and replicated through them serving as strong confirmation.

Just a few years later, the church was worshipping and praying in Antioch when the Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called



them.”<sup>25</sup> How the Spirit spoke this, we do not know. But what we do know is that this was a major confirmation for a missionary team to be set apart to reach all of Europe with the gospel.

God is still confirming callings today.

He did it for me whenever I obeyed in my weakness. Each time, He met me with His strength. As I mustered up the faith and courage to step out in preaching the Bible, often to my surprise, people responded. Lives were transformed and men and women came into supernatural, loving relationships with God through the person of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Has God called you? Do you have the desire to obey God in this call? Has He given the gifts that you need to do what you believe you are called to do? Have you and others around you seen His power confirming you as you have obeyed and responded to the call?

If you are answering yes to all, or even some, of these questions, then in all likelihood, you are wrestling through the process of a call of God to full-time service.

But we are not done yet. This is not the end.

These questions are incredibly important as a checklist in the process of working through your potential call to full-time ministry. Take some time now to stop and pray through them. Seek proven, godly counsel.

And when you are ready, come back to read on.





# 3

## Ministry in the Marketplace

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

• EPHESIANS 4:15, 16

**W**e cannot all be NFL<sup>1</sup> quarterbacks.

If fans know only one player on a football team, it is the quarterback. When kids go out to play, they all pretend they are quarterbacks. Just a quick look at the jerseys worn in stadiums and you can see how the pretending goes on into adulthood.

As recognizable as a quarterback is, he is helpless without linemen to protect him. He needs a receiver to throw to and a running back to take the hand-off. He needs a defense to keep the other team from scoring. He needs

coaches to create and teach plays, and a trainer to keep him strong and in shape.

He needs administrators (“the front office”) to account for all the details that keep the team running.

Interestingly enough, while the quarterback may get much of the glory, he is also the one who takes vicious hits that he cannot see coming. When the team struggles, he is the first guy to get booed by his own supporters, while his replacement becomes the most popular guy on the team.

It is a good thing we are not all quarterbacks.

Sometimes it is the same with pastors and full-time ministers. When you think of a big church, you immediately think of the pastors. Obviously the goals, values, and priorities of quarterbacks and ministers are often vast in their differences, but just like a quarterback, their success is dependent on a much larger team.

And a team only becomes great when every member embraces and excels in their individual role.

Though he never saw a quarterback, Paul sure understood this concept.<sup>2</sup> He realized that if the people of God were going to fulfill God’s mission, they would have to become a great team.

In Ephesians 4, he writes how God created different roles in the church so that the people could be equipped to serve the Body of Christ. As the body becomes like Jesus (the head), then it will become strong and grow in love.

When did he say this would happen? As “each part does its work.”<sup>3</sup>

All of us have work to do, a part that only we can play.

Full-time ministers are not the only ones who are called. All of us have a “calling,”<sup>4</sup> and as we discover what that is, we should give ourselves to it with all of our abilities, gifts, and passion.

I have a close friend in New York who is the president of a company on Park Avenue. He has a successful business in commercial real estate, but his real passion is to lead people to Jesus. He appears to be entirely effortless at it.

On Sunday mornings before he comes to our church service, he regularly stops by Starbucks for a cup of coffee and the chance to share the love of God. Recently he wanted to encourage the barista<sup>5</sup> so instead of just saying “Thank you,” when she gave him his latte, he told her, “You’re such a blessing. God loves you so much.”

Then he asked her if he could pray for her. She said yes, and when he finished praying, he was surprised to



discover that many of the other coffee drinkers in the crowded Starbucks had bowed their heads and prayed along with him.

This is probably not what comes to mind when you think of daily life in midtown Manhattan, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that this is a near daily experience for my friend. This is often referred to as “marketplace ministry.”<sup>6</sup>

It could be easy to conclude that because he is effortless at leading people to Jesus, he should quit his job and go into full-time ministry. But if he did, who would be in the business meetings, interacting with executives and leaders who never set foot in church? What would happen to the resources that his job generates for our church and the kingdom?

How could a pastor possibly do this same type of ministry? He cannot because these doors are uniquely open to my friend.

Remember, there is no secular and sacred divide in work and calling. Every sphere of society belongs to God.<sup>7</sup> As my friend does his work, the Body grows.

When you are on a team where each part does its work, there is a gratitude that you feel just for being on the

team. When I work with people like my friend in New York and so many others like him, I am very aware that if all I did was follow-up on their fruit, my job would be secure and fulfilling.

The dynamics between full-time ministers and those ministering in the marketplace should be a beautiful partnership; whenever people see a great team, they are attracted to it.

As those following their calling in business pursue God's mission, it creates more work and need for their full-time ministry teammates. And as the minister does his or her work, the effects should be felt in every area of marketplace life.

That is how a team works; even when you cannot see it, the success of one hinges on the success of the other.

The Bible is filled with people who were not full-time ministers, those God used to do amazing things and accomplish His mission.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king. Abraham was a land owner and farmer. Daniel was a political consultant. Joseph was a manager and a governor. Ruth was a servant. Deborah was a national leader. Esther was queen in an ungodly nation. Jesus called twelve to



follow Him full-time, but there were plenty He reached, loved, and ministered to that He sent right back to their marketplace work.

For example, Jesus healed the servant of a Roman Centurion;<sup>8</sup> Roman soldiers were despised because of their regular cruelty and abuse of the Jews. But Jesus made no attempt to call him out of his occupation.

Paul saw an opportunity to demonstrate the kingdom of God through the way that followers of Christ interacted, even in the most difficult relationship between slaves and masters.<sup>9</sup> He was by no means endorsing the institution of slavery, but he saw that particular component of the marketplace in desperate need of ministry. He was so committed to his role on the team that he even encouraged believers to pursue the call of the marketplace when it made the work of his own ministry even more challenging.<sup>10</sup>

In our church in New York City, many actors and models have come to Christ. Often what happens then is that some other young zealots insist they need to leave their “dark and tempting” professions behind. Typically that is not my counsel.

If God has placed them in this life, then to walk away could be disobedience. Like all of us, they need to

develop godly character and live a holy life, but the theaters and runways of the world need salt and light too.

There have been times when so many leaders were telling people to go into full-time ministry that I had to preach against it. That might sound strange and even contradictory to our purpose here, but it is true.

Some people erroneously see the ministry as glamorous, the fast track to spiritual stardom, or their chance to fame. While addressing a group of prospective ministers, the great Charles Spurgeon<sup>11</sup> addressed this misguided view: “The pulpit is never to be the ladder by which ambition is to climb.”<sup>12</sup> Genuine ministry is not a platform, but a service to humanity.

Others pursue ministry as a safe alternative. So many callings can be scary or feel overwhelming whether it is a call to politics, arts, business, or entertainment. These industries are often intimidating and all require endurance to succeed.

I have had countless conversations with people who were giving up on their marketplace because their jobs were too tough or they felt their only way to succeed for the Lord was to go “full-time.”

Not long ago, a man was faltering at his business and felt it was his sign to go full-time. Instead of sharing here what I told him, I'll let Spurgeon speak to this notion.

“I have met ten, twenty, a hundred brethren, who have pleaded that they were sure, quite sure that they were called to the ministry . . . because they failed in everything else.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say what I am convinced of, that those called to full-time ministry should be able to excel at most everything. In his words, “Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach His cross, and not the empty-headed and the shiftless.”<sup>14</sup>

That is a hard way of saying it, but I hope you get the point.

In the end, the goal is to find your place on the team and become the best team member you can possibly be. The mission of the team is the same for everyone; whether it is the marketplace or the ministry, both should advance the kingdom of God<sup>15</sup> through releasing blessings, winning people to Christ, and making disciples. Some of Jesus' last words were, “Go and make disciples of the nations,” and He gave this command to all of His followers, not just the full-time ministers.

All Christians are called to help fulfill the Great Commission.

In addition to making disciples and bringing transformation, marketplace members often have a unique opportunity to develop resources for the work of God and the parts of the team in desperate need of financial support. This is a critical component of any team.

Considering the quarterback again, we realize that he only gets paid when the front office manages contracts, generates fan interest, and creates a base of financial support.

If everyone went into ministry, how would the bills get paid? Where would the budget come from? Who would provide Bibles? How could there be stable salaries and support?

It is the same reason why the Levites were just one of the twelve tribes. I am sure they were glad that the other eleven tribes were bringing the goods so that they could be freed up to serve the Lord in the temple.

The responsibility for success in advancing the kingdom belongs to the entire team.

*Each part does its work.*

Some of my greatest moments of need as a minister are for financial support. It may be for training centers in

China, a new campus outreach, a new church plant or an orphanage that needs a new roof.

I am one part of the team, but I could never do it alone. It takes the entire team.

*Each part does its work.*

Fortunately, I do not recall anyone ever saying to me, “All that guy wants is our money.” The truth is it is not about me, the money, or even the need. It is about the team and our mission, which is to glorify God and advance His kingdom on earth. The congregations and leaders I serve know it is my joy to work together. I am just grateful to be on the team, and I know it pleases the Lord when each part does its work.

I will never forget the law student from a prominent university whom I met early in his Christian walk. He was so excited about his new faith in Christ that he wanted to quit law school and be a missionary in China. He wanted a new spot on the team.

He was sincere and earnest, but frankly, misguided. He had a false sense of what the Lord was asking Him to do.

I cannot tell you how many times this story has repeated itself. As a pastor of twenty-five years, I never want to

squelch zeal, enthusiasm, or joy. I want people to be excited about the mission and what God is doing. But at the same time, I want people to obey God and follow His calling, not to create a life of sacrifice that He does not expect. I love what the prophet Samuel told Saul, “. . . obedience is better than sacrifice.”<sup>16</sup>

If God calls you to be the next Bill Gates, do not try to improve His calling by being the next Mother Teresa. He knows what is best.

This process of sorting through and discovering your call is a critical moment in the life of every believer. My typical approach is to encourage someone to pray it through and carefully think about it from every angle. Take the time to get all of the appropriate counsel.

With the brilliant young law student I mentioned above, I threw my regular approach of getting outside counsel out the window. I knew this time I had to personally challenge his reasoning.

I told him as strongly as I could not to go to China. I believed he had been created and molded with keen intelligence, clear gifts, and there was supernatural purpose in the years he invested in his law degree. Certainly this was the conventional wisdom a parent would give, and pastors have to speak up too!



After a few days and intense prayer, he completely concurred. He thanked me for my honesty and has gone on to have amazing success in law, politics, and society. He is pursuing God's mission with passion and has never doubted his choice to stay in his profession. Having won major elections by landslide victories, he knows he is in a place set apart by God specifically for him.

Today, he is a celebrated believer in a very high political post. His assignment has brought much glory to God and a lot of victories for righteousness.

Not everyone needs to go into full-time ministry; everyone needs to find their spot on the team and fill it.

*Each part does its work.*

In the next chapter, we will ask one key question everyone must answer before leaving their field of study, occupation, or job and going into full-time ministry. This question has helped a lot of people make the right decision.

# 4

## The Big Question

For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

• 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16

**H**ave you ever gone on a roller-coaster that was scary enough you started to look for an exit door soon after getting in line?

As you are zig-zagging your way through the really long waiting line, you look to see what the people who are coming back look like. You are also checking out the drops in the ride from way down below. Your stomach is churning. You ask yourself if you really need to go through with this at all.

And then, over in the corner, painted to blend in with the wall, you spot it.



Sometimes they call it “the escape door.”

It is an exit, usually disguised to minimize embarrassment. At the big theme parks they are conveniently stashed at strategic locations before you reach the point of no return. Those in charge want you to know you do not have to get on the ride if you are having second thoughts.

So before we go any further here, I have to ask you an “escape door” question.

It is a BIG question.

It is a “line-in-the-sand, difficult, scary, gut-check, defining moment” kind of question.

Really, it is a question that God may be asking you as you pray through this decision to give your life to full-time ministry.

### **Are you able to do anything else and be fulfilled?**

The question is not, “CAN you do something else?” I am sure you have plenty of skills or gifts that you could make a career out of, or at least earn a living.

The question is not, “Are you willing to do this?” Being willing is not the same as having a passion. I doubt that

as you have dreamed of finding that perfect someone, your greatest desire was to find a spouse who was willing.

No, what you want in a life partner is passion. You hope this special someone will do anything to be with you, that there is no other place they would rather be.

God is the same way.

There was a young man in London who responded with this kind of passion to the call of God; he declared there was nothing he would rather do with his life than preach the gospel.

Like Paul, he was compelled. He would rather die than not preach.

At age nineteen, he took the pastorate of the largest Baptist church in the area, one that had begun to dwindle and decline. He preached the Word with power, and as he did, the Spirit of God began to fill that place. Thousands came from all around to hear him preach, and were forever changed.

Without the use of audio amplification, he would regularly preach to crowds of more than 10,000. By age twenty-two, he was the most renowned preacher of his era, and to this day he is referred to as, “the Prince of Preachers.”



His name is Charles Spurgeon.<sup>1</sup>

In time he started a pastors' college to teach and train young ministers. Now known as Spurgeon's College, it is still training hundreds for missions and ministry today.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the lectures to his students were collected and published. I mentioned and cited him briefly in the last chapter, but his thoughts on this matter deserve a much closer look. I have read, re-read, and referred to *Lectures to My Students*, on countless occasions. He has a lot to say on this issue of ministry as a vocation and was not afraid to challenge his pupils. Here is one great example:

*Do not enter the ministry if you can help it . . .  
If any student in this room could be content to be  
a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a  
doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the  
name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is  
not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in  
its fullness, for a man so full of God would utterly  
weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost  
soul pants.*<sup>3</sup>

Spurgeon's purpose here is not to diminish the contribution of certain professions. If that were the case, he would not have been a pillar in his community, serving and loving grocers, farmers, editors, lawyers, doctors, and newspaper editors.

Instead, he is trying to clarify. Out of his love for his students, he wants to ensure they realize what they are in for.

I am sure from time to time some of the students in his program were enamored with Spurgeon and his success. That is not all bad. All Christians, especially ministers, should lead lives that others will want to follow and emulate. But there is a big difference between wanting to be like someone you admire and passionately pursuing the call of God yourself.

That pursuit is something God has made each one of us for, whether or not the pursuit leads us to full-time ministry. Our work should be an act of worship. It is a sacred activity, not secular, no matter what our job may be.

God wants to give us that kind of passion for whatever we do, but because the realities of life in ministry are often so different from our perceptions, it is critical that the prospective minister is committed and passionate, no matter what transpires in his life.

Not because he is drawn to the lifestyle. Not because he thinks it might be fun. Not because it might be an opportunity to be closer to God. There needs to be a compelling sense of “I have to do this.” Spurgeon continues:

*We must feel that woe unto us if we preach not the gospel; the Word of God must be unto us as fire in our bones, otherwise, if we undertake the ministry, we shall be unhappy in it, shall be unable to bear the self-denials incident to it, and shall be of little service to those among whom we minister.*<sup>4</sup>

He was quite strong on this point when he said:

*“I have such a profound respect for this ‘fire in the bones,’ that if I did not feel it myself, I must leave the ministry at once.”*<sup>5</sup>

Judging what it is like to be a full-time minister by what you see on Sunday or Wednesday night will not provide a full view. What people see in meetings is such a small part of what this life of ministry entails. The overwhelming majority of ministry does not happen in the limelight; it does not cater to your pride or ego. It is often thankless<sup>6</sup>, and very few make it to the public renown of Billy Graham, Joel Osteen, and Joyce Meyer.

It is a calling of service to Christ. It requires sacrifice.

The late professor and theologian Edmund Clowney put it best:

*Advancement in the kingdom is not by climbing but by kneeling. Since the Lord has become Servant of all, any special calling in his name must be a*



*calling to humility, to service. The stairway to the ministry is not a grand staircase but a back stairwell that leads down to the servants' quarters.<sup>7</sup>*

If it is not done out of the right motives, you will probably give up quickly. As already mentioned, at some point along the way ministry produces an intense desire. I would call it nearly irresistible. Sooner or later, this call has to be something that you own, that you steward out of obedience. The turnover rate is already too high.

In the pastorate alone, more than 1,500 ministers resign each month<sup>8</sup> due to moral failure, burnout, or contention with their local churches. This number does not include turnover among missionaries and people in full-time roles outside of pastor.

This staggering number shows the call must be pursued with wisdom, diligence, and a sober understanding of the cost and challenge it holds in store.

The purpose of mentioning these statistics is not to invalidate or condemn those who have been released for ministry or called back to the marketplace. I have seen instances where those starting in full-time ministry later discover it is not their long-term calling and move on to further success in the marketplace.

Ministry is not the quickest way to fame and fortune, and it is not the kind of profession that carries with it widespread popularity. There have been many young prospective ministers who have broken the news to Mom and Dad, only to be ridiculed or scolded for not pursuing a more “respectable” career.

When God calls you and it becomes your passion, you must respond regardless of the cost.

Over the years, I have known numerous students from respected, world-class universities like Duke and Columbia who have answered the call to full-time ministry, despite their prestigious academic training and scholastic achievements. You can imagine this choice does not always go over too well with parents who invested so much into their education and are counting on prosperous returns.

As a parent, I can certainly understand how this feels. Yet I also realize that when a young person answers the call of God and is used to accomplish His mission and advance His kingdom, in the end, God’s blessings flow to the entire family.

It may not initially look the way they thought it would, and it will not likely come on their time frame, but make no mistake, it will come.

When you answer the call of God in faith, He will abundantly meet all of your needs—from financial to emotional, from spiritual to relational. He promises this in His Word, and I know from experience, He is faithful. Spurgeon describes the simplicity and seriousness of this process:

*This desire must be a thoughtful one. It should not be a sudden impulse unattended by anxious consideration. It should be the outgrowth of our heart in its best moments, the object of our reverent aspirations, the subject of our most fervent prayers. It must continue with us when tempting offers of wealth and comfort come into conflict with it, and remain as a calm, clear-headed resolve after everything has been estimated at its right figure, and the cost rightly counted.<sup>9</sup>*

There is a big difference between being called to ministry and making an emotional decision. This is not to say that the call of God is not emotional; what I mean is it is not uncommon for people to get the feeling they should go into ministry, only to have that feeling wane. The call of God endures over time. In fact, it grows stronger until you feel you can no longer resist. For many, this calling is described more as a process than a one time, indescribable moment like Isaiah experienced in Isaiah 6:6-8.



That is why I suggest you take the time you need to really pray through this. Sometimes God calls people quickly, but most of the time this process of praying through and discovering your call, getting input and counsel from those you look to and trust just takes time.

Seasons of prayer and fasting cannot do this without pastors, seasoned mentors, and leadership input. Many well-intentioned people try to go out and “change the world” on their own. It seems to be a mantra of every group. While well-intentioned, it is misguided. The process involves leaders you trust even when they tell you what you do not want to hear. Their involvement may be possibly the most significant voice in your entire process.

Even as I am writing this, just last night, a thirty-three-year-old successful, midtown Manhattan lawyer announced to me he was considering God’s call to the full-time ministry. I immediately pushed back with all the reasons he should reconsider.

He is skilled at his craft, working his way up through the ranks. He is realizing his dreams. Surely, God can use him right where he is.

As we talked, he would not be deterred. His burning bush was burning too strong. His call to pursue ministry full-time simply will not be put out or extinguished.

Bottom line: He is **no longer able** to do anything else and be fulfilled.

Over time this passion leads us to make a clear decision. And make no mistake, the choice is very personally yours. For me, it was a choice that ultimately I had to make. God does not force us. He is too much of a gentleman. He will not make you do this against your will. He will not trick you into it. He is looking for the man or the woman who comes with a willing, passionate heart. As Isaiah eagerly responded, “Here I am. Send me!”<sup>10</sup>

A friend of mine went to college to become a sports journalist. He went to a prestigious university that had a world-class journalism department and was quickly given tremendous opportunities to excel in his field.

At the same time he became a part of a thriving campus ministry at his school. He was continuing to grow in his faith and his involvement with the ministry. By the end of his sophomore year, he had a strong feeling God was calling him into the ministry. In his heart he agreed he would obey this call and go wherever God would send him, though he continued in his studies and involvement with journalism.

One year later at the end of his junior year, he was offered his dream job in journalism. He would get to cover the



NFL for a major network with a staggering initial salary. His prospective employer said it was not even necessary to finish his last year at the university.

As he told me this story, he said that in that moment he realized this offer was God's way of showing him He would not force him to follow the call to ministry. Instead, he had the privilege of choosing full-time ministry, so as he considered both options, he concluded that ministry was a good choice. Actually, it was not just good, it was amazing.

Like Paul, my friend was compelled. As Spurgeon had recommended, his decision was a thoughtful one, it was not impulsive, and so it compelled him on even when offers of wealth and comfort came into conflict with it.

My friend turned down the journalism offer and answered God's call to ministry. Eventually he returned to lead a campus chapter at the same school he attended and saw many students lives transformed with the gospel. There were seasons of lack, trials, and all forms of adversity, but he has never regretted the choice he made.

That is what it is like when you are called.

What about you? Is there a job offer out there that would be more compelling than the call to preach the gospel

full-time? Has your response to this call been thoughtful or impulsive?

How would you respond to offers of wealth and comfort that would conflict with the call to full-time ministry?

Like I told you, it is a BIG question.

It can be daunting to come up with an answer. It may put a lot of pressure on you, but there are ways you can figure out just how to respond.

Perhaps you should go on a short-term missions trip. There is nothing like giving your full time and attention to the work of the ministry, even for a short time. It is a great way to measure and consider your call.

You could also spend the next season volunteering to assist or serve your ministry director, pastor, campus pastor, or a missionary. This will give you better insight and access to what their day-to-day life is like, and practically, what the life of ministry is going to be.

A larger commitment might be participating in a ministry internship program. This is another great way to test your call, to see if you have the desire, the gifts, and the grace. It can be one more way for God to confirm your desire for service. Do not be shy about “experimenting” before jumping in full-time. The more

thoughtful and thorough you are, the more certain and confident you will be.

Now that we understand the big question and how to arrive at potential answers, in the next chapter we will explore where to go next, and why it is so critical to start small.



# 5

## Start Small

“Whoever can be trusted with very little, can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little, will also be dishonest with much.”<sup>1</sup>

• JESUS

**W**e live in a world of instant gratification. Too often, “right now” is not soon enough. Just a few minutes ago, while taking a break from writing, I found myself getting impatient waiting four minutes for the microwave to finish my popcorn!

When we pick up a golf club, after just one lesson we expect to be like Tiger Woods.

If we get a new guitar, we expect to be Eric Clapton or Santana, overnight.

So not surprisingly, when we go into the ministry, we expect that before long we will have a church like Joel Osteen’s<sup>2</sup> or have preached to crowds like Billy Graham.<sup>3</sup>

Typically life does not work like that, especially life in the kingdom of God. When Jesus talked about starting, he always talked about the value of starting small.

Most importantly, He set the example. No consultant or professor would suggest that a church of twelve people is a brilliant church growth model. But with just twelve initial followers, Jesus turned the world upside down.

So often His favorite illustrations involved seeds. It is hard to find anything much smaller than a seed. When Jesus talks about seeds, it is always in the context of sowing something small, trusting in faith that eventually it will become significant.<sup>4</sup>

If you have ever planted anything, you know that “eventually” is not instant. You do not microwave seeds. All the Miracle Grow in the world will not make “eventually” become instantaneous.

How long does it take for a seed to grow into a tree? It takes years. At first, the tree does not look too impressive. It does not usually grow straight. There are weird branches sprouting in different directions. Some years it may not look like the tree is growing at all. Yet in other years, when the conditions are just right, it will grow at an accelerated rate.

I have found that ministry so often grows like seeds and trees. When it starts, it is really small. I mean as small as “how-could-anything-happen-from-this” small. Ministry takes a long time to grow, and it often does not look impressive on the way. Sometimes it appears as if there are weird branches sticking out everywhere!

Fortunately, with perseverance and diligent care, in time ministry grows into something great and significant.

There is a clear principle here that Jesus describes in the quote that starts this chapter: whoever can be trusted with little, eventually can be trusted with much, but the one who is dishonest or untrustworthy with a little should not be trusted with a lot.<sup>5</sup>

So what does this mean for ministry?

If there is a job opening in ministry, one that features large beautiful facilities, thousands of people, and a massive budget, you will get a sea of applications. It is not hard to feel called under those circumstances. Who would not go to work at Willow Creek for Bill Hybels or at Saddleback for Rick Warren?

However, if you find an opening that requires long hours for little pay, meets in coffee shops and dorm rooms with disinterested students who cuss you out on your first day, you will not get the same widespread, eager response.



Very few of us like to start small, but most of the time God insists that we do.

He never seems to be in a hurry. In fact, He seems to be as concerned with the process of growth and what happens during the long, slow grind as He is with the finished product.

It never ceases to amaze me when I hear someone's story about the great things God has done in their life, almost always, things started so small.

Recently, I was in the Middle East meeting with Jews, Arabs and Muslims. There I met a middle-aged woman named Karen Dunham.

Five years ago, she lived with her teenage son in a refugee camp in Palestinian Jericho, struggling for clean drinking water and killing scorpions. In a time when many experts believed it was impossible to go and preach the gospel in that part of the world, Karen went to serve through basic humanitarian efforts.

Now, just five years later, the church she founded—Living Bread International Church, has more than 300 hundred Muslim believers<sup>6</sup> worshipping Jesus. This is quite a feat for a single mom who was serving as a humanitarian.

Joel Osteen and Andy Stanley did not grow their churches to incredible size overnight. Both of them built upon seeds God led their fathers to sow, and today they reap the harvest. In truth, all of us build upon the work of others who have invested time and patience before us.

Here are several examples of areas where God consistently asks us to start small.

## 1. Fruit

“Fruit” is biblical language for “results.” The world of the Bible is a pre-modern, agricultural world. In that world, fruit or harvest is what the growing season produced.

“Fruit” in ministry terms can be understood as the result of a season of time.

These results can be both quantitative and qualitative. It can be the number of people who hear the gospel as well as the measure of spiritual transformation in the life of a believer. It can be how many people give their lives to Christ, and the depth of relationships that are developed in the community. Or it can be the number of people added to your ministry, church, or fellowship.

Often the tendency in the early days of ministry is to expect instant and massive fruit; we think we should see

hundreds saved in a short amount of time. We expect to produce the highest quality messages and give world-class wisdom and counsel to all. Too often in our minds, we view anything less as failure.<sup>7</sup>

I truly hope that happens with you, but with most of us, it is nothing like that.

I mentioned earlier about my first day of ministry. In those days, having ten people in a room was like an ocean of humanity. There were many times when nobody showed up and an evangelistic Bible study was instantly turned into my personal quiet time. And because I felt defeated, they were very “quiet” times.

Going back to Jesus’ principle of demonstrating our trustworthiness in the little things reminded me that a massive harvest of exemplary fruit is always preceded by consistent, progressive growth.

The patient and passionate communication of the gospel that results in a single transformed life is the starting place for a dynamic ministry of evangelism. The disciplined and faithful management of a small group needs to take place before a minister is given the responsibility of shepherding a congregation.

That is why all fruit is so significant; not only should we celebrate the excitement and joy of the current results,



but we should anticipate each sign of success as an indicator of bigger things yet to come.

If you feel God is calling you to full-time ministry, one of the greatest ways you can respond in obedience is to give all of your passion and energy to the small responsibilities you have now. Do not see them as insignificant, but view them as opportunities to demonstrate your trustworthiness, knowing that in time, God will trust you with more.

Where is the fruit in your life? What is it communicating to you about your calling? Are you showing yourself to be trustworthy in the small things? Are you watching over your time? Are you faithfully giving and budgeting your finances?

The presence of genuine fruit in a person's life goes a long way in establishing credibility. When a young person chooses not to pursue a career costing a lot of money and four years of school, parents are often puzzled or upset. If however, you can point to the fruit of lives that are being changed, people who are being transformed, and the tangible blessings that the ministry of their son or daughter is accomplishing, it becomes hard to argue against such a call.

In contrast, if there is only a feeling, only the potential for calling without any of the smallest signs of fruit,

it is probably time to question this call. This is why I recommend short-term missions, local involvement, and possibly an internship as great opportunities to evaluate a potential minister's call.

## 2. Finances

Few things in life create pressure like financial need. The ability to endure and overcome in the face of great financial need is an integral part of responding in obedience to the call to full-time ministry.

Again, following Jesus' principle, we should be willing to start small. The amount of pressure and responsibility of managing the budget of a thousand-member church is a lot more difficult than raising enough money to go on a short-term mission trip. Obeying God and trusting Him for funds to go on that trip is a great first step towards being entrusted with the budget of a larger ministry.

Starting small allows us to demonstrate discipline and responsibility that become the building blocks upon which we can grow. As a single person, tithing, giving offerings, living within your means, and balancing your budget requires less faith and discipline than when you are married or have a family.

When you are faithful to consistently meet the mark, you demonstrate a trustworthiness that allows God to give you more responsibility and opportunity in days to come.

When I first started in ministry, I did not have much, and the needs seemed impossible to meet. Twenty five years later, if I had known then what my financial challenges would look like today and what God would ask me to believe for, I probably would have passed out or put in for early retirement!

People may look at the facilities and various outreaches I oversee now, those that have cost multiple millions of dollars to launch and sustain, and be quick to pass judgment on how easily we got here. We must all be careful in our criticism of someone's apparent success or prosperity. I can still vividly recall many times when I had no food wondering how God would ever provide enough when the weekly offering was just \$184.

When I first started in ministry, I hardly had a salary. Sure I had a vision, but you can not eat vision.

We were working with students, and I remember one particular time where my family literally ran out of food. If I alone had to rough it that would have been one thing but I had a family to provide for, and they were all hungry!

I prayed and asked God to provide and felt like He simply said, “Consider it pure joy when you face various kinds of trials.”<sup>8</sup> So in faith, I chose gratitude and happiness in spite of my lack. Trust me, when you look in your fridge and all you see is a stick of butter and an old can of spaghetti sauce, it is a choice to rejoice.

Then out of the blue, on that same day, a neighbor girl delivered a giant crate of oranges I had completely forgotten I had purchased earlier in the year to support her school project.

In that moment, oranges were to us like manna<sup>9</sup> was to the Israelites. We had orange juice for breakfast, orange slices for lunch and orange soufflé for dinner! Okay, not really, but we sure did get creative on eating an orange. Through that provision, God didn’t let us go hungry. I will never forget that miracle. He answered my prayer and provided for us just like He promised.

Now to date, by God’s grace and blessings, our ministry in North Carolina has given away nearly \$10 million to charity and missions. For some such as Warren Buffett, this is not much at all, but for a ministry that started with \$184 a week, it is not a bad beginning!

The temptations we face at this stage can be great as well. Sadly, there are too many stories of those in full-time ministry whose character has let them and their

supporters down. The enemy does not wait until the stakes are high to tempt us; he tempts us regularly, and when he finds an area where we are vulnerable, he attacks us whenever and wherever he can do the most damage.

That is why character and integrity with finances is so important. If you will build years of character and discipline in this area, you will have the faith and character to stand in the days when your obedience affects so many more than just yourself.

### 3. Recognition and Promotion

We live in a celebrity culture. Today it seems as though it is better to be infamous than anonymous. People want to stand out and be recognized, to make a name for themselves, to get their precious fifteen minutes of fame.

Sadly at times, the church is not much different. Just as there are stars in entertainment, athletics, and politics, there are stars today in ministry.

I believe God promotes people, and the Bible tells us in Proverbs that a person who is skilled at what they do will not stay in obscurity but will serve kings.<sup>10</sup> Proverbs also tells us that our reputation, what we are known for, is more valuable than riches.<sup>11</sup>





Perhaps more than in any other vocation, the full-time minister needs to be willing to start small. Before you concern yourself with how to become a household name, you need to develop character and demonstrate Christ-like love so you can have a great name in your own home!

The majority of full-time ministers will fulfill their call without large-scale recognition. For every well-known minister, there are thousands of faithful men and women who serve without the acclaim, without the general public's awareness, and yet still make major eternal contributions.

At the end of the day, it is all about our faithfulness to God: did we do what He asked? If so, our grand entrance to heaven will be greeted with the words we all long to hear: "Well done, my good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your master."<sup>12</sup>

Lifting up your name or the name of your ministry is not the goal; the goal is to lift up the name of Jesus and His kingdom so that His great name can be famous and honored throughout the whole earth. Someone once said, "It's for the fame of His Name!"

As a young minister, if you concern yourself with building a reputation of character, integrity, kindness, and Christlike love with those in your apartment

building or on your street, God will take care of your promotion. If you make Jesus the star, if you make His story most important, your leadership will take people to the true Source that never stumbles, the Great Shepherd who will care for their souls.

If you build your ministry this way, if and when God does bring you larger recognition, it will be the kind of awareness that will honor Him and propel your ministry and calling into greater fruitfulness. And if it does not happen, you will not feel any loss and you will not miss out on the joy that comes from making the name of Jesus great.

The longer you wait to build in this way, the more difficult it becomes. That is why it is so critical that you start from day one when things are small.

#### 4. Resources

You may not think of yourself as an administrator or manager, but if you respond to this call to full-time ministry, you cannot escape it. There is an unavoidable component of managing and administrating resources that always goes with ministry. When you first start, those resources may simply be your time, a small amount of financial support, and possibly a few volunteers.

Management is both a skill and a gift. This means people are gifted with different levels of ability, but as a skill all of us can improve. Various roles and positions in ministry will carry varying levels of management and administrative resources. This is why it is important for you to again start small.

Jesus demonstrates this principle in the parable of the talents.<sup>13</sup> In the story, a talent is the name for a sum of money, roughly equivalent to twenty years of a day-laborer's wage.<sup>14</sup> In the parable a wealthy businessman leaves on a journey and gives five talents to one servant, two to another, and one to another, "each according to his ability."<sup>15</sup>

They were all given the chance to manage and administrate resources, but they were not given equal amounts because they did not have the same ability.

When the businessman returns, both the servant with five talents and the one with two used the resources and doubled their money. The last servant, out of fear of his boss, hid the money and only gave him back what he had been given. So the businessman took that one talent and gave it to the one who had ten.

As you bear responsibility for your resources, do not worry about what God has given you compared to



others. Instead, concentrate on how you are showing yourself trustworthy and faithful with the resources you have.

From the parable and in so many life situations, we see the driving principle behind starting small: faithful in little, faithful in much.

In your early days of ministry, do not acquire more resources than you can handle. Do not accept more responsibility than you can be faithful in managing. Learn the value of strategically turning down opportunities because they will keep you from being faithful with the ones you already have.

When I was young, I made the common mistake of saying yes to everything. I wish I would have known better. Today, I still get overcommitted and continue to need help in this area, but I am getting better, and now I certainly know better.

Willingly start small with your resources knowing that as you show yourself faithful and trustworthy, God will give you more.

So what should you do if you are already in over your head? What if in trying to produce massive and instantaneous fruit, your marriage and family are

suffering? What if you did not start small with your finances and you have begun to fall behind and into debt?

There are three kinds of people in the world: the “haves,” the “have-nots,” and “the have not paid for what they have.” If you are in this third category in a serious way (exorbitant loans beyond a college education or an appreciating item such as a home), then you may have to deal with this before considering full-time ministry. When you have an extreme amount of debt, it becomes difficult to keep your focus off of your finances and on your ministry.

It could be that full-time ministry is not the best fit for you. It could also be that it is a right fit, but now is not the right time. This is why God’s lack of separation between sacred and secular work is so brilliant. It allows His people to move back and forth between the two arenas to serve Him and each other in different ways at different times.

People often are tempted to feel embarrassed because their road does not look ideal in their mind or is not like someone else’s.

Let me encourage you today. God can move you around from one kind of work to another in order to fulfill the

calling He has given you. He is always loving, always patient and kind, and always working in us to accomplish His purpose.

So there it is. With your fruit, your finances, your recognition/promotion, and your resources, start small. Do not be discouraged with where God has you. Act like the future of the world hinges on your obedience because in reality, it really does! As you are obedient and faithful with what God has entrusted to you, He will bring you prosperity in each of these areas.

So let us start small and be faithful, trusting in time, God will cause us to grow and succeed even beyond our highest dreams.



# 6

## Preparation, Education, Training, and Anointing

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

• 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

**R**everend John Harvard founded Harvard University in 1636 for one reason: **to train clergymen to be prepared for the ministry.**

Here is an excerpt from the “rules and principles” (something like a student handbook) in 1642.

*“ . . . let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life . . . ”*



To go into the ministry in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a seriously rigorous academic ordeal.<sup>1</sup>

Methods of preparation have changed since the founding of Harvard and down through the 2000-year history of the church. For a long time, prospective ministers embraced a monastic lifestyle and went off for years to quietly pray and study the Scriptures along with church tradition in same-sex environments. Many times, they never came back to the world, but the sole pursuit of their lives became a life of prayer and study.

For the past hundred years or so, the dominant vehicle for ministry training has been denominational seminaries. If a young person wants to become a pastor or a missionary, they typically find a seminary affiliated with their denomination.

Seminaries offer graduate degrees in a variety of ministry-specific roles and fields. Once you complete your study, you apply to various job openings overseen by the denomination.

Because this is the traditional model of training, there is often an expectation that going into the ministry means enrolling in a seminary. For many, this may be a great way to start. For others like me, seminary and academic pursuits can come long after early years of ministry and build on top of practical ministry experience.

Although training and education are essential, one of the clearest things we have learned through church history is this: character, leadership skills, and anointing from God are far more important than a graduate degree.

God's calling is not validated by just acquiring a degree, but it is confirmed by a demonstration of the necessary gifts, Christlike character, and consistent, lasting fruit.

At the same time, training and on-going development are absolutely essential for all full-time ministers. Without a doubt, ill-equipped ministers are ineffective and incapable of meeting the challenges and demands this calling brings and our culture demands.

Therefore the question most important to ask is, "What kind of training or education will help me most effectively obey God and complete His call at this stage in my life?"

Approaching training from this perspective allows for flexibility for different people and different callings, during a variety of seasons.

For example, it is becoming more and more common for pastors and leaders to combine in-house training with practical hands-on experience before adding seminary training to the mix.



Many organizations are recognizing this intermediate step and are developing Bible/ministry schools and training programs designed either as a part of the overall discipleship process for all believers or as an introductory program for full-time ministers just beginning in the organization.

These programs have tremendous value as a starting place to develop a basic working knowledge that can be built upon during your ministry career as needs and opportunities arise.

Let me make it clear, in order for this approach to work, we have to demonstrate the attitude found in 2 Timothy 2:15. Each of us must keep doing our best to present ourselves to God as a worker who is unashamed because we have correctly handled the words of truth.

Doing our best means we are always growing, learning, and willing to work hard to improve our skills. Secondly, we are presenting ourselves to God, it is His approval and not man's that we are after, and so out of our love and reverence for Him we work as hard as we can to represent Him in a way that brings great honor to His name.

Next, we have to resist the temptation to be ashamed. In the course of our education and development, we will be faced with the difficult task of articulating unpopular ideas and controversial concepts to those who simply will

not understand. But if we have done the hard work, we will achieve great things and should never be ashamed.

I cannot tell you how many times I have cringed watching Larry King on CNN fire the same difficult question to fellow ministers: “Are you telling me that if I don’t believe in Jesus, I’m going to hell?” Some are articulate and capable of responding while others struggle to be coherent or convincing in explaining Christ as the only way to salvation.

If Larry leaned in and fired that question at you, what would you say? Tough moments like this show the critical importance of training. Opportunities always come to those who are best prepared.

Finally, we need to correctly handle the words of truth. How we communicate is often as important as what we communicate. To correctly handle the words of truth means we not only maintain truth, but we speak the truth in love, rather than recklessly cutting people with our words.<sup>2</sup>

There are few things worse than a poorly dressed preacher whose veins are popping out of his neck while he is getting visibly distraught in a public interview. The Bible is so clear that our words are to be “seasoned with grace”<sup>3</sup> and our demeanor is to be Christ-like.<sup>4</sup> When our words and attitudes match these standards, our ministry will be persuasive and effective.<sup>5</sup>

## Four Areas of Training

I find it helpful to think about education and training in four different areas: Bible and Theology, Leadership, Practical Ministry Skills, and Culture and Contemporary Issues.

### 1. Bible and Theology

Every full-time minister needs to have a solid understanding of the Bible—how to read, understand, and apply it to daily life. They must also have the capacity to communicate and articulate biblical truth effectively. This ability should always be growing. Though this seems obvious and hardly worth mentioning, unfortunately, it must be stated emphatically.

An intern or first-year minister needs to have at least a basic overview of Scripture as a whole. He must understand its major themes, have an understanding of the Old and New Testaments, possess a clear and healthy knowledge of Jesus and His role in God’s plan, and have a concise and accurate view of the gospel.

Do not let the word “theology” intimidate you! You may not think of yourself as a theologian, but if you have ideas about God, you have “theology” because the word simply means “the study of God.” Make no mistake about it, you are a theologian. The issue is not whether or not



you are one, but rather, will you be a good one or bad one?

All ministers should have at least an introductory understanding of what the Bible says about the nature of God, the Trinity, the nature of man, the role and work of the Holy Spirit, Christology, soteriology, basic eschatology, and spiritual transformation. In addition, it is important they have at least a basic grasp of the historic Christian faith and how the body of Christ has wrestled through these issues up to now.

All believers, especially full-time ministers, should spend their entire lifetime studying and growing in each of these areas. As your unique calling develops, your responsibilities increase and the demands on your gifting and abilities are stretched. As this happens, you will need additional training and development along the way.

There are many examples I can think of to illustrate this point. Some training you will receive from mentors, coaches or peers at your ministry assignment. Many days you will be asked questions you do not know how to answer, and therefore growing in your understanding will become part of your day-to-day life.

I have often been asked questions for which I did not have an answer. Early on, I began the habit of writing down the question and the person's phone number so I

could take the question home to work on an adequate answer. I have found that people really love this because it shows sincerity and honesty. Full-time ministers need to be honest and say, “I love your question, but I need to think about it before I can answer. Would you be willing to talk about this more after I’ve had some time to pray and study?”

You may find there is an area of study or a new role that requires formal training and a season of more intense focus. The level of understanding needed to minister to high school or college students for instance, or people who are very much like you, is different than ministering to people who do not speak your language or who come from a different culture.

If you are going to go from leading a campus Bible study to planting a church, you are probably going to need some type of formal training. If you are going to go from reaching international students to doing children’s ministry, you are definitely going to need new training!

Most likely, this training will come at a considerable cost to your resources (primarily your money and time), so do not make a commitment lightly. Wait until you realize through much prayer and counsel, that this kind of training is necessary and will open the doors God is calling you to walk through.

Remember, training itself is not an endorsement for ministry or a right to a job. Training does not make the minister, rather, it better prepares the minister for his or her next step toward their destiny.

## 2. Leadership

There is a big difference between being an employee and being an employer. The level of training you need to lead a Bible study meeting is different than what you need to run a ministry staff of fifty full-time employees ranging from youth and associate pastors to secretaries, day care directors, and facility managers.

No matter what our current role or assignment is, all of us need to develop our leadership abilities. We need to work on our discipline and character, our people skills, our ability to make wise decisions, our productivity and efficiency, and our skills in making everyone around us better.

Thanks to the work of leadership guru John Maxwell<sup>6</sup> and others, we have been shown that leadership is more than a gift or a birthright. Leadership is influence, and it can be learned. When we become better leaders we will have plenty of ministry opportunities for the rest of our lives.



Leadership is like intelligence; it involves both nature and nurture. You are naturally born with a certain amount, but through hard work and the right approach, you can nurture and develop whatever amount you were given.

You do not have to be the boss in order to develop leadership skills. Many bosses prove that point. They may be the boss, but they are definitely not a leader.

Leaders inspire people to follow them. They build trust and effective teams. Leadership has value for all of us, as individuals, as Christians, as members of families and communities, and as members of all kinds of teams.

Recently, I read yet another leadership book by John Maxwell called, *The 360-Degree Leader*. The big idea of this book dispels the myth that you have to be at the top of an organization to lead. You can lead from anywhere, whether you are stuck in the middle or at “the bottom of the heap.”

This idea is consistent with countless Bible stories. One of my favorites is the account of Joseph,<sup>7</sup> the son of Jacob and the great-grandson of Abraham. Joseph never stopped dreaming, praying, or leading in spite of his negative circumstances. He was thrown into a pit and rejected by his brothers. Then he was unjustly stuck in prison, yet he continued to succeed and be promoted

anyway. His leadership abilities led him out of the prison and straight into national prominence.

Joseph may have started in the pit, but he ended up in the palace. This could be the story of your life too. You will find grace to lead in many places where you were not even invited. Do not wait on the invitation. When you see a need, take the lead. If you lead with character, integrity, and excellence, before long you will have the recognition, too.

One of the indisputable things Jesus explains about leadership in the parable of talents is that when you are a leader and you are faithful handling responsibility, you will be given even more. When you are given new leadership and management responsibilities, you will need new training and development as well.

One of the great surprises from my tenure in Christian ministry has been how much of what I have to do ultimately comes down to leadership. Leadership is not theological training, apologetics, debate and rhetoric, or even communication skills.

Leadership skills are what I have had to use daily to rally people to live for a cause that is greater than themselves. For the vision, I ask people to do this with teams they often do not know, without a salary, and many times to pay in advance with their time and resources.



Fortunately, there are more leadership tools available today than ever before. As the old saying goes, “Leaders are readers.” Build your library. Start a leadership small group with some peers and a few mentors who are willing to work with you to grow and expand your skills. Before you know it, you will be given more leadership roles in a variety of places.

### 3. Practical Ministry Skills

Though full-time ministry is primarily a calling, it is also a vocation, a unique profession that carries with it specific skills that must be developed.

James 3:1 says, “Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly” (NLT). That verse makes me uncomfortable sometimes, and it should you, too!

There are some specific responsibilities in which full-time ministers should be trained in and skilled to perform: learning detailed techniques for effective preaching, wise and compassionate counseling, how to lead people to Christ, and administering baptisms, are just a few.

These skills require instruction, practice and evaluation. When you combine a genuine call to ministry with an obedient response, and mix in the right kind of training and development, then lives will be changed, and the kingdom of God will certainly advance.

Just like any other skill, no matter how long you have done it, working on the basics with a constant focus on improvement will always raise the quality of work. Of course, this requires effort and humility. But, what cause could be more worthwhile than partnering with God in His mission on earth?

It never ceases to amaze me how complicated people's problems can be! When I first started in the ministry, it was all about changing the world. I did not know I would be changing diapers first. Not only was I changing diapers, I changed two different kinds; both natural diapers (my four children) and spiritual diapers.

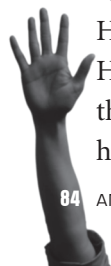
After twenty-five years of sitting down with people, listening to their life stories, you have heard it all! You even hear things you wish you had never heard or knew existed. In those moments, training is critical because it does not tend to go too well when a person opens their shattered life, you respond by saying, "They never told me what to do with somebody like you!"

There are a variety of gifts that emerge over time in the life of a full-time minister, gifts that are greatly benefited by additional training and coaching. These gifts are given by Christ to advance His kingdom and to make ministry more enjoyable for those He has called to labor. Prophecy, intercessory prayer, healing, worship, and hospitality are all examples of these types of gifts.

Romans 12:6 states, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us”<sup>8</sup>, and throughout the New Testament<sup>9</sup>, Scripture encourages and explains the role of these gifts. God gives these gifts to all followers of Christ for the common good of the body. Part of the process of growing in our relationship involves understanding and moving in the unique gifts God has given us.<sup>10</sup>

These kinds of gifts usually emerge in the context of regular ministry, and often carry with them a new assignment or a change of direction.

The indispensable element that makes practical ministry work so well is an intangible one, often called the “anointing of God.” Although Jesus was in character formation during His thirty-three years on earth, His ministry did not begin until the Holy Spirit fell on Him during His baptism in the Jordan River. From that point forward, Jesus went about doing good and healing people.<sup>11</sup>



When God calls a young man or woman, He always adds His anointing so that the work they accomplish is of God and not of them. This anointing often comes through association with those from whom they want to learn and emulate.

Elisha stayed with and served Elijah. As a result, he received a double-portion of his powerful anointing.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Timothy was mentored by Paul and he later received an anointing to be an apostle.<sup>13</sup> Being mentored, pastored, and discipled can have an amazing benefit and can release a greater anointing.

Practical ministry skills coupled with the anointing of God are the keys to an effective ministry. Skills are acquired, but the anointing is cultivated and received. Receiving the anointing comes from walking with God and availing yourself to Him. When we walk with Him, we earnestly desire Him and the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1, 14:1), and He gladly makes them available to us.

#### 4. Culture and Contemporary Issues

When you get to the bottom of it, ministry comes down to people. It is about serving, loving, leading, and having relationships with people. If you are given the privilege to do this, you need to speak the language of people,

understand what drives them, what scares them, what they enjoy, and what matters to them most.

In other words, you need to know their culture.

In our multicultural world, culture is constantly changing.

“Totò, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

I love that line from the Wizard of Oz because it reminds me how much our world has changed. I grew up in an era of record players, eight-track cassettes as big as a house, and a three-channel black and white TV with rabbit ears covered in tinfoil.

Our video game of choice was called “Pong.” Looking back, it was hilarious to think we could play Pong for hours. It was hooked up to the TV set and had a paddle that would hit a ball back and forth as it bounced off of various lines. If you knew a little physics and had good hand-eye coordination, you could bounce that ball off the line for hours.

We thought it was cool, but Pong has not stood the test of time. Thanks to Playstation, Xbox, and Wii, things have really changed.

Fortunately, we serve and represent a God who makes Himself known in every culture. He engages people in their culture, right where they are, with His presence and His kingdom.

Jesus said that the greatest command is to love God and to love people. If we are serious about doing this, we cannot stay in the safe walls of our churches and Christian ghettos (communities, I mean). We have to go boldly into the culture where people live.

The Bible is filled with examples of people who lived this way. We read of one of the tribes of Israel as understanding the times and knowing what Israel should do.<sup>14</sup>

The Lord gave Daniel and his friends the ability to understand all kinds of literature and learning as they lived in the immoral culture of Babylon.<sup>15</sup>

Paul preached to the crowds in Athens at Mars Hill using the work of their own philosophers and artists as his metaphors. This story found in Acts 17 is a great study on effective cross-cultural evangelism. When Paul spoke in the familiar setting of the synagogue, he opened the scroll and spoke of Christ from the Torah (the Hebrew law that “marked them” as the people of God) and the prophets. When he went to pagan Athens, he used their own culture to point them to God and then Jesus.



Both of these approaches were great because they demonstrate Paul's understanding, compassion and love for his audiences. Paul's approach at Mars Hill has left such an impression that Mars Hill has become a popular name for new churches.<sup>16</sup>

If we want to be like these great examples, we cannot assume we already know this culture. Likewise, cannot assume that because something is different, it is bad or wrong.

If you are going to minister to college students, you need to speak their language and understand their world. If you are going to have a community church in the suburbs, you need to know and have an answer to the challenges facing families and what matters most to those in your demographic. If you are going to be a missionary in Mauritania, there is so much to know you better get started right away!

In John 4:35, Jesus said to look at the fields as they are ready for the harvest. The Greek word<sup>17</sup> "to look" meant to study, to analyze, or to contemplate.

My wife Lynette has a real eye for New York City culture. She knows fashion and trends, and more importantly knows why women's hearts in this culture have been broken over and over again. This ability "to look" like Jesus instructed makes her effective in her mission field.

These are no small needs we face today. It requires work, diligence, and a commitment to study and pay constant, careful attention to ever-changing cultures. I have found that often there are two extremes—some Christian groups focus exclusively on the gospel, while others focus primarily on culture and becoming culturally relevant.

I believe it is our calling to embrace both, toward the end of seeing the gospel transform individual lives and culture, to the glory of God.

Where is God calling you? What do you know about that culture? Is that based on generalizations, or are you confident it is true? What areas need the most work? What type of ministry will have the most impact?

The good news is if you will take some time, listen to the people, and try to understand where they are coming from, God can use you in any culture around the world. The end goal is not cultural relevance, but significant spiritual transformation. Without prayer and understanding your cultural context, it will never happen.

Why is this so? Because love communicates in all cultures, through all languages, at all times. When you love God and love people, and you give your best effort to being trained, God will use you to do great things.



All full-time ministers need ongoing training in Bible and theology, leadership, practical ministry skills, and culture and contemporary issues, but you do not have to wait for the training to pursue your calling. Instead, you should build training into your calling.

Training can come through a variety of sources. You will receive training through practical experience. You will receive it as you become a lifelong learner through reading and studying. You will receive training through mentors, pastors, and coaches along the way. You may also receive training through formal education and seminaries.

The key is to continue in training, keeping your mind and heart hungry for the rest of your life. As we can see in the verse from the beginning of the chapter, Timothy's mentor challenged him to live this way. He could challenge him, because Paul lived that way himself.

One of the last things he wrote to Timothy was: “. . . bring my books.”<sup>18</sup>

His list of credentials are impressive; apostle, writer of much of the New Testament, mentor, master theologian, extraordinary missionary, and miracle worker.

And fortunately for all of us, he kept learning 'til the end.

# 7

## The Cost of Obedience

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it<sup>1</sup>

• JESUS

**H**ave you ever heard that if you follow Jesus, you will have peace and all your problems will go away?

Sounds good, doesn't it? It might sound good, and we might want it to be true, but it is not what the Bible says. And it certainly does not hold true to the historic experience of people who have loved and served God.

There is a cost to follow Jesus.

There was a young pastor and teacher in Germany. His country was in upheaval, and many of the people were hurting. In this context, a leader of staggering proportion emerged. His name was Hitler.

As the Nazis grew in power, we all know they tragically and brutally murdered six million Jews. Yet few remember how they also intimidated and manipulated the churches and their leadership. Those who resisted were either killed or thrown into prison. The young pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer helped to form the Confessing Church in Germany, a group that boldly resisted and spoke out against the Third Reich when so many other Christians shamefully compromised and endorsed the Fuhrer.

Taking up his cross daily and following Jesus ultimately cost Bonhoeffer his life, but before he died, he wrote a book that has become a classic, *The Cost of Discipleship*.<sup>2</sup>

He did not just write about the cost, he paid it. He trusted Jesus' promise that in losing his life, he would be saved.

Bonhoeffer's story is only one in the long legacy of those who paid the ultimate price of their lives for their faith in Christ. Many of these are described in detail in another classic, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.<sup>3</sup> I first heard about this book when I was a freshman involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

A few years later, I was spearheading a new campus ministry at UNC Chapel Hill, and I asked one of our new believers to give a brief talk to our group. He was

a student athlete (a tough wrestler, an ultimate fighter type), and since I was mentoring him, I wanted to give him the opportunity to minister to others. It was something he seemed to be good at since he had come to this newfound faith in Christ.

I asked him to speak to our young campus ministry (this can make you a little nervous as you are never quite sure what a new believer will say). It was right before Christmas, so it seemed fairly safe. I convinced myself it would be fine—he would give us a nice Christmas encouragement of some sort, the students would be blessed, and he would have a great chance to grow closer to Christ in the process.

What actually happened next was beyond belief. He did not bring Christmas cheer—he spoke on the topic of martyrdom. It was not what any of us expected during the Christmas season and all the typical “baby Jesus” talk.

I will never forget that night. His message on martyrdom was a surprise, but turned out to be excellent and showed from Scripture and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* how the early church was often built upon the willing sacrifice of the lives of martyrs.

It is not hard to separate this aspect of Christianity (dying for Christ) from our contemporary culture and the world where most of us live. But from the earliest



days of the church, this was part of what it meant to be a disciple.

All<sup>4</sup> of Jesus' twelve disciples were martyred; history tells us that they tried to kill John, but he would not die, so they exiled him on the island of Patmos where he eventually passed away. Some died at the hands of the sword,<sup>5</sup> others were run through with the spear,<sup>6</sup> and according to some accounts, Peter was crucified upside down at his own insistence because he felt he was not worthy to die like Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

We may not be forced to pay that price, but many of our brothers and sisters around the world do.<sup>8</sup> Martyrdom continues to be a part of what it means to follow Christ in the world today.

I just returned from Israel where yet another Palestinian Arab Christian was martyred in Gaza because he was a dedicated, evangelistic businessman for the cause of Christ; one willing to take a stand for the gospel in a region hostile to the gospel.

Though it will probably never happen to you or me, but if it did, it would not be the worst thing that we could endure. As hard as it may be to grasp, the Bible describes it as a sign of great faith.<sup>9</sup> Like everything in our relationship with God, it should be received with a

heart of love<sup>10</sup> and not resulting from a lack of wisdom, or worse, arrogance.

It is probably easiest to understand this lifestyle as a gift or a grace that God gives to some. That is how some of God's servants can go with their families and live in extremely dangerous places, sometimes paying the ultimate price.

He gives them the grace to do it; it does not mean that He wants all of us to rush out and throw ourselves in harm's way to prove our devotion. The story of Steve Saint and Jim Elliott, portrayed in the film *The End of the Spear*, is a moving and powerful example of this kind of grace.

This kind of grace in action, and this extent to which people love and follow Jesus, always changes the world. The story of Stephen (found in Acts 7), the first Christian martyr, was a dramatic turning point for the early church. It is also the only time in Scripture<sup>11</sup> that we see Jesus stand up from His throne to receive one of His followers.

It was as if He was giving him a standing ovation.

Very soon after Stephen's death, one of those witnessing and even relishing in that barbaric moment had a divine appointment with the resurrected Lord Himself. He was



dramatically converted and went on to change the world. Saul of Tarsus was his name.

We know him today as the apostle Paul.

Whether or not God gives us the grace to pay the ultimate price is not the issue. The issue is that all of us are called to pay the price of obedience at all costs.

The cost of discipleship is the cost of obedience. If we are to serve Jesus, we must obey Him, no matter how great the cost.

And obedience will always cost us. I have seen this principle demonstrated again and again.

A close friend of mine and partner in ministry was called to the full-time ministry as an international student at UNC Chapel Hill. He finished three master's degrees, got married (his wife finished her Ph.D.) and returned to his homeland of Taiwan where they both accepted teaching positions at a prestigious university.

In 1995, when he joined me on a trip to China, the Spirit of God began to move in a powerful way, and he was reminded of the call to ministry God had given him.

He knew he had to respond to the call, but he did not know how to tell his wife. They were starting a family,

they both had great jobs, and ministry in China meant danger, uncertainty, and none of the privileges afforded university professors in a free nation.

Reluctantly, he told his wife about the direction he felt God was leading them. At first she said, “No way.” However, gradually she came to see that this was where God had called them. When they told their parents, they faced even more opposition<sup>12</sup>: his in-laws threatened to disown them if they went.

My friend could not deny that God was calling them, and they needed to obey. Through prayer and patience, setbacks and adversity, they endured and God began to turn hearts and open doors in powerful ways.

So they left the security and stability of their home to join God in a great adventure. As a result, they have participated in a miraculous move of God of historic proportions in China.

It is no exaggeration to say their lives have influenced multiplied thousands if not millions of Chinese. Even their nationally distinguished parents from Taiwan have grown to recognize this calling and have given God glory as they have been reconciled with each other and once again walk in family harmony.

All of this came at a great price – sacrifices, facing fears, leaving security, not having parental approval, and much more.

Through the years, I have come to recognize in their story and many others that there are three costs that typically follow the call to full-time ministry. I can sum them up in three words: peers, parents, and pressures.

## 1. Peers

In our world, especially among young people, peers are one of the most important parts of an individual's support structure. Some sociologists<sup>12</sup> have argued that for the majority of young people today, the formative influence of peers has surpassed even that of the nuclear family.

If an aspiring full-time minister has a diverse group of peers, chances are good that the majority of them will not understand or support the decision for ministry. Even if the majority of their peers are believers, they probably still will not get it.

I will never forget how one of my peers told me (when I explained my calling), “I’ll do anything I can to stop you.” Years later, he came to me and asked how he could join me.

Jesus' own circumstances can provide great comfort. Matthew, Mark, and Luke<sup>13</sup> all include the story of Jesus' mother and brothers interrupting Him as He is teaching in the temple. They called Him outside to speak with Him, presumably because they were not too sure what He was up to. The Gospel of John takes it to the next level. Early in His ministry it flat out states that Jesus' brothers, "did not believe in Him."<sup>14</sup>

One of Jesus' strongest supporters was His cousin John the Baptist, but as John was sitting in jail, he sent his disciples to Jesus to communicate that he was now doubting whether Jesus was truly who He said He was.<sup>15</sup>

Even though Jesus Christ was the Son of God, He still had human emotions, and this doubt from his friends and family had to hurt.

There are other passages that show the people of Nazareth (His hometown) doubting and questioning the validity of Jesus' calling.<sup>16</sup> We do not see any of His peers rushing to His defense.

At His most difficult moment in the Garden of Gethsemane,<sup>17</sup> the only support He could rely on was His Heavenly Father. This is no doubt a model for us to follow.

While peers can discourage the call of God, in some cases, they can confuse or mislead the call in the opposite direction. I wrote earlier that there have been times in my twenty-five years in ministry where so many have wanted to enter the full-time ministry (for the wrong reasons) that I have had to preach against it.

When this happens, it is really more “contagious excitement” than the genuine call of God that people are responding to. They get excited when their friends are called, and so they want to respond too. In the long run, this excitement is never enough.

## 2. Parents

It can be hard on a parent to understand why their honor student who just spent tens of thousands of dollars on a degree will not use that investment in their career. If the parent is not a believer or has had a difficult experience with church, the thought of their child becoming a minister can make them feel threatened or ostracized.

This can be extremely challenging but when it is handled with love and guidance, it can turn out to be a great blessing for all. In my case, my Jewish father thought I was nuts for wanting to be a minister. Yet today, he is a follower of Christ and my biggest fan.

Another factor to consider is the new breed of parents today. Whether you call them, “Little League Dad,” “Soccer Mom,” or “Helicopter Parents,” they are constantly hovering over their kids. They are hyper-involved in the lives, choices, and futures of their children.

My friend Tim Elmore (the Founder and President of Growing Leaders, Inc.),<sup>18</sup> recently told me about a parent who was irate that their child received a “C” on a paper in a class in college. It turns out that the reason they were so upset and wanted to engage the professor was because the parent wrote the paper!

As it becomes increasingly common for parents to live vicariously through their children, the stress on relationships between parents and sons or daughters going into full-time ministry will undoubtedly increase.

Becoming a minister is not in the plans for most parents as they dish out thousands of dollars for their child’s education. It was not in the plans for my oldest son either, but that is what happened. He just finished his masters degree from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and has decided he wants to give his life to missions and full-time ministry.

Anyone who finds themselves in this tense situation should view it as a chance to show the love of Christ and



honor their mother and father. It can be a great moment to develop patience and perseverance in you as it takes time for them to accept it.

They may not see how the ministry actually utilizes many of the skills that a degree provides, even indirectly. Ministry will not provide the biggest salary, and may not give them prestigious bragging rights among their peers, but as God moves in your life and ministry, I believe eventually they will honor your obedience to the call.

I have seen it happen over and over again. It worked that way for me.

## Pressures

All of us face pressure in life, but the pressure of the full-time ministry is on another level. It is constant, beyond your control, affects more than just you, and the consequences are eternal.

William Carey, famed Baptist missionary to India, is known as the Father of Modern Missions. Take his life for example, as told by Edmund Clowney:

*“Every conceivable obstacle seemed to block Carey’s obedience: objections from his friends, the reluctance of his wife, her long illness and death,*

*the powerful and planned opposition of the East India company, the disinterest of those whom he sought at such vast sacrifice to reach.”<sup>19</sup>*

Probably the worst part of all was the opposition he faced from his Christian friends who really did not believe in missions as a calling.

The variety of pressures runs along a wide spectrum. From finances to spiritual warfare, from standing with a suffering family to coaching an addict to freedom, from praying for a miracle to hearing horrific and heart-wrenching details that you would give anything to forget, the pressure NEVER ends.

This pressure and fear can be especially difficult for single women. Some people are unsure of the validity of women in ministry even today, and it can be a lonely, difficult road. But God is using heroic young women who are responding in obedience and entering full-time ministry.

Answering the call to ministry is not always fun, exciting, or even spiritual. It can be grueling, excruciating, and painful. That is why you have to understand it is a calling that requires obedience.



As you are reading this book, you can probably recall people in your life who themselves withstood this pressure in order to propel you further in your relationship with God. Why don't you talk with them, ask about their story, and learn how you can encourage and support them?

We all can use a little extra encouragement and you can be the one to deliver a great line like Rocky's wife Adrienne did: "There's one thing I want you do to for me. Win. Win!"<sup>20</sup>

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul gives a snapshot into what his life of ministry was like.

*Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, **I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.***

2 Corinthians 7:25-28, NIV, emphasis mine



That is quite a list. Thank God I cannot say my list looks that bad. But I think it is amazing that of all the pressures that Paul faced, what he came back to, what he concluded with, was the constant pressure of his care for the churches.

If you respond to this call to full-time ministry, you will face tremendous pressure. You will have times when you will be persecuted. There will be other times when you feel like you are not making a difference or you have no idea how you are going to work out the finances.

I have found that in the end, it is caring for and carrying the pain of people that weighs the heaviest. People are why we are in the ministry. It is not for fame or fortune. Most ministers will not get either one. God loves people and He calls you and I to do the same.

Remember, some people will disappoint you and break your heart.

Jesus connected ministry with fishing. If I compare my early days in ministry to fishing, I caught a lot of boots and tires. I ministered to one guy for more than a year, regularly spending time with him, mentoring and counseling. After that year, he decided he did not want to be a follower of Christ or listen to what I had to say. He went on to become a leader in the gay/lesbian campus group.

Another student lied straight to me and then betrayed me. After three weeks of working with this “new believer,” he asked to borrow my car. Since he was taking time off from college to “get his life together,” I gave him my keys thinking it would help.

He ended up stealing my car.

He took it on a joyride across the state for a few days before he brought it back. He must have thought that my car was one of the perks for anyone I baptized.

Maybe I should have held him under a little longer.

Yet still, all the pain, all the horror stories and never-ending pressures seem so small once you see God do something amazing. Eventually, God will use you to bring supernatural change in people’s lives. You will develop wonderful relationships that grow to become some of the greatest treasures of your ministry.

The joy I have received from serving needy orphans, desperate house church leaders in China, new believers in our churches, and many other lives I have had the privilege of being a part of, makes it all worthwhile.

When you experience these deep relationships, as the Lord builds spiritual family among the body of believers, the pressure will get greater.

There will be those that you have walked with, great servants in the house that experience chronic pain. There will be moments when people you care deeply for go through devastating crisis and tragedy. You will come to love some who are so likeable, but just cannot seem to get it together, and you will have to patiently endure through their ups and downs.

Sometimes they will not make it. One day they might just give up and be gone.

You will give your all for people. You will pray, fast, bind and loose, counsel and encourage, and anything else you can think of to help people grow closer to God. You will literally try everything; sometimes it will become a great testimony. Other times, you will have to file it under “pastoral mysteries file,” and you will not have anything else left to say.

In those moments, you will feel tempted to feel like a failure. After all, people look to you to set the captives free. It is your job. It is what you get paid for. Then you will remember that Jesus did not help everyone either,<sup>21</sup> and you will be encouraged.

You will weep with joy in one moment and shed tears of hurt and pain in another. People will make you laugh, cry, cuss (or at least make you want to cuss), shout, steam, and vent.

This is the cost of doing life together. It is a high price, but in the end, you will find that it is worth every tear and every sacrifice. Nothing else can satisfy you if ministry is your call.

# 8

## The Consequences of Disobedience

For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. So those who are smart keep their mouths shut, for it is an evil time. Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed. Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice.

• AMOS 5:12-15 (NLT)

**T**hese are the words God gave the prophet Amos. Amos, in turn, obediently spoke them to the people of Israel. It is not hard to see how appropriate they are even today in 2008.

It is as easy as turning on the news or opening a web browser to see examples of sin, rebellion, and injustice. Whether it is racism in Jena, Louisiana, or genocide in Darfur, we can see the effect of sin all over the world. Unfortunately, you can probably see this in your own community or even in your neighborhood.

When God uses prophets in the Old Testament, they are typically given a message that tells the people of God that change is essential. Naturally, God deals with the character and the calling of the prophet before He sends them to everyone else. After all, no one wants to listen to a prophet who is not practicing what he preaches!

It is interesting to see how God deals with this situation. He sends words to a person, who then turns around and tells the people something like Amos said in the verse above.

The right response for the people is not talk, it is obedience. Communicating the message verbally is an important step in the process, but it is usually the action of obedience that creates change, and obedience is the role of the people.

Obedience, however, rarely takes place without someone calling people to repent on behalf of God. So both the message AND the action are critical. It is not one or the other.

When the messenger of God functions, the people can respond. When each party obeys and does their part, the result is reconciliation between God and an individual, a community, a culture, and even a nation.

So what happens if there is no messenger? Paul asked this question to the church at Rome.

*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*

Romans 10:14,15

How can people hear the gospel if no one is sent to preach it?

What happens if no one stands up and calls the people to turn from sin, rebellion, and evil? When will the people run from evil so that they can live if there is no one to challenge them? How will the courts be true halls of justice if no one stands up for the victims of injustice?

We must have evangelists, prophets, pastors, and leaders to turn our nation to God.





Politicians cannot do this. Doctors and lawyers cannot do it either, or actors and actresses or professional athletes. Even committed businessmen who invest and build their communities aren't able to do this work.

At least not on their own—it takes the whole team.

It takes a messenger who gives their whole life to communicating God's messages to the people. The foundational member of this team is the man or woman who answers the call of God to bring the teaching of the Word and prayer for the transformation of lives and the equipping of the saints.

From the earliest days of the church in Acts, full-time ministers were highly dedicated and motivated to spend their days, weeks, months and entire lives proclaiming the gospel without the responsibilities of another profession. Paul said, “. . . woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

Changing a nation requires the whole team, the whole body of Christ. It is God's mission and should be our goal. Therefore the cost of disobedience, the cost of failing to respond to the call of God, is nothing less than thwarting the hope of the nations.

This is too great a price to pay!

In the Gospels, we do not see Jesus give prayer requests often. But after a long and exhausting day of ministry, when the crowds seemed overwhelming and the needs were innumerable, this is what He said to His disciples. “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.” (Matthew 9:37,38)

At the risk of stating the obvious, if Jesus asks us to pray for something, it is probably pretty important. He emphasizes this point because He realizes there are a lot of sheep with no shepherds.<sup>2</sup>

There have been times in history where revivals have started from businessmen and women, people who were not in full-time ministry. I am praying this continues to happen. But if it is sustainable revival we are after, then it must include people repenting and turning to Christ. These sheep will need shepherds, and shepherding and making disciples simply takes time.

A few years ago, a football coach named Bill McCartney started a men’s movement known as Promise Keepers. All across the United States, huge gatherings of men cried out to God, stood with their friends, coworkers, brothers and sons and committed to lead as men of godly character.

In order for these covenants to last after the meetings were over, there had to be leadership and support on the ground. There needed to be those who gave their full attention to build lasting communities of faith.

I think most would agree, this is still the case today. Sheep need shepherds, and our nations need changing. We need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers!

The latest statistics are not very encouraging. Dr. Aubrey Malphurs, an expert church consultant, strategist and professor, laments the verdict his studies reveal. Eighty percent of churches in North America are either plateauing or in decline and thousands are closing annually.<sup>3</sup>

He also comments on the fact the number of young people going into ministry is also in decline. Citing another source he states, “In 1975, as many as 24 percent of clergy were 35 years or younger. However in 1999, only seven percent were 35 or younger, and a growing number of these were women.”<sup>4</sup> Church researcher George Barna adds the discouraging news that the “unchurched population” is up ninety-two percent over the past thirteen years.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these numbers, I believe God is pouring His Spirit on a new generation! I believe a door of



opportunity is open to us if we will cling to the cross, break free from our addiction to self and rise up to serve Jesus with all of our being.

We need help here in America. There was a time when this nation was sending thousands of missionaries all over the world. Today, missionaries are coming from all over the world to evangelize the United States. Thank God for their obedience to the call, but we still need those who will themselves answer this call and give their time and full attention to prayer, the preaching of the Word, and ministry to others.

There is no shortage of darkness in our popular culture. Far too often, sin is celebrated in theaters, on iPods, from Xboxes and Playstations, through web browsers, and over our plasma screens.

The power of pornography is growing at an exponential rate as it becomes increasingly accessible. What used to shock us, whether it is graphic violence, filthy language, or explicit subject matter, now barely catches our attention.

If this is going to change, someone has to sound the trumpet,<sup>6</sup> reminding us to hate evil, to run from it to what is good.

And what about justice?

There are more people suffering in the bondage of slavery today than at any other time in recorded human history.<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that most of us think slavery is something we find in a history book, by conservative estimates, more than twenty-seven million people<sup>8</sup> are currently suffering in this horrific institution.

In 1850, a slave in the Ivory Coast would have cost the equivalent of \$40,000. Today, you can purchase one for roughly \$30.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Department of Justice, the fastest growing form of slavery is “human trafficking,” trapping, forcing, and transporting people into inescapable and inhuman bondage.<sup>10</sup> According to the most recent reports, 600,000 to 800,000 people are victimized every year, and trafficking is the third most lucrative form of international crime behind drugs and weapons.<sup>11</sup> Eighty percent of the victims were female, and seventy percent of them were sex slaves.<sup>12</sup>

Here is the most heinous, shocking, and demonic part of this tragedy: right now there are more than two million children in the commercial sex trade.<sup>13</sup> Children that try to help their family through working honest jobs are often tricked, kidnapped, and then wake up in brothels where they are habitually raped, while their captors get rich.

What could be a greater injustice? Could there be anything more evil than that? Imagine how this makes God feel.

Where are God's prophets, demanding that this evil stops?

We need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers.

What about the millions who die every year because they lack clean drinking water? Where is the response to the genocide in Darfur, the compassion for displaced refugees from war and civil unrest, the answer to the global orphan crisis, and the commitment to the AIDS epidemic? If the government had all the answers, then the needs would have been met long ago.

Who will cry out for justice, love, and compassion out of service for God? Isaiah heard the Trinity say to One Another, "Who will go for us?" Isaiah answered, "Here I am, Lord, send me."<sup>14</sup>

We need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers.

Preachers, ministers and full-time workers can influence culture. They can be a part of a social revolution. It has happened before, and it can happen again. Saint Patrick brought education, literacy, and the life-changing power of the gospel and forever changed Ireland.

John Knox, generally regarded as the founder of the Presbyterian denomination, was the moral compass for England and Scotland during his lifetime and regularly challenged and influenced the questionable practices of Mary, Queen of Scots. She was famously quoted as saying, “I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all of the assembled armies of Europe.”

Though he is best known for writing the classic hymn, “Amazing Grace,” John Newton was also the captain of a slave ship. In time, because of what God did in his life through his faith in Christ, he willingly left the lucrative yet deplorable business for the full-time ministry. One of the men he pastored, British politician William Wilberforce, is generally credited as being the driving force behind ending the Atlantic slave trade.

The only minister who signed the Declaration of Independence was John Witherspoon. Also as the president of the College of New Jersey (today known as Princeton University), which as we mentioned earlier was founded on Christian principles, Witherspoon helped shape the political views and thinking of many influential American leaders—including the fourth American president, James Madison. His influence continues in this nation today.

God used a man named John G. Lake so dramatically, to heal the people of Spokane, WA, that the government declared it the healthiest city in America.<sup>15</sup>

We all know of the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the gospel and social justice, but it is easy to forget that his work started in a pulpit and that he often quoted the Bible, claiming that his source of inspiration came from above.

For more than forty years, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu loved the poor, the sick, and the orphans of Calcutta. The world would come to know her as Mother Teresa, a woman whose dramatic love for God and people changed the world. This lifestyle is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Her legacy inspired author Anthony Walton to challenge the Body of Christ with a powerful goal. “Imagine a million-strong army of Mother Teresas and the impact that would have on the neighborhoods throughout planet earth.”<sup>16</sup>

These revolutionaries changed their cities and nations because they obeyed. Who knows how the darkness may have triumphed if they had disobeyed.

The cost of disobedience is too high.

Will you pay the price of obedience?







# 9

## Funding the Ministry

I thank my God every time  
I remember you. In all my prayers  
for all of you, I always pray  
with joy because of your partnership  
in the gospel from the first day  
until now . . .

• PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6

**A**s men and women wrestle with this calling, one of the biggest issues they confront is finances. If money was not an issue, I think many more people would answer the call of God to full-time ministry.

Financial concerns are a sticky point, a daunting challenge, and often the driving force behind second thoughts and uncertainty.

Although a small minority may view the ministry as being for “money-grubbers,” most view it as a pledge of poverty ensuring a future of lack. Whether we conjure up

thoughts of the ravens bringing Elijah food, a dusty monastery, or horror stories of ministries that need urgent resources in the next twenty-four hours, it is easy to think of full-time ministry as demanding a vow of poverty.

It is just what every father dreams of—his daughter coming home with her new husband announcing, “We’re pregnant! And oh, by the way . . . God called us to the ministry.”

The value of the call is not what is questioned. It is the viability. Few will question the why since most people will not deny there is indeed a need for people to answer the call of God.

But it is oh so easy to ask, “how?” The fact is we should ask this question, and believe me I understand the uncertainties that accompany the process of getting answers.

At the same time, I want to say as assuredly as possible, with every vision that comes from God, He brings His provision. Financing the ministry is His responsibility and the God we serve owns the cattle on a thousand hills.<sup>1</sup>

The provision may not become visible exactly when or how we expected it, but you can literally take it to the

bank, His blessing is coming. He will meet all of your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup> He is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us.<sup>3</sup>

God's provision is something we must understand biblically. God wants to provide for His work. As a matter of fact, He wants to provide extravagantly for His work.

When Moses was collecting the offering from the people of Israel for the tabernacle, he had to tell them to stop “. . . because what they already had was more than enough to do the work.”<sup>4</sup>

When Jesus fed the five thousand,<sup>5</sup> He started with five loaves of bread and two fish. After five thousand men had eaten (not to mention all the women and children which assuredly would have outnumbered the men), there were twelve baskets of leftovers. This was no fluke. Jesus later fed four thousand<sup>6</sup> (again, just counting the men) with seven loaves and a few small fish—this time with seven baskets of leftovers.

You know it is a supernatural meal when you feed thousands of people and finish with more leftovers than what you had when you first rang the dinner bell!



This process of believing for financial provision will stretch you, challenge you, encourage you, and in the end, cause you to fall deeper in love with a God who will appear more loving and generous than you could have ever imagined.

That has been my story and the experience of so many who have walked down this same road.

Speaking about this subject to the church in Corinth,<sup>7</sup> Paul writes that a soldier in the army does not pay his own way, a man who plants a vineyard receives the fruit of the vine, and the shepherd benefits from the sheep.

Drawing on the custom and arrangement that God made with the Levites he continues:

*Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the LORD has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.*

1 Corinthians 9:13,14

Notice that it does not say, it is a good idea, or maybe they should, or this is the way it is always been.

No, it says, **“the Lord has commanded . . .”**

Anytime you see that phrase, whatever comes next is guaranteed to happen, whether or not we agree or understand. When God commands something, you can count on it.

Soldiers do not pay for their own expense in any army. When I think of the thousands of soldiers selflessly serving around the world, I am relieved to consider that at least they get paid to be there. Likewise, soldiers in God’s army get their provision from their commander-in-chief. It is His great desire to provide for those who would follow Him with their whole lives and their career in His mission in the earth.

Let us consider three basic ways people can finance their full-time ministry calling.

## Hired to Work Full-Time

The first practical option for many going into ministry is to be hired and paid by a non-profit organization. Depending on the size of the ministry, this is often done by invitation or through developing from within the ministry into full-time employment.

Some larger organizations have recruiting, advertising, and an open and formal application/hiring process. These organizations are more corporate in nature, having a human resources department and an extensive hiring process.

It is my experience that most churches and non-profits hire from within through established relationships or their volunteer base.

The relationship in a sense, functions as the first part of the interview process. When you know someone and have a prior relationship with them, a necessary amount of trust and confidence creates a good starting point for employment.

I have initiated employment opportunities with friends and members who are proven, effective, and “gung-ho” for our organization. Hiring people like this sure beats relying on the want ads in popular Christian magazines.

If you believe God has called you to full-time ministry in the church or organization you are currently a part of, my advice is to proceed prayerfully, go in with your eyes wide open and ask questions like these of yourself and others:

*Do you know the leadership structure? Is there an organizational chart?*



*Is there an actual offer on the table?*

*Is there a job description?*

*Is there a salary? Health care? Other benefits? Do you have to raise support?*

*Does the organization have a Human Resources Department or an employee manual?*

*Is there room for growth and development?*

*What has been the experience of other employees?*

Oftentimes people make the mistake of viewing a church or ministry as something so holy that it would be wrong to ask these kinds of practical questions. Let me encourage you as someone who hires many people, this is not the case.

You need to ask these questions, and with the right heart and a good attitude, there is nothing unholy about it at all. Providing for yourself and your family<sup>8</sup> is very important to God, and vocational ministry can be part of the provision when you approach it with wisdom and your eyes wide open.

Although most ministries will not have the corporate infrastructure of a Microsoft, GE, or Deloitte & Touche (where my wife worked for years), most of them will be



able to provide the answers you need to have clarity and understanding.

In turn, you should expect that the ministry or church will have certain professional expectations of you as well. It is not enough for them that you read your Bible some, pray for a while, and hang out with people while you drink a latté.

When you enter the ministry, you commit to do a specific job that should include performance evaluations based on a job description and achieving certain results. The non-profit in turn agrees to take care of the basic aspects of your livelihood and well-being through a fair wage.

One translation of 1 Timothy 5:17,18 explains this concept.

*Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain." And in another place, "Those who work deserve their pay!" (NLT)*

Other translations state that these elders<sup>9</sup> or ministry leaders are worthy of double honor, while The Message paraphrases double honor as "give a bonus." The idea is

clear that indeed the workers deserve their pay, and even though they are servants, their service should not come without appropriate and reasonable compensation.

The New Testament letters are also filled with qualifications and expectations of the one who serves.<sup>10</sup> They include guidelines for leadership including: a history of responsibility (often demonstrated as a husband and father), the fruit of the Spirit (self-controlled, patient, loving), and a mature and humble attitude.

If the characteristics listed in these passages are not present in one's life, then the discussion of full-time ministry should be put on hold until these issues are mastered. I cannot stress enough how critical these character issues are to success.<sup>11</sup>

The man or woman who meets these criteria, who has been called of God to the ministry, and is effectively carrying out his or her work, is certainly worthy of a salary!

## Partnership Team

Another proven financial support method that allows people to respond to this calling is the designated partnership team. Many missions and parachurch organizations are well-known for this approach.

Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth With A Mission, Overseas Mission Fellowship, Navigators, Young Life, Chi Alpha, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Every Nation Ministries, Campus Harvest, and many other missions organizations follow this method.

The partnership team refers to a group of individuals who are committed to the vision and mission of the person they are supporting, and demonstrate this commitment through financial investment. In the great tradition of the Levites and the ministers in the book of Acts, this allows the “missionary” the provision to follow God’s call with their full time and attention.

As difficult as it may be to grasp, Jesus Himself had a partnership team as referenced in Luke 8:1-3.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians gives us a window into the fact that Paul had this kind of relationship with the church at Philippi (Philippians 1:5, 4:16). The language of “partnership in the gospel,” “gift(s)” and “you sent me aid again and again when I was in need” all come straight from this epistle.

Paul writes that the gifts and blessings that the generous Christians sent him as a result of their partnership created a credit to their accounts that pleased God. Simply put, the letter from Paul to the Philippians was on one level a partnership thank you letter.

Because this is Scripture, we know that these are not just the words of a grateful minister but they demonstrate a partnership model that God created and approves of in order to strengthen His church and to accomplish His mission on earth—that of releasing more workers into the harvest.

The faithfulness and integrity of organizations which follow this model, along with humble and heroic missionaries, have helped this “Philippians model” gain recognition and acceptability in the larger body of Christ. One of the great results of this has been new opportunities for more missions groups to follow this pattern.

Training for partnership development is available in abundance. If this is your path to the ministry, then check with your organization or leadership. They will give you the expertise available to help you succeed in this path.

As you pray through this process, it is normal to be nervous and somewhat uncertain, but it is clear that God promises He will meet all of your needs. You will be amazed at how the Body of Christ will support you.

You can do it. Remember, when God gives vision, He always brings provision.



## Part-Time Employment/Creative Entrepreneurship

In Acts 18, the writer includes an interesting detail about Paul during one of his missionary journeys. He meets a Jew named Aquila whose wife is Priscilla. They would become some of his most faithful partners in ministry.

Verses 2 and 3 state, “He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.”<sup>12</sup> The Bible does not reference this again, but apparently, Paul generated income at different times through different means. Clearly in Philippians, we see the partnership model, but here it seems that Paul worked at least some of the time to generate the resources he needed for his missionary work.

This is why this method is often called the tent-making model. I know of many ministers who out of necessity to take care of their families do creative entrepreneurial ventures or work part-time.

In my early years, this was my strategy as the young organization I was building was unable to provide a salary to meet my needs. In most situations I view this solution as a temporary one. The Scriptural pattern is clear that ministry requires focus and dedication and Paul reminds us that those who do the work should be

provided a salary. As he says, “Don’t muzzle the ox while it’s treading.”<sup>13</sup>

Is God primarily concerned with oxen in this passage? No, what He is saying is do not keep the full-time workhorse from the resources and sustenance they need to keep going strong.

Still at times, creative entrepreneurship is what a person has to do to make ends meet. It can be a terrific funding mechanism as long as it does not compete with your ministry or create a conflict of interest. I realized a long time ago, I cannot be ministering and pastoring people while at the same time trying to get them to buy my products. It does not work and creates a conflict of interest and a question of ethics.

These three methods are not conclusive, but they are probably the most frequently used for enabling people to go full-time into the ministry.

When an individual earns his or her living doing ministry as their profession, believe it or not, even the U.S. Government is favorable and supportive of them.

Two particular aspects of this support that have been a great benefit to me in my years of service: the first is the housing allowance provision, and the second is the possibility of Social Security exemption.

Housing allowance is a tremendous benefit and any non-profit church organization should have the details and information necessary to begin the application process. The result of this allowance is that the approved amount of your housing allowance becomes tax-free income as a reward for the valuable contribution of your service. The allowance includes rent or mortgage, utilities and other expenses that allow your home to be a place where counseling and ministry can take place.

The Social Security exemption is a privilege that allows ministers who have a conscientious objection to outsourcing their retirement funds to the government, to opt out of the program. It only applies to income generated as result of ministry work, and it is not “free money.” If you do opt out, you have a moral obligation to follow through on your word and arrange your own retirement funds.

The result of both of these generous benefits is that men and women in full-time ministry can use the maximum amount of their resources to invest toward the pursuit of God’s mission.

DO NOT take my word here as legally binding. My goal is only to let you know these kinds of benefits MAY be available to you depending on your job status and the organization you work for. Seek guidance from a

qualified non-profit tax specialist or professionals in the non-profit organization you wish to serve.

As you proceed in discovering your calling, seek the best counsel available. Speak at length to your pastor or pastoral team. If you have leaders over you, they are there for your good and protection. As they give you the green light to press toward the full time calling, pursue it with all you have to give. Remember, God is for you, and He will meet your need “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

When God guides, He provides.

He is “the Lord who will provide.”<sup>14</sup> That is His name.





# 10

## Rewards of Full-Time Ministry

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day . . .

• 2 TIMOTHY 4:7,8 (NASB)

**B**efore we talk about many of the rewards in choosing ministry full-time, I have to say that the greatest reward I have received is the pleasure of growing closer to God. It is the reward that inevitably comes when we do what He has called us to do.

There is no way to describe the joy that comes from knowing you have done what He has asked of you. The power of His presence that meets you in that place is like no other joy. I really have no other way to describe it than to call it the “sweet spot of God.”

If there were no other rewards, this would be more than worth it.

Recently, I was meeting with a mega successful multi-millionaire businessman. He and his wife were pouring out their hearts to me, wondering if they had truly hit the mark with their lives. They, like countless others, are longing for purpose.

We had a wonderful discussion and my respect for them grew because they were so down to earth, transparent and humble. I longed to help them find new vision and new life as they began the process of living for others and giving their lives and resources away.

One thing that has helped me so much in my own quest for fulfillment is to know that more often than not, my life has been in the center of God's will. I have not done everything right, but I have had a real sense of His leading and calling. This has been such a reward from God.

I love the words of Paul as he was growing older and preparing for his graduation to heaven:

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day . . .*

2 Timothy 4:7,8 (NASB)

Paul had a sense of his obedience to the Lord and the future reward that was coming. His boast was not his ministry and all the things he accomplished. He was excited that he had kept the faith and finished his course.

What is your course? Are you finding it? More importantly, are you fulfilling it? As you do, your rewards will surely come.

If there were no other rewards, finding and fulfilling His will for our lives would be more than enough. The world longs to know this secret. What a joy this is!

Before we describe some of the other blessings, let me be clear. When you get down to it, there are no unique rewards for becoming a minister. There is no Bible verse about a reward for going into full-time ministry.

There are, however, rewards for being obedient to His calling on your life. This is what we are after—obedience to His perfect will.

Becoming a doctor or lawyer out of obedience can bring the rewards of obedience. Being an actor or actress who wants to bring godliness to Hollywood may be the calling on your life. Your obedience to God is what God will reward.



I have done what I do for one reason: obedience to the call. Not because there is a need, not because I am always motivated, not because of any expectation on my life by others. And certainly not because it makes God love me more.

My dear friend and partner Simon Kim (the name is changed for obvious reasons) is doing extraordinary and often dangerous work for North Koreans. I stand amazed at how he can continue to do what he does for the Lord. There are times when his life is literally on the line and in grave danger. Gospel work may not have the James Bond 007 look and feel, but it is often more exciting than fiction. It is opportunity met with challenge.<sup>1</sup>

Simon and I worked together for many years at my home church, Kings Park International, in Durham, NC. We prayed and dreamed of finding a way to help the North Koreans living in the worst circumstances imaginable. Satellite images at night reveal that North Korea is physically one of the darkest industrialized nations in the world.

This is certainly symbolic of the spiritual darkness rampant in that nation.

Finally, after years of ministering together in Durham, the door of opportunity opened. The Lord beckoned

Simon and his young family. They are in that place of ministry right now. His reward is not in responding to a need but answering the call of God.

I honestly think if I tried to do his calling, I would either get imprisoned or martyred. Martyrdom is not my call today; I am sure my wife and sons agree! But Simon does what he does with ease. Certainly he and his wife will receive the reward of the Lord. They have made more sacrifices than I can imagine, but they never complain and do it with a sense of true fulfillment. They are in their “sweet spot.” They are obedient, as Paul said, “to the heavenly vision.”<sup>2</sup>

In the words of the profound writer Oswald Chambers, “The only way to be obedient to ‘the heavenly vision’ is to give our utmost for His highest— our best for His glory.”<sup>3</sup> Chambers’ devotional, *My Utmost For His Highest* has inspired millions over the years. This devotional has been like a friend’s counsel to me many times.

Beyond the reward of obedience, God, our heavenly Father, also gives temporal blessings, tokens of His grace as we go along in obedience. I honestly do not have the space to list the countless ways He blesses me, but I do want to touch on a few. I want you to fully understand and be encouraged that God is a good, giving, encouraging and rewarding God.

As I have worked beside and observed those in full-time ministry, three consistent blessings mark most of their lives—people, places, and possibilities for impacting the world.

## People

Through the call to the ministry I have been able to meet some of the greatest people in the world. It is amazing how God has opened doors for me to meet with people from virtually every walk of life. Ministry does that. There is no room for prejudice or partiality in ministry. The founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, has commonly been quoted as saying the world was his parish.

Most of us in ministry have had meaningful interaction and care for orphans, the homeless, and the “powerless” of the world. I have also had interactions with the President of the United States, multiple senators, congressional leaders, business leaders, billionaires, major movie producers, star athletes, and everything in between.

Encounters with some of these people have occurred in some unlikely places. From discount stores to the seat beside me on an airplane, to sharing a ride on subways, to vacation destinations, God is always putting me where I need to be.



I will never forget the time I met one of the NFL's most influential head coaches. I do not mean to be crude, but he was standing next to me in the restaurant bathroom and in that moment of awkwardness, the Lord prompted me to give him a word of encouragement. It was a providential moment, and he joined our dinner party for the next few minutes just to show his gratitude.

One amazing night at the historic Lamb's Theatre in NYC, I met the man I consider the finest person I have ever known. His name is Harald Bredesen.

Harald was eighty-four when we met, and he died when he was eighty-eight. He was just amazing—a true leader of leaders and a pioneer in a move of God. His life touched millions. For nearly four years, he poured into my life and provided things that had never been there before. He inspired me in ways too deep for words.

He taught me to love on a deeper level and to laugh at the little things in life. He mentored me in prayer and ways to connect with God. What a gift he was! He came at the right time, a God-appointed time, and it was an amazing reward that marked me forever.

Your ministry calling will likewise put you before many people. I remember one time overhearing a tired minister say, "I like everything about the ministry but the people." People can be wearisome, but at the end of the day,



they are such a great reward. And there is no ministry without them.

Enjoy them. Love them. They are your calling.<sup>4</sup>

## Places

The call to ministry can literally take you around the world. I have ministered in and been to the African plains, the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Austrian Alps, the list goes on and on. Each of these places has brought a special reward from the Lord. God has met with me in all of these places and countless others.

It is not always some huge “ministry” moment, either. Sometimes God just wants to show me something or refresh me somewhere. For example, I do not even recall the name of the mountain, but once on a prayer mountain outside of Seoul, Korea, I had a profound experience where God healed my heart and renewed me for years to come.

Another time, I was invited to go backstage during the *American Idol Gives Back* live telecast in Los Angeles. On one of the biggest episodes of the most popular television show in America, I was hanging out with great musicians, singers, and bands backstage. I never imagined that my favorite band was going to perform. Imagine how excited

I was to be invited into their dressing room? God knew that would be a gift I would love, and I believe He did that just for me.

So you may be asking, “Did you get ‘em saved Pastor Ron?” That is the right question for sure, since it is one of the reasons why God put me on this planet. On this occasion, it was just a moment to enjoy with my youngest son. After all, it is not always about work.

There are times when God wants to give you something special to show you how much He loves you. It might be an amazing experience, a hard-to-find item, or a once-in-a-lifetime trip, but when you receive it, you will know He did it just for you.

My heart here is to encourage you that the ministry is a calling to adventure and excitement. God wants you to prosper, have a great time, and by His grace, get the job done! The world is dying to see men and women who know their purpose, decide to live it without restraint and make a lasting difference because of it.<sup>5</sup>

## Possibilities

Finally, through pursuing the Lord in full-time ministry, we are given amazing potential to change lives and impact the world. We are called to find solutions and

answers. One of the ways the Lord has rewarded me is through finding solutions to real problems. As this has happened, great rewards have come.

In 1998, I was asked to visit some key underground pastors of China. With my friend and partner Taylor Stewart, along with others, I went to a very secluded city in the interior of China. The van ride itself was quite powerful as we were with some very special leaders who led tens of millions of Chinese believers.

We were led to a remote building. We could feel the excitement in the air, but we did not know what was going to happen.

It turned out that we were privileged to join a historic meeting. Several key leaders from the underground church of China had gathered for prayer, unity-building and strategy. They specifically wanted to meet with us to express their gratitude for our labor in helping establish many training centers for their educational needs.

Needless to say, it was such a humbling moment. I cannot describe how humbled I was that they would want to thank me personally. Everything in me wanted to scream out, “YOU are the heroes! YOU are the ones putting your lives on the line!” They had all been tortured and imprisoned for the gospel. It was such a deep reward to have this time with them. I will never forget it.

Possibilities typically involve one person at a time and are not initially on a grand scale.

When I met Ann, she was a confused college student trying to find her way. She had eating disorders, depression and a lot of anxiety having grown up without a father. I shared Jesus with her, and she became a Christian after two or three Bible studies.

Through the love of God, Ann's life started to come together and peace came to her in lasting ways. She was delivered from all her eating disorders. She was able to focus on her relationship with God, her medical career, and in time, her husband and family. For years, she was a faithful part of our ministry until her career moved her to another city.

Over the years she would consistently show up on one special Sunday in June—Father's Day. She did not say it at first, but after a few years I figured it out—Ann was coming in order to quietly say to me, "Happy Fathers Day." Is there any better reward than this?<sup>6</sup>

Full-time ministry is often portrayed as a lifestyle of drudgery and sacrifice. While it certainly can have its moments, it has been my personal experience and that of so many of my peers, that it consistently offers unique and often extraordinary rewards. These rewards go



beyond the perks of so many other careers, things not measured in monetary ways.

You may not get rich as the world counts riches, but you will undoubtedly experience a wealth that no retirement fund, bonus program, or worldly recognition can match.

We live in a society where people are desperate for fulfillment on the deepest levels. If you are called and then experience the deep satisfaction that comes from pursuing and fulfilling that call, what a testament to the world you will be!

If you are pursuing the call and mission to full time ministry, you will discover what Israel's beloved King David experienced: "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."<sup>7</sup>

# Notes

## Chapter 1: What is Full-Time Ministry?

1. For starters, look at 1 Corinthians 4:12 and 2 Corinthians 6:5.
2. This beautiful metaphor comes from Ephesians 2:10. The word translated as “handiwork” is the same Greek word that means “poem.” Paul is saying that you are God’s creative expression, His living poem.
3. He strongly urges this in Romans 16:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12. It is clear that this was characteristic of how Paul thought ministry should be done, and he believed just as strongly that this should be recognized and honored with gratitude by those who were receiving this ministry.
4. Ephesians 4:28
5. 2 Thessalonians 3:10
6. Exodus 3:1
7. 1 Kings 19:19
8. Amos 7:14
9. Mark 6:3
10. Matthew 4:18-21
11. Matthew 10:3
12. Philippians 3:4-6 says that in regard to the law, Paul was a Pharisee. A Pharisee was not a priest or a minister, he was an expert of the law.

## Chapter 2: How do I Know if I’m Called?

1. That man’s name was Abram, which later became Abraham. You can find the story beginning in Genesis 11:27 and follow it through the rest of Scripture.
2. Actually, to be precise, the tribe of Judah was Joseph’s heritage because Jesus was born of a virgin and the family line was always traced through the man. To learn more about Jesus as the Son of God and the second Adam, read Romans 5.
3. John 6:37, 44, 45
4. I am referring again to 2 Timothy 1:9. By the end of the book, you’ll have it memorized!
5. Mark 16:20

6. By that I mean, at that time no one in my family was a Christian.
7. The word is “Pentecostal” and refers to a particular Christian, charismatic denomination.
8. You can find this story in Exodus 3.
9. This story follows in Exodus 4.
10. This happens in Genesis 37. Joseph’s story is one of the longest in Genesis and continues on until chapter 50.
11. You can find this story in Acts 9. Remember at this point, he was still known as “Saul.” God would later change his name as a sign of a new beginning.
12. The prophetic words are referenced in 1 Timothy 1:18-19, and both of Paul’s letters to Timothy are evidence of the mentoring role that he played in the life of this young leader.
13. Widely recognized as one of the most significant theologians in church history, Augustine heard a child that he couldn’t see say “tolle lege” which means “take up and read.” He took it to mean the Bible, and when he opened it randomly to Romans 13:13, he felt God was calling him to follow Him.
14. Martin Luther is best remembered for his pivotal role in the Protestant Reformation and is one of the most important figures in Christian history.
15. John Wesley is most remembered as the founder of Methodism, for circuit riding for large outreach events, and for his penitence for writing popular hymns.
16. Andy shares this story on page 9 of the Introduction. Stanley, Andy. *Communicating For A Change Sisters*, OR: Multnomah Press, 2006.
17. You can see this idea developed in Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Peter 4:10. These gifts are given in order to serve the body of Christ and to accomplish the Great Commission.
18. Rick Warren is the senior pastor of Saddleback Church in Southern California and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*. The church has regular weekend attendance of 22,000 and according to *Publisher’s Weekly*, the book has sold more than 30 million copies making it the best selling, non-fiction hardcover book in history.
19. Paul describes this paradox and the tension between our weakness and God’s strength in several places. Check out chapter four in both 1 and 2 Corinthians.
20. 1 Corinthians 4:1
21. A steward was the manager of the household, and that term applies to the management of responsibilities based on the commissioning of the one in authority. It’s a concept used throughout Scripture. Jesus used it on several occasions, including as dividing line in a difficult parable in Luke 12:35-48.

22. He told Jeremiah that the people would fight him and try to kill him when he spoke but He would rescue them. He told and showed Ezekiel so many crazy things I can't believe he actually wrote them down to show anybody else. He told Hosea to marry a prostitute! He told Jonah to go to the biggest, scariest city there was and to preach against it. This list could go on and on, but God confirmed His words and the people He gave them to.
23. Samuel's confirmation in 1 Samuel 3:20 is a great example.
24. You'll find this quote in Luke 10:17, and the full story in Luke 10:1-24.
25. Acts 13:2

### **Chapter 3: Ministry in the Marketplace**

1. The "NFL" is the National Football League, and it is the most popular and successful professional sport in America.
2. I think he would have loved football because he regularly used athletic metaphors.
3. Ephesians 4:16
4. Paul expands on this concept in his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:9).
5. "Barista" is the fancy name for someone who works an espresso machine. Feel free to impress your friends with the term the next time you're in Starbucks.
6. You can find all kinds of information on this concept as it is one of the fastest growing approaches to ministry. According to "YWAM Marketplace Ministries" the number of these organizations has grown from 25 to more than 900 in the last ten years.
7. Colossians 1:16 tells us that all things have been created by Him (Jesus) and for Him. Jesus is Lord over everything. Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper said it this way: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!"; Bratt, James D. ed. Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998, 488.
8. Luke 7:1-10
9. Ephesians 6:5-9
10. This is the subject of the amazing letter to Philemon.
11. I'll tell you all about this great hero of the faith in the next chapter.
12. Spurgeon, Charles. Lectures to My Students. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979, 35.
13. Ibid, 37.



14. Ibid, 38.
15. When you include Matthew's circumlocution, "the kingdom of Heaven," Jesus speaks about "the kingdom of God" in fifty-seven different passages in the Gospels. That's more than any other subject. The arrival of the kingdom of God was the first thing He preached (Mark 1:15), it was what His followers that He sent out to preach (Luke 9:20), He said we should seek it first (Matthew 6:33), and of course, when He taught the disciples to pray, He instructed them to pray that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)
16. 1 Samuel 15:22

#### **Chapter 4: The Big Question**

1. Spurgeon lived from 1834-1892 and preached more than 3600 sermons in his lifetime. He published roughly 49 volumes during his lifetime and dozens more have been compiled since.
2. For more info, check out their website at [www.spurgeons.ac.uk/](http://www.spurgeons.ac.uk/).
3. Spurgeon, Charles. *Lectures to My Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979, 26-27.
4. Ibid, 27.
5. Ibid, 28.
6. In Luke 17:12-17, Jesus heals ten men of leprosy and only one returns to say "Thank you."
7. Clowney, Edmund. *Called to the Ministry*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964, 9.
8. <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/docstudy/newsletters/A000000803.cfm>
9. Spurgeon, Charles. *Lectures to My Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979, 28.
10. Isaiah 6:8 (NASB)

#### **Chapter 5: Start Small**

1. Luke 16:10
2. Osteen's Lakewood Church meets in an arena that was built to hold professional basketball games and has a weekly attendance of more than 47,000 people.
3. No single individual in history has preached to more people face-to-face than Billy Graham, with estimates topping hundreds of millions.

4. There are several passages to choose from (especially in Matthew), but your starting point should be “The Parable of the Sower;” one of Jesus’ cornerstone teachings. You can find alternate versions in Mark 4, Matthew 13, and Luke 8.
5. Luke 16:10
6. Many of these are members of Hamas and Fatah, military Muslim political parties that are considered terrorist organizations.
7. After all, Peter had 3,000 respond the very first time he preached. You can read the story for yourself in Acts 2.
8. He was pointing me to James 1:2 in His Word.
9. In Exodus 16, God feeds the starving people of Israel in the desert every day with supernatural food called manna that appeared on the ground for them every morning. Our supernatural provision didn’t appear on the ground, it arrived in a crate!
10. Proverbs 22:29
11. Proverbs 22:1
12. Matthew 25:23
13. Matthew 25:14-30
14. From the TNIV footnotes, p. 915
15. Matthew 25:15

## **Chapter 6: Preparation, Education, Training, and Anointing**

1. 106 of the first 108 universities or colleges in the United States were started by a church or Christians. Jonathan Edwards, a giant among American pastors and leaders in history, served as the president of Princeton at one point.
2. Proverbs 12:18
3. Colossians 4:6
4. Philipians 2:5
5. There is an approach to communicating that I want you to catch here. Look at Proverbs 15:1, 2 Peter 3:15, and especially Acts 26:28. In the exchange between King Agrippa and Paul in Acts 26, Paul is on trial before the king and yet conducts himself in such a way that he ministers powerfully to the king and nearly persuades him to become a Christian! I believe that’s a great model of excellence for us to follow.

6. John Maxwell is the founder of Injoy, an organization that trains and develops leaders. He has sold more than twelve million books and is considered among the primary authorities on the subject of leadership.
7. You can find Joseph's story in Genesis chapters 37-50.
8. 1 Corinthians 7:7 says each person has their own gift from God.
9. All of 1 Corinthians 12 describes the role and function of spiritual gifts, chapter 14:1 says that we should eagerly desire them, and 14:12 says that we should go after the gifts that build up the church. 1 Peter 4:10 says that we should use these gifts to serve others as an administration of God's grace.
10. The classic book written on the subject is by C. Peter Wagner, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005.
11. This is how Peter described Jesus' ministry to the people at Cornelius' house in Acts 10:38.
12. 2 Kings 2:9
13. In the opening verse of each of the letters to the church in Thessalonica, Timothy is included as an authority figure. When considering the way that Paul talked to Timothy in each of his letters, I read that inclusion to mean that Paul saw Timothy as an apostle, a significant authority figure in the more than one church.
14. 2 Chronicles 12:32
15. Daniel 1:17
16. Mars Hill Bible Church (led by Rob Bell) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Mars Hill Church (led by Mark Driscoll) in Seattle are some of the fastest growing and most influential churches in America, especially among young people.
17. I am not a Greek scholar, but the word is "queaomai" if you're interested.
18. 2 Timothy 4:13 (NLT)

## **Chapter 7: The Cost of Obedience**

1. Luke 9:23, 24
2. The main premise of the book is the difference between "cheap grace" and "costly grace." Bonhoeffer draws from the Sermon on the Mount, and there are also clear allusions to Paul's discussion of worldly sorrow and godly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:8-13.
3. Written by John Foxe and first published in 1563, the book details the accounts of Christians who were killed because of their love for Jesus. The focus is primarily on the early church, but it does give some medieval church history and follow stories of martyrs to the time it was written. It was more than 2,300 pages in its first form, but has been slimmed down considerably, and most versions today are small, paperback editions.

4. With the obvious exception of Judas, but he died early too.
5. Acts 12:2
6. Foxe, John, *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World*. Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Co, 1989, 7.
7. *Ibid*, 9.
8. There is an organization, "Voice of the Martyrs," that works to prevent and put an end to this cruel practice. You can find their website at [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).
9. Hebrews 11:35-38
10. 1 Corinthians 13:3
11. Acts 7:55,56
12. Dr. Ron Taffel's book, *The Second Family: Dealing with Peer Power, Pop Culture, the Wall of Silence – and Other Challenges of Raising Today's Teens* is an extensive, explicit, and fascinating study in this subject.
13. Mark 3:31-32, Matthew 12:46-47, and Luke 8:19-20
14. John 7:5
15. Luke 7:18-20
16. Luke 4:21-22
17. The disciples fell asleep three times when asked them to pray on the night He was arrested, they took off when He was arrested and tried, and they went back to their life of fishing after He died.
18. Growing Leaders is a fantastic organization that is dedicated to developing young leaders who will transform society. You can find out more about them at [www.growingleaders.com](http://www.growingleaders.com).
19. Clowney Edmund. *Called to the Ministry*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964.
20. From 1979's classic, *Rocky II*
21. One of the more chilling details of the account of "the rich young ruler" (Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-31, and Luke 18:18-34) is how Jesus' interaction with the man ends. Both Matthew and Mark's versions say that "he went away grieving" (Matthew 19:22, Mark 10:22) which isn't exactly the happy ending you'd hope for. Not everyone in the crowds that followed Jesus got healed. And maybe more obviously, in the end, Jesus did not save Judas.

## Chapter 8: The Consequences of Disobedience

1. 1 Corinthians 9:16
2. If you read the passage that the quote comes from, Matthew 9:35-38, you'll realize that Jesus asks for more workers after seeing how the people needed someone to care for them. He compared the situation to sheep and shepherds. That's one of the reasons why you sometimes hear of pastors or ministers referred to as shepherds.
3. Malphurs, Dr. Aubrey. *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007, 18.
4. Malphurs' footnote comes from, Elis, Tiara. "Christians Meet to Discuss the Scarcity of Young Ministers." The Dallas Morning News, September 14, 2004 edition, p. 5B.
5. Malphurs, Dr. Aubrey. *A New Kind of Church: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007, 19.
6. Sounding the trumpet is a significant practice in the Old Testament that you can find again and again. It is used as an alarm, a call to response and a call to battle. It is especially prominent in prophecy and imagery. A great example is Ezekiel 33:3-6.
7. Llewelyn Leach, Susan. "Slavery Is Not Dead, Just Less Recognizable." The Christian Science Monitor, September 1, 2004 edition. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0901/p16s01-wogi.html> Site accessed January 7, 2008.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. According to UNICEF, by way of the International Justice Mission. [www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org).
14. You can read this entire exchange in Isaiah 6:8, especially in the NASB or the NLT.
15. (Foreward). Lake, John G. *Diary of God's Generals: Excerpts From the Miracle Ministry of John G. Lake*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2004, v.
16. Walton, Anthony. *Future Church: Church By Design*. Wellington, New Zealand: Global Tribe Productions, 2001, 45.

## **Chapter 9: Funding the Ministry**

1. Psalms 50:10
2. Philippians 4:19
3. Ephesians 3:30
4. Exodus 36:6-7
5. Matthew 14:13-21
6. Matthew 15:29-38
7. 1 Corinthians 9:7
8. 1 Timothy 5:8 amazingly tells us that anyone who does not provide for their relatives, especially for their immediate family, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Ouch! That's harsh.
9. "Elder" is a title that the Bible uses for a leader or overseer in the church or among the people of God.
10. Titus 1:7-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3, and 1 Timothy 3: all give excellent descriptions of church leadership and ministry responsibility.
11. James 3:1 states that not many should attempt to be teachers of the word because those that do will be judged more strictly. That should put some healthy fear of the Lord into you!
12. Acts 18:2, 3
13. 1 Corinthians 9:9
14. In Genesis 22:14 when the Lord provided a ram for Abraham so he didn't have to sacrifice his son, Abraham named that place, "the Lord will provide," or in Hebrew, "Jehovah Jireh," a name that people still use to refer to God.

## **Chapter 10: Rewards of Full-Time Ministry**

1. Check out 1 Corinthians 16:9. The idea that there are open doors but many adversaries sounds to me like it could apply to either ministry or international espionage.
2. In Acts 20:24, Paul says that his life is worth nothing and his only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given him. In 26:19, he tells King Agrippa that he was not disobedient to his vision from heaven.
3. This classic line comes from the March 11th entry. Chambers, Oswald (author) Reimann, James (editor). *My Utmost For His Highest*. Grad Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1992.

4. Matthew 9:35-38 describes Jesus' heart for people that was at the center of His ministry, and it demonstrates how He sees the primary reason for more workers: taking care of the people.
5. Daniel 1:18-20 tells us that the king of Babylon found Daniel and his friends to be ten times better than their peers. The main reason was these four young Hebrew men, even as they lived in a foreign, ungodly land, obeyed the Lord, and as a result, God blessed them.
6. When I realized that's how she felt, it reminded me of 3 John 4. Here in his old age, this great man of God reflects that there is no greater joy he has known than when young people he's mentored love and obey God.
7. These are David's words in Psalm 23:6. Clearly this promise is not specific to those in full-time ministry and is available to all of us. But I mention it to show that contrary to popular opinion, those of us in full-time ministry aren't exempt from goodness and mercy! And thank God for that.