

***“Capabilities will get you into ministry; character will keep you there.
Your ministry will never exceed the level of your character.”***

As an intern preparing for the ministry, you have more than likely discovered that God is not only preparing you academically, but also refining your heart and character--lovingly leading and guiding you to be more like Him. We won't be able to effectively walk out the call that God has on our lives to lead others if we do not yield our full heart to Him.

As you start your internship and before your first meeting with your mentor, read the following article about a minister's heart. Highlight areas that you found important and meaningful. Pray and talk to God about them. Be courageous enough to ask if there are areas in your heart that you are not even aware that need His touch. At the end of the sections, there are reflection questions to self-assess your strengths and challenges that God has talked to you the power of the Holy Spirit to address.



The Heart of a Minister

Combined Certified and Licensed Internship

DEVELOPING THE RIGHT HEART - CERTIFIED

The Lord had sought for a man after his own heart (**I Samuel 13: 14**). Tall and talented, the ultimate picture of a leader, Saul stood out among his generation. This son of Benjamin seemed to possess all the abilities and charisma the fledgling nation would require in its first king. But Saul lacked one thing—the right heart.

With God, the focus is centered on the attitude of the heart. At the start of life in the ministry, individuals may already be aware of certain God-given gifts that they believe can be used for the benefit of the ministry. Indeed, God has invested gifts into each of His servants, but He has shown throughout the Scriptures that His eye is more intently turned toward the development of the heart.

While gifts and skills may set one apart or establish evidence of a call to ministry, it is the heart that will determine the lasting benefits one will bring to God's purposes. Having the right attitude of heart will ultimately be the deciding factor in how useful a minister can be in the kingdom of God. But what does the right heart look like, and how does someone develop such a heart? As we often discover, the standard of a right heart is different from God's perspective than from ours. The heart God seeks must possess a consistent bend toward righteousness and the desire to honor Him above all else.

AN HONORING HEART

The Essence

To honor is to defer to or give place to another. One of the fundamental realities a minister must establish is a place as God's servant – keeping the honor of God as the central focus. Honoring God is acknowledging His place as Lord and affirming His majesty, supremacy, and sovereignty. Simply put, as servants of God, they must always know for whom they labor.

There are many ways to demonstrate the honor that is due to God. First, there is worship. The act of worship is the effort to ascribe worth to the one adored. An honoring heart is a heart that rejoices in and recognizes the greatness of God. As such, the minister must cultivate a heart that worships God for who He is and for what He does.

In **Psalm 8**, David reflects upon the majesty of the almighty God and considers the meager state of man. He is humbled and amazed that this majestic, powerful God cares for his seemingly insignificant existence. This is the attitude of an honorable heart; it bows in humility as it sees the beauty and work of God, particularly in the hearts of men and women, boys and girls. We can never be worthy of even a little of what God provides. We find access into His presence, though we deserve only judgment. Yet, by His grace and mercy, we are welcomed and given a place of love and purpose. An honoring heart affirms that there is much for which to be in awe of God.

The Demonstration

Examples of the honoring heart fill the pages of Scripture, beginning with Enoch who stood out among his contemporaries because of his close fellowship with God. Enoch's desire to love and honor God is a good model for the minister today because this servant possessed all that God requires in a minister's heart. Another example is Abraham, who is often referred to as the Father of Faith. According to Paul's letter to the Romans, Abraham's faith was demonstrated in his actions – abandoning his home to pursue God's greater agenda for his life and future. Abraham's actions were his statement of honor to the Lord and ultimately brought him remarkable affirmation from God.

Perhaps the most powerful demonstration of a heart that honors God comes from the life of Isaiah. In **Isaiah 6**, the prophet finds himself in the midst of a vision of God's throne room. He is speechless before the majesty of God. In this overwhelming setting, Isaiah momentarily sees his true self and is horrified at his own weakness. He does not belong there, in this holy presence; God's supreme holiness has unveiled his failures, and the prophet collapses in self-loathing. But in that moment Isaiah receives a gift, for God touches something and makes it right within him – something that sets his heart and mind in harmony with the desire of God for His people.

The final scene is a renewed Isaiah eavesdropping on a heavenly conversation: "Whom shall I send?" (**Isaiah 6: 8**). The haunting query explodes in the prophet's ears. Strengthened only by grace, he responds willingly, recognizing a meaning for his life that will exceed all others. In a mere eight verses, a life is transformed and will never change from its new course.

Like Isaiah, ministers must have a clear sense of the superiority of the One they are serving. Jesus demonstrated this same heart as He willingly pursued the plan of His Father and submitted to Calvary.

The Necessity

Humans' greatest temptation is pride. In fact, no other condition of the heart separates people from the Creator more than pride. As you can imagine, this could be the ultimate snare for the minister. In the

shower of affirmations that a minister can receive because of his or her efforts in the ministry or simply by virtue of being the spiritual mentor for the lives the parishioners, the minister can come to see him- or herself through a dangerous, unhealthy lens. Paul and his companions watched in horror as those they had ministered to begin to worship them. Such results can come on the heels of any number of things that a minister may do by the power of God's Spirit.

Indeed, such circumstances provide a lure to the human heart. But the honoring heart guards itself against these moments. The minister who becomes the victim of self-pride ultimately seeks to be served and adored. God has established His unwillingness to share His glory; therefore, we can anticipate His correcting response to our pride. Thus, an honoring heart is essential to the work of ministry. If we fail to see ourselves as servants, we will be left to pursue our own goals. The honoring heart keeps God's purposes in focus and in doing so, finds protection from self-focused agendas or self-serving motivations that can quickly derail the effectiveness of the ministry.

The Development

A minister who understands the seriousness of an honoring heart will surely desire to possess and operate out of this attitude. Acquiring the right heart for ministry is an ongoing work in each minister's discipleship journey. Still this attitude of heart is learned; it is a definite choice for the minister. We must work to nurture and protect a heart that honors God. Circumstances will test our hearts and try to pull us away from this important goal. But we must accept the importance of this journey and keep its challenge prominent throughout a ministry career.

Once we have made an honoring heart our target and have acknowledged that it is obtained as part of a journey, it is time to practice those things that will cultivate such a heart. First among them are regular expressions of worship. The minister must choose to worship God in ever increasing ways and times. Daily times of prayer and praise are essential. While we grow from being in God's presence, we equally submit to the priority of His leadership in all that we do. Worshipping God keeps both the servant and the Lord in their right places.

AN OBEDIENT HEART

The Essence

A minister with a right heart for ministry must have obedience to God's Word as a chief goal. Samuel scolded Saul for his failure to obey the clear directives he had been given. When Saul offered excuses, Samuel responded by insisting that God requires obedience rather than any substituting acts of worship (**I Samuel 15: 22**).

An obedient heart is a transparent heart. Because we cannot hide any part of our true nature from God, we are compelled to acknowledge and confess the true nature of our lives. An obedient heart is a heart that is clearly open to the truth imparted by the Master and is always ready to turn away from acts of failure.

An obedient heart is a serving heart. No other motivation will prove sufficient for the work of ministry than the desire to demonstrate love for Christ through obedience. Indeed, God has established that the greatest demonstration of worship is obedience to His commands.

A life of ministry can bring many days of heartache and overwhelming demands. To survive emotionally, a minister must hold fast to what will keep him or her earnestly pressing on – the desire to love God through obedience. All other motives will ultimately fail.

Finally, an obedient heart is an essential part of the example God expects of those who lead. James affirms that those who guide others will be held accountable to the highest standards (**James 3: 1**). Without an obedient heart, a minister has little chance of a passing grade in this test of servanthood.

The Demonstration

Throughout the first century, the apostle John continued to teach believers about the precepts of the Christian life. He spoke firmly and clearly concerning the evidence of a believer's connection to Christ – love through obedience. It was John who wrote of Jesus' "new" command (**John 13: 34**), to love one another and that obedience would be the evidence of that love.

Unfortunately, some ministers find themselves sliding into the same mindset as the Pharisees of the New Testament. But strict adherence to human-made and often meaningless ideals provides a poor example of a healthy spiritual life that is marked for ministry. Obedience to Jesus' command to love takes one to a higher level of personal fulfillment. And those that look on are able to see the nature of God as He relates to His children.

Perhaps the best gauge of a consistent resolve to serve out of obedience is the attractiveness of a person's life. A modern-day concern is that ministers succumb to many compromises and distractions that detract from the commitment of serving the Lord in obedience. The result is failure to please God or man, and the frustrated or defeated leave the ministry. Is there a remedy for this modern-day pattern? Holding fast to a walk with the Lord, with obedience as its foundation, is certainly the start of any remedy. Jesus' love and obedience to the plan of the Father attracted literally thousands of people. A leader that keeps this model in his or her heart will do the same.

The Necessity

An obedient heart is essential for maintaining an aggressive attitude toward conquering sin. In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds the church that it is completely unworthy of the righteousness in which it stands. We have been given grace – a gift of perfect righteousness only earned by Christ. Jesus received what we deserved while we received what only He deserved.

Failing to understand this will lead to numerous errors. Among them is a false sense of one's own righteousness. Church history is littered with periods of emphasis on legalism. Nearly every group seems to pass through periods of failing to understand the nature and purpose of its behavioral choices. When we forget our own unworthiness, we begin to see our choices to do right as evidence of personal superiority. The result is often a judgmental approach toward others and a diminished interest in their salvation. Without an honoring heart, we are quick to travel the road of self-righteousness. It is a journey that alienates us from the true purposes of God and leaves us with no ability to portray His nature.

For the minister, obedience is the true, essential act of worship. Our obedience does not make us more worthy of God or His grace. Such worthiness is out of reach. But we demonstrate our awareness of what we have been given by pursuing a righteousness that will bring glory to our Savior

The Development

Obedience is cultivated through various means; one is the willingness to be transparent before others. Occasionally a minister feels pressured to appear invincible or beyond daily struggle. However, if we are not honest with ourselves and with God, we can limit our own ability to be honest about our weaknesses and neglect the help God desires to give us. Transparency with God is most effective as a daily habit. Honest confession of failures and accompanying repentance reinforces our need of God.

In addition to transparency with God, we must be transparent with ourselves concerning our deepest desires and motives. Consistent reflection on that which drives us will help us guard against self-serving ideals that can replace the purposes of God. Journaling or an accountability relationship with another minister can aid in protecting us from developing defeating desires.

In addition to transparency should be the commitment to integrity. A minister must decide to live by what is right. It has been said that integrity is *who you are in the dark*. Such a definition points to the necessary choice to do what is right when no one other than yourself and God are looking.

Finally, there is no separating obedience from love. Love is the greatest command our Creator has placed before us. By choosing to love and growing in love, we will nourish an obedient heart. Indeed, the premier way to show our love for God is by obeying His command to love others.

A THANKFUL HEART

The Essence

Though we have addressed several fundamental characteristics that are evidence of a right heart for ministry, we must not fail to mention the need to possess and nurture a thankful heart. We have seen how Saul's failure to honor and obey cost him dearly with the God who had elevated him to the position of king over all of Israel. But the loss touched more than his life. The kingdom passed not only from him, but from his descendants as well. In their place, a new king was chosen – David, a man known for his thankful heart.

The simplicity of David's love and relationship with God spilled over to the collection of psalms. For David, his job was to behold what God was doing! When good things came, David gave God the credit, the glory. When heartache or disappointment came, David knew his hope was in God, and when a battle ended in victory, David's first reaction was to praise His Deliverer.

A thankful heart is one that sees God not only in times of blessing but is aware of His presence in every challenge. Too often ministers will rely on their own resources until all strength is gone. This is when the needy one looks up. But a thankful heart anticipates the hand of God and begins addressing difficulty by calling unto God. Simply put, if you look to yourself in times of trouble, you will have little motive for thanksgiving when relief finally emerges.

A thankful heart guides others to thankfulness as well. When a minister credits God for the events of his or her life, those who follow will cultivate the same habit. As with honor and obedience, the evidence of a thankful heart in a minister's life may be most clearly seen by those whom the minister leads. The minister's thankful heart will begin to be imitated by those under his or her influence. Whether through word, attitude, or behavior, a thankful heart is contagious. And God wants this side of a leader's heart to be seen, by all. Thanksgiving is not reserved for the inner man but is intended as outward expressions to be heard by all peoples (**Psalm 57: 9**).

The Demonstration

A thankful heart manifests with an overflow of joy. When an individual lives with a thankful heart, that person maintains a keen sense of God's presence – here is the source of the joyful spirit. David possessed such a heart at each stage age of his life. In **Psalm 9**, David lifts up praises to God for the presence of joy in his life; he knew that the reason for his praise was God's faithfulness (**Psalm 9: 1, 2**).

A thankful heart generates from the trust one has in God. The person who maintains an awareness of God's presence and activity in daily living finds many opportunities to demonstrate trust in God. Thus, thankful becomes an automatic response to living.

The Necessity

The best evidence of a need for a thankful heart is the fruit that is seen when it is missing. A lack of thankfulness will send an individual down many potential paths, none of which brings honor to God.

A lack of thankfulness can grow into an ungrateful spirit. Such a spirit is unable to recognize the real source of all blessings, while taking for granted the works and acts of God. A minister's life and demeanor ought to point to God in a way that brings Him glory. An ungrateful heart offers no potential for joy to those who follow.

Of course, the pitfalls of an unthankful heart grow even deeper. If we do not cultivate a thankful heart, we can drift into self-reliance and pride. After all, if we cannot recognize the hand of God in our lives, we have little explanation for our ability to do good other than to think more highly of ourselves. A thankful heart takes the focus off the minister in times of blessings and calls attention to God, the true source of blessing.

Finally, a heart that lacks thankfulness will ultimately bury itself more deeply in sin. Without thanksgiving in times of blessing, times of difficulty are more overwhelming. Failure to acknowledge God will shrivel faith and magnify moments of hardship, leaving the man or woman of God with the feeling that there is little benefit in pursuing or living for God. A thankful heart is insulation against hopelessness.

The Development

A thankful heart is not developed accidentally. A weekly habit of gathering with others and singing praises will not yield a thankful heart. Thanksgiving grows out of an awareness of God in every part of life. The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians to "pray continually" (**1 Thessalonians 5: 17**). Of course, we cannot think he meant an unending kneeling with petitions. Rather, Paul is encouraging them to abide in an ongoing awareness of God and His abiding presence and provision.

Extended times of worship are also essential for the thankful heart. The life of ministry will provide its busyness, but the minister must step away from the endless list of tasks, separate from a self-consumed heart, and offer genuine praise.

Finally, a growing trust will lead to thanksgiving. While it is possible to receive from God and fail to be thankful, the more genuine the trust in God, the more alert one becomes to the need for thankfulness to fill all the recesses of that heart.

The Lesson

While the ministry is dominated by tasks and demonstrations of gifts, it is the nurturing of the right heart that will bring the greatest and most lasting results. The Bible has much to say about the heart, pointing out that from the heart all of life will ultimately emerge. Therefore, ministers must cultivate the right heart above all other efforts in order to fulfill their greatest potential for God's kingdom.

There are many components to the right heart – too many to include in this lesson. But among the most essential are a heart that honors God, obeys His commands, and gives thanks to Him. The first two kings of ancient Israel demonstrate these essential qualities by their absence from the heart of

one (Saul) and their abundance in the heart of the other (David). Ministers must recognize that the condition of their hearts will ultimately shape their effectiveness in ministry.

Let's Apply That!

- Define the traits of an honoring heart, an obedient heart and a thankful heart.
- Identify scriptural examples of an honoring heart, an obedient heart and a thankful heart.
- Identify and explain three of the tests God presents to those who serve in leadership.

TURNING FROM THE WRONG HEART

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do” (**Proverbs 4:23, NLT**).

Tiny and unseen, the rudder of a ship wields a powerful influence over the mightiest of vessels. Though buried beneath the waves, this little piece of metal dictates direction by parsing the stream of water according to its own bent. A passing ship will cross the same waters, but take a different direction based on the angle of its rudder. So, it is with our hearts. Each of us can encounter circumstances that are virtually identical to the experience of another but find our course through them unique, based on the condition of each heart. For this reason, the Bible compels us to guard our hearts, to protect this rudder of our lives. Our lives will be channeled wherever our hearts turn.

Many ministers find their effectiveness derailed by the emergence of a wrong heart. For some, it is a momentary period of slipping off course; for others the result is a long trek downhill. In this lesson, we will look at some of the characteristics of the wrong heart and how we can avoid the destruction that comes from it.

A DOUBTING HEART

The Heart Defined

A doubting heart is more than an uncertain heart. An uncertain heart seeks direction, but a doubting heart rejects the direction it has received. To doubt is to call into question what one has received. When applied to our spiritual journeys, the doubting heart demonstrates reluctance to follow the path God has revealed.

Faith believes that God will do as He has spoken. Some operate from a more dangerous definition of faith – the belief that God will do what I want or deem that I need Him to do. Guided by this definition of faith, they live in the expectation that they can have what they want if they believe hard enough. But this is not the faith to which God calls us. Biblical faith knows God will fulfill His Word, even when the results are not yet evident and if they are different from what we want or feel we need.

To doubt, then, is to call into question the promises of God, such as His abiding presence, His promise of eternal life, His commitment to build His church, and many more. The minister who cannot trust God to fulfill what He has promised will cut a very jagged path for others to follow.

Biblical Examples

There are many examples of doubt that peppered the disciples' lives as recorded in the Gospels. Chief among them took place at sea, amidst a violent storm (**Matthew 8: 24**). Though several in the boat were accomplished seamen, none could match the peace Jesus displayed as He slept in the bottom of the boat. Panicked, they shook Him awake, asking if He cared that they were on the verge of dying.

After calming the storm with a mere sentence, Jesus chided them for their lack of faith. But if they had faith, what would it have looked like? How should they have reacted? Some might think that they should have commanded the waters; after all, they are children of God. Or perhaps they should have ignored the water and pretended they were not in trouble at all.

These responses, while extraordinary, would not demonstrate biblical faith. Likely, the response Jesus criticized was the panic and assumption of His lack of concern. Had they possessed sufficient confidence in Jesus, they could have responded with peaceful hearts and simply ask that He help them. But doubting His love and concern for them led the disciples to a panicked, demanding response.

Others demonstrated doubt at the words of Jesus or the ancient promises He was fulfilling before them. Each time, the doubt brought a storm of anxiety and took the doubter farther from the peace God promises to those who trust in Him. Not all lack of faith is an expression of doubt, but when those who know what God has promised fail to trust Him, doubt is usually the culprit.

Evidence and Results

James writes that a doubting heart is as unsettled as a wave on the sea, tossed about by the winds (**1: 6**). It is interesting that this is the first issue James tackles as he teaches the scattering church. To doubt is to shift between following or trusting God and relying on oneself.

For leaders, doubt takes on a greater dimension because others are following their example. It is difficult to follow people when the path they cut is unclear or their direction continually shifts. Such leaders are usually driven more by their emotions than by the knowledge they have of God.

Fear is the common evidence of doubt. When a leader allows circumstances to become larger than God, fear will overwhelm him or her. That fear may not reveal itself in panic, but it will be evident in the shifting flow of doubt.

Self-reliance provides yet another evidence of doubt. When we are reluctant to trust God to fulfill His promises, we tend to seek to fill the gaps of our faith with activity. A leader who depends on God one minute but takes matters into his or her own hands the next does not have inner peace and loses the ability to lead effectively.

James says that the result of doubt is clear – one is tossed back and forth with no apparent control over one's direction. Waves rise and fall, and the boats they toss are navigated with great difficulty. But those who turn away from doubt live with peace and a sense of direction that makes life clear for followers.

Pursuing Change

The steps of conquering a doubting heart are few but powerful. First, we must know what God has said and put confidence in it. The promises God has given to His children are discovered through the study of His word. While we cannot categorically claim every promise God made to an individual in the Scriptures, each of us is admonished to believe and stand in the hope of numerous others.

Once we are armed with the promises of God, we must choose to act on them. We must believe, depending upon God's promises of presence, provision, and power. His methods of response will vary according to His own sovereign purposes, but His faithfulness to fulfill His Word should be unquestioned.

Finally, we must deal with the causes of our doubt. Satan will surely seek to question the validity of God's promises, and we will never fully avoid his whispers, but we can conquer our self-reliance and the way we allow non-believers to influence our thinking. We can learn to live in expectation rather than anxiety because God will be faithful. Remember, without faith it is impossible to please Him.

A PROUD HEART

The Heart Defined

In the previous lesson, we saw how a prideful heart is the enemy of a heart that honors God. Since it is the central product of our sinful nature, a proud heart shows itself in many ways. Self-reliance is the first snapshot of the proud heart. Over time, self-reliant people come to depend so deeply on their own wisdom that there develops a dullness to the direction of God for the local church. No longer do these people see lasting changes in the lives of those who are influenced by that ministry.

The proud heart will ultimately lose its self-awareness and melt into hypocrisy. For the proud, the failures of others are clearer than one's own weaknesses. In fact, the proud can even magnify the sins of others while ignoring the presence of the same sin in their own lives. A person who easily sees others' faults gives evidence of his or her own proud heart.

Self-focus is an even deeper picture of the proud heart. Here pride demonstrates itself as envy, greed, and ultimately rebellion—demanding its own way. The minister who labors for the affirmation of others, even to the point of silent pleasure when others fail, has journeyed well down the path of pride. Self-aggrandizement is incompatible with the call to servanthood. Repeatedly we are called to a focus on God's will and the good of others. A proud heart has little desire to achieve either.

Biblical Examples

In Scripture, while there are many examples of hearts controlled by pride, the Pharisees of Jesus' day offer perhaps the most poignant picture. Jesus labeled them "white-washed tombs" (**Matthew 23: 27**) to symbolize their hollowness. Though on the outside their abilities and performances caused others to think them spiritual, within they lacked much.

The minister can slip into the snare of functioning the same way. Good performance at ministry tasks can mask a growing emptiness within. The affirmation that comes with successes can add to the lure. Ministers who nourish their self-worth on the praise of others will ultimately make praise a goal and ignore the Spirit's tug toward a sincere and humble heart. A proud heart takes control and leaves one bankrupt of true success. Thus, the proud heart ultimately seeks for itself at the expense of others. Without question, it destroys its host.

Evidence and Results

There is no denying that pride comes in many forms. The beginner must understand that humans cannot outrun the temptation of a proud heart, so there must be a guard set against allowing the seeds to take root.

Justification is another sign that hangs on the door of a proud heart. While it seems unconscionable on the surface, a proud heart can lead a minister to ignore grievous sin in his or her own life while the minister is hard at work leading the rest of the church in spiritual pursuits. In ancient Israel, the high priest was careful to purify his own heart before offering sacrifices of atonement for the people because he knew sin in his own life would bring death inside the holy place. Today, God's grace shields us from this kind of punishment, in most cases, and the proud of heart take advantage of that grace with a portrayal of spirituality that covers neglect and sin. Because a proud heart sows seed that will ultimately choke out the purposes of God in one's life and ministry, the minister should note that pride tops the list of behaviors God finds abominable (**Proverbs 6: 16 – 19**).

Pursuing Change

There is but one way to counteract a proud heart – to humble oneself before God and others. As children of God, we must acknowledge our sins and turn from them in order to move toward God. There is no special prescription for the minister. The minister's pride is conquered just like any other sinner.

However, the minister ought to consider the impact of personal pride when desiring to turn from it. While public confession may not be warranted, true humility will take into account those damaged and make appropriate effort to repair. The prescription for maintaining a heart free of pride is worship.

A RESENTFUL HEART

The Heart Defined

Life in the ministry can be most difficult. Surveys typically find the ministry as one of the most stressful occupations. The expectations of people coupled with being the recipient of that occasional hurtful expression make a resentful heart.

By definition, a resentful heart is one that has failed to forgive past wrongs, and instead allowed those wrongs to grow beyond their original size. A resentful heart can emerge from a variety of circumstances. While the wrongdoing of others can get it started, there are also the wounds of sorrow. Periods of sadness and depression can also corrode the heart with resentment, as can lost dreams or shattered successes.

Unforgiveness is the ugly conscience of a resentful heart, so a minister needs to stay on the alert for the many ways and circumstances in which it steps to the forefront. While its form may vary, the end result looks much the same – a hardened heart, inability to love, and absence of joy.

Biblical Examples

No one knows better than the minister the magnitude of God's forgiveness. In your life of ministry, you will see God's grace extended to the most impossible situations. This is the nature God has revealed and the message of hope He has placed within us.

Jonah, however, lacked a desire for the forgiveness God could extend. He demonstrated many efforts to avoid the proclamation of God's love when it came to the people of Nineveh. After all, they had been wicked and unfair to Jonah's people. Perhaps Jonah's own family had even felt the brunt of Assyrian domination. For whatever motive, Jonah would have rather died than see such people worship God. And he almost did.

Jonah's story is not too far removed from us. While we may lack the same fervor or national hatred, a grace dependent on us would fall well short of the grace we have been given. Jesus told of a servant

who was forgiven a huge debt only to go out and treat his own debtor harshly. The minister's knowledge and experience of God's grace must eliminate unwillingness to forgive offenders.

It is of note that Jonah's story ends with him still wanting to die though he is sitting amidst one of the greatest revivals of human history. As with Jonah, a resentful heart will steal the true measure of ministry from the minister's heart.

Evidence and Results

Ministers have feelings. Such a statement may seem obvious and unnecessary, but the minister will occasionally be treated as though it is impossible for him or her to be hurt. If a hurtful experience continues to affect the minister, he or she may be harboring resentment. Such a heart needs only two things to develop – a cause and time. Jesus warned His disciples of this potential condition when He spoke of His coming death. He told them they would be treated similarly, and they were. The minister must understand that to follow Christ still means to suffer for Christ.

Like the disciples, most ministers choose this path hoping to make a difference and receive God's rewards for their effort. They do not enter the ministry looking forward to heartache and mistreatment. But such was the experience of the Master; can His servants expect less?

Therefore, when past hurts keep haunting you, step back and take inventory of your heart. Have you truly forgiven? Do you still wish the offenders would get their deserved punishment? If these feelings continue to flood your thoughts, resentment is present and should be dealt with before it steals your joy.

Pursuing Change

A number of the prophets came to a place where they wanted to die. Elijah hid in a cave from Jezebel just a few days after his greatest victory. He was persuaded that he had endured all that he could. God understood the struggling prophet and cared for him, just as He understands His modern servants during their times of hurt. He will help us when we are ready.

When a minister recognizes the signs of resentment, it is time for him or her to return to the path of forgiveness. First, the minister needs to reflect on God's forgiveness. One cannot truly justify withholding forgiveness from others once it has been so gloriously experienced personally.

Second, ministers must identify the scope of their feelings by considering every aspect of how the circumstance has affected their lives. Then, the minister must give God the troubling emotions and allow Him to heal the residual hurts.

Third is the point of separating the offender from the offense and finding ways to renew the person(s) in love. Then, finally, the minister must proclaim freedom for the offender and the offended. If necessary, inform the offender of your past resentment and assure him or her of your choice to forgive. It is the resentful heart that needs to be free, so proclaim your own freedom and allow God's healing to finish its work.

The Lesson

The heart dictates a life's direction. The heart shapes perception and leads to decision-making. Many ministers have found themselves stunted by the fruits of a wrong heart condition, and God's gifts have been compromised or abandoned. To have the right heart, a minister must choose to turn from the self-centered state of a wrong heart. The Bible admonishes us to avoid certain things if we are to

guard our hearts from unholiness and fruitlessness. Among these are doubt, pride, and resentment. Each of these characteristics conflicts with the essence of the Gospel and the purposes of God in this world. The doubting heart turns us from trust. The proud heart teaches us self-focus, and the resentful heart undermines the forgiveness that can set us free.

Let's Apply that!

- Define the traits of a doubting heart, a proud heart, and a resentful heart.
- Identify scriptural examples of a doubting heart, a proud heart, and a resentful heart.
- Summarize the importance of turning away from a doubting heart, a proud heart, and a resentful heart.

GOD'S TESTS FOR LEADERS

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts” (**Psalm 139: 23**).

In his book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Rick Warren proclaims that life is a test (2002, 42). He goes on to explain how God is at work in the circumstances of our lives, using them to develop us more in the principles of His nature and kingdom. For the minister, there should be no doubt that these tests will come. After all, as stewards of God's kingdom, ministers should set the pace among God's people.

Tests are the tools God uses to shape our character and give us understanding of His heart. Tests are not a sign that something is broken or that we have failed in some capacity. Instead, they are the strategy of a loving God to develop us. Do not aim to avoid the tests – aim to pass them.

THE TEST OF TRUST

Understanding the Test

Scripture tells us that faith is necessary in order to please God. It makes sense, then, that the test of trust would play a significant role in the development of the minister's life.

In the twenty-first century, people think a lot about the pursuit of ease and comfort. The achievement of these modern-day treasures – along with wealth and success – is an indication of a good life. This makes it hard to accept difficulty and to experience uncertainty. It is more unfortunate when we realize that we have let ourselves believe ease and prosperity are synonymous with knowing the blessings of God.

When a test of trust comes, this modern pursuit of comfort is interrupted. God makes us uncomfortable and forces us to face the uncertain. We are left feeling abandoned and hopeless. Sadly, this is the time when some turn away from God, abandoning all possibility that this is a test to see where their trust lies.

Both for personal benefit and as an example to others, the minister has to see this process for what it is. God has not abandoned or failed His servant. Rather, the moment has come for the minister to demonstrate the life of faith – a life that cannot exist without unanswered questions.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

As we have noted, God requires faith from those who would serve Him. This is reason enough to put all diligence toward passing this test. But there is more to the urgency for success in this area than divine compulsion.

The minister has launched into a life much different from that pursued by others. First, the minister has agreed to the call to live sacrificially as a servant of God and the purposes of His kingdom. When God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac (**Genesis 22**), He was not being impulsive or trying to stretch Abraham to breaking point. He had a specific purpose in the test. God would ultimately lead Abraham to places where absolute trust was needed, often without understanding or prior discussion. Abraham had to pass the trust test in order to be ready for the life God had placed before him. The same requirement holds for today's minister.

How to Get a Passing Grade

First, success in the test of trust demands focusing on the faithfulness of God. His trustworthiness is a proven reality. If you know He has come through for you on past occasions, it is easier to trust Him for the situation at hand.

Second, consider the places where you have invested your trust. Perhaps it has been placed in your own abilities, in a long-standing organization, or in a very influential friend. You may have more trust in your resources or may be hoping for good fortune to deliver you. Once you locate where your trust is placed, begin to identify the weaknesses of such trust.

Finally, confess your fears to God as you take steps of obedience. God understands our weaknesses, but He will not tolerate a decision to let those weaknesses paralyze us. Walk as God has revealed and let Him help with your feelings of uncertainty. Each step of trust becomes stronger.

THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE

Understanding the Test

In a relationship with God, obedience is an aspect of trust. But obedience is also an expression of love and a demonstration of a servant's willingness to be used in the plan of God. God will test our obedience frequently.

Very little of a minister's life goes untested when it comes to obedience. In fact, it is hard to think of an area or an occasion when a minister is not challenged to choose between obedience or ignoring some principle of Christian living or faithful servanthood. Sadly, many well-seasoned ministers who frequently passed this test in their younger years grow lax and become less faithful in their example and ministry. One trip through the test of obedience, even if successful, does not bring an end to this challenge.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

The apostle John writes that if we say we love God but do not obey His commands, we lie (**I John 4:20**). Failure to obey God is tantamount to complete failure of mission, for if we do not obey, what hope do we have that those who follow us will choose better?

While we can only speculate about what God's response would have been had Abraham refused to obey Him in offering Isaac (**Genesis 22**), it is reasonable to assume that Isaac would have been taken

from his father by other means. God will respond to our disobedience by removing whatever we place before Him.

Thus, obedience is not optional for the minister as the hope of those who follow the minister's example rests on the minister's obedience. God will help and provide for His people, but He cannot make the decision of obedience for anyone.

How to Get a Passing Grade

What steps does a minister consider when facing the test of obedience? Firstly, the minister must be clear as to what God has commanded. When one comes up against an issue that God has clearly answered in His Word, His expectations are clear. But at other times, one may need to seek counsel or other confirming sources to understand what God requires.

Secondly, obedience is a decision. Once one understands the will of God, the only decision is to do that will. Justifying another route is trying to justify disobedience. To avoid this temptation, the minister must seek and obey.

Thirdly, the leader must also avoid the temptation to justify a weaker response. It is not hard to imagine Abraham looking for a way around God's command. But he did not allow himself to be sidetracked. His obedience was full and complete.

Finally, the leader must take the necessary steps to obey. As with Abraham's experience, the path of obedience may require many steps up the mountain. Take the necessary steps and walk straight toward God's command. Satan has a much easier target if you veer from the path of full obedience.

THE TEST OF DEPENDENCE

Understanding the Test

One of the most difficult tests a minister will face is the test of dependence. This test measures who or what we may be leaning upon as we attempt to serve God. As ministries grow, it seems easier to slip into dependence upon other things, people or methods, rather than on God.

This test usually comes when something we are depending on is taken from us. A small-town pastor's heart may fill with anxiety at the announcement that the family that gives the most to the church is moving to the city. At other times, a key leader may become disenchanted with the pastor and make more than a little noise when departing.

But the test of dependence does not just affect the church and its ministries, the individual minister is measured in this area also. When someone fails, compromising the efforts and effect of the ministry, this is a good sign that God is testing for what this heart depends upon. Even more painful is when a key mentor falls into moral failure. In this moment, the exam can be emotionally excruciating.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

The test of dependence can be particularly difficult, but one cannot afford to fail. If our dependence is tested by the threat of losing people, resources, or possessions, we can be assured that though we fail God's check in our heart, the things that we have tried to hold on to will eventually be lost anyway. Succumbing to temptation does not ever lead to a good end. If it is people that we are relying upon, they will fail us too. God is obligated to show their weaknesses so that we can reinvest our trust in Him.

Thus, the minister should be careful about letting others become over dependent upon him or her. This requires consistent teaching on God as the believer's caregiver. A minister's obligation to the church includes training up healthy, balanced Christians who know their God and their source for all good things. Any other perspective is unhealthy.

How to Get a Passing Grade

It is understandable (in those times when our hearts are tender toward God and His will) that failing the test of dependence can result in great loss. This is a hard test for the minister, in the context where he or she is set to be a servant and the primary human example of the right relationship with God.

First, the leader must cultivate dependence on God. Daily times of seeking God and bringing Him the deepest issues will build dependence. This test is designed to help the minister establish dependence on the one foundation that will never crumble. Second, ministers must consider their weaknesses and determine the reason for their dependence on other things. Perhaps personal fears or lack of faith need to be addressed. God will help leaders discover answers if they ask Him the questions.

THE TEST OF LOVE

Understanding the Test

God is love, and the minister is a servant of our loving God. This makes it natural to expect to see love as the central characteristic in the lives of God's servants. God commands our love – for Him and for others. These commands form the most essential core of a minister's assignment.

To reach such a goal, love becomes a test. God may place a minister in the middle of some people who are difficult to love. When those we love act in unlovely ways, it can be a test for us to respond with kindness. Jesus said that anyone could love those who are lovable, but to love enemies or backstabbing friends is difficult.

Joyce Meyer has stated that the "sandpaper" people in our lives are used to smooth out our rough edges. Maybe the greater the number of rough edges we have, the more of those people God sends. Loving the unlovely is what set Jesus apart from His contemporaries. It is, also, what will provide the clearest evidence of a minister's connection to God.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

The ministry will teach the novice to master the techniques of ministry. But without love, the minister has missed God's point and purpose for His work in this world. Paul speaks of this when he tells the Corinthians that mastering spiritual gifts and demonstrating incredible personal sacrifice mean nothing without love (**I Corinthians 13: 1**).

A minister must understand that the most effective tool in the work of God is love. Only love can truly change a life. Laws and rules can form a fence around behavior, but they cannot change a heart. Only love can penetrate a life and establish the believer in a new direction. Without love, we eliminate our hope of making a difference for Christ.

Therefore, as Christ's representative, ministers must realize that their actions portray the Master's heart. When a minister fails to love, Christ's credibility is damaged. Many refuse to enter a church due to the lack of love once shown to them in God's house. Indeed, the modern world is less convinced each day that the answers they seek can be found among God's people. Failure to love renders the church ineffective.

How to Get a Passing Grade

Walking in divine love is not a natural choice. It is the overflow of the divine relationship with God. The more a child of God abides in that love, the more conditioned that person becomes to act, think, and work with others. A leader should be strengthened for the day's challenges by considering how great a love has been given to him or her. Understanding the depth of that love is a lifetime experience, with so many new facets to explore. It is an unending wonder. The one called to ministry personally knows the love that does not consider worthiness. It is a love of personal sacrifice; it seeks the lasting well-being of the one loved. This must be the first step, daily.

When the mind is renewed in this reality, the loved will want to extend that offering to others. God does not require us to give what we have not received. But He does require us to give what He has freely given. For this reason, the test of love will be placed before us repeatedly. It is the nature of functioning in God's kingdom.

The minister must therefore recognize what makes him or her reluctant to love. Perhaps a past hurt hinders you from opening your heart to others. If so, take the necessary steps to forgive. If selfishness keeps you from loving, your pride must be conquered. This is a test you must pass, or you will be rendered ineffective for God's purposes.

THE TEST OF TIME

Understanding the Test

The western world moves at an accelerated pace. Waiting implies that something is not working properly. Yet, much of what is spoken to us from the Scriptures was originally addressed to an agrarian culture. In such an economy, periods of waiting were reflected in all of life. A crop was planted but reaped many months later. Activities of life were planned around seasons or segments of a day; battles, entertaining guests, everything happened in the framework of prolonged time. God's timetable is like this; discipleship is a life-long journey that will demand much patience.

God sees the needs and future of His church, so He helps His stewards learn patience as they lead His people. The writhing that we create in our spirits over who owns our time is useless, and God's tests help us to learn this truth. Our own impatience becomes an enemy to the work of the Lord, an enemy that the test of time will help us conquer.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

There is much to learn as we wait on God. In fact, the majority of God's great lessons require a period of waiting. Waiting establishes dependence and helps attribute value. That which we can have instantly is not treasured like that which comes after a good season of waiting. The minister who cannot wait on God will never experience the true provision and abundance God desires to give.

The leader sets the pace for those who follow. No one will believe a message preached that is not practiced by the preacher. People face many challenges, and their desire for instant answers works against the peace they seek. The minister who cannot wait on God must manufacture reasons for His delay – reasons that typically work against genuine faith.

How to Get a Passing Grade

While waiting is not easy, learning to wait is even more difficult. The first step is to identify the one on whom you depend. Have confidence in God's love and plan. If you know God will bring the best possible result, waiting becomes simple. Inability to wait usually reveals a lack of confidence in God's love and the perfection of His plans.

Finally, if you are still struggling to wait, occupy your heart with other things. Often when we face the test of time, we become so obsessed with our need that we get overwhelmed and decide we can wait no longer. However, just a little more confidence in God's faithfulness will prove to be worthwhile. Anchor your heart in His love and wait.

THE TEST OF SOLITUDE

Understanding the Test

Another common test for the minister is the wilderness experience or the test of solitude. Every minister—young and old, experienced and novice – will face wilderness moments in his or her tenure of ministry for God. It is inherent in the journey, and Scriptures teach this as surely as it teaches of God's love. Most of us prefer the bounty and refreshing of those moments when we are experiencing God's love and have a clear understanding of His plan. But there will be times in a minister's life of spiritual dryness, and weeks may pass without any refreshing, or so it seems.

Some make the mistake of assuming that a dry period or a wilderness experience is evidence that they have stepped out of God's will. However, this may simply not be the case. Throughout Scripture, God led His servants to the wilderness for testing and strengthening. Even Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness; it was there that Satan unleashed his greatest temptations. But the Spirit led Jesus in and out of the wilderness!

Times of solitude make us thirsty for God's presence. This is part of its function. If we run from these times or give up our pursuit of God's purposes because the sun seems not to be shining on us, we will fail this essential test. Inability to face the wilderness will keep us from the true blessing of great moments with God.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

The wilderness is always a part of the journey to the Promised Land. We have come to see the wilderness experience as a time of being off-track. After all, if we are truly living where God desires, we should experience unlimited blessing. But these are the same types of ideas the false prophets spoke to Israel.

The truth is that if you reject the wilderness, you will never find the Promised Land (the answer or the place you are seeking). You will never learn the lessons that will guide you in times in the future, and you will never come to love and lean on God the way that He desires. Though you may not see or feel Him, this is a precious time for just you and God.

A minister who fails the solitude test will also breed followers who cannot survive apart from God's clear presence. Such disciples wilt when difficulty comes and only follow Christ if they can be spoiled by constant blessings. These are not the type of disciples God expects His servants to produce.

How to Get a Passing Grade

Passing this test starts with accepting the nature of the test. Times of solitude should be embraced just as strongly as times of blessing. If you abandon the feeling that something is not right or fair, your endurance will be enhanced.

The leader needs to be honest with the Father in the wilderness. Here, dependence on Him will be maximized. Just as David cried out his whole heart to God, all ministers must lay open their hearts before the Lord. God does not ask us to pretend we are not feeling alone, broken, confused, empty or scared, but He wants us to bring all of ourselves to Him so He can meet our need. In turn, God's

honesty will be reflected upon our hearts, and our true need will become clearer. Then God can work from there.

Praise God for the wilderness. Moses likely thanked God often for the lessons he learned in the wilderness. They were the equipment he needed to lead Israel when their path crossed the wilderness. God will use your solitude to equip others.

The Lesson

Life in the ministry will be one test after another. The tests have a purpose – the equipping of our lives for greater effectiveness. Those who resist God’s testing lessen their chances of making it in the ministry. But those who trust Him to lead find He has a plan ideally suited for their growth.

Be careful not to oversimplify your journey or that of another. Tests require careful attention and preparation. Those who disregard their importance are like the student who neglects study and then hopes to achieve his or her best.

Let’s Apply That!

- Explain characteristics of the tests of trust, obedience, dependence, love, time and solitude.
- Identify scriptural guidance for the tests of trust, obedience, dependence, love, time and solitude.
- Summarize the tests trust, obedience, dependence, love, time and solitude, including the means by which each test is passed.

DEVELOPING THE RIGHT HEART - LICENSED

“O God, you are my God; I earnestly seek you” (**Psalm 63, NLT**).

The minister’s heart is the key element that will shape his or her life. Jesus pointed out that everything proceeds from the heart, and this is true for the life and work of the minister, perhaps more than for anyone else.

Among the many reasons for this reality is the manner in which Christ works. His key means of equipping us is to change our hearts by giving His love, peace, and a host of other blessings He intends for us to spread. He always works from the inside out. God prepares us for ministry by changing our hearts. He then intends ministers to work out of their hearts or out of what God has done in Christ.

Some professions can be fulfilled successfully without ever putting one’s heart into it. But the very nature of the ministry is one of love and intense dedication. You simply cannot succeed by Christ’s standard without allowing everything within you to be poured out.

Since the heart is central to the work of ministry, guarding and cultivating it are critical tasks the minister must pursue in private moments. He or she must allow the beneficial traits of the heart to emerge unhindered, while purging his or her heart from those attitudes and ideas that can be damaging. God will test the heart, too, and these are tests a minister will want to pass.

To the outsider, the ministry may look like counseling, preaching, administrating, and moving a lot of tables and chairs. But ministry tasks seldom reflect the true nature of ministry. It is an inward issue, a heart that grows and flows forth for the purposes of God's kingdom and the benefit of those the minister serves.

A THIRSTY HEART

The Essence

Jesus told His disciples that those who were hungry and thirsty for righteousness would be blessed by being filled (**Matthew 5:6**). One should note that the idea of both hunger and thirst indicates all satisfaction is aimed toward the pursuit. In other words, individuals are looking for nothing else.

This presents a unique scenario for ministers because their performance is rarely evaluated based on their hunger for God and His righteousness. Instead, it is the ability to perform the tasks of ministry that shapes the success and reward ministers receive by those they serve. While the pursuit of God is assumed by many, it does not connect immediately to a person's perception of ministry success. Though it may sound proper to refer to our hunger and thirst for God as the key to ministry success, most ministers will acknowledge that this pursuit does not always form the measure of ministry success. If a minister is going to pursue God, it will be because of an inner compulsion, not because such an effort is closely monitored by those who evaluate him or her.

Sadly, many ministers never cultivate a heart that thirsts for God. Instead, they become consumed with the work of ministry, which rarely leaves time for private moments with the One they claim to serve. But a thirsty heart is a significant part of the supernatural ministry God desires to pour through His servants. God's promise to satisfy those who seek Him is intended as an encouragement to make just such a choice.

A thirsty heart is one that longs for more of what it does not have. Everyone's heart is thirsty for something. Perhaps some thirst for recognition or position, while others thirst for wealth. The minister's heart must be steered away from such ambitions. To do this, ministers must give themselves to a beneficial thirst – and there is no better option than to let their greatest desire be for the God they serve. In many ways, a heart thirsty for God protects the minister from other agendas and pursuits, as well as brings him or her God's power.

The Demonstration

While a thirsty heart is illustrated throughout Scripture, David is the first individual we think of in this manner. The passion in his pursuit of God is evident through the emotional tenor of his psalms of praise. David uses the imagery of a parched land (**Psalms 63**), a thirsting deer (**Psalms 42**), and a search and rescue mission (**Psalms 9**). His words convey the awareness that without God's presence, satisfaction is not possible.

But David is not the only example of thirsting for God. In the earliest days of Christ's ministry, the longing for God's presence is evident in the response of the men, later known as disciples, to the invitation to follow Christ. Matthew, like the others, abandoned his former life in an instant at the invitation to follow Jesus. While much can be made of the humble places they came from, each of these men left the familiar life they had long expected to live in order to pursue God's purposes and presence.

In a similar way, you have made such a choice. As a minister, you have stepped away from the pursuits others will choose for their lives. You have opted for God's kingdom and His work. While a few have become wealthy or prominent in such work, the majority take such a step because of the

desire to serve God and pursue His agenda and presence, not to enjoy earthly benefits. Just as many of the disciples, you have chosen to sacrifice other possibilities in order to serve God.

Why? Perhaps you have a heart that is thirsty for God.

The Necessity

Though there are multiple ways to measure the work of God and your success in performing it, there is only one enduring measure. That, of course, is God's measure. The minister will have his or her performance in ministry evaluated by numerous sources (i.e., congregation, denominational leaders, etc.), but the standard for the servant is the pleasure of the Master.

You cannot please God unless you serve Him out of a heart that is thirsty. In fact, God is more concerned with our pursuit of Him than our pursuit of His purposes. If we thirst for God, He is able to work His purposes in our lives without the hindrances of pride or selfishness. But if we are driven by our talent or even our God-given gifts, we will quickly stumble into a host of self-serving snares.

A minister must cultivate a thirsty heart for God. First, we know that such a heart places us where God can pour His Spirit on and through us. Serving God is intended to be a work greater than any we can fulfill on our own. His work requires His presence and power. To deem the pursuit of God as a side issue is to lay aside any hope of experiencing the potential He desires to work through us.

Secondly, a thirsty heart protects us from unhealthy motivations. As stated previously, we can easily fall into chasing what those without Christ pursue. But given a heart that is thirsty for God, our direction is focused on Him and His will. Such a choice will help keep us from wrong choices.

Finally, the minister must have a thirsty heart to maintain right perspective on whose agenda he or she pursues. When our performance is evaluated by others, we can slip into believing we serve those who evaluate us. We can seek to meet their expectations and forget whose work we are truly engaged in. Many ministers can work for the paycheck or to keep vocal people content, and those ministers typically will find life in the ministry unfair and frustrating. Some will even blame their dissatisfaction on God when they have made the choice to pursue pleasing others. Ministers should not be offensive in their claim to serve God first, but they must be clear in their own hearts that their pursuit of God takes precedence over all other desires.

The Development

The way to a thirsty heart is no secret. God has made such a desire available to each of us. But if a minister has made a long habit of living with other thirsts, he or she may find the road to health a bit difficult to navigate.

First, we must see our need of God. If we think we can succeed without pursuing God, we will lack sufficient motivation for change. But when we see that we can only be satisfied with the presence of God in our daily lives, we will take the first steps toward such longing.

Second, the minister must step away from other motivations. This is a difficult step, but it is absolutely essential. A person cannot reach for God while holding onto things that are an affront to Him. Through repentance, the minister can demonstrate a turning toward God by confessing former pursuits and ridding himself or herself of what those pursuits have brought.

Third, the minister must learn to reach for God through sincere communication of the heart. Many ministers struggle with this step because few people have ever listened to the minister's deepest needs and issues. A minister spends a lifetime caring for the concerns of others, all the while unable to express his or her heart in a similar fashion. Many ministers struggle with expressing their thoughts

and emotions in a healthy manner simply because they have had so little practice or because they have been busy being what others need them to be rather than being themselves.

Finally, the minister must make this pursuit a top priority. Ministers must learn to judge themselves based on God's grace and not on the affirming or critical comments of others. They must see their own need to grow and pursue that growth, knowing it will yield the right harvest in their lives.

A REPENTANT HEART

The Essence

One of the most critical concepts for a minister's understanding is the idea of repentance. In all aspects of ministry, repentance plays a major role in spiritual formation. From the initial moment of salvation through every stage of life change, repentance is an essential concept.

The core idea of repentance means to "turn from." If a person repents of sin, that individual turns from that sin. Also included in this idea is the need to turn toward something else. Jesus spoke of how turning away from sin can be compromised by failing to turn toward righteousness as sin can come back in greater degrees of temptation. So, repentance is turning away from a former choice and pursuing a new one.

We may think of repentance as a remedial part of Christian living – one that does not need much consideration after a few years of walking with Christ. But such is simply not the case. Repentance is a necessary practice for Christians at all phases of spiritual growth – even for the minister. A minister must learn to make daily choices to turn from evil and turn toward the righteousness that God requires.

The Demonstration

Again, David is an excellent source for understanding this trait. His exposition on repentance (**Psalm 32**) helps us see the working of repentance in an individual's heart. Of course, no passage of Scripture more powerfully illustrates the heart of repentance than David's pursuit of restoration after his sin with Bathsheba (**Psalm 51**).

But numerous others illustrate the heart of repentance. Simon Peter launched himself from the boat and paddled toward shore to have a private moment with Jesus (**John 21**). He wanted to express his repentant heart after having denied his Savior three times. And in the course of that critical conversation, Jesus restored His disciple.

Zacchaeus reveals much of the heart of repentance by his subsequent effort to rid himself of the wealth that he had gained dishonestly. While Jesus did not require the quadrupled repayment of his wrongdoing (Jesus would pay the full price for Zacchaeus's and our sins), He also did not stand in the way of the tax collector's effort to demonstrate how he had turned from selfish gain and turned toward a new day of righteousness in his own heart. Out of his overflowing heart, Zacchaeus showed his choice to turn.

The Necessity

Repentance is the only means God gives us to see life-change. First, by our confessing wrongdoing and choosing to turn away from it, God is able to help us experience new life. We have no other formula for our forgiveness or for the new, abundant life Christ came to give.

The minister must maintain a healthy habit of repentance in daily living. Being a man or woman after God's own heart is not being a sinless person, but a repentant one. To acknowledge our sin and to

choose to withdraw from it is an essential act for every Christian. Temptation does not diminish with years of Christian service and the possibility of failure does not go away either. Only through repentance can our failures be conquered.

Ministers will face temptation in the area of pride. They can easily come to believe the kind things people say of them. They can quickly forget that God's glory is their highest aim and can begin to relish the attention that success in the ministry has brought. Pride is an enormous snare for ministers, and they must maintain repentant hearts in order to keep this area of sin from conquering them.

A repentant heart will protect the minister from holding on to sins that work long-term destruction, such as pornography, gossip, greed, slothfulness, and so forth. The temptation to deny or avoid dealing with sin works powerfully against the minister. After all, he or she cannot afford to be caught in sin or to acknowledge failures publicly. Such pressures work against a heart of repentance and can be catastrophic to the minister's life and work. Only by holding tightly to a repentant heart can a minister overcome these devastating realities for his or her life and work.

The Development

A repentant heart is cultivated by going back to the beginning. Our first experience of Christ came through a repentant heart. In that moment, the individual has a clear sense of his or her own unworthiness and tendency toward failure. The person sees clearly the impact of personal choices and feels the brunt of the consequences of what he or she has done. In the desire to be free from such weight, the person calls out to God for help.

Even after decades of serving God, this same mentality is key to the heart of repentance. Knowing our need of Christ and holding tightly to the absolute dependence we have on Christ's righteousness helps maintain a heart of repentance.

We should also see ourselves realistically. While we thirst after righteousness, we must also see that we continue to battle temptation and we are no less human than before. Though we ought to be growing in righteousness and have chosen to avoid the things that ensnare others, we must realize that we are susceptible to temptations of pride and selfishness. These things offer their momentary pleasure to ministers too. Keeping hold of the reality that ministers are not immune to temptation will help us maintain an awareness of our need for God.

Living honestly is essential to a repentant heart. While ministers may not publicly proclaim their failings, they must be honest with themselves and must find appropriate accountability for their life choices. Ministers who isolate themselves from all human accountability will find it virtually impossible to maintain a repentant heart.

A TEACHABLE HEART

The Essence

It may seem hard to imagine, but many individuals who are pursuing ministry as their life's vocation have trouble maintaining a teachable heart. Perhaps because their perceptions of ministry were shaped by watching certain people, they view the ministry through only one or two ways of doing things. "Pastor Bob did it this way, so it must be the way it should be done."

Of course, one can lack a teachable heart because of pride. Sadly, some choose a life of ministry because it seems to offer a place of authority over the lives of others. Many confuse spirituality with always being right or refusing to acknowledge their need of anyone's help other than God himself.

Regardless of the many reasons for this malady, ministers have a tendency to be among the most unteachable folks around.

The idea of *teachable* is not a difficult concept to grasp. A person is teachable when he or she can be taught or when the heart is open to other thoughts or other ways of doing things. A desire to learn is typically a part of a teachable heart. We move away from this place when we think we know all things or have no ability to open our hearts to other approaches or ideas.

In many ways, a teachable heart is reflective of a humble heart. One who cannot be taught reveals a growing wall of pride that must be brought down. To be a servant-leader, a person must simultaneously be a follower. If we cannot be taught, then the reservoir from which we draw our teaching will ultimately run dry.

The Demonstration

Simon Peter grew up with the same prejudices and political ideologies of his contemporaries. Rome was an unjust oppressor and Gentiles were on the outside looking in when it came to serving God. Even after Christ's resurrection and Peter's own baptism in the Holy Spirit, he still held to what we would call racial and ethnic prejudices in regard to the Jews.

Was Peter teachable? Certainly, he had learned a lot during his three-year stint with Jesus. Though much of Jesus' teaching eluded him for a time, Peter and his fellow disciples ultimately grasped the new ideas about grace, love, and serving God. But it would take another life-altering experience for Peter to begin overcoming a lifetime of prejudices.

In Joppa, as Peter was waiting for lunch to be prepared, he was given a vision of animals that Peter had always believed were unclean (**Acts 10: 9 – 13**). He was told to get up, kill the animals, and eat them. The vision opened a door that Peter had never considered opening. He had a choice in his response, and he chose to let the Holy Spirit rewrite his lifetime of programming. Peter's teachable heart led him to the home of Cornelius where he saw what he never expected and learned what he would have previously rejected. The gospel had indeed come to the Gentiles.

Of course, some of us would say that a vision directly from God is acceptable but opening our minds to the ideas of others is a different matter. However, a teachable heart must dwell within the minister, or his or her ideas will become master.

The Necessity

A teachable heart protects a minister from many of the snares of pride. Some portray themselves as only listening to God when they are truly only willing to listen to themselves. A teachable heart overcomes such pride and will rescue the minister from God's other means of conquering our pride.

To be a servant-leader, a minister must be a follower. Ministers must not isolate themselves from others but must learn to receive and evaluate the input of others. Ministers' insecurities are often driving their resistance to others' ideas, though they may try and convince people that they are protecting the essentials of faith and God's Word. Likely fear is the greater reason for their rejection of learning.

Sadly, the ministry is an attractive option for those who do not want to listen to others. As a minister, one can set oneself up as the ultimate authority on many things and even find followers who will help maintain such a position. But a teachable heart reveals the greater maturity.

A teachable heart is critical for a healthy life of ministry. One simply cannot survive the pressure of always needing to have the answers or always being right. Soon enough our weaknesses will be

revealed, and failure will result. A teachable heart helps protect us from such tragedy. A teachable heart will seek out and submit to wise counsel and be willingly accountable to spiritual leaders.

The Development

A teachable heart can only grow out of a humble heart. The starting place is in acknowledging weakness and the need to learn more daily. Then, the right heart will emerge. The minister must turn away from fear and insecurity that impede learning. The need to learn is not an expression of incompetence. Those who resist learning have not convinced others that they know it all; they are only fooling themselves. A desire to learn is not an admission of weakness, but an evidence of desire for greater strength. Once we stop learning, we stop living. Learning is a life-long process.

Another component of maintaining a teachable heart is to teach. A few experiences of unteachable attitudes in others will heighten our own desire to maintain a learner's mind-set. As you see the benefits of learning in the lives of others, you can gain more confidence and desire for your own learning.

Lesson Summary

The ministry is a life designed to work from the inside out. God intends that who we are will define what we do, and He is at work shaping us every day.

A part of the heart He desires to build is a thirsty, repentant, and teachable heart. Such a heart knows it desperately needs God, His presence, His grace, and His direction. Pride works in the opposite direction. When a person is hungry for selfish gain and feels he or she is above the need to confess wrongdoing, that individual is headed toward a colossal fall. Only through a humble heart can we receive from God what we need for the work He has placed before us.

Let's Apply That!

- Identify the traits of a thirsty heart, a repentant heart, and a teachable heart. How do those scriptures speak to you?
- Summarize of the importance of cultivating the three types

TURNING FROM THE WRONG HEART

“Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction” (**Psalm 5: 9**).

If ministry flows from the heart, then the wrong heart can be devastating to the work of God's kingdom. Ministers are susceptible to the same temptations and potential snares that others face, and they are not insulated by their title or responsibilities.

Ministers must guard their hearts, or the circumstances they face will propel them toward various failures. They will face hurt and disappointment, mistreatment and criticism, just as others encounter. How a minister chooses to deal with these difficult times will shape his or her life and the work God has given.

Because ministers help others with their times of challenge, some imagine they are better qualified to manage the crises of their lives. But often a minister can struggle to take advice or apply the Bible's wisdom to his or her hurts. Because they often lack accountable relationships, ministers can hide from solving challenges and postpone dealing with their own problems. This is a recipe for disaster.

As the minister faces challenging issues, he or she must be diligent in applying the Bible's principles, or more could be lost than the minister's own soul. A wrong heart will not only devastate the work of God in the leader's life, but it will have an impact on those he or she leads as well. For the minister, guarding the heart is not an optional pursuit. It must be the greatest priority.

A WOUNDED HEART

The Heart Defined

A major part of the minister's work is assisting individuals with the traumas of their lives. The minister is frequently called into crises and expected to help map out a strategy for survival and recovery. As he or she gains experience in these critical ministry moments, the minister will become quite adept at aiding others in times of trauma.

Unfortunately, many ministers are less capable when it comes to their own times of crises. Some believe they are not allowed to feel the weakness of emotional stress. Others give themselves little time to cope with their difficulties. Often a minister will suppress feelings or deny disappointments. But these are only temporary strategies for relief. Emotions that are neglected will resurface, often in the form of a wounded heart.

Every minister will experience times of wounding or hurt. It can be especially disheartening to have invested much effort and love into individuals only to have them turn against you. Such are the wounds of the ministry. When we say that a wounded heart is dangerous for ministry, we do not mean to imply that a minister is not allowed to hurt. But when the leader fails to care for his or her emotional healing and those wounds drive deeper over time, a definite problem has been born.

The wounded heart is one that carries hurt and disappointment beyond its healthy time parameters. A minister who cultivates bitterness or hidden anger toward someone or a group that has hurt him or her is compromising the heart that the minister needs for ministry. Frequently a minister who has experienced hurt will hold that hurt in the shape of a grudge and will later react to situations based on past experiences.

Biblical Examples

One interesting example of the wounded heart occurs early in Scripture in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain's failure in the type of offering he provided was certainly self-inflicted. Rather than deal with his failure, however, he chose to blame his brother. Ultimately his unresolved anger led him to a tragic and life-altering choice to retaliate in violence.

A wounded minister may argue that Cain was the guilty party, and he or she would be correct. Often a minister's wounds occur when he or she has done nothing wrong. But the benefit of Cain's story comes in God's counsel – that sin is crouching at the door. Though Cain's error led to his rejection, it was his failure to deal with his anger that led him to attack his brother. Regardless of fault in the original act, the unwillingness or inability to deal with hurt feelings opened the door for a devastating decision.

Cain's example, while extreme, is instructive for the minister. When our hurt emotions are not dealt with effectively, the door opens to a variety of bad responses. The minister may not attack with physical violence, but other forms of hostility, even passive ones, have been known to emerge from unresolved hurt. The minister who has not dealt with wounds will keep them fresh and ultimately act out of the pain they have caused.

Unresolved emotions led Joseph's brothers to treat him unfairly. But Joseph managed to conquer his own hurt and extend forgiveness when his brothers needed it most. He would have seemed justified in

attacking them or reciprocating their unkindness, but Joseph did not carry a wounded heart. For this reason, he was able to respond in a healthy and remarkable manner years later.

Evidence and Results

What are the signs of a wounded heart? While there are many, suspicion likely tops the list. When a minister privately feels suspicious of people or the motives behind their actions, he or she is likely operating from a wounded heart. Healthy people are not careless or naïve in their views of people, but they are open and able to believe the best about others' actions and motives. The wounded heart battles paranoia as it experiences even the kind efforts of those who have previously hurt.

Another evidence of a wounded heart is fear or deep anxiety. Unresolved hurt or anger will lead us to expect more of the same. Trust becomes difficult. Even the smallest failure of another individual opens old wounds of concern and the fear that a painful road is being revisited.

Hostile responses can also signal a wounded heart, particularly if they are out of character for the minister. When an individual who has always been a peacemaker now struggles to respond in kindness, there is likely a cauldron of pain lurking underneath. Unresolved pain does not diminish with time, rather it typically reroutes itself and pours out on those who may not have had any connection with the original hurt.

A minister with a wounded heart will reach the point of frustration far more rapidly than others. Statements like, "I cannot take it anymore" are seldom a reflection of the current crisis alone. Typically, they are supported by a host of previous events that have yet to be resolved.

A minister who sees such things in his or her own life can self-diagnose a wounded heart. And with such awareness comes a need for immediate action.

Pursuing Change

Conquering the wounded heart can take many varying routes, but the key steps of identification and healing are a part of every journey. To heal a wounded heart, we must first identify it and its source. While the minister may have allowed multiple experiences to pile on the emotional pain, each piece of that pain must have its day of resolution. It may help to have the assistance of a trusted friend in talking through this stage of healing as a minister may struggle to fully acknowledge the impact his or her past has made on the present.

Once the hurtful experiences have been identified, the next step is to prioritize them according to their level of current impact. Certain hurts leave deeper impressions than others, and these must become the key areas of focus for final victory. While hurts do not have to be resolved in the order of greatest pain, knowing which ones have hurt deepest will aid the minister in marking out the road to spiritual health.

Armed with knowledge of the events that have broken his or her heart, the minister is now ready to move toward resolution. As with any emotional crisis, the first step is to acknowledge and experience the full impact of the troubling feelings. In a safe environment, hurt should be expressed, stories told, and emotion vented. God cannot heal what we fail to give fully to Him. Though difficult, the minister must let out the emotion that is affecting his or her life through speaking, writing, or any other means that will help to communicate the pain.

The next step is to decide what to do with these feelings. Should the wronged person choose to forgive, confront the offender, or repack them in his or her own heart? Obviously, the choice to forgive is superior, but it must be the decision of the hurting individual. A minister who forgives because it is expected rather than because he or she chooses to will find any relief short-lived. Choosing to forgive and taking a practical step to communicate that forgiveness will release the bonds that have held the

minister. Then that minister should celebrate the decision in a meaningful way and identify what he or she will think when those who have inflicted the hurt come to mind.

A HYPOCRITICAL HEART

The Heart Defined

One of the most dangerous heart conditions a minister can develop is a hypocritical heart. At first glance, it may seem that such a heart is easy to identify and avoid, but the life of ministry opens doors of temptation in this area that are not always recognized by the minister.

A hypocritical heart is one that fails to achieve honesty in its view of itself. A leader who is more focused on the faults of others while at the same time ignoring his or her own weaknesses is guilty of a hypocritical heart. Some may see hypocrisy as the intentional effort to deceive, but it can also develop unintentionally. When ministers lack accountability or fail to evaluate their own hearts closely, they can slide into this dangerous sin. Jesus called the Pharisees of His day hypocrites, but it is unclear whether their deceptive motives were intentional or equally self-deluding.

A hypocritical heart also is revealed when one is more consumed with appearances than is healthy. The disconnect between what is seen and what is true opens wide the door to this destructive heart condition. Because ministers must perform in many different settings, the potential for this kind of hypocrisy is significant.

Biblical Examples

As stated, the Pharisees offer a powerful example of the hypocritical heart. They simply were not what they appeared to be. Jesus scolded them for their hidden motives and the pretense of righteousness that they were so dependent upon.

It seems that their focus on external things is what led to their hypocrisy. They had mastered common ideas of holiness, but these were largely outward. Because they were reluctant to deal with their own hearts, hypocrisy became their only option.

But biblical examples of hypocrisy are not limited to these deceivers. Paul scolds Peter for a hypocritical lapse concerning his acceptance of the Gentiles, and he expresses his disappointment with Demas who forsook him because his heart was truly more focused on worldly things. Whether a momentary lapse or a life pattern, hypocrisy quickly destroys one's effectiveness in ministry.

Evidence and Results

If a hypocritical heart can begin developing without our awareness, we must understand the warning signs. Certainly, one such sign is the inability to celebrate the successes of others. When a minister is critical of those experiencing success, he or she may be revealing a level of insecurity that will turn into a focus on appearances. Indeed, the Pharisees could not celebrate the repentance of the deepest sinner because their hearts were more in tune to a competitive response to Jesus' popularity.

A hypocritical heart will flourish where there is no self-evaluation or regular pursuit of private times with God. When a leader's ministry is largely or solely public, the environment is set for a prioritizing of the external over the internal. Hypocritical living is just around the corner.

As stated, a focus on the failings of others likely reveals a level of hypocrisy. Jesus suggests that the right response to the sin of others is mourning, not private satisfaction. Certainly, love does not desire the sin to be magnified or the punishment to be without mercy. Only those who have failed to receive the mercy they need can justify failing to extend mercy to others.

Of course, discovering that we are guilty of the same failures we have criticized in others is evidence of a well-developed hypocrisy. The Bible commands everyone to guard and evaluate his or her own heart. If we fail to do so or focus greater energy on evaluating others, hypocrisy is in full bloom.

It should also be noted that a minister can identify hypocrisy in his own heart by taking inventory at home. If a minister is one thing publicly and something else in private, his or her family will be well-versed in the inconsistency. If the pastor's children see the church as something shallow or unreal, it will either be because of the behavior they have seen in the congregation or the conduct of the minister/parent.

Pursuing Change

As with all spiritual change, the first step to healing is humility. Those bound up in hypocrisy can build formidable defenses against an honest look at their lives. We must humble ourselves and acknowledge our wrongdoing before any process of healing can begin.

The second step is repentance. It should be noted that hypocrisy that has been lived publicly may require a repentance that is a bit public as well. When the minister has spoken badly of others, repentance usually should include confession and requests for forgiveness from those who have been hurt. While not every sin will require public acknowledgment and confession, hypocrisy often does.

A new habit of self-evaluation is essential to avoiding a repeat journey down this devastating road. It is also beneficial to engage an accountability relationship with an honest friend or fellow minister. We should not assume that new determination alone will keep us from this familiar path. If ministers have allowed themselves to develop such a heart in the past, they will need the input of others to avoid a return to this failure.

Finally, the minister must steel himself or herself against the temptation to criticize others or highlight their faults. Unless it is our spiritual responsibility to bring discipline to the life of another Christian, we should avoid all temptation to comment on someone else's life. This is the easy path back to dangerous territory and should be avoided by all possible means.

A GREEDY HEART

The Heart Defined

A greedy heart works directly against the heart we must develop for ministry because the greedy heart is self-focused. To become the kind of minister Christ desires, a person must pursue a self-sacrificing mentality. Greed is the desire for one's own benefit.

At first glance, this heart condition may not seem to significantly threaten the sincere minister. But greed takes many forms and is a constant attacker of the right heart for ministry. The Bible defines greed as a form of idolatry, revealing a love for the things of this world. Because a minister's life may require sacrifices others do not seem called to make, the temptation to long for what others enjoy can be surprisingly powerful.

Greed destroys for many reasons. First, greed focuses the heart on things that cannot truly satisfy. The pursuits of wealth, popularity, and power are illusions as they cannot provide the satisfaction or lasting contentment they advertise. Because these are the core temptations that every individual faces, a minister must conquer this battle in his or her own life so he or she can assist others in their own struggles.

Greed is also destructive because it opens the door to the control that such pursuits will exercise in the minister's life. A greedy heart does not always mean the minister will be able to obtain the objects of

desire. Our pursuit or the debt that can occur because of this heart can quickly become a bondage to our ability to be sensitive to God's plans for our lives.

Of course, greed is an affront to God. Idolatry is a clear violation of God's first and most significant command. He has the right to supreme leadership in the believer's life and to the unhindered devotion of the heart. Greed works against these core essentials of walking with God, and it will bring God's judgment. He will not allow His servants to continue in idolatry without serious ramifications.

Biblical Examples

While no specific individual is mentioned, the Proverbs speak often of the heart that pursues what is destructive rather than fearing God. Using numerous images, these paragraphs of wisdom speak of the inability of possessions to truly satisfy while also showing their tendency to destroy.

Solomon, writer of many of these proverbs, also writes in Ecclesiastes of his own experiences with the pursuit of pleasure through wealth. Having the rare vantage point of one who actually attained what he chased, Solomon not only reveals the dissatisfaction of his achievements, but also speaks of the damage such an agenda brings to one's life.

Greed shows up in Ahab's desire for Naboth's vineyard, a parable Jesus told of a deeply indebted servant, and Demas' choice to abandon his calling at the side of the apostle Paul. In each case, greed formulated into a significantly impacted service to God. We have no way of knowing if full recovery is likely or even possible in these circumstances.

While not a part of the biblical record, history is dotted with the greedy pursuits of those who once knew the pure calling to serve God. In the name of money, many things have occurred that directly oppose the principles Christ gave to those who serve Him. It may be accurate to state that greed has undermined more ministers than any other form of temptation.

Evidence and Results

When is greed at work? Expressions of greed or abandoning our ministry to pursue worldly things is an obvious occurrence. But ministers would benefit from earlier detection, so they can avoid the devastating final blows of this negative heart condition.

The book of Proverbs speaks of greed robbing an individual of life (**1: 19**). Perhaps this is a good first place to look for signs of this heart condition. When individuals are unable to be happy or content in their circumstances, it may be because their desires have turned elsewhere. A minister's greed may not focus on things as much as on the attaining of a new place of ministry where success is more visible, or benefits are more attractive.

Each individual knows his or her own thoughts. When those thoughts focus more on what one lacks rather than on the benefits of what one has been given, a greedy heart may be forming. A minister who has trouble being thankful may face this dilemma because his or she really is not thankful. Again, this may be an indicator of the beginnings of greed.

Excessive debt also can be a sign of greed. While ministers may justify their debts based on the limitations of their income, such debt likely reveals more. When we must acquire regardless of our ability to pay, greed is at work. Though modern times have made debt an acceptable option, we can also see what that debt may be saying about the condition of our hearts.

Pursuing Change

Healing such a heart begins with confession as acknowledging the greed opens the way for God to remove it. Unfortunately, many fail to take such a step until they are threatened with a severe loss—perhaps an inability to pay one's debts or the loss of a ministry position.

Various forms of fasting can aid the recovery from greed as well. The choice to deny ourselves for another purpose can help a reforming heart learn new spending patterns. Those who seriously desire to turn from these habits find great satisfaction in successfully postponing an expenditure or denying it all together. Self-denial is living the reality of the crucified life and an important expression of faith.

Of course, greed cannot be fully healed until contentment is achieved. This requires a shifting of focus rather than a decision to be happy with what one has. Those who can shift their focus to heavenly treasure find earthly treasure less appealing. The minister who has let greed feed self-worth needs to rediscover the nature of his or her worth and find satisfaction in life with the Creator.

A minister must pursue healing in this arena for his or her own benefit and for those who follow after. Greed is a powerful temptation, particularly in a world that prizes possessions above all else. The minister who can conquer greed will be free to experience a life of dependence on God's love and provision.

Summary

A key part of developing the right heart for ministry is found in being sensitive to those things that can destroy the heart. A minister who does not manage the negative experiences of life and allow God to heal them will find long-lasting problems developing within.

When the minister feels the sting of emotional hurt, feels he or she does not measure up to others, or is frustrated by what he or she does not have, the door is open to the development of a negative heart condition. Each of these experiences is common, and, sadly, they derail an individual's pursuit of God's plan. Only through carefully guarding and cleansing our hearts can wounded, hypocritical, or greedy hearts be avoided.

These are not areas for the careless. A minister must be diligent to see that these temptations are conquered within. Failure to root them out quickly will devastate our ministry and make it difficult to rebuild.

Let's Apply That!

- Define the traits of a wounded heart, a hypocritical heart, and a greedy heart. How did the scriptural examples speak to you?
- Summarize of the importance of turning away from the three types of hearts in objective. Do you recognize areas of your heart that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you?

GOD'S TESTS FOR LEADERS

"You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting" (**Daniel 5: 27, NLT**).

Tests are designed to prove or demonstrate knowledge. When a student is tested in mathematics or history, that student's knowledge and ability are on display. What he or she knows will be proven by the testing.

God tests His servants in a similar manner. Through times of testing, He is able to prove what we know and what we have developed within our hearts. But God's testing has the dual purpose of teaching us. Different from a university's exam, God's tests seek not only to measure but also to further the teaching process in our lives. In fact, it could be stated that without His testing, there is no real development of the traits He has targeted for us.

The minister can anticipate times of testing as he or she pursues God's plan for his or her life. Often the minister will be tempted to feel these times are a battle between self and those who oppose him or her. But God's tests operate on a higher level. More is happening than the circumstances one sees. God will often use our circumstances to bring out His character in us or reveal that we have a deeper need of His influence.

James reminds us that God should never be charged with tempting us, because His motive is not to lead us to sin. But He will test us to teach us and to help us see where our own growth is most significantly needed. As a minister, you will face numerous tests and you will likely face them repeatedly. The more often you succeed in God's priorities, the closer you will come to the fullness of all He has designed for your life of service.

THE TEST OF SERVANTHOOD

Understanding the Test

Any understanding of the ministry must include a keen sense that a minister is called to the life of a servant. The minister's priority is to serve the desires of the Master and to demonstrate His love by serving others. Jesus revealed the latter when He responded to Simon Peter's claim to love Him with, "Feed my lambs."

A minister's servanthood will be tested. One such test comes when God's directives oppose one's personal desires. While serving Christ gives us the joy of fulfilling the desires of the heart, there are occasions where life as a servant requires us to step outside of personal preferences. In these moments, the true nature and depth of servanthood is revealed.

Another expression of this test is found in those times where the work of a servant requires personal sacrifice. When there is a need to give beyond what we have given or where we are called on in difficult times to sacrificially respond, such moments test servanthood. The minister must manage his or her strength and time within healthy boundaries, but the life of a servant is not a part-time role. We must be ready when the Master calls on us.

Perhaps the most difficult expression of the test of servanthood comes when we are treated like a servant. Ministers can be tempted to expect a certain level of respect or good treatment because of all they give for others. But there are times when the minister is treated unfairly or "persecuted for righteousness' sake" (**Matthew 5: 10, KJV**). When we are treated like servants, the nature of our sacrificial lives is revealed. Much of modern culture is keenly focused on individual rights, but the servant has few. We cannot seek our own and qualify as a servant.

Biblical Examples

Ezekiel is an interesting servant of God. During Ezekiel's life and ministry God asked the prophet to speak to His people in some unusual ways. Such occasions included complete silence except when God had given him a message and illustrating God's word through unusual and personally embarrassing ways. Ezekiel was willing to deny his own popularity and cultural advancement by being obedient to God.

Noah's test brought great public humiliation. His obedience to God caused him to spend more than a century promoting a project that brought him no converts but gallons of ridicule. Noah proved himself a worthy servant by demonstrating extraordinary obedience. And, of course, he received a supernatural rescue from God's judgment.

Among God's other amazing servants was Hosea. God asked much of this minor prophet. Hosea's love life became his sermon illustration as God commanded him to marry a harlot. His experience of personal rejection and then the command to remarry her despite her unrepentant heart illustrated God's love for His people. Consequently, Hosea was required to abandon hopes of the happy home others enjoyed.

These and numerous others demonstrate that the test of servanthood is designed to reveal the level of obedience a servant will offer. While these may seem to be extreme illustrations – and we should not think that God wants us to do extreme things simply to impress Him – they illustrate the fact that God has a right to ask anything and everything of those who serve Him.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

If a minister fails to develop the heart of a servant, the price is significant. It is possible to continue in positions of ministry without maintaining the heart of a servant. Certainly, the Pharisees of Jesus' day had mastered this compromised position. But the price of this disconnect between heart and true mission was high for the Pharisees and continues to be costly for ministers who, in modern times, fail to develop a heart of servanthood while filling the role of a servant of God.

Part of the cost comes in the inability of God to work through the self-focused. Those who will not allow Him to build a servant's spirit within them will see God remove His hand and glory from their efforts. He has made it clear that He will not share His glory. Those who do not live to magnify God will not experience the lasting sense of His anointing for their work.

Failing the test of servanthood spirals one into a growing sense of pride in ministry. Sadly, some ministers see their pride grow as their ministries grow. After a time, they are more likely to expect to be served rather than to continue seeing themselves as servants. When we allow this takeover of our hearts, we find ourselves moving in the opposite direction of the God we claim to serve.

One of the clear realities of the Pharisees' experience was the complete inability to accomplish life-change for those who needed God's work. When a minister fails to be a servant, God will remove His power and leave the minister to depend on his or her own abilities. Such a scenario eliminates the potential of anything more than surface change in people's hearts. God alone can bring the power and freedom people need to experience His life-change. Without His presence and power, hope for making a real difference is lost.

How to Get a Passing Grade

As with many of the tests that God will place before His servants, the key ingredient for a passing grade is humility. Since pride is the enemy of the servant, humility must be seen as his or her greatest

protection. A servant must maintain a daily focus on an intimate relationship with God and seek to serve the agenda of the Master fully.

Another step that can be beneficial in passing this test is the pursuit of relationship with others that maintain a servant's heart. Ministers can study the lives of those who have successfully served God before them, and they can prioritize friendships with others who hold a servant's attitude. These influences make a significant difference in helping the minister stay focused on life as a servant.

Through these relationships a deeper step can be taken as well. By entering a relationship of accountability with another minister or trusted friend, the minister can protect himself or herself against the temptation to be self-serving. Typically, such a relationship is most effective when it is with another minister. Few people outside of the life of ministry can truly understand the temptations to pride that a minister will face. A trusted friend who shares the same calling can be an enormous aid in holding fast to a servant's heart.

Finally, a willingness to aggressively sacrifice those things that hinder is essential to a passing grade. When we recognize that we are slipping from our commitment to serve, we must act quickly to remove that which is hindering us. If we fail to act quickly, we will become more comfortable with the intrusion and soon not notice when the attacks come. Paul takes such a strong step when people begin to worship him. Rather than tolerate the temptation to lose track of his place as a servant, Paul reacts strongly, pushing away the moment in no uncertain terms (**Acts 14: 8 – 18**).

THE TEST OF SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Understanding the Test

Love is a concept confused by its multiple uses. For some, love seems like an emotion that floods the life with warm feelings when the object of that love is nearby. For others, love is a decision of commitment that can endure times when the emotions are not deeply engaged. For still others, love has lost all meaning as it seems no longer attainable or able to satisfy the cravings of a troubled heart.

In spite of these confusing thoughts concerning love, the love required of a servant is sacrificial. God will develop this love in the lives of His servants by testing, and those tests take a clear and consistent form. The test of sacrificial love comes when a servant is confronted with the command of His Master. Love can mean any number of things, but love that costs is clearly sacrificial love.

Life in the ministry will confront the individual with many costly choices. Financial sacrifice, deep emotional requirement, and hard-fought forgiveness are some of the results of loving. Paul spoke of denying himself on a daily basis, indicating his understanding of this test. The life of ministry calls those who pursue it too often deprive themselves of things others happily pursue. Other times call for forgiveness and love to be extended to those who certainly do not deserve it.

Sacrificial love differs slightly from unconditional love, but they flow from the same heart. Unconditional love focuses on the one being loved and highlights his or her inability to act in ways that remove him or her from that love. Sacrificial love focuses on the one giving love and the lengths that person will go in maintaining that love.

Biblical Examples

Abraham's trip up Mount Moriah with his son Isaac in tow is a significant example of the test of sacrificial love. It is a compelling story that challenges the most ardent servants of God. Surely Abraham was traumatized by the possible outcome. Had God required his own life, the decision would

have been easier than sacrificing the life of his promised and precious son. How could God ask such a thing? How can this be God?

Often in the test of sacrificial love, the minister will ask the same questions. This test comes without the desired explanation or understanding. Thoughts of the overwhelming unfairness are within arm's reach. Justifiable defenses are raised, and rationalization of other alternatives is a ready option. The price is more than unfair—it does not make sense at all! Abraham was a human just like we are, and though the Bible does not elaborate his emotional struggle, we would be foolish to think one did not take place.

Still Abraham obeyed, leaving us to wonder how and why. The answer comes in the angel's observation, "now I know that you fear God" (**Genesis 22: 12**). Abraham made his choice because choosing to disobey was not an option for him. God was his greatest focus and priority, and obedience to God's commands – even the ones that did not make any sense – was Abraham's most critical agenda. He feared God, feared the thought of disobedience, and obeyed what he did not understand. Perhaps this is the strongest definition of faith offered in the Bible.

Of course, we know the outcome. God stopped Abraham's act of obedience and provided a substitute to save Isaac. But it was Abraham's sacrificial love that was proven and generations beyond him would be blessed because of it.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

Sacrificial love clearly implies a price. But there is a price for choosing against such love as well. Those things that we are unwilling to sacrifice will capture our hearts and ultimately possess us.

God typically will not require that we sacrifice everything we possess, but He could. When Jesus informed the rich young ruler that he would need to sell all his possessions and give away what he owned, He was acting within His right as God. He knew what already possessed this young man. While some see the command and wonder if all of us must obey it, the true story is found in the man's unwillingness to part with what was already keeping him from God.

When we fail the test of sacrificial love, we solidify the hold of inferior things on our hearts. What we are unwilling to part with moves into the place of the Master and begins to control us. This is idolatry in its clearest expression. It may seem difficult to think of Abraham's love for Isaac as possibly developing into idolatry, but this is the reality of the path had he disobeyed God's command. Anytime we say no to God and choose something or someone else, we sow seeds for future destruction, and we take a clear step away from the God who has called us.

How to Get a Passing Grade

Passing this test requires a sacrificial spirit and some practice at sacrificing. The more you cultivate a giving spirit, the more easily you can give what God will require. Certainly, the answer is not in simply giving everything away, but if you have trouble responding with compassion and self-sacrifice in those times you are confronted with need, you will not be able to give sacrificially when your Master calls on you.

Be a giver when it does not hurt, and you will have greater ability to give when it does. Avoid the attention of others when you give, and you will not feed the pride that causes you to desire to hold on to what is yours. Be intentional in your giving, not careless. Foolishness in giving ignores the price and ultimately eliminates the sacrificial element of the act of giving. Knowing the price and choosing to give on purpose brings the experience to the place of worship.

Be careful what you attach your heart to. Be aware that the love you attach to things will prompt God to require sacrifice to save you from such harmful lusts. Do not be afraid to love what you should love,

but do not choose to love what is unworthy of eternal attention. If you love temporal things, you are essentially asking God to require them of you in order to help you stay focused on what is eternal.

THE TEST OF FAITHFULNESS

Understanding the Test

The idea of faithfulness is bound in constancy or dependability. It conveys the choice to remain steadfast regardless of the changing circumstances. To be faithful is to always respond in the required fashion.

Testing faithfulness comes, then, through the changing of circumstances. Every Christian knows of the determination born in a Sunday night altar that melts into failure by Tuesday. But the faithfulness God wants to cultivate in His servants holds steady regardless of even the deepest crisis.

God's faithfulness is demonstrated in the constancy of His love regardless of our worthiness or performance. Our faithfulness is demonstrated in the constancy of our obedience regardless of our understanding or comfort. The only means by which such love can be tested is the removal of understanding or comfort, and such are the realities of the tests God brings to our lives.

When our circumstances move beyond what we can understand, God is testing our faithfulness. Because His love is perfect, and His plan is unstoppable, we can have confidence in His promises in any circumstance. But learning to apply that confidence is not automatic, so God tests us to grow us. By requiring us to be faithful when it is difficult to be faithful, God is developing this essential trait in those who serve Him.

Biblical Examples

Joseph provides us with a remarkable story of a young man's faithfulness to God when understanding was lacking. At first glance, we might mistakenly perceive that this favored son with the colorful coat and the dreams of his future prominence was a spoiled child who needed to be taken down a notch or two. But when the coat and the close-by love of his father are removed, something much stronger emerges.

Joseph remained faithful through what appears to be more than thirteen years of mistreatment. Sold as a slave, accused of a crime his accuser knew he did not commit, and forgotten by the people he had remarkably helped, Joseph could have justified turning from his life of obedience to God's commands. But he stayed faithful. Even when it would have been impossible to see what God was doing, he stayed faithful. If only his progeny in future generations could have done the same, the Old Testament would likely read very differently.

The disciples offer amazing stories of faithfulness as well. Though Scripture does not follow each of their lives to the end, church history helps us see that these struggling recruits developed into men who would be faithful in spite of deep persecution and enormous personal cost. As they walked with God, He molded them into faithful heroes as they faced test after test – and our grasp on the gift of salvation is one of the lasting results of their faithfulness.

Why You Cannot Afford to Fail

What can separate us from the love of Christ? Nothing can, except our own choice to separate ourselves. Repeated failure of the test of faithfulness brings spiritual tragedy. Simon Peter knew the trauma of failing the test of faithfulness. In the confusion and emotions of Jesus' arrest, he lacked the strength to stand faithful when confronted by a servant girl. A few pages later, Peter clamored out of a boat to apologize to Jesus and seek an opportunity for restoration.

Thankfully, God does not eliminate us or our potential when we fail this test, but repeated failure will ultimately bring separation.

The very nature of this test defines the means of punishing our failure. When Israel failed to be faithful to their faithful God, He used their circumstances to teach the hard lessons of faithfulness. When they chose comfort and other gods over Him, God removed their comfort and let the nations of those gods dominate them. Essentially, He gave them what they chose in nauseating portions. This is how God turns us to faithfulness as well. He lets us have the consequences of our choices and helps us discover how completely unsatisfying they are.

How to Get a Passing Grade

A passing grade comes with the choice to be faithful – a choice that can only be made through clear priorities. We will become consistently faithful by outlining and adhering to a common sense, biblical plan for daily living that includes finishing what we start, keeping our promises, and giving our resources when no one sees. We must choose ahead of the challenge in order to be ready for the challenge when it comes. Choices made in comfort will be tested by discomfort. If, however, we cannot make such a choice in comfort, we have little reason to think we will make that choice in discomfort.

As with the test of sacrificial love, we can increase our likelihood of passing this test by choosing to remove what we sense is getting in the way. When the objects that breed unfaithfulness are eliminated, we have limited our choice to faithfulness in times of crisis.

As the title indicates, faithfulness starts with faith. We should aggressively build our faith – our fear of God and determination to obey Him. We must resist temptations to pursue our own pleasure and determinedly pursue His plan for our lives. When His purpose is our priority, the choice for faithfulness can withstand challenge.

We must also cultivate the concept and priority of faithfulness in our families. When faithfulness is the priority of husband, wife, and children, it will more easily be their choice when hard circumstances arise. Often a minister's inability to be faithful in changing circumstances can stem from differing agendas with those he or she loves. By building all relationship around a commitment to faithfulness, we surround ourselves with strength and encouragement toward faithfulness.

Summary

Tests are a key way in which God grows those who serve Him. While tests measure what is already present, they also help identify and establish what needs to grow within us. The tests of servanthood, sacrificial love, and faithfulness all operate on this principle.

Each of these tests depends on a clear view of God as Lord of our lives. If He has the right to direct us and can require of us as He sees fit, we are ready to allow Him to set the agenda of our lives. If we insist on maintaining leadership and control, we will not only fail the test but also lose significant opportunities for effectiveness in the life of ministry.

Passing the tests of servanthood, sacrificial love, and faithfulness begins with the commitment to let God rule us. But we must then expect that decision to be tested in a variety of changing circumstances. Each time, we are given opportunity to affirm God's first place within us. This is our greatest success. By surrounding ourselves with others who desire the same direction and by cultivating our own faith, we can learn the relationship of dependence and faithfulness God has always desired to grow in those He loves.

Let's Apply That!

- Explain characteristics of the tests of servanthood, sacrificial love, and faithfulness. How did the Scripture verses apply to what God is doing in your heart?
- Summarize of the tests of the three virtues in this section, including the means by which each test is passed.

Excerpts from:

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