

Theology/Philosophy of Ministry

The Ministry of the Word is the primary work of a Pulpit Minister. While he may assume many tasks as needed, the capacity to convey God's Word is primary and essential to his work. The minister needs a "deep well" of study, personal spiritual disciplines, and experience on which to draw in order to communicate the Scriptures fruitfully.

Preaching and teaching should be genuine speech, not a formulaic product ("three points and poem"). At the end of a sermon, the audience should feel like someone genuinely spoke to them about God's Word. Even more so, in a perfect sermon, the minister would become transparent and God's voice in the text would be louder than that of the minister. Whenever I speak of God, "he must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Preaching the Word intends to assert God's reality. Most listeners will by default think of their everyday life as "the real world" and Sunday morning's sermon as idealism or useful fiction. Nothing could be further from the truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the reality we must live by, and the function of preaching is to captivate the heart and mind of the audience with the gospel's claims. Each sermon strives to claim a little more of Monday morning for the Lord.

The goal of a minister's preaching must be "faithfulness" above all else. When a minister makes either "practical advice" or "growth" the goal of his preaching, he has put the cart before the horse. Instead, when the Word calls the church to be more genuinely faithful to God, then God produces better lives and church growth, rather than the minister. The goal of the minister's work in the Word is to help the church be the best, most genuine church it can be.

Beyond Preaching

A successful minister will also engage in a variety of other tasks beyond the pulpit. The minister will imagine, design, promote, and execute programs which help the vision and mission of the church to flourish. This requires the minister to be both a dreamer and worker. He cannot allow mundane tasks to keep him from looking ahead, but neither can he adopt an attitude of superiority rather than a blue collar work ethic. Jesus began both "to do and to teach," and so must his servant-leaders (Acts 1:1).

A successful minister works in the lives of the members of his church. He must "set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). His job is never to replace the elders/shepherds in their work of guiding the flock, but he must supplement it with personal interaction with the membership and the community. He must act as a servant, both in gently correcting and in patiently enduring (2 Timothy 2:24).

Ideally, in our modern context, a minister must also be an apt administrator. By default, in medium and small sized churches at the least, the minister becomes the point of contact for every work of the church. He needs to have a working knowledge of the church's life and work. He needs to be able to delegate as needed and also dive into projects himself if called upon to do so. He needs professionalism and flexibility.

Humility and a sense of humor help, too. The work of ministry is very serious, but a minister who takes himself too seriously cannot do it well.

Personal Strengths & Weaknesses

In baseball, scouts often speak of the “five tools” of speed, power, hitting for average, fielding, and arm strength. Once or twice in a generation, a scout will find an athlete with all five tools. More often, managers create a successful team by finding the players with two, three, or even four tools which complement each other. Church ministry operates the same way. The “five tool preacher” is rare indeed. God just didn’t make many of us that way. Instead, churches need to assess their strengths and find ministers who supply the missing “tools.”

I believe that I am a minister with several tools or gifts, but certainly not all, and I prefer to be honest about that rather than pretend otherwise. In my own ministry, I have strengths in the areas of preaching, teaching, writing, administration, and counseling. I communicate effectively and actually enjoy the work of preaching and teaching in its own right. Teaching and preaching multiple times per week and generating curriculum for the church is a true joy for me. As an introvert of sorts, I am fueled by the quiet tasks of study and preparation. I am not shy by any stretch, but neither am I a social butterfly. I can interact well with others and build relationships, especially in small groups, but I think I can fairly say that this is not the area where I thrive in the way that some other minister might (the same ministers who may not thrive in their study, teaching, and preaching in the way that I do). While I am happy to engage in any sort of visitation ministry requested of me, in some ways it will always be like putting a pitcher in the outfield. It might work, but a shepherd-led visitation program will always be better than putting that entire responsibility on me personally.

My strength and weakness come from the same feature of my personality. A cold congregation with a need for a minister who will push them to be more open and lively to the outside world might be better served with a different minister than myself. On the other hand, a family-oriented, outgoing, and friendly congregation will find that I am a great fit. I can supply depth of teaching to the already vibrant life of the church while taking nothing away from the outgoing hospitality already alive in the church family.

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5/1/19