Samuel Song
Professor Wanda Walborn
SF703: Capstone
20 Mar 2023

Philosophy of Ministry

Theological Foundations of Ministry

In *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*, Robert Clinton explains that philosophy of ministry is a crucial aspect of a leader's approach to ministry. According to him, it encompasses "a leader's personal beliefs about God, their understanding of their role and purpose in ministry, their approach to disciple-making and mentoring, and their strategies for achieving ministry goals."[1] Through Clinton's definition, it became clear to me that developing my own philosophy of ministry is crucial in building upon leadership skills and effectively directing ministry in my context. By doing so, I can refer back to this essay throughout my time in ministry as a guide to stay on course, make decisions based, and regularly assess my effectiveness. Clearly, this will not only involve continued development of my philosophy of ministry, but also making revisions as I grow deeper in knowledge and wisdom of what ministry is not only in theory but in practice.

In order to first form my philosophy of ministry, I will begin by defining what a ministry is according to the Bible. As commonly known, the Greek word for ministry found in the New Testament is diakonia. Diakonia, used in the NT, means to serve others and it was used in wide array of contexts such as distributing food to the needy (Acts 6:1-4), caring for the widow (1 Timothy 5:3-10), and even closely related to preaching and teaching (Acts 6:4, Romans 12:7). Clearly, Jesus modeled diakonia throughout his entire life as he healed the physically ill (Mark

1 Clinton, J. Robert. *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats Library, 2015), 98.

2:1-12), fed the hungry (Matthew 14:13-21), washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-17), taught and preached about the kingdom of God (Luke 6:17-49), and, ultimately sacrificed himself on the cross for all of humankind (John 3:16). Finally, Jesus instructed his disciples, including us, to replicate his life through our own (Matthew 28:18-20). Drawing from the example of diakonia, Jesus' life, and the Great Commission, it is clear that our role as followers of Christ is to serve and care for others and invite them to a relationship with a loving God through sharing the good news. To do so, our ministry is to partner with God by replicating the life of Jesus through our own. In order for me to replicate the life of Jesus, however, requires for me to clearly know God, His intention for salvation, and what the life of Jesus means to us all.

Statement of Faith

I believe that there is only one true God and He created all things both seen and unseen (Genesis 1:1). Through all things created, the Bible, and the life of Jesus Christ, God revealed himself that all may know Him (Psalm 19:1-4. Hebrews 1:2-3, 2 Timothy 3:15-17). God, although one, exists in three persons as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are one in substance, power, and eternity (Matthew 28:19, John 14:16-17, 1 Peter 1:2). Furthermore, Jesus Christ, who was born through the virgin birth of Mary, was both fully divine and fully human (Luke 1:26-38, Hebrews 2:5-18). Through his life, Jesus demonstrated, preached, and taught about the kingdom of God that arrived through his death and resurrection; he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:4, Romans 8:34). Through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, all of humanity was tainted with sin and separated from God (Genesis 3). However, through our faith in Jesus, we are gifted God's salvation that is fully depended upon the grace of God, not our works (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 5:12-15). Our works can only represent our growth and maturity in sanctity and are not able to solve the issue of sin.

Finally, I believe that the day is approaching where God will administer justice to all of humanity on the day of judgment appointed by Him (Acts 17:31).

Core Ministry Values

In working through my philosophy of ministry, I have identified five fundamental values that I believe to be essential to my leadership. Those values are solitude (prayer), worship, humility, compassion, and collaboration. I will use the following section to explain the significance of these values to me and support using passages that underscore the importance of these values.

The first core value I will discuss is solitude and prayer. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." In this specific chapter, the psalmist is declaring that he will trust in the Lord through all times of trouble. It is an acknowledgement, not only of God's faithfulness, but also his sovereignty. In ministry, especially in Army chaplaincy, moments of hardships, difficulties, and disappointments are frequent as chaplains are given the opportunity to serve soldiers. Although soldiers are trained in both mind and body to be ready for war, no one can be fully prepared for what comes of it. Because of the gruesome nature of combat, many return home with emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical hurts that need to be processed. Furthermore, many face trouble not only overseas but within their own home. Soldiers in every Military Occupational Speciality (MOS) need support and the rising number of suicide in every branch is a clear indication.[2] It is to these individuals that the military chaplain is called to support and provide care. In such a tough environment, if I am not rooted in the truth, love, and grace of God daily, I will find myself in deep trouble.

2 Thomas Howard Suitt, "High Suicide Rates among United States Service Members and Veterans of the Post-9/11 Wars." Watson Institute, Brown University, June 21, 2021.

By turning to the Lord in solitude and prayer, I have the opportunity to find rest and recuperate as the psalmist in Psalm 46 did. Furthermore, I am able to reconcile disappointments of ministry because I get to meditate upon His faithfulness and recognize His sovereignty. Indeed, God is my refuge, my strength, and ever-present help in all times of trouble.[3] Through solitude, I acknowledge that ministry is simply participating in what God has already begun and will complete. Recognizing that it is not upon myself to solve the issues of humanity and to solve the issue of sin, I find hope. Because where I am unable, He is (2 Corinthians 12:9). Just as Jesus regularly retreated to solitude and prayer, I dare not think even for a second, that I can go without. As a chaplain in the US Army, my goal is to replicate, represent, and reproduce the work of Jesus to the soldiers. To do this, I believe the most important aspect is to always turn to God as Christ did and receive from the source of all strength and wisdom (Luke 5:16, John 5:19).

Alongside solitude, I believe worship is a vital part of a healthy ministry. In many ways, my thought and meaning of worship is to praise him with music in both the assembly of people and alone. As the psalmist declares in Psalm 149, worship is a way for us to not only acknowledge God as king, but to deepen our relationship with the Creator who brings joy, strength, and victory over our enemies. Through worship, I get to turn my attention from the worldly things and set my eyes upon the Lord. If I set my eyes on the worldly things instead, I am often blinded to the majesty of God. However, through worship, my relationship with God deepens and I begin to understand what it means to seek His face instead of His hands; a reflection of a genuine relationship.[4] Worship is a humble posture of recognizing that He is God. Often, especially when I am stressed and overwhelmed because of ministry and life in general, I remember to worship God with songs. The blessing and irony in doing so is this: in the act of

3 Psalm 46:1, NIV
4 Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: Seven Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. (Franklin, TN: Carpenters Son Publishing, 2016),

worshiping God with music, I am comforted in recognizing and experiencing the depth of His love and mercy.

Additionally, theology of worship goes beyond deploying music, songs, dances, and artistic expressions. As Paul stresses in Romans 12:1, worship is to offer our whole selves as a living sacrifice to the Lord. This means that worship is a posture of humbleness that is chosen daily. It is to offer ourselves fully to God and submit ourselves to His will. In doing so, I recognize that my life itself is a form of worship. Through living under His will and direction, I have the opportunity to honor God in all that I do, both in and out of ministry. Therefore, even if the task feels miniscule and small, I am urged to do it as to do it for the glory of the Lord. Through the life of worship, I realize that I live each day as the child of the King of the universe. As His child, I find purpose in living a life that is worthy of the King.

Ephesians 4:32 says, "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Through Ephesians, apostle Paul teaches that Christians are to take off their old self and put on the new self in Christ. Essentially, he is teaching the people of Ephesus to put away their sinful behaviors, attitudes, and even habits and, instead, to live a life that is pleasing to God. One specific topic he addresses is for Christians to display compassion for one another because that is what God did for us! The reason why Jesus' life, death, and resurrection stands as the central message of the good news is because God forgave us through him. Therefore, to reflect God is not only to love, but to forgive, "it is utterly absurd for us to hold someone in our debt in light of the remarkable forgiveness God has offered us… who are we to hold a grudge?"[5] Forgiving others and showing compassion is not only a core value, but what it means to be a follower of Christ.

5 Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: Seven Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. (Franklin, TN: Carpenters Son Publishing, 2016), page 83 of 160 according to Hoopladigital.com

Compassion and forgiveness is one of the seven principles in Dr. Rob Reimer's *Soul Care: 7 Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul.*" As already mentioned, Dr. Reimer addresses that Christians are to forgive because that is what God has done for us. God describes Himself to be compassionate and commands his people to do the same (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 103:8). Specifically, the Bible repeatedly speaks of showing compassion to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-11), to the foreigners (Leviticus 19:33-34), and the orphans and the widows (James 1:27). Furthermore, Jesus himself teaches in Matthew 25:31-46 that when we care for the marginalized, oppressed, and vulnerable members of society, we are in fact caring for him. Showing compassion and forgiving others is undeniably the way of God's Kingdom, and not doing so is a manifestation of darkness. Dr. Reimer states plainly that bitterness and unforgiveness "gives Satan a foothold in your life."[6] The enemy will use our choice to cause bitterness, anxiety, and shame which will torment our souls, "there is no other doorway that leads out of this prison–other than to forgive as you have been forgiven." As ministers, we must embody Christ by forgiving our enemies and care for those in need. This, as I learned, is diakonia.

My final core value of ministry is to do it in collaboration. I believe that collaboration in ministry is done in two-folds: with God and with others. As I have already established, to do ministry is to participate in what God has already begun through His ultimate plan of salvation. As Christ did, we are to reflect his life through our own by serving others, helping the needy, healing the sick, and preaching the arrival of God's Kingdom. To collaboratively work with God, it is crucial for us to know the will of God. It is essential that I study the Bible daily, work on growing in leadership, and invest time, energy, and money in learning to do ministry effectively.

6 Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: Seven Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. (Franklin, TN: Carpenters Son Publishing, 2016), page 39 of 160 according to Hoopladigital.com

That is the reason why I am in seminary. Finally, to collaborate with God means to understand that He is the head of the church. It is with this understanding that, as Jesus taught us, we pray for God's will to be done and not our own (Matthew 6:10). In doing so, we recognize that the ultimate goal of ministry in both our prayers and actions should be to align ourselves with God's will and purposes, rather than seeking our own selfish ambitions.

Ministry is also to be done collaboratively with others. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 compares the Church to a body. Each member has a unique and essential role, without even one, the church cannot stand. Without the collaborative effort of the church, we cannot stand to do what God calls us to do. Furthermore, Paul recognizes that each person has been gifted in different ways. This is not only in skills and abilities, but even in exercising spiritual gifts. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul writes that each member must wisely use their gifts and work together for the common goal. It is through collaborative work and recognizing and honoring the difference of each other that we can fully do God's work. Finally, the Bible teaches that we must sharpen one another (Proverbs 27:17), and to encourage one another in love as we gather together (Hebrews 10:24-25). Without each other, we cannot grow. Without each other, we cannot survive the heavy burden of ministry. Collaboration in ministry is a key value that must be followed for success.

Non-Negotiables of Ministry

Now that I have established what I believe to be the four core values of my philosophy of ministry, I will now discuss the non-negotiables. What I will discuss first is the importance of being gospel-centered. Far too often, I have seen members of my childhood church repeat the statement of faith weekly without understanding the weight of it. The statement of faith holds together the gospel truths that we believe in. To deviate from it means to add our own agendas to it. As ministry is participating in what God has already begun, it is crucial that we do it in His

ways. Growing up in the Korean diaspora church in Los Angeles, I have often seen members of the church emphasize the desire to uphold Korean culture and traditions over the Kingdom culture of God. Although I have seen many good things through my church being a cultural hub for Korean immigrants to find refuge, help, and community, being gospel-centered was often blurred. Arguments were often ensued between Korean-led versus English-led services and we struggled to meet the gap of cultural differences between first and second generation Korean Americans. Even now, it is no surprise or news to hear about Korean diaspora churches splitting due to cultural differences. Having seen and experienced this all my life, it is a non-negotiable for anyone to bring their own agenda or cultural biases to ministry. I believe that it is essential for ministers to stay gospel-centered. Even in uncomfortable and sticky situations, we must first learn to love, forgive, and care for others. That is the way of the gospel.

However, I also believe that culture is a significant part of our life and that the Bible affirms it as it reflects the diversity and creativity of God's creation. For example, apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 that we must choose to be all things to all people in order to win them to Christ. In fact, his ministry is clearly reflective of this as we see Paul share the gospel in Athens in Acts 17. He takes his time to study the culture and beliefs of the Athenians and uses it as the starting point to share the gospel message. Instead of rejecting and destroying culture, he is wise enough to redeem it for the Kingdom of God. Culture plays a significant role in all of mankind. I do not mean to reject it, but to not let it divert the message of the gospel. Instead, we should learn to wisely navigate through the uniqueness of each culture to affirm and display the gospel message in ways that can be understood by each person. Although affirming and working through culture is not the central message of the gospel, to reject it and ignore it altogether is another non-negotiables in ministry.

Another non-negotiables in ministry is commitment to integrity and rejecting secrecy. Although it was disturbing to hear about Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM)'s Ravi Zacharias committing sexual abuse and displaying predatory behaviors in 2020, it was not a shock. Throughout the history of Christianity and especially in the modern day ministry, news about shocking secrets of Christian leaders is nothing new. It is sad, but it is the direct result of lacking integrity and having a secret life. Dr. Rob Reimer writes in *Soul Care* regarding secrets, "Secrets are toxic to the wellbeing of the soul. If you are going to experience breakthroughs, then you must resolve to live confessional lives with no secrets."[7] He emphasizes multiple times that people cannot experience freedom with secrets. Therefore, as ministers, one must commit him/herself to living a life that is transparent and free of secrets. Without it, we cannot be free from giving grounds of our soul to the enemy. It is only through integrity and rejecting secrecy that we can live freely and fully experience the love and forgiveness of God.

Finally, I believe remaining teachable is a non-negotiable in ministry. In every area of our life, we must continue to strive to be more and more like Christ. This not only means that we will continue to grow in maturity, but also that we will remain humble. The truth is, once we decide that we had enough and pridefully remain still, that is as far as God can take you. Abraham's father, Terah, died where he settled (Genesis 11:31-32). To be effective ministers, we must always learn to remain close to the Lord and quickly recognize and grow through life lessons. In rejecting to do so, we may just be rejecting God's will and direction in both ministry and life.

7 Reimer, Rob. *Soul Care: Seven Transformational Principles for a Healthy Soul*. (Franklin, TN: Carpenters Son Publishing, 2016), page 22 of 160 according to Hoopladigital.com

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