

What is Personal Ministry

By: Church of God Mission North America GOFINISH Team

One of the greatest challenges today for local church leaders is providing ongoing opportunities for members to be trained and involved in ministry. Many believers want to be involved but just don't know where to begin. They look around the church and wonder what they can do for the Lord.

Personal ministry to the rescue! The term "personal ministry" is one of those common phrases we hear all the time in the church world. So many times, it becomes just a religious expression that is used without any specific shared understanding of what it means. So, let's take a closer look at this golden opportunity for all believers by defining it and showing some examples.

Personal ministry is cultivating redemptive relationships with a goal in mind of sharing one's testimony and the Gospel message in a relaxed, friendship style atmosphere. It involves more than just Christian "chit chat" or giving people that catch phrase we all use like "God has a plan for your life." The essence of personal ministry is developing relationships with non-Christians and the unchurched through mutual growth in Biblical understanding, obedience, and serving others. The key word here is "serving." The word "ministry" is from the Greek word *diakoneo* [this is where the word "deacon" originates], meaning "to serve" or *douleuo*, meaning "to serve as a slave." In the New Testament, ministry is seen as service to God and to other people in His name. Jesus provided the pattern for Christian ministry—He came, not to receive service, but to give it (see Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17).

The Christian should minister by meeting people's needs with love and humility on Christ's behalf. We are to minister to others out of our devotion to Christ and our love for others, whether the other people are believers or unbelievers. Ministry to others should be impartial and unconditional, always seeking to help others as Jesus would.

God's plan is for every believer to have a personal ministry. He has a particular task, good work, or personal ministry for each of us. His Word says, "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" (Ephesians. 2:10). A personal ministry is based upon a believer's spiritual gifts and their position in the body of Christ as a leader, servant, teacher, giver etc. Personal ministry involves helping people in a practical way and offering them a listening ear when they have problems. It is so exciting to get involved in the lives of those who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus and see them grow more like Christ. This is a ministry that any believer can do.

Personal ministry will follow one or more of three main strands: evangelism, equipping disciples, or mercy ministry, such as meeting the needs of the poor. Here are some practical areas where we can develop this type of ministry:

In the family.

This is the easiest and most important place to begin a personal ministry. It is Satan's goal to destroy the family so if you want a powerful ministry, begin by discipling your own family. A great way to start to change the world through the power of the gospel is to begin in our own homes. No amount of success at work or church will ever compensate for failure at home. Former First Lady, Barbara Bush said, "*Success doesn't depend on what happens at the White House, but what happens at Your house.*" If you are married, then after God but before all others, you must make your spouse your top importance. Pray for

your spouse and your children daily. You may be the only person in the whole world praying for your children on a regular basis. You may be the one chosen to win them to Christ!

In the local church.

If possible, find an outlet for using your spiritual gifts in your local church. A great place to begin is with discipleship. This might be in the form of leading a small group, one-on-one mentoring, facilitating a Bible study, or providing strategic leadership for the any of the different areas of ministry that are going on in the church. It can be ministering as a greeter to welcome visitors. We know of one church where one of the ladies personally, every week and for every service, cleans and refreshes every bathroom in the church! What a beautiful ministry! If you aren't sure where to start, ask a pastor or another leader to help you find a place of service where you can use the gifts that God has given you.

On the job.

Just think of the potential here. God has put His people in every type of secular place that can be imagined. We are everywhere! We are paid to work in places of business, hospitals, funeral homes, factories, construction sites and everywhere else! We have been placed there to be loyal to our employers but, also, to serve the Lord. We are to “let our light shine” in every place where God has placed us. Think about this: your job could be the lampstand that God has ordained where you let your light shine! You have been saved out of the world and then sent back into the world to witness to the world, and that's the only business in the world you have in the world, till you're taken out of the world! Be sensitive for opportunities to care for people you know through work. Be excellent in your work ethic and integrity. People will decide if Christianity is true or not based upon how you work when you think no one is looking. Francis Schaeffer said, “If you do your work well you will have a chance to speak.”

In the community.

Use your imagination. There are so many kinds of needs around you. Start a community-wide annual prayer breakfast. Consider becoming foster parents. Dedicate your home to Christ and open it up to your neighbors for a Bible study group. Visit residents at a nursing home. What are the issues and needs that grip your heart? Perhaps that is where God is calling you to engage.

Around the world

If you *really* want to experience a personal ministry, go on a missions trip to another country. The Church of God International Offices in Cleveland, Tennessee has many opportunities for missionary work both in the USA and in many other parts of the world. For more information visit *Operation Compassion* at: www.operationcompassion.com and/or *Men and Women of Action* at www.cogmwoa.org. If you are unable to travel, why not have a missionary family stay at your home during a church or missions conference. You can also pray for missionaries using a globe, write to missionaries and support them financially or send care packages for their children's birthdays.

You don't have to have a full vision and strategy before you start serving Him. Even when you have an incomplete picture of the personal ministry God has for you, you can seek to be faithful to what God has already shown you—and vigilant for more clarity along the way. Henry Blackaby said it well: “Find out where God is working and join him there.”