

Spiritual Ministry

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Walking In the Spirit – Series 24 (A Ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL MINISTRY?

Spiritual ministry is ministry with spiritual goals which is done under the power, inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit. It is ministry that simply cannot happen unless God shows up. Its basis and its main priority is the Word of God and prayer:

Acts 6:2-4 EMTV *Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not pleasing to us that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables. (3) Therefore, brothers, select seven men from among you, of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint for this need. (4) But we will faithfully engage in prayer and in the ministry of the word."*

The following verses indicate some areas of spiritual ministry that Jesus expected His disciples to be involved in:

Matthew 10:7-8 MKJV *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.*

This is 'scary ministry' because you are totally reliant on God showing you what to do and how to do it and for Him to provide 100% of the results.

Areas of spiritual ministry may include:

1. Proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:9)
2. Casting out demons (Matthew 10:8, Acts 8:5-8)
3. Healing the sick (Luke 10:9, Matthew 10:8, 1 Corinthians 12:9, James 5:15)
4. Cleansing lepers (Matthew 10:8) & raising the dead (Acts 9:36-42, 20:7-10)
5. The gift of special visionary faith (1 Corinthians 12:9)
6. The working of mighty miracles (1 Corinthians 12:10)
7. The discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10)
8. Tongues & the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)
9. Prophecy (Acts 2:17,18, 1 Corinthians 12:10, 1 Corinthians 14:1-40)
10. Words of wisdom and knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8)
11. The ministry of the Word – anointed teaching (Acts 6:2-4, Romans 12:7)
12. The ministry of prayer and intercession (Acts 6:2-4, Colossians 4:12)
13. Shepherding the flock as ones appointed by the Spirit (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4)

14. Providing Scriptural counsel and encouragement (2 Timothy 3:16,17, Rom 12:8)
15. Anointed helping of others in constructive ways (1 Corinthians 12:28)
16. Godly wise leadership administration (Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28)
17. Sharing (Romans 12:8, 13; 1 Timothy 6;17-19, Hebrews 13:16, 1 John 3:16-28)
18. Mercy (Romans 12:8, James 1:27)

Some of these gifts such as mercy, helps, sharing, leadership and administration may not seem to be 'very spiritual' yet they are among the leading causes of burn-out, rage, and compassion fatigue in ministry when they are attempted without the proper calling and anointing. And spiritual leadership and administration are vastly different from that in the business world (just ask any businessman who has tried to transition over to a missions organization or church).

All of these eighteen powerful gift areas require sustained immersion in the Word of God and prayer if they are a) to work at all and b) if they are not become destructive of either the hearers or the practitioners.

During the next few weeks we are going to have a deep look at spiritual ministry and how it differs from ministry done the world's way, with the world's attitudes and means just as if the church or missions agency was a small, medium or large sized business or bureaucracy and without much real dependence on God the Holy Spirit.

For instance there is a mile of difference between preaching that has anointing and comes from deep bible study, prayer and dependence on God and preaching that is just theology on display, or preaching that is all theatrics and showmanship. Real spiritual ministry comes from Christ Himself working through that person via the gifts and calling that He has imparted to them.

Spiritual ministry is not automatic and needs to be fanned into flame:

2 Timothy 1:6 MKJV *Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands.*

When the flame goes out a real ministry crisis can result. This is why we need to deeply study the ministry gifts and how they operate and how we can develop them and sustain them so that the body of Christ is fully edified.

I am not meaning to imply that normal day-to-day operational areas such as 'waiting on tables' (Acts 6) or being a parking lot attendant are un-spiritual. They are still very much needed. But they support the work of the spiritual ministries. If no one is getting healed, saved, delivered or instructed in the Truth inside the building then there is not much use parking the cars outside the building!

Jesus was 100% focused on spiritual ministry. He never built a building or set up a publishing house. Even when he fed the five thousand it was with spiritual teaching purposes and faith-building in mind. And this miracle caused Jesus much trouble when the multitudes then wanted Him to become King, and when Jesus refused they deserted Him in droves so only the twelve were left (John 6).

Spiritual ministry was the focus of Jesus and the apostles and so it should also be the focus of the Church today. But our program mentality will have to move out of the way in the process!

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY: GREATER WORKS

Physical ministry is limited by money, labor supply, building size and so on. However spiritual ministry is only limited by the supply of the Holy Spirit, who is given abundantly to those who believe. Jesus told His apostles they would do 'greater works' because of the spiritual supply that He was going to provide to them after His ascension:

John 14:12-17 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (15) If you love Me, keep My commandments. (16) And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, so that He may be with you forever, (17) the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and shall be in you.*

The 'greater works' are done 'because I go to the Father' - that is because Jesus would ascend into the Heavens, take captivity captive and pour out the Holy Spirit and various ministry gifts upon those who believed (Acts 2, Ephesians 4 plus John 14:16,17 above).

At this point after the ascension, Jesus is enthroned in Heaven at the right hand of the majesty on high (Psalm 110, Hebrews 1:1-3) and we can pray to Him as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:12-16) so that if we ask anything in His Name He will do it ((John 14:13,14).

Thus the ascension of Jesus Christ has HUGE implications for spiritual ministry:

1. We have God answering our prayers and requests and moving on our behalf
2. We have immense amounts of spiritual power made available through the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual gifts to men and who will enable us to do 'greater works'.

The only resource that is absolutely essential for effective spiritual ministry is God the Holy Spirit. Only God can cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead,

convert sinners, work mighty miracles and so on. Without God none of these things happen.

The fact that our ministry is limited by our financial budget is a terrible lie. Some ministries believe they can 'do nothing' without funding. That is simply not true. None of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 accomplished their ministry goals through a stewardship program or ministry development fund. Moses did not need to raise a million dollars before going to see Pharaoh and Elijah did not have wealth when he stood and confronted the prophets of Baal. Gideon did not have an office and the three young Jews in the fiery furnace did not have an insurance policy. But they all had faith and they all had God on their side.

No amount of gold or silver could have made the lame man at the Gate Beautiful walk again - but God could, and God did.

You can have the biggest buildings and best programs on the planet and it can all be empty human activity. Or you can be like Peter and John and 'have none' and be able to heal the sick and convert 3000 people on one day. The critical element in ministry is not funding, it is the supply of the Holy Spirit! (Now if God has given you abundant funds and a big building, that is great, but do not rely on that rather rely on God!)

The glory gets into our soul through prayer, faith and believing the word of God. We need more anointing, more faith, and more reliance on God. When we have faith then God turns up and we see miracles and conversions. Without faith all we have left is ecclesiastical machinery.

Galatians 3:1-5 MKJV *O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified? (2) This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it is even in vain? (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?*

We are very easily persuaded that this is not so. Strong personalities tell us that we can begin in the Spirit – but that is only a beginning, even a fine beginning, but after that we will require programs, buildings and a bureaucracy if our ministry is to 'be credible, have status, line up with the latest business practices' and so on. And of course 'to be effective' we will need the latest church consultants, expensive development programs, websites and a big billboard down on Main Street.

Jesus, the apostles and the heroes of faith were very effective and they had few if any of those things. Building are incidentals, not essentials. You can be effective preaching in the fields to coal-miners (John Wesley was). And Martin Luther began the Reformation as a humble monk with few possessions of his own. Anointing with the Holy Spirit is the key ingredient for ministry effectiveness. All the other things are mere props and tools to be used along the way.

The supply of the Holy Spirit is so vast and so complete that we are only perhaps glimpsing the very fringes of it. The Holy Spirit can create a mighty apostolic ministry out of the most poverty-stricken circumstances. We see people in India and China doing great works for God on \$150 a month, riding bicycles, walking barefoot, living simply. And the ministry of the apostle Paul was not limited when he was destitute:

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 MKJV (9) *For I think that God has set forth us last, the apostles, as it were appointed to death; for we have become a spectacle to the world and 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 honorable, but we are despised. (11) Even until this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place. (12) And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; (13) being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

Now the point of all this is not to shame or to accuse anyone but rather to point out where the true source of our power lies and where our confidence and our hope should be. We can do greater works, and we can do them no matter what our financial circumstances are – because of what Christ has done for us through His death, His resurrection and His ascension into Heaven to reign at the right hand of God on High.

There are no fixed limits to your ministry. Money cannot limit your ministry. Being in prison cannot limit your ministry (e.g. Paul's epistles). And being thrown into a fiery furnace or being nailed to a Cross cannot limit your ministry. And geography cannot limit it - John the Baptist preached in the remote Judean wilderness yet he was heard. If God is with you no man or circumstance or demon can be against you!

Romans 8:31-39 MKJV *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) Truly He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ... (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep of slaughter." (37) But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God wants to do 'greater works' through you as you believe in Him. God wants to increase His glory through you. God wants to touch the hearts of men and women through you. But you must believe. You must call on God for the anointing. You must know for absolutely certain that without Jesus 'you can do nothing' (John 15:5) but in Him, and with the anointing, you can 'bear much fruit' (John 15:1-8).

Do not think, even for a single second, that you can accomplish any spiritual ministry of any sort by your own power and piety – you simply cannot (Acts 3:12). As you become utterly dependent on God, as you abide in the vine, as you exercise faith, as you believe, then the Holy Spirit will abundantly come upon you and move in you and move through you to the nations.

Ephesians 3:20-21 MKJV *Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, forever. Amen.*

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY: FEAR AND FAITH

John 14:12-13 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. (13) And whatever you may ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

We have seen that spiritual ministry requires God the Holy Spirit to show up. For many people that is rather frightening. What if God does not show up? What if people are not healed? What if the demon is not cast out and what if the Spirit-led worship is a disaster? There is a fear of appearing foolish. Even a fear of diminishing "God's glory" through such public forms of "failure". We think: "O my goodness what will we do if God does not show up on Sunday?"

So from this small unbelieving question, from this lack of faith we start substituting for the Holy Spirit. Instead of proclaiming the Kingdom we proclaim the church or the denomination, instead of preaching the Word we preach human reason, instead of Spirit-led worship we have professional orchestrated worship programs. Gradually every function of the Holy Spirit is replaced with a "program" until even sanctification is a "counseling program". (Now outside the Church, there is nothing wrong with counseling, but when it is viewed almost as a substitute for actual grace, then it becomes wrong).

Now in order to do all this frantic substitute activity that 'keeps face', that shows that God is real - even though we secretly believe he would never show up on Sunday; we need facilities, committees, websites, development programs etc. Over time this results in an empty organization, an institution, that tries to 'protect God'. It's hollow. It is full of secret unbelief. And it's scared half to death of ever really being asked to deal with the awesome and the Holy. James deals with this kind of doubt in his epistle:

James 1:6-7 MKJV *But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For do not let that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord;*

Our doubt about God turning up becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because the person who doubts 'receives nothing from the Lord'. So we see that this series of 'little fears' eventually has catastrophic consequences for the spiritual life and for the proclamation of the gospel. So what can we do about it? How can we move from fear to faith?

Let's go back to John 14:12 above. This verse is a promise, straight from the mouth of Jesus, that God will turn up in amazing ways if we just truly believe on Him. Indeed we will see the incredible miracles of Jesus, plus even greater works (which are left undefined).

Whatever else it means, it means that the really big stuff was not going to end with Jesus, or even with the apostles, but would flow from: *he who believes on Me* – which is from anyone who has faith. Let's look a bit more at the phrase "he who believes on Me":

John 7:37-39 MKJV *And in the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (39) (But He spoke this about the Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

So we see that faith unlocks the 'rivers of living water' – torrents of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit flowing from our innermost being is the power behind all true spiritual ministry. This again is a promise from the lips of Jesus.

We also find that 'he who believes': is saved (Mark 16:16), does not come into condemnation (John 3:18,5:24), has everlasting life (John 3:36,5:24,6:47), has passed from death to life (John 5:24), shall never hunger or thirst (John 6:35), will be resurrected (John 11:25,26), believes in Him who sent Jesus (John 12:44), will not be ashamed (1 Peter 2:6), has overcome the world (1 John 5:5) and has the witness in himself (1 John 5:10). Believing drives the entire spiritual life from start to finish!

God wants us to move beyond spiritual timidity to have power, love and a sound mind:

2 Timothy 1:6-7 MKJV *Therefore I remind you to inflame anew the gift of God, which is in you by the putting on of my hands. (7) For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Timothy had let his fears get in the way of his faith and his gifting. Paul was urging him to go on, to believe, to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Fear sometimes masquerades as common sense, respectability and many other things. Following the Holy Spirit seems risky and even foolhardy (which may be the reason Paul called himself a 'fool for Christ's sake'). Yet it is those who are led by the Spirit who are the sons of God (Romans 8:14).

Elijah is a good example of bold spiritual ministry:

James 5:16-18 MKJV ... *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous one avails much. (17) Elijah was a man of like passion as we are. And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for the time of three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth caused its fruit to sprout.*

Elijah fully expected God to answer his prayers because he was being led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not lead you to pray for things that God does not want to do!

Bold spiritual ministry comes about once we realize that the Holy Spirit is leading us and that God is with us in that endeavor (which is why the first 50 studies were about being led by the Spirit and communicating with God). Once we understand the 'initiatives of heaven' we can step out and be bold and know, for sure, that God is going to be there because it was His idea in the very first place!

Jesus gives us some tantalizingly brief glimpses into this process in His life and ministry:

John 5:19-20 MKJV *Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do. For whatever things He does, these also the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all the things that He Himself does. And He will show Him greater works than these, so that you may marvel.*

John 5:30 MKJV *I can do nothing of My own self. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me.*

John 8:38 MKJV *I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you, then, do what you have seen with your father (the Devil).*

John 12:49-50 MKJV *For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak. (50) And I know that His command is life everlasting. Therefore whatever I speak, even as the Father said to Me, so I speak.*

John 13:3-4 MKJV *Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and went to God, (4) He rose up from supper and laid aside His garments. And He took a towel and girded Himself.*

John 14:31 MKJV *But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father has given Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go away from here.*

So we see that Jesus saw what the Father was doing and did likewise (John 5:19), sought only the Father's will not His own will (John 5:30), spoke what He saw with the Father, indeed God commanded Jesus as to what to say and what to speak (John 8:38, 12:49,50) , had God communicate to Him his identity and His destiny yet was humble about it (John 13:3,4) and fully followed the commandments that He received from the Father, even going to the Cross (John 14:31).

Now of course we are not Jesus Christ, but we are called to be in His image and to do His works, and we are to be led by the Spirit and to follow God's will and God's commandments in all things. In Acts we see that the apostles took this leading of the Holy Spirit very seriously and that it was part of the dynamic life of the early Christian Church.

So how do we go from fear to faith? First we must put aside our doubts, pray to God, listen to God and then act on what we hear. We must believe that God is honorable and will back up His words and His commandments with His power.

Yes this is risky and yes it may take some practice, but is far better than receiving nothing from the Lord. God WILL turn up. He promises to turn up and there are thousands of testimonies about Him turning up for those who believe.

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