

*How to Be a
Good Minister*



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BE LIKE JESUS, THE PERFECT MINISTER

Many Bible leaders were known for one notable grace or ability: Abraham for faith, Moses for meekness, Job for patience, Nehemiah for organization, Barnabas for encouragement, and John for love.

In my teen years I was blessed by leaders and speakers in whom I observed particular abilities: Elmer Grove for evangelism, Curtis Cressman for administration, Moses Baer for types and shadows, John Risser for application of Scriptures, Dan Byler for tabernacle studies, Paul Landis for simplicity in explaining Scriptures, and Norman Bechtel for compassion in shepherding. But in one leader, Jesus Christ, I see all of these qualities and capabilities, as well as many more. In Jesus Christ you find everything.

It is our privilege and joy to keep “looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2) both as our Saviour and Example in ministry. A missionary to China, J. Hudson Taylor, once said, “Satan, the Hinderer, may build a barrier about us, but he can never roof us in so that we cannot look up.”

Christ was the ideal minister. He excelled in all areas of ministry to people—preaching and teaching, counseling one-on-one, disciplining, visiting and helping the needy, ministering to children, evangelizing, praying, and modeling a life of righteousness. In the area of humble servanthood, He said, “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye

should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14, 15). Consider a few areas of His ministry which are exemplary for us:

1. HE CARED FOR PEOPLE. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). As He observed people and their need, He was “moved with compassion on them” (Matthew 9:36). His attitude to the rich young ruler was typical of His caring: “Then Jesus beholding him loved him” (Mark 10:21).

2. HE PRACTICED WHAT HE PREACHED. He preached integrity and denounced hypocrisy—He was absolutely sincere. He taught self-denial—He denied Himself and took up the cross. He condemned pride and preached humility—He was meek and lowly in heart and came from the glories of Heaven to live among sinful men.

3. HE UNDERSTOOD PEOPLE. John 2:24, 25 says, “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Take, for instance, His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4). He understood her real need (verse 14). He was aware of the human tendency to be evasive (verse 17) and to direct attention to peripheral issues (verse 20). Then He guided her to believe that He was the Messiah. When the Pharisees tried to trap Him by asking Him to judge the woman taken in adultery, He understood the workings of their consciences. Also, He understood the heart of Nicodemus as He said, “Ye must be born again.”

4. HE WAS THE MASTER OF COMMUNICATION. His sermons were clear, succinct, and always according to truth. His preaching abounded with helpful figures of speech. For example, He used metaphors: “Ye are the salt of the earth,” “neither cast ye your pearls before swine,” “go tell that fox.” He also used comparisons using *like* or *as* (similes): “Ye are like unto whited sepulchers,” “the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field,” and “it is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took, and cast into his garden.”

He was an expert in using stories to convey His message. From a literary as well as a moral standpoint, you cannot find any story better than the story of the good Samaritan or the prodigal son. He had a vast repertoire of

stories either true or simply parabolic. Matthew 13:34 indicates that “without a parable spake he not unto them.”

Jesus was a captivating speaker—partly due to His divine character and personality, partly due to His message, and partly due to His manner of speaking. For example, Luke 5:1, 3 says, “As the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.” Luke 19:48 says, “All the people were very attentive to hear him” (literally, they *hanged on his lips*). When the officers sent to arrest Jesus came back empty-handed, they explained, “Never man spake like this man.”

Jesus was interesting to listen to because He was practical. His words were relevant to people’s needs, aspirations, and problems. He spoke about money, prayer, worry, salvation, faith, honesty, obedience to parents, repentance, response to civil authorities, hypocrisy, God’s love, the Holy Spirit, freedom, thought life, greed, worship, giving, peace, Heaven, gratitude, self-denial, resurrection of the dead, restitution, cross-bearing, dealing with interpersonal offenses, patience, temptation, judging, evangelism, Satan, and humility. That’s over thirty topics that I thought of in a few minutes, and there are more.

Apart from the message of Jesus’ preaching, a twenty-first-century minister can learn a prodigious amount from examining Jesus’ methods of communicating the truth. We will look more closely at His methods and manner in Chapters 21-24.

5. HE PRAYED MUCH. An anonymous writer said, “Prayer is the preface to the book of Christian living, the text of the new life sermon, the girding on of the armor for battle, the pilgrim’s preparation for his journey; and it must be supplemented by action or it amounts to nothing.”

Jesus prayed in the morning. “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Jesus prayed in the evening. “And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land” (Mark 6:46, 47).

Jesus prayed all night on occasion. “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

Jesus prayed in solitude. “And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5:16).

Jesus prayed in public. At Lazarus’ grave, “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:41, 42).

6. HE DEMONSTRATED SUPERLATIVE CHARACTER QUALITIES. Jesus was the perfect minister because His character was flawless. He could confidently say, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” (John 8:46). Concerning the Father, Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). He “is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26).

We ministers today are fallible, imperfect, with tendencies to selfishness, pride, and carnality. We periodically need God’s forgiveness and occasionally the forgiveness of the people in the congregation. But Christ was the ideal minister.

7. HE WAS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT. As He began His preaching ministry, He quoted from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). As Stephen preached to an antagonistic crowd on the day of his martyrdom, he was “full of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 7:55). Preachers, like other believers, need to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Preachers have been compared to a wind instrument: the breath that is blown through them is that of the Holy Spirit as the Word is preached. The phrase, “Thus saith the Lord” occurs approximately two thousand times in Scripture.

A preacher is simply the message bearer—the message and conviction come from the Holy Ghost. As one layman said, “A good sermon leaves you wondering how the preacher knew so much about you.”