

7. Developing Ministry Skills Through Joint Ministry – Part 1

In our last five topics, we have looked at how we develop ministry skills by:

- Observation
- Participation
- Doing and Reporting

Today, we will look at the next step in the development of ministry skills. We will see that we continue to develop and improve the ministry skills of developing leaders by participating in joint ministry with them. After Christ sent out the twelve on their ministry trip, and had them report back to Him, Christ then spent eighteen more months in joint ministry with the disciples.

In Mark 7, Christ discussed with the disciples how to understand the heart of a person. The Pharisees provided the opportunity for this time of discussion. In Mark 7:1-13, Christ and the Pharisees had a discussion while the disciples observed. This discussion focused on the religious activities of the Pharisees. Mark 7:3-4 says, “For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. *When they come* from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, *like* the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.” Today, many people also think they are good Christians because of the religious things they do or avoid.

Christ very clearly told the people the final result of such religious activities. In Mark 7:13, Christ told the Pharisees they were, “Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” Christ then gave the parable in Mark 7:14-16. “When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, ‘Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!’”

This parable caused a discussion between Christ and the disciples when they were alone. Mark 7:17 says, “When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.” Here, we see one of the key values of joint ministry after a person has had an opportunity to minister for a period of time. Christ and the disciples were able to talk together about two key topics:

- The impact of the traditions of man
- The true nature of the human heart

Unless a developing leader has a clear understanding of both of these topics, he will be limited in the effectiveness of his ministry. By the time Christ had finished this discussion, in Mark 7:18-23, the disciples had a much better understanding of the nature of the human heart, as well as a clearer understanding of the impact of tradition.

Joint ministry also provided an opportunity for the disciples to expand their vision to those who were not Jews. Christ took the disciples with him and traveled to the cities of Tyre and Sidon in the area of Phoenicia. There, they met a Greek woman. Through this joint ministry, the disciples were able to see that Christ reached out to the Greeks as well as to the Jews. Then, in Mark 7:31-

37, Christ took the disciples to the area of Decapolis (these ten cities were Gentile cities that focused on preserving the Greek culture that they had brought to the area nearly one hundred years earlier). The man who had the legion of demons cast out in Mark 5:1-20 had gone through these cities telling the people what Christ had done for him. Through this joint ministry, the disciples had the opportunity to be exposed to two different Gentile cultures.

Joint ministry in Mark 8 gave Christ another opportunity to teach the disciples about the impact of tradition in Mark 8:10-21. One of the things to notice is that when Christ talked about the traditions of men, Christ described the traditions of the Pharisees as being like leaven that spread through the entire lump of bread dough. The leaven of the Pharisees included the fact that they acted with hypocrisy, as seen in Luke 12:1. In Matthew 23:3b-4, Christ said, “...for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.” The leaven of the Pharisees also included their false teaching, as seen in Matthew 16:12: “Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Christ also talked about the leaven of Herod. The leaven of Herod involved his conduct. In Mark 6:14-29, we see in verse 16, that Herod was living with his brother’s wife. Herodias was also Herod’s niece which meant that this relationship also involved incest. Then, we see that Herod ordered the death of John the Baptist, in order to save face after he had made a rash promise. As a result, we see that the conduct of Herod was both immoral and evil. Christ discussed with the disciples the fact that hypocrisy, false teaching, and immoral and evil conduct will spread like leaven in a group of people. As we minister with a team, we are also able to point out some of the dangers of these things to the team.

Christ used this time of joint ministry to question the disciples to help them realize what they understood and what they still needed to learn. In Mark 8:27, Christ asked the disciples a question as they traveled along the road. That verse says, “Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do men say that I am?’” This question helped the disciples to focus on what others were saying. Then, in verse 29, Christ asked a second question, “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’” In these verses, Christ took the disciples from telling what others were saying to what they themselves believed about Jesus.

Once they were able to tell what they believed, Christ could begin to teach them new things. Mark 8:31 tells us, “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Joint ministry allowed the disciples to move in their thinking from who Christ was to the purpose for His coming. Christ also used this opportunity to help the disciples focus on godly priorities, instead of worldly priorities, through the rebuke of Peter in Mark 8:33.

Christ then began to teach them what it would cost them to be His disciples. Mark 8:34-35 says, “When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever

desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.'" In these verses, we see that Christ was inviting the entire multitude to be His disciples. Most chose not to follow Christ.

Again, in this period of joint ministry, Christ told the disciples that they needed to understand the cost of following Him before they made an empty promise. John 6:66-69 gives the choice that the twelve made. We read, "From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then, Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?' But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" Here, we see that the disciples were learning the importance of helping people count the cost of their commitment to Christ.

If we fail to help people count the cost of their commitment to Christ, many will drop out, and often become inactive Christians, after a short time. Learning to help people count the cost of serving Christ is one of the key ministry skills that developing leaders need to learn. We help developing leaders learn to count the cost of their commitment to Christ by helping them clearly understand what Christ required of His disciples. Next, we model that commitment to Christ by our commitment. Only after they have made such a commitment in their own lives, do we show them in joint ministry how to help other people develop similar commitments. By this process, we will see very few who back away from that commitment at a later time.

An effective spiritual leader is one who has developed a clear understanding of the nature of sinful man. That leader also needs to understand the various kinds of leaven that will destroy, such as hypocrisy, false teaching, and sinful living. As a leader understands these things, he needs to count the cost of being a disciple of Christ and also help others learn to count the cost. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing spiritual leaders learn these things through joint ministry.