

# Essentials of a Competent Ministry

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*A competent Christian ministry is built on the foundation of fellowship with God, the presence of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** John 20:19

**Topics:** "Christian Ministry", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of the minister's fellowship with God, highlighting the power that comes from having Christ at the center of one's life and ministry. The sermon delves into the significance of the minister's union and communion with Christ, focusing on aspects like peace, purity, power, courage, wisdom, satisfaction, and expectation that stem from Christ's presence. It also addresses the perils of losing fellowship with God due to preoccupation, neglect, or presumption, stressing the need for faithfulness and obedience to maintain a strong connection with the Holy Spirit for effective Christian service.

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## Transcript

It is evident from almost every consideration we have given to the Christian ministry that the prime secret of its power lies in the minister himself, his life, character, and tone. Only as these are true will his work be effective. Bunyan's picture of the Christian minister emphasizes this, for every aspect is concerned chiefly, and in some respects entirely, with the man himself.

But there are certain aspects of the life and character of the minister which call for special attention if we are to realize the full meaning of a competent ministry.

Section 1. Fellowship With God (Gal. 1:16; 1 John 1:3).

The end of all God's dealings with man is union and communion. From Genesis to Revelation we see how sin separates and how Christ unites. The work of Christ for us leads to His work in us, and the preposition "in," whether referring to "Christ in us," or to us "in Christ," is the keynote and central truth of the teaching of St. Paul and St. John. "In Christo" has been called "The Monogram of St. Paul". In the Epistle to the Galatians five times the Apostle refers to Christ being "in" us, and in Phil. 4 it is recorded no less than eight times that we are "in Christ" or "in the Lord".

I. The Power. Almost every grace and blessing of the Christian life is associated with the presence of Christ in His people. "Jesus in the midst" is the description of the Cross. "There am I in the midst" is the assurance about the two or three gathered in His Name. "The Prince in the midst" is the prophetic anticipation of the Messiah (Ezek. 46:10). And "the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne" is one of the last visions of the exalted Lord (Rev. 7:17). If then He is to have His rightful power over our lives, He must be in His rightful place "in the midst".

This ought to be a matter of special concern to the Christian minister. 1. Peace. "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you" (John 20:19). The peace of His presence gives restfulness in the ministry. 2. Purity. "The Holy One in the Midst" (Hos. 11:9). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). The purity of His presence is the guarantee of ministerial holiness. 3. Power. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. 3:17).

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you" (2 Cor. 3:13). The power of His presence is the assurance of the powerlessness of all opposition to our ministry. 4. Courage. "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whither soever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9). "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him for the health of His countenance" (Psalm 42:5, R.V.).

"He saith unto them, It is I, be not afraid" (John 6:20). The courage due to His presence is the one sufficient inspiration of all ministerial service. 5. Wisdom. "To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks One like unto the Son of Man" (Rev. 1:13). The spiritual perception required for the varied demands of the ministry can only come from the indwelling presence of Christ. 6.

Satisfaction. "And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the Name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and My people shall never be ashamed" (Joel 2:26 f.). Amid all the disappointments attendant on the ministry nothing can compare with the joy of the conscious presence of Christ. 7. Expectation. "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

The presence of Christ in the heart is the pledge and foretaste of that glory which will be ours at His Advent. These and other passages show that the presence of Christ in the heart is the center from which radiates every experience, every blessing, every influence.

## II. The Peril.

But privilege brings peril, and the very blessings of the Gospel may easily be turned into their opposites by carelessness. While it is eternally and blessedly true that so far as salvation is concerned the believer's position "in Christ" and his possession of Christ ("Christ in you") are untouched by anything merely human, yet it is equally and solemnly true that our personal experience of these realities may be affected by our sin, or neglect, or nonfulfillment of conditions. As the disciples on the way to Emmaus "constrained" our Lord to abide with them, so there is a sense in which we have to fulfill requirements if He is to abide in us and we are to abide in Him. The peril of lost fellowship is a real one and should be faced by every minister, for nothing can make up for it. What are some of the causes of this failure in fellowship?

1. There is the danger of preoccupation with other interests. It is only too possible for ordinary everyday affairs to shut out the clergyman from his Bible and from fellowship with God. Even our legitimate intercourse with others can easily exclude Christ. It is therefore essential that we shall so arrange our time, that not even the most natural and normal earthly concerns may affect our conscious communion with our Master.

2. There is the danger of pressure of daily work. It is also very possible to neglect Christ through haste. One of our most serious perils is that of having "no time" for fellowship, because of the constant pressure of engagements connected with our own clerical work. How often clergymen have said that they have scarcely any time even to read their Bible, and yet we must "take time to be holy".

3. There is the danger of presumption. By this is meant the solemn possibility of taking spiritual realities too much for granted. While we know the joy of resting upon fundamental facts, such as Justification, Righteousness, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit, we must never allow the freedom and fullness of Divine grace to hinder our definite fellowship in daily experience. No knowledge of doctrine, no certainty of spiritual position must interfere with our effort to hold communion with our Master. We dare not take His presence for granted; and if we do, we shall find the risk is great and the loss will be serious. We ought to know by definite fulfillment of conditions that He is in us and with us. These are only some of the spiritual perils connected with our loss of fellowship, and they are among the greatest and most serious we can experience. A ministry which is not based on a constant "recollectedness" of the Master's presence must necessarily be shorn of spiritual power.

### III. Protection.

But how may we avoid these perils and experience the power of His presence and fellowship? The way is very simple.

1. He is brought into our lives by faith. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17). Trust unlocks the door and allows Him to enter and abide. And the act of faith by which He first enters is to become transformed into an attitude for daily living. "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).

2. He is kept in our lives by faithfulness. Communion with Him by prayer and the Bible, and obedience to Him by response to His will, are the guarantees of a perpetual fellowship which is the heart of the Christian ministry. The whole of Christianity, and therefore the whole of our ministry, is summed up in the Lord's words: "At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you" (John. 14:20). Here we have (1) Our Safe Position. "I am in My Father." On this all else rests, the Divinity of our Lord. (2) Our Strong Protection. "Ye in Me." This means our acceptance in Christ for pardon and righteousness, and our union with Him in His death and His life. (3) Our Sure Provision. "I in you." This guarantees all necessary power for life and holiness. And in the Holy Spirit we come to "know" this gradually and increasingly, and enter into the full blessing of communion with God in Christ. Herein lies our power for life and service, and the guarantee of "full proof of our ministry."

### Section 2. Concentration (1 Kings 20:40, Phil. 3:13).

There is nothing finer or more fascinating than life. We see this in Science as we are shown the glories, first of the crystal, then of the cell, the inorganic and the organic in nature. But it is still more evident in the

spheres of morality and religion, for there is nothing more wonderful or beautiful than a life of holiness which combines nature and grace. The essence of life is will, and every true life will be dominated by purpose. It has been pointed out that there are three principles which actuate human life. Some lives are regulated by external forces (as illustrated by the clock and its weights). Others by the internal force of conscience (as illustrated by the watch and its mechanism). Others again by a Divine vitality (as illustrated by a bird and its wings). The third is the real life, because in the believer it implies surrender to the will of God. Blending the two passages that stand at the top of this section let us give special heed to the need and power of a concentrated purpose in life.

#### I. A Great Trust.

The man in the story was given the charge of a prisoner, and, like the prophet, we may use the incident parabolically. Our trust is twofold. (a) We have the care of our own life; our time, our gifts, our character. God has a plan for every life. Bushnell's great sermon suggests this by its title, "Every man's life a plan of God." When we realize this, we begin to know something of life's dignity and responsibility. The Holy Spirit reveals this plan step by step as we abide in fellowship with God. (b) And the second part of our trust is the care of other lives. "None of us liveth to himself." Our life is bound up in the bundle of life with others, and we cannot move far or often without being conscious of our relationship to and responsibility for others.

#### II. A Great Failure.

While the man was preoccupied the prisoner escaped. "While thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." And he paid the penalty of his error. There is nothing sadder in life than lost opportunities. Time for reading comes and goes without being utilized. Opportunity for work comes and is not taken advantage of. And such opportunities never recur, nor can be recalled. It is utterly false to say "We may be what we might have been." God's grace may do much, but it is not His will to do all, and concerning failure of time and service, the solemn words must be written, "Never again". There is no need to fail. The Holy Spirit is ready to bestow grace, and so enable us to fulfill God's purpose, and to carry out His plan.

#### III. A Great Weakness.

"Thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Then the trouble was not work, but busy idleness, mere triviality. How vivid, picturesque, and searching, is the word "desultory," i.e. leaping from one thing to another. Desultory reading, desultory work - these are among the greatest snares of the ministry. There is a danger not only of rush, but of useless rush in a clergyman's life. Nothing can compare with personality; it is only as we are that we do. And if we cannot see the relative and proportionate values of things, we shall fail lamentably. We must not hesitate to drop work, however important, if thereby we can do other work that is still more important. We shall do more by doing less, because we shall be able thereby to put our personality into what we actually accomplish.

IV. A Great Need. "This one thing I do." Mark the terseness of the Greek. "But one." This will mean Conviction, Concentration, and Consecration. A definite assurance as to life's plan; a definite object of life, as high as possible; and a definite purpose to carry out the plan and realize the object. These will unite all our energies and prevent their dissipation. Paul's purpose transformed all that he touched; it was the secret of his mighty power and influence. And it was in this spirit he urged Timothy.

"Give thyself wholly to them." Indeed all lives, worthy of the name, are dominated by purpose. "Daniel purposed in his heart." Esther ventured everything for her people. The ideal man of the Psalmist takes up a position and does not change (Psalm 15:2-5), because his heart is fixed. Every element in David Livingstone centered in his will. Opposition, trial, failure, only nerved him afresh. "If I live, I must succeed in my undertaking; death alone will put a stop to my efforts."

It is the same in every career. Business men, athletes, artists, scholars, scientists, must concentrate or fail. But what is of great moment is that the power of a concentrated purpose often makes the difference between the failure of the genius and the success of mediocrity. Men of moderate powers if wholly consecrated can accomplish what greater men fail to do because they lack concentration. As a well-known American scholar said, "It does not take a great man to radiate a pure spirit," and the difference between men almost invariably lies in the will.

This is especially true of the ministry where the danger of the dissipation of thought and energy is so great and pressing. A clergyman's time is so largely his own, that if he has no plan of reading and study, no distinction between engagements, no power of saying "No," he is likely to be an utter failure however great may be his natural gifts. "He who is false to present duty breaks a thread in the loom and will find the flaw when he may have forgotten its cause." One special application of this important subject is the need of maintaining our habits of study all through our ministerial life.

With all possible emphasis it should be said that no ministerial work, however important, must ever be allowed to interfere with our studies. But if this is to be so, there must be (1) a settled determination on our part to devote some time every day to study; (2) a careful arrangement and husbanding of our time to allow of this being done; (3) a choice of some particular branch of biblical and theological study which will bear fruit in our ministry. It may be Old Testament, or New Testament, or Doctrine, or History, or Evidences; or it may be all of these in turn in the course of a settled ministry.

But whatever it be, the plan must be rigidly adhered to. (4) Most important of all, even though mentioned last, is a regular, firsthand study of our Greek Testament, together with all the best available helps. The value of such a plan and determination is that our reading will have definiteness amid purpose; our spiritual life will be helped by the intellectual discipline; our sermons will never lack force and freshness; and our ministry will prove increasingly fruitful to the very end.

"This one thing I do." Concentration and Consecration. And then it is that "God that worketh in us both to will and to work." The heart right with God, the mind true to truth, the will loyal to law, the life filled with the Spirit. Granted all this, and then, not failure but success, not weakness but strength, not disappointment but delight will characterize our life and ministry.

### Section 3. The Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29).

The unique feature of Christianity, its last, greatest, and most characteristic fact and factor is the Holy Spirit of God. And if this is true of Christianity generally, it is preeminently true of the ministry. Our Lord's ministry began "in the power of the Spirit". He told His disciples to tarry "until ye be endued with power from on high." St. Paul says that his ministry was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4). The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of Truth"; the Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit"; and over all the operations of the Christian Church in Acts the Holy Spirit exercised constant and complete control. Out of the various passages where the Holy Spirit is mentioned in connection with Christian service, let us take the story of Philip and the Eunuch.

## I. The Relation of the Holy Spirit to the Christian Worker.

1. He discloses the will of God. God has spoken through His Word which is itself the work of the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21), and He still speaks to the soul as He applies that Word. The Word without the Spirit is dry and useless. The Spirit without the Word has no message. But the Spirit in the Word is the twofold secret of all true ministry.

2. He needs a ready and obedient heart. In wireless telegraphy two stations are required, one for transmitting, the other for receiving. And these two must be perfectly attuned to each other, or the message will be lost. It is the same in Christian work. Philip was in Samaria, hard at work winning souls and shepherding them. The call of the Spirit came, "Go toward the south into the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." Surely the work ought not to be left at so critical a juncture! But obedience had made him spiritually acute, and he knew the Spirit's voice. The soul must be attuned to the will of God by faithful loyalty, or else the messages from above will be lost.

3. The word of the Spirit to us will agree with what He is saying to others. Philip soon understood why he had been called away from Samaria; for when he saw the chariot, the Spirit spoke again, and in a short time Philip was proclaiming Christ to the Ethiopian and winning him for his Master. Today we call this "providential," or a "coincidence"; but if we gave things their right name, we should call it the leading of the Spirit.

One thing is perfectly certain; the Christian minister must be in constant and close touch with the Holy Spirit of God if his ministry is to be fruitful and glorify God.

## II. The Work to be done.

Philip represents the Christian minister as he faces his work in the power of the Spirit. The same Spirit that guides to the work and brings the work to us, equips for it, and provides grace sufficient.

1. Philip had to proclaim the Gospel to a man of great personal power. His position was high, his influence great, and the minister of the Gospel was fearless because full of the Spirit of power. Whatever be our work the Gospel is adequate to every need.

2. Philip had to proclaim the Gospel to a man of distinct material power. The circumstances of his journey to and from Jerusalem, the distance from and to Ethiopia, the time required, the chariot and the entire surroundings, might easily have made Philip quail, but they did not. God's Gospel proclaimed in the power of the Spirit is sufficient for all possible materialism.

3. Philip had to proclaim the Gospel to a man of evident intellectual power. He was reading and pondering for himself, and required "light and leading". Philip addressed himself to this task and soon explained what was needed. There is nothing more striking than the power of a consecrated, sanctified man to satisfy the intellect with the truth and grace of the Gospel.

4. Philip had to proclaim the Gospel to one who felt spiritual hunger. The Ethiopian was seeking light and yearning for satisfaction. The religion of Judaism, while better than his former paganism, did not fully satisfy. Even its own pages seemed to point to something higher as he pondered the mysterious words of the prophet. And in this state of hunger Philip met him and preached to him Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophet's words, as the satisfaction of all yearnings, as the inspiration of all joyous life. This is the greatest and deepest work we can do. There are hungry ones to feed, thirsty ones to satisfy, empty ones to fill, sad

ones to cheer, dark ones to illuminate; and when the man of God has the Gospel of God and preaches the Christ of God in the power of the Spirit of God, he reveals the Salvation of God to the needy ones who soon go "on their way rejoicing".

How, then, may the servant of God so keep in touch with the Spirit of God that his work may always meet with blessing?

1. He must maintain spiritual sensitiveness by fellowship with the Spirit of God. "Ye know Him." Do we?
2. He must cultivate spiritual responsiveness by obedience. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." Obedience is the organ of vision and the guarantee of power.
3. He must ensure spiritual equipment by discipline. The habit of prayer, the habit of meditation, will provide channels for the Spirit to pour His grace into our souls and through us to others. In everything, therefore, our ministry must be "full of the Holy Ghost".

#### Section 4. Faith (Luke 17:5).

There are few things more obvious in the New Testament than the emphasis laid on Faith. In every part, Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse, the call of God to man is clear. And "without faith it is impossible to please God" might almost be regarded as the keynote of the New Testament. Almost every aspect of the Christian life is connected with Faith. We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1), purified by faith (Acts 15:9); we live by faith (Gal. 2:20); we stand by faith (2 Cor. 1:24); we walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7); Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17); we are victorious by faith (1 John 5:4). And yet the very familiarity tends to make us overlook the meaning, necessity, and importance of faith. It is so simple and obvious that we fail to do justice to its depth of meaning and its fullness of power in connection with every aspect of Christian life and service. And if this is true generally, it is especially true of the ministry; for unless that be a ministry of faith, strong faith, constant faith, persistent faith, it will of necessity prove very largely a failure.

But amid all the strong and striking stress laid on faith in the New Testament one thing is missing, a prayer for faith. The prayer of faith is often found, but never the prayer for faith. Why this is, we shall see in due course. The nearest approach to it is the prayer, "Lord, increase our faith," and yet even here the Lord's answer is to be carefully noted. He replies virtually by saying: Use the faith you possess, and you will have more. "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed." All this shows, and is intended to show, that faith is an act and an attitude towards God. Let us give this our special consideration in those ways in which it affects the Christian life.

I. The Attitude of Faith. 1. Faith reckons. In Romans 6:11 we have the great Apostolic word connected with holiness. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The word is "a metaphor from accounts". There are two columns of spiritual figures; on one side is Death, on the other Resurrection; on one side is Sin, on the other Deliverance. And the Christian is to make a careful "calculation," to reckon himself dead to one side and alive to the other.

This reckoning is one of faith, not of feeling. The believer depends on the great facts of Christ's death and resurrection; and resting himself on these facts, he reckons their spiritual efficiency his own, assured that, as his faith accepts and appropriates the Divine work of Redemption, the results of Christ's death and resurrection are "put to his account," imputed reckoned to belong to him for pardon, life, and holiness.

There is, perhaps, no aspect of faith that needs such careful and constant attention as this as the secret of Christian holiness.

The Divine order is Faith, Fact, Feeling, and whether we "feel" it or not, the facts of Christ's Redemption are ours, and faith "reckons" them such, and lives accordingly. 2. Faith responds. On the basis of this reckoning we yield ourselves to God and present ourselves to Him to be a living sacrifice, and our members instruments of righteousness to holiness. This is the second element of the attitude of faith. On the foundation of our acceptance of Christ and our acceptance in Christ, we surrender to Christ and present ourselves to Him for service.

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). This is the meaning of such lives as those of Barnabas and Paul, who "handed over" their lives "for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26). Just as our Lord "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23), so we commit our souls to God as our faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).

This "presentation" or "yielding," or "handing over," or "committal," is the attitude expressed by the frequent phrase in the Old Testament: "Here am I." It means the life at God's disposal, the response of the soul to the love and grace of God in Christ. And it is by faith that the soul makes this response and commits itself to God. 3. Faith receives. The outgoing of faith in "reckoning" and "responding" is here met by the corresponding attitude of receiving. Faith appropriates.

"Of His fullness have all we received" (John 1:16). "Receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1). "That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). The word "receive" is one of the great words of the New Testament, and it is by faith that we receive from God. Herein lies the great distinction between asking and taking. Faith not only asks, but accepts. Prayer is the faith that asks. Thanksgiving is the faith that takes. Faith takes, appropriates, applies, and in this attitude of receptiveness and reception we have one of the prime essentials of the true Christian life. 4.

Faith rests. The greatest word of Christ for the spiritual life is "abide" (John 15:4). This means nothing more, as it can mean nothing less, than "Stay where you are." You are in Christ for pardon; abide there. You are in Christ for power; abide there. You are in Christ for peace; abide there. You are in Christ for life; abide there. Our union with Him is so real and close that He does not say, "I am the root, ye are the branches," but "I am the Vine, ye are the branches," and a vine includes branches as well!

It is faith that enables us to accept this position and to abide in it. We continue in His Word (John 8:31) by believing it. We continue in His love by believing it (John 15:9). And the more we believe the more we abide, for faith's resting place is ever in union with Christ our life. Now as we review these four aspects of faith; its reckoning, its response, its receptiveness, its rest, we ought to see that for the ministry faith is the great necessity, the great power. Without faith our lives and work cannot possibly be pleasing to God, and by faith everything goes well because "all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

Faith includes the whole of our attitude to God; it submits to Him in everything; it admits Him to everything; it commits to Him everything; it permits Him to do everything; and it transmits for Him everything. We remember our Lord's rebuke to "them of little faith," and His explanation of the disciples' powerlessness because "this kind cometh not forth but by prayer," which means at the root, faith. Nothing is more striking in the Gospels than Christ's constant demand for faith, and His constant rebuke of the want of it.

It may be said without question, or even qualification, that our ministry will be one of power, grace, and influence in exact proportion as our inner life learns, and experiences, and expresses the secrets of faith. But how can this be?

## II. The Warrant of Faith.

Faith must have a foundation; and if only our foundation is right, we need not concern ourselves unduly, or indeed at all, with the reality or quality of our faith. Just as a healthy man is not always occupied with the thought of his health, so the man of God whose faith finds its true foundation is not concerned with the fact or the depth of his faith. What is this basis? It is simply the Word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Herein lies the explanation of the absence of prayer for faith from the New Testament. It would be unnecessary and futile. Faith does not come down from heaven in answer to prayer; it springs up in the soul in response to the Divine Word. Faith is believing, trusting, crediting, confiding, and faith must have something to credit, Someone in Whom to confide. And so, the more we know of God through His Word, His revelation of Himself, the more we shall trust Him. Faith will rise and grow instinctively as we enter more fully into the mind, will, and character of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, the power of our ministry will be in exact proportion to our knowledge of the Bible in regard to God. If we study it but seldom, our faith will be poor because we know not God. If our study and meditation be constant and true, our faith will be strong because "they that know their God shall be strong" (Dan. 11:32). Faith, then, is our response to God's revelation, and it will respond in accordance with its knowledge of the contents of that revelation.

Herein, therefore, lies the great secret of ministerial power, the knowledge of God; and herein lies the secret of this knowledge, faith. This is the explanation of George Muller's wonderful life. He knew God by knowing and believing his Bible; and whenever there is ministerial shallowness, poverty, and lack of blessing, it is invariably due to ignorance of God through ignorance of His Word. The preeminent need today is of spiritual men. The secret of spirituality is fellowship with God. The secret of fellowship is time spent with God through the Bible, and the one supreme factor in all such time will be faith, trust, confidence. From the act will come the habit, and from the habit the character. We shall enter more fully into His character and revelation of Himself in Christ. We shall find our souls growing in grace and "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Our people will feel and know the difference in our ministry, "the hungry sheep look up and are fed," and people will know that God is in us of a truth.

## Section 5. Simplicity (Phil. 1:21).

We are apt to think of Christianity as complex and complicated, and in particular to regard the ministry as involved in a variety of great problems, hard tasks, conflicting duties. There is no doubt that modern life is complex and difficult, and that the demands on the ministry seem to grow in number and increase in strain and stress. But is it not possible to find some unifying factor, some element in which the various complications can be either resolved or relieved? After all, life for the average man consists of a few simple, all-embracing principles, which when applied are seen to work out all right. And why should not the clergyman possess some such method of reducing life to a little more of its essential simplicity?

We believe that there is such a possibility, and that in the possession of this secret, life becomes much easier, even though it grows none the less complex when regarded in itself. The one great necessity is an unifying factor that can be applied to everything in life. Is there such a factor? There is; it is found in the Apostolic words, "To me to live is Christ." If Christ is made the center of our ministry, we shall be able to

use Him as the unifying and simplifying factor of all the varied complexity and perplexity of our life and work. "To me to live is Christ." What does this mean? Just three things.

### I. Receiving Everything from Christ.

Our lives are constantly receptive. Experiences come to us in a variety of ways and through very different channels. But when once we realize that Christ is all, then everything that comes into our life comes in and through Him. Not only is He our Saviour from Sin. He is our Friend, our Teacher, our Lord, and all that we possess comes from him. Even though we have trouble and trial we can say with truth that "it comes from above," because we know that His permissive will does not allow anything to come to us apart from His knowledge and consent. It simplifies matters immensely when we can take this position of realizing that everything which enters into our life comes from and through Him.

### II. Seeing Everything in Christ.

As we ponder the problems of life, we find very many things that perplex and puzzle and distress us. The problems of sin, suffering, and sorrow lie heavily on heart and brain, and on none more than on his whose life is brought into close touch with human needs. As we meditate on the hardships, injustices, and cruelties of life, we soon feel the pressure of mystery amid the many forces of the world which do not make for righteousness. But if once we realize that "our life is hid with Christ in God," we begin to look out on the world around with very different eyes; and though we cannot solve the problems, the way we look at them makes a profound difference. We view them from the standpoint of Christ. Some thirty years ago I remember reading an address containing an illustration of this point, which has proved to me and to others a word in season. The Christian was depicted as a man living in a room which had but one window in it, made in the form of a Cross. The result was that the outlook from the window took that shape under all circumstances. The sunshine came to him in the form of a Cross. The landscape in all its beauty and variety was shaped like a Cross. The shadows deepened in the form of a Cross. The storms fell and the lightning flashed in the form of a Cross. Everything bright and dark took that shape and entered thus into his consciousness. So should it be with the Christian: joys and sorrows, light and darkness, sunshine and shadow, should all be looked at in the light of Christ; and when this is so, in His light we see light and can wait until all things are made clear.

### III. Doing Everything for Christ.

Life is largely made up of activity, and the ministry finds itself engaged on a multifarious variety of work; "the daily round, the common task". At times brain and body are apt to stagger under the load, and we are tempted to succumb under the pressure of the burden. Then it is that our simplifying and unifying factor comes in with blessedness and power, and we begin to realize that everything is to be done for Christ. No task that comes can possibly be outside His ken or sphere. No work that is really our duty can fail to be accomplished if done unto Him. "For Christ" is the talisman that opens every door. "In Christ" is the guarantee of grace sufficient for every task. As George Herbert says: -

"Teach me, my God and King,

In all things Thee to see;

And what I do in anything,

To do it unto Thee.

"A servant with this clause,  
Makes drudgery Divine;  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and th' action fine."

"Drudgery divine." This is only possible when we do everything for Christ, when He is the motive, the inspiration, the joy, the power of service.

"To me to live is Christ." Receiving everything from Christ. Seeing everything in Christ. Doing everything for Christ. This is life in its simplicity, sufficiency, and satisfaction. This is ministry in peace, power, and progress. Away from this is unrest, dissatisfaction, emptiness, weariness, powerlessness. Apart from this is disappointment, depression, discontent, despondency, and despair. But when Christ is our life, ministry becomes a privilege, a joy, a delight; an ever-deepening experience, an ever-increasing power, an ever-extending blessing, and an ever-heightening glory to God. So let us sum up all by saying that for life and ministry Christ is always necessary, Christ is always available, Christ is always sufficient.

"Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,  
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed,  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,  
Christ the beginning, and the end is Christ."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/essentials-of-a-competent-ministry/>

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