

The Ministry of One-Anothering

by Chip Brogden

Chip Brogden emphasizes that every Christian is called to the ministry of One-Anothering, which involves serving and encouraging one another in everyday life.

Scripture: John 13:34, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:21, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24, James 5:16, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Christian Community", "Spiritual Gifts"

Description

Chip Brogden emphasizes the importance of the ministry of One-Anothering in Christianity, highlighting the various ways believers are called to love, serve, submit, instruct, encourage, help, and forgive one another. He stresses that every Christian is called to this ministry, and it is the basis from which all spiritual gifts should operate. Brogden warns against seeking recognition or position in ministry, urging believers to focus on simple acts of service to fellow believers. He shares personal experiences and challenges the common misconceptions about ministry, emphasizing the need for practical, humble service over grand gestures.

Transcript

Every Christian is called to the ministry of One-Anothering. We are to love one another, serve one another, submit to one another, instruct one another, encourage one another, help one another, forgive one another, and so forth. This is our spiritual service. This is your ministry to the Body of Christ and the basis from which every spiritual gift should operate. It would be profitable for you to do a study of all the places in the New Testament that mention "one another". There are a considerable number of references. You will immediately benefit by seeing that Christianity is not for hermits. There is no place for individualism in the Kingdom of God, for we are a Body of many members, each fashioned together into interdependence. You will also see that we are called to live very simple lives of quiet service to our brothers and sisters. It is neither complicated nor difficult.

People ask me all the time, "How do I know if I'm called to the ministry?" I answer by saying you are definitely called to the ministry. They think perhaps I am a prophet or I can see something that they cannot. Then I have to clarify it by explaining that all of us are called to the ministry of One-Anothering. No one is exempt. How that will eventually work itself out in your life is a wonderful mystery that you will have to discover for yourself. Only don't look to do some great thing to begin with, just find some brothers and sisters and begin your practice of One-Anothering.

Others will ask, "But how do I know if God is calling me to a full-time ministry?" My response is that He is calling all of us to the full-time ministry of One-Anothering. I'm missing the page in my Bible that talks about a part-time commitment. There's no such thing as a part-time ministry, a part-time minister, or a part-time Christian. It is either all the time or none of the time.

The problem with many people who aspire to some "full-time" ministry is they want to do some great thing, something immediately visible, appreciated, and recognized that will take up all their time and support them so they won't have to work at a "secular" job. They want to start up at the top with a title and a position but they don't know anything about the ministry of One-Anothering. They want to preach, or teach, or sing, or be up on center stage someplace.

I have counseled more than one young man who believes the Lord is calling them into some ministry. Certainly their motives are sincere, and they desire to do a good work. But upon close examination you find that they have a certain idea or presupposition about what ministry is. They imagine that having a ministry means people will come and hear them preach. They think about what it will be like to stand behind the pulpit and talk, hearing people say, "Amen!" and "Preach it, brother!". In some cases they are looking to me to wave my hand over them or speak some word to them which will confirm their calling and give them clear direction. Or they will talk about giving up their "secular" employment so they can be in the "full-time" ministry.

HOW TO GO INTO MINISTRY THE WRONG WAY

When I was twenty-three years old I sensed that it was time for me to take a big step and enter the ministry "full-time". I knew I was called to the ministry and I was already an associate pastor in our church, but I was impatient and anxious to devote all my time to what I thought ministry was all about - preaching and teaching. I thought going into the ministry "full-time" was some great event that would be accompanied by trumpets and heralds. I wanted to be sure of the Lord's leading so I fasted and prayed to see if He would approve of my plans (please note how I worded that). For three days I did not eat or drink. At the end of the three days I quit my job and announced to everyone that now I was in the "full-time" ministry.

After about three months of being in the ministry "full-time" I had preached in three churches and mailed out a newsletter so everyone would know where to send their money. It wasn't long before there was no food in the house, so we began visiting friends and relatives for "fellowship" in hopes that they would invite us to stay for dinner. We depended on the church to pay our phone and electric bills. About this time I found out that my wife was pregnant with our second child. Of course, we had no insurance.

When things were really tight I remembered a man who owed me money an hour's drive away. Since it was dinnertime I asked my wife to fix something for me to eat on the way to this man's house. She gave me a single Beef Jerky and a thermos of Kool-Aid because there was nothing else. Eventually I went to the food ministry our church supported and asked if I could help load trucks in exchange for one of the boxes of food. For the next few weeks we lived on microwave pizzas and frozen tortellini which we had to boil and learn to serve in a variety of interesting ways. I understand now how the Hebrews were able to complain about manna from heaven after eating it for so long. To this day I will not eat tortellini.

Eventually we had to leave our house since we couldn't pay the rent. We moved in with my wife's parents and lived out of a single bedroom. Since we had no money to put our things in storage, we wrapped them in plastic and put them in her parent's garage. Meanwhile someone had told me about a small church that

was looking for a pastor. It paid the amazing sum of \$100 a week, which sounded like a king's ransom to us at the time. So we went.

The church was able to increase our pay a little over time, but it was soon clear that I would have to leave the "full-time" ministry and go back to the "secular" job market to support my family. I remember when this first dawned on me, and how deeply my pride was offended. I remember praying as I drove over the Tar River bridge to get home, "Lord, I'll do anything if You will only let me stay in 'full-time' ministry." I didn't want to go get a job because I thought that would be interpreted as a lack of faith. The following week I was offered a job, and I took it at the insistence of my wife.

Why am I sharing this with you? Am I holding this up as a model of what it means to suffer for Jesus? Is this an example of what it means to be in the ministry? By no means. I was committed, no doubt about it. Somebody might say it happened that way because you didn't have enough faith. Maybe, but I bet I had more faith at twenty-three years old than you did. I could out-pray, out-fast, out-preach, and out-work anyone. As Paul said, "I labored more abundantly than them all." But as the saying goes, fanaticism consists of continuing to do something when you have forgotten why you are doing it.

SPIRITUAL MINISTRY IS PRACTICAL

I have since learned (after many more trials and tests) that the loftiest spiritual service will never cause us to neglect our most menial earthly duty. If you are not faithful with respect to earthly things, who is going to commit spiritual things with you? Paul's letters always begin with the spiritual reality and end with the earthly responsibility. This is why he urged people to remain where they are when they are first called. That is to say, if you are a husband, love your wife. If you are a wife, love your husband. If you have children, raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Be there for them. If you will not take care of your family, no matter what spiritual excuse you offer, you are worse than a pagan. And if you will not work, you will not eat.

BALANCE is the Holy Grail that we so desperately need to re-discover in the Church today. This is Paul's counsel, and it is sound. His example was to work with his own hands to provide his own support so he could make the Good News available without charge. Technically, yes he could receive support, and he did on occasion, but most of the time he chose not to do so. When he said his last goodbyes to the Ephesian elders at Miletus he could testify that in his three years of ministry in Ephesus he had coveted no one's gold, silver, or clothing, but had worked to support himself and those with him so as not to be a burden to the church. What a glorious testimony!

How different were the false apostles who followed after, claiming all the support they could muster and refusing to work, eating and drinking everyone else's groceries, robbing the widows and making merchandise of the Good News. Yet this is precisely what many who claim a "full-time" ministry do today.

Our idea of ministry is narrow and ill-defined. Most folks have one notion about ministry - preaching in a church. If I am preaching in a church, I am a minister. But if I am waiting on tables or washing dishes or working in an office or doing other menial, secular things I am not a real minister. This is the way people have been led to believe.

As a pastor I was supposed to attend ministerial conferences and gatherings. After the introductions, the first question we asked a new acquaintance was NOT how many in your church are growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but rather, "How many people do you have on Sunday morning?" The

second question we asked was, "Are you full-time or bi-vocational?" The size of your church and your status as full-time or bi-vocational helped establish the pecking order. I noticed the pastors with large churches and "full-time" ministries were typically selected to leadership positions within the denomination.

One of these successful pastors spoke once and "encouraged" those of us with small churches by saying, "God is with you, too."

But I noticed that whenever these pastors would gather together everyone would talk about how hard it was and how they were just trying to hold on for dear life. The bigger the church the more stressed out the pastor was. They were walking around with the weight of the world on their shoulders, trying to deal with so many problems. They were so enmeshed and caught up in themselves that they seemed almost catatonic. I would come home from these meetings depressed.

I began thinking to myself, what is wrong with this picture? Why am I aspiring to do this full-time? Why am I seeking to advance myself within this group of nervous wrecks? What do I stand to gain, but more problems and stress? How did we get so far removed from the New Testament? Why are we so concerned about numbers and size when we aren't faithful to what little we have to begin with? Why are so many pastor's wives taking antidepressants? Why are so many pastor's kids in serious trouble? What am I doing here? What will my family look like in twenty years?

This began a process through which God radically changed my perception of ministry. It was the beginning of the end of my career as a preacher for Organized Religion. I gave up my little penny-ante ministry and took my place with the One Flock under the One Shepherd. I do not regret that decision, for what I received is far greater than what I gave up.

THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE IN CHRIST

Friends, the situation as I have described it is not God's intention for ministry. I have learned that there is something called the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2). I have seen this in operation and I know when it is at work in someone's life and when it is not. I can look within myself and instantly know if I am cooperating with the Life or not. I give thanks to God for teaching me this, and I pray He will grant all of us to see it, for it will set captives free. Let me explain how the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus relates to our work and ministry in the Lord. It is summed up in this maxim: God will not LEAD you where His grace cannot KEEP you.

That is to say, when we undertake the work assigned to us by the Lord we will find the Life of the Lord is present to give us all the inner spiritual strength to see it through to completion. I am not saying everything will go smoothly and you will never have any self-doubt or fear. Far from it. But listen to what Paul says:

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed (II Corinthians 4:8,9). His secret? "I labor according to His mighty power which works in me (Colossian 1:29)." Not I, but Christ. This is the secret to the Christian life and it is the key to all fruitful spiritual work.

The majority of people in Christian service are given methods, plans, formulas, books, tapes, seminars, conferences, education, and training in order to fulfill their ministry. There are currently more pastors than there are churches for them to pastor. These young people fresh out of college are sitting around waiting for churches to open up to them so they can come in and begin their ministry. They are looking forward to

the day when they can put all they have learned into practice. What happens when they finally get elected to pastor their first church? They make a mess of the whole thing.

I worked with a fellow like this. I can truthfully say today that I love him, but at the time of our working together I came close to breaking his nose on more than one occasion. I'm sure he felt the same way about me! He was intelligent, articulate, and well-educated. He was committed to his idea of ministry. We cannot judge his heart, but we can look at the fruit of his pastoral ministry and see all the people damaged as a result of his best intentions and efforts. After driving off a sufficient number of people and putting the whole congregation and staff into an uproar, he came under such stress that his body rebelled and he was sick for three weeks. Suddenly he "felt called" to accept another church in another state, where we can only pray that he will not make the same mistakes.

What is missing? How has the Church reached such a pitiful condition? We give people a method, but God desires us to cooperate with His Life working through us. This is a spiritual matter. This cannot be taught in a classroom. People cannot pay a tuition and get a degree and say that they are now fit to shepherd the flock. A thousand times no!

BEGIN YOUR MINISTRY TODAY

When anyone comes to me now and wants my advice about "going" into the ministry, the first thing I seek to do is upset all their ideas about ministry and talk to them about being a servant, taking the back seat, being hidden from view, lowering yourself, and practicing the art of One-Anothering.

The ministry of One-Anothering doesn't require a platform, a pulpit, a building, a budget, or a Board. You can start immediately, with no training and with no experience, and you don't have to quit your job or do anything dramatic. You cannot be voted in, and you cannot be voted out. The Life you possess qualifies you to be in the full-time ministry of One-Anothering. Your wounds are your credentials. You can go to your brothers and sisters right now and say, "The Lord has called me to the ministry, and I am beginning it today." Love, pray for, encourage, and serve the saints. So many times we have observed individuals who claim to be called to some great work but they neglect the basic principles of One-Anothering. There is no competition for the lowest position, so let all who love the Lord go there first and become a servant.

So what if we can't preach, teach, or sing? Is that all there is to the Lord's work? Hardly. You could begin a ministry of affirmation. Just make it your mission to encourage everyone you meet, building them up in the Lord. Most people tear each other down, so determine in God that you will lift up and encourage the Church at every opportunity. Keep a list of addresses and every so often send them a little note. That is a simple way to start. The possibilities are endless!

You see, ministry is not some great, profound, extraordinary thing, but ordinary things done in an extraordinary way.

Whatever our age or stage of spiritual growth we are called to the Ministry of One-Anothering. It is a rewarding call. Only let us walk in love and work diligently according to the Law of Life (not in our own strength) and we will do well. Let us learn to buy up the opportunities and redeem the time. The servants are not greater than their Master, but the servants may aspire to be as their Master. I pray the Lord will raise up more servants as a result of these words. Amen.

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