

WHAT DOES REAL MINISTRY LOOK LIKE? PART 1

Theology and ministry are two completely different terms that make up a perfect whole. Theology without ministry is nothing but worthless ideas and philosophy. And ministry without theology is like running a race with no clear finish line. It lacks real purpose because theology defines the parameters for proper ministry. So how do we get to proper ministry from the ivory towers of theology? Imagination. Imagination is the ability to see something without eyes. Like a painter that transfers his thoughts to the canvas via his imagination, so a minister transfers theology to ministry through the medium of *his* imagination. And as the physicist Albert Einstein once said, "*Imagination is more important than knowledge.*"



Ministry is not the concrete and rigid practice of theology in nice little boxes to be unwrapped at the appropriate moment. Instead, it is the use of the imagination that takes the text on the scroll and brings it to life in an individual's life. Like the inventor uses his imagination to create a product that will revolutionize a consumer's life, the minister uses *his* imagination to take the pages of Scripture and revolutionize a seeker's life.

While imagination is the tool that brings theology to life in the real world, it is a spirituality that brings ministry back to theology. All too often, ministry displaces theology, and theology is left to the theologians that sit in ivory towers, telling us what to believe and what the Bible says. Yet if the theologians don't practice their theology in real-time among the kingdom folk, their "**doctrine**" becomes nothing more than theory, or intellectual candy. Unfortunately, what we see today all over the Internet is Bible teachers who spend their time giving people what their itching ears want to hear. And while what they say may contain some truth, they neglect the higher truths, the practical truths that can be found in the fruit of the Spirit. This type of "**must have knowledge at all costs**" mentality can kill true spirituality and bring a strong separation between the secular and spiritual parts of our lives.

In contrast, true spirituality does not find a separation between the spiritual and the secular. Spirituality is found in every part of who we are and what we do. It is found in how we love and in how we handle conflict, our workplace, our home lives, and even our playtime. *Spirituality is the net result of "what I do" which defines "who I am."*

If theology uses imagination to bring us to ministry and spirituality brings ministry back to theology, then it is a commitment that becomes the central hub of the circle. And that commitment is to view these ideas through the eyes of Christ so as to allow us to view situations and people through the correct theological lens. The only way to do that is to climb down out of the ivory towers of theology and participate in the struggles of the townspeople. Only in this way can the powerful message of the scriptures really hit their mark in the center of the heart and result in real-life transformation. True theology is meant to be practical. If it's not practical, it's not from God.

It is to this end that the Creator of the universe made the Word become real to His people by becoming flesh. By becoming what we are and experiencing the greatest pallet of pain imaginable, the "**theology**" of the Word that sat in the ivory towers of heaven became real "**ministry**." By participating in our struggles, suffering, and pain, His blood, sweat, and tears became the long-awaited water to the parched seed of life. That seed has now sprung into a fruit-producing orchard. And the primary emotion the Messiah experienced toward us humans is compassion. Compassion is the driving force of all ministry and should be the driving force behind every believer's life.

This concept has definitely been proven true in my own life. I had an international ministry reaching millions of people all over the world in over eight different languages. My life and ministry were focused intently on theology. I had no idea that I had actually become one of the pin-headed theologians I used to make fun of. I understood theology from virtually every angle. I had a passion and the imagination to turn it into ministry. My commitment was unquestioned. So where was my lack? What was I missing that would cause the Creator to allow a corrupt governmental system to imprison me when from every reasonable calculation I was accomplishing God's will on this earth? Compassion. Compassion was one of the missing pieces in my tool belt.

Teaching theology is not the goal of ministry or my life's calling. In my mind, if I could teach people the truth, it would set them free. It became a "**right versus wrong**" methodology, albeit

unconsciously so. But the Father's purpose of all ministry is not to teach us right or wrong as the first step, but to have compassion on us, which then allows us to hear His instructions with an open heart. Trying to prove to someone else that your "theology" is correct for the sake of having correct theology is nothing short of egoism, a base form of pride that motivates itself by staying in the superior position. This is not "ministry." True ministry starts with correct theology and using the compassionate motivation of Christ, our imagination is ignited to bring that theology into the practical world of every child of God.

This is one of the reasons why Yahweh brought me to prison. He's simply following the pattern He's used throughout the Bible and since. He brought me from my own "*ivory tower*" of a large, thriving ministry to the dungeons of a lowly prison so that I could participate in the struggles of those living in constant pain and suffering. In doing so I've learned to understand their suffering, which has automatically induced the power of compassion that was lying dormant until such a time as this. Living within the confines of prison allows an upper-middle-class white man to fully understand the historical impact and current damage that racism has created in America. It reveals a greater understanding of why people choose to enter the world of drugs, prostitution, and crime. It's shown me what real poverty looks like. Being among the oppressed, the outcasts of society, and the poor have, quite frankly, put me squarely within the framework of Yeshua's entire ministry, a ministry that was filled with compassion.

Without the motivation of compassion, a theologian, or any believer for that matter, becomes nothing but a polyester professor, feeding people the truth but not really understanding its full power in the life of the common man. With compassion, he becomes water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, and a salve to those weakened by pain. In short, he becomes the image of Christ, his perfect representative on earth.

Compassion is the fuel to real ministry. Yeshua didn't heal the sick because He wanted to demonstrate the power of His theology, but because "He had compassion on...[them]" (Mark 5:19). He actually felt their pain and desired to see them made whole. His starting point wasn't the salvation of a soul but the salvation of a human being with real needs. He didn't see only a lost soul but a real hurting person that He could help. Take a look at just a few of the scriptures that catalog this compassion:

Matthew 9:36 *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*

Matthew 14:14 *And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.*

Matthew 15:32 *Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way."*

Matthew 18:27 *Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

Matthew 20:34 *So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

Mark 1:41 *Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him...*

I used to proclaim from my white, middle-class, suburbanite podium that God is going to judge us for everything we do, think, and say. I had little feeling or concern for those who are outcasts and prisoners of society. After all, I thought, they did it to themselves, right? I have since learned that ***mercy triumphs over judgment***. These are the very types of people Yeshua spent His time ministering to! While most of us care little for those who are poor, sick, weak or have made great mistakes that have cost them everything, Yeshua chose not to judge them. He chose to have compassion for them. Real spirituality and real ministry are making people whole. It's extending the compassion of Christ to a lost and dying world, even to your enemy. It's being the first-century Yeshua in a twenty-first-century world. I contend that we need to change the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) to **WDYD** (What DID Yeshua Do?). *And He had compassion.*

So let's put the things we've learned into practice. Let's love with no expectation of return. Yeshua's eyes are still filled with compassion, not judgment. And only those who see through His eyes will hear "Well done My good and faithful servant."

Love...It does the body good.

Shalom,

Jim Staley