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# PURSUING A MINISTRY MANTLE

2 Kings 2:1-18

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## INTRODUCTION

Like Jesus, you and I have been *anointed* to bring God's life-changing, life-saving message to people—no matter how low or desperate their condition<sup>1</sup>—the anointing abides.<sup>2</sup> We do not have to go someplace to have it reapplied; neither do we need to seek for it to ready ourselves for each ministry situation we encounter.

*Anointed* literally means *to be smeared with oil*, but its symbolic implication—taken from ancient coronation services—means *to be commissioned or set aside* for a role. A king was *anointed* as king. That was his job from henceforth, and until he was dead or deposed, he remained the *anointed* (officially recognized and empowered) king.

God has anointed us as ministers of reconciliation, introducing people to Jesus and ministering to them.<sup>3</sup> Because Jesus is in Heaven, we get to say and do the sorts of things He would say and do if He was still here. That's why He gave us the Holy Spirit to guide our words and steps as we act and teach in His Name.<sup>4</sup> Every child of God, every person indwelt by the Holy Spirit is *anointed* for ministry.

Though we are each given specific ministry roles and spheres,<sup>5</sup> no one believer is more anointed than others. No follower of Jesus has been left out of the anointing process. You have been set apart

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 60:1-3

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 2:27

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

<sup>4</sup> John 14:8-17; 16:7; 13-15

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Corinthians 12:6-7; 27-30

as a royal, priestly minister, so that “you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness.”<sup>6</sup>

How, then, do we explain the differences of ministry scope and impact in the *body* of Christ? Why are some believers used in bigger, or at least more visible, ways? Why do some lives, more than others, impact people so significantly? Part of the answer lies in the differences between various ministry Gift-Mixes; an evangelist with a sign-gift ministry will be far more public than a server-helper.

Another factor is simply the degree of someone’s surrender to Jesus’ words and ways. The more obedient we are, the greater impact our lives have because we live and minister in closer alignment to His truth. It’s much like someone who is accustomed to using a certain tool: they will be better at it and more efficient with it than someone who rarely uses it.

Additionally, the degree to which we *seek first the kingdom*,<sup>7</sup> *deny* ourselves and willingly *lose* our life,<sup>8</sup> affects the outcomes of our life. And that doesn’t even begin to consider how much love, prayer, Bible reading, etc., adds to what we can accomplish; unforgiveness, greed and jealousy take lots away from our effectiveness and what He wants to do to us and through us for the sake of others. While we will never understand all the particulars of how and why believers end up making varying degrees of impact in the world, some parts of our ministry portion clearly depend on us!

## MINISTRY MANTLE

But the Bible hints at another aspect of our ministry influence. It has come to be called a *ministry mantle* because it is often associated with the story of Elisha assuming the cloak or mantle of his mentor, Elijah. It came at a time of ministry transition. It is one of the extraordinary stories of one man’s empowerment from the Lord being passed directly to another person in the form of a piece of clothing.

We cannot say exactly how this works, or precisely why one person seems to get a hefty mantle while another does not. But we do get some hints from this story in 2 Kings—and from other passages in the Bible. Jesus refers to one possible reason why some people are used more noticeably than others when He tells people how *kingdom ministry* works:

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>8</sup> Mark 8:34-35

*“...The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” ~Matthew 11:12*

It becomes more understandable when we substitute other words for the unfamiliar idiomatic expressions:

*“...The kingdom of heaven can be pressed into, and determined, as well as, persistent people grab hold of it when they want it more than anything else.” ~Matthew 11:12 (paraphrased)*

## ACTIVE PURSUIT

Vital ministry is active, not passive. While we must always wait on the Lord, that waiting is not the same as singing, “*Que sera, sera!*” We wait on God in order to gain new strength for additional, proactive ministry. We are invaders striking deep behind enemy lines in a world held captive under the sway of the devil. Everywhere we go we’re privileged to assertively introduce the power of the kingdom of God to override the *world as it is*.

Paul advised Timothy, who was just beginning his ministry, to live intentionally and “*make the most*” of his time.<sup>9</sup> When describing his own attitude and ministry lifestyle, Paul says,

*“...I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” ~Philippians 3:12-14*

Jesus said the same thing another way: “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find...*”<sup>10</sup> Some things only open to those who persist in pursuit of what God makes available to them. That’s why Jesus’ most powerful invitation to us is, “*Follow Me!*”

## ELISHA SEEKS A MANTLE

Reviewing the whole story of Elisha’s inheritance—not just the moment when he saw the chariots of fire and picked up the mantle of his predecessor—we see that Elisha understood this *Kingdom principle*. He was determined to stick with his mentor until the very end of Elijah’s life. He wanted everything God and Elijah had for him. Knowing that the opportunities for further contact and discipleship were now few, Elisha made the most of his time with Elijah. When other prophets

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 5:15-16

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 7:7

stood back at a distance, content simply to observe Elijah, Elisha shook off every legitimate reason for staying put. Instead of opting for an easy, sedentary spiritual pursuit, he kept paying the price of pressing ahead.

Furthermore, He had no thought about a final destination, so he didn't really care where Elijah led—or how long it took to get there. He wasn't frustrated that the destination kept changing. Elisha didn't complain or try to second-guess why they needed to travel in a giant circle: from Gilgal west to Bethel; then east to Jericho, and finally, further east to the Jordan River, ending up close to where they began the journey.

Elisha knew what he wanted. He wanted a double-portion of Elijah's spirit. He understood that no human agency could present it to him—or prevent him from receiving it. A ministry mantle, especially a double-portion, is a *hard* thing to receive.<sup>11</sup> It's only found after going down an arduous road. We have to be determined (almost stiff-necked) to pursue it. The double-portion of Elijah's ministry was Elisha's for the asking, *as long as* he stayed with Elijah until the end.

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus couldn't promise the sons of Zebedee they would sit at His right and left, even after being directly asked. But He did promise them great ministry with great price.<sup>12</sup> He does the same for us; He offers us great ministry but at great price. He offers a double-portion of His Spirit to us—and a mantle of flame instead of cloth. So, how far will you go after a mantle for ministry?

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Kings 2:10

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 20:20-28