

3. Jesus Showed How to Develop Priorities in Ministry

In our last topic, we talked about how Jesus developed godly character in the life of His disciples. Today, we will see that Jesus showed His disciples how to develop priorities in their public ministry. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul told Timothy, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” In this verse, we see that Paul gave Timothy three priorities in his public ministry. We will also see that Christ showed the disciples the importance of developing these same priorities in their public ministry.

First, we see that Paul told Timothy to give attention to the public reading of the Word of God. We see that this was a very important part of the public ministry of Christ. Luke 4:16 says, “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.” Here, we see that Christ regularly read the Word of God in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. A Jewish boy began taking his turn reading the Old Testament, in the services at the synagogue, when he reached the age of twelve. Since there were seven to nine passages read in each service, this allowed several men to read in each service. This verse tells us that Christ regularly took His turn reading the Scripture.

Christ called His first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. Then, Matthew 4:23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Christ had the opportunity to give His disciples many opportunities to see His example as He publicly read the Scriptures in the synagogues throughout Galilee. We see that the disciples followed the example of Christ, and both read and quoted the Scriptures every time they had an opportunity to speak.

The only detailed description of a service in the early church is given in 1 Corinthians 14:23-40. There, we see that it was common for most of the men to participate in the early church services through reading or explaining Scripture. That would be the result of the example of the early leaders of the church. One of the things we need to remember, when we have a worship service, is the fact that God is the audience and we are the participants. One of the things that we need to encourage, by example, is to have several Scripture readings in each public service so that various men and teenage boys can get involved in reading Scripture publicly in each service. Remember, Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is living and powerful. Isaiah 55:8-9 says that the thoughts and ways of God are higher than our thoughts and ways.

Second, we see that Paul told Timothy to give attention to exhortation. The word that is translated “exhortation” means *to comfort, to console, to encourage, to exhort, to intreat, or to call to one’s aid*. Christ demonstrated the importance of encouraging and comforting others many times as the disciples traveled with Him. In John 11, we see Christ encouraged and comforted Martha and Mary following the death of Lazarus. One of the ways Christ provided encouragement and comfort was by reminding Martha of the resurrection. John 11:25-26 says, “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

Christ also provided encouragement to His disciples. In John 13, Christ told the disciples that He was going to leave them. John 14:1-3 says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” In this case, we see that Christ provided encouragement to the disciples by reminding them that He would return to take them to heaven with Him.

Then, Christ provided additional comfort to the disciples a few verses later. John 14:16-18 says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” In this case, Christ promised the disciples that He would provide them with comfort and encouragement through the ministry of the Holy Spirit living in their lives.

Another way Christ provided encouragement was through the Word of God. Romans 15:4-5 says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.” Here, we see that the Word of God also gives encouragement. In Luke 24:27, we read, “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Then, in Luke 24:32, we read, “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” These two disciples received great encouragement as Christ shared the Word of God with them.

Luke 24:44-45 shows that Christ encouraged the disciples the same way later that evening. Those verse say, “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Christ taught the disciples, by His example, the importance of encouraging people with the Word of God as He encouraged them from the Word of God.

Third, we see that Paul told Timothy to give attention to doctrine. Paul had used this word earlier in 1 Timothy 4:6, which says: “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” Paul told Timothy that he would be an effective leader for Christ if he would help the brethren receive spiritual nourishment by teaching them good doctrine.

Christ was continually teaching His disciples good doctrine. In Matthew chapters 5-7, Christ spent much of the Sermon on the Mount explaining the Old Testament to His disciples and helping them learn how to apply it in their daily lives. Matthew 5:1 says, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.” We see that this sermon was really a time of teaching for His disciples, while the crowds had the opportunity to listen.

Christ also taught the multitudes with parables. However, He would then explain these parables to His disciples. Mark 4:33-34 says, “And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” The crowds had the opportunity to hear the parables of Christ, but only the disciples had the opportunity to have each of the parables explained to them. This reminds us of the fact that teaching and training His disciples was a great priority in the life of Christ.

The most detailed account of Christ teaching His disciples is His teaching the night before He was crucified. This is recorded for us in John 13 through 17. In chapter 13, Christ taught the disciples by His own example. After washing the feet of the disciples, Christ said, in John 13:14-15, “‘If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.’” He showed them that good doctrine includes putting what is taught into practice.

In John 14, Christ taught the disciples by answering their questions. In John 14:5, Thomas says, “‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’” Then, in John 14:8, we read, “‘Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’” Judas asked his question in John 14:22, where we read: “‘Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?’”

In John 15, Christ taught the disciples that their lives would only be fruitful as they learned to abide in Him. He also helped them to understand that they now had a new relationship with Him. John 15:13-15 says, “‘Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.’” Christ changed their status from servants to friends and shared His plans with them. Then, in John 20:17, Christ changed their status from friends to brethren, and, in verse 21, sent them as the Father had sent Him.

In John 16, Christ taught the disciples by preparing them for the future. Then, in John 17, Christ taught the disciples about His concern for them as He prayed to the Father for them. John 18:1 tells us that this prayer happened just before they went to the garden where Christ again prayed, this time, alone, to the Father.

Christ showed the disciples three key priorities in public ministry as He showed them, by example, the importance of the public reading of Scripture, the importance of encouraging others and the importance of teaching sound doctrine. May the Lord richly bless you, as you help developing leaders grow in their understanding of the importance of these three key priorities in their public ministries.