

106. Ministry Gifts

By Arland Steen

Supreme Scripture

Ephesians 4:11 (NKJ): ¹¹ *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:”*

Context

He in verse 11 refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave these ministry gifts to the Church. He gave them when He ascended on high, taking with Him the Old Testament saints who had awaited the consummation of God’s plan of redemption since their physical death in Abraham’s bosom.

Paul continued in Ephesians 4:12, *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”* The Greek word for “equipping” implies a process leading to consummation. So, without these ministry gifts it would seem maturity would not be realized. These ministry gifts are Christ’s own provision for the continual need for ministry to His Church until He returns. An erroneous teaching recycles through the Church that downplays the need for ministry gifts and claims they aren’t needed any longer. But that can’t be true because Paul also wrote these ministry gifts would be needed, *“till we all come to the unity of the faith ... to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (verse 13).

A Divine Call

Unlike the motivational gifts, which every person has, not every person is a ministry gift. To be a ministry gift to the body of Christ, you must have a divine call for the office. God gives you that divine call. You can’t set yourself in one of these ministries. You do not enter the five-fold ministry – any phase of it – just because you *feel* it is a holy calling and you’d like to respond to it. You cannot make yourself a ministry gift. You don’t even enter the ministry because someone tells you that you are suited for it. Seeing a need is not a call to the ministry either. This is not scriptural because to be a five-fold ministry gift, *there must be a Divine call.*

Twenty years ago one of my spiritual mentors invited pastors across the nation to describe as well they could, “The reason I’m in the ministry.” Unsurprisingly and almost to the person the answer was the same: “I’m called of God.”

Anticipating that kind of answer, he had also asked for a brief elaboration of the response. The testimonies ran the gamut from childhood experiences to miraculous deliverances, from inner impressions or “the voice of the Lord” to circumstantial guidance confirmed by trusted friends or other pastors.

People do not really become ministers for other reasons. In a generation now distant, pastors were held in esteem. However, we are living in another time, in America’s so-called “post-Christian” era. This era has shrouded ministry with a cloud of public doubt that has brought the once-designated *highest* calling to often be regarded as less than the lowest. But then not much has changed since the days of the apostles.

1 Corinthians 4:9-10 (NKJ): *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death: for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak but you are strong! You are distinguished but we are dishonored!*

Prayer is the most powerful and effective thing on earth but today in light of the shooting at the Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs TX, people with a political agenda are taking a dim view of it. They are doing so in response to Speaker of the House Paul Ryan tweeting: *Reports out of Texas are devastating. The people of Sutherland Springs need our prayers right now.*

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA): *Thoughts and prayers are not enough, GOP. We must end this violence. We must stop these tragedies. People are dying while you wait.*

American actor Wil Wheaton: *The murdered victims were in a church. If prayers did anything, they'd still be alive you worthless sack of {expletive}.*

Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA): *We are praying – but prayers won't fix this or prevent it from happening again.*

Author Stephen King: *Enough with the prayin'. Time to start legislatin'.*

Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA): *They were praying when it happened. They don't need our prayers. They need us to address gun violence.*

American actress Mia Farrow: *Prayers and thoughts don't seem to be working.*

British comedian and actor Ricky Gervais: *My thoughts and prayers are that people wake the {expletive} up.*

American writer David Simon: *Those slain were praying in a church. Prayers are not a relevant intervention.*

Managing editor of Shareblue: *"Thoughts and prayers" is just another way of saying "I literally give zero {expletive}."*

Still, the primary explanation for the fact that in the United States alone more than a half million such dedicated servants labor tirelessly and pray ceaselessly, serving humanity in the name of God for one reason, can be described in two words: *"I'm called."*

Crucify Peter upside down, burn Polycarp at the stake, behead the apostle Paul, imprison and torture Pastor Saeed Abedini in Iran but men and women will still answer and remain faithful to "the call!"

No humanly inspired source or power can explain this phenomenon. It is more than a mysterious human motivation; it is a heavenly one.

Nothing else could cause capable, intelligent men and women to leave or refrain from more profitable or more socially acceptable professions. It extends deeper, wider and higher than any other sense of vocation, however valid, transcending even the inner urges of people who have lofty goals – those of scientists, writers, athletes, explorers and teachers. For as shepherds who have been called of God, we have answered an inescapably insistent summons; we are committed to serve a cause that pursues values earth can't quantify; and offers hope unto an era when earth will have vaporized.

How Do You Describe a Call?

A *call* cannot be described in any one way but those who have *heard* it recognize the constraint it contains, and cannot do anything else. God's *call* is a composite – a magnificent combination of factors that can be found in opening the pages of scripture and seeing the responses to His voice calling the ancients. To read their responses to His words is to feel the same heartbeat that resonates in the minds and souls of those He calls today.

- They have answered the summons of the Savior like Peter, James, John and Andrew, hearing Him say to *them* – *Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men* (Mark 1:17).

- They have chosen to follow in Abraham's footsteps, who *went out, not knowing where he was going* (Hebrews 11:8) because they hold in their hearts His same hope for a place and a people.
- They have experienced Isaiah's sense of personal inadequacy in the presence of God's holiness but have received His cleansing and responded with their own, *Here I am. Send me!* (Isaiah 6:8).
- They have overcome Jonah's fears, resisted Balaam's deceit and refused Simon's greediness as they seek to minister Barnabas's comfort, John's love, Elijah's miracles and Solomon's wisdom.
- They have felt Jeremiah's inescapable assignment as being pre-ordained to ministry before birth, and known Elijah's doubts of personal significance, wondering if anyone cares anymore.

Whatever their circumstances – beyond last Sunday's low ebb, beyond today's discouragement, beyond tempted feelings of worthlessness, a consummate conviction remains – an inner compulsion that brings:

- A re-announcement of Paul's cry: *The love of Christ constrains me ... and, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel* (1 Corinthians 9:16)!
- Or a renewed acknowledgement like Jeremiah's: *Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him; nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not* (Jeremiah 20:9).
- It's men like a young man I know, who was gifted physically and with a scholarship to play ball for a college with some probability of going pro, but chose instead to pursue Bible training and has been a pastor for years.
- Or another man I know who had a successful air freight business and loved to fly planes himself but gave it up to pastor a church and touch thousands for Christ.
- Or another man I knew, who though not called to ministry himself, had an overwhelming burden to help start a church in his hometown. So with personal money he purchased a lot with a building on it and drafted a pastor and turned everything over to the church. That was in 1976 and that church is still going today although the man died years ago.
- Or several others I know personally, called to preach, who would mortgage their homes or refinance homes to come up with the money to start a church or get some property.

How to Recognize a True Ministry Gift

True spiritual leaders and pastors care about two things deeply:

- They care deeply about fulfilling their responsibility to the One Who has called them, gifted them, and asked them to lead. They care far more about the approval of their Father — Whose sheep they have been asked to watch and Whose sheep they have been asked to lead and feed — than the approval of men.
- They care deeply for the welfare of the flock of God.
They don't care about the applause of men because they aren't "speakers."
They don't care about making a lot of money because they aren't "business men."
They don't care about popularity because they aren't "entertainers."
They don't care about "going to the next level or being promoted" because they are already as high as they can get in God's kingdom — they are servants!
True Shepherds are deeply concerned that the flock of God prospers, that it is well taught and abiding in the truth, that it is healthy and fit, that it is growing, that it is safe from unsound doctrine and unsound leadership, and that it is bearing much good fruit for the benefit of the Father.

How You Know You Are a Ministry Gift

- Divine compulsion inside you - You'll know you have a Divine call because you will have that conviction in your own heart. You'll simply know that you know!
- Divine anointing upon you - to help you fulfill the particular office you are called to fulfill. There is a huge difference between standing up before a group of people and giving a "talk" compared to speaking by the authority and anointing of the Holy Spirit. People can tell the difference and you can too! The reason is because God equips those He calls with the spiritual means to stand in a particular office and get the type of results one should get. Laymen can have motivational gifts operating through them but the same gifts operating on a ministry gifts level will carry a greater anointing.
- Divine obstinacy - like some of the examples I just shared a moment ago, they won't allow anything to stop them or won't take 'No' for an answer.