

## November 2001: What a True Ministry Is

by Aaron Greenway

Next month, by the Lord's grace, I will be concluding my studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. I will be going off to new places and seeing new faces. With the church that I just became a member of, I will be sinking my energies into being apart and ministering to the people in that assembly for the next two or three years. I know the Lord will use this in my life to prepare me for the next step. You may ask, "I thought you wanted to do missionary work? Aren't you eager to get out onto the mission field?" Yes, I am! But, I decided that I will not enhance my ministry, stepping on the heads of others. I will not join a church just simply so they will make my way. I have been in similar situations like this before where I came out looking like something that was never in my heart.

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This leads me to what I wish to say for the month of November, to those of us who are in the ministry or assist others who are in to some capacity. In America we are very goal driven, very task-oriented. We set goals (high goals) for ourselves and we set out to achieve those goals. These things have done us well because we are the number one superpower on the planet. Our economy is superior to that of any other nation. People all over the world would love to come to this country and be a part of it...and they do! We have seen businesses flourish. We are the products of the Industrial Revolution. However, the flip side to that is this: We have the number one divorce rate in the world. We pass each other on the sidewalks of life asking, "Hi, how are you doing today," not really caring if we get an answer or not ("How are you" really doesn't mean "How are you" anymore). We are materialistic. We abort little children and put them in dumpsters. The list goes on...

Am I making a generalization? Probably. But these are definite problems in our country. The problem becomes that all of the things of our society begin to seep into the church, because we

are products of that society, not to mention that we are sinful human beings. When Jesus saved us, He did not save us in a vacuum. We still have to work through the things of the flesh. Well guess what? We haven't done that so well. In the last few years, the divorce rate in the church has been higher than the national average. However, we do set great goals! We have great music ministries (funded by national record labels), we have megachurches, we have pastors who write all kinds of books, we have seminars, we have Christian counseling programs and we have all kinds of multimedia equipment and state-of-the-art technology to assist us in it all. We have it "down pat" when it comes to setting goals and seeing the Lord bless us in ways unfathomable.

But, when we leave out the relational aspects of our ministries, where it becomes what we can accomplish at the expense of people, then we have a problem. I am convinced of this: It is not that Americans do not love. It is that they do not know how. It is not that Americans do not want to communicate. It is that they do not know how. In this regard, Christian Americans do great going to Seminary, Bible School and getting their "spiritual notch" in their academic belt. That is a "piece of cake", making a 4.0 grade point. The hard part is when (in a real life situation) you come to the end of that 4.0 with a sense of failure as your wife invalidates your entire ministry handing you divorce papers at the end of the graduation platform. If you don't believe me, go to some Bible college, seminary, or church today and watch and see how people communicate. Do they have deep relationships with one another? Do they really nurture and care for one another? How do the men communicate with their wives and children? It speaks volumes!

Well, in the United States, the answer has become: We don't have time. We have studies. We have work. We have our ministries. Well, isn't that rubbing the cat the wrong way? Our ministries have become nothing more than a way for us to get recognized, a way for us to get a plaque on our wall and we didn't have to do the hard work of investing into someone's life or listening to someone's voice as their heart breaks over the loss of a spouse, or just giving someone a hug — because they needed it. What an easy ministry, huh!

This world is full of broken people and I am afraid that our churches and our Bible colleges are putting out people who treat the Church like it's a business and its people like they were just

faces. We are affected by our culture, but that doesn't mean that we have to allow ourselves to be sucked into it. Ministry is about people! And Jesus said, "As you have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it as unto me."

Perhaps, we could begin by praying something as simple as this, "Father in Heaven, by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, could you show me ways that I can bless, encourage, love, nurture and care for someone today that needs your touch in their lives. If this means that I need to get rid of any agendas, then I will do that, just simply so someone can experience You and You can be glorified." If we have ministries in the Church today, perhaps we need to cancel a business meeting, so we can do something special for our families. Perhaps, if we are at Seminary, we could take an hour of our study time and go visit and talk to someone we wouldn't talk to normally. Perhaps, if we know someone today who is hurting, perhaps we can call them and tell them that we love them.

If all this is something we can very easily shake off and ignore, then we have missed the entire essence of what it is to be a part of Christ's Kingdom, because Jesus responded to the needs, the hurts and pains of others. And He saw the greatest need that others had, a need for a Savior. Jesus was never too busy for any of that and yet He was never irresponsible. Jesus never became so "ministry-oriented" that people went hungry under His watch. Jesus never looked for a ministry plaque; He went out preaching the Kingdom when it flew in the face of the current religious establishment. And Jesus didn't just love, He demonstrated it. He was love in action! Could we dare to be like this? Could we (like the Steven Curtis Chapman song says) live out loud? Perhaps, the next time we ask a brother or sister, "How are you?", we will actually stop to hear their answer.