

the tenth step

Prepare to undertake God's specific will for our lives, using his gifts, in his power, to fulfill his perfect plans

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -fruit that will last..." (John 15:16)

In this session, we are going to be considering specific service, or *ministry*. Ministry - for some - may conjure up images of dog-collars, pointy hats or other strange items of clothing. Perhaps it is seen as a calling for the few... the super-spiritual, the heavyweights of doctrine and theology. The church itself may be responsible for such perceptions of ministry but, taken together, they paint a picture that is far removed from reality. So what is ministry really about, and why is it important for *us* to consider it?

Ministry - loosely defined - is service to church and individuals that we are specifically called to do. It is the expression of God's love through the abilities he gives us, in the manner and situation of his choosing - inside or outside of the church environment. In the eighth step, we made the distinction between the kind of general service we are all called to (and can all render), and the particular service that Father God has pre-planned for our lives. It is not a perfect distinction - for example, the line between general and specific service may be blurred, and general service itself may well be pre-planned - but it is, nonetheless, one we should find helpful in realising our full potential in Christ.

One of the reasons it is helpful, is precisely because of that perception of ministry that we began with. Ministry is not just for the few, it is for all of us...and it *doesn't* have to be high-profile. Alongside callings like pastoring and evangelism, the bible talks about such ministries as encouraging and giving. We should all encourage and give, anyway - but some Christians have a *gift* for serving in these (and similar) ways. They are able to encourage, give - or whatever else - *effectively* and *decisively*. People who are called to ministries like these may never be household names - even in their own church - but through using what God has given them, they are able to make a profound impact on the lives of individuals.

We all have those works '*prepared in advance*' to do, and while that can apply to general service, it is equally true of ministry. Ministry may be full or part-time, paid or unpaid. It may or may not require study or training, but it will *always* require commitment. Ministry is a divine tool to build up the church and to bless individuals, whether they are giving or receiving ministry. It is God's chosen method of including his children in his plans, giving real meaning and significance to our daily lives. Like our general service, it is the opportunity to put love into action, but it is also the opportunity to put our specific abilities to use...*in the situation - and for the purpose - that God intended!*

The primary purpose of being given any ability, talent or gift, is so that we can honour God with it by employing it in the service of others. Yet in giving, we, ourselves, receive: There is deep fulfilment in effectively conveying the love of Christ through service. It is a level of satisfaction that only those who know Jesus can ever feel, but it is also, sadly, one that many Christians miss out on, simply because they have never come into a full understanding of ministry. As we are pursuing God's best plan for our lives, we will want to be sure we have a good grasp of ministry, which is going to be a significant part of that plan.

the connection between 'gifting' and 'calling'

"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it according to his faith. If it serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:4-8:)

Here, the Apostle Paul again uses that analogy of the human body to describe how the church works, which we first encountered in 1 Corinthians 12. The overall message is the same: Christians have specific God-given abilities, to be used for the benefit of the others. Like Corinthians, it emphasises our mutual belonging and dependence -our differences in gifting are *planned* and *complimentary*, designed to produce a dynamically functioning church. But whereas the Corinthian passage is focussed largely on the subject of unity in diversity, this one addresses the practicalities of service. It seems to tell us the obvious, that what we are gifted at is what we should be doing. Yet obvious or not, even Christians sometimes feel drawn to areas of service for which they are not suited. Like pop-stars who take up acting or actors who decide they can sing, they can be tempted to engage in activities for which they may be ill-equipped. The consequences, however, are far more serious than a bad film or a rotten recording, because ministry is the work of God. The church - the body of Christ - suffers when this happens. Service carried out by those who are not called to do it is poor service, and they may well be neglecting what they *are* supposed to do. To illustrate, let's return to the body analogy for a moment - ears are just great for the purpose intended, but if you tried to use them for walking, a) you wouldn't get very far and, b) you wouldn't hear very much.

Christians may be tempted to branch out into the wrong ministry, but the main reason they sometimes become 'square pegs in round holes' is because they have not correctly ascertained their calling. We don't want that problem, and by the time we finish this session, we should be well-equipped to avoid making such mistakes. Before that, there's a few other things we need to consider. Let's start where ministry itself starts - our relationship with God.

ministry and our relationship with God

Ministry, of course, is about love in action. It is also about God enabling us to help each other realise our full potential in Christ - as individuals and as a church. It is a primary source of God's blessing...both for the server, and the ones being served. But it *isn't* our primary reason for living. Our 'design function', our main purpose in life - is to enjoy eternal relationship with our Heavenly Father and, while ministry is an important part of that relationship, it can never become a substitute for an ever closer walk with God. Ministry is "God's will in God's way", and God's way is *service through relationship*.

Among the many blessings that specific service brings, is that it is used by God to help the one serving come to maturity in Christ. Part of that maturity is a heartfelt understanding that our dependence on him is *absolute* - that everything we do, and everything we are, derives its significance from being in relationship with him. Sometimes people can loose sight of that and, when that happens, their ministry suffers. More importantly, their relationship with God suffers. To ensure that never happens to us, we need to know how it can happen to other people. Let's take an imaginary (and extreme) example - 'John' - to see the kind of problems that can occur.

getting it wrong...

'John' has correctly identified his gift and ministry as preaching, and he is called to do that at his home church. He does it well and, pretty soon, he's getting invites from other churches. He accepts all of these, and also the invitation to write a column for a Christian newspaper. He reckons he can just about survive on 'offerings' by now, and he resigns from his day job - to the dismay of his wife. Because of the time involved in writing his first book, he has taken to downloading sermons from the internet and 'personalising' them. He seldom has a moment to pray or read the bible, although he listens to worship tapes while he writes. His more lucrative speaking engagements now preclude preaching at his home church, he rarely gets to a service or house-group, and he has forgotten all about his commitment to pick up the elderly for their Tuesday night meeting.

Five years after the call to service, John is 'burnt out'. The speaking engagements have largely dried up, the book has bombed, and he is wondering if he will ever hear from God - or his wife - again.

What did John get wrong? Almost everything. *Absolutely everything* after answering the call to service. John took on work he wasn't called to do. He took on work outside of his gifting. He 'turned professional' because it suited him - without God's leading (or his wife's blessing), and he relied on the gifting of internet preachers because he no longer had time to use his own. He neglected fellowship, his specific service, and his *general* service. Most importantly, he neglected his relationship with God. Unsurprisingly, he also neglected his marriage, and his wife abandoned him, some time after *he* had effectively abandoned *her*.

John didn't end up like this because he was pursuing his ministry. He *wasn't* pursuing his ministry - he was pursuing selfish ambition, personal significance and financial security. Ministry is about God, it is not about *self*. John was offered the opportunity of a fulfilled life - service which would have been a joy to him and a blessing to others - but he came to see his identity in what he did, rather than in his relationship with God. He wanted to be 'John - the international speaker and bestselling author', but God wanted him to be 'John who loves Jesus and serves him faithfully'.

If John *had* concentrated on spending quality time with God, he would still have had time to effectively answer his call, enjoy fellowship, perform general service *and* have a home life. The first time, *the very moment* that John's workload prevented him from praying, reading the bible or worship, he should have realised that he had stepped out of God's will. When ministry comes between a man and his fellowship with God, at least some of it *isn't* ministry!

...and getting it right!

Worthwhile service - that is, service that blesses all concerned - is dependent on *love*. As the Apostle Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 13, *only* that which comes from love has real value. That love, in turn, depends on maintaining and deepening our relationship with God. In that relationship, we are refreshed for our work, given joy in service, and empowered to do it well. On that last point, when we are doing God's will in his strength (and we are in close fellowship with him), we *will* do it well. *His* gift, used in the situation of *his* choice, used in submission to (and in relationship with) *him*, equals dynamic ministry. But, just like in a chemical compound, the removal of any one of these elements results in something quite different... in this case, *mediocrity*. We won't be going down that road, but it's as well to have it clearly signposted.

ministry and general service

When we looked at 'John', we touched on the fact that he neglected his general service - that 'love in action' we considered in the eighth session. But can our ministry become so crucial that we really *shouldn't* spend time on small acts of kindness others could do? Let's take our cue from Paul the Apostle. Aside from the work of Jesus, ministry doesn't come any more crucial than that entrusted to Paul - Apostle to the Gentiles, charged with spreading the gospel throughout the known world. With this ministry, and very little time in which to accomplish it (and much of *that* spent in prison), Paul, if anyone, could claim the right to ignore the little things. But he didn't. He was Paul the Apostle, but he was also Paul the encourager, and Paul the peacemaker. He probably 'greeted' more people than the average welcome team, and gave personal witness to any who came his way - be they fearful sailors, superstitious islanders, or the prison warder holding him captive. But perhaps the general service he did most of was to pray for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

We can see Paul's caring attitude in his letter to Philemon. This short note can be sometimes overlooked - it contains no apparent teaching, just an appeal on behalf of a runaway slave called Onesimus. But actually it tells us rather a lot. It tells what general service *is* - not as a theological idea, but what it is in practice. The apostle is pleading for this slave to be forgiven, and for him to be treated as a brother. Paul is willing to use his time and all his influence to help this man - a man who had failed, a man who could never repay this kindness. Paul says this about Onesimus, *'If he... owes you anything, charge it to me'*(verse 18). Paul, of course, was himself only imitating Jesus - who cared (and cares) for the smallest need of the least important person. Come to that, didn't Jesus himself (in effect) say to Father God on behalf of each of *us*, the same that Paul said to Philemon on behalf of the slave - *If he owes you anything, charge it to me?*...but let's not forget to do the 'little things', no matter what our calling.

Whether we are in general service now and looking towards ministry, or we are already in ministry and want to serve God even more, there is one thing that will make us eligible for all God has for us. *All we have to do to experience God's best plan for lives is to put our willingness and application into what we are doing now.* Put simply, God responds to *faithfulness*.

faithfulness - a key to greater service

In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus tells the 'Parable of the Ten Minas'. It is an illustration which addresses an important principle of service. In brief, three men were given varying small sums of money and told to put it to work, until the king returned. Two of them did just that, while the other did nothing with what he had been given. The two who faithfully discharged their duties were rewarded out of all proportion - *"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'* he said to the first, (Luke 19:17) while the second man was given control of five cities. Yet the one who did nothing forfeited even the little he had (Luke 19:24).

There is more to the message of this story, however, than 'use it or lose it' - let's consider the rewards of the faithful servants for a moment. Aside from the fact that their rewards were out of all proportion to their achievements, there are a couple of other points which are relevant to us: First, the rewards were for faithfulness in service, and they were rewarded with *greater service*. They were put in charge of cities, becoming servants of the people... but they were still servants of their master. These men were given *leadership roles* but, in the Christian context, leadership is (or always should be) servanthood. Christian leaders may have more responsibility than other Christians, yet their *main* responsibility is still to serve God and their brothers and sisters in Christ. *Second*, they were given their positions over cities on the basis of their faithfulness in small matters, *not* because they had shown any aptitude for local government. It may be that

God calls *us* to serve in a way that seems quite beyond us. We could feel we have no aptitude for the task - that we are inadequate. Well, that's the best type of calling - the call to rely totally on God - to serve in *his* strength alone.

God wants us to *succeed*. If we *know* we are called to something beyond our capabilities, we also know that he will accomplish it through us, *if* we remain faithful. As Paul once said, '*I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*' (Philippians 4:13)

more about gifts and abilities...

Let's consider what might be called our natural gifts and abilities...that is, those talents we seem to have had from an early age, or the abilities that we have later learnt. Will God use these in ministry? That depends on what they are! If they serve God's purposes, he may well make use of them. For example, if we have a talent for such things as singing or music, if we are good at organising or publicity, we may find that these skills will be useful in the service of God. But, because ministry is about building up the church - in maturity and in a numerical sense - there will be some talents that just don't have an application in God's service, and others that only get used in specific circumstances. The life of King David illustrates talents that are seldom (or never) used: God employed David's musical ability to minister to Saul, and once even found a purpose for David's dexterity with the sling...but his skill with domestic animals was never needed again - even though we may think of him as a shepherd to his people! However, talents that have no direct bearing on ministry may sometimes perform a supporting role: The Apostle Paul utilised his skill as a tentmaker to support himself as he went about God's business. Though the ability to make tents had no direct application in his calling, it nonetheless served a purpose. When Paul came to Christ, he brought with him a couple of things that God *could* make direct use of in his ministry: His 'great learning' (gained under the Jewish teacher Gamaliel) gave him a strong base from which to demonstrate that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah of scripture. Perhaps equally important to Paul's ministry, though, was his *character*. Before his conversion experience, he had pursued Christians with determination and zeal, even being willing to travel in order to bring them to punishment. That same determination, when submitted to Christ, led him to travel much of the 'known world', and despite beatings, imprisonment and hardships he continued to proclaim the good news.

Sometimes, though, God calls people to work in ways that are far removed from their field of expertise....if they have one at all. In fact, God has a long history of picking the most unlikely candidates to do his will - or at least, they may seem unlikely to us. People like Moses in the Old Testament - and Peter in the New - would not appear to be the obvious choices for powerful ministry, yet God used them mightily. Come to that, David the shepherd boy could only have looked like a potential king to God himself. Certainly, Samuel - who was sent to anoint a new king - was not looking for someone like David. Though he hadn't been told by God exactly *who* it was going to be, Samuel had his own expectations of the sort of man who would make a national ruler. The account of this event (1 Samuel 16) is quite revealing, so let's join it at verse 6, where Samuel (having been guided to the general location of the man he sought) is trying to identify God's chosen servant... *'When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things that man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* Samuel was then led to David, God's chosen king.

the heart of he matter

“The Lord looks at the heart”... what matters to God is not how talented we are, it is what we are like deep down. Moses, Peter and David were chosen for their *potential*, but it was the potential of their *hearts* that mattered. If we love God and his people, if we have submitted our lives to him unconditionally, we are already realising our potential as human beings - and we can be sure that God will give us every opportunity to express our heart attitude through fulfilling service.

One of the most encouraging things about Moses, Peter and David is the fact that they *weren't* the obvious choices. Apparently, they didn't have a single significant gift between them. Even the potential of their hearts would not have been immediately clear to anyone but God - and that's perhaps especially true of Moses. This was a man who made several attempts to reject God's call on his life. He was rude and off-hand towards God, but instead of treating him how he deserved, God persisted with Moses, patiently dealing with every objection raised. Interestingly, the main objection Moses raised (Exodus 4) was his own inadequacy - he couldn't speak for God because he was “*slow of speech and tongue*” (verse 10). God's response was not only to give him an assistant (Aaron), but to promise to help them both speak. One of the problems Moses had was that - because he couldn't see the gift - he wanted to reject the call.

When Moses told God he was no public speaker, did he *really* expect the Almighty to say something like “I never thought of that - sorry to bother you”? God is *omniscient* - he knows everything - and he was fully aware that if he wanted anything worthwhile to come from the mouth of Moses, he would first have to put it there himself.

In the bible, there is a general principle of *supernatural empowerment* - that God imparts whatever abilities are necessary for his people to function dynamically . The lesson we can draw from Moses is that if God calls us to a task which seems beyond us, we can trust him for the power to carry it out... *The difficulty of the work doesn't matter, when it is Almighty God who calls us to do it!*

the call to service

Some Christians never attain all God has for them in ministry - perhaps because they don't understand that we all have a role to play in the body of Christ. Others (like Moses) may think they have nothing to offer. Yet it is part of God's perfect plan for our lives that we *all* know the joy of love in action, contributing to the well-being and growth of his family. But exactly *how* do we come to an understanding of God's particular will for *our* lives...how are we going to know what we are called to?

When we are considering our calling, we still need to remember that *God wants us to succeed*. We can only succeed in the *right* ministry and, therefore, we can be sure that our Heavenly Father *will* guide us. We might get a very direct call to service, but God may well only reveal his plan a piece at a time. For example, when Abraham was called, he was given some idea of what would ultimately happen, but no details about how it would come to pass. He was just told to pack up and leave, and to ‘*go to the land I will show you.*’(Genesis 12:1) In Acts 8:26-40, we see this principle repeated with Philip, although *he* was called to a much smaller task. Philip was just told to head south to the Jerusalem road. No explanation was given, but - in obeying God - Philip led a man to faith *and* personally experienced the miraculous.

Often, God leads people a step at a time, but he doesn't always tell them *where* he is leading. At such times, the key is *obedience* and *trust*. We obey to the limit of what we know we should be doing, and we trust God to bring his perfect plan into our lives. In truth, those who disobey never get to see that plan come to fruition. If they have refused to take the first step (for example), they

are not in the right position from which to take the second. We will find, however, that there are rich rewards in obeying our Heavenly Father, whether or not he tells us the outcome in advance.

Sometimes, Christians may not be sure they are hearing correctly from God regarding ministry, and other times they may feel they are ready for service, but still await direction. It may be that the situation will be clarified through prayer, or through prayerful consideration and discussion with a church leader. It is always good to pray, and there may be much to be gained from the counsel of another Christian. Some people use gifting and calling 'checklists', which ask the reader to tick various abilities and character traits. The answers are then 'scored', and the stronger elements of talent and personality are matched with a list of possible callings. Of course, this method may tell us what we are like - and what we are good at - but it *won't* tell us what God wants us to do with our lives. Yet checklists can serve a purpose: They can highlight abilities that may be valuable to the church, and these may be used and developed - even if they don't form the basis of our specific calling. Nothing that can serve the church should be wasted, but (in any event) it's quite possible to start using gifts in this way - only to find that we *are* fulfilling God's main purpose in our lives!

It would be nice, though, to be absolutely sure...to *know* that we are right at the centre of God's will for us - ready to enjoy dynamic service now or be certain of the prospect of it in God's perfect time. Well, we *can* be sure...

'bearing fruit'

This session began with a quote from John 15, in which Jesus is telling his disciples that they are appointed to 'bear fruit'. Though bearing fruit is also about personal maturity in Christ, the essence of ministry is to bear fruit for God's kingdom - whether that is leading people to Christ, or serving those who already know him. In that same chapter of John, Jesus promises us that we will bear **much** fruit. In effect, he is promising each of us powerful service...but it is a *conditional* promise, which means that - if we meet the condition - we will certainly receive the promise. Let's have a look at it - John 15:5. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit;..."*

The promise is 'much fruit', and the condition is 'remaining' in Christ. *Providing that we remain in Christ, meaningful and fulfilling service is absolutely inevitable*, because the promise is made by the One who has all power. We should remember, however, that the fruit belongs to God - we just bear it. It is he who produces it, and that fact is emphasised by the end of that line from John 15:5, which goes on to say ... *'apart from me, you can do nothing'*. Our service derives its value from being 'in' Christ.

There is nothing that can prevent us receiving that promise of 'much fruit' in full, because it is not dependent on our personal circumstances, talents or anything like that - it is dependent on maintaining our relationship with God.

a lesson from history

We can see this principle at work in the account of Joseph (Genesis, chapter 37 onwards). The story of Joseph is well-known - how he went from slavery to saving a nation - but it's a great example of how even the worst circumstances can't come between a Godly person and their calling: Chapter 39 (verses 2,3 and 21) tell us that the Lord was with Joseph. In our terms, *he was remaining in Christ*. He was sold as a slave by his own brothers - but that just got him to Egypt, where he was meant to serve. He was falsely accused and imprisoned - but that led to him meeting Pharaoh, who gave him the position which he needed to carry out his calling. As

Paul later said, ‘...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...’(Romans 8:28) Paul, himself, knew all about producing ‘fruit’ in adverse circumstances, as he carried out much of his ministry from jail.

So, the promise of bearing much fruit holds true whatever our circumstances. It *will* happen, but we should remember that it will happen in God’s time-frame. Going back to Joseph, he spent two years in prison apparently forgotten by a man who might have helped him. Yet the moment this man remembered him and spoke to Pharaoh was exactly the right moment for the start of Joseph’s work. *God* forgets no-one, even if his perfect timing for our service may seem like a delay to us. What matters is that we remain eligible, and we do that by *remaining in Christ*.

How do we remain in Christ? By pursuing our relationship with God. In effect, by applying ourselves to the principles of this programme, we *are* remaining in Christ! We are in that relationship with him - the Lord is with us, just as he was with Joseph. This is the key to specific service, or ministry: We become and remain eligible, and God *will* make it happen. It’s as simple as that, because his promise is as simple as that...and it really doesn’t matter if we have to wait, or study or train. It doesn’t even matter if we are currently uncertain as to what we are called to do, because - as we remain in him - his plan for our lives *will* unfold. Nobody ever misses out on God’s perfect plan because of uncertainty - the condition he sets is not that - at any given time - we must know the big picture (remember Abraham and Philip?), it is that we remain in him.

Our Heavenly Father wants us to experience the joy of service in all its fullness. Our continuing commitment to a deepening relationship, and the submission of everything we are and everything we have (including our gifts) to him, guarantees our eligibility for his best plan. In that quality of relationship, we need never fear becoming ‘square pegs in round’ holes’... God himself will guide us - and we will follow.

Summing up ministry...

- 1. Ministry is for everyone...** we all have a part to play in building up the ‘body of Christ’ and conveying the love of God to others. God may utilise our existing skills or we may gain new ones, but the privilege of service is available to all - whether or not we feel we have much to offer. By far the most important qualification for ministry is the ‘potential of the heart’ - our attitude and commitment to God. Like general service, ministry is ‘love in action’ - though here, our specific abilities are submitted to God for his specific purposes. Ministry is God’s chosen method of building up the church **and** those who are ministering.
- 2. Gifting and calling...** we are only ever called to do things that God has empowered us to do, or that he **will** empower us to do. God wants us to succeed, and though ministry might not always be easy, it will always be achievable. As in everything else, we bring the willingness and application and he will provide the power. But it is as well to remember that even our existing gifts have come from God’s hand, and whatever we do, it is he who enables us to do it. Even if we come into a ministry that affects many people it says nothing about us...it only speaks of the grace of God. It is he who provides the gifts, and it is he who makes them effective.
- 3. Ministry is not ‘instead of, it is ‘in addition to’...** Ministry never means we no longer need to bother with those little acts of love we call general service. Going deeper into relationship and ministry, we will want to do more of them - not less. As we minister, part of the fruit will be the development of a deeper humility, such as we can see in Paul’s attitude to ‘doing the little things’. We will avoid the problems ‘John’ had, whose self-importance and pride led him not only to neglect general service, but to utterly fail in his calling. Ministry can never be a substitute for a vibrant relationship with God. Worthwhile ministry depends upon that relationship - it flows **from** it - and usually, it grows **with** it.

4. **Faithfulness counts!** Obedience, diligence and faithfulness - no matter how small the task - are invitations to God to bless us with greater service. Faithfulness is an outward manifestation of a heart attitude, and it is one our Heavenly Father won't ignore!
5. **Being sure of our calling...** Prayer and the counsel of other mature Christians are both valuable when confirming what we believe we are hearing from God. But even when there is uncertainty over the specifics, we can be absolutely sure we are not going to miss out. The key to 'bearing much fruit' is to abide in Christ. In our deepening relationship with him, we are guaranteed meaningful service - and because that is so we can be completely confident that he will guide us (by whatever means) to the works he has prepared for us. Put simply, we remain eligible (in Christ) and effective service is inevitable... but if we are waiting for his perfect timing, let's do all we can **while** we wait!

A prayer of commitment

Father God,

I thank you that you have a perfect and fulfilling plan for my life, individually designed for me. I thank you that you will both reveal what I must do, and empower me to carry it out. I commit myself this day to embracing your will for my life, even as I remain committed to pursuing my relationship with you. In addition, I also declare my intention never to neglect those little acts of kindness you would have me do, and to carry out all my service in obedience, diligence and faithfulness. I thank you for the privilege of becoming part of the 'body of Christ', and for the role you have assigned to me in building up your church.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

The tenth step says that we:

Prepare to undertake God's specific will for our lives, using his gifts - in his power - to fulfill his perfect plans

We are now prepared, because we have committed ourselves to pursue both the calling *and* the relationship which will make it effective. We have, in essence, stated our intent to 'remain in Christ' - and we can look forward *with confidence* to highly productive service!

comments and questions for the group meeting

the journal...continued

Morning Prayer

Before doing anything else, a short time of prayer containing the following elements: Thanks to God for who He is, what Jesus has done, and for His love and provision (including the new day). Commit the day to Him, asking for His protection and presence.

Through the day

Involve God in your daily life, seeking His guidance in situations as they arise, and endeavour to respond to people as you believe Jesus would.

In the evening

Set aside a little time, every evening, to pray, complete your journal and consider the readings. Prayer should include thanksgiving, repentance, prayer for others and for yourself - particularly that God's perfect will should be completely fulfilled in your life. Pray for each member of your group (by name). Matters arising through the day, personal situations or difficulties should also be brought before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you in your prayers, and be open to His leading.

Day One

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible Reading - John 15:16-17

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Ministry - loosely defined - is the expression of God's love through the abilities he gives us, in the manner and situation of his choosing - inside or outside of the church environment*

Day Two

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible Reading - Romans 12:4-8

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *The primary purpose of being given any ability, talent or gift, is so that we can honour God with it by employing it in the service of others. Yet in giving, we, ourselves, receive: There is deep fulfilment in effectively conveying the love of Christ through service*

Day Three

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - John 5:15

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Providing that we remain in Christ, meaningful and fulfilling service is absolutely inevitable...because he promises we will 'bear much fruit'!*

Day Four

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - Luke 19:11-27

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Obedience, diligence and faithfulness - no matter how small the task - are invitations to God to bless us with greater service. Faithfulness is an outward manifestation of a heart attitude, and it is one our Heavenly Father won't ignore!*

Day Five

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - 2 Peter 1:3-8

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *God wants us to succeed, and though ministry might not always be easy, it will always be achievable. As in everything else, we bring the willingness and application and he will provide the power.*

Day Six - The weekly review

In your relationship with God, what has been the highlight of the week?

What have you found most challenging or difficult?

Have you been aware of God's care for you this week?

Has God intervened in your life - answers to prayer etc.?

Have you been able to pray consistently throughout the week?

Can you think of any areas in your relationship with God that could be improved and, if so, how are you going to tackle them?

In times of trouble or temptation, how easy is it for you to seek the help of

a) God

b) other Christians?

What has been the most encouraging aspect of this past week?

PREPARATION FOR THE ELEVENTH SESSION

Please prepare for the eleventh session by *prayerfully* reading the next chapter, noting down any comments or questions that you'd like to bring up in the group.