

# Christ in Me

## Ministry in Christ

February 1, 2026

Colossians 1:24 - 2:5

## Introduction

I was in grade school when I became a Christian, and I was a high school senior when I became convinced the Lord was calling me into full time ministry. A critical component to that calling were the ministers at a church who fully embraced student ministry, giving much of their time and effort to us. In and out of church ministry programming, I spent a LOT of time with our lead pastor, worship pastor, and student pastor. But just because you spend a lot of time with someone doesn't mean you know everything about them.

I was a junior when my interest was first piqued about the life of a minister. I wondered, "What does a minister even do all day?" And one afternoon after school I went by the church and saw my youth minister's truck was there, so I popped into his office and just started talking. And at some point in the conversation, I noticed that his Bible was open on his desk, and I said, "So, do you basically just get paid to read the Bible all day? Is that your job?" To which he replied, "Something like that."

Fast forward to last Friday, a mere 30 hours before the sleet and freezing rain came through. Holly was out of town and I was picking up the kids at school at the same time we were getting ready to tell everyone that services were going to be cancelled and that we would be posting a sermon online Saturday afternoon. So on the drive home from school, I was (safely) texting with folks about all this communication going out, and finally one of my kids had had enough and said "I feel like all you do as a pastor is communicate!"

Reading the Bible all day ... communicating ... What does ministry actually look like? What are your presuppositions regarding the goals, work, and life of a minister of the gospel? What should be the focus of a minister? How should a minister go about pressing toward those goals? What character is required in order to be a successful minister? What does a minister do anyway? Is a minister:

1. **The Motivational Coach** – Someone who inspires people to think positively and "be their best selves."
2. **The Community Organizer** – Coordinating service projects, charity events, or local activism to make the world a better place.
3. **The Religious Professional** – A ceremonial figure who handles weddings, funerals, and religious holidays.
4. **The Morality Police** – Someone who tells people what's right and wrong and keeps everyone behaving "properly."

5. **The Authentic Caregiver** – Someone who loves and cares for others well especially in times of need

Our text today brings a lot of clarity as to what the goal, work, and life of a minister should be. And while those of us who have been in the church for some time may generally understand what it is the minister is supposed to be about, I think there is more confusion than ever from the perspective of a non-Christian or someone who hasn't been in a church in a while and whose primary exposure to ministers is either through some sort of political stance being taken or from some moral failure that has taken place. If all someone hears about ministers is something about their convictions on a social issue or that they had some sort of a moral failure, then they are not getting a biblical view of the minister's goals, work, and life.

So, with that kind of audience in mind, let's look at Colossians 1:24 - 2:5 together. It's here that Paul is kind of introducing himself to the church in Colosse, and in doing so, we get a nice little snapshot of what a minister is supposed to be about.

## Body

### The Goal: Spiritual Maturity

The first thing I want you to notice is what the goal of ministry should be. Paul touches on these in different places throughout the text. Look at the following with me.

- Verse 25 – ... to make the word of God fully known ...
- Verse 28 – ... present everyone mature in Christ.
- Verse 2 – I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery—Christ.
- Verse 4 – ... no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable ...

When I ponder these and try to put them all together into one cohesive thought, this is the best I could come up with.

***The goal of ministry is to form knowledgeable, discerning, and loving followers of Jesus.***

The goal for any form of ministry is another person's maturity in the faith, defined in this passage as having knowledge, discernment, and love.

- It is the goal of Christian ministry for others to know what God has revealed about Himself in His Word and in the person of Jesus.
- It is the goal of Christian ministry for others to be able to discern the difference between truth and error ... godliness and hype ... counterfeit from reality ... to be able to apply the knowledge of God in real life.

- It is the goal of Christian ministry for others to reflect Christ's heart—joined to others with patience, humility and sacrifice ... that there be an affection for one another in the church.

And **all three** of these are critical.

- Knowledge without discernment is just information.
- Knowledge without love becomes arrogance.
- Discernment without knowledge leads to suspicion and confusion.
- Discernment without love leads to criticism.
- Love without knowledge is mere sentimentalism.
- Love without discernment is naivete.

Knowledge anchors us in truth. Discernment protects us from deception. Love ensures we use both to build up the body of Christ. Together they describe the full goal of gospel ministry: forming people who think clearly, choose wisely, and love faithfully in a confusing world.

## The Work: Teaching

With that as the goal of ministry, you might then ask, “Well, what does a minister do to accomplish that?”

Ministry work takes many different forms. Communication is ministry. Caring is ministry. Administration is ministry. Event planning is ministry. Studying is ministry. Hospitality is ministry. Paul would affirm all of those things play an important role in helping make others mature in Christ. But when all is said and done, ***the primary work of the minister pursuing maturity in Christians is teaching***. Paul hits on this explicitly in v. 28.

*We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

One cannot reach the goal of spiritual maturity apart from biblical instruction. Think of ministry like a vehicle. If ministry is a car, then preaching and teaching are the engine and the fuel of ministry.

- **Truth fuels transformation.** The Spirit uses the Word to renew minds and conform lives to Christ's image. We can't faithfully live what we don't understand.
- **Teaching anchors believers amid deception.** Paul warns in 2:4 about persuasive but empty arguments. Teaching equips believers to recognize half-truths and cultural distortions.
- **Teaching guards unity.** As every believer grows in the same truth, love and discernment strengthen the church's bond.
- **Teaching multiplies ministry.** Faithful instruction reproduces faithful leaders who can teach others.

Do ministers comfort? Yes. Do ministers administrate? Yes. Do ministers train? Yes. Do ministers communicate? Yes. Do ministers listen? Yes. Do ministers counsel? Yes. Ministers do lots of things, but *the minister's most important and loving act toward others is to teach them truth that transforms them*. Teaching is how faith deepens, discernment sharpens, and the church grows up “into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

## The Life: Service

So the goal of ministry is maturity, and the primary work is teaching. And if you put those two things together, what does the minister's *life* look like? Paul's one word answer to that is “SERVICE.” And he describes what service looks like in at least these four places in our passage. I think it would be especially beneficial for those of you praying about going into ministry to hear these.

- Verse 24 – I rejoice in my sufferings ...

**Service is joyful suffering.** It's interesting to me that Paul doesn't say “I'm handling or tolerating my sufferings for you.” He says he REJOICES in his sufferings. He's not a masochist ... enjoying pain for pain's sake. He's a servant. He recognizes that his suffering as a minister of the gospel leads them to maturity, so he expects hardship and finds joy in what it produces.

A second attribute of service comes from v. 25.

- Verse 25 – I have become its servant, according to God's commission that was given to me for you ...

**Service is commissioned stewardship.** Paul sees himself as a steward, which is different from a founder or an owner. The role of a minister isn't self-chosen or self-directed; it's a divine assignment carried out for others' benefit. What this means is that service flows from calling, not convenience. Ministers don't serve because it's trendy; they serve because God entrusted something to them—the gospel for the good of others. This means that service isn't about finding personal fulfillment first—it's about being faithful with what God has placed in your hands.

A third attribute of service comes from v. 29.

- Verse 29 – I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

**Service is laborious.** The words *labor* and *strive* evoke an athlete giving everything in pursuit of the goal. Paul's service is intense and exhausting, but also Spirit-empowered. The work demands everything you have, but it depends entirely on a strength that isn't yours. It is both grit and grace. It requires wholehearted effort joined to wholehearted reliance. The proof of divine strength is a tired but faithful servant.

The last description of service in this passage comes from 2:1.

- Verse 1 – I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you ...

**Service is emotionally taxing.** Paul's word "struggling" is *agonizomai*. It's where we get the word "agonizing" or "agony" from. It conveys deep care, prayerful wrestling, and empathetic concern for others' faith ... and this for a church he's never met in person. The struggle of prayer and empathy is part of the cost of real ministry. **When the goal is maturity and the method is teaching, the life that carries both must be one of devoted, joyful, Spirit-empowered service.**

## Conclusion/Application

All of this—the goal of maturity, the work of teaching, and the life of service—finds its center and power in one phrase Paul states in v. 27:

"... Christ in you, the hope of glory." (1:27)

The heart of Christian service isn't first about what we do for Christ, but what Christ has already done for us—and now does in us. The gospel gives both a pattern to imitate AND a power to live by. We look to Jesus to see how to serve and for the power to serve

As great a servant and minister as Paul was, even he knew that to serve rightly, he had to look to Jesus for how to serve and the power to serve, because Jesus is the truest and best servant.

- Jesus didn't just rejoice in suffering—He embraced the cross for the joy set before Him.
- Jesus didn't simply teach the Word—He *is* the Word made flesh, teaching us by His life and death what love really costs.
- Jesus didn't just struggle for the church—He agonized in Gethsemane and triumphed at Calvary so that we could be reconciled to God.

So the call of this passage isn't, "Try harder to serve like Paul." It's, "Let the Servant-Lord live in and through you." When you see that Jesus gave Himself completely for you, service stops being a duty—it becomes a delight. The same Christ who worked through Paul now works through you, until the day He brings all our labor to its glorious completion.

If we are in Christ and Christ is in us, then His life now pulses through ours. We don't serve to gain His approval—we serve because we have it. We don't labor to make His glory appear—we labor because His glory has already appeared in the face of Jesus Christ. And even when our strength runs out, His resurrection power keeps working in us, renewing us from the inside out.

So here's the call:

- If you're a believer, see your life as an outpost of His ministry. You are sent, wherever you are, to proclaim Him and present others mature in Christ. Look to Christ service as the model and for the power for your own service.
- If you're discerning a call to full-time ministry, don't chase the platform or the title—pursue the presence of Christ and the maturity of His people. The same Christ who called Paul, commissions you: not to make your name known, but to make His Word fully known.

May our church be filled with men and women who labor joyfully, teach faithfully, and serve selflessly—not because ministry is easy, but because Christ in us makes it possible.