

Equipping the Saints For the Work of Ministry

The Necessity of Equipping the Saints – Part 2

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Last week we began a brief series of lessons entitled “Equipping the Saints for the Work of Service.”
 - A. The purpose of this series of 5 lessons is to help us focus on ways we can be PERSONALLY involved in what the apostle Paul calls, "The work of ministry."
 1. Let’s look again at the passage that is serving as the basis for this brief series of lessons.
 2. **Ephesians 4:7-16** – *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 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; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

3. I want you to take SPECIAL NOTICE of what the apostle Paul said in **verses 15 and 16**.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:15-16** – *...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*
 - b. Paul said the body of Christ – the local church in this instance – grows and prospers “*by that which every joint supplies,*

according to the effective working by which every part does its share...”

- B. Unfortunately, far too many in the Lord’s church today feel the work of ministry – which includes teaching the lost OUTSIDE of the body, and strengthening the saints WITHIN the body – is a job best left to so-called “professionals.”
1. Sadly, we have forgotten that the power of the gospel of Christ is not in the person presenting it, but in the message itself.
 2. The work of ministry is something Paul said EVERY member of the body of Christ needs to be doing.
 - a. The work of the ministry is two-fold in nature:
 - (1). Sharing the gospel of Christ with those who are not Christians.
 - (2). Ministering to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - b. Therefore, in one way or another, EVERY MEMBER needs to be involved in helping to reach the lost, or in helping to minister to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ.
 4. So, what are some things you and I can do to PREPARE ourselves to be a productive laborer in the vineyard of the Lord?

BODY:

- I. Perhaps the most important thing we can do to prepare ourselves to do the Lord's work of reaching the lost and of strengthening our brothers and sisters in Christ is to DEVELOP A HEART OF GENUINE COMPASSION.
 - A. Over and over again, the Scriptures speak of the COMPASSION of Jesus – toward those who were sick, those who had nothing to eat, those who wept over the loss of a loved one, and especially toward those who were lost in sin.
 1. Jesus also taught several parables that dealt with the theme of compassion.
 - a. The parable of the Unforgiving Servant – who was forgiven of his enormous debt, but who showed no compassion to one who owed him a small, insignificant debt (**Matthew 18:21-35, esp. vs. 27, 33**).
 - b. The parable of the Good Samaritan – who saw a wounded man that others were passing by, and had compassion on him and took care of him (**Luke 10:25-37, esp. v. 33**).
 - c. The parable of the Prodigal Son – whose father saw him returning home while he was still a great way off, had compassion on him, ran and fell on his neck and smothered him with kisses (**Luke 15:11-24, esp. v. 20**).

B. Of all the acts of compassion we see in the life and ministry of Jesus, one stands out head and shoulders above the others.

1. **Matthew 9:36-38** – *“But when He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’”*

a. Try to imagine sitting beside Jesus as He looked out on the throngs of people who surrounded Him, only to have Him turn to you and say, *“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* What would be your response?

b. Jesus saw the multitude as being *“weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”*

c. He was *“moved with compassion for them”* because He realized that unless someone reached them with the message of hope, they would remain lost and eventually die in that condition.

d. Therefore, compassionate Jesus told His disciples, *“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”*

2. There is SO MUCH work to do in the Lord’s vineyard, but there are SO FEW to do it.

- a. The reason is simple. There are so few who see the lost and the hurting with the same heart of compassion as Jesus saw them.
 - b. The Lord desperately needs those who have a heart of compassion to see and respond to those who are “weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”
- C. Let me suggest THREE WAYS we can develop a genuine heart of compassion.
1. Jesus said it best when He told His disciples: **John 4:35** – *“LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND LOOK AT THE FIELDS...”*
 - a. To develop a genuine heart of compassion we must get our attention off of ourselves and truly lift up our eyes and look intently on the fields all around us.
 - b. When we do, we will see ourselves surrounded by souls dying in sin.
 - c. We will also see those within the body of Christ who are lonely and hurting, or struggling with sin in their lives and slowly dying from a lack of proper care.
 - d. We must force ourselves to look into the faces of men and women and realize we are looking into the faces of people destined for eternal torment unless we do something.

2. Second, we can develop a genuine heart of compassion by learning to APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE.
 - a. The value of human life can be seen in many ways:
 - (1). By its nature and origin: God created man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life **(Genesis 1:27; 2:7)**.
 - (2). By the duration of its existence: We are destined to live forever, and will either go away to eternal life or to eternal punishment **(Matthew 25:46)**.
 - (3). By the cost of its redemption: We have not been redeemed by perishable things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ **(1 Peter 1:18-19)**.
Jesus was willing to give His life to redeem the world. This means He even laid down His life for those we think are unworthy of that sacrifice.
3. Third, we can develop a genuine heart of compassion when we UNDERSTAND THAT THE FATE AWAITING THE LOST IS REAL.
 - a. **John 3:18** – Jesus said, *“He who believes in Him (the Son of God) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*

- b. **1 John 5:12** – the apostle John wrote: *“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life.”*
- c. Hell is not some imaginary place, nor is it some place where the lost will experience only discomfort and displeasure.
- d. The Scriptures tell us of *“weeping,” “wailing”* and *“gnashing of teeth”* in a place described as *“outer darkness.”*
- e. Eternal and unimaginably horrible. And unless we can develop a heart of compassion for the lost we will be there too.

II. In addition to developing a heart of compassion, we need to DEVELOP A HEART OF SERVICE.

- A. When the disciples of Jesus were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest, Jesus said, *“...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*

(Matthew 20:26-28).

- 1. Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured by our willingness to serve.
 - a. The greatest gift that anyone can give is to give of themselves.
 - b. That’s what Jesus did, and that’s what He expects of His disciples.

- c. Those who give of themselves have only one thing in mind – how they may serve others without expecting to be served in return.

B. In perhaps the greatest lesson Jesus taught on the subject of servanthood, the Savior gently and humbly set about to wash His disciples' feet (**John 13:3-14**).

1. It was customary for a servant to kneel with a pitcher of water and a bowl to wash the feet of every visitor to his master's household, especially since the roads and alleys of Israel and Jerusalem were unpaved and dusty.
 - a. If the household could not afford a servant, either the host or one of the early arriving guests would humbly assume the role and wash the feet of those who came in.
2. But on this night, none of the disciples of Jesus had volunteered for that lowly task.
 - a. The room was filled with proud hearts and dirty feet.
 - b. Therefore, Jesus needed to teach these men a final lesson about servanthood.
 - c. Unless they learned this lesson, they would never be effective in humbling themselves to take the message of the Cross to a lost and dying world.

- C. From what Jesus did, three observations about being a servant emerge.
1. BEING A SERVANT IS DEMONSTRATED, NEVER ANNOUNCED.
 - a. Jesus didn't say, "I'm now going to demonstrate servanthood – watch my humility." Rather, He quietly removed His tunic, took a towel, a pitcher and a bowl of water, and began to wash His disciples feet.
 - b. The servant does not attempt to draw attention to himself nor to his acts of service. He quietly demonstrates his servanthood in a humble manner, and never makes a boastful proclamation about his acts of sacrifice. He simply does what all servants do – graciously serve the needs of others.
 2. BEING A SERVANT MEANS BEING ABLE TO RECEIVE AS GRACIOUSLY AS WE GIVE.
 - a. Peter was too filled with pride to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Therefore, Jesus replied, *"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me"* (**John 13:8**).
 - b. The heart of a genuine servant is a heart empty of pride. It allows one to accept the gracious acts of others without feeling guilty, or feeling the need to repay.
 - c. While it is truly more blessed to give than to receive, a servant's heart is genuinely humble enough to also accept a gift as graciously as it is given.

3. BEING A SERVANT IS NOT A SIGN OF INNER WEAKNESS, BUT OF INCREDIBLE STRENGTH.
 - a. When Jesus finished the task of washing His disciple's feet, He asked, *"Do you know what I have done to you?"* (**John 13:12**).
 - b. He then proceeded to state His role of authority among them as "Teacher and Lord." Then He said because He had washed their feet, *"you also ought to wash one another's feet"* (**John 13:14**).
 - c. No doubt, His disciples expected to hear Him say, *"because I washed your feet, you should wash Mine."*
 - d. But that's not what He said. Even the most pride-filled Christian would jump at the chance to wash Jesus' feet, but only those empty of pride would stoop to wash the feet of his fellow man.
 - e. Servanthood requires incredible inner strength to willingly humble ourselves to serve even the most basic needs of others. That's the example Jesus left.
4. After the disciples of Jesus learned this lesson of servanthood, they were prepared to do two things – *"go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (**Mark 16:15**), and lovingly respond to the needs of *"one of the least of these My brethren"* (**Matthew 25:34-46**).

D. So how do we develop a true servant's heart? Let me suggest just TWO THINGS we can do.

1. ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN OURSELVES.

a. **Philippians 2:3-4** – the apostle Paul speaks of the need to *“let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but for the interests of others.”*

b. Paul is not suggesting we develop an “inferiority complex,” but rather place the interests of others above our own.

c. **Philippians 2:5-7** – then he says: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ, who...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant...”*

d. A servant's heart puts the needs of others first.

2. MODEL THE CHARACTER TRAITS REVEALED IN THE BEATITUDES.

a. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus listed eight character traits that should be found in the life of every disciple (**Matthew 5:1-12**).

b. When all eight character traits found in the Beatitudes are mixed together in our life, the heart of a servant emerges.

(1). A true servant of God mourns over sin in his own life as well as in the life of others. He is gentle. He hungers and thirsts for righteousness. He is merciful to others. He is pure in heart because he thinks on pure things. He is a peacemaker, who not only seeks to make peace between men, but between man and God. He happily endures persecution for the sake of righteousness. And he rejoices because he knows his reward in heaven is great.

III. Another aspect of preparing ourselves to labor in the vineyard of the Lord is to DEVELOP A LIFE DEVOTED TO PRAYER.

A. Prayer must play an important role in TWO SPECIFIC AREAS of ALL who would labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

1. Prayer is critically important in our efforts to teach the lost – especially since salvation of the soul is not a HUMAN work, but a DIVINE work.
2. Prayer is critically important in ministering to the needs of others, especially since the Lord can do far more than we can with our own limited abilities.

B. So, in our efforts to share the gospel with others what are some things for which we should be praying?

1. PRAY FOR COURAGE TO SPEAK FOR CHRIST.

- a. If the apostles felt it necessary to pray “...grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word” (**Acts 4:29**), what makes us think we should not also be praying for boldness to do the same.
 - b. **Ephesians 6:19** – Paul asked the Ephesians to pray: “for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”
 - c. This will not keep us from occasionally making mistakes and perhaps saying the wrong thing, but it will keep us from making the worst mistake of all – saying nothing!
 - d. A lack of courage to speak for Christ is one of the major obstacles every Christian must overcome.
 - e. The only way we can have the victory over this fear is to do as Paul and the other apostles did – pray for courage that we may open our mouth “boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.”
2. PRAY THAT OUR EFFORTS TO REACH THE LOST WILL NOT BE HINDERED.
- a. **2 Thessalonians 3:1** – the apostle Paul asked, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course...”

- b. **Colossians 4:3-4** – Paul also urged the church at Colosse to pray *“for us, that God would open to us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ... that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.”*
 - c. Since Jesus prayed for the lost, we can also pray that the Lord help us in reaching the lost by ensuring that our efforts will not be hindered, and we can pray that the Lord open to us a door for the teaching of the Word.
 - d. How the Lord opens doors through His divine providence is not for us to understand.
 - e. All we are asking is that the Lord help us find an open door (a heart that is prepared to receive the truth), or help prepare a heart so that its reception of the truth will not be hindered.
3. PRAY FOR THE SALVATION OF LOST SOULS.
- a. **Romans 10:1-3** –The apostle Paul wrote: *“...my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”* While Paul recognized they had a *“zeal for God,”* that zeal was *“not according to knowledge.”* They were ignorant of God’s righteousness and had gone about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God.

- b. The apostle Paul understood the only way the people of Israel could be saved was through the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ (cf. Romans 10:14-17).
 - c. The same is true for the good, moral and religious people of our day who have not obeyed the gospel.
 - d. Therefore, like Paul, we should pray for opportunities to share the gospel with those who will be most receptive, and pray that these lost souls will be saved.
- C. What about being more effective in our efforts to minister to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

What should we be praying for?

1. PRAY FOR THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF SPECIFIC PEOPLE.
 - a. Unfortunately, we have developed a GENERIC kind of prayer in which we often pray “for those whom it’s our duty to pray.”
 - b. But praying for SPECIFIC NEEDS focuses our attention on SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS – especially when we ask for God’s SPECIFIC INTERVENTION in helping us meet their needs.
 - c. Praying for our brothers and sisters by name also draws us closer to THEM as we pour out our hearts to God for their sake.
2. PRAY FOR GOD’S HELP IN COMFORTING OTHERS.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** – in the opening remarks of Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth, he describes God as, “*the Father*

of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

- b. One of the reasons WE go through various trials in life is to enable us to comfort OTHERS are going through SIMILAR trials.
- c. What kind of comfort is that? The word “*comfort*” in this passage means “*to stand beside, or to call along side.*” That’s the way God comforted us. He stood beside us during our darkest moments.
- d. And that’s how we can comfort others in the same way – standing beside them with hope and encouragement while they endure trials and tribulations.

IV. However, one of the most important aspects of preparing ourselves to labor in the vineyard of the Lord is to DEVELOP A LOVE FOR THE WORD.

- A. There’s an old axiom that says, “we cannot teach what we don’t know.”
 - 1. There is simply no way we can impart an understanding of the Word of God if we don’t know it ourselves.
 - a. And this is the greatest obstacle in our efforts to teach the lost and comfort the suffering – we don’t feel comfortable enough

with our knowledge of the Word of God to adequately share it with others.

2. However, by developing a genuine LOVE for the Word of God we can overcome this obstacle and assume the role the Lord intends for us as laborers in His vineyard.
3. In time, EVERYONE should be able to teach others about Jesus.
 - a. The Hebrew writer severely rebuked certain first century Christians for their lack of spiritual growth that made them incapable of teaching others the gospel of Christ.
 - b. **Hebrews 5:12-14** – *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*
 - c. Some never grow beyond “the first principles of the oracles of God.” They are incapable of digesting anything “solid” in the Word of God because they are still spiritual infants.
 - d. This is why Peter tells us, *“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).*

4. There must first be a desire for the “pure milk of the word” before we can expect to grow.
 - a. When we have a sincere desire to know the things of God nothing will keep us from achieving the goal of spiritual growth.
 - b. And once we have matured in our own understanding of the Word we will be capable of teaching it to others.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How prepared are you to labor in the Lord’s vineyard?
 - A. Taking the gospel to others and ministering to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ is not an option.
 1. The Lord expects us to do OUR SHARE – to do OUR PART – in helping the body of Christ grow and prosper in this community.
 - a. It is through *“the effective working by which EVERY PART DOES ITS SHARE,”* that results in the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. **(Ephesians 4:16)**
 2. There are souls to save, and there are hurting to comfort – they’re all around us.
 - a. But no lost soul will be saved, and no hurting, anguished soul will be comforted unless WE step forward to do the job.

B. Although we've talked about several things we need to do to prepare ourselves to labor in the Lord's vineyard, perhaps for some of you there are some initial steps you need to take.

1. You can't labor in the vineyard of the Lord unless you're **FIRST** willing to commit yourself to **BE** a laborer - making a commitment to come to the Lord in complete obedience, repenting of your sins, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins.
2. And neither can you labor in the vineyard of the Lord unless you're **FIRST** willing to set aside anything that may **KEEP** you from being an **EFFECTIVE** laborer – setting aside any sin in your life that interferes with your **INFLUENCE** as a Christian, or with your **RELATIONSHIP** with the Lord.
3. If you need to take care of either of these areas to labor in the vineyard of the Lord, we encourage you to do that today.