

Discipleship 101

a beginner's guide to Christianity

Chapter 24

Responding to the church with teamwork

Sometimes Christians assume that full-time pastors serve the Lord more than other members do. Although that may be true in some cases, it is not true in all cases. Paul tells us, “Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Whenever a Christian works in a bank, he or she does it for the glory of God. A Christian who teaches school does it to glorify God. A Christian who takes care of children at home glorifies God in changing diapers and scrubbing floors. They are all serving the Lord—full-time, perhaps 100 hours a week!

Every member lives to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15). Every member serves him as circumstances and abilities allow. Every member is a witness of Jesus Christ working in this world—and that includes secular occupations just as much as it does religious jobs. Jesus himself served God by working as a carpenter for many years. Even today, Christian carpenters serve God in the work they do.

Members have a mission

As we know, the church is not a building. It is not a social club or a self-benefit society. The church is the people of God. That means both ministers and lay members. Now, let's consider that the church has a mission to the world. The people of God have a mission to the world. Both ministers and members have a mission to the world.

Lay members have a prominent role in the church's mission—partly because there are many

more lay members than there are ordained ministers. Another reason for the importance of lay members is that lay members are more often “in the world.” Due to the nature of their job, ministers often interact mostly with people who are already Christians. It is the lay members who are mixing with non-Christians on a daily basis—on the job, in the neighborhoods, in hobbies and sports. They set examples of Christ-like life, hopefully a life that evidences hope and joy despite the troubles of this world. Non-Christians need that kind of example.

The church meets for worship and fellowship a few hours each week. What is the church doing most of the time, during the rest of the week? Much of our time is spent mixing with the world, in our jobs, in our neighborhoods, even in our families. Most of the time, the church is *dispersed*, setting an example in the world. This is part of our Christian calling, part of our mission, even part of our worship as we seek to glorify God in all that we do.

Our weekly worship services should fill us with the joy of salvation and strengthen and instruct us in living in Christ throughout the week. They remind us of what life is for. They also give us opportunity to come together into the presence of God and express thanks to him for what he has done in our lives the preceding week. They give us opportunity to join the angelic choir in praising him in collective song and prayer. They help us seek guidance from his Word regarding how we serve him in the coming week.

Likewise, our small group meetings give us opportunity to reflect on the Word of God and share

with one another the work God is doing in our lives, so that we might encourage one another, and pray for one another that our service might be all the more effective.

All members are ministers of Jesus Christ. We all serve him. Some serve him primarily in prayer, some in helping the poor, some in their family and neighborhood responsibilities, etc.—each according to our circumstances, each according to our abilities. Pastors serve him in pastoring his flock; members serve him in contributing to the spiritual health and unity of the flock, and we all serve him throughout the week in our ordinary activities, too.

When Christ said, take up your cross and follow me, he was not referring to pastors only! We cannot pay someone else to do our Christian service for us. Pastors are to lead, to teach, to equip members for service. But each of us must do our own duty, as we have been called and gifted by the Holy Spirit. All Christians follow Christ in denying the self and in serving others. The Lord served others, and service is not beneath the dignity of anyone who accepts Jesus' death as being payment for his or her sins. He served us, and calls on us to serve others, to do good to all.

The question is not *whether* we serve Christ throughout the week—it is *how* we serve him. Whether we want to or not, we represent Jesus Christ in the office, on the highway, in our homes. Are there other ways in which I could help my neighborhood? The new covenant emphasizes what we do throughout the week—this is where doctrine comes to life to illustrate the fact that we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. He is living in us, Paul says, and the effect he can have in our lives is limited only by the vitality of our faith in him.

Most of us are quite responsive to the will of our Lord. But many of us are not used to thinking of ourselves as ministers of Jesus Christ. Every member is ministering, being led by Christ to work and serve in the world. This fact magnifies the importance of what we do in the name of Jesus throughout the week—not just in the work we do, but also in our relationships with the people we work with.

The fact that our work is a ministry magnifies

the importance of community service. Works of service are of value in themselves, of course, but they are also opportunities to witness to what Christ is doing in our lives. Some people are better at sharing the gospel in words; some are better at sharing it through their work. And when Christians work together, they can often be even more effective than either one would be alone.

Mutual support

Throughout the week, members are at the “front line” of the church's work. We can support each other in prayer in this work. We need to be *aware* of how we are serving, and how others are serving, so that we might better encourage them. We can share our experiences and opportunities whenever we meet. Worship services can also strengthen and equip us for this work. Our success as a church is measured in large part by what we do *during the week*. When members are doing good in Jesus' name throughout the week, and when they are being energized and encouraged by what they do and hear at worship services and in their small group meetings, then the gospel is being spread.

When members realize that they are ministers of Jesus Christ, they have a realistic view of who they are, what they have been called for, and how to live. Their identity is in Christ. They come to worship services not only to give worship, but also to receive instruction that will help them serve even better during the week. Perhaps that also generates fewer complaints of “I'm not getting fed” and more thoughts of “How can I glorify God in my life?”

The pastor's job is to provide vision and leadership as he equips members for their ministries. For one thing, this means helping them connect to God, from whom all ministry should originate. This means inspiring, encouraging, comforting, exhorting and challenging. It includes preaching and administration, and it also includes training leaders for small groups and developing and mentoring leaders for other ministries.

The church, from the pulpit and in small groups, can provide moral support for the work that is being done, helping remind one another that our activities are serving Jesus Christ, and that he gives us the power and courage to carry out his will. In small

groups and other activities, the church also provides practical opportunities for skills to be developed and spiritual gifts to be discovered and ministries to be encouraged.

Pastors have a difficult job. How can members help their pastors? For one thing, pray for them. The pastors' job cannot be done without supernatural help. For another thing, ask pastors what to do to help. Be a volunteer—don't wait for an assignment. Third, help create an environment of love in the congregation. This will give "weak" members comfort and "space" while they work through some of their needs. Strong members need to assist in the ministry of reconciliation, of

soothing hurts within the body of Christ, of encouraging, comforting and edifying one another.

Fourth, many members have some pastoral skills. They can even help equip other members for works of ministry. They can invite other members to join them in their ministries during the week. They can mentor and set examples of service. In small groups and one-on-one, they can share their faith in Christ with other members, to strengthen their faith. They can pray for other members. In all these ways, members can assist the pastor.

Every member is a minister.

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