

A Word based Philosophy of Ministry

*What is a philosophy of ministry? A framework for what God wants and how to achieve it.
How do we please God? What is His plan and how do we fit into that plan?
How do we accomplish God's plan in God's way?*

At the heart of our philosophy is how God uses His Word to transform people into the image of Christ: We clearly explain, exhort, and exemplify God's Word which the Spirit uses to grow convictional faith and Christlike love as people see and embrace the goodness of God for themselves.

I. The Sufficiency of Scripture - Exegesis drives everything

We believe Scripture tells us everything God intended for us to know to please Him and accomplish His will.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The word **exegesis** means the process of interpretation. There is a process or a system for how to understand God's intent for us. If God has truly revealed Himself and His will, everything we do should be based upon the correct interpretation of God's communicated intent in Scripture!

All preaching, teaching, counseling, worship, evangelism, discipleship, work, parenting, and life should be driven by what God has revealed!

A. All Spiritual transformation takes place as God's Spirit applies His Word

All the good we truly want accomplished in this world is spiritual, and only God can ultimately affect that change.

John 15:5

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

While we have responsibility and God uses us, ultimately He is the One who causes growth and gets the glory.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

We have no sufficiency or strength in ourselves to accomplish God's will.

2 Corinthians 3:5; 12:9

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God...

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

We must trust God's methods and leave the results to Him. This doesn't mean we shouldn't seek to evaluate how we are doing based on the things that God says are His priorities. But true success is measured solely by our faith in and faithfulness to God as revealed in His Word. So when things are going well, we can't attribute that to our methods, because it was truly God's grace for His Spirit to work.

B. The Danger of Pragmatism: Wisdom, experience and how we evaluate success

A key question we have to wrestle with is "How do we define success?" Any metric that is observable can't fully measure transformation, so we can't know the true spiritual affects of what we do until eternity. The whole book of Proverbs is a master class in recognizing our desperate need for wisdom. The moment we think we are wise we prove that we are a fool, because if we think we are wise we don't desperately seek out God's perspective. It's very easy to let our experience define what is good or bad, whether through positive or negative experience. But the fear of the Lord is the beginning or foundation of wisdom. That means knowing God alone is wise is the true foundation for all skill in living.

Proverbs 3:5-7; 30:1-5

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: Surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man. Neither have I learned wisdom, Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? what is His name or His son's name? Surely you know! Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

For example, how should we evaluate the success of this course? We could have a survey at the end of the course, and what if every single person here finished the whole course and gave it 5 stars and said that they loved it, would that make the course a perfect success? Not necessarily. The question is how God evaluates the class. Did it accomplish His goals? How would we know?

The only way to know if something is a success from God's perspective is to know what God values in every area of life. Scripture is the only standard and only mirror we have. How can we know if we could have done something better? We have to understand God's values, His purpose, and His methods. Ultimately, we need a biblical grid to evaluate everything. One of God's primary goals is to grow our faith. That's why we are teaching a class on how to study the Word. We want you to grow in your confidence in Scripture.

- C. **Table Discussion:** If someone comes to us with a problem or question, and we don't think that the Word addresses it, what will we turn to for help?

It's so natural to default to and rely on so much common "worldly wisdom!"

II. The Dual Authorship of Scripture - God's Word was communicated using human words

God didn't dictate (most of) Scripture, but carried men along by the Spirit so that they wrote exactly what He intended.

1 Peter 1:20-21

For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The intentions, styles, personalities, and plans of the human authors were not violated (overridden) when they wrote (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 7:12, 25, 40; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

- A. This means that to understand God's meaning we look for the **authorial intent** of the human author

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he told them not to "associate with immoral people." They took that to mean that they shouldn't associate with unbelievers. But in 1st Corinthians 5, Paul clarifies that wasn't what he **meant**. He reasons that they should have known that, otherwise, they would have to leave the world (ie. it's literally impossible not to associate with unbelievers). "I wrote to you... **not at all meaning** to not associate with immoral people of this world."

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler— not even to eat with such a one.

When Jesus tells Peter how he will die, out of curiosity, he asks about John. Jesus says that if he wants John to live until his return, that's none of Peter's business. People took that to mean that John would live until Christ's return. But John clarifies that **Jesus didn't say** he wouldn't die (and didn't mean that), that's just how they took it. Jesus' *intention* was to teach Peter to focus on himself and not envy his brother's lot.

John 21:21-23

So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" Therefore this saying went out among the brethren that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Jesus tells the disciples that Lazarus was asleep, and they thought he meant it literally. But John clarifies in verse 13, that Jesus **meant** death, and they just misunderstood him.

John 11:11-14

This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead..."

B. Example:

If I tell my teenage kids, "You have to eat your greens before desert." Then if I see them eating mint ice cream without eating their greens, and I asked them, "Why didn't you eat your greens?" If they say, "Dad, the mint ice cream is green," how would I respond? That's not what I meant, **and you know it!**

C. **The Danger of Mysticism:** Change unhinged from meaning

It's easy to confuse change being **spiritual** with it being **mystical**. The fact that change is *spiritual* means that it is a supernatural work of transformation done by the Holy Spirit. It means that change isn't physical. But the fact that true change *isn't mystical* means that transformation is based on truth and reason. In other words the Spirit uses the Word to transform us. We don't believe true transformation

Ephesians 4:15, 20-25; 5:18-19

...but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord...

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Ephesians 6:17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We grow through **understanding** the Word transforming our thinking.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- D. **Table Discussion:** Can you think of a time someone didn't understand what you meant, and tried to tell you what you meant?

None of us like our words being misunderstood! We must always give God the respect of seeking to understand what He meant with His words.

- III. The Clarity of Scripture - Meaning is discovered through the human author's intent

While the Bible is God's Word, He accommodated and communicated to us using men who wrote in normal language.

- A. The text only has one meaning because God's Word is clear
- i. God intended to communicate and reveal Himself (and God's never fails!)

God communicated so that we would be careful to listen!

Deuteronomy 29:29

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

God gave it at the level of our hearts so we can listen!

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."

The purpose of God's Word is to illuminate.

Psalms 119:105, 130

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

- ii. When God speaks, He **expects** people to listen, understand, and obey
- a. Believers have an obligation to grow in knowledge and maturity

The author of Hebrews rebukes his hearers because they should have been teachers and yet they remained immature in their knowledge.

Hebrews 5:12

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

- b. We are held responsible for what has been revealed

This is even more the case since the coming of Christ and the greater clarity in knowing God that He brings.

Hebrews 2:1-3

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard...

- c. It is possible to investigate and study Scripture to determine whether what someone says is true

The fact that we are called to examine and discern proves that we can verify what Scripture means.

Acts 17:11

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

1 Thessalonians 5:21

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good...

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

- d. God **expects** people to **listen** and **obey** and holds us responsible when we don't!

The Bible doesn't teach a skepticism that objectivity is impossible. The whole Bible (and all the commands in it) rests on the assumption that clear communication with understanding is possible!

Zechariah 7:11-13

"But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing. They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen," says the Lord of hosts...

Every time God holds someone responsible for not listening or obeying Him, it is proof that clear communication is possible.

John 12:48

He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

The whole process of church discipline presumes that the Bible is clear.

Matthew 18:15-16

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”

1 Corinthians 5:11-13

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler— not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

God will only hold people responsible for what was clearly communicated!

B. The plain sense reading is the correct interpretation

- i. The Bible was written in common language, not religious or technical jargon

The New Testament was written in *Koine Greek*, or the common Greek of the day.

- ii. The Bible was written to common people, not scholars

The recipients of the various books of the Bible were normal people from every walk of life. Some were rich, some were poor. Some were educated and some were not.

- iii. The books of the Bible were meant to be understood the first time they were read

The authors didn't expect the hearers to have to read what they wrote multiple times to try to decode and analyze what they meant. Almost no one had an individual copy of the Bible. The books/letters of the Bible were read to the group and they were expected to listen and understand.

The assumption would have been that the hearers wouldn't be able to take a copy of the letter home to study, as copies were prohibitively expensive.

This doesn't mean that detailed study can't help us to understand. Because of the gaps between our situation and theirs study can help make things clear to us that would have been to them. But any interpretation that depends on very nuanced details to make sense of normal sentences is suspect.

- iv. Words and grammar have meaning, as defined by the rules of language

We can't make words mean whatever we want, the same for grammar. Although words and grammar have meaning, that meaning is broad, and so context refines and limits all the possible meanings to the one intended by the author.

- C. Because the meaning is objective, we can correct each other and grow in unity as we wrestle through the Word together

If multiple interpretations could all be correct, no interpretation would be falsifiable. If interpretations aren't falsifiable there is no clear way or path to change each others' opinions. Then, whoever is the boldest, loudest, talks the most, or is most sure of themselves will lead. But God wants His Word to lead us.

Pastors have to (*and everyone should aspire to*) be able to refute those who contradict the Word.

Titus 1:9

...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Pastors have to (*and everyone should aspire to*) study to be able to teach it correctly.

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

- i. Biblical Examples

Jesus clearly corrected wrong interpretations many times.

Matthew 22:29

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."

Peter and Paul: Paul confronted Peter to his face because he wasn't walking consistently with the gospel.

Galatians 2:11-14

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Bereans: They were more noble than others, they received the Word eagerly, but examined for themselves that what was said was true.

Acts 17:11

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

Priscilla and Aquilla: Even though Apollos was passionately and accurately teaching about Jesus, Priscilla (the wife is listed first!) and Aquilla took him aside and explained truth more accurately to him. He needed that!

Acts 18:26

...and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

ii. As parents, husbands, pastors

All biblical leadership should be simultaneously convictional and yet humble. All biblical leadership based on the Word must have the Word as the final authority, and so that makes us firm where Scripture is clear and emphatic, and teachable where we may have missed a nuance or understanding some aspect of the Word.

iii. The authority of Scripture

If we lose the objectivity of the Word, we ultimately lose all authority of the Word. We must all submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture. It is clear, and so we must wrestle out what it means and then submit to that.

D. **The Danger of Relativism:** That's true or good for you, but not for me

We know our society doesn't believe in objective truth. But Scripture claims to be and is the ultimate standard. At the foundation of a biblical worldview is the conviction that there is absolute truth, and that we can know that truth. While we can't have absolute surety about everything, because God has absolute knowledge, and He has revealed Himself clearly, we can know and know rightly. We can have confidence about what Scripture is clear about.

E. **Table discussion:** Has God's Word ever opened your eyes to an area that you were blind in?

Correction is so good for us!

- IV. The Goal is convictional and conscience driven faith and Christlike love
- A. We should do *everything* from **faith** because humble dependence is at the heart of the Christian life

Faith is what pleases God, and anything that doesn't come from faith is sin!

Hebrews 11:1-4

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Romans 14:23

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

All of the Christian life is by faith.

Romans 1:17

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:2-3

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

In fact, God calls us to always do what we believe to be best, anything less, is sin.

James 4:17

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Faith is the method God uses to save and grow His people, because faith is what gives Him all the **glory** as ultimate giver.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Becoming a Christ involves a commitment (a pledge) to live with a clean conscience by faith.

1 Peter 3:21

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you— not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience— through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

B. So biblical ministry seeks to build **faith**

The goal is the obedience that comes from faith. If Paul has to qualify and say the “obedience of faith,” then not all obedience is from faith.

Romans 1:5

...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake...

The goal of ministry is love that comes from a heart of sincere convictional faith. God wants us to be driven by love that comes from a sincere faith.

1 Timothy 1:5

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The goal is not to manipulate people into doing the right things for the wrong reasons. We want every person living by faith with a clean conscience. That's why at the heart of ministry is making the truth as plain as possible.

2 Corinthians 4:2

...but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The goal therefore is always to persuade people of the truth so they can live it out with a clean conscience.

2 Corinthians 5:11

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

The goal is for people to live with integrity, with a consistency between what they believe and how they live.

2 Corinthians 1:12

For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

Hearing and understanding Scripture is at the heart of faith.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

C. God's goal is for us to become like Him, not simply to follow rules

God made us in His image to rule over creation for Him as His representatives. This means to fully obey God we have to become like Him, using the creativity, rationality, personality, and morality He has given to to rule in His place on earth.

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

God gave us **principles** so that we would internalize His **values** and become like Him, not just mindlessly follow rules.

Proverbs 26:4-5, 7

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes.

Like the legs which are useless to the lame, So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

Even the Law was ultimately about desires and the heart.

Exodus 20:17

*"You shall not **covet** your neighbor's house; you shall not **covet** your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

*"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your **heart**. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."*

Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:10

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

*Scripture is about shaping our **worldview** and **values** through which we see and evaluate all of life. One of the implications of God's design is that in order to properly obey God, we must internalize His values. God wants something deeper than us just doing what He says; He wants us to become like Him. Scripture always aims for heart transformation into the image of Christ, seeing Him and becoming like Him, as we see Him in the Word.*

D. Being driven by conviction empowers humble confidence in God

On the one hand for leaders, there is a danger of being authoritarian, overly self assured, and not listening to others. On the other hand, there is a danger of being wishy-washy, and not having convictions. When we have clarity about what God says and what God wants, that gives us confidence in Him, and not in ourselves. But that also makes us humble and correctable, since our confidence comes from the Word.

Paul called Timothy to gospel strength and conviction.

2 Timothy 1:7-8; 2:1

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God...

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

V. Discussion Questions

1. How will our ministry go astray if we don't believe Scripture is sufficient for the questions/problems people have? What else can subtly define what is best over God's Word? (Feel free to have some people answer each question)
2. How does the fact that God's Word is understandable help us to both be correctable and united together around the truth? (Feel free to have some people answer each part of this question)
3. How does a Word based conviction produce humble confidence and not either self-confidence or false humility?