

Ministry in the Image of God – Study Guide

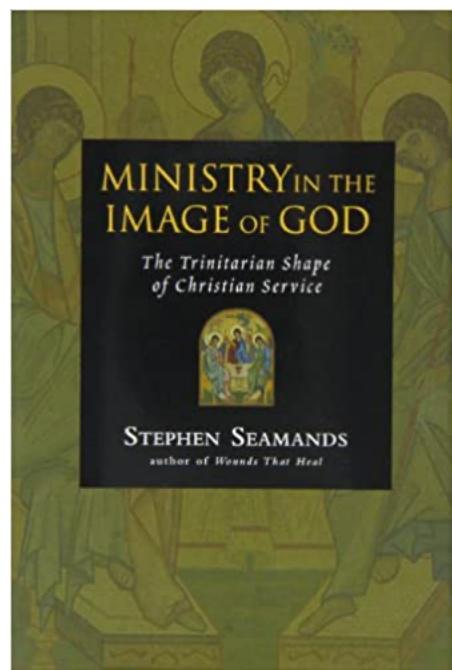
Book by Stephen Seamands

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Those of us called to Christian ministry are commissioned and sent by Jesus, just as he himself was called and sent by the Father. Thus we naturally pattern our ministries after Christ's example. But distinctively Christian service involves the Spirit as well, just as Jesus himself accomplished his ministry in the power of the Spirit. Thus the whole Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—gives shape to truly authentic Christian ministry.

Though as Christians we all affirm the doctrine of the Trinity, many of us might struggle to explain how understanding the Trinity could actually shape our ministry. Stephen Seamands demonstrates how a fully orbed theology of the Trinity transforms our perception and practice of vocational ministry. Theological concepts like relationality and perichoresis have direct relevance to pastoral life and work, especially in unfolding a trinitarian approach to relationships, service and mission.

A thoroughly trinitarian outlook provides the fuel for our ministry "of Jesus Christ, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, on behalf of the church and the world." Essential reading for pastors, parachurch workers, counselors, missionaries, youth ministers and all who are called to any vocation of Christian ministry.



Introduction

1. What is it you hope to get from this study? Write out your goals, individually and as a group, so you can review them when your study is over.
2. Take some time to pray and invite God into your study. Ask him what HE wants you to get out of this and add those things to your list. Ask him to speak to you and to give you open eyes, ears, mind, and heart to receive all that he has for you, in humility, as you move forward.

Chapter 1 – Trinitarian Ministry

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What is your understanding of the Trinity today? Where did this understanding come from?
3. What analogies have you heard to describe the Trinity? What are the weaknesses of these analogies? What are the strengths?
4. Are there any persons of the Trinity you relate to more or less than the others? Explain.
5. How does your understanding of the Trinity impact your daily walk with God? With other Christians? With the rest of the world/creation?
6. Take time to study Rublev's icon on page 13. What stands out to you (if anything)? Is there any aspect of the relationship depicted here that surprises you or grabs your attention?
7. What is the difference between a *life* of ministry and the *work* of ministry? Do you tend to prioritize one of these over the other or overlook one in light of the other? If so, explain.
8. **The ministry of Jesus, the Son:** Are there any areas where you're feeling weary or burnt out right now? Think for a moment whether God has asked you to do this or whether are you doing it according to your own plans, desires, and expectations. If it was God who called you to this area, where have you taken over that you need to surrender back to him? Take time to pray as the author did: "Forgive me, Lord. Forgive me for taking this burden upon myself. I've made this all about me and my performance. It's more about you than it is about me. *Help yourself to me, Lord.* Use me to accomplish your ministry. I want to run with you."
9. **Ministry to the Father:** Who is it that sets your agenda for ministry? Are you trying to meet the demands and expectations of the people around you, or are you carefully listening and attentive to where God is moving in the moment? Why is it so hard to be attentive amidst all the voices crying for help and attention? Why is it important to be attentive to God before being attentive to people?
10. Have you ever been quick to do things *for* God instead of *with* God? What happened? How could things have been different if you'd done things the other way?
11. **Ministry through the Holy Spirit:** What does it mean to be full of the Holy Spirit? Why is this a vital prerequisite for ministry?
12. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
13. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 2 – Relational Personhood

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Four characteristics of the Trinitarian relationship are *intimacy, equality, deference* and *submission*. Share your examples of each of these characteristics from an earthly relationship that you have, have experienced, or have witnessed.
3. Have you ever experienced these four characteristics in the church? If so, share about these relationships with your group. If not, why do you think that is?
4. Discuss what you think the author means by “you are only truly you in relationship to others.” Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
5. When we operate out of fear and self-protection rather than love, we tend toward either unhealthy “embrace” or toward unhealthy “exclusion” of other people. Which style gives you a greater sense of security? Why do you think this is so? (See the last paragraph on page 41 for a more thorough explanation of these two relational styles.)
6. Who is in your band? If you are in one, share the value of this group in your life. Is there anything off-limits in your band? How often do you meet and what do your meetings look like? If you’re not in one, look around the room at some others (of the same gender) who are band-less and consider forming one together. Or make a list of people you are close with who you can ask to join you. Start off slow and see if it’s a good fit – you’ll be walking in deep relational accountability before you know it! Check out the resources for bands on the Revolution Mobile App to help you get started and to help guide your discussions. There are also free pocket guides available upon request from the church office. These are business-card-sized and fit great in a purse or wallet.
7. Take a moment to review the four relational characteristics in a family context (pages 48-52). Ask four different people in your group to read one of the sections to themselves and then to summarize it for the group. Then ask each presenter to reflect and share how their family is doing in the area they shared.
8. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
9. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 3 – Joyful Intimacy

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What do you feel when you read God's words to Sandra Wilson on page 57? Could you imagine God speaking these words to you? How often do you take time to listen for words like these?
3. How comfortable are you using the term Abba (or "Daddy") to refer to God? Explain.
4. How easy is it for you to believe that the Holy Spirit delights in his relationship with you? Why do you think it is that easy or difficult? Why do you think the Spirit delights in you (Hint: "Because he's God, and he has to" is not a correct response)?
5. "God wants us to be lovers so we can do work." Our work should be a result of who we are in relationship to God, but too often we try to earn our place through our service. Take a look at Lake's four phases on pages 63-64. Which one is the hardest for you? In what order do you typically approach your relationship with God? With others?
6. "Before you can have God's heart for others, you must know his heart for you." What is God's heart for you? Do you know it? Is his love in your mind, or is it working its way into your deepest parts? Take out your calendars and schedule some alone time with God over the next week (actually do this). Ask God in this time to reveal his heart for you – then schedule your next time with him and repeat indefinitely.
7. What is standing in the way of you fully experiencing God's love for you? What from your past makes it difficult for you to see God in the way this book describes? What disappointments have you faced with God that have created a distance between you? As scary as it may be to face some of these things, the reward is infinitely worthwhile.

Consider resources such as Matthew Bauer's book *The Journey to Freedom: Navigating the Roadblocks to Abundant Living* (www.journeytofreedom.net) as a guide to help you navigate these obstacles, and then find a pastor or counselor who can help walk you through the process and hold you accountable.

8. Divide your group into 4 and assign each subgroup to rewrite a section of Wesley's hymn on pages 73-74 in their own words as a personal prayer to God. Come back together and share what you wrote.
9. Take time to pray in silence. Ask God to speak to each of you and reveal his heart for you. After a few minutes, pray together for a renewed experience of God's love, as individuals and as a group after his own heart.
10. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
11. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 4 – Glad Surrender

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Think of a relationship in which you were most self-giving and self-sacrificial. Was it fulfilling? Full of joy? Or did it feel like something else?
3. Describe the most sacrificial and giving person you know. Are they joyful? How do you feel when you are around them? Do they inspire you to be more generous or more selfish?
4. What kind of person are you most likely to give joyfully to and sacrifice for? Someone who is selfish, or someone who is equally generous?
5. Mark 8:34-35 says that “whoever loses his life will save it.” The word for life (*ψυχή* “psuché”) is actually translated as breath or soul, self or individuality. So while this can be taken literally as “life” it could also be referring to life as “identity” or “individuality” – what makes you uniquely you.
 - a. How does surrendering our lives in this respect help us to find salvation?
 - b. How does this kind of self-denial reveal our purpose?
 - c. How does it reveal the depth of love God has for us and wants us to have for others?
 - d. How is this passage calling you and convicting you today - in other words, where do you need to lose your life today?
 - e. How can you foresee that leading to your salvation?
6. What is God calling you to die for so that you can fulfill his ministerial call in your life? What is the hardest obstacle you face in fulfilling that call?
7. “There was a day when I utterly died,” said George Müller, “died to [my] opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval for censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends.” Have you so died? Who is the owner of your house, the hub of your wheel, the Lord of your life? Share with your group about an experience of dying to self and how it has transformed you – how it has helped you find yourself. Also share what is holding you back from full surrender. Take time to pray for each person as they share, that God will give them the faith and courage to give themselves up.
8. What are the idols you’ve made in your relationship with God? Your Ishmaels, where you’ve forged your own way? Your Isaacs, where you’ve prioritized your ministry above your relationships?
9. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
10. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 5 – Complex Simplicity

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. If we only worship a god we can understand, is it truly God (or are we still the “hub of the wheel” and the “owner of the house”)? Why do you think we struggle so much with the concept of Trinity? Why are we so quick to dismiss what we don’t understand?
3. What do you love about mystery? What don’t you love about it? What does mystery add or take away from a relationship?
4. What other things do you believe, that are (and might forever be) a mystery? Is it easier or harder to believe in Trinity? Explain.
5. Explain the statement, “the presence of mystery evokes gratitude, for it is the gateway to humility and wonder” (page 105). How does mystery evoke gratitude in your life?
6. Discuss the meaning of Seamands’ quote on page 107: “That’s what theological error most often is: not the absence of truth, but truth separated from its balancing counterpart.” Where do you see this in the church today? In our society? In politics? In your group? In yourself?
7. How does the church (local church and global Church) reflect the paradox of Trinity? Which part of the church (relational or institutional) do you have the most appreciation for or difficulty with? Explain.
8. What burning questions do you have about the Trinity after reading this chapter? What are you struggling with? What could help you to arrive at the “simplicity on the far side of complexity” today?
9. Do you have any other questions about the topics presented in this chapter?
10. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 6 – Gracious Self-Acceptance

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. How do you relate differently to each of the three persons of Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? How do their roles differ in your life? How are they the same?
3. We are our own worst critics, for sure, but how do you (or do you not) struggle to minister to yourself with the same love and grace that you extend to others? Do you see yourself more as the “least of these” (unworthy of love and grace) or the “best of these” (someone who should know better and therefore deserves no grace)? Why do you think this is so?
4. If low self-esteem “paralyzes our potential, destroys our dreams, ruins our relationships and sabotages our service” (page 126), what could your life look like if you saw, loved, and accepted yourself the way Christ does? Be specific.
5. What does your false self look like? What are the fig leaves you hide behind to keep up that appearance (see page 128)? Take some time in silent and earnest prayer to renounce your false self and ask God to remove these leaves from you. Give your group permission to gently call you out if they see you trying to hide behind them in the future.
6. What “seeds of rejection” have taken root in your life? What lies have you believed about yourself and your worthiness to be loved and accepted? Ask God to reveal these things and where they came from and consider diving deeper into this subject with resources at www.journeytofreedom.net/curses or through Matthew Bauer’s book *The Journey to Freedom*.
7. Take another moment in silent prayer to listen. Ask God what He says about you. Repent of believing the lies of your false-self and choose to receive His word over you. You may also want to pair off during this time and spend time praying over one another. Ask God to speak through you to your partner. When you’re done, be courageously vulnerable with one another and share what you heard God speak. Also write it down and keep it close, because times of doubt and attack are sure to come. As a group, commit to encouraging and calling out God’s words of acceptance in each other.
8. Have you ever been afraid to ask God what He thinks of you? Have you, like Barbara (page 134), ever been afraid that “his standards will be lower than [yours]”? What would it look like to embrace your weaknesses? How might God be glorified even more through your weaknesses than through your perfection? Would it (honestly) be okay with you if he got that glory instead of you?
9. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
10. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 7 – Mutual Indwelling

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What does it mean to have Christ indwelling your life? What has been your experience with this? How do you know he's living in you? What does it feel like? (You may find help answering these questions by considering the alternative – what did it feel like when he wasn't in you?)
3. "There is a world of difference between being productive and being fruitful." And the key to being fruitful is surrender. What feelings, hesitations, revelations, etc. come when you read the suggested words of Christ, saying "All this time you've been sincerely trying to do *for* me what I deeply desire to do *through* you"? What do you find is the biggest hindrance to surrendering to God in this way?
4. Who are your favorite people to hang out with – sharers, listeners, or both? Why? On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best), how great is your group at empathetic listening? Are you generally more quick to speak and share, or more quick to listen and understand?
5. What is the difference between intercession and other types of prayer? Split into groups of 2-3 (preferably not related) and take a few minutes to intercede for each other out loud. Commit to interceding daily for your partner(s) for at least 5 minutes every day until your next gathering. Write down anything you hear from God during that time and share it (if appropriate) with your partner(s).
6. Consider the ways your group serves together. How has this service built you together as a team? How has it enhanced your relationships with God and with each other? How have your unique gifts come together to have a synergistic effect on your ministry?
7. If you're married (or have been married), share about a time when being "too close for comfort" helped you grow as individuals and as a couple. How have the "painful, practical expressions of self-denial and self-sacrifice" brought you closer to God and closer to each other? How do these kinds of lessons influence your other relationships (spiritually and naturally)?
8. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
9. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 8 – Passionate Ministry

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Describe a time in your life when you were caught up in something bigger than yourself. What about it was life-giving? (What about it wasn't?) What did it reveal to you about your identity? Why do you think it is important (if you do) for all people to be involved in something that is too big for just them?
3. What does it mean to you that your ministry and mission is not your own, but God's? Have you considered this before? How does it affect your ability to do ministry *with* God and not *for* God? Does it take any pressure off of you when you know who is ultimately responsible, or does it add more?
4. Who do you know that best reflects this picture of action, love, and self-giving? What intrigues you about them and the way they live? What terrifies you or offends you about it? Is this something you truly want for yourself? If so, what (if anything) is holding you back?
5. Read Acts 1:12-15 and Acts 2:1-6. This is the beginning of the outward mission and expansion of the church after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What was the role of the disciples in this mission? What was the role of the Holy Spirit? If this is an indication of how we are to approach mission, what is the most important step we can take to partner with God in his work?
6. "The church always fails at the point of self-confidence" (page 167). Likewise, those in ministry often fall when they begin to feel competent in their own abilities. It is one of the things we must guard carefully against, so that we always rely upon the Spirit to guide us and to use us in places that are too big for us to go alone. Where is the fine line between confidence and experience in yourself and confidence/experience in God? What safeguards can you put in place to help yourself stay on the right side of that line?
7. "What's hindering us from joining the mission in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are already engaged" (p 169)?
8. Are you more like a frog or a lizard? Explain. What are the benefits and dangers of each approach?
9. Jesus didn't call his disciples to worship him, but to follow him. How does this relate to Seamands' vision of the vineyard on pages 174-175? How do you envision you, your group, and your church needing to change to become followers in this manner? Take a moment to dream out loud... what would your life, your group, your church, and your community look like after that change (give specific examples)?
10. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
11. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Conclusion

1. What stuck out to you most from this study? What have you learned about God that you did not know before? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about others?
2. Take some time to review your goals from the beginning of your study. What goals have you accomplished, what are you still working on, and what do you need help with?
3. What questions do you still have after completing this study?
4. Finally, so what? What are you going to do with what you've studied, learned, and discussed? Be specific.
5. Now spend some time in prayer, asking God to awaken his purposes within you concerning this study. Consider whether you need to spend time in repentance, in a time of commitment and commissioning, or in a time of surrender. Add this to your prayer time as the Holy Spirit guides you.