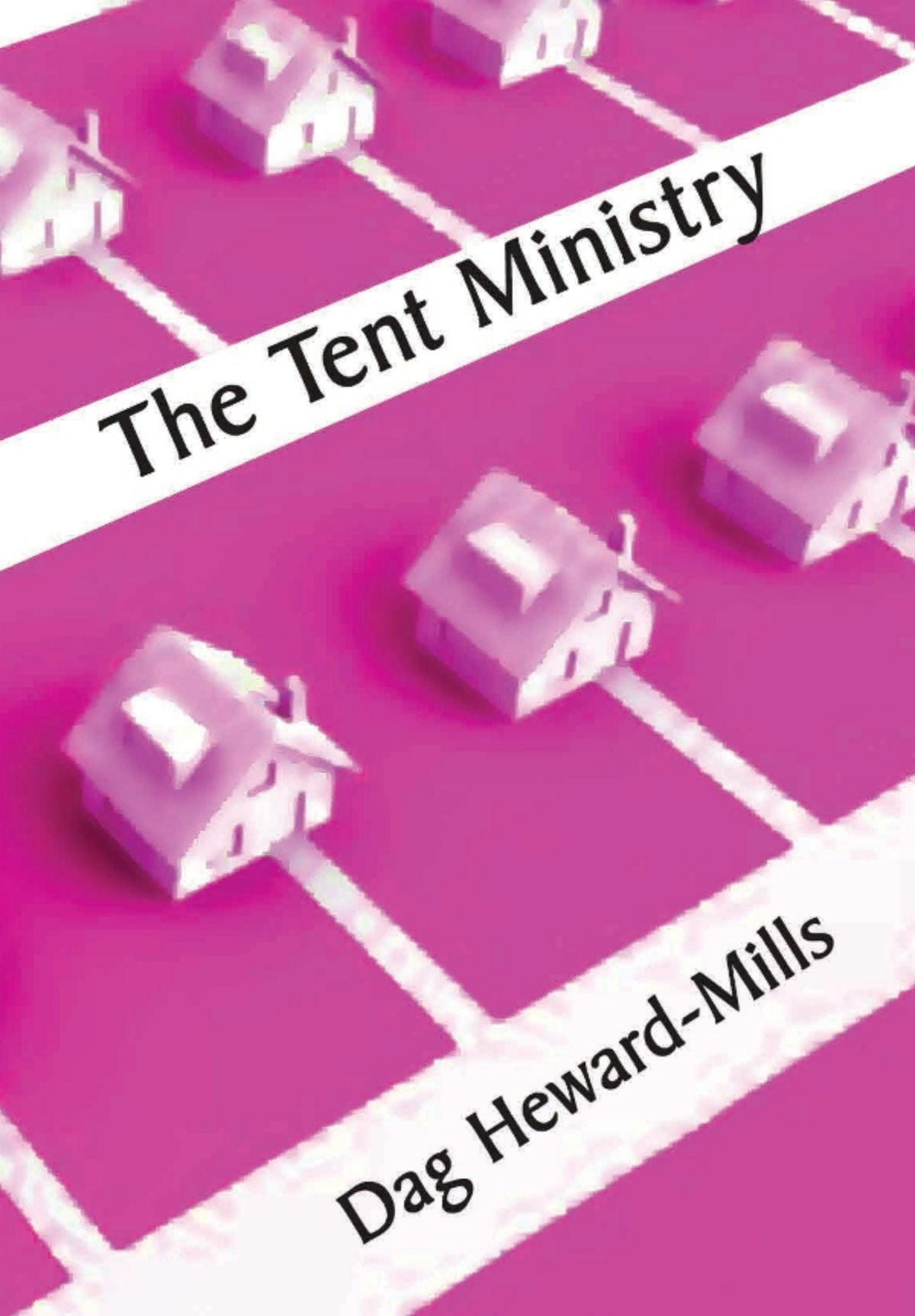

The Tent Ministry
Dag Heward-Mills

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by Dag Heward-Mills

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Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible

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Chapter 1 - The Tent Ministry

One of the greatest keys to extensive ministry work is the tent ministry. The tent ministry demonstrates the sacrifice of pastors and evangelists who labour in the work of God, without receiving income for their services. The enormity of the ministry work is such that, without the strategy of tent ministry, very little expansion will be seen in the work of God.

I know of many ministries which have ground to a halt because of mounting bills, and the high cost of maintaining staff. It is virtually IMPOSSIBLE for the church to employ all the people that are needed for the work of God.

The tent ministry or lay ministry is not popular in some circles. In certain environments, everybody must be paid for his services. The organist must be paid! The guitarist must be paid! The sound controller must be paid and the pastor constantly seeks a higher salary for his services!

Dear friend, most of the ripened harvest fields are in the poor regions of the world. How will the poor people of the earth be reached in their poverty?

Most of these people cannot pay for the services of good pastors and evangelists. *The ministry of unpaid pastors and evangelists is the key to continued ministry work.*

The church was born out of the sacrifice of Christ. It grew through the sacrifice of the apostolic church. Once again, the church will only expand through sacrifice. Where the sacrificial nature of Christianity is compromised, the ministry comes to an end.

In the next few chapters, I will be sharing about the tent ministry. As far as I am concerned, it is only through the tent ministry that the ministry work will be possible on a large scale.

Chapter 2 - Seven Things You Should Know about the Tent Ministry

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where he met Aquila, a Jewish man from Pontus. Not long before this, Aquila had come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Emperor Claudius had ordered the Jewish people to leave Rome. Paul went to see Aquila and Priscilla and found out that they were tent makers. PAUL WAS A TENT MAKER TOO. So he stayed with them and they worked together. Every Sabbath, Paul went to the Jewish meeting place. He spoke to Jews and Gentiles and tried to win them over.

Acts 18:1-4 (Contemporary English Version)

1. The tent ministry is actually the lay ministry.

It is the ability to combine secular work with real ministry.

The best example of the tent ministry was the apostle Paul's ministry. In fact, the tent ministry is so called because Paul was a tent maker.

2. It is possible to combine secular work with the ministry.

It is a ministry in which you support yourself. You may ask, "Is this the way that God planned for the ministry to be?" "Does the Bible not teach that they that preach the Gospel must live of the Gospel?"

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:14

I combined being a medical student with ministry work. I know many people who are effectively ministering the Word of God while they continue in their professions. Paul was a great apostle of the New Testament. He was able to accomplish great things for the Lord whilst he supported himself with the tent making business. The tent ministry is even more vital for the ministry today.

3. The best New Testament example of the tent ministry is the Apostle Paul. The best Old Testament example is the Prophet

Daniel.

Daniel had three jobs:

a. He was a Member of Parliament for the Babylonian province.

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and

made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel 2:48

b. He was the second Vice-President to Belshazzar.

Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Daniel 5:29

c. He was the Prime Minister during the rule of Darius.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

Daniel 6:1-2

4. Sometimes it is the will of God for you to be a tent minister and sometimes it is the will of God for you to be in full-time ministry.

In one breath, the right thing to do is to be fully supported by the ministry, but in another breath, the right thing to do is to support yourself. It is important that we follow the leading of the Spirit at all times. Is it not amazing that the right thing can become the wrong thing because God said so?

Paul declared that he was instructed by the Lord to be both full and hungry.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Philippians 4:12

5. The tent ministry will be a prominent ministry in the last days.

The best way some people can help in the ministry is to be like Paul – secular work during the week and then reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews on the Sabbath day. Paul's ministry must still live on today.

And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

Acts 18:3-4

6. Paul practised the tent ministry so that others would follow his good example.

I now place you in God's care. Remember the messages about his great kindness! This message can help you and give you what belongs to you as God's people. I have never wanted anyone's money or clothes.

You know how I have worked with my own hands to make a living for myself and my friends. By everything I did, I showed you how you should work to help everyone who is weak. Remember that our Lord Jesus said, "More blessings come from giving than from receiving." After Paul had finished

speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. Acts 20:32-36 (Contemporary English version) For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

I am talking about a fruitful and lasting ministry. Paul was not a reverend minister who did nothing for God. He was indeed an anointed and powerful minister of the Gospel. It is time for many who are called, to follow this good example.

7. The tent ministry can be just as fruitful as full-time ministry.

I do not know of anyone who will say that the apostle Paul was inferior to any of the other apostles. He laboured more abundantly and travelled more extensively. He did more for the Lord than any one else did. He was truly an effective, anointed and fruitful pastor.

Chapter 3 - How and When to Flow in the Tent Ministry

1. When it is the only way you can live in certain geographical locations and do the Ministry.

When missionaries were sent from Switzerland to Ghana two hundred years ago, they had to support themselves on the mission field. Many of them became farmers, teachers, etc. There was obviously no way of making bank transfers to these missionaries. It is important for ministers to understand that there are times when secular work gives you the legitimate basis for being in particular places. I have pastors in certain countries that do secular work simply because they need to be able to live in that country legally.

Are we ready to do anything for Christ Jesus our Lord? If you have to hold down a secular job so that you can live and minister in a strange land will you do it? Is that asking too much? How do you think the prophet Daniel was able to flourish in Babylon? He maintained his job as a Member of Parliament.

2. When you can avoid becoming a burden.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

2 Thessalonians 3:8

There are times when being a full-time minister is a burden to a small congregation. Sometimes a particular person in the congregation is burdened by the fact that he has to support you all the time. There are times I would not want to stay in certain people's homes. This is because I feel that my presence is burdensome to my hosts.

Once, we went out preaching and we got back home very late. It was past midnight. Our hostess came out of her room looking very sleepy and tired.

She said, “Oh, are you guys back?” “What time is it?” she mumbled.

We found out that it was about one a.m.

“Would you like to eat?” She asked. I thought to myself, “Of course I would like to eat. I am starving; I haven’t eaten the whole day.” But I muttered some non-committal and diplomatic answer.

My hostess continued, “I have some fish in the freezer, I can defrost it and make some stew.” I was quiet but she continued, “I have some rice which I can also prepare.” Then she asked again, “Would you like me to make the food?” I thought to myself, “Should a Christian ask someone to defrost fish and boil rice at one a.m.?” I decided that I did not want to be a burden to this dear hostess.

I smiled sheepishly and said, “Oh, it is alright.”

I went to bed on an empty stomach. I simply did not want to be a burden to my hostess. I have learnt to carry secret supplies of food with me when I travel so that I do not become a burden to people. This is what Paul was talking about. He did not want his ministry to become a burden to anyone.

3. When it enables you to survive in ministry without being paid by the church.

Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

2 Thessalonians 3:8

Four Ways in Which Paying Pastors Can Hinder the Ministry

a. Building projects are slowed down or stopped.

b. The church cannot buy the equipment it needs.

c. Missionaries cannot be sent out.

d. Immature church members who do not understand why pastors should be paid certain amounts of money could cause trouble in a new church. Some people simply do not understand why people who work for God should be blessed. I advise pastors to keep their lives as private as possible.

4. When the tent ministry enables you to be free from all men.

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

1 Corinthians 9:19

Many times people who give money develop an attitude because of the size of their donations. It is very important for pastors to be free from the negative attitudes of church members. The prophets were warned, “Don’t be afraid of their faces” (Jeremiah 1:8). This is because the facial expressions of people often intimidates us. There are times when the fact of our being tent ministers eliminates the need for people’s gifts and donations, thereby eliminating these bad attitudes.

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I

do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

1 Corinthians 9:16-19

5. When the tent ministry enables you to enter the Ministry whether finances permit it or not.

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:16-18

Paul said, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."

Sometimes we do not have a choice! We have to do His will whether there is a salary or not. That is exactly how I feel. I do not think that I have a choice. I am bound to obey God. I feel that if I do anything apart from preaching His Word, God will destroy me. I have heard other pastors say the same thing.

One pastor said to me, "Before I entered into the ministry, I knew that God had called me. At one time I felt that God would kill me if I didn't go into the ministry."

He continued, "That is why I am in full-time ministry today."

6. When the tent ministry is the only way to ensure that you play a part in this great ministry.

And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

1 Corinthians 9:23

Many of us may never play a part in building the kingdom unless we do it as lay people. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all evangelists? Are all pastors? Obviously not! But thank God you can support yourself and make a significant contribution to the ministry as a tent minister.

7. Some people are able to relate better with unpaid ministers of the Gospel who maintain their secular jobs.

God is merciful and He makes a way for all kinds of people to be saved. There are people who have their own impressions of full-time ministers and find it difficult to receive from them. They find it easier to receive from tent ministers who are obviously not in the ministry for money.

8. To flow in the tent ministry, you need to be sacrificial.

The tent ministry is essentially sacrificial in nature. Unlike what many people think, the ministry is very tiring and stressful. Even paid ministers are often

called upon to sacrifice. Many pastors do not have a normal family life because their family lives are constantly interrupted by the incessant demands of the congregation. When it is holiday time, instead of the pastor having time for his family, he has to attend various church and social functions. No one really cares about that until the pastor's children become rebels.

There are many pastors' children who hate the ministry. They feel the ministry stole their parents from them. Besides this, there are many stresses that come to the pastor and his wife by virtue of the position they hold. He is the focus of every spiritual attack. Many people do not know this.

One time, when Israel went to war with Syria, the Syrian king gave a very revealing command to his generals and to his captains. He said to them, "Do not fight with just anyone. Do not fight with the great and do not fight with the small, fight only with the king personally."

But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel.

1 Kings 22:31

You can see from this instruction that no target was significant enough except the King of Israel himself. The king represents the leader or the pastor who becomes the focus of the attack. When a person takes on the sacrifices of ministry without being paid, he makes a double sacrifice.

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if

I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

The tent ministry will test your Christian character. Virtues like self-control and temperance will be tested.

When I was a medical student and doctor on the wards of the hospital, I had to sacrifice my resting times for the ministry. When people were watching television, I could not afford that luxury. I did not have time for useless socializing and chatting. All my spare time was taken up.

9. Selfishness is the greatest hindrance to the tent ministry.

Selfishness is the principal reason why many people do not get involved in the lay or tent ministry. Most people are basically self-centred in their outlook on life; they have no concerns for anyone except for themselves. They are engrossed in the little world they have built around themselves.

Selfishness speaks of self-centredness, self- concern, self-awareness, self-help and self- gratification.

A selfish person can never be a servant of the Lord. Selfishness makes you think about yourself but ministry makes you think about people you do not even know. The apostle Paul lamented about this phenomenon. He noted that all men seek for their own welfare. He said, "... no one cares for the things of the Lord."

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

Philippians 2:20-21

We are all selfish by nature but the deeper we get in the Lord, the less selfish we become. The barrenness of most Christians is as a result of the spirit of selfishness. Who cares if others go to Hell? At least I am going to Heaven. Who cares if there is a village somewhere that has not heard the Gospel? At least my family and I are okay. Who cares if somebody is sick and lying on the hospital ward? At least I am well. Who cares if there is some dirty old prisoner languishing in jail? At least I am free!

That is the spirit of selfishness at work in the Church and in the Christian. If Jesus were selfish, He would not have left His throne in glory and come to this rotten world.

10. Laziness is another great hindrance to the tent ministry.

Most people are not prepared to work for anyone, much more to work without being paid.

11. Use a lot of wisdom when practising the tent ministry.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Matthew 10:16

Because of the intrinsic hatred for God and the ministry, many people would like to pick on someone who claims to be a pastor.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

John 3:1-2

People often look out for your faults at work or at school. They say things like, "I am surprised that a pastor would do that." "I never knew that pastors also came to work late." I remember when I worked as a doctor at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital, the biggest teaching hospital in my country; I never told them I was a pastor. I knew that at the slightest opportunity they would use it against me. While a student and a pastor, I never indicated that I was even religious. I did not want them to know anything about me.

It is foolishness to go announcing to the whole world that you are a pastor or a religious leader. Jesus said we should be as wise as serpents.

What does it mean to be as wise as a serpent? What wisdom does the serpent have? It has the wisdom to exist quietly in the midst of people who hate it. The serpent is universally hated and killed on sight, with no questions asked. And yet, snakes flourish all around us. There are millions of snakes all over the world. How has the snake managed to live and multiply in a world that utterly hates it? By discretion, carefulness, judgement, secrecy, prudence and caution!

12. Become a source of financial support by engaging in the tent ministry.

I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:35

It is amazing that a large amount of financial support comes from my lay pastors; particularly, at times when there is a special appeal for financial support.

When you are involved in the ministry, you know the needs of the ministry. Tent ministers are a good support base for every church.

13. The tent ministry fights idleness in the church.

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

After people have been in the church for some years, they seem to know all your sermons. No matter what tricks you use, they are able to see through the message and identify where it is coming from. I remember preaching a powerful series in church. People were really blessed. Many commented on how powerful the services had been. Then I had a note. This note was from a long-standing church member.

He wrote, “Dear pastor, We were tremendously blessed by your message tonight.” He continued, “This is exactly what you preached five years ago. You only changed the title.” He went further and enumerated the messages from where he claimed I had duplicated my current series. Then to reassure me, he said, “We were mightily blessed anyway, so keep on doing the good work.” You see, it is important that Christians get involved with the ministry otherwise they become critical busybodies, analyzing and commenting on things that they do not even understand.

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

Psalm 131:1

My dear friend, we cannot reach the remotest parts of the world if people are not prepared to sacrifice. People have made sacrifices for us to be Christians today. They made it possible for us to know the Lord.

Where there are no sacrificial people, the church of God cannot advance on the kingdom of the devil! The sacrifices of tent ministers will take the ministry of God further than available finances can take it!

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