

## LESSON 12

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# Finding Your Place in Ministry

Few things are as rewarding as responding to the needs of others. Paul quotes the words of Jesus as a standard for sharing our lives with others: ““It is more blessed to give than to receive”” (Acts 20:34–35). An important step toward joyful Christian living is giving your life in service to others. Sharing your life in ministry spiritually strengthens you and those served.

Biblical Christianity is based upon two great commandments. First, Christians are told to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). A second commandment flows naturally from the first commandment: ““Love your neighbor as yourself”” (Matthew 22:39). A Christian’s love for God finds full expression through loving and serving others. The Bible is very clear on this point. Believers manifest genuine love for God when they actively minister to others. Saying to God, “I love you,” is good, but loving God requires more than words.

Think about John’s words: “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18). John was concerned that Christians would be all talk and no action. How easy to talk about how much we love one another! While it is important to tell people they are loved, words are seldom enough. Transforming ministry demands love in action.

John was amazed by Jesus’ sacrificial death for us. He realized that Jesus’ sacrifice made God’s love tangible and visible. Likewise, John believed Christians should demonstrate love in a sacrificial and active manner. According to John, active expressions of Christian love are foundational for effective Christian ministry (1 John 3:17).

This lesson is designed to help you develop attitudes and tools necessary for ministering with love to a hurting

world. As you study this lesson, ask God to help you express your personal ministry to others. Remember this basic truth as you study and pray: Christian love is the foundation of all effective ministries (1 Corinthians 13). Therefore, invite the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with love. Then shall a natural flow of ministry be possible.

## LESSON OUTLINE

The Believer's Responsibility  
Uniqueness in Ministry  
The Ministry of Servanthood  
Loyalty to the Local Church  
Discovering God's Will in Ministry  
God in the Local Church  
A New Level of Service

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. Describe the ministry responsibilities of believers in the local church.*
- 2. Give a biblical explanation for personal uniqueness in ministry.*
- 3. Explain the mix of a good servant.*
- 4. Demonstrate ownership and loyalty within the local church.*
- 5. Describe the process of discovering God's will in ministry.*
- 6. Discuss God's role in local church ministry.*
- 7. Show the steps in preparing for a new level of service within the local church.*

## The Believer's Responsibility

### *Objective 1:*

*Describe the ministry responsibilities of believers in the local church.*

People often think the term ministry applies to a special group of people, including church leaders, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. However, the New Testament teaches something very different. The word *ministry* is used to translate the Greek term *diakonia*. *Diakonia* refers to a compassionate love and response to those in need. In the first century church, this word generally included all ministry areas of the church. Thus, Christian service conducted by anyone in the church was viewed as ministry. Today, such a view of ministry should encourage all believers to seek meaningful ministry within the local church.

First Corinthians 12 provides a firm understanding of ministry in the local church. This chapter also reveals important information on the expression of ministry through certain gifts.

- There is a diversity of ministering gifts in the church, and the Holy Spirit is in charge of their manifestations (vv. 4–5).
- Although ministering gifts have a variety of expressions, “God works all of them in all men.” This opens up special giftings to everyone (vv. 6–7).
- A wonderful variety of gifts is mentioned. God empowers their manifestations through any individual He selects (vv. 4–11).
- Like our human bodies, the body of Christ (the church) has many different kinds of members (vv. 12–14). God values the variety of personalities and giftings in His church.
- We must never think that because we do not have a ministry like someone else, we are not important (vv. 14–17).

- God uniquely arranges gifts and ministry given to individuals (vv. 18–19).
- God uses a variety of people and gifts for balance and wholeness in the body of Christ (vv. 21–26).
- All of us should desire to help others through gifts or ministries God imparts to us (vv. 27–31).

Paul viewed a life of ministry as the spiritual birthright of every believer. He understood that ministry involves more than great teaching and preaching. Ministry was also practical, touching every area of human experience. Paul recognized a wide range of ministry efforts within various situations (Romans 12:4–13).

## Uniqueness in Ministry

### *Objective 2:*

*Give a biblical explanation for personal uniqueness in ministry.*

The word *unique* means “one of a kind.” You are one of a kind! There is no one else like you. For example, no one else has fingerprints or footprints that match yours. Your personality is also different from that of everyone else. Personality is the most distinct thing about you. How you relate to others and how you communicate with others are features of your personality. Your general attitude toward life is another important aspect of personality.

God’s choice to make us unique is an expression of His desire for variety. Creation has many expressions of God’s desire for variety. The lavish colors in birds or the variety of exotic fish in the sea are examples of uniqueness. God gave majestic mountains one kind of beauty and rolling plains another kind of beauty. Examples of God’s variety in creation are almost limitless.

Just as God celebrates uniqueness in creation, He also wants variety in His church. Have you noticed how people express love for God in different ways? Think about this example: An elderly woman often purchases a box of food. Because she has little money, buying this food is a

sacrifice. She places the box of food at the door of a needy family and walks away. The needy family never knows the source of their blessing. Secretly giving food to those in need is this woman's unique way of ministering to others.

Uniqueness is reflected in the attitudes and actions of our lives. When we minister to others, our uniqueness shines. Consider this example: A man often takes a large box of apples to a busy street corner. As people walk by, he holds out an apple in one hand and a gospel tract in his other hand. Usually, people graciously take both the apple and the gospel tract.

We are also unique in our experiences. God often uses the unique experiences of each believer as a means of ministry to others. God may, for example, use the past difficulties of your life to help others during hard times. Like Paul, we can offer our experiences to others as a means of comfort. Paul's darkest experiences were used to bring hope to others. Note what he says in the following passage:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. (2 Corinthians 1:3–5)

Never feel you have little to offer God. Your uniqueness and experiences are two ways that you may minister to others.

## The Ministry of Servanthood

### *Objective 3:*

*Explain the mix of a good servant.*

An important question that every follower of Jesus must ask is, "How may I best serve Christ in my local church?" This is a vital question that is close to the heart of God. God already knows how you may best serve His

church. He also knows that your desire to serve Him leads to Christian service. Your prayerful consideration of Christian service allows God to speak to you about specific ministries.

Prayerfully considering ministry goals also helps you think clearly about your personal “gift mix” for ministry. The phrase gift mix applies to the combination of potential ministry abilities. These ministry abilities are often viewed as talents, skills, and spiritual gifts. Following are definitions for these abilities:

- Talents are natural abilities that a person may have from birth. Some individuals, for example, may have the natural talent of singing or public speaking. Natural talents are often strengthened through study and practice.
- Skills are abilities largely acquired through instruction and training—both formal and informal, and through life experience. Administrative and accounting skills are good examples of learned skills.
- Spiritual gifts are special abilities that come to the individual through the power of the Holy Spirit. We find listings of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:7–11.

The most important step in exercising ministry ability is asking God to make you a servant to the church. The servant attitude will open many doors of opportunity to minister through your special abilities (1 Peter 4:7–11). You must also study the Scriptures to understand how God uses the unique talents, skills, and gifts of His servants.

Jesus called us to serve others. He taught that ministry begins with the attitude of servanthood. The excellence of our gifts or abilities is not the primary issue in effective ministry. How pointless to use one’s years of service as the ultimate standard of ministry! Rather, Jesus taught that servanthood is the standard of great ministry (Matthew 20:25–28).

Peter also understood that any gift or ability finds its highest expression through servanthood. Consider his words:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

Bill Bright was the founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ. Even after Bill's death, this ministry remains one of the largest in the world. Bill Bright had deep respect for Christian and secular leaders all over the world. He was a man of great ability, who carried out ministry with a humble servant-like attitude. Bright noted four servant qualities that demonstrate passionate and effective ministry.

- *Sacrifice*: Sacrifice always puts others first no matter what personal comforts the believer must release.
- *Humility*: Being humble means surrendering our own rights to minister to others. Like Jesus, we look at sincere humility as a serious issue in kingdom ministry.
- *Encouragement*: Jesus constantly taught and encouraged His disciples through His careful training and thoughtful words. Scripture teaches us to encourage one another (Romans 12:8; Hebrews 10:25).
- *Giving*: A giving servant sees the needs of a person whom others overlook. Giving to others is a ministry of great joy that seeks no repayment (Bright 2004, 104–107).

Ministering to those struggling was Jesus' passion. His life is a pattern for us to follow in ministry. Reaching our local communities for Christ depends upon ministry abilities that reflect the spirit of Jesus. There is simply no other way to accomplish ministry tasks.

## Loyalty to the Local Church

### *Objective 4:*

*Demonstrate ownership and loyalty within the local church.*

Ownership is at the heart of passionate ministry. We know that the church belongs to God. He has paid the price of owning the church through Jesus' sacrificial death (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). God has, however, given the church the responsibility of caring for itself. Paul had this caring ownership in mind when he said, "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5). Paul wanted believers in the local churches to have a deep sense of responsibility toward one another. The backbone of ownership is our enduring responsibility toward our fellow servants.

How important that we learn to love and care for one another! Believers who care for one another will stick together in tough times. Too often, Christians break off relationships when there is stress or difficulty. Surely, owning something that is not broken is easy, but repairing broken things takes time and sometimes money.

Our reasoning can become flawed during times of difficulty within the church. Often we think that another church will be better, but there are no perfect churches. It will be only a matter of time before something goes wrong in the new church. Also, the influence of our ministry is lost every time we make such a change out of frustration. Long seasons of prayer and self-examination should be conducted before giving up and moving on. We must be careful not to give up ownership too quickly when things go wrong.

Ownership is reflected through qualities like loyalty and persistence. When times get difficult, we must care for one another even more. Gary Collins, a Christian psychologist, writes "Caring can be difficult, challenging, time consuming, and often inconvenient. But caring is therapeutic for both the one who cares and the one cared for." He further states that caring for each other in troubled times brings a sense of satisfaction and deep joy (Collins 1980, 18).

Jesus paid the ultimate price for God's ownership of the church. Believers honor God when they, too, pay a price for a healthy local church. Patience, forgiveness, and love reflect a deep concern for the church. Remember, ownership means that you take full responsibility of caring for something that belongs to you. Successful ministry shouts out this powerful message: "We belong to one another; therefore, we care for one another!"

## Discovering God's Will in Ministry

### *Objective 5:*

*Describe the process of discovering God's will in ministry.*

Ministry within the local church is an exciting challenge. Finding your place in ministry within the local church is a true adventure in faith—an adventure that requires vital work on your part. As we desire God's guidance in this important area of personal ministry, it is well to remember the words of Jesus: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7–8).

Although we commonly connect the above verse to prayer, it is also a powerful statement about moving forward in God's plan. According to Jesus, we need a determined attitude toward prayer and life. The verbs ask, seek, and knock represent an increasing intensity in our approach to prayer and life. Asking is passive. Seeking is one step beyond asking; seeking implies that we are looking for something. Determined seekers knock on doors to get the answer.

The prayerful process of asking, seeking, and knocking helps you discover the right ministry at the right time. This focused process of spiritual discovery will aid you throughout your life. Believers will always have seasons of getting new direction from God. There will also be times of redirection in ministry. Like an airplane in flight, we

often are required to make mid-course corrections to keep our God-given ministries on target.

Your attitude of prayerful determination can be applied to various steps in discovering God's will for ministry. Always include the following steps in discovering your personal ministry to the church.

- *Consulting Others:* Godly individuals can help us define our strengths for church ministry. Proverbs 11:14 states, "Many advisers make victory sure." Such advisers include your pastor, a godly elder, or a trusted and mature friend.
- *Searching Scripture:* God's word is a lamp to our feet and light to our path (Psalm 119:105). The psalmist was likely referring to a small oil lamp that provided limited light. He had light for the next step only. Do not become overly anxious when your ministry opportunities seem limited. Faithfully study Scripture, and take ministry one step at a time.
- *Interpreting Experiences:* Expect your experiences to play a strategic role in shaping your ministry. Think about how God used both good and bad experiences to guide Joseph's life (Genesis 37–48). God often uses circumstances to help us discern and accomplish His will in ministry.
- *Utilizing Prayer:* The book of Proverbs shares great wisdom: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5–6). It is not unreasonable to pray about your ministry in the local church on a daily basis. Few things are more important than discovering God's ministry plan for your life.

As you seek God's ministry plan for your life, David's words will be encouraging: "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11).

Do you know the joy of ministering and living exactly in the way God created you to live? God's will is that you find great

joy in your service to His church. Great joy and peace are God's gifts when you walk by faith and live in obedience to His will.

## God in the Local Church

### *Objective 6:*

*Discuss God's role in local church ministry.*

Our role in ministry requires obedience to God's plan. God's role in ministry is to impart to us strength and ability to carry out His plan. Every kind of ministry requires God's power. Memorize these words from Paul, who prayed that we would know and understand "the riches of his [God's] glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:18–20).

Paul's prayer refers to God's manifestation of power through Christ's resurrection. He wanted us to understand that God's power brings vitality into daily living. Paul also teaches that Jesus now rules our lives with ultimate authority. He is the supreme head of the church (Ephesians 4:15) and offers the fullness of His powerful life to everyone ministering within the church.

I started preaching at a young age. When I was sixteen years old, I was asked to preach a series of meetings. How well I remember the first night of those meetings! I had carefully prepared an outline on the outstanding conversion of the apostle Paul (Acts 9). I studied hard and sought God's blessings upon my effort.

Delivering the sermon that evening was more difficult than I imagined. There seemed to be no life in my preaching, and I got little response from the congregation. After preaching the sermon, I was deeply discouraged. I wondered if I was really called to a preaching and teaching ministry.

The next morning, I earnestly sought God in prayer, asking for His anointing on my ministry. My words were, "Lord, I will preach for you all the days of my life if you will bless my sermon tonight. I cannot do this without you." I feared another failure without God's help.

That night, a miracle occurred. A great sense of God's presence overwhelmed me as I began to preach. Words with authority flowed easily from my mouth. It was as though God had taken over my mouth. I knew then that God had powerfully answered my prayer for anointing. Still, after forty years of ministry, I remember the significance of that powerful night. It was the moment when God's call to ministry and His empowerment for ministry came together.

While your call to ministry may not be preaching, you too need empowerment for ministry. The favor and blessing of God must bless every kind of ministry within the church.

## A New Level of Service

### *Objective 7:*

*Show the steps in preparing for a new level of service within the local church.*

God desires that you discover new levels of ministry to both believers and nonbelievers. A new level of ministry means two things: that your present ministry is raised to a new level of spiritual quality and that you are capable of accepting a new role of ministry. This new role often includes more responsibility in serving others.

Achieving a new level in ministry, however, does not mean that you become more important in the eyes of others. Ministry is never about personal agendas or how others view your service for God. Ministry is always about unselfishly serving God by serving others. New levels of service come when you have faithfully prepared for future ministry. Do not assume your ministry will always be the same; be open to any new direction God creates.

## Conclusion

Preparing for ministry in a new direction benefits your present ministry for God. Prayerfully consider these steps to your next level of ministry:

- Continually study and memorize the Scriptures. God's Word is our primary tool in ministry to others.
- Read and study books that can help prepare you for a life of service.
- Faithfully develop a devotional life that includes prayer, the study of Scripture, and personal examination.
- Acknowledge your weaknesses, and allow God's Spirit to help you overcome personal obstacles.
- Learn flexibility and patience. God seldom works out our life plan according to our blueprints or timetable.
- Develop the important qualities of loyalty to others and faithfulness to your local church.
- Make your ministry accountable to others. Flying "solo" in God's work does not succeed. Making yourself accountable to other members of your ministry team helps insure successful ministry.
- Foster creativity in your approach to ministry. You are unique. God wishes to use your special gifts, talents, and skills.

Discovering new pathways in ministry is both a challenge and a responsibility, but seeking fresh approaches for serving others will keep ministry exciting. So, prepare yourself in the moment, and the future will bring opportunities never imagined.

## Reference List

- Bright, Bill. 2004. *Discover the Real Jesus*. Wheaton: Tyndale.
- Collins, Gary. 1980. *The Joy of Caring*. Waco, TX: Word Book.

## SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

- Proverbs 3:5–6
- Matthew 20:25–28
- Matthew 22:37–40
- Romans 12:5
- Romans 12:4–8
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–5
- Ephesians 1:18–20
- 1 John 3:18

## SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *Loving God is*
  - a) *not that important.*
  - b) *passive in nature.*
  - c) *vital as a motivation to serve others.*
  
2. *The Bible teaches that we should love*
  - a) *only with our words.*
  - b) *only when we receive love in return.*
  - c) *through our words and deeds.*
  
3. *Our uniqueness*
  - a) *only creates more problems in ministry.*
  - b) *is to be celebrated and used for ministry.*
  - c) *is an error in design.*
  
4. *The ministry mix of a true servant includes*
  - a) *one or more of your gifts, skills, and talents.*
  - b) *only things you read from a book.*
  - c) *only gifts and talents that other people recognize in you.*
  
5. *Whether we talk about gifts, skills, or talents, we know our abilities*
  - a) *should be hidden away and never used.*
  - b) *are used only at our leisure.*
  - c) *are a means to serve God by serving others.*
  
6. *How does the Holy Spirit assist us in finding a place of ministry?*
  - a) *He helps us feel good when we are successful.*
  - b) *He empowers us for effective servant ministry to others.*
  - c) *He empowers us only in the areas of our personal ministry interest.*

7. *What does the Bible teach about personal ministry within the church?*
  - a) *Local church ministry is only for a few chosen people.*
  - b) *Local church ministry is possible only after extensive education.*
  - c) *Local church ministry provides a point of service for all believers.*
  
8. *Ownership in the local church*
  - a) *means you develop a deep sense of responsibility for the ministries of the church.*
  - b) *is a concern for only leaders in the church.*
  - c) *is nothing you need to worry about until someone says you are needed.*
  
9. *Ministry and service in the local church are largely the result of*
  - a) *sincere and persistent prayer by anyone desiring ministry.*
  - b) *deciding what you want for ministry.*
  - c) *someone telling you how and where to minister.*
  
10. *We reach new levels of ministerial calling and effectiveness by*
  - a) *getting at least six years of training after conversion.*
  - b) *studying Scripture, developing a strong devotional life, and continuing in prayer.*
  - c) *relying only on what we feel is right for us.*

## ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answer a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the references in parentheses.

1. *c* (12.1)
2. *c* (12.1)
3. *b* (12.2)
4. *a* (12.3)
5. *c* (12.3)
6. *b* (12.6)
7. *c* (12.5)
8. *a* (12.4)
9. *a* (12.5)
10. *b* (12.7)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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