

Who Wants to Be a Minister? – Part 1

Message for Sunday, September 6, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Children's Message: "The Dribblers" by Betty Mittler (Bruce's mother-in-law)
based on Acts 4:14-20

Some children enjoy sports because they are natural athletes. They seem to always run the fastest and jump the highest without even trying. That was not the way it was for Jerry and his sister Tina. They were fit enough but they really had to practice and practice any sport they played.

They both enjoyed playing basketball but never made the first team. Then one year when basketball season came round and the first practice began, the coaches were amazed. Both Tina and Jerry had improved so much they were among the first picked to the teams.

Ms. Brown, coach of the girls team, sat on the bench by Tina and the other new team members. "You have really improved, Tina" she said. "How did you do it?"

"My Mom and Dad and some other parents have been playing every Wednesday night and Saturday morning with us since September. We have half grown-ups and half kids on each team. We have a house league set up at our church gym and the adults teach us to be good sports. Before each game we stand in a circle and pray that everyone will remember to be a good team player, a good sport, and that we will all have a good time. It's really great. My little sister sits with her friends and they cheer for both sides in every game because my Dad and I are on one team and Mom and Jerry are on another. It doesn't matter which team wins as long as we do our best and have fun. We even have a funny name that is sometimes in the bulletin at church. The league is called The Dribblers.

The coach said "That's nice dear." and promptly forgot about the conversation. But the other children who heard what she said didn't forget. Some of those who were weak in different skills and some who didn't make the team asked Tina if they could come too.

Bill said "My Mom is too sick to play but my Dad would bring me. Is that O.K.?" "Sure" said Tina.

Jenny said softly "I don't live with my Dad anymore and my Mom works a lot. Do they take just kids?" "Our rule is, anyone that comes out gets to be on the team as long as they follow the rules and come out to all the practices that they can. Also we have to be eight years old or more. Come to practice and see how you like it," invited Tina.

Quite a few other children asked questions too. Time passed and all the children's abilities improved but the ones who had joined The Dribblers League were improving much more rapidly than the others.

Then the first tournament at school was only a month away and the coaches said that all team members had to come to practice after supper on Monday, Wednesday and on Saturday morning.

Tina said, "I can't come on Wed. or Sat. That's Dribbler League and I promised to go to it first. Besides, it's more fun than practising here and I learn more."

Several others nodded and said they had promised too. "We are learning about fairness and kindness as well as teamwork. Anyone else who wants to come with us can come to fun practices too, if they promise to play our rules rather than killer basketball we play here."

The coaches took the Dribbler League children aside and said "If you want to play fun basketball you can but keep quiet about it. We need to have our teams win tournaments and it won't happen just because we are nice. Don't keep talking about it at team practices or there will be trouble."

At the Wed. and Sat. practices at school the teams drilled all kinds of shots and evasive techniques without their friends from the Dribblers but each practice there were fewer and fewer players.

The coaches warned the Dribblers again. "If we lose the tournament because you have talked so many players into going to the church to play fun games, you will be off the team."

The Dribblers protested “We can’t stop telling about our league when other kids ask us why we are playing so much better.”

“You heard what we said” said the coaches. “Off the team if you don’t keep quiet and we lose the tournament.”

The first day of the tournament was when the girls played. There was a different mood in the gym. Usually there were few spectators but that day the bleachers were crowded with Moms, Dads, and little brothers and sisters. As the girls got ready to go out on the floor, after the coach had given her instructions, the girls who belonged to the Dribblers stood in a circle and said softly, “God expects us to play fairly, to do our best and to have fun. Jesus, please help us do this. Amen.” Then they took deep breaths and charged out onto the gym floor.

They did play their best but the game ended in a tie. They had fun and it was the best game they had ever played.

The next Sat. the coaches and their children joined the Dribblers. They said “Tina and Jerry were right to keep telling us about the importance of enjoying the game and playing fairly even when we told them to stop. We must remember that there are many things that are more important than winning at all costs. Thanks kids.”

1) Superhuman power or supernatural power?

When I was thirteen years old, I had chosen my life’s work: I was going to be a doctor. I was going to use the marvels of modern medicine to help people. I was excited just thinking about it. Somehow, though, after I had been accepted into medical school, I felt that God was pulling me towards full-time ministry in the church. Reluctantly, I switched my classes in this new direction.

I eventually graduated from theological school with a piece of paper that said I had earned a degree, that I was qualified to be a minister. My head was filled with knowledge, and I was ready to take on the world.

Some years after that, I was looking for a church to which I could move. The search committee here was obviously getting a bit desperate, so they agreed to take me on. And so, on July 1, 2013, I began work as the pastor of St. Paul’s United Church.

By the way, the word “minister” as it is used in churches today means someone like me, the paid professional leader of the church. But that isn’t what it means in the Bible: it simply means someone who serves others in the name of Jesus Christ. That means all of us. All of us are called to be ministers, to love and serve others. That’s why I use the term “pastor” to describe my role.

Luke 22:24-27, New International Version:

A dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Jesus sets the example for us to follow. All Christians are called to serve. All Christians are called into ministry. That’s good, because there is only so much that one person can do. That’s where the title for this series of messages comes in: “Who wants to be a minister?” (Yes, you’re right if you’re thinking that’s a play on the popular TV game show. In fact, next week we’ll play our own version of that game show as part of the message!)

During this past week, I spent some time considering my own role in the church. I’m not too bad as a preacher, but I don’t have the power to move people to tears with my speaking, and make them change their lives. After one of my visits, no one has ever jumped up and exclaimed, “I feel so much better now; I’m going to go out and tell everyone about Jesus!” And I can’t say that my input at meetings has ignited a blaze of zeal to save the world.

No one has the power to change a person’s heart. That kind of power is from God. God can and does

choose to work through people; but no one can claim that they have the power to work the miracle of new life.

Acts 14:8-15, New Living Translation:

While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so he had never walked. He was listening as Paul preached, and Paul noticed him and realized he had faith to be healed. So Paul called to him in a loud voice, "Stand up!" And the man jumped to his feet and started walking.

When the listening crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human bodies!" They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul, because he was the chief speaker, was Hermes. The temple of Zeus was located on the outskirts of the city. The priest of the temple and the crowd brought oxen and wreaths of flowers, and they prepared to sacrifice to the apostles at the city gates.

But when Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings like yourselves! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them."

This is both humbling and encouraging. It's humbling, because it puts us in our place. But even more, it's encouraging because it puts God in his place: always with us, more than willing to help if we will only ask, eager to keep his promises.

Acts 1:4-5, 8, New Living Translation:

Jesus told [his followers], "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised. Remember, I have told you about this before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit..."

When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere — in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2) Putting the power to work

God delights in using small things. Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe lists some of the

things which God has used to accomplish his purposes:

- Moses' rod [Exodus 4:2]
- David's sling [Samuel 17]
- a jawbone [Judges 15:15]
- a hammer and a tent peg [Judges 4:17-24]
- a piece of rope [Joshua 2:15-21]
- a basket [Acts 9:23-25]
- loaves and fish [John 6:9]
- a cup of cold water [Matthew 10:42]
- and even mud [John 9:6-7].

God loves to use small things. You see, when the Spirit of God fills someone with power, even someone as small and insignificant as you or I, there's no telling what will happen.

I don't know what small abilities you have. But I know that if you are a believer, you have received a spiritual gift. Speaking of spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul writes:

Romans 12:4-11, New Century Version:

Each one of us has a body with many parts, and these parts all have different uses. In the same way, we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts. We all have different gifts, each of which came because of the grace God gave us. The person who has the gift of prophecy should use that gift in agreement with the faith. Anyone who has the gift of serving should serve. Anyone who has the gift of teaching should teach. Whoever has the gift of encouraging others should encourage. Whoever has the gift of giving to others should give freely. Anyone who has the gift of being a leader should try hard when he leads. Whoever has the gift of showing mercy to others should do so with joy.

Your love must be real. Hate what is evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like brothers and sisters. Give each other more honour than you want for yourselves. Do not be lazy but work hard, serving the Lord with all your heart.

When we use our spiritual gifts, even if we consider them to be small, we are accepting the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God promises us his Spirit

to give us the ability and the power to accomplish the task he has given us.

What God needs most of all are people who are willing to serve. Allow God to work in your life, to guide you and help you, and you will see wonderful blessings in the lives of people you touch.

I was part of a choir when I was at theological school. At the start of the year, when the choir director was recruiting new members for the choir, he gave this invitation: “You supply the body. I’ll supply the voice.” In other words, just come and be willing to follow my instructions, and I will make you a good singer.

That’s what God says to us: “You supply the body. I’ll supply the Holy Spirit and the power. Just come to me and be willing to obey, and I will help you to do wonderful things.”

What kind of things could you do as a minister? If you’ve never thought about it, you might have trouble seeing yourself in this way. One day I started dreaming, and I was amazed at how many ideas came to mind, and how quickly. Here are a few things that people of all ages could do as a ministry:

- tutor child having trouble in school
- pray for other people’s ministries
- help with Youth Group
- visit people in hospital
- sing or play in worship band
- visit shut ins
- Amnesty International
- mentor a new Christian
- teach Junior Church
- tending the flower beds
- host a cooking club at the church, for people who never learned
- after-school drop-in program, where children and youth could get help with homework, and have a snack
- environmental group to promote a healthy community
- do minor car repairs and oil changes for seniors and single moms
- home repairs for seniors and low income people

- be a safe person to talk with, for people who are emotionally troubled
- open your home to be an emergency shelter for women and children needing a refuge
- invite people along your road to a home Bible study
- seeks ways to tell others about Jesus

The question today is, “Who wants to be a minister?” Who wants to offer himself or herself as a servant? Who is trusting the power of the Holy Spirit to give you the power and wisdom you need?

Next Steps:

- Pray: Open yourself to God, to help you grow and become more like Jesus.
- Offer yourself as a minister: one who loves and serves others in Jesus’ name.