

Christian Ministry

Lesson One: The Call to Serve and Its Implications

As we start to look into what being in ministry means, let's begin with the New Testament definition. There are two words for "ministry" found in the New Testament.

1. The first word gives us the office of "Deacon" in the church. This word commonly focuses on our work as servants in the church. It may be a title, but it's task oriented. It speaks of a person's voluntary service to others and finds its foundations in unconditional service to God. It describes someone who gives wise, selfless, sacrificial service to God's people.
2. The second word is, "doulos" (Strong's #G1401). It's no-choice servanthood. Paul found it to be foundational to his service to God. He called himself a "bondservant."
 - A deacon serves others without any pressure from forced bondage. It's voluntary. So, we can establish that ministry today is voluntary, dedicated submission to the call of God. It flourishes within His authority structures. I have come to believe that commitment to ministry has to grow until it's without any other option. There is to be no "Plan B."
 - If you properly understand it, the things you do as a minister may vary, season to season, but **the call is for a lifetime.**

A Call from God

All valid pastoral ministry originates from God's divine call or charge to an individual. It's a "mandate" (Strong's #G3852). A mandate is a command, a charge, or a set of orders given to someone God calls to minister. It can also be given indirectly through someone with valid spiritual authority. It requires the person called and charged with the mandate to faithfully fulfill it. It begins when the Holy Spirit speaks the call into our hearts. Never take it casually or lightly!

In the Epistles of First and Second Timothy, the Apostle Paul gave Timothy twelve "mandates" or "charges" for fulfilling Timothy's call as a pastor and leader in the church. We will look into just four of these in this lesson.

First Mandate or Charge from God: "Wage a Good Warfare"

1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2:1-4

*"This charge [or mandate] I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them **you may wage the "good" warfare, {19} having faith and a "good" conscience, which***

*some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, {20} of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. {2:1} Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, {2} for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. {3} **For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, {4} who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.***

Answering God's call to Christian leadership is not easy. Each day you may face challenges. Some will be small, while others will be full blown spiritual battles. In Paul's first mandate or "charge" to Timothy, he charged Timothy to conduct warfare. Paul labeled this as "good." He wrote it required "having faith and a good conscience." This invites the question, "What is "good" warfare" in in the day-to-day challenges we will face while serving God and His people? Paul gives us guidance for this.

1. It's a challenge to our faith: Here's the challenge - We will have only three choices in our day-to-day ministry lives.

[a] We can surrender to our circumstances and let our feelings paralyze us. Then, we lose the battle and fail to fulfill our call from God.

[b] We can let our feelings control our actions. This may result in victories, but it can also cause us to make choices that lead to bad outcomes. Feelings are a necessary part of God's call because we are human beings ministering to each other, but they're not the deciding factor.

[c] We can make God's leading our default position. It's found in Romans 8:14. It says, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." This describes who we are as Christian leaders.

- A good leader identifies as a child of God... every day in every way.
- A good leader takes his direction from the Holy Spirit... every time.
- A good leader is a Christ follower... and has learned to lead by following others who follow God... at every opportunity.
- A good leader allows Holy Spirit-led instructions to govern his or her choices. This becomes the guiding principle practiced in every decision. A leader still has feelings, but does his or her best to submit them to what God says.

2. It's a challenge of conscience: This requires trying to serve without allowing any compromise in your service to God and His people. It's to be done with complete integrity. This will always be a challenge to honor this commitment in our hearts. "A good conscience," of integrity and honor must be the governing and deciding factor in our lives. It will show in our ministries. There is never room for compromising your conscience. It is the

window into your integrity. A compromised conscience will cause you to lose the battle and may likely take you out of the fight! It will rob your heart of the conviction and willingness to fight for what's right. You will be tempted to deny your call from God. Ministry without a conscience that's submitted to the Holy Spirit has actually submitted itself to the devil.

A good conscience is satisfied when you do what you know is pleasing to God. It will also please you because you know your choices fulfill your obedience to do what God mandated or charged you to do. It keeps your heart clean. Doing what's right, according to your conscience, leaves no room for self-condemnation. You have acted according to the Holy Spirit's direction. Then, you will experience the joy and satisfaction that you're doing what's right.

**It's always right to do what's right, to honor God's direction, regardless of any external pressures.
It's never right to do what's wrong. Your conscience will let you know, even when you do not feel like accepting what it's telling you.**

Here are two additional ways of understanding “good” warfare and a “good” conscience:

[1] “Good” warfare may be defined as “taking righteous action for God against demonic principalities and powers.” It makes you a winner and champion for Jesus, because you did it His way.”

[2] A “good” conscience may be defined as “knowing that whatever you do or say would not change if Jesus was standing next to you, watching or listening to what you said or did. It's knowing that what you allow in your heart will always be pleasing to God.”

“Good” warfare and a “good” conscience will give you the assurance your decisions are the best you can do concerning how you conduct yourself and your ministry. Do your best. God will do the rest.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

*“These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; {15} but if I am delayed, I write so **that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.**”*

1 Timothy 4:1-2, 6-7

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, {2} speaking

*lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron... {6} If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, **nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.** {7} But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness."*

Many people you encounter in ministry will be vulnerable to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. These spirits will attempt to deceive them into losing their faith in the resurrection. They will try to convince others that Jesus died, was buried, but never rose again the third day.

- This is the worst apostasy there is! It tries to destroy the truth and dependability of the Bible. It attempts to invalidate God's saving grace and kill a Christian's belief in Christ. (You are called to deliver and defend the Gospel! It's God's mandate to you!)
- Deceivers may be intentional or not, but the devil is always intentional in his commitment to kill, steal and destroy. Through people, he will try to take the truth out of the Gospel and substitute lies. (Again, you are called to deliver and defend the Gospel! It's God's mandate to you!)
- Deceivers will try to convince people there is no God, or that there are many other gods, and many other ways to heaven. They will do their best to drive people to eternal hell. (Once more: It's deadly warfare and you are called to deliver and defend the Gospel! It's God's mandate to you!)
- If deceivers cannot destroy someone's faith, they will do their best to trap or keep them in some personal hell on earth.

The best definition of ministry is simply "influence." Have you thought about the implications of what your ministry will be known for and how it will ground people in the truth, so they're not vulnerable to these kinds of attacks?

- If you were to create a ministry plan, designed to strengthen yourself and those you lead, what would it look like?
- What would be the first and then the most important steps in it?
- What would give it a significant impact on others?
- Would your choices have everything to do with faith and conscience? This may take some serious thinking in which you consider what your call from God really means to you, and what your priorities, looking inward will be.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ,"

Philippians 3:17

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.”

Second Mandate or Charge from God: “Do Not Neglect the Gift.”

1 Timothy 4:11-15

*“These things command and teach. {12} Let no one despise your youth, but **be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.** {13} Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. {14} **“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. {15} Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.”***

Paul commanded Timothy to be an uncompromising example of Christian leadership: (*“in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”*). Let’s look at each of these and see what the challenges to us might be... and remember, they are easily ignored or neglected. The Bible says we are to give ourselves entirely to them. Before we unpack what we’re to be examples of, so as not to neglect these gifts and therefore, our call from God, here’s a definition of the verb “neglect” from Merriam Webster’s Dictionary:

“To give little attention or respect to [something]; to leave undone or unattended to especially through carelessness.”

Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance agrees with this definition of “neglect” and unpacks it with additional meaning - “to be careless, not to care, making light of it.”¹

Be an example in word:

Words, and especially for a minister of the Gospel, carry only two messages:

[1] I don’t really care if I hurt you by what I say or don’t say... or

[2] I care so much; I will honor God and you with my words. That’s what the love of God is all about. It’s easy to minister without love and leave people empty who should have been filled. That would be the devil’s call, never God’s.

Be an example in conduct: Have you ever watched a leader in a church do something that says these things:

[1] I don’t really care about who I hurt. I just want to look good. I don’t really care about who I help, if I’m able to put on a good show... or

[2] I always consider what God thinks about what I’m going to do or not do.

¹ Strong’s Number G272 - “ameleo.”

I have a young friend with a strong call on his life for ministry tell me his dream is to help others realize their dreams. (I don't know what could motivate God to respond any better than that!) Every call from God carries this implication.

Be an example in love: Have you ever asked God to help you have a softer more loving heart, especially toward those you really don't care for or care about? Do you know how God always responds to this prayer? He says, *"Ahhhh, that's a prayer I wanted to hear. I can help you with that. Now you are on the path to a fruitful, satisfying call to ministry."*

Be an example in spirit: Have you ever felt like rejecting what you know God is calling you to? How much do you want to be more like Jesus, to be more pleasing to Jesus, and to love Him more? Having a sacrificial, fruit bearing attitude will lead to your doing what changes somebody's life for the better.

We are filled with the Holy Spirit so we can operate in ministry and life fully connected to Him. **This requires us to crucify our flesh daily. How's that for an invitation?** (Luke 9:23) Yes, it can be painful, but God is always there and will remind us to trust Him. Though there will be challenges, they will help you to be transformed and changed into all God called you to be. Ultimately, when you look back, you'll be thankful for the experience.

Be an example in faith: This is not about being perfect or some kind of faith super person. It's about believing God and behaving accordingly. It really goes beyond your expectations and you learn to never measure your faith by the outcomes. It's really about just trusting God, ... especially when things don't come out the way you hoped for, prayed about or wanted.

The call to ministry requires perseverance in the face of obstacles. Look inside yourself and you'll find the will to press forward through any barrier to your ministry. When you're discouraged or even fearful, the answer is always to press into God and allow Him to take you through to your victory. Ministry is always a challenge... but what makes it so worthwhile is that God is always God and He's always with us. In Him, you can do all things and be more than a conqueror... and especially over your own thoughts and attitudes. (That's something to think about. Our own thoughts and attitudes can be the most effective weapons the devil deploys against our successes in ministry.

Be an example in purity: This cannot be successfully manufactured or maintained from human feelings or flesh. It has to come from a heartfelt, Spirit-led lifestyle. It's a matter of accountability, both to God and to ourselves. God keeps it simple. He says, *"Be Holy for I am Holy."* (1 Peter 1:15-16) To be holy is to imitate Christ and follow His Word. It will not return to Him void but will accomplish what He sends it to do! (Isaiah 55:11)

The public display of Timothy's gifts was to be "*evident to all.*" This is certainly as true for a minister today as it was in Paul and Timothy's time. How does this fit with a balanced life? We try to juggle our relationships with family, friends and ministry. However, they cannot be put into separate compartments. As you can see, everything is inseparably tied to personal integrity. Your word is the measure others will take of your commitment and integrity. There is no justification to accept anything different. If you do, it will become a stumbling block and your reputation will blow away like dust in the wind. You'll be left with the sorrow of having failed to honor God, or your call to serve Him and those He gives you. Ultimately, you will fail to honor yourself. Don't allow that to happen.

Neglect of personal integrity is neglect of your call and responsibility to represent Christ. It's a ministry killer!

Third Mandate or Charge from God: "Observe These Things."

We have looked into being an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Let's now look into how Paul specifically charges us to observe them. These charges become walls of safety, boundaries of grace and protective our ministries and honor intact.

1 Timothy 5:21-22

*"I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you **observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.** {22} Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; **keep yourself pure.**"*

In the original Greek language of the New Testament, the word for "*observe*" meant to "be on guard, to watch over, to preserve, keep" or "take care of."² Timothy was charged with being "on guard" so his leadership would be impartial toward all people. He was mandated to be being equally fair to all those he would encounter in his ministry (and therefore, his life). The implications of this are great. Timothy's life would be on display for everyone he led to see.

You and I are to accept this scriptural mandate to practice impartiality in our ministries. There's never a call for prejudice in ministry or life. This means it's time to wage spiritual warfare and drive out any demons of superiority, and hatred we may have allowed to infect our attitudes. If we call ourselves Christians, called to serve to the Most High and His people, we cannot be

² Strong's Number G5442.

selective in our attitudes toward others. Let God's Word define and drive your attitudes, words and actions. Integrity demands this.

Be cautious, careful and committed to the well being of those you will lead. It's your obligation to represent Christ and lead His people with righteous living. In 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul identified three common temptations that will challenge your integrity, and therefore effectiveness as a pastor or leader:

First - Hasty Actions: Is this a shortcut you take when you'd be better served by patiently thinking through the consequences? It's wise to never allow impulsive behaviors, or pressures of any kind to dictate your actions.

Second - Tolerance for Sin: The Song of Solomon 2:15 sings of *"little foxes"* that spoil things. They become open doors for sin to enter our lives and ministries. **Take inventory. Are you aware of any of these "little foxes"?**

Third - Tolerance for Impurity - Personal or Within Your Culture: It's easy to allow today's sociological/cultural environment to pollute our lives and therefore, our ministry activities. Have you accepted the world's way of doing anything that compromises your purity and weakens your effectiveness? Think about it.

Fourth Mandate or Charge from God: "Guard What Was Committed to Your Trust."

1 Timothy 6:20-21

"O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge- {21} by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen."

The same original Greek word for "observe" in 1 Timothy 5:21 ("to guard, keep or take care of") is used again in 1 Timothy 6:20. **This time, Paul is more intense and urgent when he charges Timothy to be watchful over what God called him to as a leader.** Instead of intending the word to only mean, "observe what was committed to your trust," **Paul used this word in its military or warfare meaning, which is "to guard."** There was dangerous spiritual warfare going on and Timothy needed to maintain a strong "guard" over those things Paul charged him with and to use the weapons of his warfare to do so. It required a response fully dependent on his personal commitment to his call.

Be assured that our minds can become strongholds of resistance to what God calls us to; and we will need to contend with every thought and temptation.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. {4} For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, {5} casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, {6} and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Like Timothy, you must “guard” those things that make you an effective Christian leader and minister of the Gospel. Fight against the intrusion of feelings to be a people-pleaser instead of being a God-pleaser. This will try its best to convince you to passively permit sin or neglect that would change people from winners to losers. Above all, guard your call and sense of personal integrity. From it springs the power and ability to guard everything else.

Four Critical Questions for Leaders

Paul had firsthand experience at navigating troubled waters in order to serve Christ. Nothing stopped him. He refused to be denied. Paul’s words and his witness throughout his ministry were clear. He never surrendered them to Satan. We are called to the same attitude and determination. It’s the foundation for what Paul often described as his “bondservice.” If you’re to place the appropriate value on being a winner for Christ who finishes your race, you must refuse to be denied a winning attitude! (If you can be denied, you will be denied.) It’s this simple - With God, there’s more power available than all the demons in hell could ever have. Don’t go through your day without God.

[1] What character strength do you have that will make you determined to finish your race as a minister? Why does this make you dangerous to the devil?

[2] What character weakness should you be most aware of that could tempt you to walk away from a pure conscience, and even walk away from God?

[3] What specific changes in your daily routine could strengthen your resolve to be a person of no compromise, who is an example to others?

[4] What are you most vulnerable to when it comes to losing your integrity by moving past the biblically mandated borders of your life?

END OF LESSON ONE