

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Called To The Work Of Ministry

by Dan Trygg

In the Kingdom of God, we are *all* called to serve people. Leaders are especially called to be servants (Lk. 22:24-27). **My job as a pastor-teacher is to equip you for the work of ministry** (Eph. 4:11,12). The word for "equip" means "to fit out", i.e., to give you the tools, vision, understanding, skills and motivation to prepare you for the activity described as the "work of ministry". "The ministry" is not about determining policies, initiating programs, or directing people into slots of activities which *we* decide need to be filled. **Our religious traditions have gotten things all turned around. First, we have "religified" the word "ministry". The original word simply meant "service",** practical, hands-on helping. We have assigned religious ideas, connotations and images to this word that would have been totally foreign to first century Christians. **Secondly, we have emphasized the wrong word,** as though "ministry" was the focus. It is *not*. **The main word in this phrase is "work",** not "ministry". "Work" is the noun functioning as the object of the preposition. The phrase "of ministry", or more literally "of service", is an adjective telling us more about the *kind* of "work" we are being prepared to do. **Ladies and gentlemen, we are called to "work",** ...not pontificate, direct, discuss, plan, set goals, do "religious activities", etc. We are called to labor, to toil, **to expend energy accomplishing tasks, effecting change, producing something visible, tangible and lasting through effort, etc.**

The work of ministry (service) is *not* a passive thing, it is an *active expenditure of one's self to accomplish benefit in the lives of others.* That's right, the focal point of this effort is to be on building up *other people.* **The "work of ministry" is *not* primarily about God-focused activity. Rather, it is human-focused activity, which is generated from our relationship with God.** To use the allegory of the Vine and branches in John 15:1-8, we must abide in Jesus to receive the strength and vitality to do the work, to produce the fruit (which includes *more* than what Paul is discussing in Eph. 4). The "work of service" that Paul is talking about must come *out from* the life and leading of Jesus inside of us, ...*but* the outworking of that life in the "work of ministry" is describing the effortful, labor of investing in the lives of other people in order to build *them* up and mature *them* in their faith. **If we are not investing in the lives of others to build them up, then we are not doing the "work of ministry".** *Talking about it is not doing the work. Thinking about it is not doing the work. Strategizing about it is not doing the work. Praying about it is not necessarily doing the work. Going to meetings, classes or conferences is not doing the work. Worshipping God is not even necessarily doing the work described here. The work is the work.* That is not to say that there is no effort involved in prayer, worship, planning, etc. There is, but these activities are not the "work of ministry" which Paul is discussing here. They may be *foundational* to the work of ministry, but they are *not* the *work* of ministry. **We can expend countless hours and limitless energy in preparatory or peripheral activities and never get around to doing the real job we are called to do, serving others to build them up.** The activity of "truthing in love" in specific interchanges with others *is* doing the work. The coming alongside of another to comfort, encourage and instruct, ...and actually listening and speaking into that person's life..., *is* doing the work. The investment of effort to influence and help others to grow *is* doing the work. The sharing of material things to assist those in need, and to encourage their hearts, *is* doing the work. Practical acts of service to help others and demonstrate the love of Jesus *is* doing the work. Using our spiritual gifts to benefit others *is* doing the work.

Since "work" is the expenditure of effort, energy and resources to accomplish a task, ...here, to build up and strengthen others..., **the "work of ministry" will cost us something.** Paul stated very plainly that he would most gladly "spend and be expended for your souls" (II Cor. 12:15). We need to face this reality squarely and face the fact that *we have an agenda given to us,* a stewardship from God, *which will affect our choices and lifestyles, if we intend to take it seriously.* We are finite. Inevitably, to do the work of ministry will mean that we cannot do all of the other possibilities which are out there. Of course, we cannot do it all, anyway, but sometimes we fail to see clearly that **the work of ministry will cut in on our time, energy and resources, and we will not be able to live like other people.** Somehow, we want to believe that serving God by serving others will not cost us. It *will.* **That is what Jesus was referring to when He told us to count the cost of being His followers** (Lk. 14:25-35). Remember, *you are not your own,* you were bought with a price (I Cor. 6:19b,20). You are supposed to be a people for *God's* possession, ...holy, set apart for *His* purposes (I Pet. 2:9), which means that *we can no longer live for ourselves,* but *for Christ,* who died and rose again on our behalf (II Cor. 5:15).

Still with me? Still want this? Are you willing to lay your life down as a *living sacrifice,* ...offered to *God...*, to offer your body as a tool for *Him* to use? **He wants to partner with you to do His work His way, by His power.**

Are you willing to do that? **It will require all from you, as it required total commitment from Him. He laid down His life for you, so that you could live and lay down your life for Him.** His promise is that as we lay down our lives in obedience to Him, we will find our lives, i.e., we will be fulfilled. **The cost is absolute, but the benefit is what everyone is searching for!!** Jesus tells us that it is *only* to be found in the life surrendered to Him.

Doing the Work of Ministry God's Way

The phrase, "the work of *ministry*", tells us not only that we are to be doing something, producing something at the cost of effort, expending energy, investing time, laboring, etc., but it tells us what *kind of effort* God has in mind. **We are to be performing a function of service to others.** We are *not* to be trying to get *them* to serve *us*; we are to be busy serving *them*, so that they can mature and become ones who *also* express the life and heart of God in their behavior. This is how the apostle Paul saw himself. He wrote to the Corinthians, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all people; you are ones visibly-evidencing that you are a letter of Christ, *served by us*, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God..." (II Cor. 3:2,3). This is in agreement with the heart of Jesus, who also saw Himself in the same way. **Jesus came not to be served, but to serve** (Mk. 10:41-45; cf. Phil. 2:1-11; Jn. 13:12-17). That was at the core of the example He left regarding what ministry should look like. **He went where the needs were**, travelling the countryside among the people, **and He met those needs.** "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38; cf. Gal. 6:9,10; Tit. 2:11-14; 3:8). This is a fundamental principle of effective ministry.

Jesus addressed the needs of people on an individual basis. His was no "one size fits all" kind of ministry. If you look at the things He did, **it is amazing to see the variety of situations He addressed**, ...and we have only a very thin "slice" of what Jesus' entire ministry entailed! Jesus was very adept at seeing and correctly recognizing the needs of those who came to Him (e.g., Matt. 9:36). Of course, part of this was that He was very intimate and sensitive to His Father, who would tell Him what to say and what to do (Jn. 5:19,20; 8:28). We do, however, witness times where He simply asked people, "What would *you* have Me do for you?" (e.g., Mk. 10:51). We want to spiritualize things so much as to lose touch with the obvious reality. Some needs are so apparent that they are easily noticed. Others only come to the surface as people share with one another (e.g., Acts 2:42-47). Open-heartedness was a key ingredient of early church life, and as needs came to be known, often the Holy Spirit would direct someone to meet the need. **If we are eager to do the work of ministry, we will want to encourage open sharing**, with a heart ready to assist, as we have the ability, and as the Lord leads. Interestingly, if we think of ministry as only *teaching, telling, and "leading services"*, we may not take the time to ask people questions and listen to one another. **If we see the work of ministry as serving, we will be quick to hear, and slow to speak, because we will want to find out the needs of those around us.** Of course, the best listening technique is irrelevant if we do not *take the time to find out* what others' needs may be.

In Jesus' teaching on being the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10), He describes some necessary dynamics of caring for one another's needs. A good shepherd (1.) has a commitment to lay down his or her life for the sheep - vs. 11; (2.) develops relationship and intimacy with the sheep - vs. 14; (3.) has relationship and intimacy with the Father - vs. 15; (4.) establishes familiarity [i.e., through repeated meetings and interaction] and trust with the sheep - vs. 27; (5.) will not abandon his or her responsibility of care, even in the face of danger or threat of great personal cost - vs. 12; (6.) is genuinely concerned about the welfare of the sheep - vs. 13. To these we could add, from Ezekiel 34, that a good shepherd (7.) nourishes the sheep - vs. 15; (8.) seeks the lost and scattered - vss. 11, 16; (9.) tends their wounds and heals their sicknesses - vs. 16; (10.) protects the weak from predators and other abusive sheep - vss. 17-25; (11.) does not dominate by force and severity, or plunder and consume the flock - vss. 2-4; cf. Prov. 28:16; (12.) creates an environment of safety and security - vss. 25-28. The relationship of shepherd and sheep is a great analogy because the work of ministry is all about creating an environment where people can get healed, can be nurtured and can grow to maturity. Just as a shepherd must know and tend to the needs of the flock, so **our relationships with one another give us the cues as to what practical things are needed to build each person up toward maturity in Christ.** *Relationships only happen as we effectively "relate" to one another*, i.e., as we spend time with each other, engaged in serious, caring conversation, with a view toward helping that other person to grow, ...and as *we* make *ourselves* vulnerable to receive *their* help, as well. The building up of the Body of Christ is all about establishing an honest, open, caring network of relationships that support one another. **The practical "work of service" grows out of the deepening understanding and perception we develop as we interact with each other.** As we become aware of needs in each other's lives, we are motivated by Christ's love to serve. As we do, the love of Jesus that is working within us finds a *visible* expression. It encourages those we serve, and *demonstrates Jesus* to those who are watching.