

PERSONAL PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY ACTION: P.R.A.Y.E.R.

Perhaps you are drawn toward community ministry ... but you aren't sure whether you are really ready to plunge in. Like an athlete warming up before a sporting event, you can take the initiative to intentionally prepare to enter the ministry arena. This personal preparation not only strengthens your readiness to be used by God as an agent of transformation, but also cultivates God's transforming work within you.

P.R.A.Y.E.R.: Pray, Relationships, Act, Yes, Equip, Reflect

P = Pray and Practice spiritual disciplines

- Confess to God your inadequacy for the ministry journey (John 15:4-5, 2 Cor. 4:7). Ask God to empower you with His Spirit to do God's work, in order to display God's glory (2 Cor. 3:5-6, 12:9).
- *"The spiritual disciplines help us build up our spiritual muscles so that when life requires more of us, we can rise to the task"* (*The Leader's Journey*, 133). What spiritual disciplines (prayer, journaling, Scripture meditation, fasting) have been meaningful to your personal spiritual journey, that you could now extend to your external ministry journey?
- What is a specific concern in your congregation, community or ministry team that you can begin making a matter of persistent prayer? (John 16:24)

Seek the spiritual wisdom, power and discipline to guide you personally and your church into fruitful good works (Col. 1:9-10).

R = Relationships

- Breaches in relationship can become stumbling blocks to ministry. Assess your relationships with people in your family ... in your church and ministry team ... in your workplace and neighborhood. Is there anyone you have offended? Is there anyone you need to forgive? What steps can you take to seek reconciliation and unity? (Matt. 5:23-24, John 17:21)
- *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak"* (*James 1:19*). Who is someone who *really* listens to you? What impact does that have on you? Work on *really* listening to each person, and to the voice of the Spirit through their life.
- Seek to be in an accountable relationship with a spiritual mentor or a small group who can support your walk with the Lord and encourage your calling to holistic ministry.

Nurture relationships of mutual trust and respect in which a shared vision can take root.

A = Act

- Be the change you want to see! Put "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6) into practice in your own daily life, by ...
 - Showing mercy and compassion
 - Practicing hospitality
 - Being a light for the Gospel
 - Loving your neighbors
- If God has been leading you personally to a specific expression of ministry ... now may be the time to answer the call! Your experience of taking a step of faith may help others down the line.
- Prayerfully assess any personal actions you need to undertake (making a lifestyle change, breaking a bad habit, becoming more organized) in order to be a more effective leader.

As "doers of the Word" (James 1:19), act in faithfulness to your best current understanding of your calling.

Personal Preparation for Ministry Action

Y = Yes to God

- "Spiritual preparation has the goal of getting God's people in partnership with Him in His redemptive mission in the world. It requires that His people say yes to Him. ... Saying yes usually comes about when God's people have had their hearts captured by His heart." (Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future*) What are you most saying Yes to in your life now? Is God's heart in it?
- What has helped you in the past to be captured by God's heart? How can you grow in saying Yes to God? Pray that you would allow your heart to be broken by the things that break God's heart.
- Reflect on God's amazing "Yes" to you in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). You are not just a worker in God's harvest field—you are a precious child in God's family! Spend time soaking in God's love and grace.

Cultivate an attitude of openness to God's plans and ways, so that when God calls, your answer may be: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Sam. 3:9).

E = Equip

- The word 'disciple' comes from the same root in the Greek as 'learner.' Become your own trainer! One way to equip yourself is to read good books on community ministry. Recommendations include:
 - Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (P&R Publishing, 1989).
 - Robert Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life* (Regal Books, 2007)
 - John Perkins, ed. *Restoring At-Risk Communities* (Baker, 1995).
 - Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Group, 2004).
 - Amy Sherman, *Restorers of Hope* (Crossway Books, 1997).
 - Ronald Sider, Phil Olson and Heidi Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference* (Baker, 2002).
 - Jay Van Groningen, *Communities First* (CRWRC, 2005).
- Follow a daily devotional or Bible study on an aspect of God's mission in the world (such as Amy Sherman's *Sharing God's Heart for the Poor*, or the study resources in the *Faith in Action* Bible).
- Connect with an experienced leader or long-term volunteer in a community ministry program or nonprofit. Take this person out to a meal and ask them to share their story.

As a disciple (learner) of God's mission in the world, strengthen your theological understanding, background knowledge, and skills.

R = Reflect

- Take time to cultivate ongoing awareness of yourself, your church, your community, and God's presence in all of these:
 - Consider how your life story has brought you to this point. How has God been shaping you for this ministry assignment?
 - Develop antennae for missional themes in church activities, conversations and culture. What sparks your prophetic imagination?
 - Be intentional about listening to neighbors – their dreams and concerns, their gifts and griefs, what they fear and what they love.
 - As you go about your daily routine, pray "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10) and imagine what this would look like in your setting.
 - Follow the local news with an eye for what God may be doing, and an ear for how God may be speaking to the church (Matt. 16:3).
- Give thanks to God for all He is doing in and through you.

Practice the art of reflection in order to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7).