

Steve Baney – Philosophy of Ministry

Introduction

The call to ministry is both a great honor and a tremendous responsibility. The honors are many. The pastor is invited into the most precious events of life, including birth, baptism, marriage, and death. He is respected in his community. And he has the privilege of speaking with authority.

Yet coupled with these honors is a list of tremendous responsibilities, to rebuke, to teach, and to equip others on their spiritual journey. Like the watchman described in Ezekiel 3.16-21, when God tells the pastor to warn someone about his sin, the pastor is responsible for the sin unless he warn them. Scripture says those who teach others will be judged more strictly than those who are taught.¹ Having tasted the goodness of the Lord, the pastor can no longer find ignorant bliss in sinful indulgence. And the pastor must act counter-culturally, even against the grain of the congregation at times, in order to powerfully enable others along their spiritual journey.

A personal philosophy of ministry is important because it manages much of the life and ministry of its author. It describes the purpose of my life, the values which are most important to me, life-long goals and obstacles that stand in their way.

God has called me to be his servant. I could easily pick a career that utilizes my skill or passion outside ministry. But God has called me to set my agenda under his. My desire is to worship him by responsibly responding to that call. As a sinful man, I

¹ James 3.

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received God's grace and cleansing. Now he has asked me to walk alongside other people who are just like me along their journey toward God.

Unfortunately, the call to ministry isn't understood by most people, even those in the church. We live in a money-minded culture that prioritizes corporate business and career goals. So the idea of setting aside one's goals in surrender to God seems foolish to anyone who isn't making him their first priority.

In the midst of this misunderstood call are many men and women who think they know the best way to supervise and evaluate the pastor, especially one like myself who is young with little experience. These people operate on the assumptions that right belief, right behavior, and right service² qualify the pastor for ministry. The danger here is one's ability to fit those criteria yet remain far from Christ. Does attending seminary and assenting to moral and doctrinal beliefs make one a true follower of Christ? Does avoiding visible sins and performing religious rituals determine the condition of one's heart? Does humanitarian concern for others qualify a person for spiritual leadership? The answer to these questions is no.

The call to ministry comes from God and should not be taken lightly. Fulfilling my call cannot simply be done by pursuing the requests of other people, sometimes even people on the leadership board of a church. Faithful stewardship of my call cannot bow to every whim of the selfish church member. It cannot be dictated by money, agenda, special requests, assumptions, expectations, or even a written list of job responsibilities. It must be evaluated by God's Spirit. It must help the pastor to pursue the requests of God

² The ideas of right belief, right behavior, and right service were discussed in Terry Wardle's class, "Person in Ministry," during a lecture on "Centered Set" ministry.

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by using careful discernment. It must help the pastor trust God to provide for his needs. It must advance based upon God's timeframe.

Since many spiritual leaders are far from Christ, the pastor must have a method of evaluating whether he or she is fulfilling this call. In the seven years of lay ministry and three years of pastoral ministry, I can see clearly that ministry is demanding. Without an end goal in mind, much of my ministry was haphazard, best-guess. Although often educated guesses, this approach left me frustrated for lack of clarity in direction, always wondering what to do next. In a class lecture, Dr. Terry Wardle said, "Life comes at you fast. If you don't have a way to evaluate it, then what comes at you will control you."

My philosophy of ministry will help me evaluate my call to ministry. It will greatly influence how I make decisions, how I prioritize time, where I place value, how I invest my resources, and more. The specific goals described in my philosophy of ministry, including steps toward achieving each goal, will make decisions easier.

Personal life statement

There are four desires in my heart that seek to respond to his call. I desire to live in intimacy with my God by constantly pursuing him, to be continually transformed by the Holy Spirit, and to steadily grow within the context of spiritual community. Only when these three desires are pursued can I continue with the fourth in integrity: to move forward in service to the world in which I live.

The first desire is to live in intimacy with my God, the one who created me and knows me better than anyone else, by constantly pursuing him. It is an unending task. One cannot maintain intimacy with God if he stops somewhere along the journey. Pursuing intimacy with him means he will be a part of everything I do. It means I will

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rest in his care instead of depending on sin to satisfy my desires. It means seeking him will be the thing I desire most.³ It means I will find my identity in the one who created me rather than in what I do, which can change or be taken away.

The next desire of my life statement is to be continually transformed by the Holy Spirit that counsels, calls, comforts, communicates, cleanses, and commissions me with power. What a joy it would be to live alongside Jesus. He knew his followers would desire to spend every moment of their lives with him. So he sent his Spirit to live with and in us.

When I face difficulty, the Spirit is there to counsel me as the best listener with the best advice. It is the same Spirit that awakened my mind and filled my heart with a passion for God's call upon my life. He is the one who brings comfort in the midst of my deepest sorrow, my greatest pain, and my worst fear. The closer I am to him, the more I readily recognize the sound of his voice as he communicates on behalf of the Father. He reveals Scripture to me. And he prays on my behalf. It is God's Spirit that pours out cleansing grace upon me, changing me into a completely new person. And the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8.11) is the Spirit that commissions me with power to live a godly life against all odds.

The third desire is to steadily grow within the context of spiritual community that trains, stimulates, rebukes, and holds me accountable. The sermon presented to the congregation is a valuable avenue of teaching. But little dialogue happens in that setting. The smaller, spiritual community is a vital part of my life since God made me a part of it.

³ Deuteronomy 4.29.

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No part can say it does not need another part.⁴ I need spiritual community as much as it needs me.

Along with spiritual training, this community stimulates both thought and action, as Hebrews 10.24 instructs us to spur each other toward love and good actions. It is difficult for me to accept criticism, especially from those I already hold at arms length. But when I permit it to come from the spiritual community that I trust, from the ones that unconditionally love me, from those that are just as broken along the same journey, I can better respond to rebuke. This spiritual community includes the select few who see me for more than my “false self.”⁵ I can accept their constructive criticism because I know they treat me completely with love and acceptance. In the safety of this intimate community, I can invite my Lord to work through my weakness and bring wholeness through confession.⁶ And my spiritual community helps to ensure that I do not fall back into sinful patterns, keeping me accountable, motivating me to press on.

The last desire is to move forward in service to the world in which I live. But it can only take place with integrity *after* the first three. The service I am describing comes in various forms of skills, talents, and passions. As a part of the body of Christ, I have a function. God has designed me in a way that my skills, talents, and passions are a part of my function within Christ’s body. Much like when a person’s liver fails and the rest of his or her body becomes ill, if I cease to perform my function as a part of the body of Christ, then the whole body suffers, including myself.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12

⁵ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 83.

⁶ The discipline of *Confession* is described in our class notes, page 19.

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Core Values

If I am going to live by my personal life statement, there are certain things that are non-negotiable. These are commitments that I must act upon to fulfill my life statement. Core values are important because people constantly demand my time, energy, and attention. If I do not hold on tightly to my core values, then I'll end up going somewhere that I do not want to be. These values are essential to my ministry. I'll never be the man God wants me to be if I don't maintain the following:

Life-long learning

Having the value of life-long learning means loving my Lord with my entire mind.⁷ As I seek to represent God to other people, I must pursue being one of his most highly educated students. I desire to be an expert who “correctly handles the word of truth.”⁸ I must be able to accurately understand and interpret God's word. When I better understand God and his word, then I can better draw others toward him. Nehemiah 8 describes a day when a priest named Ezra read and explained God's word. In response the people worshipped the Lord. How can I be this kind of spiritual leader, one who rightly explains God's word and leads others to worship him? Before Ezra taught God's word, he first devoted himself to study and obey it. Without excellence in this area, I risk not only my own soul but the souls of those I lead.

Steps:

- I will complete my seminary education to earn a Masters of Divinity degree. This is a step towards excellence in loving God with my mind.

⁷ Matthew 22.37

⁸ 2 Timothy 2.15 NIV

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- I will pursue the possibility of doctoral work later in life by identifying how such study could apply to my future ministry.
- I will attend no less than one leadership conference per year. This is a practice I have held for several years now.
- I will read weekly on topics related to pastoral ministry and Christian living.

Obstacles:

- This goal will require our money. In order to consider doctoral study, I must be financially prepared to invest in education rather than an expensive home, vehicle, or other material items or leisure activities.
- This goal can easily be neglected as other responsibilities are more readily visible. Others may not necessarily know whether I am continuing to read and study.
- My calendar and agenda will make setting aside time for an annual conference difficult. I will need to plan far in advance to ensure my other responsibilities are met and that other people can cover for me while I am away.
- I plan to have children in a few years. When I do, I will spend much of my free time with them. Many parents tell me that children take much time and drastically change one's life.

Healthy Family

I am committed to loving my wife the same way that Jesus Christ loves the church, giving myself up for her.⁹ I must lead her, serve her, prioritize her, and love her every day. Since we plan to have children some day, they will also hold an important

⁹ Ephesians 5

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place of priority in my life and ministry. “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?”¹⁰

Steps:

- I will continue as I do now to set aside no less than one night per week to have a date with my wife.
- I will refuse to volunteer my wife for ministry responsibilities without her express consent.
- I will continue to ask my wife to complete an annual “Pastor’s Wife Review” evaluation form and process it together afterwards. I developed this evaluation a few years ago to ask her to list things I have done well and things I have done poorly. Then it asks her to identify the areas of my ministry, how she is connected or involved in each area, and how she would like those connections or involvements to change.

Obstacles:

- From time to time, the pressing responsibilities of work and ministry spill over into the night set aside for dating my wife.
- Some people have specific expectations of the pastor’s wife. Adrian might not meet those expectations.
- As responsibilities increase, leisure time becomes precious, especially in the evenings. Spending time specifically set aside for us to enjoy each other will take me away from my other responsibilities, which at times seem urgent and important.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 3

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- My wife has a tendency of keeping quiet when others hurt her. I may have difficulty knowing when she is hurt by me or others.
- I have a hard time accepting criticism. I respond more to the feeling of being hurt than to improving my behavior and character. So I might even avoid helpful criticism that I request from my wife.¹¹

Spiritual formation

Most Christians would easily agree that spiritual growth is important. They believe it is the result of reading and studying Scripture, believing religious truths, and attempting to behave based upon its rules. For most of my Christian life, I approached spiritual formation in these ways. But I am convinced that there is a plethora of other ways to encounter God and so be changed by the experience. These practices of positioning myself will help me to focus less on solving the problems in my life and more on finding God amidst them.¹²

Steps:

- I will devote a half-hour of time no less than four days per week for silent waiting on the Lord. Just as David waited patiently for our Lord¹³ I will make my soul still before him.¹⁴ The focus here will be two-fold: to listen and to allow God to evaluate me so that the parts of me that still cling to control will surrender to the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ During these times, I will use a variety of disciplines such as communion, reflection on an icon or symbol, prayer, etc.

¹¹ Benner, David. *Surrender to Love*. Page 39.

¹² Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 17.

¹³ Psalm 40.1

¹⁴ Psalm 62.5

¹⁵ Wardle, Terry. *Draw Close to the Fire*. Page 51.

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- I will reflect on Scripture by meditation, journaling (for myself) and writing (for others) with additional texts such as commentaries, devotions, and other books. This feasting on spiritual food will ensure that I am not inviting others to a meal when my own pantry is empty.¹⁶
- I will spend time alone playing guitar and singing to my Lord no less than once each week.
- I will walk with him around the nature trail near my house no less than once each week. These times have been the most refreshing experience with God that I have ever known, as his divine love does not depend on my faithfulness.¹⁷
- I will worship with a congregation outside my church denomination no less than four times each year.

Obstacles:

- Silence is quickly overcome by any number of noisy distractions surrounding me, including the computer, phone, radio, television, people, and the unexpected. I will need to develop the discipline of silent waiting.
- *Doing* for my Lord comes much easier than *being* with him.
- I grow tired of spiritual disciplines when used for lengthy periods of time. I will need to stretch myself to use each discipline longer while balancing variety at the same time.
- I have a tendency of always writing for others, seldom journaling for my own benefit. Some of my journaling must be kept private if I am to be completely honest about my feelings and thoughts.

¹⁶ Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 65.

¹⁷ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 48.

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- I enjoy music so much that it can become my focus, rather than leading me to focus on my Lord.
- I prefer to stay indoors, even though I recognize the benefits of my outdoor walks with my Lord. I may need a scheduled time for my weekly walks in order to keep them consistent.
- My responsibilities of ministry to a church may make it difficult to worship with congregations outside my church denomination. People will expect me to be present at all ministry events.

Passionate Body-Part Ministry

Different people have their unique ministries because God has given them different gifts and passions (1 Corinthians 7). The small congregation that ministers to older, rural families is no better or worse than the large congregation that ministers to young, post-modern individuals. When each works together, God's kingdom grows.

In the same way, God has designed me with specific gifts, loves, and passions that should not be stifled by a need or mandate. Some have called this a gift-based ministry. There will be times when I am required or asked to do things that don't interest or excite me. But to prevent discouragement, low morale, and burn-out, I will focus 80% of my time and energy on the area of my greatest passions. As much as my passions contribute to my effective ministry, so my weaknesses and limitations contribute to my ineffective ministry.

When I first began ministry, I spent much time and energy trying to convince search committees that I could bend myself to fit the mold they were seeking to fill. Their needs and requests were dictating my ministry pursuits. A year later I was asked by a

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pastor what I would love to do most in ministry if I could choose anything. I listed my three passions, not knowing that they would soon become my job description at that church! Ministering in the areas of my passion and giftedness brought liberty and joy.

Steps:

- I will, if at all possible, pursue an associate ministry position rather than a senior pastoral role. The senior pastor who I work with will share my value for passionate body-part ministry.
- I will trust God to present to me the opportunities to minister in the areas of my greatest passions, and remain willing to follow him in the areas of my weakness.
- I will build a team of coworkers that fill in the gaps where I fall short. I cannot (and should not) try to accomplish the tasks of every part of the body of Christ. The hand cannot be the ear. The foot cannot be the eye. God has arranged the parts just as he wants them to be.¹⁸ This team will work together, not micro-managed under my supervision, but in the freedom that comes from passionate body-part ministry.
- Since pastor's minister to people's vulnerabilities, I will be in a position to abuse power. I will use power to create, not destroy. This power brings the best out of people.¹⁹
- I will encourage the involvement of all members of the congregation, empowering them to minister, decentralizing my power as a pastor.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 12

¹⁹ Foster's discussion of power is found on page 29 of our class notes.

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Obstacles:

- The need to earn money to provide for my family's needs makes this kind of trust and patience difficult. I may desire to give in when an opportunity comes along if I think I could compromise or eventually change the job requirements.
- I will resist ministering in the areas outside my greatest passions, the things which should be done that I do not want to do.
- Most people in the church (and outside of it too) will have expectations of me and my job responsibilities. They will need to come to an understanding that I am not simply a hired-hand slave or a do-it-all expert.
- Many people do not want to participate in ministry. They like to be told what to do. They like to have a pastor to whom they can attribute far too much credit and blame. I will need to show that that finding their area of ministry will be an opportunity for great joy and fulfillment in their lives. As a means of serving the congregation, I will help them be good stewards of their spiritual gifts.²⁰
- I am a control freak and a perfectionist. The idea of decentralized power is not a difficult concept to imagine, but is easier said than done. I find myself turning to the people who always say yes, rather than helping each person find their place.

Evangelistic Ministry

The role of the chaplain is important, nurturing the saints with teaching and preaching, encouraging fellowship with social gatherings and meals, comforting those who have lost a loved one, etc. Unfortunately, many people in the church forget that our mission includes those outside the church's four walls: to preach good news, heal the sick,

²⁰ 1 Peter 4

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and set captives free. The outward focus of my ministry is so important that I wanted to distinguish it from the passionate body-part ministry listed above.

God's grace touched my life; I will never be the same. I desire to see people experience grace much like Peter did when he experienced Jesus' loving forgiveness of his denial.²¹ My God "loves sinners, redeems failures, delights in second chances and fresh starts, and never tires of pursuing lost sheep, waiting for prodigal children, or rescuing those damaged by life or left on the sides of its paths."²² My ministry must follow his gracious character.

Steps:

- I will focus my ministry not inward on those who probably need it least, but outward, focused in grace to the non-members.
- I will attend community meetings, pastoral association meetings (between churches, and political meetings to stay informed and connected to the contemporary events of my community.
- I will lead weekly prayer meetings specifically for the community surrounding the church where I minister.
- I will "take work home with me" to my neighbors, those I meet at the store and the bank, etc.
- I will prayerfully and intentionally do everything I can to disciple one person to a relationship with Jesus Christ each year.
- I will use small group ministry as a means to encourage and participate in the evangelization of lost sinners.

²¹ Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself*. Page 29.

²² Benner, David. *Surrender to Love*. Page 45.

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Obstacles:

- People in the church are often selfish, especially regarding the way their pastor spends his or her time. They may expect me to devote more of my time to them than to the community.
- It is easier to attend to the church member who speaks up than to the community that feels shut out of the church's member-only congregation.
- I may have difficulty identifying who the Spirit leads me to disciple.
- Sometimes people in Christian small groups are not ready to appropriately respond to a non-member attending the group. I will need to coach the Christian group members to make the group a place where non-Christians feel comfortable.

Accountability

I will need to do several things to ensure that I live by my life statement. I will re-write this reflection paper once every three years. Upon re-writing it, I will have at least two people read it to prayerfully help me evaluate my progress and my failure. One of these people will be my wife. The second will be my best friend.

Conclusion

When I reflect on how I experienced this exercise, I must be honest about how my attitudes changed. At first, I thought this would be another hoop to jump through. Certainly a significant hoop, one that would require much work and greatly impact my course grade. But all along I guess I knew there was more to it. The more I reflect, the more I want to spend time in reflection because I recognize the benefit. I don't think about my call often enough. But when I do, it almost scares me. I have to respond to my Master. I love him so much. I long for intimacy with him. But my weakness and sin keep

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me from it. I must be continually cleansed and anointed by his Spirit. Then I will be able to truly enjoy worshipping and serving as a part of his body.

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