

Encouragement to Ministers of the Gospel

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: Ephesians 4:11-13

The focus of this paper is encouragement and counsel for new ministers, but applies to all ministers regardless of age or experience. As ministers of the Gospel we are instructed to take heed to the ministry we've received in the Lord and to fulfill it. (Col 4:17) It is important that we, in humility, recognize our reliance on God's enabling grace while being willing to be used in His service. (1 Cor 15:10) In an effort to build on the principle of dependence on God, coupled with desire to feed the church of God, a list of encouragements and lessons learned have been compiled. The foundation of this work is God's Word combined with the wisdom and experience of our ministers. To God be the glory, who has purchased the church of God with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

1. Preparing your Heart for Service

Your Relationship to Christ

- You are His ambassador; ensure your efforts are always focused on pointing others to Christ. Be close to Jesus; you must know Him first yourself in order to lead others to know Him. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and being. (Mark 12:30, 2 Cor 5:20)
- Jesus gave you your commission (Matt 28:19-20). Your ministry must be about Him and not about you.
- Being placed in the ministry is an opportunity to be used; it is not an accomplishment in itself. Time and events will prove and try your work and stewardship of the mysteries of Christ. (Psalm 26:2, Rom 10:15, Col 1:25-26)
- You can do this joyfully, with respect and appropriate Godly fear. Serving with joy encourages others to do the same. (Rom 12:18, Phil 2:17-18, 1 John 1:7)
- Your relationship with others will not be better than your relationship with Christ. A close relationship with Christ is the foundation for a good relationship with others. (John 13:35, Rom 14:15-19)

Your Bible Study Habits and Prayer

- It is important to study your Bible, and to do so with discernment and humility.
- The more you study the Word, the more it can work through you during your ministry. (1 Cor 8:2, 2 Tim 2:15)
- If you aren't sure what certain words mean, stop and look them up. The 1828 Webster Dictionary works well.
- Appropriate helpful reference materials include Strong's Concordance of the Bible, Easton's Bible Dictionary, and a Vines Dictionary for looking up the Hebrew and Greek meanings of words.

- Spend time memorizing Scripture. When you have the verses and their references memorized, God can draw your mind to them as you minister and talk with people. Topic 4314 (from the Thompson Chain Reference Bible) or the Scripture Memory Program (from Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services) are good starting points. Saturate your mind with the Word. (Psalm 119:11, Col 3:16)
- Prepare your heart and mind by prayer in the hours preceding the worship service. Make every effort to keep these hours "unrushed." Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10, Eph 6:18)
- You are encouraged to seek counsel from your elder regarding appropriate use of Parallel Bibles or additional electronic Bible study aides which might be helpful.

Pride, Humility, and Insecurity

- It is important for you to avoid the extremes of either pride or insecurity. Both are distractions that take your focus from what is truly important and limit your ability to be a servant. (Rom 12:3, 1 Cor 15:10, Phil 1:14)
- Insecurity is not the same thing as being humble and will distract you from the Word. Consider three different aspects of insecurity to determine what you need to work on:
 - a. Insecurity about knowing the Word of God
 - b. Insecurity about public speaking
 - c. Insecurity about what people are thinking about you
- While it is good to show proper respect to other ministers, don't try to get out of your turn or be unwilling to step into your role. Be willing to be used. (1 Cor 9:17)
- Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Humility is essential to the ministry. Self-deprecating (e.g., beating yourself up or hanging your head down) is not inspiring. Humility allows us to remember that it is God who empowers us and who deserves all the glory. (1 Cor 10:31, 1 Cor 12:1, Phil 4:19, 1 Tim 1:12)
- Be prayerful that your role does not become a source of pride. In other words, don't let your role go to your head. Ministers are servants to the flock, seeking to follow Christ who was the ultimate servant. (Psalm 139:23-24, 2 Cor 6:3)
- Be thankful and joyful you are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ! (Col 3:17, Phil 2:17)
- When you are dealing with insecurity, read and meditate on the book of Philippians. It highlights Paul's joy and attitude toward the ministry even while he was experiencing difficulty.

Discretion

- Show appropriate deference to more senior ministers and elders. This is especially helpful for young brothers put into the ministry. You will gain the confidence of others and be a good example to young people by doing so. (1 Pet 5:5)
- Be aware and respectful of local customs when visiting other churches. Some will expect a visitor to have both services; others will not. (1 Cor 10:33)
- New ministers should be careful about admonishment. You should speak the Word as it opens but be mindful of the role of the elder to admonish.

- It is a good idea to limit travel for the first year of your ministry as you settle into your new role. Your home church also needs to have you there while you and the congregation develop a new relationship.
- Confidentiality from you and your wife is a requirement. Breaking confidence or sharing information quickly with others can be hurtful and harm your effectiveness as a minister. (Prov 11:13, 17:11)

Sharing God's Word

- Your duty is to preach the Word, in season and out of season. (Rom 10:14-15, 2 Tim 4:2)
- Don't preach away from a topic in the Scripture out of fear of man. Also, don't preach toward a topic because you want to send someone a message. The sermon should correspond to the Scriptures read. (2 Tim 1:7-8)
- We are not called to teach or advocate our agenda, but to speak God's Word through His Spirit's direction. (2 Tim 2:2, 1 Pet 4:11)
- Examples are effective in teaching scriptural principles, and should be used where appropriate with the Scripture content.
- Don't be afraid of shorter sermons. A short and effective sermon is better than a long and ineffective one.
- Long prayers can detract from the Word. Your elder, wife and family can be helpful and watch for this with you. You don't need to preach a sermon in your prayer.
- When following up, don't deliver another mini-sermon: share a brief summary, a key takeaway, or an application.

Communicating Effectively

- Read and speak slowly enough so everyone can understand you. State and repeat verse references and pause long enough so that the congregation can find where you are reading. (1 Cor 14:8-9)
- Before you begin reading, it may be helpful to scan the surrounding text to provide context.
- Project your voice and speak into the microphone. Some people are hard of hearing and need you to speak loudly and clearly. (Large variability in volume can be problematic.)
- Sharing chapter headings and subheadings in the pulpit Bible can be helpful to the congregation.
- Eye contact is very helpful to the audience. It makes them feel respected and included.
- Learning about public speaking can be helpful; however, don't get caught up in entertaining. (Gal 1:10)

Adjusting to Your New Role

- Be willing to exercise your God-given gifts. (Rom 12:6-7, 1 Cor 14:12)
- Be comfortable with who God has made you, and don't try to be another person. Learning from other ministers is important; however, don't forget that you will have your own style. (Psalm 139:14, Prov 1:5, 2 Tim 3:14)

- Don't expect that you will understand the whole Bible. Just focus on systematically studying through Scripture and God will grow your understanding. (Psalm 119:130, 2 Tim 2:7)
- Remember that preaching is a great privilege, being thankful to God for the opportunity before you speak. (Rom 1:16, 1 Thes 2:4)
- Always depend upon the Holy Spirit for guidance, rather than trusting in your own experience. (Prov 3:5)

2. Serving the Body of Christ and Nurturing Relationships

With the Congregation

- Be "real". Have a genuine care and love for each and every person in your Church. (Rom 12:9)
- Marvel at the love and patience of the congregation; express appreciation for their prayers. (Col 3:15)
- In discussions with people at church, some may look to you for the "final answer" on a topic. You are not expected to provide the "final answer" nor should you desire to. You can always share what the Word teaches.
- Regardless of the size of the congregation people want to hear the Word preached. Care about the hearts to whom you are preaching and not the number. (Rom 10:13-15)
- There are multiple gifts in the body. Be willing to exercise the ones you have been given and not covet the gifts given to others. (1 Cor 12:18)
- Be willing to be used, but also to demonstrate a submission to others, including brothers in the congregation. The ministry is a place of service. (Eph 5:21)
- Your friendships and interactions may change. You must strive to be impartial and love without dissimulation, or insincerity. Reach out to everyone in the church. Reaching out to those who don't know you well may be difficult at first, but is necessary. (Eph 1:15-16, 1 Tim 5:21, James 3:17)
- Resist the expectation by some in the congregation to advocate for their desired change. (1 Cor 7:23, Gal 1:10)

With the Ministers

- Learn from the other ministers. Learn to appreciate each one's gifts and strengths. (Prov 1:5)
- Our common purpose is to minister God's Word. There should not be competition in the pulpit. We are servants preaching the Word of God. (1 Cor 12:25, Eph 4:12-13)
- Understand the other minister's gifts, realizing we work together as a whole pulpit. Some may excel at preaching or teaching, others may excel at visiting or counseling.
- When in humility you recognize your strengths and weaknesses, God's strength can come through. (2 Cor 12:10, James 1:17, 4:10)

With your Wife and Children

- Talk to your wife and children about your thoughts and emotions in your role as minister. In turn, listen to your wife and children about theirs. (Eph 5:21)
- Your attitude toward the ministry will impact your family's attitude. (1 Cor 9:17)

- Include your wife and children in your ministry when you can (e.g., traveling for church rotations).
- It is appropriate to say, “no” or “not now” to opportunities in order to make time for your wife and family. Remember that your wife and children have needs, too.
- Don’t put pressure on your wife and children to be perfect. However, be aware that your family is a role model, especially your wife. (Eph 5:25, 6:4)
- Some people in the church may expect your wife to know about everything that is going on and fix things that they perceive need fixing. (Prov 2:11, 5:2, James 1:19)
- Prioritize maintaining and building your relationship with your wife. Welcome her feedback as there are times she will share things that others may not see or be comfortable saying.

Ministering to Hurting People

- Be available and approachable. Acknowledge their hurt and provide a safe place for them to express their hurt. (1 Pet 3:8, James 3:17)
- People who are hurting can be angry and lash out; don't take it personally. They are reacting in ways that they wouldn't normally. Do not be defensive. (1 Pet 3:9)
- Ask, "How can I be of help to you or help you find someone who can?" (Gal 6:2)
- Take time with people to listen and hear them out. Let them talk. Most people will help themselves if you let them talk it through. (James 1:19)
- Two particular areas of concern, among others, to be aware of:
 - a. Co-dependency can occur in the role of minister and counselor. You should not take ownership of someone else's problems. (Gal 6:1)
 - b. You must establish boundaries in counseling females alone, being above reproach. (2 Cor 2:11)
- Get help in counseling others, available from your elder and professional counselors. Recognize your own limitations; be ready to involve others as you learn and grow. Your ability to counsel others is a gift, but your effectiveness will grow with experience. (Rom 12:16, Gal 6:3)
- The books, How to be a People Helper by Gary Collins and Encouragement by Larry Crabb, provide helpful instruction for counseling.

Receiving Feedback

- Be open to feedback; in fact, welcome it. (Prov 10:17, 12:15, 19:20)
- When you say something wrong, accept the counsel and correction from the other ministers or from the congregation. Recognize that you will make mistakes, and be willing to learn from them. (Psalm 119:71)
- Iron sharpens iron, and a sharpening from constructive criticism is good. However, being crushed by criticism isn't good. Harsh feedback frequently contains some degree of emotion. Resist an emotional response and instead provide a soft answer. Even when criticism is harsh, there is often some merit in it – listen for that kernel of truth. (Prov 15:1, 27:17, 1 Pet 2:19-20)
- Be ready to listen to counsel from a quiet voice or the meekest member. (Ecc 9:17)
- Sometimes, when teaching the truth, what you say will not be well received. However, speaking the truth in love is necessary for growth, and desired by the believer. (Eph 4:15, 2 Tim 3:16)

- If personal convictions do not align with a church position, it is important not to allow those convictions to become divisive among the body. Discussion with your elder, in the spirit of humility and transparency, is an important first step. (1 Cor 1:10, 3:3)
- At times Christians will disagree on matters that matter. Resolving disagreements in the meekness and gentleness of Christ is a high calling which may be more important than avoiding conflict. God's children should live the biblical standard for resolving conflict. (2 Cor 10:1)

In conclusion, we want to encourage all ministers of the Gospel to remember the great privilege it is to serve in this capacity. It is a work larger than ourselves, thus we must fully depend on the counsel of the Holy Spirit and the help of others along the way. It is our prayer that we will continue laboring together with joy, purpose and biblical unity, as we seek to walk worthy of this high calling. The Bride of Christ, His church, is worthy of our best. (Psalm 133:1, Eph 4:1, Heb 6:10)