

Ministry, accountability and lifestyle

It is important that those of us who exercise any ministry role are known and seen to be actively seeking holiness and committed to becoming more like Jesus in our actions, words, attitudes and lifestyle.

This, of course, applies to all Christians in terms of the requirements of discipleship but in more public ministry we are conscious of the responsibility we carry as 'models' and the impact we can have, for good or bad, on others.

Ministry

'Seeking to serve God in ways that honour Jesus by obediently following any calling that is in line with biblical teaching and recognised by the church'

Whilst this paper applies to any ministry role it is particularly important for those in a more public ministry role.

What ministry is not:

1. It is not the source of our identity.
I have never met anybody in public ministry who would say it is the source and basis for their identity, but I have met many for whom it has clearly become that. The clues can be found in things like the descriptions of ourselves in social media profiles, attitudes such as 'I need to be doing this or that thing before I can worship or feel useful'.
2. It is not a stage, or worse a microphone, from which or through which we take every opportunity to express our personal thoughts to a captive audience
3. It is not a 'promotion', a move up the 'hierarchy' or a sign of maturity (spiritual or otherwise)

At WAVC we have a code of ethics and practice for leaders, but anyone in ministry also has biblical guidance and imperatives.

Phil.3:10-15

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, **but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 1:15-16

But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy in all you do**; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Hebrews 12:14-15

Make **every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy**; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

A W Tozer on holiness:

- A pharisee is harder on others than he is on himself, but a spiritual man is easier on others than on himself.
- The stiff and wooden quality about our ‘spiritual lives’ is a result of our lack of holy desire.
- Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people.
- No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should be.

Being lifelong learners:

‘Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.’ Phil. 3:17

It’s not about ‘not sinning’ or none of us would be in ministry, but we should be known and seen to be active in:

1. the battle against sin
2. the pursuit of holiness
3. our practical accountability to each other
4. our commitment to personal growth and spiritual development

Public ministry

Any ministry activity in which we are regularly representing the wider church and which involves carrying out a role in public or in regular personal contact with individuals or groups.

This would include preaching, worship leading, pastoral visiting, prayer ministry, welcoming, leading study groups, courses or house groups, leading children and youth work and so on.

Whilst **Points 1 & 2** in the list above may largely consist of our private life with Jesus they will certainly be evident in our public life in front of others.

Point 3 however will most definitely involve others. There should be at least one other person with whom we honestly share our battles and from whom we seek prayer support and have an accountability relationship. This is unlikely to be a husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend.

Point 4 would require active participation in a house group and, where possible, in at least one of the corporate prayer activities of the church.

General characteristics present in effective ministry

A. Constructive restlessness

A 'holy discontent' with within our area of calling, to change, to move, to reach out, to grow, and to take a group or an institution to new dimensions of ministry. They are excited as they read Paul, who said in **Philippians 3:13–14**, "I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

B. Optimistic

Because God is good and in control you see better things ahead. We do not let discontentment become disconsolation. When we see the imperfection of the church, of which we are each a part, we say with the writer of Hebrews,

"Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things — things that belong to salvation" (Hebrews 6:9)

Without this confidence based upon the goodness of God manifested in Jesus Christ, perseverance stalls and people are not equipped or inspired. Without optimism, restlessness becomes despair.

C. Zeal and knowledge

Prov 19:2 'zeal is no good without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps misses the mark'.

There is something very inspiring when we see a genuine zeal for their area of calling and service, but, the irony is that to let that zeal guide the timing and method of exercising our calling means we can totally miss the purpose of God for us and others. Zeal is not enough!

Rom 10:2 'For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge'.

The knowledge that must accompany this holy zeal is not head knowledge, it is not knowledge that can be gained by cursory or superficial reading of the bible. It begins with the knowledge that only comes through relationship, personal knowledge and experience of Jesus and matures as we begin to understand and apply His word. It deepens as we learn more about His calling and purpose for our lives, and here's the thing, zeal that lacks this knowledge will be misguided and will fizzle out like a shooting star as things don't go as you expected whereas zeal undergirded with knowledge will deepen, passion for Jesus will grow and ministry grows in fruitfulness.

D. Self-Control

By self-control I do not mean prim and proper and unemotional, but rather master of our drives. If we are to lead others toward God, we cannot be led ourselves toward the world. According to Galatians 5:23 self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. It is not mere willpower. It is appropriating the power of God to get mastery over our emotions and our appetites that could lead us astray or cause us to occupy our time with fruitless endeavours.

In **1 Corinthians 6:12** Paul says, "All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything." In public ministry we must ruthlessly examine our lives to see whether we are the least enslaved by television, alcohol, coffee, golf, computer games, fishing, pornography, drugs/alcohol, good food, success

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27, “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” And he says in Galatians 5:24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

E. Thick-Skinned, soft hearted

One thing is for sure: in any form of public ministry you will be criticised. No ministry will be fruitful if our aim is to please others and seek their approval.

Galatians 1:10, “Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” We do not seek the praises of people, but we may be wise to seek their counsel, even in their criticisms, as we seek to please God.

If criticism disables us, we will never make it in public ministry. I don’t mean that we must be the kind of people who don’t feel hurt, but rather that we must not be wiped out by the hurt. We must be able to say with Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8–9, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” We will feel the criticism, but we will not be incapacitated by it.

2 Corinthians 4:16, “We do not lose heart.”

We must be able to ‘digest depression’ because we will eat plenty of it. There will be many days when the temptation is very strong to quit because of unappreciative people. Criticism is one of Satan’s favourite weapons to try to get effective Christian ministry sidetracked or destroyed.

I should, however, qualify this characteristic of being thick-skinned. I do not want to give the impression that, in ministry, we are closed off to legitimate criticism. We must not only be thick-skinned, but also open and humbly ready to accept and apply just criticism. No one is perfect and Jonathan Edwards said once that he made it a spiritual discipline to look for the truth in every criticism that came his way before he discarded it. That’s good advice.

F. Energetic

Lazy people cannot be effective in ministry. We must redeem or “[make] the best use of the time” (Ephesians 5:16).

But we do not take credit for this great energy or boast in our efforts because we say with the apostle Paul, “I worked hard (harder than any of them), though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). And, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29).

G. Tactful

Paul said in Colossians 4:5–6, “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” We must remember that we are aiming to change hearts, not win arguments. We are about being fruitful in Gods calls no not just to getting jobs done.

Alienating people unnecessarily is self-defeating. ‘Speaking the truth in love’ is not at all like the rather tactless ‘just saying it as it is’. Tact is that quality of grace that wins the confidence of people who are sure you won’t do or say something stupid. You can’t inspire a following if people have to hang their

heads in embarrassment at the inappropriate and insensitive things you say or do. Tact is especially needed to help cope with embarrassing or tragic situations.

H. Dreamers

According to Joel 2:28, in the last days (in which we now live), “Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” This is the positive counterpart to restlessness. We must not only be discontent with the present, but also dreaming dreams of what could be in the future.

In 2 Kings 6:15–17, Elisha and his servant were surrounded by Assyrians in the city of Dothan. When the servant sees this and cries out with dismay, “Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Those in effective ministry can see the power of God overshadowing the problems of the future. This is a rare gift: to see the sovereign power of God in the midst of seemingly overwhelming opposition. Most people are experts at seeing all the problems and reasons not to move forward in a venture. Many pastors are ruined by boards, groups or committees who think that they have done their duty when they throw up every obstacle and problem to an idea that he brings. That’s cheap. Hope and solutions are expensive.

How we need people who will devote just five minutes a week to dream of what might possibly be. The text says that “old men shall dream dreams.” How sad it is, then, to see so many old people assuming that their age means that now they can coast and turn over the creativity to the young. It is tragic when age makes a man jaded instead of increasingly creative. Every new church, every agency, every new ministry, every institution, every endeavour, is the result of someone having a vision and laying tight hold on it.

I. Restful

We began with the quality of restlessness and we end with the quality of restful. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:1–2).

In ministry we must know that ultimately the productivity of our labours rests in God, and that God can do more while He is asleep than we could do while awake without God. Jesus said to his busy disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31).

We are not so addicted to work that we are unable to rest. We are good stewards of the life we have been given.