



The idea of restoration is central to the effort of reaching our communities for Christ. It is simply not good enough to have an occasional outreach activity or to have a transactional based ministry, no matter how popular or well intended, because it misses the most important elements of God's design. That is because we are not called to do works but to conduct works as an outpouring of our faith. Faith without works is dead, and so is works without faith. Both faith and works are not stand alone disciplines but are dependent parts of the great commission where we are called to reach every people, tribe and nation with the gospel. Therefore ministry outreach needs to be accomplished with an approach that meets physical needs within the community as a means to develop relationships where the gospel can be introduced successfully. More than 2,000 verses in the Bible discuss Christian care for those in need. This is our attempt to collate some of that scripture into usable bites that will deepen your understanding of what God's intent is for restoring His people to Himself.

The following is constructed in the format of a daily devotional to engage you and your church in thinking deeply about God's plan for restoring all peoples back to Him and providing some practical examples of how that plays out in the life of the church on mission. This tool is designed to guide your thinking and daily prayer life toward becoming a 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 beacon of light in your community. In this verse we understand that we are given a ministry of reconciliation and that we are therefore ambassadors of Christ. The act of reconciliation or restoring people to Christ is highlighted in this devotional each day, providing a time to reflect on the scripture and the duties of the ambassador. Please resist reading this devotion as if it were a book in one sitting, as the intent is to provide a means where reflection, prayer and application to ministry provide space for the Holy Spirit to move in your heart, producing not only a deeper understanding of restoration of God's people, but a calling to apply these principles in your own community.

The devotional is divided into one week sections each focused on a specific aspect of restorative ministry, that frames the thought for the week. The first day introduces the principle that is to be examined and provides the biblical background for that principle. The second day through the fourth day provide other scriptural examples of the weekly principle and an example of how that can be applied in restorative ministry. On day five another scriptural example is provided, but no ministerial application example. On the fifth through the seventh day, after prayer and reflection consider how the weekly principle could be applied within the context of your ministry and your community. Consider how it would be applied, when it would work most

effectively, who would need to be involved, and what the desired effect would be. Write these insights down each week, if you desire more input or coaching or just to share your insights with other churches, I'm available to do that with you. Contact me at DMolind@bcne.net . Completing the weekly insights will be important and helpful to you because the end of the devotional we ask that you complete a will be a final application project. More detail is provided at the end of the devotional about the project, but we want to assist you in the design, implementation and sustainment of a restoration ministry within your community.

The Centrality of the gospel (week 1)

Day 1 Welcome and thank you for taking this challenge and completing this devotional, we are praying that it makes a significant impact in you, your church and your community. If you haven't taken the time to read through the introduction please do that, as it will help you achieve a bigger impact by using this devotion.

Calling people to a personal and righteous relationship with God (through repentance and forgiveness by belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord through His death on the cross for our sins) was central to everything Jesus did and wants us to do. Matthew 4:17 says **“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** The call to repent from sins and trust in Jesus was so much a part of Jesus’ message that it is stated as the summary of His teaching right from the beginning. This call to repent and turn to Jesus is our message to the end of this age (Rev 9:20-21, 16:9, 16:11). Even through the final tribulation, God’s desire is that even the most antagonistic people repent and believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit and the Church (the bride) are calling people to come to Jesus even to the last chapter of the Bible. **“The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”** Revelations 22:17.

As we think and pray this week on the centrality of the gospel, let us consider in what aspects of our missional outreach to our community can we expose this truth. In word and deed how can we demonstrate to our community how important Christ's story is, and our desire is to reveal that.

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The Centrality of the gospel (week 1)

Day 2, In Paul's letters to the church he established in Corinth, we see that he was concerned about the disorder, divisions and difficulties of the church he has planted, the outreach, and the ministry to those people. It is clear in reading the book of Corinthians, Paul's letter to them, that he left them with a host of deep issues. As Paul begins to address these issues a common underlining theme emerges in the scripture. This underlining theme is that the church of Corinth has taken its eye off the centrality of the gospel. To address this Paul writes his first letter to the Corinthians. His objective was to restore order in the Corinthian church. As he writes this letter to the church he desires that they would be unified in the gospel and that they would be proclaiming the gospel correctly.

The fundamental idea of his desire is recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2. **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”** Perhaps there is no more important element of the gospel than faith in the resurrection of Christ. Without the resurrection there is no hope of salvation. Without the good news of who God is and what His son Christ did for us through the resurrection there can be no restoration. The gospel is not just a story, fable or tale, but instead **“the power of God unto salvation”** (1 Corinthians 1:18).

So how can this be applied in outreach ministry. One example we have used it to engage those tasked with serving to also be engaged in sharing the source of their hope. It sounds harsh but my favorite saying is “if we don't share the gospel with those who come to soup kitchen then all we are doing is sending fat people to hell.” As Paul points out in today's scripture, I'm reminding you, you have been told the gospel, you stand in it, you are saved by it, you hold fast to it - all this including your service is in vain unless you share it with those around you and in desperate need of it.

It what ways can you encourage those in ministry to adhere to the centrality of the gospel as they work out their faith ?

Centrality of the Gospel (week one)

Day 3, In order to apply the gospel in ministry it is critical that we know the gospel ourselves. The obvious answer for this is discipleship training and sound preaching. But often times congregations are confused about the centrality of the gospel, it becomes masked in the personhood of Christ. We can tend to focus on the miracles, and character of Christ and His relationship with God, rather than His atoning sacrifice for us.

Paul is careful in his letter to the Corinthian church to remind them of the centrality of the gospel. He begins by stating **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel... in verse 1a of 1 Corinthians 15. We often speak of the gospel but Paul lays it out clearly for the church in Corinth in verses 3-4. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”**

Paul instructs us at the foundational level, this is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this we come to understand that this is the saving message of Jesus taking our place on the cross, His death and ultimately His resurrection from the grave. The centrality of the gospel must be impressed into our hearts in church and expressed in our ministry to the community. It is all too easy for us to lose track of gospel in all that is occurring around us, and the adversity delights in it. While conducting our ministry it is also critical to be able to keep the gospel central to what we are doing.

This is a method that we use to ensure that the reality of the gospel stands as the primary focus as we conduct the restoration of our community. Volunteers in your ministry are not just free labor, or tools to accomplish your objectives. It is important that volunteers are regularly and generously poured into so that they in turn have the ability to pour out their faith in the ministry they have been called too. Having regular discipleship training is central to this effort. Consider not only what is important for your volunteers to know to be able to do their jobs, safely and efficiently, but also do they know the gospel ? The road for ministry of restoration is paved with the faith of the workers incased in the gospel message. We can not expect that the interactions of our ministry would be capable to restoring our community if the workers themselves don't understand the gospel of salvation.

How might your church become a tool for instructing the volunteers in your ministry to keep the gospel as their primary focus ?

Centrality of the Gospel (week one)

Day 4, we have discussed and prayed over the importance of the gospel, why we need to know the gospel, why our co-laborers need to be disciplined in the gospel. Today we are going to continue this devotional with the focus of why we need to proclaim the gospel.

Paul himself proclaimed the gospel at every opportunity he had, including during his time in Corinth and through his instructional letter to the church. It is simply not enough to understand the importance of the gospel and its place within our own hearts, but we must be prepared to share it with others. Mark 16:15 instructs us to **“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole of creation.”** There are more than one hundred such verses in the Bible that inform us about our responsibility to share the gospel with others.

A careful reading of Paul's letter reveals our responsibility to personally proclaim the gospel to those around us, and especially in the context of ministry. In verse 3a, Paul says **“For I delivered to you....”** Paul is telling us, this is not something he made up, but rather the gospel is God's word to which Paul was the messenger of. The gospel is meant to be proclaimed and shared to all people. This is not an organizational exclusive tasking but one which we all share responsibility for achieving. Today we should be in thought and prayer about how we would achieve that instruction. Paul provides us some insight into how this should be accomplished within the scripture we have been focused on this week.

Back in verse 1a, Paul begins by writing **“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you,...”** The word preached is defined in Strong's as 2097. εὐαγγελίζω *ēuaggēlizō*, yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo; to announce good news (“evangelize”) especially the gospel:—declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel). We see the gospel as foundational for evangelism, and declaring God's word. It does the kingdom of God no benefit if we keep our faith to ourselves, rather we are instructed to share that message with those we come into contact with inside and outside our ministry.

One of the ways in which we have connected this with ministry is the presentation of scripture while people are gathered. In our prayer over the meal we include the gospel message of restoration through Christ's sacrifice. It is as important now, as it was during Christ's ministry, to let people know what is provided is not of our own hands, but is in fact a demonstration of God's goodness and provision for them. In what ways through your ministry can you and others help to proclaim the gospel ?

Centrality of the Gospel (week one)

Day 5, for restoration to be effective and to transform the people we encounter, they need to see living breathing examples of this restoration in others. This is why personal testimonies are such a powerful tool in evangelizing to others. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”** Once we have been restored to Christ, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), it is our responsibility to help others in being similarly restored to Christ.

Paul's writing in Galatians provides his testimony as to who Paul understands Christ to be. Dr. J. Vernon McGee wrote in the introduction to his commentary on Galatians, "In a sense I believe this epistle has been the backbone and background for every great spiritual movement and revival that has taken place in the past nineteen hundred years. And, my friend, it will be the background for other revivals. I would like to see the Spirit of God move in our land today. I would like to hear the Epistle to the Galatians declared to America. I believe it would revolutionize lives." I believe we would all love and desire to see another revival explode through New England and around the world.

In what specific ways can we build our ministry in such a manner as to express the centrality of the gospel to our communities ? Take the next few days before starting the devotions again on day 8 to pray asking for wisdom and discernment over the issue of proclaiming the gospel to your community. Use the space below to journal about what God is revealing to you. Your efforts now will greatly aid you in completion of the completion exercise at the end of this devotion.

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Word and Deed Together (Week 2)

Day eight, we are encouraged to see that you are hanging in there with us as we use this devotional to help draw together the unique way God will use your church and ministry to restore the people in your community to Himself. This week the mega theme is tying word and deed together. Once again Paul writing this time to the Colossians tells us to keep these two elements together. In chapter 3 and verse 17 he writes “**whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**” Neither word nor deed are designed to stand alone and together they make a compelling argument for accepting the gospel and being restored to God.

Perhaps you have heard the quote, “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words.” It is often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order, but that is uncertain. Never the less this exhortation implies that it is more effective to communicate the gospel by example than by simply sharing it verbally. Although this is perhaps a old saying it holds more sway today than back when it was first spoken.

Gen Z, has been described as the post-truth generation. Born between 1997 and 2012 this generation has never known life without access to the internet. This has helped develop their own definition of truth which might seem very odd or perhaps different from our own. Their model for determining truth is to question what is presented to them as truth, and to instead of seeking truth to look for what works, then to see if that also works for them, and only then are they ready to accept it as truth. This is possibly because of so much false information on the internet. If this profile of Gen Z is accurate, then it will become even more important that the church demonstrates the gospel with skin on, more than just speak to the truth of the Bible. We each are individuals with unique God given testimony about what He has done for us and how it has “worked” in our own lives.

Jesus often combines speaking and action (word and deed) to bring the gospel to people. “**And he (Jesus) went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people**” (Matthew 4:23). Jesus combined the message of the gospel (good news) with actions that met human physical needs. Jesus combined proclaiming the gospel (word) and healing (deeds). His ministry was characterized by both speaking about God and sharing the love of God, in action.

In ministry it is also an important principle to combine the word and deed together. A good example of this is simply re-enforcing with those you serve that it is not the volunteer, nor the church, that has provided for them, but this it is God's provision for them. People will often be thankful for fulfilling of their felt needs. Ministry leaders need to be quick to help them combine that appreciation for meeting felt needs with the gospel. **God is the word** (John 1:1), and helping someone see that for perhaps the first time, a living example of God's word and deed operating in their own life. This can help start someone down the road to restoration with God by connecting these things together. In what way do you plan to connect word and deed together in your ministry ?

Word and Deed Together (Week 2)

Day 9, when John the Baptist ‘**heard about the deeds of the Messiah**’ (in Matt 11:1-5) he sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus about it. John, and many others of that day, were expecting something different from the Messiah (Christ) that was promised by God. Jesus’ reply combines the good news being proclaimed with acts of compassion that help meet human physical needs. The works of physical compassion were listed as evidences of Jesus being God’s chosen one. Reflecting the truths recorded in Isaiah 35:4-6 and 61:1, Jesus makes it clear that His actions and words were what has been God’s intent all along. **“Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”** (Matthew 11:4-5).

Notice in this passage that Christ combines all three aspects we have been in prayer about this week. First He says report “what you see and hear”, for John the Baptist’s disciples have both seen deeds being done and have heard the good news preached. In verse 5 Jesus says what deeds He has done for those with felt needs. Notice also Jesus ministry of restoration. Those without sight have their sight restored. Those without the ability to walk have their mobility restored. Those with skin disease have their health restored. Those who can not hear have their hearing restored. Even those that are dead are restored to life. The ministry of restoration is about setting things back into God’s original design. Jesus didn’t produce super hero with extra human abilities, instead He restored them from their broken state back to the way God had originally designed them. Following the restoration Jesus then proclaimed the good news. In our ministry we should also be seeking to restore people’s felt needs and then proclaiming the good news.

In ministry it is important that we help people establish the connection between word and deed that they might not otherwise be aware. When attempting to help someone with felt needs beyond your control to support, prayer is always the answer. Once a homeless couple of five years approached the church for help. They told us that they had been homeless for 5 years because of poor tenancy skills, not keeping the place clean and not paying on time and so they had been blacklisted by landlords. It was also obvious that she was several months pregnant at the time. Not yet having our shelter in place we had limited options to support them, but did tell them we would pray for them. Two days later they returned quite happy, our prayer for them had been answered, they were provided providentially shelter. In what ways could you craft encounters with people in your ministry to help them connect word and deed ?

Word and Deed Together (Week 2)

Day 10. While Jesus often combined both word and deed (acts of compassion with verbal message), Mark 1:35-38 makes it clear that the priority of Jesus is always getting the message to more people who haven't heard yet. After a particular intense time of healing people's physical needs and freeing them from demonic oppression, there were many more with physical and emotional problems that showed up seeking help. **"Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.'"** (Mark 1:36-38). Even though there were many more that could have been physically helped in that area, Jesus told the disciples He had to move to other areas so His verbal message could be heard by those who had not heard the gospel yet. The reason He came was to bring the good news. It is essential that all our deeds also have a verbal and relational component that identifies and shares the good news of Jesus.

It was not unusual for Jesus to use the actions that helped people physically or mentally as a spring board to begin talking about spiritual needs. In John 9, Jesus physically heals a man who had been blind since birth. This was in answer to a question by the disciples about whether this physical problem was punishment because of him or his parents. After replying 'neither', Jesus refocuses us to see that these physical needs are actually an opportunity to see God at work. Later Jesus interacts with the man in John 9:35-38 connecting word and deed together. using the restorative action. **"Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.** Jesus as the perfect leader, hearing that His disciples had cast out the demon, He went to find the man in order share the word with the blind man. Jesus checked to see if the man believed and finding that he didn't, proceeded to proclaim Himself as Lord. In ministry what kinds of action should we be taking to check to see if our people are connecting word and deed with those they are ministering too ?

One way we accomplish that is to organize in such a way as to draw people ever closer to an authentic encounter with Christ. Our model is to seek to draw the community, and from there, seek people of peace to draw into a crowd, and from the crowd invite people to join our congregation, and then to develop and disciple them into becoming part of our core group. These four C's form a construct where we can draw people into an ever deepening relationship with us and with Christ. Each of these actives offer a new opportunity to share the word with people we have already supported with restorative needs.

Word and Deed Together (Week 2)

Day 11. When the disciples were sent out on their first missional journey (Matthew 10), Jesus instructed them to both preach the gospel and do acts of restoration in their first outing. **“And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.”** (Matthew 10:7-8). Interestingly Jesus again personally modeled this right before that. **“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** (Matthew 9:35-36) Combining the verbal witness with help for physical needs was an act of redemption on Jesus’ part and one that He wanted His followers to practice.

Notice that in Matthew 10:8b Jesus tells them **“You received without paying, give without pay”**. It is difficult to preform restoration then there is a sense of give and get. Give and get is the economy of this world, while get and freely receive is the economy of God. Matthew 10:8b (NIV) translates that section as **“Freely you have received: freely give.”** In restoration we do not work in the economy of transaction but of economy of relationship. We have received our ultimate gift of salvation freely, so just as we have received freely we must also give to those in need freely. Even when people in need offer to pay for services always refuse. Payment eases the conscience and smooths the transaction in their mind. Refusing payment as one would do for a dear friend opens the door to developing relationships, which in turn fuels the opportunity to share what Christ did freely for you.

In ministry we never solicit a donation or offerings. Soup kitchen, food shelf... all freely offered without expectation or opportunity for donation. We take this even farther that when someone decides to attend discipleship or Bible study classes nothing is charged for books or materials. The exchange of funds is inconsequential to the reward of leading someone to Christ. How might your design or restructure your ministry to ensure that word and deed stay firmly connected and are not diluted by fund raising ?

Word and Deed Together (Week 2)

Day 12. The book of Acts shows us that the disciples imitated Jesus in this combining word and deed - combining acts of compassion/physical help with preaching/sharing the gospel of Jesus verbally. In Acts 3: 1-7, Peter can't help a lame man's financial needs, but instead Peter calls on/prays to God to heal the man. **Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.** Peter then uses this man's joyful response and witness to his physical healing to be able to clearly preach the good news of Jesus in a most powerful way.

In Acts 14, God confirmed Paul & Barnabas' bold speaking about Jesus with miraculous acts of compassion meeting physical and emotional needs. **"So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."** (Acts 14:3). In Acts 19:10-12, we see Paul and the early believers in Ephesus combined the verbal teaching about Jesus with acts of restoration that God inspired and showed His power in. **"This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,"** (Acts 19:10-11). In both these examples we see that God blessed these ministries that connected word and deed by granting them longevity.

How do you see your ministry being able to connect word and deed together so that you might similarly be granted the opportunity to have a lasting impact on your community ?

Getting Personal (week 3)

Day 15, congratulations for hanging in there, you are half way through this devotional and prayerfully you are getting a sense of how restoration is a key component for your missional outreach to your community. This week we will be looking at the importance of getting personal in restoration. A key in restoration ministries, that helps keep the gospel in forefront, is to change the environment from a transactional one to a relational (personal) one. When people have needs, we often offer them some physical help - food for the hungry, clothes for those without, supplies that are needed, etc. When done without intentionality the ministry starts off 'transactional' - someone comes for food and you give them some. How well do you know the clerk at your grocery store? Likely, not well at all, similarly what opportunity does that clerk have to convince you to change your life ? While God can use this (and anything else), there is far more significant witness that can happen when we get personal. Keeping this in mind, God loves us and desires to have a relationship with us (John 3:16). Being His creation and created in His image we have inherited His DNA, a DNA that also causes us to desire to be in relationship with one another. At the very beginning of the Bible we see this in Genesis 2:18 **“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”** God understood the need for man to have relationships, and that it is not good to be alone. Often people in need feel as if they are alone, trapped in their situation without support, understanding, sometime ashamed of their situation. They need to have their physical needs met, food, shelter ... but in a bigger way they need to have their relationship needs met. Often before people are physically broken, they are relationally broken (with God and with others). Having someone who joyfully enters into relationship with them, cares genuinely for them, and comes alongside them in crisis helps to restore and rekindle their desire for relationships. This restoration can then be more easily expanded to include their understanding and desire for relationship with God as well.

In ministry one of the successful ways that we have been able to develop relationships with those we serve is too when serving physical needs to ask deeper questions. This might look like someone needing a raincoat from the clothing closet and then to ask then deepening question. Here is a raincoat to help keep you dry today, can you tell me more about what caused you to be so wet today ? Or I see the weather is not your friend today how else can I help you ? Any of these kind of questions avoid the transaction of just providing a raincoat and get us closer to understanding a deeper need in which we can start to develop a relationship around.

Getting Personal (week 3)

Day 16, People will share their physical needs, but are much more reluctant to share their personal needs. It is the personal needs where Jesus wants to make the greatest long term changes in their lives and in our own lives. Developing relationships will help get us from addressing the superficial felt needs to the deeper spiritual needs. A key element of building a relationship is developing trust. We will have already gained some trust by providing for the initial felt need, but we need to go deeper and help them develop ever more trust by staying connected and caring for them. Often the second greatest commandment is the only principle we need to adhere too. **“And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Matthew 22:39). Placing ourselves into their shoes can help us develop the next set of deeper questions and assist with growing the relationship.

The book of John has a number of extended personal encounters between Jesus and individuals.. Read through John 4:1-42, the account of the Samaritan woman. Notice that Jesus first enters into a doubly forbidden relationship with not only a Samaritan, a culture Jews considered unclean, and also a lone woman who men were not supposed to associate with. The woman comes to the well because she is need of water, Jesus uses this opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with her. Notice how Jesus asks good questions starting with her physical, the need for water and then Jesus turns the conversation spiritual, by telling her about living water, seeing that she doesn't understand what He is talking about, Jesus goes deeper still. Asking about her husband Jesus goes deeper still by revealing sin in her life, and the need for the offered living water. Ultimately, Jesus leads the conversation to reveal Himself as the messiah. This woman now having discovered faith is quick to share this good news with many in town resulting in even more people accepting Jesus as Lord. No other Jew had even attempted to have a relationship much less share their faith with the Samaritan people. Jesus understood His purpose was to reach all peoples, and not to overlook or reject anyone.

In our ministry we were once doing an outreach by visiting homeless encampments and walking the railroad tracks. Rounding the corner in the tracks we found several homeless folks in back of one of local drinking establishments. We freely offered a hot meal we had prepared, water, socks and other sundries. One of the men asked “where are you from”, I explained we were from a local church and wanted to show them that we cared for them. He then stated that “every time I've needed something I've had to search for the church”. Handing him a meal I responded at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, “brother you are a child of God and Jesus has always been out searching for you”. What are some approaches, actions or questions to help people open up, and to share their real spiritual needs?

Getting Personal (week 3)

Day 17, we continue today on this weeks theme of getting personal in order to develop relationships and earn the privilege to share Christ. Proverbs 17:17 tells us **“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”** People that seek our ministry are no doubt feeling they are in a place of adversity. They likely have all ready asked friends for help without avail. Now they are turning toward your ministry at a time of real hardship. Jesus points out that this is a time in which a brotherhood can be born. A friend may take care of a need for a moment, but someone who is a brother will care for a need during a great trial. Perhaps the trail others are facing as they come to your ministry is God at work, building a relationship so you can share Christ with them.

Continuing in the book of John and focusing on relationships we see numerous examples where Jesus calls others to Himself in close relationship in order to help them deepen their spiritual relationship with the Lord. Jesus says in John 13:34, others will know you as disciples, if you have love for your theology... we all know that theology is important, we know that there can be no compromise with the truth,, but actually Jesus didn't say that at all what He said was **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** You see people don't care about who you know, until they know that you care. It requires an often supernatural love of one another to meet needs, but out of that love for one another we are blessed to put them in right relationships with Christ also.

Loving one another can sometimes be super challenging. We often meet others in ministry that are demanding, mean, angry, entitled, ungrateful, or have strange mannerisms, are aggressive, have mental health problems and the like. Demonstrating love in these circumstances helps us to grow in Christ likeness, He witnessed the same kinds of people during His ministry as well, and some were even trying to kill Him. Prayerfully, no one is trying to kill us while we are doing ministry. But, we are called to love them and keep loving them. One of the ways we accomplish that is by being a very encouraging congregation, both in the context of ministry and worship. For example, we often have people who will share they are 2 month or something sober. This is indeed a cause for celebration that Christ has set the captives free. The challenge is that later they also want you to know they are 2 days sober. Celebrating and loving them in this context is harder, but helps to show our unconditional love, acceptance and non-judgmental attitude. In what ways can your ministry demonstrate love for one another as a means to deepen relationships ?

Getting Personal (week 3)

Day 18, as we consider how to get into relationship with the people we are serving, it is important to understand that ministry moves at the speed of relationships. The faster you dive into getting to know someone and building their trust the faster an opportunity will come along to share Christ. My dad, who was a missions director for many years, once told me that the key to international short terms missions was connecting to the underground church. Because you can start something, but people need to be connected to the church for longer term care and of course, discipleship. He said that it takes on average 18 positive encounters with Christians before someone will be ready to accept Christ. So if your church is doing a fantastic outreach event every year and making a wonderful impact on those served, in 18 years (on average) you can expect someone to accept the Lord as their Savior. Of course, we walk on the shoulders of those before us, taking advantage of the efforts of others to make those early impressions, so perhaps you may see one sooner. On the other hand if you're persistent, like we are, with your ministry and people stop in daily, you should expect opportunities to share Christ and have professions of faith every few weeks, a weekly ministry every quarter of the year, and so on.

For me waiting years for and years is really hard. But seeing God's word return in a few weeks time, that fuels a fire for ministry, likewise seeing a steady stream of baptisms every month helps to encourage more laborers, and support for the outreach ministry among the congregation. There is nothing wrong with either approach, short or long, but seeing people more often, aids in becoming relational and sharing Christ sooner.

Consider the people Jesus had repeated encounters with yet they resisted accepting Him. The Pharisees encountered Christ often, saw His miracles, sat for His teachings, and even shared the old testament scripture, and yet steadfastly refused to accept Him. In Mark 7:6-8 Jesus **“says to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”** The lost similarly are following their own teaching and doctrines, we should not be surprised that when they first encounter Christ they are not moved to the point of acceptance. They might even rebel or speak evil of the ministry as the Pharisees did of Christ. As Christ did we need to lovingly, patiently and persistently point out the errors of their of their doctrine and how Christ desires to restore them out of that place. Think and pray about how your ministry might be able to make more positive encounters with Christ for the people you serve ?

Getting Personal (week 3)

Day 19, As we finish up this week in prayer about getting personal and the power of relationships in restoring your community to Christ, let us consider the role of sacrifice in getting personal. We see at several points in the gospel we see Jesus touch people with leprosy, eat with sinners, and hang out with the unclean, so much so that He was openly criticized by the religious leaders. But we also are called to be fishers of men. Well the fishing is best where the fish gather, so ministry might call you to the homeless encampment, the bar, the crack house and other favored fishing places not often frequented by religious leaders of our day.

I look fondly back at my first visits to such places not knowing what to expect, how to act or how to protect myself. These fears can keep us from reaching the same kind of people Jesus did. Of course we don't want to become foolish either, but these people are unlikely to show up to your worship service on Sunday or maybe even come to your ministry at church, so how can they be reached ? John 15:13 tells us that **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** We need to be prepared to be uncomfortable, feel a bit unsafe, and get dirty in order to reach those hard to reach people. It has been my experience that in this difficult place the lost often have the softest hearts. They truly desire to leave that place also, but often don't know how. Sometimes just showing up is the greatest way to show Christ's love and start a relationship.

Another way to show others Christ in ministry is a baptism wall. Early on in our ministry I was moved to start a wall, where those who are baptized sign their name, put the date of their new birth, and favorite scripture. This has three purposes, first it is a very public declaration of their faith, secondly it is view by countless others that no matter where they are, God desires to and is able to restore them, and third it's a blessing for the pastor. During the hard days of ministry to come (and it will come), to sit before the wall and breath deeply knowing it's all worth it, is an incredibly valuable encouragement. As this week ends let us consider the role of getting personal, getting into relationship and how those things are critical for enabling genuine conversations about Christ. How can your design or re-design your ministry to take full advantage of getting personal with the people you serve ?

Dependence on prayer (week 4)

Day 22, last week's theme was getting personal, leaning into relationship. This week we continue on another aspect of relationship, that of communication. Communication with the Lord is accomplished by prayer. Think about it, if we don't communicate with those we are in relationship with what kind of a relationship is it, estranged? The way we maintain communication with the Lord is through our prayer life. Therefore we need to seek ways to stay in continuous prayer with the Lord, our boss, and also model that dependence for the people we are serving. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us simply **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing"** Certainly it is a blessing to be able to get on knee-email and communicate our needs and brokenness with God directly. In the case of those we serve they don't know that blessing and can't rejoice in it. One of the things that separates us from the secular community is the power and comfort of prayer. We have a hope that simply doesn't exist in their lives.

The power of prayer has the ability to even raise the dead. We see this in Peter praying for Tabitha and she was restored to life (Acts 9:40). **"But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up."** Prayer is key both in our relationship with God, but also in our ministry for God. We will often be challenged with seemingly desperate and impossible situations in ministry. Problems that we don't have the resources to help with, no matter how much we would like to. The answer is prayer, open up your communication with the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills.

There are two parts to prayer that I believe strongly in and that we need in ministry. The first is our own need to communicate with the creator about needs and direction in ministry. Because our God is a living God, He is constantly on the move, we need to regularly check in, and seek discernment to ensure we are still in alignment with Him. We must also turn to the Lord every time we are challenged in ministry to gain the resources needed to accomplish God's purpose and to seek His direction and blessing to ensure we are still focused on following where ever God is at work. Secondly, we need to pray with those we serve. It is not enough for us to turn toward God to meet the needs in ministry, but we must also be transparent with those we serve, by demonstrating that dependence, by this God can use it to showcase His love, provision, healing, and protection over those in need. We are truly not in ministry alone and serve both God and man. In ministry this may look like when a person has a need we can not meet, turning to God in prayer with the person in need, in the moment. Praying together over that need, we don't have resources to help with. Repeated, and quickly we have seen God use this to reveal Himself to that person in need and meet those ministry needs. We have used prayer for every kind of need from milk to cancer, from housing to addiction. God is good, He is alive and He is interested in showing Himself to the lost. How might you demonstrate the power of prayer to a community that doesn't know Christ?

Dependance on prayer (week 4)

Day 23, Praying increases your faith. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is that of the father whose son was possessed by a deaf-mute spirit (Mark 9:17-29). The disciples had tried to release the boy from his demonic captor but had failed. At the end of his wits, this poor father came to Jesus and said, **“Help us, if you can”** (Mark 9:24).

I almost imagine that Jesus was a little incredulous but I understand how the man felt. He wanted to believe that Jesus could help his son but so many others had failed to help him before. Finally, he said, **“Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!”** (Mark 9:24). It may seem as if this man’s statement is contradictory, but who among us hasn’t felt this way? We want to believe but sometimes it’s hard. Praying helps to strengthen our faith. And the more we see our prayers answered, the more we’ll be able to believe that they will be answered in the future.

As in the case with this man sometimes the lost need to be helped with their unbelief. It is not as affective to tell someone you will pray for them as it is to pray for them in the moment. My father often traveled to creative access countries to offer medical help to the indigenous people as a means to share the gospel, he later told me that in all his missions trips he never had anyone refuse prayer when it was offered to them. In the same way we can encourage someones unbelief by praying with them over felt needs. I was once ask by a homeless couple to pray over their long term lack of housing. I prayed for them and within three days saw them again. The man was overjoyed that after such a long time their housing situation had been answered. He then told me “I don't know about your God or the power of your prayer, but I'm coming to church every Sunday from now on until I figure it out.” I think his unbelief was helped!

As you conduct ministry in what ways can you incorporate prayers to increase unbelievers faith ?

[illegible]

Dependence on prayer (week 4)

Day 24, answered prayer can be an incredibly powerful affirmation of faith, especially for those that have lost all hope and feel as if no one else cares. In Jeremiah 29:11 the scripture tells us **“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”** This is an awesome truth for our lives and something that can't be said often enough to those experiencing temporary hardship and feeling that God has abandon them. We also know from James 4:2-3 **“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”**

We need to help model effective righteous prayer for those we encounter in our ministry. Sometimes they have never been exposed to prayer, other times they see prayer just as a magic lamp they rub only when they need something, other times they blame God for not answering past prayer, whatever the reason the power of prayer must be reintroduced as a lifeline between them and a loving and caring God. As we pointed out in yesterday's devotional praying in the moment with them is an effective method for achieving this, another is to pull out the big guns.

In ministry we often ask those we serve for their prayer needs. Not only do we pray for them in the moment and ask them to report back to us if their prayer has been answered, but we share those prayer needs with the congregation. This have multiple effects throughout the church. It works like this, someone makes a prayer request, we pray over it in the moment, demonstrating both our love for them and our own dependence upon prayer. Then we share that prayer request in church on Sunday with a family who has agreed to pray over the request all week. That is when the Lord's power is showcased. Sometimes that family has never prayed for someone else, especially someone they have never met and likely never someone who is homeless, addicted or hungry. When that pray is answered, the person making the request is encouraged, God loves them enough to answer their prayer, secondly, the family that was praying over that request is encouraged, in their power of pray and seeing it answered and third the praying family and the person with the need are drawn closer together in process, providing more people interested in volunteering for ministry and greater closeness with those in need.

In what ways could your ministry use the power of prayer to connect believers with those you serve ?

Dependence on prayer (week 4)

Day 25, maybe you are thinking, you know my prayers never really seem to be answered, or whenever I pray for a person to be healed they end up in worse shape not better. I think at one time or another we have all been frustrated by prayer. Especially, in ministry when we feel we are doing God's work, why are we left wanting. After all 1 John 5:15-16 tells us **"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."**

Well, part of that may arise from not reading what comes before that in John 15:7 **"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."** We often focus on the last part of that verse and over look the first part. First we are called to abide in Him and His words will abide in us. In ministry we need to give up the notion that it some how belongs to us. If we focus on the truth, we understand that is in fact Christ's ministry to a broken people and we are fortunate enough to be able to be invited to work alongside Christ as He ministers to these people, restoring them to God. It's not that God has let us down, but that our own expectations have gotten ahead of His purposes. God isn't about to let His word return void.

In ministry we must depend on prayer, after we act in accordance with Christ. We can't hope to be perfect like Christ, but we must act according to His character. Years ago the popular thing was WWJD, what would Jesus do ? As we serve those around us let use serve them in the same way Jesus would. In ministry as in Christ's life treating others with dignity is an important character trait. If we abide in Christ we will also treat those we serve with dignity. Ever noticed that Jesus never shies away from anyone, never treats them as unclean, dirty or sinful ? For example, at soup kitchen we treat everyone as if they were Christ. We offer plenty of food, good food, prepared with care, served on real plates, with real flatware, not with plastic or paper. As we abide in Christ, His words abide in us and are on display for those we serve. In what ways can you demonstrate treating others with dignity in your ministry and have your prayers answered ?

Dependance on prayer (week 4)

Day 26, there is so much about our dependance on prayer that it is difficult to keep to only one weeks worth of examples. So unfortunately we need to end here. On this last day on our theme of dependance on prayer, we are going to focus on not developing dependance on us but on the Lord. Those that will seek out your ministry can easily grow attached and start to develop an unhealthy dependance on you and your prayer, your relationship with God and so on. This is especially true for folk that might have had experience with the Catholic Church in the past.

We need to be good at let people know of our dependance on God and that through a restored relationship with God, they have the same power and relationship with Him we enjoy. Matthew 5:16 says, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”** Note the end of that verse. “That they may see your good works” but that they would not be dependent on you or your ministry, but “give glory to your Father who is in heaven”. It is God we desire them to be in relationship with, dependent on and to communicate with. In ministry we often provide opportunities to those we serve to pray to God for themselves, instead of us always praying for them. Maybe that they would say grace at lunch, or maybe praying together with you for a certain felt need. In what ways can you construct your ministry so that those you serve grow their dependance on God in their prayer life ?

[illegible]

Final project

I hope that you have both enjoyed and been inspired by the devotions, and even been moved by the Holy Spirit to actively participate in the restoration your community to Christ. We don't want to leave you with all this pent up energy and ideas, without an outlet for it, so we pray that you will stick with us for the final part of this devotional, the culminating project. This culminating project will give you a chance to pour over all your prayers, integrate your insight, solidify your leading in action and place all of it into a product that will serve many purposes. First it will help to formalize what you have learned, secondly it is designed to provide some organization to your ideas so you can clearly relate to others what you have learned, third it can serve as an implementation document you can present to leadership to actually establish this ministry and fourth sharing your insights with us will help us grow our understanding of how to better operate restorative ministries across New England.

In order to help you organize your thoughts we have provided a format for you to share your ideas and a list of relevant prompts in each section to get you oriented toward completing that area. Remember that all of your weekly insights are designed to help you populate these sections, so refer back to them as often as you need to keep moving forward. Additionally, we want to hear from you and we want to be able to coach you through this process so feel free to reach out if you feel stuck or you want to share what you are doing. Once again my contact is DMolind@bcne.net.

Don't attempt to write a lengthy paper that others will likely never read through, but instead strive for a shorter work, spiked with insights about how you see the ministry of reconciliation at work in your church and community. Take as much or as little time as needed to explain how each prompting area would be addressed. Additionally, if you have others from your church going through this devotional at the same time we encourage you to all get together and complete this exercise together, pooling your ideas and leading.

1. Introduce yourself and provide background information about your ministry

The goal of your project's introduction is to gain the interest of your leaders and church. This paragraph should include basic information about your calling to this ministry, what the proposed ministry is and an overview of the community need, to make it clear to others what you are doing. If you are having difficulty determining what kind of ministry your community needs, then we would suggest our training on understanding your church and community (to be published in January, and available on the BCNE website). If your ministry is already in place note that, and explain in what ways this devotional will impact or modify your ministry plan. What is your ministry called, how would it operate, how often is it open ? It is also important to express how you see this ministry being centered on restoring people to Christ.

2. Those in need

In this section of the project provide some clear details and processes you intend to use to reach these people. What felt needs do they have, in what ways will your ministry address those needs, how will you avoid transactions and develop relationships, what is the spiritual condition of the people you are reaching ? How might you attract people you want to engage

with ? How will you express to them that what is being offer is from God as provision for them and a sign of His love for them ?

3. The Church.

Restoration ministry should be added on to what the church is doing be integrated into the church. In what ways would you like to see the whole church engaged in this ministry ? What type of purposeful interactions might help the congregation join you in restoring your community ? What will you need to ask of the church to successfully meet community needs ? How do you plan to introduce the concept of restoring your community to Christ to the church ?

4. The volunteer

In what ways can your recruit people to help in this ministry ? What kind of training do they need to understand that the objective of the ministry is restoration, and not just meeting physical needs ? How do you plan to provide encouragement and sustain their efforts in dealing with people who are far from the Lord and hard to love ? How will engage them to be relational with those they come in contact with ? What spiritual giftedness would be helpful for your volunteers to have ? If yours is an existing ministry what areas do you need to redirect or start to focus on restoration of God's people ? How will prayer by volunteers be incorporated into the ministry ?

5. The ask

What is the next thing you need to do to begin implementing the ministry of restoration in your church, and who do you need to ask ?

I pray this has been an effective tool for you in getting started with the restorative efforts God has put on your heart for your community. We are encouraged that you have spend this time in prayer and reflection about achieving the great commission in your community. We also want to develop relationships among the churches doing this work so that we can share best practices, helps, insight, prayer and anything else that will help these type ministries thrive. If there are areas you would like to see added to this devotional drop me those ideas so we can continue to engage others to join us in the ministry of restoration. Please share with us what you are doing and how we might be of help. Our email is DMolind@bcne.net

Credit

All scriptural references are from the The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV,) Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016, unless otherwise noted.

Day 4, Week 1: Preached, James Strong, A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 33.

Day 5, Week 1: J. Vernon McGee, 1991, Galatians: Thru the Bible Commentary Series, Thomas Nelson Publishing, Nashville, TN