

## Why Are We Here? To Minister to Others

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

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July 17, 2022

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Purpose: The purpose of this sermon is to help members embrace their giftedness and put it to work to minister to others.

An avid duck hunter was in the market for a new bird dog. His search ended when he found a dog that could actually walk on water to retrieve a duck. Shocked by his find, he was sure none of his friends would ever believe him.



He decided to try to break the news to a friend of his, the eternal pessimist who refused to be impressed with anything. This, surely, would impress him. He invited him to hunt with him and his new dog.

As they waited by the shore, a flock of ducks flew by, they fired, and a duck fell. The dog responded and jumped into the water. The dog, however, did not sink but instead walked across the water to retrieve the bird, never getting more than his paws wet. This continued all day long; each time a duck fell, the dog walked across the surface of the water to retrieve it.

The pessimist watched carefully, saw everything, but did not say a single word.

On the drive home the hunter asked his friend, "Did you notice anything unusual about my new dog?"

"I sure did," responded the pessimist. "He can't swim." <sup>1</sup>

I know a few of us operate on the pessimistic side of life. We tend to look at everything from a negative, unproductive viewpoint. If we stay stuck there, we will never accomplish anything useful for ourselves, our families, our church, or our community.



I want to remind you, sometimes it is good to go to the pessimistic side of life. But we do not need to live there. We need to get up and get busy with the important things in life!

Over the past few weeks, we have been looking at the five key purposes of the church. We need to go back and re-examine why we are here so we can put together a roadmap for where we need to go next. This can give us the framework for organizing our ministries here.

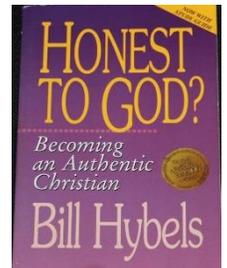


A few weeks ago, we discussed the need to **evangelize** our surrounding community with the good news that Jesus Christ is their Savior. We need to be about the business of teaching and leading others to accept Christ as their personal Savior.

The second purpose of the church we discussed last week is **discipleship**. That is the systematic instruction of what Jesus taught. This is best taught in relationship with others in an extended teaching format. As we have discovered on our Wednesday night Bible studies, when we come together around the word of God as our guiding text, we can hear God's leading and respond to it. This model of reading God's word and praying is a powerful example of discipleship in community. Today, many churches have adopted a small group format to explore God's word more in depth.

Today I want us to look at the third purpose of the church. That is **ministry**.<sup>2</sup>

Bill Hybels in his book, *Honest to God*, describes the ritual that takes place in churches when it comes to the practice of ministry. The pastor, we will call Bob, has received his annual flood of resignations from Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, ushers, and youth workers, all of whom want out. But Pastor Bob isn't really surprised – it happens every year. Some offer lengthy explanation; some just say they have done their part and it is time for someone else to do it.



Pastor Bob knows that the ministries of the church cannot continue unless somebody fills these positions, so he gears up for his annual recruitment campaign. While Pastor Bob is gearing up for the annual affair, so are the members of his church. They know Pastor Bob is going to be coming after them to serve, and they are already thinking about how they are going to turn Pastor Bob down.

I can hear Deacon John, say to himself, *“He’s not going to get me this year, So help me! I don’t care what he preaches on or how often he threatens God’s judgment. I’m not going to cave in – even if he starts to cry! Three years ago, he cried, and I ended up as a center aisle usher – and I don’t even like people!! This year I’ll resist to the very end.*

Pastor Bob knows he will encounter serious resistance, so this year he is bringing out the heavy artillery. He’s planning a four-part series called, *“Serve or Burn.”*



Every sermon will begin with an illustration from Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. He’s already decided to wear the lapel microphone so he can walk the length of the stage. He will raise his voice, perspire a little bit, and wave his Bible in the air. On the fourth week, he will bring out his secret weapon – seven-year-old Suzi Miller. He will cradle the little darling on his lap and ask her what it will be like to spend a whole year in her second grade Sunday school class without a teacher. He hopes that she will cry. If she does, Pastor Bob will win hands down!

Pastor Bob’s strategy works. The “Serve or Burn” series goes better than expected. Little Suzi cries on cue and he didn’t even have to pinch her to cry. People feel worn down and guilty. By September 1<sup>st</sup>, the empty positions are filled for another year.

### **Traditional Approach to Ministry**

This approach towards filling ministry positions is all too prevalent in many churches. Essentially it is a five-step process.

## **I. Begin with a Program**

According to the traditional approach to ministry, a church begins with a program. A vast majority of churches have a program-based design. This means that the ministry plans have been transported from outside the church.

If you have ever looked in a catalogue sent by Lifeway bookstore, you can find a KIT or PROGRAM for every possible ministry. Children, teens, adults, senior adults, nursing home, homebound, after school, men’s bible studies, women’s bible studies, mothers of preschoolers – If you can think of a possible program, I can put a kit or program in your hand.



Before I move on, I want to say there is nothing wrong with using a kit to guide a ministry. But that ministry must have its roots in a real, practical need in the community. Children, youth, and senior adults – all of these need to be ministered to. Simply to start a program to keep busy and not meet a ministry objective will lead to fatigue and burnout.

## **II. Find some People**

After the leaders have decided upon a program, then we have to find people to lead the program. Of course, there will be several positions that are needed. Sometimes those filling the positions only tell the potential volunteer the name of the program – but skip the important details.



### III. Sell the Program

After the program is staffed, it is then promoted in the church. Posters will be put up, announcements will be made, invitations are sent out, phone calls are made, and announcements are given from the pulpit by the Pastor. Often the purpose of the program is minimized. The program itself becomes the purpose, not the need underlying the program.



### IV. Carry out the Program

The next step is to carry out the program. In the movie, *Field of Dreams*, Kevin Costner's character hears a voice that says, "If you build it, they will come." The voice is telling him if he builds a baseball field, then people will automatically come to the field. Often with church programs we say, "If we do the program, then the people will come." The program becomes the ministry instead of the program meeting a real need in the church or community. It doesn't matter if the program is intended to meet a specific shepherding need, generating an increase in attendance, stimulating financial giving, or creating an interest in world missions, the church members stand back with expectation and a sense of accomplishment. They did the program. It doesn't matter if it succeeded in any purpose of the church.



### V. Maintain the Program

The final step in this approach to ministry, which is employed by many churches, is to maintain the program – no matter what. It is almost an



unwritten rule that once a program begins, it cannot be allowed to end. That would be ministry failure. If the program doesn't work, then there must be a problem with the church. So, to avoid that – more people are committed, more money invested, and heavier promotion is done in order to help the program succeed.

### Rethinking Ministry

But we need to go back and ask that essential question again, "Why are we here? – That is to minister to one another." Webster dictionary defines ministry as "meeting a need." For a need to be met, two things have to be in place: 1) the need must be real and 2) a person or a resource must be in place to meet that need.



### Existing Needs

I once read about a young boy scout that was asked by his scoutmaster if he had done his good deed for the day. The young boy said he had not done one today. The scoutmaster told him to go out and do one now, and then come back when he had completed one.

The little boy left, but he came back in less than twenty minutes. His clothes were torn, his hair was sticking out, and his face was cut and bleeding.

The scoutmaster asked, "Goodness, boy, what have you been doing?!"



The boy replied that he went and did his good deed for the day.

The scoutmaster said, “What did you do?”  
“Well, I helped an old lady across the street.”

The Scoutmaster was confused and asked how he got so messed up.

The boy replied, “Well, the lady didn’t want to go.”

Sometimes we forget that ministry is supposed to meet a need. If a ministry does not meet a need, then it is not a ministry. It is a wonderful program, but for a ministry in a church to meet its objectives, it must meet a need in our church or community.

The most effective ministries in churches are those that are based on knowledge of the needs and interests of the people a church is trying to minister to. A good place to start is to place people in positions based upon their giftedness.

## The Bible and Ministry

There are three important truths about our gifts and ministry.

### I. Every Christian is a Minister

First, the bible teaches that EVERY Christian is a minister. Not just the ordained clergy of the church. Not just the deacons in the church. Not just the Sunday school teachers. EVERY Christian is a minister.



Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus that “*Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*” (Ephesians 4:11-12) **Did you catch that the purpose of the pastor was to prepare God’s people to do works of service?**

Have you ever traveled by a church and seen their church sign? In front of several churches, I have seen this logo - **EVERY MEMBER IS A MINISTER**. They were saying to the world and themselves that every member is to be a minister. It became the theme for their church. Every person could use their special giftedness for the glory of God, for the building up of the believers, for the encouragement of those downcast, for the various needs in an organization.



Our churches nominating committee is still working and may be asking many of you to use your giftedness to serve our church and the ministries and programs we offer here. In August, we will begin the Deacon and Trustee nomination process. If you are asked, please consider participating in the church leadership.



At John Ed Matheson’s church, Frazier Memorial United Methodist Church, in Montgomery Alabama, their church has over 6000 members and over 90% are directly involved in some ministry in their church. Being a member of that church means that you will be **DOING** something to help the body of the church.



of giftedness. We believe that the church is supernatural in its origin, but we forget that it is supernatural in its operation as well. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “*The Holy Spirit displays God’s power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church.*” (I Corinthians 12:7)

I have met several ministers over the years that do not handle hospital or nursing home visitation very well. They are not gifted to extend the kind of mercy needed in these situations. They do not know what to say, they become uncomfortable in those situations, but the wise ones know how to involve others that have that gift of mercy.

Bill Hybels shares an experience he had in his book, *Honest to God*. He said:

Speaking of mercy, it is no secret to those who know me that I don’t have the gift of mercy. Not long ago at an elders meeting I prayed with a dear woman from our church who is slowly dying of diabetes. As much as I love that woman and wanted to minister to her, I was painfully aware of my awkwardness. I just don’t function well in situations like that. After I left that woman, another elder approached her. Without hesitation, he wrapped his arms around her, kissed her on the cheek, and said, “Oh, Jane, I’m so glad you are here tonight.” While he held her hand she wept. Because he was so natural and tender, she could really feel his love and concern. I thought, “Lord, thank you for giving him that beautiful gift of mercy. Thank you for prompting him to use it here tonight.”

I want us to realize that we are gifted differently. Our church needs you to operate in your area of giftedness. It was interesting to hear how Pastor Bob handled the vacancies in his church. Through manipulation and he filled the positions in his church. You may be sitting here thinking, I have a certain gift, but I have not been asked to use it. If that is the case for you, please talk with me or others in this church and we will find a place of ministry and service for you.



Over the past week, I was thinking about how many in our church are already involved in some type of ministry. I have seen members visit those in nursing homes. Others have gone to hospitals to minister. Some have taken meals to people that have come home from the hospital. Some are delivering meals to people that can no longer prepare their own meals. Others have taken gifts to cheer those that cannot get out on their own.

Quite a few of you have taken up the ministry of writing a card to someone in need. I know I have been the recipient of cards of encouragement.

Over the past four years, I have received more cards of appreciation and encouragement from this church than I did in the previous 16 years of ministry. It has meant so much to me, and I know it means so much to others. I know many of you are already doing all you can, but I want to encourage you not to do more, but to continue to do those things that build up the body of Christ.



Maybe you have not been as diligent as you know you should be. I want you to seek out ways in which you can become intentional in ministering to others. It is not necessarily about finding a job within the church as it is finding your place of service in the world and using this church as a source of encouragement to continue to do the good work God has called you to

Several years ago, Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville North Carolina began a ministry they called, *Operation Inasmuch*. It became an annual one-day event where the church planned practical, hands-on mission projects in their community. They planned neighborhood block parties, prayer walking, volunteering at a food bank, serving at a soup kitchen, door to door visitation, built handicapped ramps for people, raked yards, and distributed water at nearby recreation parks.



This project caught the attention of many other churches and now there is an emphasis across North Carolina for churches to take this same idea and implement it as they are able in their own communities.

Ministry is really a matter of the heart. We cannot begin to minister to others until the needs of others touch our hearts. We cannot begin to share the good news of salvation until we are broken and realize how important the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to us and how it has touched our hearts, before we are willing to share our faith with others.



There is a song we have sung here at Spilman called, "Change my Heart, Oh God."

Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart Oh God, may I be like you.  
You are the Potter; I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.  
Change my heart Oh God, make it ever true.  
Change my heart Oh God, May I be like you.

Until our hard-stony heart is changed, programs will not bring about change. Until God "Speaks to our heart," we cannot move forward. If Jesus is not in our hearts, then we will only operate in areas of instinct instead of true compassion and passion.

The time has come for us to move forward and do the work prepared for us.

## LET US PRAY

Lord, you have called us to go into the world and take Your love into the world.

The world desperately needs Your word of comfort.  
The world desperately needs to hear Your word and witness.

Give us as Your people the heart necessary to do your work here in this community.

I have seen Your saints in action sharing Your love.  
Give us a vision to continue to be Your ambassadors.  
In Jesus Christ name we pray. Amen.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Mikey's Funnies (July 6, 2012) forwarded by Steve Sanderson – A Pessimist Funny

<sup>2</sup> Taken from "Rethinking the Church" by James Emory White