

Chapter Eight

MINISTRY

Wherever did we get the idea from that 'ministry' is the responsibility of ordained clergy and that the laity are to help them in that ministry? It certainly wasn't that way in the early church! There, everyone had all things in common as they fellowshiped in community, and they supported one another as the gifts of ministry became evident. When the emperor Constantine declared that Christianity would be the religion of the Roman empire, Christendom was born with its hierarchic structure, soon to be led by popes, cardinals, et.al. - and the dark ages fell upon the world. The reformation of the C16th brought light to the church but its pyramidic leadership was so well established that the protestant churches adopted the same leadership style. Martin Luther's *95 Theses* of 1517 was a presentation against the use of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church, but they were birthed out of a natural reaction against so much that was wrong in the church. Years later, in 1530, he made a cool, non-controversial explanation of his views, seeking to be a peacemaker in the growing protests being heard throughout Europe. However, by this time his movement was splitting Europe in two, giving rise to the churches known as *evangelical* or *protestant*. Three main groups emerged: the Lutheran (in Germany and Scandanavia); the Zwinglian and Calvinist (in Switzerland, France, Holland and Scotland) and the Church of England. Do not be fooled by the name *evangelical* - these churches were often no different to the mother church, more political than spiritual. The word evangelical referred more to their emphasis on the *evangel* (the Gospel - ie. the Bible) as being their authority rather than the pope and cardinals of the Catholic Church.

As each of these groups tried to establish themselves, the politics of warfare was the instrument used and much bloodshed occurred. To maintain control over their lands and people, church leaders made it mandatory to belong to the 'state' church, on pain of excommunication from society, non ability to obtain or keep employment and even death. Fortunately, time has brought some measure of release from such ungodly bondage, though church structure often remains pyramidic in form with power emanating from the few (ordained clergy) at the 'top'.

It is not until the latter part of this century that a major move away from such authoritarian leadership has led to the formation of many house churches and independant assemblies. Sadly, even in this new reactionary movement, oftentimes a leader has risen with his own charisma, to become another self-appointed authority.

I had been invited to London to spend a few weeks travelling around the different small groups of believers who were employees of the National Westminster Bank. There are several of these groups in the City - as the London business centre is known - who meet once or twice a month for mutual encouragement and fellowship. My time in England would end with a weekend retreat at Haythorpe Hall, the country mansion in Oxfordshire, belonging to the NatWest bank.

My first lunchtime meeting was with about a dozen bankers of the Square Mile group, very near the Bank of England. I spoke as a pastor for the twenty minutes allotted to me and felt positive about the meeting. Five weeks later, nearing the end of my time in

England, I returned to the Square Mile for a second meeting, but this time, I apologised to my listeners. “When I spoke to you five weeks ago,” I said, “I had no idea of the stress under which you work. My teaching must have seemed very superficial to you and with little relevance to your situation. Have you ever brought your pastor to see what you do in a normal day’s work?” I went on to encourage them to invite their church leaders to spend some time with them at work, just to see the pressures under which many of them operate.

I had discovered that many of the younger employees work for ten hours or more a day, in a room filled with over two hundred other employees, all eyes glued to their computer monitors and afraid to leave their chairs too early lest they be the next one to receive a redundancy notice! More senior executives often work even longer hours to keep up with the demands of their employment. On weekends they are often too tired to be actively involved in their churches and I suspect that their pastors consider them as having little commitment to *the work of the Lord*.

I would suggest that they, as all ‘laity’, are the real ministers of the church, working on its front lines in the battle against the darkness of the world, and the pastors’ responsibility is to equip them to handle the stress and to be as light in the midst of that darkness. Pastors, let me encourage you to take time to visit your parishioners at work and see for yourselves where the real witness is seen.

Alan works in the bank on one of its busiest floors. A year ago he was very frustrated by his church as he felt a ‘call’ into the full-time ministry as a pastor. This he had interpreted as being in the pulpit of a local church but his denomination did not believe in releasing lay men into such an *important* position and there were few opportunities in other churches.

He spoke with the leader of his local believers’ small group who suggested to him that there was great need for a pastor to minister to the many people surrounding him at work. “Look at that lady” he said, “She has just lost her husband. And that man has just been given a redundancy notice after working here for twelve years. The lady sitting at that desk has a child who is dying with cancer, and the man next to her is going through a divorce.”

Suddenly Peter saw with a new vision. This was the field where he was supposed to be a shepherd. He began to approach those whom he discovered were hurting and was amazed as they began to open up to him and allow him to speak into their sorrows. Surely the Lord was opening people’s hearts to him! A year later he has no desire to leave that work but is truly fulfilled in the pastoral ministry in which *the Lord has ordained* him.

It is your responsibility to define your burden; your friends and counsellors will define your gifts but your ministry should be defined by the church leadership, pastors and elders. Not chosen or appointed but defined! The leader’s first responsibility is to recognise the ministry that **the Lord has prepared** each of His sheep for. This is where

the process of being disciplined to reach your destiny as flying eagles usually breaks down, leading to frustrated, often bitter and cynical believers.

When a mother eagle knows it is time for her young to leave the nest, she removes all the soft down and feathers with which the nest had been lined and then nudges the eaglet to its edge. With a none-too-gentle push the youngster is launched into space! Inexperience - and the Law of Gravity - causes the young bird to fall toward the ground, flapping its wings in a futile attempt to regain the comfort of the nest. Before it reaches the ground, however, the mother eagle swoops down and catches her offspring on her wings, bearing it up again to the heights! There is no safety there, for just as suddenly as it was saved from being dashed on the ground, the youngster is once again cast off into space and begins to fall. This is repeated until the young bird begins to feel the wind under its wings bearing it up so that it would not fall to the ground. Finally, the mother eagle returns to her nest to stand and proudly watch, as her youngster begins to know the delight of soaring upon the wind into the heights of the heavens.

The role of a pastor is just like that of the mother eagle. We are called to 'equip the saints for the work of ministry'. We are to seek out those in our congregations who display the gifts necessary to carry their expressed burden, and then set a ministry before them that will enable them to learn to fly on the anointing winds of the Holy Spirit. This is a risky business! It may mean that they will fail and cause people to question our judgement; or it may mean they will succeed and surpass us in prominence and achievement. Only those pastors who are secure in their own calling, who know their own blessing of fulfillment in ministry, are able to freely release others. This releasing is not a one-time thing; it requires a commitment to nurture, support, defend, guide until they begin to fly.

It is because pastors and church leaders have failed to release their people, that so many have branched off and 'done their own thing' with little support from the church and little anointing on their work. I have had to deal with many young people who had a burden for missions and who displayed evident calling and gifting for such work, but who struggled financially and with little or no prayer support from their home church, because the church had a set missions program - or none at all - and that church member didn't fit into their plans. I have also seen many who should never have been released into missions work but came with an attitude of rebellion. This introduces us to the whole area of authority, responsibility and accountability within the church.

I have had many sad experiences counselling those who have been hurt by a wrong exercise of authority in church or parachurch leadership. Being the pastor or an elder in the church does not give one authority to dictate to others - our calling is that of a servant and what servant exercises dictatorial authority? **The authority lies not in the position but in the anointed gifting of the ministry.**

Jesus came among men as a humble servant but when He spoke, the people remarked that He spoke as one with authority. The Roman Centurion was the most powerful man in his district, but when his son was ill, he came to Jesus and asked that He might exercise

that authority and heal his son.¹ He was a humble itinerant teacher who surrounded Himself with the outcasts of society and had received no mandate from the Sanhedrin or the High Priest. Yet the centurion had the insight to see His authority. People will gladly follow a pastor in whom they see the anointing of a shepherd's heart but they will not readily allow a man to rule over them who has the title but does not display such gifting. They will be eager to learn from an anointed teacher, but will reject the authority of one who is unable to lead them into the deep truths of the Word, even though he has the title of elder.

Though I was the pastor, I was glad to sit under the ministry of Jim (Ch.6) as he led us into meaningful prayer and intercession, for he was the one with anointing and authority in that area. However, he also displayed a recognition of my authority as one, called by God to be his pastor, and would often question me as to the things he was teaching. Were they Biblically correct and edifying to the church? He knew that my responsibility was to safeguard the spiritual health of our congregation, so was careful not to cause offense. I gave him a measure of authority and he made himself accountable to me. Authority should never be exercised by one who is not also under authority.

Before I became a pastor I served as an elder in a Toronto church. One day, while we were without a pastor, two ladies came to the church seeking advice concerning a loved one whom they thought to be demon possessed. This was not something I knew much about but we did have a man in the congregation who was very wise in this area. Ron was going through a messy divorce at the time and could not serve as one of our elders, though he was, without doubt, well versed in the Scriptures and 'apt to teach'. I asked him to speak to the two ladies in one of our classrooms while I sat in and listened. I was well aware that whatever Ron told them, it would be understood as being the counsel of our church. Ron was teaching with the authority of my eldership, and I, not he, would be accountable to the other elders for whatever was said. He was being released to exercise a ministry that I was incapable of performing. I gave him a measure of authority but the responsibility remained mine.

Oftentimes we give a person responsibility for a ministry within the church but we do not give him the authority to carry out that ministry. You cannot delegate responsibility; it always remains yours. Only authority can be delegated and that means giving the freedom to make mistakes. Of course there are many levels of authority, dependant on the maturity of the disciple, our eagle learning to fly, and a wise servant-leader will nurture those he releases into ministry by giving just the right amount of authority with the appropriate accountability.

These three terms, authority, accountability and responsibility can never be separated. You should never have one without the others. (See Appendix 1 for more on Authority, etc.)

I believe that every meeting of the church elders should have these two items on the agenda. Prayer, to seek the mind of God, and a time of asking 'who in our congregation

¹ Luke 7:8

is ready to be released into their ministry?’ People should be encouraged to express the burdens upon their hearts, and leaders should be constantly watching to see if there is evidence of giftings appropriate to that burden. Not everyone who has a burden should be immediately released - there is need for growth in maturity, in the fruit of the Spirit. However, God is still ready to take the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the wise and strong.² He is usually far more willing to use a weak vessel than we as pastors are to release them.

I was walking out with a young pastor who was expressing much interest in this teaching. I asked him, “Whom do you have in your church who has a real burden from the Lord?” “That’s easy,” he said, “Peter does, but we cannot help him because he has a street ministry in our city centre and our church is in the suburbs.”

“Evidently God has made a mistake” I said, “for He has sent Peter to your church and not to an inner city church! Why don’t you ask Peter how your church can help him carry his burden?”

Peter had come to the Lord just two years earlier while he was living as a society dropout and a rebel. He stood out as someone different in this suburban church, as he shaved his head and wore a earring. However, no one could deny that his love for the Lord was genuine and he was growing daily in his Christian walk. He wanted to go back to his old haunts to share his good news with former colleagues on the street.

The pastor went to see Peter and asked him to explain his burden again and to tell him how the church might be able to help. “Pastor, what I really need is an old van. It seems that everytime anyone stops to talk with me, we are interrupted by someone else. It would be good if I could take them somewhere private, like a van, where I could keep some booklets and good coffee.” This was presented to the elders, an old van was purchased and renovated, another brother in the church volunteered to man the coffee pot in the seperated front of the van, and Peter had his ministry. And the Lord anointed the work!

² ! Corinthians 1:26f