

(A Spiritual Leader) 8. Ministering From Life

by Zac Poonen

The core message of this sermon is that new covenant ministry is about ministering from life, not just from knowledge.

Scripture: Genesis 1:11-12, Matthew 5:14, Matthew 7:28-29, John 1:4, John 7:38, John 8:12, John 9:5, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Hebrews 1:1-2, Revelation 2:1-7

Topics: "Discipleship", "New Covenant Ministry"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that a spiritual leader must minister from their life rather than mere intellect, contrasting the old and new covenants. He explains that while leaders in the old covenant could serve despite personal immorality, the new covenant requires leaders to embody the life of Christ, producing disciples rather than mere converts. Poonen warns that the spiritual state of a church reflects its leader, and that true ministry flows from a deep, personal relationship with God. He illustrates that just as Jesus' life was the foundation of His ministry, leaders today must ensure their lives are a testament to the transformative power of the Gospel. Ultimately, the call is to cultivate a life that can be passed on, fostering genuine discipleship within the church.

Transcript

A spiritual leader ministers to others from his life and not from his intellect.

Under the old covenant, God used men even when their private lives were immoral. Samson could deliver the Israelites even when he was living in sin. The Spirit of God didn't leave him even when he committed adultery. God's anointing left him only when he cut his hair and broke his covenant with God. David had many wives. Yet the anointing of God remained upon him and he even wrote Scripture.

But ministry in the new covenant is totally different. 2 Corinthians 3 contrasts service under the old covenant with service under the new. The difference is basically this: Under the old covenant, the priests studied the Law carefully and taught the people what God had said in His Word. But in the new covenant, we follow Jesus Who spoke God's Word from out of His inner life and walk with His Father. There's a lot of difference between preaching from our life and preaching from our knowledge.

If there is shallowness in the lives of most believers in India today, it is because the lives of their leaders are shallow. The people's lives are carnal, because the leader's life - his thought-life, his relationship with his wife, and children and fellow-workers - is carnal. The ministry of such leaders is only the dissemination

of information. This is an old covenant ministry.

Any preacher who communicates only information is an old covenant preacher. All the information he gives out may be accurate. But if he is not communicating life he is not a servant of the new covenant. The old covenant was a covenant of the letter whereas the new covenant is a covenant of life. The letter kills but the Spirit gives life.

In the old covenant, God gave Israel laws to keep. But in the new covenant, God has given us an Example - in the Person of Jesus. His LIFE is the light of men. The light today is not a doctrine or a teaching, but Jesus' own life manifested through us. Anything other than this is darkness - even if it be evangelical doctrine.

In the Old Testament, God's written Law was the light, as we read in Psalm 119:105. But then the Word became flesh and Jesus Himself became the Light of the world (John 8:12) His life was the light of men (John 1:4). But Jesus told His disciples that He could be the Light of the world only as long as He was here on earth (John 9:5). Now that He has gone to heaven, He has left us in this world to be its light (Matt.5:14). So our responsibility is very great to show forth that light - by our lives.

A church invariably becomes like its leader. In Revelation 2 and 3, we see that in each of the seven cases, the Lord spoke the same message to the church as He did to its messenger. Each message concluded with the statement that the Spirit was saying the same thing to that church. Where five messengers (elders) were carnal, their churches were carnal. And where two messengers were spiritual, their churches were spiritual too. The messenger in Laodicea was lukewarm and so was his church. The messenger in Philadelphia was faithful and so was his church.

In Genesis 1, a phrase that occurs frequently is 'after their kind'. We read there of fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, plants yielding seed after their kind, the fish and the birds after their kind, and beasts, creeping things and cattle after their kind (verses 11,12,21,25). In creation, everything produces after its own kind.

God created Adam "in the likeness of God" (Gen.5:1). But Adam produced a son "according to his own image" (v.3). He could not produce a son in the likeness of God. He could produce one only after his own kind.

Spiritually too, we will all produce children according to our own likeness and after our own kind. If we are the intellectual type, we will produce intellectually-minded people through our ministry. If we are misers, we will produce misers. And if we're haughty and proud, we will produce haughty people through our ministry. On the other hand, if we have the spirit of a servant, our spiritual children will have a servant-spirit too

It is possible however, that a rare brother may break out of his leader's mould and seek God for himself and become spiritual, in spite of his leader's carnality. But such a case is rare. Generally speaking, most believers are like sheep who blindly follow their leader, wherever he goes. Like preacher, like people! And when both sheep and leader are blind, they both fall into the ditch.

Remember that the believers in your church will go out and reproduce others after their kind too. And then you'll have grandchildren after your kind! So you had better be careful right now, what type of children you're going to produce - because this process will continue, until Jesus returns.

It's important right at the beginning therefore, to ensure that you make disciples in your church and not just converts. To do that, you must be a disciple yourself. You must have a life that you can pass on to others.

Converts will go out and make other converts, who in turn will go out and make still more converts. Such converts may understand the message of salvation, but they will have no desire to follow the Lord. They will have knowledge but no life. But if you make disciples, they will go out and make more disciples. So transmitting life to others is fundamental.

The tabernacle in the Old Testament was a picture of the church. That tabernacle, as you know, had three parts - an outer court, a holy place and a most holy place (where God dwelt). The people in the outer court symbolise believers who just have their sins forgiven. They don't take any responsibility in their local church. They come to the meetings, listen to the messages, give their offerings, break bread and go home. The people in the holy place are those who seek to serve in the church in some way - like the Levites who lit the lampstand and put incense on the altar. But those in the most holy place are the ones who enter the new covenant, seek fellowship with God and are united with the other disciples as one body. They minister from their life and constitute the real church, the functioning church, the ones who battle Satan and keep the Body of Christ pure. In many churches however, there is no such central core.

In every church - in the best and in the worst - those sitting in the outer court will be of the same type - half-hearted, worldly, seeking their own, lovers of money and lovers of ease and pleasure. But a good church will have a strong inner core of leaders who are godly. This core determines which way the church is going to go.

The central core will usually begin with two men who have become one with each other. God will be with them and the core will begin to grow in size and unity. A human body too begins with two dissimilar units becoming one in a mother's womb. As that little embryo begins to grow bigger, the cells all remain united. But if at any time those cells break away from each other, that will be the end of that baby!

It's the same with the building of a local church as an expression of Christ's Body. If the core splits up, that will be the end of the real church, even if the external structure continues to remain as an institution!

Hebrews is one book in the New Testament that contrasts the new covenant with the old. Unfortunately, Hebrews is not a popular book with many Christians. Romans, Ephesians and Philippians are popular books, but not Hebrews! That's because Hebrews is full of meat, not milk - and most believers haven't got their "teeth" as yet. They're still babes. The very first sentence in Hebrews says that in past times God spoke through the prophets, but now He has spoken through His Son. The old covenant was mostly a communication of commandments from God, with their "Thou shalt"s and "Thou shalt not"s. But the new covenant is a communication of LIFE from God through His Son.

That was why the Father sent Jesus to earth as a baby. It would have been no problem for God to send Jesus to earth as a full grown man. But He came as a baby so that He could have the same experiences that we have, and face the same temptations that we face, from childhood onwards.

But most Christians think of Jesus only in terms of His 3½ years of ministry and His death on Calvary. I think it would be right to say that 99% of believers never think of how Jesus lived during the 30 years He was in Nazareth. They think of His birth. That is celebrated every year. They think of his death and resurrection. That too is celebrated every year. And they think of the miracles He did. That's about all.

Hardly anyone thinks of the major part of Jesus' life. His ministry was only 10% of His earthly life - 3½ years out of 33½ years. And His birth and His death were just one-day events. The major part of His life was the 30 years He spent in Nazareth. His whole ministry was based on those 30 years. It took Him 30 years to prepare the sermons He preached during His ministry. He didn't preach "the sermon on the mount" the way preachers prepare their sermons these days - sitting down in their study and consulting books and concordances and writing down their notes and preparing three neat little points that all begin with the same letter of the alphabet!! No. That sermon came out of His life. He took 30 years to prepare it. That's why it was so powerful and that's why the people marvelled at the authority with which He spoke (Matt.7:28,29).

In the old covenant, we read that God spoke to Jeremiah only on certain days. Jeremiah dictated what God spoke, to his scribe Baruch who wrote down exactly what Jeremiah dictated. In the same way, God spoke to Ezekiel only at certain times and told him what to say to the people of Judah. And Ezekiel went and told the people exactly that. That was good. Even if we had preaching like that today, it would be great!

But new covenant ministry is even better! God didn't speak to Jesus only on certain days, as He had done to those Old Testament prophets. God spoke to Jesus every day and Jesus spoke to people every day from His life. His ministry flowed out of His life. That's the meaning of "rivers of living water flowing out from our innermost being" (John 7:38).

In the light of this, it is good to ask yourself whether you're producing new covenant disciples or old covenant converts in your church. The answer to that depends on whether you're a new covenant servant or an old covenant one yourself!

The Old Testament prophet was only a messenger. To pass on a message, all you need is a good memory. But in the new covenant, God doesn't give us messages to pass on to others but His life! Then what you need is not a good memory, but a good life - the Divine life.

Let me illustrate the difference: If you collect some water from a tap (get a message from God) and pour it out - that would be a picture of old covenant ministry. Then you could go back and collect some more water from the tap (get another message from God) and pour that out too.

But in the new covenant, we are given a spring of water (the life of Jesus Himself) within us. And that flows out from within us constantly. So we don't have to keep going to God each time, to get a message. He makes us the message. Our life itself is the message and we speak from that!

Most people have a pouring ministry. Some have nothing to give when they pour out, while others have something to give. But both are still pouring. And then both of them run dry.

But Jesus told the woman in Samaria that he would put a spring of eternal life within her that would flow out of her constantly. (Eternal life means the life of God Himself.)

This life is what the Lord desires should flow out from within us too - not just a message. This is new covenant ministry.

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