

Joshua S. Kim

SF 703 Spiritual Formation Capstone

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### **Philosophy of Ministry**

I believe that a philosophy of ministry is crucial to have as it provides a clear focus on what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and how it can be accomplished through our efforts as believers combined with the power of the Holy Spirit. Dr. J. Robert Clinton had stated that a “Ministry philosophy refers to ideas, values, and principles that a leader uses as a guideline for decision making, for exercising influence, or for evaluating his ministry.”<sup>1</sup> This signifies that a philosophy of ministry is not only advantageous for the spiritual leader’s growth but also can be beneficial for the entire church as well as neighboring communities. Nevertheless, if a spiritual leader has an ambiguous ministry philosophy, “Either they do not learn the lesson or they fail to identify this lesson and integrate them into a system that can undergird future ministry decision making.”<sup>2</sup>

It is also interesting to note that a philosophy of ministry starts off as simplistic and can be more adapted to a specific ministry circumstance or context.<sup>3</sup> However, as time goes on and the spiritual leader gains more experience and biblical insight, “the philosophy will include general, umbrella-like guidelines, as well as specific guidelines.”<sup>4</sup> This can interrelate to “the evolutionary pattern” of a philosophy of ministry in accordance to the Dr. J. Robert Clinton.<sup>5</sup> The author explains that there are three stages, the first stage is what he calls an “osmosis.” This is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado: NavPress, 2012), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

where “leaders learn implicit philosophy experientially.”<sup>6</sup> The second stage is self-explanatory by its name which is called “baby steps.” This entails that “leaders discover explicit philosophy through experience and reflection.”<sup>7</sup> The third and final stage is when leaders formulate their most optimal philosophy of ministry through time, effort, experience, and spiritual maturity.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, spiritual leaders will gradually learn which of their skills to apply to a given situation and which biblical principle is applicable to a situation and which principles are not applicable. In more direct terms, the spiritual leader will become more flexible and make more decisive decisions using their intuition and judgment using a solid biblical foundation. Having such a strong biblical and theological foundation is important because even though “Lessons learned in life situations become underlying assumptions that guide leaders,” which become integrated into their philosophy of ministry, it is not sufficient in and of itself.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, my theological foundation is servant leadership. This is because I want to model my philosophy of ministry by the actions and behavior of Jesus Christ himself. As Dr. J. Robert Clinton asserts concerning spiritual leaders, “They learn from Scripture. They are pressed by their situations to see new truth in the Scriptures and in the situations themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Luke 22:26, Jesus states, ‘Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules should be like the one who serves.’<sup>11</sup> Therefore, one can discern that it is relatively easy for a leader to become conceited with his or her power and abuse his or her authority. Therefore, a consistent practice of humility in terms of servant leadership would minimize such a possibility by strengthening the individual’s spiritual faith and expelling any necessary pride which would hinder the work of the Church of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 22:26, NIV.

**Statement of faith**

I believe in the One True God who created the heavens, sea, and the earth as well as the universe. (Nehemiah 9:6, Genesis 1:1, Romans 1:20, 1 Timothy 2:5). I hold the conviction that the Lord reveals himself to all living things he created through the means of general revelation and reveals himself through special revelation to devout believers who believe in Jesus Christ and the inerrant biblical Scriptures. (Romans 1:19, Psalm 19: 1-4, John 1:14, 2 Timothy 3:16). I strongly believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent as he is not bound by human constraints. (Matthew 1:23, Psalm 147:5, Genesis 18:14). The Lord is one Godhead with three persons who are distinct which are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 2:9). I believe that Christ was fully man and fully divine who was born out of the womb of the Virgin Mary. (Matthew 1:25, Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus Christ had died for the sins of all of mankind and rose again from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3, John 11:25-26, 1 Corinthians 6:14). The Lord had created Adam and Eve out of the earth and to dust they shall return because of their sins which caused the fall of man and tainted their descendants. (Genesis 3:16-19, 2 Corinthians 11:3). I hold the conviction that eternal salvation is not something to be earned through one's merits but through the Lord's grace and our faith in Him. (John 5:24, John 6:47, 1 John 5:4). Finally, I believe that the Lord will come back as a roaring lion instead of a sacrificial lamb to bring harsh judgment upon the wicked and save the righteous. (Ecclesiastes 12:14, Acts 17:31).

**Five Core Values**

The five core values that shape my vision are faith with works, magnanimity, prayer, meditation upon scripture, and simplicity. In pertinence to the first core ministry value which is being active in the world, James 2:14 states, 'What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says

he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?’<sup>12</sup> This signifies that our words as Christians should carry more weight than empty words. The only way to add meaning to our words of good will in Christ is to exemplify them. A good example of this contradiction between the words and actions of a believer in Christ is James 2:15-16. It states, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’” “but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”<sup>13</sup> This is very important to provide the physical needs of a potential believer first before a believer tells him or her about the gospel. Rather than imposing the Christian faith by only permitting them to get free food after listening to a sermon, we need to exemplify the love of Christ to nonbelievers who are suffering due to their impoverished lifestyle. Matthew 25:35 asserts, ‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...’<sup>14</sup>

And it is not only poverty, but serving our community as well. Whether the job entails painting classroom walls in a school, raking leaves, shoveling snow for our elderly neighbors, or evangelizing prison inmates, we must be the salt of the earth. As Matthew 5:13-16 states, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and be trampled underfoot.”<sup>15</sup> In more direct terms, as believers in Christ, and especially as spiritual leaders, we must continue to be humble, caring, and loving to others, especially those who are nonbelievers to show the world our proactiveness regardless of whether they believe in the Christian faith or not.

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<sup>12</sup> James 2:14, NIV.

<sup>13</sup> James 2:15-16, NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 25:35, NIV.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:13-16, NIV.

My second core ministry value is being magnanimous because this is how Christ was in biblical antiquity and how he expects his believers to be. He had never once defended himself out of insecurity in the Bible when he was in confrontation with the Pharisees because he knew he was loved by the Father. We also as believers should not be defensive and should learn how to separate the messenger from the message. This signifies that some of the beneficial feedback we can receive is from individuals who we do not like or get along with. This is certainly not in the case of Christ with the Pharisees, but as we are not perfect like Jesus, this is certainly the case with us. This is because those individuals are very direct and do not try to cushion their words or lie to make us feel better. Instead of attacking our criticizer back, we must be generous with our love and patience regarding our attitude, behavior, and words to them, especially if some of us are pastors in a Christian church. Rather than hating the person, we should love them unconditionally, whether they hate us or love us back in return. Being magnanimous also entails being forgiving. We as Christians should also be forgiving just like how Christ was forgiving towards us. Matthew 6:14-15 states, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others of their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."<sup>16</sup>

When Christ was being crucified on the cross and was slowly dying, his transgressors had mocked him because they did not believe that He was the Son of God. They urged him to call down his angels to save him as proof of his divinity to them. Little did they know that He could have called legions of angels to rescue him from his pain and suffering, but he did not because he wanted to save humanity by taking all of their sins on himself as a sacrificial lamb. He wanted to forgive humanity from the sin of Adam and Eve and become the bridge between his Father and mankind. He wanted to forgive the world, and that included his enemies. In Luke 23:34, Jesus

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:14-15, NIV.

said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’<sup>17</sup> I know that in my ministry there will be rude individuals who are Christians who can possibly plot against me or insult me, however in that case, I need to show them my magnanimity instead of striving toward retaliation by forgiving them unconditionally. This entails forgiving my transgressor regardless of whether they apologized to me or not.

Another aspect of magnanimity is courage. As was mentioned previously, Christ had come down to earth as a sacrificial lamb. However, He will come like a lion on the day of judgment, unlike when he was a sacrificial lamb in which he had suffered for our sins on the cross. He had to perish like other criminals to cleanse all of our sins with his precious blood. It took Christ a lot of courage to give himself up to be crucified, knowing that the physical pain would be tortuous and that his death be made slow and cruel. It took Christ a lot of courage to not give up and not call upon his twelve legions of angels to come and rescue him during the six hours of his crucifixion. But he knew that if he did that, humanity would be forever damned into hell. It took Christ a lot of courage to perish, not just physically, but also spiritually as well. This is because once he had taken all the sins of humanity upon himself, the Father had turned away from Him. For the first time in his life, Jesus could not feel his Father’s presence and thus experienced a spiritual death. This is why he cried out in around the sixth hour of his crucifixion, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ in Matthew 27:46.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, we must be courageous and keep on fighting the good fight as the Apostle Paul mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:7. We must wear the armor of faith so that we can face the enemy. In my ministry context, as an aspiring pastor, and as a current children’s pastor, I desire to have the courage to confront

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 23:34, NIV.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 27:46, NIV.

individuals in uncomfortable circumstances so that I can be direct instead of indirect when dealing with hostility or misunderstandings.

My third core ministry value is prayer. One can consider these spiritual disciplines to be one of the most important ones. Jesus had stated a good way to pray is by saying, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’<sup>19</sup> Prayer is important because it is the precious time of the day when we speak to the Lord and nurture our relationship with Him. It should be done as a daily routine. As Richard Foster asserts, “We must never wait until we feel like praying for others. Prayer is like any other work; we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working.”<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, it should not only be about our blessings and requests, but it focus more on receiving wisdom and spiritual empowerment from the Lord as well as blessings for other individuals. Rather than praying out of fear due to a precarious circumstance, we should pray out of faith and trust in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Meditation is pivotal for the Christian faith as well. This is because it is essentially “the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”<sup>21</sup> It is also wise to keep prayers simple and not too intricate. We should not confuse complexity with quality when it comes to prayer.<sup>22</sup> A long and complex prayer may sound exemplary, however, that is not the most optimal way of doing it.<sup>23</sup> In Matthew 6:5, Jesus states, ‘And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew 6:9-13, NIV.

<sup>20</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

their reward in full.’<sup>24</sup> This signifies that the Lord values prayer that is authentic and simplistic just like how children pray rather than prayer that is done to show off in front of an audience of listeners. We as the believers of Christ are the children of God. Thus, we must have a child like mindset in this regard concerning prayer. As a future associate pastor and senior pastor, I need to learn how to pray more effectively for others, as prayer would be the most frequently used spiritual discipline in the church. This is not to save my own reputation, as I know that God will take care of it if I am faithful, but to show other believers how to pray like Christ intended for us to pray.

My fourth ministry core value is meditation upon scripture. Richard Foster describes this as transforming “the inner personality. We cannot burn the eternal flame of the inner sanctuary and remain the same, for the Divine Fire will consume everything that is impure.”<sup>25</sup> This means that meditation if used correctly, can transform a person spiritually and cleanse his or her heart from their sin. It is intriguing to note that meditation has two parts of detachment and attachment. As Richard Foster asserts, “No, detachment is not enough; we must go on to attachment. The detachment from the confusion all around is in order to have a richer attachment to God. Christian meditation leads us to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely.”<sup>26</sup> One can say that “These two concepts of meditation are complete opposites. The one confines us to a totally human experience; the other catapults us into a divine-human encounter.”<sup>27</sup> In context of ministry, it is crucial to meditate upon Scripture because the number of pages read in a Bible do not mean anything if a believer is rushing to get his or her daily bible reading done and over with. Meditation slows down the pace and allows the reader to slowly but steadily process the

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:5, NIV.

<sup>25</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018), 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Word into his or her heart in order to strengthen their comprehension of it and apply it in their daily lives. “Meditation sends us into our ordinary world with greater perspective and balance.”<sup>28</sup>

My fifth and last core ministry value is simplicity. This is because a simplistic lifestyle where materialistic obsession is discouraged brings more spiritual potential into the believer’s life than a luxurious lifestyle. Things such as electronic game systems, the latest iPhone, or a plasma television are unnecessary for a Christian lifestyle in which God should be the center of the life of a believer in Christ. If we have too many luxurious household items and devices, we can lose track of the Lord in our lives and forget the primary purpose of our lives which is to bring glory to the One True God. This is especially crucial for spiritual leaders such as pastors to adhere to, as many people will look to him or her as a guiding example of how Christ should be. Therefore, as one of these pastors, I aim to simplify my life even further and have more quality time to spend with God.

### **Non-Negotiables**

My first non-negotiable is taking breaks whenever I feel overburdened with work. This is important because there needs to be a healthy balance of work and relaxation in order to be productive in the long run. For an example, if a minister is pushing himself without taking any days off for a month to several months, there will come a time where all of his pent-up stress and frustrations will explode onto someone. However, even before that, there can be emotional leakages where the spiritual leader can become impatient or easily irritated. Therefore, it is wise for one to know when to take a break and for one to know one’s reasonable limits. Although it is possible for a spiritual leader to ask for motivation and energy from the Lord, there is no guarantee that the Lord will grant this wish each time, as sometimes the answer to a prayer is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 22.

“no.” If a spiritual leader knows how to take breaks, then it will surely help him or her in the future in terms of their ministry and mission to bring God glory.

My second non-negotiable of my philosophy of ministry is giving credit to where it is due and honoring others. A good spiritual leader knows when to give attention to a particularly helpful believer or follower when that particular individual goes up and beyond with his or her task which had benefited the church. For an example, if an adult believer had been a teaching assistant to a children’s pastor for free as a voluntary service, the senior pastor needs to address this individual. This is accomplished by asking him or her to stand up to receive ovation and a present from the church as an appropriate reward for his or her diligent work. If a pastor does not know how to do this or refuses to do this, next time that believer will not volunteer any more or work as hard as before. Thus, the quality of the overall ministry drops as an inevitable result. A successful ministry not only entails spiritual discernment and skills but also social skills as well.

In finality, my third and final non-negotiable is servant leadership. This is because Christ had demonstrated servant leadership by cleaning the feet of his disciples, something a household servant would do. We as believers in Christ need to follow his example. The main obstacles to this are laziness and pride. The Church of Christ must be more engaged in the outside world not only in terms of evangelization but also by serving the community in order to exemplify servant leadership. We must not be too proud to deny requests to help clean restrooms or to clean the floors like a janitor, or to shovel manure in an agricultural context such as a farm or in a foreign nation. Thus, I believe servant leadership is a pivotal component to a good philosophy of ministry.

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