

Elisha 1 - An Invitation to Ministry

1. The "ministry" -

In many churches, there is often a certain mystique about ministry. This is not without reason because ministers are likely to have more spiritual training and experience than the average church member. The respect given to such ministers is very much appreciated. The word "elder" is used in the Bible to convey this. Peter addressed the elders/pastors/bishops in the Asian churches and talked about this important aspect of their ministry. The elders were to feed the flock of God, or pastor the believers, and take oversight, or take care of the church administration as bishops. As elders, they were to be a mature spiritual example to the flock.

1Pet 5:1-4 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Young ministers are supported by people who also extend that respect to them. Paul challenged Timothy to set that example so that no one would depreciate his ministry.

1Tim 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

I appreciated that support when I was

young and we will give that same support to the worthy candidate who comes on board to take the church into the future.

In many other churches, ministry is more commonly shared. The pastors are still highly respected. But the average church member is also comfortable referring to the ministry that he, himself, has. This is not out of order because ministry is a shared burden.

2Tim 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. **[Timothy was to commit the work of the ministry to faithful men]**

Phil 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. **[Epaphroditus was a minister, a companion in labor, and fellowsoldier]**

Rom 12:3-6 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

4For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

6Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith; **[Paul goes on to describe other gifts, but everyone was to recognize that with the exercise of their**

various spiritual gifts, they were *one* body.]

There are various ways someone might experience the call of God to ministry in the usual sense we think of ministers. It was certainly a strong way for me. The call of the apostle Paul, was far more dramatic. While he was on the road to Damascus in search of Christians to persecute, Jesus came to Paul, blinded him, and challenged him directly. Jesus then told Ananias that He had high plans for Paul.

Today, We are going to focus on *Elisha* as a minister because *his* entry into ministry was different. It was something that more people can, and should, identify with. Ministry is a reference to serving God in general. Paul expressed his gratitude to God for calling him into ministry in 1 Timothy.

1Tim 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

The word for ministry comes from the same word for being a deacon and merely means *servant*. He also used the word *doulos*, which is stronger, meaning a *slave* to describe the servant of God.

2Tim 2:24,25 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient,

25In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

Although we recognize the significance of some kind of anointing in the service of God, there are those who serve God in powerful ways that we would not think of in the same way as pastors, apostles, evangelists, or prophets. Nebuchadnezzar was named by God to serve Him by taking the Jews into captivity. Persian King Cyrus was

named before he was born to serve God by restoring Israel to the Promised land. Kings and princes were known as pastors and shepherds and regularly held accountable to God. The holy, the powerful, *and* the lowly have all been employed in ministry.

2. The call of the regular -

For our encouragement, Elisha was a regular kind of guy who served God. He *stepped* into ministry without a dramatic or sensational calling. Amos was a husbandman.

Amos 7:14-15 Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I *was* no prophet, neither *was* I a prophet's son; but I *was* an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit:

15And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

David was a shepherd. Peter and others were common Galilean fishermen. Matthew was a tax collector. Gideon was a farmer who thought of himself as the least in his father's house.

1Kgs 19:19-21 So he [Elijah] departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who *was* plowing *with* twelve yoke *of oxen* before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.

20And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?

21And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose,

and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

Elisha was evidently from a well established family as we see him plowing with his father's plow teams. He was handling one of twelve pairs of oxen. Even though he had a position of inheritance, he was no stranger to work. When Elijah called on him, he had not been preparing for ministry. He did have character because he honored his father and mother, paid his respects to them, and set off to join Elijah. He was his own man and demonstrated that by burning his bridges behind him. He burned his plow and made a feast out of his oxen. All of this was done without a heavenly vision, a call from heaven, a burning bush, or even a still small voice. Elijah cast his mantle over him, a sign of sharing his blessing and power, and Elisha effectively said, "Okay. Let me seal off my past and I will serve."

Growing into ministry and stepping into ministry by stepping up to a need are not uncommon ways to find oneself serving God, even into the pastorate at times. You don't have to wait for some sensational call of God in order to make a difference in ministry.

3. A regular kind of ministry -

Elisha's sense of industry in the regular affairs of life was consistent with a life of ministry. He exhibited a number of qualities that served him to step into ministry.

- He was no stranger to work.

We pointed out before that, even though he came from a position of wealth, he was no stranger to hard work. We have child labor laws today that were much needed when they were created. Without a proper sense of balance, people today make the mistake of over sympathizing with why such laws were needed. Certainly, there are ways in which we need to let children enjoy being children. However, without a proper sense of balance, they could miss the lessons learned from hard work.

We give babies pacifiers to quiet them down. Parents make the mistake of giving them video games as pacifiers to keep them quiet as they get older.

The book of Proverbs is filled with admonitions about slothfulness and poverty. It has been said that if you want something done, give it to a busy man. Someone who is busy is a person who knows how to work and is practiced at management.

- He had a strong sense of family and social order.

Elisha was responsible to his parents, but he could distinguish between his responsibilities to them and to God. He said a proper goodbye, but not like the man who told Jesus he wanted to wait and take leave of those who were at home.

Luke 9:61-62 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.
62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

This man might seem to be no different than Elisha, but notice that he is not taking leave of his father or mother. He is concerned about people, in general, at home in his house. Elisha put his hand to a new plough and burnt the old one behind him. He did not do this disrespectfully, but "kissed" his parents goodbye as he moved into a new field of ministry.

- He accepted mentorship of Elijah.

He recognized authority and his responsibility to the leadership of Elijah. When Elijah entered into the service of God, he did so under the mantle of Elijah. The mantle represented the power and spirit of Elijah that he had from God. He did not enter the ministry with a prideful arrogance exercising a lordship over anyone. He simply became the disciple of Elijah. Elijah knew that

Elisha was to take his place, but at this point Elisha merely said, "Yes, sir!"

This message actually can fit anyone whether they are a believer or not. Pharaoh was a not a believer and yet he was used to serve God. Because of his resistance to God, he served in a way that was not profitable to him. Yet, he was used by God. Paul was not a believer when God laid out his plans for him. One way or another, you will be used in the kingdom. The message for the unbeliever is to get saved so you can serve God joyfully and join Him in His kingdom. If you are ready to quit resisting God, your life can be filled with meaning, service, and the ultimate blessing of reward in heaven. It requires recognizing that you are responsible to God, admitting that you are a Sinner against God. Realizing that you are a Sinner, you understand that you deserve judgment in hell. Finally, receiving the good news that Jesus died for your sinfulness by asking him to forgive you and accept you. As believers, we are saved unto good works.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

One of the great failures of new and older believers is to avoid the responsibility of ministering. Elisha's example demonstrates how you don't have to wait for some sensational dramatic movement of God in your life to serve in ministry. As you are involved in His work, you will find that you are a minister in God's work for your life. It will only remain to be seen how God will promote you in His service.

1. The "ministry" - 1Pet 5:1-4, 1Tim 4:12, 2Tim 2:2, Phil 2:25, Rom 12:3-6, 1Tim 1:12, 2Tim 2:24,25
2. The call of the regular - Amos 7:14-15, 1Kgs 19:19-21
3. A regular kind of ministry - Luke 9:61-62, Eph 2:10