

Making Sense of the Ministry by David Wiersbe and Warren W. Wiersbe, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1983 (57 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Methods

Methods are many,
Principles are few.
Methods always change,
Principles never do. ---Anonymous (p. 30)

2. Principles and Rules

The difference between principles and rules is radical. Rules can be made, and therefore broken. Principles cannot be made, and cannot be broken. Rules are things of time. Principles are matters of eternity. Rules are accidental. Principles are essential.
--- G. Campbell Morgan (p. 30)

3. The Center

Fasten yourself to the center of your ministry; not to some point on the circumference. The circumference must move when the center moves. ---Phillips Brooks (p. 30)

4. Success and Small Men

The success syndrome has enabled some small men to reach some large places, *and remain small*. It has also caused the church to overlook some giants simply because these men refuse to jump on the success bandwagon and join the parade. Walter Savage Landor said it perfectly: “When little men cast long shadows, it is a sign that the sun is setting.” (p. 31)

5. Principles of Ministry

Different men will use different methods, but the *principles* of ministry do not change from age to age or from place to place. We care not how successful a church may claim to be or appear to be; if that church is not following the biblical principles of ministry, the whole enterprise will turn to ashes when Jesus puts it through the fire. (p. 32)

6. Preparation for Ministry

As Phillips Brooks stated it, preparation for ministry is “nothing less than the making of a man.” (p. 32)

7. Ministry without Character

Ministry without character is only religious activity, or possibly religious business. It simply will not last. Henry Martyn wrote in his journal, “Let me be taught that the first great business on earth is the sanctification of my own soul.” (p. 33)

8. Spiritual Muscles

Spending time meditation on the Bible, praying, and listening to God’s voice in the inner recesses of our hearts is the oxygen, food, and water of the inner man. Then, obeying what He tells us is the exercise that helps our spiritual muscles to grow. That is how we build character. (p. 33)

9. Building Character

Whatever you do, please keep in mind that *you* must build character; this means you must avoid anything that would tear down what God is trying to build up. (p. 34)

10. Human Personalities

The church today has far too many celebrities and not enough servants. We suffer from what Dr. John R. W. Stott has called “the shameful cult of human personalities.” (p. 35)

11. Loving the People

Andrew Bonar once asked a guest preacher, “You love to preach, but do you love the people you preach to?” (p. 36)

12. The Cost of Ministry

John Henry Jowett used to say, “Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing,” Jesus said it better: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Sacrifice and service go together, if you have a servant’s heart. (p. 36)

13. Responsibility and Privileges

There are people who can handle responsibilities but fall apart when they are given privileges. Actually, responsibilities are the preparation for privileges; but some people never mature. The immature person uses privileges to help himself; the mature person uses privileges to help others. The careful use of privileges is a mark of a mature person who knows what it means to submit. (p. 39)

14. God Choosing Us

Never lose that sense of wonder that God should chose *you* to be one of His servants! We have the privilege of digging into the Word, feeding His church, winning people to the Savior, and all the while, sharing in spiritual growth ourselves. And we get paid for doing it! (p. 43)

15. The Success Cult

Our church leaders hobnob with great people, presidents and celebrities, but the early church was persecuted by that same crowd. In New Testament days, the cross was an offense, but today it is part of a success cult. (p. 44)

16. The Sprit-Filled Life

“The Spirit-filled life is not a special deluxe edition of Christianity,” wrote A.W. Tozer. “It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.” (p. 45)

17. Real Flame

It is not a minister’s wisdom but his conviction which imparts itself to others. Nothing gives life but life. Real flame alone kindles another flame. ---F.W. Robertson (p. 48)

18. Conversation

“A single conversation across the table with a wise man,” said Longfellow, “is better than ten years’ more study of books.” (p. 57)

19. The Testing of Faith

A faith that can’t be tested can’t be trusted. All truths come from God; so, if your faith is in Christ and His Word, your educational experience ought to strengthen your faith, not destroy it. You never need to fear the truth. (p. 61)

20. Charity in All Things

It’s difficult to improve on Augustine’s counsel: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” (p. 61)

21. Doubt and Unbelief

There is a difference between doubt and deliberate unbelief, between questioning God's ways and denying God. The patriarchs and prophets had their hours of darkness, and so might we; but we never doubt in the darkness what God teaches us in the light. There is no need to abandon ship simply because the storm is blowing and you are not sure how the compass works. God has proved Himself faithful to you in the past, and He will not forsake you now. (p.63)

22. Pray For

“Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.” -- Phillips Brooks (p. 63)

23. Organization

The organization must serve the organism; the church bylaws were made for man, not man for the bylaws. G. Campbell Morgan's philosophy of the local church program was a wise one: “A minimum of organization for a maximum of work.” Try it! (p. 70)

24. Focusing on the Individual

If you take a negative attitude toward organizational ministry, you will only hurt yourself and the church. Again, focus on the individual, and use those administrative tasks as opportunities to be a better pastor. (p. 70)

25. Growing Power

“A ministry of growing power,” said James Stalker, “must be one of growing experience.” It is difficult for the church to rise above its leadership. The pastor must lead the way, and that means maturing in spiritual power, in wisdom, in pastoral skills, and in Christian character. Sometimes God will send you special trials just to help you grow. After all, you can't have mountaintops without also having valleys. (p. 70)

26. Out of Joint

If Shakespeare's Hamlet thought the times were “out of joint” in his day, he should see the world today! Sinners are destroying themselves and their world because they need to be reconciled to God. (p. 72)

27. Child and Parent

Christianity knows no truth which is not the child of love and the parent of duty. --- Phillips Brooks (p. 74)

28. Practicality in Theology

All true theology is thus intensely practical. That is why all theories purporting to show how the Gospel can be made relevant to man, even modern man, in his need, are by their very nature impossible, for they are substitution an intellectual relation for the practical relation which God himself has established in Jesus Christ. --- T.F. Torrance (p. 74)

29. Devotional Truth vs. Doctrinal Truth

If devotional truth is not based on doctrinal truth, it is merely religious sentimentalism; and it will take more than a sentimental church to win a world for Christ. (p. 75)

30. Getting Better Acquainted with God

There are godly people who serve Christ faithfully and yet probably can't even spell "theology," but that is no argument for ignorance. We should love God with the mind as well as the heart and the strength. Churches need to get better acquainted with the God they profess to love and worship. (p. 75)

31. Studying Theology

Nothing will stretch your mind or encourage your spiritual growth like a reverent study of theology. Note that we said *reverent*. God makes himself known to the meek and lowly, those who want to learn more because they want to live better lives for God's glory. Theology is intensely personal and practical. (p. 75)

32. Deep Insights in Familiar Doctrines

It is exciting to see how biblical doctrines relate to each other, how they center in Jesus Christ and at the cross, and how they magnify the grace of God. Doctrine gives us a solid foundation for life and ministry. Deeper insights into familiar doctrines are ever the mark of the growing Christian. (p. 770)

33. Mistake in Not Following Truth

"All err the more dangerously because each follows a truth," wrote Pascal. "Their mistake lies not in following a falsehood but in not following another truth." (p. 78)

34. Centrality of the Cross

The centrality of the cross is important. It gives you perspective when you discover how the church Fathers and the Reformers struggled to understand and to defend the doctrine of atonement. It was said of Spurgeon that, no matter what his text was, he ran as fast as he could across country to the cross. We need more of that kind of preaching today. (p. 79)

35. Lazy Theologians

When a man becomes a lazy theologian, he becomes a lazy thinker, and that will make him a lazy preacher. Clear thinking and clear preaching always must go together. (p. 81)

36. Remembering the Past

Someone has said that most of the problems in this world are caused by people who haven't taken time to read the minutes of the previous meeting. The philosopher George Santayana expressed it well: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfill it." (. 83)

37. Looking Back

"When I want to understand what is happening today," wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "or try to decide what will happen tomorrow, I look back." (p. 84)

38. Examining the Present

When we study history, we are not ignoring the present; we are examining the present. "Life must be lived forwards," wrote Kierkegaard, "but can only be understood backwards." A healthy understanding of the past helps to provide a good corrective for the present. It also helps you to keep your thinking in balance.

Those who talk about "the dead past" have never really been there; for the past is not dead to the person who thinks it. The popular historians, Will and Ariel Durant, said that they "buried [their] heads in the living past rather than the dying present." (p. 86)

39. The Science Which Considers Truth

Aristotle defined philosophy simply as "the science which considers truth." (p. 89)

40. Right thinking vs. Right Living

Philosophy has to do with the nature of right thinking, and Christian philosophy has to do with the right living that ought to result from right thinking. (p. 89)

41. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics –the science of literary interpretation of the Bible. The word comes from the Greek word that means “to interpret.” You will find it in your Greek New Testament in John 1:38 and 42 and 9:7, as well as in Hebrews 7:2. (p. 101)

42. The House of the Interpreter

G. Campbell Morgan used to say that each church should be “The House of the Interpreter.” (The allusion is to *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a book worth reading.) People come to church to hear the Word explained and applied. That is what they need and that is what they have a right to receive. (p. 101)

43. The Human Side of Divinity

Phillips Brooks advised young pastors to “seize the human side of all divinity...and the divine side of all humanity.” In other words, doctrinal truth must issue in *practical truth*. Behaving and believing must always go together. The Puritan preacher Thomas Adams quaintly said, “The Word of life may be so distorted from the life of the Word, till it becomes the food of death.” That is a statement worth pondering. (p. 102)

44. Receiving God’s Voice to the Inner Man

“Read the Scripture, not only as history, but as a love-letter sent to you from God.” Thomas Watson said that, and saintly John Newton echoed it: “To read the Scripture, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense; but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the Gospel as the voice of our Beloved.” There is a time and place for exegesis, grammar, syntax, and all valuable apparatus of linguistic scholarship; but there is also a time and place for opening the heart to God and receiving His Word as His voice to the inner man. (p. 102)

45. Scripture

“Nobody ever outgrows Scripture,” said Charles Haddon Spurgeon; “the Book widens and deepens with our years.” (p. 103)

46. More Truth

When the Pilgrims left for America, the pastor, John Robinson, reminded them: “The Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy Word.” “O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me” (Psalm 43:3). (p. 104)

47. God has Given Us the Best

Let us rejoice with one another that in a world where there are a great many good and happy things for men to do, God has given us the best and happiest, and made us preachers of His truth. (p. 107)

48. Preaching

The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our greatest perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching. (p. 107)

49. A Glorious Calling

The work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. (p. 107)

50. Waiting for Preachers

The church is waiting for preachers and desperately needs preachers more than she realizes. On those gloomy days when you feel like giving up, ponder these words of the master preacher, A.J. Gossip, in his book *In Christ's Stead*:

But always it has been through preaching that revivals have come: always by preaching that the Spirit has made the tired Church young again. No bustle of energy can do it, no whirring of machinery, sending a gale into our tired faces, no endless and elaborate organization, no, and no glory of art. (p. 112)

51. Courage to be a Preacher

“It takes more courage to be a preacher,” wrote Bishop William Quayle, “than to be a gladiator, or a stormer of fortresses, because the preacher’s battle is ever on, never ceases, and lacks the tonic of visible conquest.” (p. 112)

52. Statistics

“I am not among those who decry statistics, “ Spurgeon told his students, “not do I consider that they are productive of all manner of evil; for they do much good if they are accurate, and if men use them lawfully.” (p. 116)

53. Effective Evangelism

Evangelism that is related to the local church is the most economical and the most effective. To quote Spurgeon: “Christian labors, disconnected from the church, are like sowing and reaping without having any barn in which to stow the fruits of the harvest; they are useful, but incomplete.” (p. 116)

54. Visiting the Missions Field

It would be helpful if each ministerial student could, during his years of training, actually visit a mission field and serve for a few months. If such an opportunity comes along, take advantage of it! It will enrich your life and ministry. That is not to suggest that a summer in Zaire will make you an expert, but it will open your eyes and touch your heart in ways that no amount of lecturing could do. (p. 117)

55. Frequent Meditation

It is not the number of books you read, nor the variety of sermons you hear, nor the amount of religious conversation in which you mix, but it is the frequency and earnestness with which you meditate on these things till the truth in them becomes your own and part of your being, that ensures your growth. ---F.W. Robertson (p. 120)

56. Discovering God’s Word

The minister can tell he is growing when his mind and heart are open to the truth and he is excited about discovering God’s Word. He is willing to face problems honestly and seek God’s will in solving them. He is relating creatively to his people so that they are not a threat to him but, instead, a challenge for him to do his best. (p. 122)

57. The Unexamined Life

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, and we say that the unexamined ministry is not worth maintaining. A growing knowledge of yourself and your work is essential to an effective ministry to the glory of God. (p. 127)