

Romans: The Good News of God

What Does the Bible Say About Ministry?

Romans 12:3-8

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Scripture

Today, as we continue our study in Romans 12, the Apostle Paul is in the so-called practical section of his letter to the Romans. He begins chapter 12 by exhorting the Christians to live utterly and completely for God. Then, in verse 3 he starts explaining how Christians are to serve in the body of Christ.

I would like to take a few weeks to talk about how Christians are to serve in the body of Christ. So, let's read Romans 12:3-8:

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

Introduction

Napoleon once pointed to a map of China and said, "There lies a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up, it will be unstoppable."¹

So, if I could copy Napoleon, I say, "The church in the United States is a sleeping giant. If it ever wakes up, it will be unstoppable." Vast numbers attend church each Sunday, and that is about

¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1995), 365.

as far as their faith takes them. There is simply no doubt that if all church members were as active as Christ calls them to be, the church would be unstoppable. Instead of lamenting all the bad things that are going on in our culture, the church would be actively engaged in transforming our culture for good.

So many Christians have a country club mentality regarding church. What I mean by that is that so many of them think that becoming a member of a church is like becoming a member of a country club. They apply to join, their membership is reviewed, they may have to go through a membership class, they are interviewed and, if they pass, they are accepted into membership, and they start paying their dues. After they are members they can then be as active as they decide they want to be. Some are very active, whereas others are non-active.

But Christ has far greater expectations than that for his body, the church. He expects *every* Christian whom he has saved to be actively using the gifts and talents that he has given for ministry.

I read a shocking statistic in a Gallup survey which discovered that only 10% of American church members are active in any kind of ministry. Isn't that terrible? Is it any wonder that the church is a sleeping giant? But what I think is even worse is that the Gallup survey said that 50% of church members have no interest in serving in any ministry at all. Think about that! Half of all church members say that they simply want to remain as spectators. When asked to serve in a ministry, they say, "I just don't feel *led* to get involved." (Actually, one wonders if it is not another kind of *lead*—in the seat of their pants!)²

Lesson

So, what I would like to do in the next few Sundays is to take you through what we call Class 301, which is also called "Discovering My S.H.A.P.E. for Ministry." Today, I want to examine

² Warren, 365-366.

what the Bible says about ministry.

I. The Definition of Ministry

Let me begin with a definition of ministry.

The New Testament word for ministry is *diakonia*, and it simply means “service.”³

The pattern for Christian ministry is provided by the life of Jesus, who came not to receive service but to give it. Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; cf. also Matthew 20:28). The verb used for “served” and “serve” is the verb form of *diakonia*.⁴

Throughout the New Testament the word *diakonia* is used to describe the service of the apostles, ministers, elders, deacons, and church members.

So, simply put, I would like to suggest that ministry be defined as follows: *Ministry is using whatever God has given you to serve him and the needs of others.*

II. The Direction of Ministry

Note that we minister in three directions.

First, we minister to the Lord. We read in Acts 13:1-2, “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” All Christian service is primarily because the Lord has called us to do it. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:17 that “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord

³ T. Friberg, B. Friberg & N. F. Miller, *Vol. 4: Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* in Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 109.

⁴ D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962), 769.

Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Second, we minister to believers. The writer to the Hebrews says, “For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do” (Hebrews 6:10). One way in which love is shown to God is in our service to one another as believers in Christ.

And third, we minister to unbelievers. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matthew 5:13). Salt, in Jesus’ day, was primarily a preservative, and it was used to prevent food from decaying. Jesus is saying that Christians are to engage the culture in order to prevent its decay. And that is one way that we minister to unbelievers.

So, we minister to the Lord, to believers, and to unbelievers.

III. The Areas of Ministry

When we minister to people—believers and unbelievers alike—we minister to four areas of needs.

First, we minister to people’s physical needs. When Jesus was speaking about the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25:31-40 he said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a

stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 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.’” Clearly, ministering to people’s physical needs is extremely important to Jesus. Moreover, Jesus will reward us as we minister to people’s physical needs.

Second, we minister to people’s emotional needs. The Apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). We minister not only to people’s physical needs but to their emotional needs as well.

Third, we minister to people’s intellectual needs. Sometimes people struggle to understand God’s truth, and so we have an opportunity to minister to them. The Apostle Peter said, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

And fourth, we minister to people’s spiritual needs. This is of course the most important need that any person has. We often, however, can only get to minister to people’s spiritual needs by first ministering to their physical, emotional, or intellectual needs. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

So, we minister to people’s physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs.

IV. The Purpose of Ministry

But, what is the purpose of ministry?

In our text the Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:4-5, “**For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**”

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul specifies the purpose of

ministry in the section on spiritual gifts. He says in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good.*” In other words, spiritual gifts have been given so that everyone benefits—and God is glorified.

So, the purpose of ministry can be stated as follows: *God wants to use you to help the church grow.*

V. The Priority of Ministry

At this point you may be saying to yourself, “Okay, I understand that ministry means service, and that we minister to the Lord, to believers, and to unbelievers. I can also see that the Bible says that we minister to people’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs. Further, I grant that the purpose of ministry is that God wants to use me to help the church grow. But why should I be interested in ministry? Why should I be interested in getting involved in service?”

I am glad you asked! The Bible actually gives at least 10 reasons why you should be involved in ministry. Here they are:

First, you were created for ministry. Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” You were not created to live for yourself, your family, your legacy, your prosperity, or whatever. You were created in Christ Jesus to minister to the Lord, believers, and unbelievers.

Second, you were saved for ministry. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9 that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” You have not been saved to sit in a church and soak it all in. No, you have been saved to serve! And what happens when you don’t serve, when you are not active in ministry, you are not blessed by God.

Listen, can I tell you why some of you are struggling in your lives? We all live in a world that is fallen. We will always struggle to lesser or greater degrees in this world. But sometimes you won-

der, “Why are things so hard for me?” I’ll tell you. One reason may be because you are not active in ministry. You are part of the 90% who are not active and involved in the holy calling that God gave you. And because you are not actively involved in a ministry in Christ’s church, you are frustrated and not enjoying the blessing of God in your life.

Third, you are called into ministry. Paul says in Galatians 1:15-17, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.” Paul is speaking of his calling in salvation, but it is also a calling to service. And what God has done for Paul, God has also done for all believers.

The Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9 that “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” Why? Why has God called you to himself in salvation? It is so “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

All believers are called into service of some kind in the church of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, you have been gifted for ministry. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” This is perhaps the clearest statement in the New Testament that every Christian has received a spiritual gift. Now God does not give spiritual gifts to use on ourselves. No. He gives spiritual gifts for the benefit of others.

Fifth, you have been authorized for ministry. In his Great Commission, Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-19, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . . .” The Father gave authority to the Son, and the Son now gives authority to his church to go and serve him in this world by making disciples of all nations.

A few days ago Michael Vick signed a contract with the Philadelphia Eagles. Vick of course spent about 19 months in jail for abusing dogs. It was interesting to me that Tony Dungy was at

his press conference. Apparently, Tony Dungy went to visit Michael Vick in jail and has helped him get right with God. During the press conference Tony said quite simply, clearly, and powerfully, “Michael got off track with the Lord, and I have been helping him get back on track.” Now, obviously when Tony went to help Michael he was a well-known former NFL coach. Perhaps the Commissioner of the NFL even authorized him to help Vick. But while that may have been helpful, ultimately Jesus has authorized Tony Dungy to serve him, and Tony Dungy is simply obeying Jesus because all Christians have been authorized for ministry.

Sixth, you are commanded to minister. Paul gives a very interesting command to Archippus at the end of his letter to the Colossians. He says in Colossians 4:17, “And say to Archippus, ‘See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.’” We don’t know much about Archippus. All we know is that he was a Christian at Colosse who seems to have held an official position in the church, and that the Apostle Paul called him “our fellow soldier” in Philemon 2.⁵ Could it be that Archippus got saved and was active in ministry for a while? He labored with Paul as a fellow soldier in the work of ministry, even serving in some official position in the church. But then, his involvement in ministry stopped. He was no longer active in the ministry of the church, so that Paul had to exhort him strongly to do the ministry to which he had been called. I don’t know. But what I do know is that every single one of us who has been created, saved, called, gifted, and authorized for ministry has also been commanded to minister.

Seventh, you are to be equipped for ministry. Many Christians believe that the work of ministry belongs to the pastor. Their attitude is that they show up on Sundays to encourage the pastor to keep pressing on with the ministry. They will even put money in the offering plate to make sure that he doesn’t have to take on a second job to do the ministry. The biblical position, however, is that the job of the pastor is to equip *you* to do the ministry! Here is

⁵ R. F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison & Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).

how Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:11-12, “And he [i.e., Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers—[why?]*—to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*” My job is to equip you to do the ministry! And that is why I am taking these few weeks to talk about ministry in our church.

Eighth, your ministry is needed by the body of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” The Living Bible puts it this way, “Now here is what I am trying to say: all of you together are the one body of Christ and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.” What Paul is saying is that ministry always functions in the context of the church. Someone says, “My ministry takes place in my home” or, “My ministry is in my workplace.” Could you tell me then how you are ministering to me? You see, the way ministry works is that I minister to you, and you minister to me. In other words, by ministering to one another, we then together minister to the Lord, to believers, and also to unbelievers. We work together as a body for the good of all.

Ninth, you are accountable for your ministry. Later in his letter to the Romans Paul says, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Always keep in mind that one day you will stand before God and you will give an account of yourself to God. Oh, you won’t lose your salvation. But it will affect the reward you will receive from God.

And tenth, you will be rewarded for your ministry. Jesus said in Matthew 25:23, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

So, why should you be involved in ministry? You should be involved in ministry because you are created for ministry, saved for ministry, called into ministry, gifted for ministry, authorized for ministry, commanded to minister, equipped for ministry, accountable for ministry, and because your ministry is needed by the body of Christ, and because you will be rewarded for ministry.

VI. The Discovery of Ministry

How then do you discover your ministry? How do you know what you should do in the body of Christ? This is where Romans 12:1-8 comes into play.

First, dedicate yourself. Paul says in Romans 12:1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Second, eliminate competing distractions. Verse 2a says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

Third, evaluate your strengths. Verse 3 says, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”

Fourth, cooperate with other believers. Verses 4-5 says, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

And fifth, activate your gifts. Verses 6ff says, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. . . .”

Conclusion

Next Sunday, Lord willing, I will teach you how to discover how God has shaped you for ministry.

I hope that you will not be one of the 90% who is not active in ministry in the church. Make a commitment today to join the 10% who are active in ministry. And may God bless you as you do so. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, the Bible has a great deal to say about ministry. Help each member of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church not to be part of the 90% who are spectators in the church. But rather help each one today to make a commitment to get involved in some ministry in the church.

There is so much that can be done. There is women's ministry, men's ministry, children's ministry, youth ministry, Emptynesters, pacesetters, nursery, hospitality, prayer, ministry deployment, missions, NTCA, music, choir, greeters, ushers, Sunday school, adult Christian Education & Fellowship, Growth Groups, and so much more. Help each one here today to get actively involved in a ministry of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.