

Philosophy of Ministry

As I prepare myself as a spiritual leader, I have reflected on my own philosophy of ministry. At the core, I believe that all ministry needs to be rooted in intimacy with God, obedience to the Holy Spirit, and the desire to see people living freely in Christ. Since the beginning of humanity's existence, God has longed to have intimacy and relationship with people, and the heart of God has not changed.¹ Jesus incarnated in human flesh to destroy the barrier of sin separating God and humanity, and His life has served as a model to show people how to live aligned with God.² Jesus only did what the Father told Him to do, and this was strongly emphasized in His ministry.³ The need around him was always tremendous, but he was focused on the specific tasks and people that God led Him to. As humans, we truly do not have the authority, power, and influence to do the tasks that God sets before us.⁴ God wants to work through us so that He may be exalted and others may be able to encounter Him. The will of God is to set people free from their bondage, and bring them into the freedom, fullness, and joy of a relationship with Him.⁵ As a result, all of God's tasks are centered around leading people into freedom through Christ.

A large temptation in ministry is to assume God's will without confirming with Him. Reading the Bible can help draw general principles which Christians can base their ministry on, but the danger in this is that God isn't formulaic or predictable. We also have limited time, energy, and resources that we can devote to our ministry, and expending all the energy in areas

¹ Isaiah 65:24; Jeremiah 33:3; John 3:16

² John 1:14; Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Timothy 1:15-17

³ John 5:19; John 14:31

⁴ John 15:6

⁵ Galatians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 3:17

that God is not leading us into will lead to discouragement, burnout, and self-glorification. Since we can get nothing done with our own plans, we must ask God all the whos, whats, whens, wheres, and hows of ministry. This requires the intimacy to be able to hear God’s voice, *and* the obedience required to do what He says.

Another temptation in ministry is to misunderstand the true nature of Jesus’s ministry. Religiosity puffs up people’s self-perception of holiness and creates arrogance. Religious people look down on those who are struggling with sin, addiction, and brokenness. In the same way the Pharisees and religious leaders in Jesus’s time branded a group of people as “unclean”, many in the church are consciously and subconsciously looking down on those who are living in sin. This was not Jesus’s approach to ministry at all – he was the one who approached the most scorned people and met them where they were. This is a core part of my philosophy of ministry, to understand that no one is more holy before God and the most detested of people are the ones who God wants to approach.⁶ All those living in bondage are desperate for freedom, the type of freedom that can only be found in Christ.

Statement of Faith

All philosophies of ministry must be grounded in a theological faith statement. I believe that there is only one God who exists in the form of three Persons, known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁷ God has, is, and will always be omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.⁸ Before the universe existed, there was nothing except God. God decided to create the universe out of nothing, and He has created our world and humans in a state of purity.⁹ All of creation was good. God created angelic beings and human beings with the desire to co-rule over his creation with them. He gave angels authority over the heavenly/spiritual realms and He gave humans

⁶ Luke 4:18; Luke 5:32

⁷ John 10:30; Matthew 3:16-17

⁸ Luke 1:37; Psalm 139

⁹ Genesis 1:31

authority over the earth.¹⁰ The rebellion of humans and angels caused the world to plummet into a state of brokenness and shackled humanity with sin.¹¹ Sin fundamentally opposes God because God is holy and righteous and cannot tolerate sin.¹² Instead of forsaking humans and this world, God chose to come in the form of a human named Jesus in order to undo the curse of sin by sacrificing Himself on a cross.¹³ Our salvation comes not through our own work, but through our trust and faith in Jesus.¹⁴ Those who trust in God can have a relationship with Him and are empowered through the Holy Spirit in order to do God's work of setting the rest of humanity free. God will judge all humans on the Day of judgement at the end of this era, deciding the eternal fate for everyone.¹⁵

¹⁰ Genesis 1:28; Hebrews 1:14

¹¹ Genesis 3

¹² Isaiah 59:2

¹³ Philippians 2:8

¹⁴ Romans 10:9-10

¹⁵ Matthew 12:36

Core Ministry Values

Prayer – *Listening to the will of God and aligning mine with His.*

A central part of my ministry philosophy is intimacy with God and aligning myself with His spirit. This is not possible without prayer, or more specifically, listening prayer. I must be in a posture of stillness to be able to come openly before God and inquire about what He wishes to say to me. God's affirmations of love, worth, and love are always the first steps in securing my trust in Him. I need to know that God loves me, protects me, and has not forsaken me though I continue to struggle with sin. From this reservoir of love and security, I can then move into any area God guides me to. This leads to the second part, inquiring God's will. I have learned that God wants to be involved in all areas of my life, and thus I have surrendered my life to Him. Before any large decision, I always pray and wait on God for an answer. In big decisions like marriage, moving to New York, and pursuing a PhD, I have waited on the Lord for His leading. Even in little decisions, I am learning how to daily lean into what God may be saying to me. My ability to hear God isn't perfect and I make mistakes, but I am striving to grow in my intimacy and grow my discernment.

The third part of this is intercessory prayer. There are general prayers that I have been praying for a long time, such as the salvation of my family and friends, but I also believe that God wants to lead us in specific prayer directions. Instead of having all my intercessory prayers be driven by need, I also believe that the Lord will put prayer burdens on my heart. This is how He partners with us and aligns His spirit with ours. At times, I have felt a deep sense of concern for random people and I have taken it upon myself to pray until that burden is resolved. Sometimes I pray in tongues during this prayer, and most of the time I don't really know if the prayer has moved anything. However, I trust that God is the one leading me in this, and I will continue to intercede when prayers are placed in my heart.

Specific Calling – *There are many good things, what does God specifically want ME to do?*

When I first joined a church as member, it was 2016. Although I became a believer in the beginning of 2015, I could not freely join a church because my college was too close to my hometown. I did not get involved in church publicly at all, and I was secretly being disciplined by one pastor. When I moved to Boston 1.5 years later, I had so much pent-up energy for the church. I signed up for every ministry (that I could reasonably do) immediately when I joined my first church. I immediately became part of the “inner circle” at the church, and I convinced myself that I was faithfully living into what God wanted me to do. At the height of my involvement, I was the co-Children’s ministry leader, University ministry small group leader, prayer team leader, and part of the short-term missions team. On top of this, I was asked to consider becoming a deaconess for the church. In my personal life, I was dealing with a difficult master’s program and was preparing to cut myself off from my family. Even though I turned down the deaconess offer, I reached the lowest and deepest point of burnout in my life. Clearly I was being swayed by every need and assumed that it must be MY burden if I was able to do it. I could not tell the difference between what I could do and what I should do.

As with every hardship, I learned a valuable lesson from this chaos. A father figure in my life told me, “Esther, there are many good things to do in the world, but not every good thing is your responsibility. What is God ASKING you to do?” I was floored, and this dramatically shifted the way I viewed and approached ministry. I have learned how to say no to people, which was hard for me initially, because otherwise I would just be wrapped up again in things that God wasn’t asking me to do again. As time went on, I have taken bigger offers of commitment to the Lord and I try to discern if it is aligned with His will. I also have learned to be more secure in my identity and understand that my value is not in what I do, but who I am as a daughter of God.

This has prevented me from keeping busy just to make myself feel like my life has worth.

(Parable of talents)

Soul Care – *Clear up the baggage in my soul so that I hear and obey God.*

When I first became a believer, I thought that all of my past life was completely sanctified and made new, that I was free from everything. It didn't take long for me to realize I was far from it. My demonization, identity issues, life lies, and family trauma kept bubbling through my religious front and I felt the need to cover it with more religiosity. I started to doubt my salvation as things progressed – am I truly saved if I am still this much of a mess? The immediate problem was my demonization, and the heaviness of it finally led me to seek help. I was introduced to *Soul Care* by Rob Reimer, which completely changed my outlook on sanctification. Although Christ had made me new, I still had to deal with the repercussions of my past that left with so much baggage in my soul. The clean-up process took years, and each time I thought I had figured it all out, God peeled back another broken layer of my soul. Through this experience, I realize how damaging it was for me to doubt whether I was truly God's when I was struggling with my demonization. Church leaders have told me that I needed mental help and medications, because the darkness in my soul cannot co-exist with the light of Jesus. I have recovered from this horrible lie, but experience led to me develop another core value in my philosophy of ministry. We need to walk all believers through Soul Care, because all of our soul issues do not suddenly disappear when we receive Christ. We have been given a new Spirit in Christ, which can now enable us to work through our soul issues with God. Sanctification is a slow lifelong process and requires lifelong commitment, support, and guidance from pastors/shepherds.

Mercy – *Go to people before they come to me.*

In my experience of churches, passages about caring for the widows and sojourners¹⁶ are

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 5:3; Deuteronomy 10:17–18

faithfully preached on Sundays, but there is little to no evidence of this being lived out in the congregation. The church is often too busy scrambling to care for its own members and leaves little resources for external care ministries. Additionally, there is often an unhealthy outward obsession with holiness and purity, specifically when it comes to judging others. God only told us to keep our own souls free of sin and holy¹⁷, but this holiness primarily comes from the righteousness of Christ.¹⁸ Nothing we could do is ever enough to be holy before God, it only our faith in Christ which allows us to access His holiness.¹⁹ Even so, the church has become quick to point out others' sins, as if she has a right to judge others. Some groups of people have even become labeled as "enemies" of the church that need to be rejected and banned from the church. This very mentality has caused the church to ask people to implement moral changes in their lifestyle before being allowed to even enter a church. How backwards is this? This was not Jesus's approach to ministry at all, this was how the religious leaders of His time dealt with broken people. Jesus sought the very sinners that were scorned by the religious leaders and told them that He wants a relationship with them. In response to the opposition of religious leaders, Jesus told them that he has come to call the sinners to repentance, not the righteous²⁰. I believe that we are to love those Jesus loves, and that includes our modern-day tax-collectors.

This means that instead of asking people to clean themselves up before coming to church, we must *go to them in their broken messes*. Many of these people will not be believers, and that does not matter. Our only job is to help people come into the presence of God, for it is only through the Holy Spirit where people can be healed, delivered, and transformed. No human personal development plan will lead to freedom. We must meet people where they are rather than having them come to you, and we must love on them mightily.

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 2:21-26

¹⁸ Romans 1:17; 1 Corinthians 1:30

¹⁹ Titus 3:4-7

²⁰ Luke 5:31-32

Leadership Development – *When I think “I have arrived,” I have plateaued.*²¹

From Maxwell’s book *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, I have learned that leadership is much more than simply attaining a position.²² I admit that much of my experience with ministry leadership in the past was performance driven. Of course, I was going to make many mistakes because I was learning how to be a leader, but I was so ashamed of my mistakes. In fact, I learned that I had a deep-rooted fear of failure. I was worried that if I failed as a leader, I had no value to God’s kingdom. My thinking became so warped and I would believe that “God has wasted his gift of salvation on me if I can’t do this, He should have saved someone else.” As if God’s free gift of salvation was somehow limited! How ludicrous is it that I believe God would regret saving me if I stumbled? These realizations have showed me that I was really limiting myself as a leader. I always stayed in a comfort zone, where I was confident I would be able to complete the job well, and I never tried to accomplish a task that was too big for me. This is not the type of mentality which leads to growth, and I must remember that my failures are not what defines me. Most importantly, if I am truly walking in the Spirit then I will consistently face tasks that are too big for me! God wants to stretch us in our reliance and trust in Him and release us from the crutch of relying on only ourselves. When I am comfortable in where I am, I must remember to not “arrive” but keep letting the Spirit led me on.

Teaching/Discipleship – *Make disciples who can make disciples.*

Early in my faith, the pastor who disciplined me told me again and again, “Esther, I want you to be a disciple who one day makes your own disciples.” I didn’t quite understand the impact of his words until years later, when I realized that the amount of biblical discipleship that I received from him was far more intensive than what most believers receive. As followers of Christ, we need to know the Bible and be grounded in the truth as we navigate decisions in life.

²¹ Maxwell, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, 44.

²² Maxwell, *The 5 Levels of Leadership*, 51.

Otherwise, our minds and lives will be too consumed with the ways of the world, and they will eventually choke out our faith.²³ I also realized that even if people do end up studying their Bibles, they end up exalting the Bible itself. The Bible is the guide that allows us to connect to God, and it is only through the transformation of the Holy Spirit that we can deeply grow in our faith. God calls us to abide in the vine²⁴, because He knows that He is our most crucial lifeline. Too often, the church does not empower people to grow in their faith and this results in a group of immature believers who rely on a spiritual leader for their faith. Paul has the expectation for us to grow beyond our infancy and become mature, empowered believers²⁵. We should not simply be content that someone is attending church; we should empower them to keep moving towards Christ and eventually be able to lead others towards Him as well. This for all people, not just those who are in leadership positions. This is absolutely necessary when passing on faith to the next generation of believers.

Limitations – *I must know my human limits, and not be ashamed of them.*

In SF503, I learned about the importance of understanding your limitations. I am a limited person with limited resources, and the needs around me seem limitless. At times, I feel guilty for not having “enough” to be able to fix the issues around me. However, God never asked me to be a savior, because He is the only with who is “enough.” Our only task is to be obedient to what God is specifically asking us to do, therefore I should not be ashamed of all the things that I have no power or control over. To surrender to the will of God and trust Him when stepping out is enough. The outcome is up to Him. Understanding my limits allows me to develop a lifestyle balanced with rest (Sabbath), so that I do not burn out, feel defeated, and quit ministry.

²³ Matthew 13:22

²⁴ John 15:4

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:1-5

Perceived Strengths

One of the biggest problems of the church clergy is that burn out and scandals are leaving a deficit of spiritual leaders to care for the church. Having healthy understanding of limitations and a consistent intimate relationship with God is absolutely key to kindling a passion and integrity for ministry. Ministry is about guiding others to Christ, not to showcase ourselves. Leaders feel the temptation to make their ministry about themselves, but this does nothing to advance the Kingdom of God. A healthy, humble, and obedient soul will focus on building up and loving others so that they can also become empowered believers, and my philosophy of ministry focuses on this.

Perceived Weaknesses

Time management is likely the greatest weakness in my ministry philosophy. The perfect balance between tending to my relationship with God, tending to others, and resting is something that will take trial and error to finesse. Of course, different seasons of life will alter the time allotted between these three areas. This does not even include external responsibilities, such as my job, marriage, family responsibilities, and non-ministry friendships. My proposed values seem idealistic, but with experience I believe that I will learn how to do this with time.

Implications as a Leader

As a result of my philosophy of ministry, I don't want to be a leader that points others to myself. I will strive to focus on Christ and point others to him. I want to be a leader who is humble, walks alongside people in their messiness, and shows them that Christ want to reach them. I want to show others how they can be spiritually healthier as they walk with God, and I want that to be my own life testimony as well. I believe that a leader should not be afraid of mistakes and takes the time to develop other believers in their faith. Above all, I believe that our

mission is to bring the Gospel to those who are lost, and I will follow the Holy Spirit to whomever needs to hear of His love.

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