

COUPON CODE **OPCONF25**



EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

BUILDING FAITH TO MOVE **MOUNTAINS**

A new online ministry course designed to help you:

1. **understand** the challenges **holding ministry back**
2. **develop** a vision for **a way forward**
3. **implement** the **practices** of effective Christian ministry

EFFECTIVECHRISTIANMINISTRY.ORG



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MODULE II, LESSON 5
Transcript



Welcome to Module II, Lesson 5 of Effective Christian Ministry.

This lesson sets the stage for Module III, wrapping up everything we've talked about so far and exploring the ministry vision that's behind this course and all of our work at Y2AM. We've drawn our ministry map: we know where we need to go, we know what's standing in the way. Now we need to be clear about what our next steps are, about what kind of work amounts to truly effective Christian ministry.

LESSON GOALS

Here are our goals for this lesson. Once you've completed it, you'll be able to understand:

1. how what we do shapes who we are;
2. why the challenges to good ministry are opportunities for effective ministry; and
3. how the five practices of effective Christian ministry help us meet the five challenges to ministry head on.

REMINDER

Before you get started, I want to remind you of two things.

First, turn off your phone, close out of any other windows in your internet browser, turn off your email, put away any books or distractions or work you have going on. This course is only as good as you let it be. And to get the most out of it, to really learn how to lead effective Christian ministry, you need to give this material the attention it deserves. Not for my sake, not even for your sake, but for the sake of the people who are in your care. The people who are going to look to you for good and Christ-centered ministry.

And second, I want to remind you to download your workbook, which you can find on your screen with other materials you can download as part of this lesson. The workbook has blanks you can fill in as you listen, and areas



where you can work through questions I'll give you as we proceed. It's a tool, and I think it'll really help you learn and implement what we're going to cover.

So pause this video if you need a moment to set aside any distractions or print your workbook. And if you're ready, let's get to it.

TWO STORIES

I want to start this lesson by sharing two stories with you. One of them is real, an experience I recently had while visiting a parish. The other is fake, something I made up. Let's see if you can tell the difference.

Ok, first story. Christian and I were in an Orthodox parish in the midwest for a BeeTreat. During one of the breaks, the priest of the host parish came up to thank us, to compliment us on how the BeeTreat was going so far, and to ask a difficult question. He, like most Orthodox parish priests, was married and had a family. He told us about his oldest child, who had graduated from college a few years before and had long ago disconnected from the Church. He told us about his middle child, who was in college and really only went to Church during the holidays. He told us about his youngest child, who was still in high school and was actually attending the BeeTreat that day.

With pain in his eyes, pain I'll never forget, he looked at us and said: "look, I've already lost my two oldest kids, and I'm a priest; how do I keep my youngest kid in Church?"

Was that story real? Or made up? Go to your workbook and write down what you think.

Ok, second story. Christian and I were in an Orthodox parish in New England for another BeeTreat. During one of the breaks, one of the parents in attendance came up to thank us and ask us a difficult question. She told us about how her child (who was attending the BeeTreat that day) was going to graduate from high school later that year, and was planning on going to college in New York City. With pain in her eyes, she told me that she and her family were proud fans of all the Boston teams, and how it



would devastate her if her child somehow started cheering for New York teams.

She looked at us and asked: “how do I keep my kid connected to Boston sports?”

Was that story real? Or made up? Go to your workbook and write down what you think.

PARENTS NEVER WORRY ABOUT THIS

As you might expect, the second story was made up. No matter where we’ve traveled, I’ve never heard a parent worry that her kids were going to change loyalties and start rooting for a different team. Seriously, it never happens. No matter how terrible their home team might be, you don’t really see college students switching sides and cheering on a new team. It just doesn’t happen.

On the other hand, the first story was absolutely true. A priest approached us, with such pain in his eyes, heartbroken about his two oldest kids and terribly concerned about his youngest. And, to be honest, that’s not the only time we’ve been asked how to keep kids in Church. We get asked that question all the time, from parents throughout the Church. Whether or not those parents are involved in ministry, whether those families live in the city or the country, whether those families are rich or poor: it’s as close to a universal question as I’ve come across.

MORE LOYAL TO SPORTS TEAMS

And I think it’s worth digging into why this is. Why is it that young people show far more loyalty to sports teams than to their Church community? I actually want to pose that question to you before we talk about it together. Go to your workbook, pause this video for a moment, and write down your thoughts.

Now, we might be tempted to answer that sports are fun and Church is not; that obviously sports have an entertainment advantage. But that misses



something important. I'm going to pick on a particular city for a moment, and I want to ask for your forgiveness in advance.

THE CLEVELAND BROWNS

Now, I have a lot of good friends from Cleveland: I've been to Cleveland, it's a wonderful city full of wonderful people. But we need to be honest: Cleveland does not have the best track record when it comes to sports. In 2017, the Cleveland Browns finished their season without a single win: 0-16. And this wasn't an aberration; the Browns had been a bad football team for a long, long time. Fans were so upset by this winless season that they actually organized a mock parade to make fun of the whole situation.

You might even wonder if being a Browns fan is any fun at all.

Think about it: those fans dedicated time to watching the games, they spent money on tickets and merchandise, and all they got was a season of complete embarrassment: just the latest gut-punch in a long series of gut punches. If I was just getting into football, there's no way I'd become a Browns fan. No rational person would hop on board a team that promises nothing but heartache and frustration.

Yet, at the same time, even the most rational and level-headed Browns fans stayed loyal to their team. They wouldn't think about ditching the Browns and cheering for another team, even one that was a favorite to win the Super Bowl. It might make more sense to cheer for a team that wins, that's not the point.

Browns fans, like other sports fans, tend to stay loyal to their team.

THE CHICAGO CUBS

Consider fans of the Chicago Cubs. For years and years, this was a fanbase that was synonymous with long-suffering. The Cubs finally won the World Series in 2016, breaking an unmatched 108 year drought. Imagine that: multiple generations of Cubs fans were born, lived, and died all without seeing their team win that elusive championship. Being a Cubs fan was



almost guaranteed to bring on pain and frustration. There wasn't an ounce of celebration to be found, yet fans kept cheering on the team, and they kept raising their kids to root for the Cubs as well. And what's truly incredible is this: that even after a century of losing, there's no way a Cubs fan was going to cheer for the rival St Louis Cardinals, or for the other Chicago team (the White Sox). Even though both of those teams were more successful, and cheering for a winner would have been way easier.

Why? Why is it that people remain loyal to a sports team even when it makes no logical sense? Even when it brings on more pain and frustration than joy?

And why does it seem so comparatively easy to fall away from the Church?

HOW WE RAISE SPORTS FANS

Let's think about how a sports fan is raised. From the time you're a kid, you're dressed in the colors of your team. When the game's on TV, you and your family are watching. Then, of course, there's the spread. You gotta have chips, salsa, soda, beer, whatever. It's a whole production. Maybe you even make the trip to the stadium every now and then, the pilgrimage to see the team play in person. Maybe you hear your parents or older siblings talk about the team during breakfast, rattling off stats and accomplishments; talking about their favorite players and favorite plays. Maybe your parents even tell you stories about the good old days when the team was full of all-stars, and how their parents even used to take them to see their favorite players.

When the team wins, you see other fans not just cheer, but become positively ecstatic. When the team loses, you see other fans not just get bummed out, but weep with sorrow. When you talk about the team, you don't simply refer to what "they" did; you talk about what "we" did: who we played, who we beat.

By the time you're old enough to decide which team you want to support, there's no question. You don't need to be convinced because you're already a part of the team. By that point, loyalty to and love for your team is in your



blood. It's embedded deep in your bones. And not even a string of losing seasons, not even a century of disappointment, will be enough to overcome that loyalty. Because, in the words of St. Paul, "Love never fails."

Even when you're a Cubs fan or a Browns fan.

HOW WE RAISE CHRISTIANS

But think of the way we raise Christians. When kids are young, we send them off to Sunday School and youth group, hoping they learn some things about the Church that we don't even know as their parents or other invested adults. Maybe we pray at home as a family, maybe we don't; it doesn't matter, because that's really the Church's job. When our kids get older, we insist that they stay in youth group because it's good for them, even if we don't have much of a connection with the Church ourselves. When our kids ask questions, we don't have answers; because it's the Church's job to answer, anyway. When our kids insist on an answer, maybe we dig up a book (or now, since there's a ton of stuff online, a blog, podcast, or video).

This was all summed up very nicely in my favorite headline on The Babylon Bee, a Christian news satire website: "After 12 Years Of Quarterly Church Attendance, Parents Shocked By Daughter's Lack Of Faith."

The difference between how we raise up sports fans and how we raise up Christians should be pretty clear. We outsource Christian education and ministry. We over-intellectualize Christian formation, reducing it to facts and figures that can be found in a book. We try to convince people into becoming Christians or staying connected to the Church.

SPORTS FANS DON'T NEED TO BE CONVINCED

But a Cleveland Browns fan is never convinced into supporting the team. That wouldn't make any sense, and it would be a very hard sell. In fact, presenting them with the bare facts may actually dissuade someone from cheering for the Browns at all and send them looking for a team with a better chance of winning. Instead, sports fans are formed below the level of



their heads. They are formed at the level of their affections. It's not their minds that are shaped, but their hearts.

Their hearts are shaped, slowly but surely, over many years. They don't need to be given reasons to support a team: they are introduced into the joys (and yes, even the sorrows) of loving a team. A sports fan never needs to be convinced to be a fan, and certainly won't be convinced out of being a fan either.

SECOND NATURE

You've probably heard the phrase "second nature" before. That's when something sinks so deeply into our hearts, become so wrapped up in our very existence, that it becomes a part of who we are. A part of our nature: a new nature, a second nature.

Think of a particular skill you have. For example, maybe you play music. I play the guitar, and I remember the first time I ever sat down for a lesson. The instructor taught me a simple chord: it was a simple chord, sure, but it was really hard to actually play it. My left hand was on the neck of the guitar, and I had to very carefully maneuver each of my fingers to the correct string on the correct fret. When my left hand was set, I had to make sure that I was holding the pick properly with my right hand, and then I had to strum the correct strings with the correct technique to finally execute the chord.

Making this simple sound proved to be anything but simple: it took a lot of mental concentration, a lot of physical coordination, a lot of exertion, a lot of effort.

But that changed over time. After a few weeks, I realized I could make that chord almost without thinking about it. After a few months, I realized I could change back and forth between different chords without thinking about it. It's almost like the music had sunk into my body. Playing the guitar eventually became second nature.



PRACTICE CHANGES US

If you're a basketball player, think back to the first time you ever shot a free throw, and how much easier that got with months and years of practice. If you're a dancer, think back to the first time you ever tried to plie, and how much easier that got with months and years of practice. The more you did this, the better you got.

But you may have noticed that it wasn't just your body that changed. Your heart changed, too. The more you played basketball, the more you danced, the more you played the guitar, the more it became a part of who you are. In fact, if you've been doing it long enough, you might not even remember a time when you didn't know how to do these things. It's just always been a part of your life.

You may have even realized that this goes far beyond knowing how to do something; it's a question of who you are. It's not just that you can't remember a time before you played basketball; you've always been a basketball player. It's not just that you can't remember a time before you danced; you've always been a dancer. At some point, you became a basketball player or a dancer.

These things are now so much a part of you, you don't even have to think about doing them anymore. You are them.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU LOVE

James K.A. Smith talks about this in another of his books. In *You Are What You Love*, he talks about the moment in his life when he finally decided to start getting in shape. He decided to start running. But there was one problem: he hated running. With much difficulty, he woke up that first morning and went on his first run. It was a terrible experience. With much difficulty, he did it again the next morning. At some point, he realized something weird: not only was he getting in better shape, he was actually beginning to enjoy running.



Eventually, it got to the point where he didn't have to force himself out of bed in the morning. He liked running. He wanted to run. He had become a runner. The repeated practice of running hadn't just changed him physically, it also changed him emotionally, even spiritually. The practice changed his body and his spirit.

It made him into something new, something he hadn't been when he first took up the discipline of running.

CHRISTIANS ARE FORMED, NOT SIMPLY BORN

In the same way, Christians aren't simply born. Christians are formed. This takes work. And it's a work that, for whatever reason, we seem to have forgotten. We've turned Christian ministry into either an academic exercise (where we need to convince people to become committed Christians) or a bait-and-switch exercise (where we entice people to participate in games and activities and social events to get them in the door, because getting them in the door is all that matters).

But as we've already seen, this battle for where to get kids to plant their ideological and theological flags is deeply rooted in the Secular2 story, where we are trying to defend against the advance of secularism. But while we are caught in the battlefield of Secular2, waging war for religious turf, we are also caught in the gravitational pull of Secular3, which has flattened the world of all transcendence, leaving nothing but human activity, human organizations, and our own ability to use these things to make meaningful lives for ourselves.

"CHRISTIAN MINISTRY" ISN'T NECESSARILY CHRISTIAN

In this narrative, there is no place for God to move, no room for God to act, and certainly no way for God to fill people with His Holy Spirit, transforming them into the very likeness of His Son. Instead, the story we've been a part of is that of being caught in the flattening pull of Secular3, where what we've been passing off as "Christian ministry" has been shaped by ideas, assumptions, and attitudes that aren't concerned about connection with the divine.



They are not concerned about union with God.

And I'm sure you can see clearly that such a story, whatever else it may be, most certainly is not the Christian story. And that's precisely why this stuff we call "Christian ministry" has been so ineffective for so long. It's a bunch of tactics and strategies that come from within a flattened and immanent world, where man is the measure of all things; where God isn't even in the picture.

So our goal isn't to get people to ascend a mountain, come face-to-face with God, and be transformed: our goal is to capture people's commitment, to get them to come to our events and identify with our groups, because ultimately, all we're inviting them to be is committed to the organization of the Church.

Not members of the very Body of Christ.

THESE CHALLENGES ARE OPPORTUNITIES

But we can turn the challenges of Secular3 into opportunities for real, Christ-centered, and Kingdom-oriented ministry. We can turn the challenges of Secular3 into opportunities to open our real and lived experiences to divine action, to welcome God into our hearts so that He can act in us and through us. So that we can become, not just individuals who are affiliated with the human organization of the Church, but literal members of Christ's mystical Body.

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO EQUIP THE SAINTS

This is work that we can all participate in: whether you're a priest or a parent, a Church volunteer or employee, young or old. We are all called, as St Paul writes, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12-13).



We are all called to help bring people into this true faith, not just intellectual belief but deep, existential connection. Love of God. Trust in God. Literal membership in His Body. We are called to do much more than educate Christians. We are called to form Christians. We are called to minister to Christians.

Just like Ananias met Paul when he was on his back on the street called Straight, blind and helpless, we are called to stand by people in their pain and walk with them to the source of healing and life. We are called to stand with them in death and point the way to life. Not to simply talk about life, to teach them the theory and theology behind life, but to give them a taste of life Himself.

This is about far more than books and programs and lectures: it's about practices, it's about practicing the transforming presence of God.

WHY PRACTICES MATTER

Practices are really the forgotten piece to the puzzle. For too long, ministry work has been either too abstract (trying to communicate religious facts and figures, religious data, religious arguments); or, it's been too...well...thin (trying to trick people with a bait-and-switch, tempting them to stay connected with games and activities and social events, uninspiring stuff that's working at a very shallow and superficial level).

Both of these approaches are rooted very deeply in a Secular² mindset. We see the minds of our people as part of the battlefield; when it comes to young people, for example, we want to make sure their heads are stuffed full of Christian perspectives so there's no room for the godless, secular nonsense they're going to get in college or the workplace. Or, we're so obsessed with simply getting people to show up in our physical Church space that we don't care what the reason is: kids can show up for nothing but an ice cream social or dance or cultural event and we call it "ministry" because, hey, at least they're here and not getting into trouble having sex or doing drugs.



But, as we've seen over the past few decades, none of this works. None of this helps to form faithful Christians because these are the wrong approaches for the wrong time.

PRACTICES AREN'T MAGIC

But I also want to be clear: practices aren't magic. Doing certain things is no guarantee that things are going to work out, that young people are going to be formed into faithful Christians. Rather, practices are a way that we sink into a narrative: the unfolding narrative of God's saving work in the world which leads us into His Kingdom. It's the hope that Abraham held onto, even as God's promises seemed to go unfulfilled. It's the hope St Paul and St Ignatius held onto, even as they suffered martyrdom.

Practices pull us into a story. They are lived theology, which is to say: they are ministry. They invite us to participate in an unfolding story: God's unfolding story. And this goal of participation, of helping young people participate in the life of God as His children, is at the core of effective Christian ministry work.

THE FIVE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Remember, back in Lesson 3, we reviewed the five basic needs that young people have in their lives, and how meeting these needs must become the five basic goals of effective Christian ministry.

Let's review those five goals one more time:

First, young people need to actually know Jesus. Second, they need to know who they truly are. Third, they need to belong to the full community of the Church. Fourth, they need to be empowered with a faith that makes a difference. And fifth, they need to be equipped with the teachings of the Christian faith.



THE FIVE CHALLENGES TO CONTEMPORARY MINISTRY

In Lesson 4, we reviewed the five challenges that young people are facing; five challenges that are standing in the way of the faith formation that is the goal of real ministry.

Let's review those five challenges one more time:

First, young people are struggling with doubt. Second, they're struggling with self-preoccupation. Third, they're struggling with loneliness. Fourth, they're struggling with choice paralysis. And fifth, they're struggling with an experience of flatness.

THE FIVE CHALLENGES STAND IN THE WAY OF THE FIVE NEEDS

You may have realized that these five challenges are precisely what's standing in the way of us meeting the five needs we identified.

Young people need to know Jesus but they're struggling with doubt; they're not even sure that God is real, let alone taking steps to know Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Young people need to know who they are but they're struggling with self-preoccupation; instead of looking outside of themselves to God as the source of their identity, they're too busy looking inward to construct identity for themselves and make meaning for themselves.

Young people need to belong to the full community of the Church but they're struggling with loneliness; they're too disconnected from other people, even other young people, to be connected to the Body of Christ

Young people need to be empowered with a faith that makes a difference but they're struggling with choice paralysis; when it comes to living as Christians in the world they don't even know where to begin.

Young people need to be equipped with the teachings of the Christian faith but they're struggling with a sense of flatness; they have no reason to care



about what the Church teaches because they're too stuck in a vision of the world that is flat, immanent, centered purely on the materiality and distractions of this present life.

THESE CHALLENGES ARE ACTUALLY OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY

But as we suggested at the end of Lesson 4, these challenges are actually opportunities. The action of God is revealed in the midst of great need: we experience the healing that God offers in the midst of illness, we experience the life that God offers from deep within the grave. This is exactly what ministry is: God's action in the midst of doubt, His action in the midst of our self-preoccupation, His action in the midst of our loneliness, and our choice paralysis, and our experience of flatness.

THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

And this is where the five practices of effective Christian ministry come in. Because these five practices push back against these five challenges. You might even say they baptize these five challenges and transform them into opportunities: opportunities for God to fill what is lacking and act in our lives.

Because, if young people are struggling with doubt, then that is an opportunity for the practices of faith; practices which deepen our connection with God.

If young people are struggling with self-preoccupation, then that is an opportunity for practices of self-emptying; practices which turn our attention away from ourselves and outwards to God and neighbor.

If young people are struggling with loneliness, then that is an opportunity for practices of fellowship; practices which truly bring us together in openness and vulnerability.

If young people are struggling with choice paralysis, then that is an opportunity for practices of discipleship; practices which give young people a clear direction for their life in Christ.



If young people are struggling with an experience of flatness, then that is an opportunity for practices of testimony; practices which open us to the saving work of God who is active in our lives and throughout the world.

THE NEXT MODULE

This is where it all comes together in the next Module. In Module III, we'll explore each of these practices in detail and offer a roadmap so you can apply these practices in your particular home or community.