

Philosophy of Ministry

Backpacking this weekend

-Nice to be in creation, away from most distractions

-computer

-phone

-tv

-Gave me time to think

Now, I'd already picked out my topic and had done a fair amount of preparation for it, but it was still nice to have some quiet time out in the middle of nowhere to reflect.

Lately I've been thinking about my philosophy of ministry.

Now, a philosophy of ministry isn't something the average church go-er usually thinks about. A philosophy of ministry is usually reserved for, well, those who are in ministry.

When I was in seminary, we talked about how to create a philosophy of ministry.

And when I was in ministry, I had a philosophy of ministry.

I don't remember it exactly.

Something along the lines of "create a safety net for kids".

The idea was that I wanted that to be the guiding principle for the things I did, and it was a sort of a defining point of the ministry for people to rally around if they wanted to be involved.

But as I've gotten older I've thought that a philosophy of ministry might not be a bad thing to have whether I'm "officially" in ministry or not.

Some day I might be a pastor again. Maybe I won't. But what doesn't change is the fact that the minute I walk out of this door I'm in the mission field, and every interaction I have with every person is an opportunity to do ministry.

But whether we're an official minister or not, we should be prepared for every chance we have to minister to someone. And for me, part of that is having an understanding of what I want to prioritize in how I treat people.

So I've been working on a philosophy of ministry, and I thought that this sermon would be a good chance to take it for a test drive and see how it feels, and how it holds up to scripture.

As of right now, my philosophy has three parts.

FIRST:

I believe in "come as you are" Christianity.

Both physically and spiritually.

-James 2:1-13:

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

I think this verse does indicate we should not judge by outward appearances, but I also think there's a message in there to be careful how we judge at all.

It's easy to sort people out by what we know about them, or think we know about them.

It's much harder to open our arms wide and accept anyone who comes to us.

It can be difficult for people to decide to come to church.

Too often I see people think that church isn't for them.

- intellectually dishonest
- waste of time
- bad previous experience

These people need Christ and the church just as much as those of us who have been going to church for decades.

As a Christian, church go-er, and church leader, I want to reduce the barriers that cause some people to avoid church.

I can't take all those barriers away.

They might not like our style.

They might not like us.

They might not be able to get past their own personal opinions, and it's hard to do much about that.

But I can at least do everything in my power to help them understand that God isn't waiting around for them to clean up their act before heaven is available to them.

He is just waiting for us to turn toward him so he can run towards us.

Everyone is worthwhile, and worth treating well.

-Psalm 139:13-14: For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

-Matthew 10:29-31: ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.^[a] ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Every person has value. Young, old, rich, poor. No matter what you look like, no matter what you're wearing, no matter where life has taken you.

Because we are all sinners anyways.

Romans 3:23: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But in Christ there is a perfect response to our sin...

-John 8:1-11:

¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

I doubt she was ready for that meeting. Coming before Christ probably wasn't on her mind when she was dragged into the temple courts. She didn't have time to "get her house in order", as it were.

But it didn't matter. Christ wasn't after her condemnation. Only her salvation.

Transition: come to God as you are, but don't stay that way.

SECOND:

I believe that Christianity should change how you view yourself and the world around you.

Transform of self: romans 12: 1-2: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We're supposed to be transformed. How? Fruit of the Spirit.

I was looking for the opposites to Fruit of the Spirit. I found counterfeits, which I think is more important since we can easily fool ourselves into thinking we're changed people.

Love:

- Joyfully serving another for their good, not to get something in return.
- Opposite: Fear leading to self-protection resulting in the harm of others.
- Counterfeit: Affection shown to others for selfish reasons. Attraction to others for how they make you feel. Helping others to feel good about yourself.

Joy:

- Delighting in the beauty of God and the salvation he gives us in Christ even in difficult times of loss, disappointment, and pain.
- Opposite: Despair and a lack of or fear of hope.
- Counterfeit: Excitement and happiness that exists only when things are good leading to mood swings. Happiness not in God but in what he brings.

Peace:

- Confident assurance that God is for us, that he is wise, and that he is in control rather than trust in ourselves.
- Opposite: Worry and anxiety.

- Counterfeit: Apathy; calm without concern (I'm guilty of this)

Patience:

- Suffering joyfully and not becoming angry at God when his timing doesn't match our own.
- Opposite: Bitterness, resentment, and anger.
- Counterfeit: Self-righteous cynicism that pretends concern is unspiritual.

Kindness:

- Sincere vulnerability that involves empathy, compassion, and help.
- Opposite: The inability to rejoice in the good happening to others.
- Counterfeit: Helping others because of what it will gain you.

Goodness:

- Honesty, openness, and consistency in all contexts of life.
- Opposite: Hypocrisy, phoniness, and insincerity.
- Counterfeit: Being honest in an insensitive way without love. Insincerity that pretends to be sincere.

Faithfulness:

- Loyalty, reliability, and courage based on convictions and not on practical benefit leading to loving confrontation when it is right.
- Opposite: Living without commitment
- Counterfeit: Being 'loving' without any concern for truth. Being loyal out of self-righteous pride leading to an unwillingness to address wrongs.

Gentleness:

- Not thinking of yourself highly so that you are sensitive to the needs of others.
- Opposite: Thinking you are superior leading to self-absorption and self-promotion that crushes others.
- Counterfeit: Insecurity that is self-absorbed so that words of self-deprecation are said so that others affirm us.

Self-control:

- Staying focused on the important things rather than what is urgent.
- Opposite: Impulsive living in the moment.
- Counterfeit: Leads to pride.

I find thinking of the counterfeits of the fruit of the spirit to be helpful. It's easy to identify the opposites in our life and avoid them. But I think identifying the counterfeits can be more useful, since those are the ones that might fool even ourselves.

And while change in ourselves is a wonderful thing, I think it's equally important that our view of the world around us changes.

Transform our worldview: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I like the idea of 'fixing our eyes on what is unseen'. I think that's a perfect description for how we should see the world as Christians.

We should be focusing on that things around us that others might be missing. People and places in need of prayer, or a helping hand, or a kind word.

Sometimes those places are obvious, but all too often they aren't.

****story****

Nudged to bring coffee to people holding tax signs.

THIRD:

I believe Christianity is about moving forward, not dwelling in the past.

We also know that according to 2 Tim 3:16, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Clearly God does not intent for us to stay the same once we come to know him. We need to be taught, corrected, trained, and equipped. In other words, we need to become more than we were when we first came to know Christ.

But that's hard to do when we're stuck with something in our past holding us back, especially if it's the way someone sees us.

Girl who got pregnant in high school.

Guy who got into a fight in high school.

Both had to live with the consequences of their actions.

And as highschoolers, we always saw them in a certain way after their actions.

Their reputations preceeded them.

But thankfully that's not the way God sees us.

2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

We are intended to become new creatures in Christ and to continue to grow in him. We can't do that if we are held back by our past.

Unfortunately, sometimes that's the way we see others. We can't move beyond who they might have been in the past.

Story:

My very first tech job was working on email.

After a while I wanted to do something else, but I was afraid that I would always be "the email guy".

Had to move on to break out of being seen like that.

Even if I'd stayed and moved on I was afraid I would always be "the email guy". I'd have to come in to fix email problems, or worse, maybe wouldn't be taken seriously in another role because someone might assume I should be doing email.

Conc.

Our faith is a relationship with God through Christ.

That relationship allows us to be like Christ through the Holy Spirit.

And that relationship should be reflected in our relationships with other people.

My philosophy of ministry is concentrated on how I interact with people in order to help them come to know Christ.

I'm deeply concerned about making sure that I don't treat them in a bad way that might cause them to think that God would treat them in the same way.

Unfortunately, I think a lot of non-Christians avoid church and avoid God because they've actually met some Christians, and they've often left a bad impression on them.

Sometimes, there's nothing we can do about that; the gospel will be offensive to some.

But even though the gospel might be offensive, I don't want to be. And I hope my philosophy of ministry reflects that.

Not everyone needs to write out a philosophy of ministry.

But I think it's important that we do think about our impact on other people, and how we are going to make a difference for Christ.