

Key Value # 3

Ministry

Synonymous words. *Diaconos*. Ministry = Service. A Minister = A Servant.

Service is not optional but at the heart of the Christian life. In Acts the word is used of the apostles' labours, the deacons' work, financial gifts, a mission, & Paul's ministry, In the Gospels it is used of angels' ministry, the hospitality of Peter's mother in law's & Martha, the saint's labours, the women's financial backing, a condition of discipleship, & our Lord's service in redeeming us. There's no waiting list. But in God's Kingdom we all have a place, a role and a function to fulfill. Our Identity is based on Christ but our Significance in His service. We each have a mission to the world & a ministry in the Body.

A) Our Service is based on Jesus Example

- Leading people to understand who He was (the *servant* of Isaiah's prophecy)
- Washing the disciple's feet – John 13
 - The Disciples jockeying for position & prominence
 - Jesus took up the towel and basin
 - He did not abdicate His role as King or Lord
 - He is aware of His greatness.
 - He was preeminently a Servant-Leader
 - Servant leadership is no respecter of persons (He washed Judas' feet, too)
 - Then He taught them:
 - Not just an action, but an attitude – having the heart of a servant.
 - Not how you behave when you serve, but how you react when someone treats you like a servant.
 - Jesus was not saying, "I want you to become footwashers; or I want you to like washing feet."
 - "Don't cling to your rights; serve others!" (Phil 2:6-9)

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

B) Signs of a Servant

1. *Real servants make themselves available.*
2. *Real servants pay attention to the needs of others – Gal 6:10¹*
3. *Real Servants do their best with what they have. Eccles 11:4*
4. *Real Servants perform every task with equal dedication. Col 3:23*
5. *Real Servants are faithful to their ministry. Matt 25:23 Col 4:17*
6. *Real servants maintain a low profile*
7. *Real Servants recognise they are serving Christ²*
8. *Real Servants admit their weaknesses.³*

C) Spiritual Gifts

We are God's hand crafted work of art. Not an assembly line product. Each one is unique. Whilst gifting is essential our attitude is most important – holiness include humility. When we talk of gifts we must always keep the purpose in mind, which is primarily the edification of the entire church. We aim for something greater than our own growth in grace.

Important passages about gifts: 1 Cor 12; Eph 4; Romans 12; 1 Peter 4:8-11. Variety.

Some gifts are for the necessary maintenance of the church – sustaining current levels of service: & relying upon God for wisdom, strength & blessing.

Others are inclined more towards the advancement of the church – cutting out new territory, new ministries, new possibilities, calling for the exercise of a creative kind of faith.

Some may have a more public contribution.

Some have gifts & insight that take them wider than the service in their own church – eg. Stott, Lloyd Jones, Billy Graham, C H Spurgeon.

- He gives gifts to all
- He gives undeserved gifts to all
- He gives different gifts to all, according to His will.
- We're called to use the gifts God has given us, not for personal boasting or impressing others, but for the good of others & the local church.

"It is not great gifts that God blesses but great likeness to Jesus". R. M. M'Cheyne

"In fact, ministering through spiritual gifts is defined by the apostle Peter as mediating grace from God to other people, as "good stewards of the grace of God" 1 Pet 4:10 ⁴

D) Problems with gifts

- Envy through comparisons
- Monopoly Building
- Unrecognised changes
- Others serving my gifting
- Still waiting to discover my gifts⁵
- Early retirement through disappointment

"If my life is fruitless, it doesn't matter who praises me. And if my life is fruitful, it doesn't matter who criticises me." John Bunyan

E) Finding our place

If we lose sight of the UNITY of the church it leads to **anarchy** & chaos, as in the times of the Judges. **"Every man did as was right in his own eyes..."**

If we lose sight of the VARIETY that leads to **uniformity**, & so to frustration, dissatisfaction & discontent as gifts go wasted & unused. We should echo Paul's prayer after conversion Acts 9:6

"Lord what will you have me to do?"

According to Eph 4:16 the body of the church grows only **"as each part does its work."**

There we find that pastors & teachers – those who labour in the Word, are responsible for liberating other believers to discover their own gifts & ministries. And so the body grows as all pull together in the same direction with a variety of skills & callings & services, all dependent upon the Head, the source of all gifts & graces. If we lose our contact with the Head, any ideas of body growth & ministry become a sterile social exercise. Never forget whose body this is.

Questions for discussion

1. What part do others play in determining your gifts?
2. Muscles weaken through disuse. How can you improve your serve?
3. How can the church better equip believers to serve others?
4. How might God *suggest* various new forms of ministry to us as a church?
5. What procedures should we adopt in Ebenezer to ensure everyone has a part to play – seen & unseen?
6. How can we ensure that each member is actively doing their work, since many works of service are hidden & less obvious?
7. How important are the "word-based" gifts of pastors & teachers in the church's growth?
8. Apart from labouring in the Word, how can pastors & teachers be responsible for liberating other believers to discover their own gifts & ministries?
9. Are we responsible to identify the next generation of leaders & preachers? How can we encourage the timid?
10. Is the purpose of the gifts restricted for the benefit of the church's present membership?

F) Ministry Is More Important Than Life

"According to the New Testament, "ministry" is what all Christians do. Pastors have the job of equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). But ordinary Christians do the ministry. What ministry looks like is as varied as Christians are varied. It's not an office; it's a lifestyle devoted to advancing other people's

faith and holiness. In this sense the only life that counts for anything is a life of ministry-whether you're a banker or a bricklayer. Fulfilling your ministry is more important than staying alive.

This conviction is what makes the lives of radically devoted people so inspiring to watch. Most of them speak the way Paul did about his ministry: **"I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24).**

Doing the ministry that God gives us to do is more important than life.

You may think you need to save your life in order to do your ministry. On the contrary, how you lose your life may be the capstone of your ministry. It certainly was for Jesus, at age 33. We need not fret about keeping ourselves alive in order to finish our ministry. God alone knows the appointed time of our service. Henry Martyn was right when he said, "If God has work for me to do, I cannot die." In other words, I am immortal till my work is done. Therefore ministry is more important than life".

(p.287 of Future Grace; John Piper) "No one fulfils any spiritual ministry without relying on future grace"

¹ Galatians 6:10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

² Matthew 25:40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

³ 2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

⁴ John Piper, Future Grace p293

⁵ "Ministry is given as freely & sovereignly & as graciously as the 1st experience of mercy that we received in salvation" Advice given to John Piper when he was looking for a situation. *"Future Grace"* p296