

## **My five reasons to do a Ministry Apprenticeship**

Dave Martin, August, 2016.

The traditional model of training people up for a lifetime of ministry was just to send them off to Bible college to do a three or four-year degree and then send them out into ministry or the mission field. While that might work for some people, is it the best, or only training? I don't think so. I think you are much better off testing the waters first.

The number of people who have completed a degree at Bible college and then pulled out of ministry after a few years because they couldn't cope is ALARMING. Why is that? Because they were unaware of and unprepared for the difficulties of ministry. So, here's five good reasons for doing a full-time ministry apprenticeship.

### **1 – You learn ministry.**

Bible College doesn't teach you ministry. It teaches you the Bible: Context and meaning; Exegesis; Immersed in OT, NT; Church history; and Theology. This is all great and necessary, but college doesn't teach you how to minister to people.

In the last month, since taking on this role as MTS network co-ordinator I've had somewhat random conversations with at least 3 ministers all of whom experienced surprise at the lack of basic ministry skills of their assistants, who have come to them fresh out of college. They're not useless but they don't know some of the basics of ministry:

- What ministry actually is;
- How to go about it in a systematic and organised way;
- When to push, when to hold back;
- What to do with my day and my week; and
- How to identify or even how to create ministry opportunities.

A full-time ministry apprenticeship teaches you that. It gives you valuable experience in ministry while a trainer is coaching you. You aren't doing ministry alone for the first time. You're getting constant feedback all the time too. In a full-time apprenticeship, you learn ministry. And, by the way, in the process of doing an apprenticeship it actually prepares you for Bible college. Added bonus.

## **2 – You learn about yourself**

This is very important because wherever you minister in the future, you will be with yourself! You can't escape from yourself - and it may be like bad breath! You become self-aware. You learn how people react and respond to you. In particular, you learn your strengths and weaknesses. Some things you will be naturally good at and you should be thankful for these. Other people won't have those 'natural' 'God given' abilities. So, make sure you praise God for them not pat yourself on the back. It makes sense to play to your strengths as well. Use what you're good at for building God's kingdom.

But other things you will be weak at, very weak at. With these, you have to get on your knees and beg God to help you. The worst thing you could do is to ignore them and hope they go away. They won't (it's the bad breath I mentioned earlier). So, you have to work at developing them. For me, I'm not a natural reader and I don't think and breathe theology. I have to force myself to read a heavy theological textbook each year, otherwise I wouldn't do it and I'd get stale. I get depressed (and jealous) when other ministers tell me about the 10 books they've read this month. Every February I read a new book on the topic of our Summit conference. Since I've got apprentices, I force them to read it too. No point in suffering alone. Doing a full-time ministry apprenticeship, you learn about yourself. You become much more self-aware about your ministry strengths and weaknesses and that's very helpful BEFORE you take the plunge into a lifetime of ministry.

## **3 – You learn to trust God**

When you do a full-time apprenticeship, you learn to depend on God like never before. For starters – you have to write letters and ask people to support you. You have to step out in faith in that area. You can't escape from the difficulties of ministry. You have to 'cast your bread upon the waters' and trust God as Ecclesiastes says.

Secondly, you have to fully trust God for the progress of the ministry you do. I'm dependant on God for any and all of the progress he might make in people's lives, so I get on my knees and ask God to work in and through me. I have to lean on him fully. If I want to learn farming – I can't do that a day a week. Farming is a whole of life kind of experience – spend two years doing it. You experience the ups and downs, the difficulties and joys over a couple of years and you have to trust God for good weather, rain and sunshine in its seasons. A ministry apprenticeship is like that – you learn to rely on God for everything.

#### 4 – You learn humility

This may have more to do with my training techniques than anything else. E.g. I have given feedback to my ministry apprentices over the years that include:

- “Your talk was the best 30 minutes sleep I’ve had all year”;
- “You just went on and on and on that I started praying, ‘Come, Lord, Jesus’”;
- and
- “The problem with that Bible study is that it just kept going round and round in circles til I got giddy”.

You learn humility doing a full-time ministry apprenticeship and that’s good for you. You learn that world revival is not going to begin with you, it began with Jesus. You learn that you are not the Messiah of the world, that also belongs to Jesus. While it’s good to be ambitious and excited about ministry, ***it’s essential*** to be humble. The most humbling thing that’s ever been said to me about my ministry was when someone told me what my best ministry gift was. I was expecting them to rattle off any number of the great gifts I had. I was shocked when they said ‘Your best ministry gift is your wife.’ It was quite humbling to hear that and, to my shame, it took me six years of full time ministry to realise that they were right. Six years! I’m a slow learner. A ministry apprenticeship teaches you humility and that is essential.

#### 5 – You learn about the Bible

You learn lots of the Bible yourself as you open up the Bible with people. It’s good for you to discover and dig deeper into parts of the Bible and you begin on the journey of learning how to teach the Bible to others. That journey will take you 50 years to complete, but that’s okay. But there’s something else you learn about the Bible – a surprise about it.

On the one hand, you learn that the Bible is all you need. It is God’s word. He speaks to us through his word and it’s useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training (as we know). In fact, if the Bible is not used in ministry that ministry becomes ‘useless’. We need to hear it lest we be tempted to rely on some other voice. But, surprisingly, teaching the Bible is never enough. You can’t just be a machine, churning out biblical truth *because you’re a person and you’re ministering to people*. You have to learn to relate to people. Some people find this easy. Others find it incredibly difficult. Doing a ministry apprenticeship, you learn that the Bible is all you need but the Bible is never enough.

## **To sum up**

A full-time ministry apprenticeship is like being on 'L' plates. It's a protected learning environment. You have the trainer sitting next to you, giving you guidance and instructions, with the ability to prevent any disasters. But also, you have the grace of all the people you are ministering to, because you're only learning, like we give grace to 'L' plate drivers. We are more forgiving of 'L' plate drivers and give them an extra 50 metres. When I get complaints about my apprentices (tally was 6 this week – joke) I say 'Oh no. Did they really? I'll have a chat with them. But just remember, they are only learning. They are on 'L' plates. So, let's forgive them and help them learn. It's a protected learning environment that you don't have after college.

Congregations and ministry organisations expect a lot more when you're getting paid a full ministry salary. An apprentice feels the pressure to succeed in ministry and to be effective in ministry but they don't have to bear the pressure. The pressure is on the trainer. An apprentice feels the pain and frustration of ministry as well but they don't feel all the pain and frustration. They don't have to bear that pain alone. A full-time ministry apprenticeship is a wonderful environment to learn ministry and it's an opportunity you should grab with both hands if you have the chance.