

How do we minister?

- 1 Peter 4:7-11
- We will be winding down our series on Church Foundations over the next few weeks. Though it has been a series about a topic, the church, it has been grounded in expositional teaching as we have looked at what the New Testament teaches are the foundational principles upon which the church is based and by which the church flourishes and accomplishes the purposes of God. Last week we looked at what the church should expect from its leaders, the elders. The elders are biblically qualified men whom God has raised up to shepherd the flock, to lead, feed, protect, and care for them. Today I would like to begin a look at what the church should expect from its members. I will talk about three responsibilities the members have to one another. And as someone who is an elder, but also just a member of the flock like everyone else, these three responsibilities belong to me as well. We are accountable to one another in three areas, which I have broadly labeled Ministry, Morals, and Money. Let's look today at our accountability for ministry. There are two things I mean by "ministry." Ministry of Presence, and Ministry of Spiritual Gifts.
- **We have a ministry of presence.** We looked at this several weeks ago when we examined eight signs of a healthy church as displayed by the church in Jerusalem in Acts 2. One of those eight signs was fellowship. Lots of it. They spent time together. Just like a bunch of sheep. Day by day and week by week. What should that look like for us?
- It starts, of course, with our **worship on Sunday morning**. This is where we go hard after God, where we worship him as a body, with singing, with preaching, with giving, with testimonies, with fellowship, with the sacraments. There is no substitute for what we do together on Sunday mornings. People who understand this say things like, "Man, I missed the last two Sundays because of vacation, or a mission trip, and I feel like I have been gone for a month. I feel so disconnected. I could not wait to get back to Antioch on Sunday mornings." That's the response of someone who has a ministry of presence that he or she is cultivating. They know they need to be there on Sunday morning. They also know they need to be with the body on Wednesday night, or whenever the home group they are a part of is meeting. To borrow from John Piper, Sunday morning is when we go hard after God. Wednesday nights we go hard after each other. We go over the sermon from the Sunday before, but it is in a small group setting where we can look everybody in the room in the eye and ask how they are doing and we can pray for each one by name. You cannot do that on Sunday morning. Corporate worship on Sunday morning; body life on Wednesday night. Paul mentioned these two ministries of the church in Acts 20:20 when he said, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable...teaching you in public and from house to house." So, we have a ministry of presence with one another. That helps facilitate the next ministry we have with one another:
- **We have a ministry of spiritual gifts.** Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 12:1. *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.* Understanding spiritual gifts and using them will impact our ministry in the body of

Christ, our ministry to our wife or husband and to our children, and even our ministry to those outside the body.

- 1 Peter 4:7-11
- The context of Peter's brief mention of spiritual gifts is interesting. Peter writes, "the end of all things is at hand." If Peter believed that the end of the world would take place in his lifetime and that Jesus would return for his church, what did he instruct the church to be certain they were doing? (It is interesting what he does NOT tell them to be concerned with!) But he says, do this: Grow in character (be self-controlled and sober minded) for the sake of effective prayers. **But above all**, "keep loving one another fervently." What does that mean, Peter? Several things.
- **Love covers sins.** We will talk more about this next week, Lord willing, but all spiritual gifts are grounded in and controlled by love. And when we love one another enough to help them overcome sin, even and especially when they have sinned against us, that's a powerful gift of the Spirit. It should lead to forgiveness so that we can say, OK, we have dealt with that. I will not dwell on this incident. I will not bring it up again and use it against you. I will not talk to anyone else about this incident. I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship. (adapted from *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande) You are forgiven! Love forgives. Second, love serves. That's where spiritual gifts can be so powerful. Love is the fuel and spiritual gift is the vehicle that facilitates growth.
- **Spiritual gifts serve the body and grow it up!** Look at verse 10. Question and answer. Question #1: How many believers have a spiritual gift? EACH ONE. That means that every single person in here who is born again has a spiritual gift. Paul said, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7) None of this, "I was looking the other way when God handed out the gifts" jazz. No. In fact, YOU had nothing to do with it. Question #2. How did you get a spiritual gift? You RECEIVED it. It is a spiritual gift which means you received it from God. He gives. You and I receive. "God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." (1 Cor. 12:18) Just as He pleased. Question #3: What is the purpose of the gift you and I have received? "Use it to serve one another." Again, from Paul in 1 Cor. 12, the gift is given to each one "for the common good." In other words, the purpose of spiritual gifts is other-centered. God gives it to us so we can serve one another. I was reminded this week as I thought about this passage of what Paul said about marriage in 1 Cor. 7. He said the wife does not have authority over her own body; but her husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does. They serve each other by yielding their bodies to each other, and the marriage thrives and is blessed. It is that way with our spiritual gifts. You do not have authority over your gift; you have been given the gift so that you can use it for others. I remember this illustration from years ago. People were invited to a dinner party and all this delicious food was on the table. But when the guests sat down, they were each strapped with planks on their arms. The planks were several feet long and there was a fork attached at the end of each plank. The blessing was spoken, and the people were invited to begin eating. But there was no way to eat. They could not get the fork to their own mouths because of the planks. They were frustrated at first, but then one of them started laughing as she realized that though they could not feed themselves, they were each

uniquely “gifted” to feed the person across the table from them. What they had been given was not for themselves and if they tried to use it for themselves, they would not only frustrate themselves, but they would not be feeding someone else. Instead, they fed each other and had a lot of fun doing it. Question #4. How do I know what gift I have received? This is where we need to read the Bible, and pray, and even experiment a little. The fact is, there is a “varied grace” of God when it comes to spiritual gifts. Many-colored. Many variations. That’s one of the things that makes the church so exciting and so frustrating at the same time. Frustrating because everybody is not just like you and does not see things the way you see them. Exciting for that very same reason! That’s why Paul said, “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?” (1 Cor. 12:17-18) God arranged us so that we look just right together.

- That’s why some people come into a church and the first thing they see is a need for more organization and leadership when it comes to meals for people, baby showers, work days, and mission trips. Others come in and they want to get people together to teach them the Bible. Others say, “Let’s reach the lost!” Others say, what this church needs are more resources! Others say, “Somebody needs to come early on Sunday and make sure the chairs are set up where they need to be.” There are two broad categories of gifts. Look at verse 11.
- **Speaking and serving gifts.** There are gifts that are primarily exercised through speaking. There are gifts that are primarily exercised through serving. That’s not to say that the speakers don’t serve, and the servers don’t speak. The speakers love the body through teaching and preaching and exhorting. That is how they serve. The servers love the body through giving and through showing mercy and organizing, and, well, serving. That is how they speak! Serving includes so many things, from playing an instrument or singing with the worship team to cooking for the men’s breakfast or the women’s dinners, from taking home the tablecloths to wash them after a shared meal to keeping up with the finances and our giving as a church. It includes organizing prayer teams, or sending a meal or a note to someone who is out sick. And much more. We all serve, but some are particularly gifted. But notice the encouragement Peter gives to each group. If you are speaking, speak as one who has been given a word from God. If you are serving, serve as one who has been given strength that comes from God. Do you see? The source of each gift is God. If anyone is to boast about anything, it should not be about himself or his gift, but about God and His grace. His VARIED grace. When that happens, God is glorified. Peter breaks into a doxology here, a hymn of praise, as he thinks about the church working together as one body, serving each other with the gifts which God has supplied, because when that happens, God receives glory from His church.
- **Romans 12:3-8**
- I heard a teaching many years ago that helped me see spiritual gifts in a different way. Paul only mentions seven spiritual gifts in his letter to the church in Rome. Perhaps it is because they are the seven primary gifts of the Spirit (some say “motivational gifts”) and each believer is equipped with one of these.
- **Prophecy.** This is not so much foretelling as it is forth-telling. Prophets speak the truth. They are truth-givers. If they are not careful, and humble, that can mean they are NOT grace-givers.

- **Serving.** Servers serve. They don't mind being in the background; in fact, they prefer it. They make things happen so those who have something to say can say it.
- **Teaching.** This is the person who cares most about people knowing the Bible. Or anything else that they have learned.
- **Exhorting.** This is the discipler. He or she is mostly motivated by a desire to help people grow in their faith. The word is parakaleo, same word we saw last week, someone who comes alongside, like a Barnabus, to encourage spiritual growth.
- **Giving.** This is the one who is mostly motivated by a desire to see the work of God resourced. They give of their own resources, whether they are a little or a lot, and they help others see how they can give as well.
- **Leading.** This is sometimes translated organizer or administrator. The word simply means to stand before, to preside over. The implication is that this person takes responsibility for a task, or for a group of people.
- **Mercy.** This person is most motivated by helping others who are in distress or in need. They are the grace-givers, which can sometimes mean they are NOT truth-givers!
- Now it is interesting to ponder the idea many have suggested that Paul went on to give a word of encouragement (he probably was an exhorter, most of all) about each of these seven primary spiritual gifts in the seven verses that follow. **Read verses 9-15** Verse 9, then, would refer to prophecy: a prophet must love people without being a hypocrite. If you are going to speak truth to people, Mr. or Mrs. Prophet, make sure you are living the same truth yourself! Abhor evil, especially in your OWN life. Hold fast to what is good. Verse 10: Those who serve, make sure you do so because of love, because you prefer others. Otherwise, you can get all twisted up and become bitter when you serve, and no one serves you and few even say thank you! Verse 11: Those who teach, make sure you are not dry as dust, but teach with a fervent spirit. That will take hard work on your part. Verse 12: Those who exhort, you will need lots of patience in discipling sinners saved by grace. Be willing to suffer. Be steadfast and constant in prayer. Verse 13: Those who give, make sure you are giving to the needs of the saints (Paul wrote, "do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" – Gal. 6:10). Open your home as well as your purse. Verse 14: Those who lead, be ready to bless those who don't appreciate your leadership. Bless them. Don't curse them. Verse 15: Those who show mercy should rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.
- Two final words on spiritual gifts. **First word.** Can you see how, as we mature in the Lord Jesus, we should show more and more evidence that he is doing all of these things in and through us? Isn't that right? Jesus has all of the spiritual gifts, in perfect completeness and in perfect proportion. We are not to ever say, "Well, I don't do mercy. That's just not who I am." No, who I am is a son of God who is being conformed into his image. So, God will stretch me in all of these areas, though he uses my primary gift to direct how I minister the most. **Second word.** When the church is healthy, ministering to one another with the gifts which God supplies, then something beyond these four walls will happen with greater and greater impact. Remember the purpose of these gifts is that the body may be edified and the Father may be glorified. And he is working in us for the purpose of reaching the whole world with the Gospel. Megan Hill writes in *A Place to Belong*, "The church's disciple-making mission is an all-hands-on-deck congregational task with each member contributing to the work. The church powerfully

proclaims to the world the good news of Christ, and its members are coworkers.” So, what are we to do? Minister with our presence. Show up. Know our spiritual gifts. Use our gifts. And the church will *grow up!*

- Prayer
- Greet One Another