

## SEMINARY TRAINING – A FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY

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*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble” (Ps 46:1).*

In preparing to write this article I prayed for help and then recalled reading a list of principles from which the following are drawn. There are certain principles involved in ministry, a unifying center around which we are called to build our preaching and ministry.<sup>2</sup>

- First, there must be Christian character, which is the personal foundation for ministry.
- Next comes an “attitude adjustment.” The pastor needs the attitude of a servant, a servant’s heart and mind to serve Christ and his Church.
- Next needed is love for God and God’s Church, and we also need love for a lost world. To properly minister we also need knowledge, but as Paul insisted, “The greatest of these is love.”
- Somewhere in these precepts there is sacrifice. “How much can I give?” we ask. This allows us to receive the very best God has for us.
- Submission to authority is the best way to learn how to exercise authority.
- We must always remember that our ministry is to glorify God, just as salvation is to glorify God.

I came to seminary to learn how to minister, and the dear, faithful teachers at seminary taught me that the tools of ministry are the Word of God and prayer.

The power of ministry is the Holy Spirit, and the model is Jesus the Christ. The list of principles above is not intended to be exhaustive, but to represent the more salient principles. I have found that their purpose is to ever remind us to be conscious of and guided by certain moral and ethical mores, and I hasten to add, these were graciously exemplified in character and behavior by all the members of the faculty at WRS.

In theology classes I learned that there is a necessary balance between biblical theology and systematic theology. Biblical theology goes to God’s Word in the text and raises the question, “what did this mean to the original writer and what does it mean to the church today?”

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<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe and David W. Wiersbe, *Making Sense of the Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 31-46.

Systematic theology is the study of God and is basic to true exegesis in God's Word. Theology training is very practical in that it provides the firm foundation for ministry. Coupled with biblical interpretation, these have provided me with the ability to comprehend and share Scripture both in Bible teaching and in preaching.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones in his book *Preaching and Preachers* states, "Preachers are born not made. This is an absolute. You will never teach a man to be a preacher if he is not already one."<sup>3</sup> While I believe this is true, I also believe it takes training and practice to hone the skills needed to be an effective preacher. Thanks to the patience, diligence, and perseverance of the WRS professors, I have been able to compose and deliver a sermon with a modicum of effectiveness. Learning that preaching is a science and an art was the turning point for me in my seminary training.

In church ministry classes I learned much about visitation, the necessity of keeping in touch with those dear souls who are not physically able to attend worship services. Because of these classes I have found visitations not only helpful to those I have visited, but also they in turn have caused me to grow in compassion.

Having "stayed the course" for such an extended time (fourteen years), I see the need to do the same, because a congregation needs a pastor to "stay the course." Paul's words echo for me, "But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; a wide door has opened to me for effective work" (1 Cor 16:8-9).

In seminary I experienced a process of Christian maturing. This maturing became evident while visiting Remann Hall (an institution for juvenile offenders). I discovered, quite to my surprise, that I could draw on my knowledge of Scripture. This was joined with the spiritual stability, spiritual independence and confidence gained from the instruction received in class. Of special use was the knowledge of God's attributes. Also, the verse, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5), came to mind, frequently reminding me of who I was. This highlighted for me the value of my theology courses.

Also I found strength from Heb 5:14, "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." My professors brought this verse to the forefront of my thinking, and gave me much "solid food" in the theology classes.

The course on American church history magnified how prevalent it was, and still is, to be tempted to stray from the truth into false doctrine. Hence, the necessity to cling to the truth found in God's Word, and not try to make it say what we want it to say. This was one of the chief reasons I chose to study at WRS. At WRS the inerrant Word of God is taught, preached, and adhered to faithfully. From this I have developed a sense of confident security in following doctrines of truth I learned at seminary, and I believe this brings the power of the Holy Spirit to bear in my ministry.

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<sup>3</sup> *Making Sense of the Ministry*, 107.

Growth does not end with seminary graduation. The continuance of doctrinal study since graduation holds delightful surprises in that God's grace, divine love, and truth become emblazoned signposts to lead me into deeper understanding of who God is.