

A person is shown rappelling down a dark, craggy rock face. The person is silhouetted against a vibrant sunset sky with orange and yellow clouds. They are wearing a dark t-shirt, pants, and a large backpack. A rope is attached to their harness and extends upwards. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and challenge.

**TAKE  
YOUR  
NEXT STEP  
INTO MINISTRY**

**PAUL J. BUCKNELL**

# **Take Your Next Step into Ministry**

**Pastor Paul J. Bucknell**



**Helping you take the right steps  
toward an effective full-time or tent-  
making ministry!**

Take Your Next Step into Ministry: Helping you take the proper steps toward an effective full-time or tent-making ministry!

By Paul J. Bucknell

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# God's Next Step for You

People are frequently called into ministry. I recently heard of a Brazilian physicist and a retired Indian railroad worker who were called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Many others also sense God's voice directing them into a part-time or full-time ministry.

You might be one of them. We all remember Samuel's call. In the middle of the night, he heard God calling him. He needed Eli to clarify some things for him that put him on the right track. Eli's advice wasn't astonishing, but he did believe in the intervention of God in people's lives. He told Samuel that when God called again, he was to say to the Lord, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

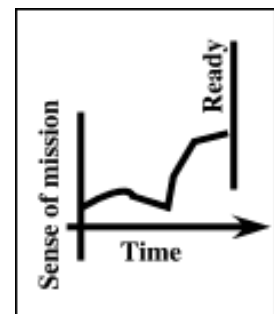
Those who feel a pull from the Lord in their hearts often have many questions. They seek answers and wonder if they are on the right path. While we cannot provide personal answers here, we hope to help guide you toward finding the answers you need. God interacts with each person uniquely, but He guides all willing servants along a similar journey. We want to help you see more clearly the boundaries of that path to both encourage and reassure you on your way.

Our world has secularized the way people search for a job or profession. We must resist the tendency to exclude God from this vital part of our lives. The Lord is the One who calls and trains. He is the One who gifts us and also provides for us. For these reasons, every genuine minister of God will stay attentive to what God is saying.

## Timing and Training are Important

One of our first impulses when we sense God's calling is to think we must make a drastic, radical change immediately. While that might happen, it's not always necessary.

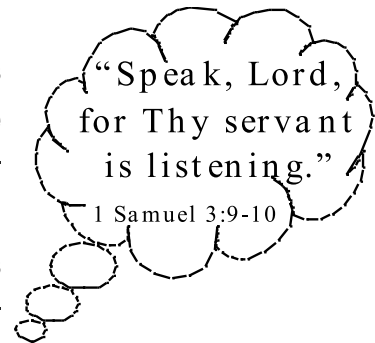
First, God touches our hearts and earns our commitment to His plan for our lives. A young boy might dream of being a soldier, but he still needs to grow up before he can wear that uniform. Similarly, we might feel a strong calling to serve the Lord full-time, but we still have significant training ahead of us before the Lord sends us out as His missionaries or pastors.



One of the biggest mistakes people who have received God's call to ministry make is thinking that Bible College or seminary is what qualifies them to serve the Lord. With all their studies, ability to connect with some of the greatest people in the Lord, making

many sacrifices, and so on, we often develop quite a bit of confidence in our ability to make a difference in God's kingdom.

The Lord does not require formal ministerial training, even though many people around us believe that such training is necessary. Christian training institutions we now recognize are, however, a relatively recent development along with our modern educational system. While a seminary can help us in some ways, we do ourselves much harm when we equate this type of training with the training the Lord wants to provide for our lives. The Lord considers His way of equipping us for service to be much broader.



## A Closer Look at Training

The Lord's training is holistic; it involves every part of our lives. He is much more interested in strengthening our faith than in any degree we might earn. I remember preparing to go on my first short-term trip to Asia.

Though excited, I realized I didn't even have enough money for the trip. Excitement alone wouldn't get me to the mission field. Eventually, the mission called to see if I had the funds. Not much had come in. They suggested canceling, but something in my heart pushed me to pursue this trip. With a bit of encouragement, they granted me two more days. Would you believe that God prompted someone to ask how my preparations were going and then wonderfully supplied that need the very next day? I was on my way to Asia! God was training my faith.



God is deeply involved in how He equips us for service or spiritual growth. He even trains us through what might seem like ordinary moments in life. One of our most significant errors is to assume that God isn't actively working in events like long, boring night shifts, efforts to pay off loans, finding a life partner, or even trivial tasks like filling out applications. Even today, I find encouragement when I recall how God intervened in seemingly impossible situations.

Often, when we consider our calling in light of our current situation or qualifications, we feel discouraged. There appears to be an overwhelming number of obstacles preventing us from serving the Lord. Don't let these circumstances dishearten you. Instead, see

them as opportunities for God to demonstrate His call on your life, both for yourself and others.

God uses financial needs, parental objections, lack of opportunity, difficult neighbors, spousal conflict, and more to train us further. The Lord is in no rush. If He were, He would quickly remove these obstacles. Yes, people are perishing without Christ. The mission is urgent. Yet, God wants to properly train us because He desires our success.

The Lord will take the necessary time to complete that training. If God is patient with the training process, then we should be too. Take a moment now and tell the Lord that you're willing to wait however long He deems best before starting full-time service. Consciously let Him lead you. Don't rush things. If we try to speed up the process, we may miss some crucial aspects of that training. Lying on forms or subtly hiding weaknesses would be ways we attempt to 'speed' things up.

He may perform tasks very quickly or choose to do them slowly. The most important thing is to stay in a learning mode. His training is essential for effective service. You are looking forward to his training day by day. Each day, then, becomes an exciting training adventure.

## **Summary**

We hope this article broadens your understanding of how God might train you. Think of your training as a lifelong obstacle course. Although the evil one wants us to fail, God has, by His grace, given us exactly what we need to overcome all the obstacles we face in life. This is true not only for our spiritual lives but also for the additional challenges and temptations of ministry. Just look at the Apostle Paul's life. The training can even increase at the end of a person's ministry!

## **Who we are, not what we do**

Ministry training is the training of our lives. Indeed, a seminary degree is often the first qualification Christian organizations look for before you can join them. However, God is more concerned with who we are than with what we know.

He is more interested in the way that we trust Him than in what we have 'done for Him.' We tend to think that we are ready for service far earlier than He thinks. In other words, we are much more prepared for the training period to stop than He is. God's actual graduation ceremony takes place when we step into His presence in heaven.

It's hard for us to assess where we are in our lives objectively. We usually concentrate on the areas where we excel, while overlooking the parts where we face challenges.

It helps us to see our lives on a timeline. We start with our birth and mark important moments when God interacted with us over the years, including trials, opportunities, and key experiences. If God has called you into full-time service, you can be confident that He has already enrolled you in His training school. It is encouraging to look back and see where He has begun His training in your life.



God does not call His leaders out of nowhere. Like Moses, Joshua, and the many other servant leaders He has called throughout history, they all have a context shaped by culture, gender, language, age, and more, often carrying baggage such as unresolved personal issues. They may be young or old, but all have felt God significantly moving in their lives.

The clearer we understand how God works in preparing us for the works He has called us to, the easier it is to see what He has already done and focus on developing what still needs improvement.

We admit that our understanding of what God will do through our lives is often unclear until we look back on history. We can trust God in His chosen role to train us. He uses many people, situations, and His Word to do so, but He ultimately oversees the process. We can fully trust Him in this journey, even if, like [Abraham](#) or [Moses](#), it takes us 80 years to reach the point where He can use us.

We have created two sections to help you better understand the key areas of your life that God is most interested in developing. We suggest that you read both of them, regardless of where you are. After reading, go back and focus on the exercises in the group that apply most to you.

- **The Starting Point** is for those who are just beginning to consider God's call for their lives. Many helpful questions identify areas to explore at this early stage of understanding and confirming God's call.
- **The Pursuit of Christ** is designed for those who have already started thinking and actively working with God in this training process for full-time ministry. This second set of questions helps assess and improve your preparations for full-time ministry.

These are areas where we should expect God to train us actively. The closer we work with Him in these areas, the easier and smoother the training will be. If we neglect any of these areas, we can expect to face significant challenges ahead. You should get a

long piece of paper and start jotting down your observations on a timeline. Then you will begin to see where you are heading!

# The Starting Point

## Discerning and Affirming God's 'Call' on Your Life for Full-time Ministry

If you have recently started seriously considering part- or full-time ministry, you are probably trying to think through the many implications that God's call has on your life. We have provided numerous questions to help you gain a broader understanding of your call and the overall process of God's training program.

### Clarifying the 'call'

- What drives you to pursue full-time ministry?
- Is this a new desire, or has it been there for a while?
- Where and when did it start?
- Write down as clearly as possible what God's 'call' for you means.

### Seeking direction

- Have you prayed and fasted to confirm and clarify God's guidance for your life?
- What specific confirmations and clarifications regarding His will has He revealed to you?
- Have you talked with your church leaders about your God-given burden?
- Do you, church leaders, parents, or others around you, have concerns? What are they? Do you take them seriously?
- What obstacles have you encountered?

### Parental blessing

- What do your parents think about your decision to go into full-time ministry?
- What are their concerns? What could be causing those concerns?

God communicates with us through our parents, even when they are older or unbelievers. They may not fully understand what we are saying, but we must honor them by respecting their advice and taking it seriously.

### Marital unity

- If you're married, does your spouse share your vision?
- Did you communicate your burden clearly to them?

Both husband and wife need to share the same willingness to serve the Lord.

As a husband, have you loved your wife and strengthened your marriage so she feels the security and love needed to share your vision? If not, wait and deepen your commitment to establish your marriage properly. Your wife's eager participation is essential.

As a wife, have you talked with your husband about both of your spiritual 'dreams'? You need to pray and wait for God to bring them to pass. Often, they are fulfilled only later in life. In the meantime, consider how you can be a 'helpmate' to the way God is guiding him and explore how God might want you involved right now where you are.



### **Recognizing experiences**

- Are you serving right now? Where?
- List the actual ministries you are involved in (planning, counseling, visiting, teaching, serving, etc.).
- List other ministries you've participated in that are not mentioned above.
- What spiritual gifts have you utilized in the ministries mentioned above?
- Which ministries do you enjoy being involved with the most?

### **Training in God's Word**

- Have you personally studied God's Word seriously? List the studies you've been involved in and when they occurred.
- Have you received discipleship training or mentoring from someone else? Please list when it occurred and specify the level of training, such as beginner, growth/overcomer, or specialized training.
- Have you completed any formal training programs? When did they take place? How did they benefit you?

### **Your spiritual life with God**

- Do you meet with the Lord every day through prayer and reflective reading of His Word?
- Are there days or times when you're not consistent? Why is that?
- Do you keep a spiritual journal of what He is saying to you?

### **Formation of concrete plans towards the goal**

- What actions have you taken so far toward serving Him in full-time or part-time ministry?
- Are there specific skills or degrees required for work in your area of interest?

- What barriers are between you and reaching that goal?
- How much time will it take to reach that goal? How much money?
- What milestones have you already achieved?

Don't get frustrated by 'closed' doors. Focus on the steps you can take. Pray for guidance on how to overcome those final barriers to reach your goal. Remember, God allows these obstacles to strengthen our faith and give us a chance to grow. This is our training.

## **Learning from others**

This is a critical time for those considering entering ministry. Paul says it is a 'fine work' that the overseer is involved in (1 Timothy 3:1). We are proud of God's exceptional work in our hearts, but this should not lead us to believe we are fully ready for ministry. God will use others to train us, but we must learn how to learn from them and avoid letting our pride get in the way.

Probably each of us has seen those individuals who say God calls them to serve Him, and yet something makes us wonder if this is true. Brothers and sisters often hint that they might not be fit, at least at this point, for this ministry.

It would help if these individuals spoke more directly to us about their concerns: "Bob, I appreciate your heart to serve the Lord, but to be effective, you need to work on your relationship with spiritual authority, such as your pastors. I sense there might be spiritual pride that could ruin your work in the years ahead."

Many brothers and sisters are so careful not to hurt us that they end up not being helpful. They might 'hint', "Hi Bob, how are you going to live?" They might be trying to caution you that you should not do something out of concern. Or, "Bob, maybe you should wait a bit before going." They might be thinking specifically that you need to work on your marriage.

Since you are the one being called, you need to pay close attention to the suggestions, 'hints', and warnings people give. Some comments can be ignored, but value those that come closest to your experience, even if they seem to threaten your calling. Usually, people aren't questioning the calling itself as much as their preparation. They either can't bring themselves to identify their concerns or don't know how to phrase their feelings and observations effectively. Generally, the more immature and insecure someone is, the less sensitive they might be to others' suggestions.

If God, however, has placed those people around you with those suggestions, then we should pay close attention to them, even if it's a little child. Comments about our calling, positive or negative, are there for us to consider.

Comments about missing out on the world can be easily dismissed. Often, they come from others who favor the things of this world. They feel uncomfortable with you, your burden, and your standards. We need to develop a good biblical mindset towards these concerns about how God will take care of us. People will often, throughout our lives, openly state or quietly suggest that we ought to provide better or differently for the needs of our families.

Other comments, however, should be welcomed. Write them down. Ask yourself, "Why are people saying such comments, positive or negative?" Usually, the positive comments are those words from God encouraging us on our path. Do not interpret a compliment to mean that you do not need to improve!

If we are clever, we should learn from these comments. They might come from someone who doesn't fully understand us. If we get easily offended by their comments, we will miss the chance to clarify and build a good relationship. Usually, though, people understand us more than we think. They often share points from their own experiences.

- It's going to be tough.
- Are you confident you're up for it?
- Laughing, I said, "I bet there are some 'hot' conversations between you and your spouse!"
- "You will come back in two years."
- Seminary training destroys people's hearts.

Tackle each one of them. They are likely thinking of something when they mention it. They might recall a past defeat or notice a particular problem in your life that they fear could develop. They may see you as lazy and wonder if you'll ever be able to persevere. They won't say they think you're lazy, but instead wonder if God is calling you.

If something isn't clear, ask them why they made a particular statement. Learn from what they have learned. Treat it as if God is offering sound advice or warnings. Take an extra step and ask, "What do you suggest I should work on personally?" Or, if it's someone you admire, ask if you could meet with them once or twice to hear more about their concerns and suggestions. This is how you find good mentors. It's probably not wise to commit long-term to meeting someone until you see real results from your time together.

This is God's training time for us. Learn to listen to the people God brings into your life and pay attention to a particular matter. Don't dismiss their words too quickly. Again, there will be those sent from Satan to discourage you. Nehemiah and others experienced this. Not everyone who speaks to you is trying to discourage you, even if their comments seem somewhat negative. They are, in their way, trying to help you by subtly warning you, even if they don't clearly express what they are thinking.

You might respond to one of these statements by saying, "Thank you so much for your caution. I will try to work on this area. Do you have any suggestions on what I could improve? I would welcome any suggestions because I want to prepare myself for God's work." Or you could even proactively ask, "If God somehow helps me in this area, do you see any other areas I could also work on? I want to be God's effective servant."

These kinds of statements not only take pride away from our hearts but also enable those around us to become our helpers, guides, and even mentors.

### **Final Thought**

Learn to keep a spiritual journal that tracks God's guidance in your life. It serves as a place to remember what God has said and is saying to you. This is a time to clarify your calling, recognize areas for growth, and discern the way forward. Through the spiritual journal, you can see how far God has brought you and stay focused on upcoming challenges. It's also a time to enjoy and record what God has done for you.

Look at this training period as a special time when He will actively work in and through your life. A calling is, after all, a special joint venture in which He has called you to work alongside Him. He promises to equip and use you for that work.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:12-14).<sup>1</sup>

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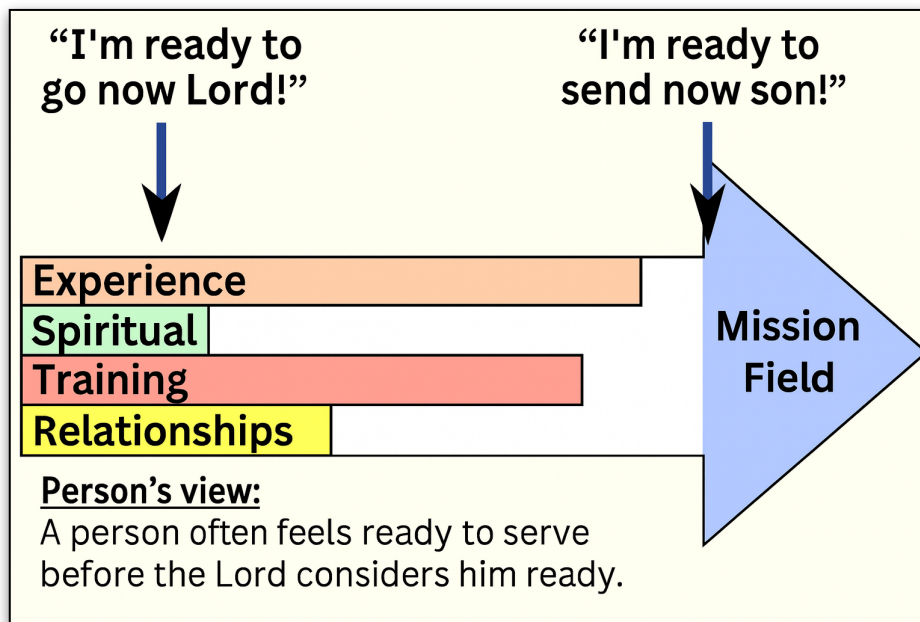
<sup>1</sup> Bible quotes from NASB unless otherwise noted.

# The Pursuit of Christ

## Understanding God's Training Program for those in Ministry

Training for a full-time ministry is an ongoing process. We must continuously prepare our hearts to serve the Lord rightly. There is always room for growth. Jesus said, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Therefore, we need to listen attentively to the Lord for wisdom, courage, strength, and endurance.

God's training program might look a bit different after we've been serving the Lord for a while, but in many ways, what God has been doing remains the same. God's purifying goals for us require lifelong discipleship training. To be an effective leader, we need to be faithful disciples.



Training is essential for those in ministry. We might see a big difference between training before full-time ministry and afterward, but the Lord doesn't. We never graduate from His school of training until we reach heaven's shores. He shapes us so we can bear more fruit. It's important for us to better understand how He trains us.

King Saul refused God's training. He was qualified in human eyes (tall, big, and strong) but not in God's eyes. God wanted to work with him, and He did, but Saul repeatedly rejected God's training. This attitude eventually cost him his chance to serve God and others.

In many cases, a candidate for full-time ministry considers themselves qualified for service before God does. This overconfidence likely stems from a combination of several factors: pride, a misunderstanding of holiness and God, and a calling from God.

It is easy to mistake a call from God for an appointment. A call should be viewed as a boost of confidence to guide us in a specific direction where we can serve Him more effectively in the future.

God, however, is the best evaluator of our strengths and weaknesses. There are many tools to assess a person’s qualifications for ministry, but most of them fail. They often focus on graduation from a formal training program and the soundness of one’s doctrine. Although helpful, they tend to fall short for those who rely solely on these standards. The main reason is the decline of the family and the resulting lack of personal character.

Personal problems are worsened by the lack of ‘hands-on’ training, which is greatly improved by role models and personal challenges. God looked beyond David’s older, more mature brothers and chose the smallest boy out in the field shepherding because he had a heart after God.

We need to learn how to properly assess our qualifications for service. How should we do this? We must avoid the tendency to focus only on what we know or have accomplished. Instead, we should concentrate on the outcomes of ministry, personal growth, and relationships within the church. Due to the emphasis on academic training, we often ask the wrong questions. Here are some good and bad questions.

<b>Bad Questions</b>	<b>Good Questions</b>
What do you know about God’s Word?	How do you show your love for God’s Word?
How do you feel about your past ministry?	What spiritual fruit have you seen in your spiritual service? Be specific.
How long did you lead the youth group?	Have you trained a new convert? How?
How has your marriage been? How long have you been married?	About how many times do you have friction with your spouse each week? From a scale of 1 to 10 (10=worse), rate those times.
How long have you attended church there?	Do you have tension with anyone in the church? If so, explain.

We need a clearer understanding of God's complete training program for our lives. Although we might focus on specific qualities necessary for ministry, we will take a more strategic approach here.

Here are four key areas of training that anyone aiming for missions should focus on. This is similar for those entering the pastorate, except for the aspect of raising support. Each area will be briefly introduced here and explained further below.

- **Experience/training:** Acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue full-time ministry.
- **Character/spiritual:** Develop and sustain the moral character and effective spiritual disciplines necessary to foster a close and intimate relationship with the Lord.
- **Mission/support:** Establish the appropriate contacts with a mission or denominational agency and gather the necessary prayer, financial, and other support.
- **Church relationships:** Maintain good and proper relationships with members of your home church. Ensure clear communication is happening.

Neglecting any area can lead to problems and misunderstandings. Undoubtedly, areas of deficiency will eventually be revealed and cause damage to our ministries and lives.

God wants to prepare us properly so He can work more effectively through our lives. He did not want Peter and the others to stumble, and He does not want us to fail either. Effective training results in long-term success—just what God your Father desires for you.

# (1) Evaluating Our Experience and Training

This initial category of experience and training covers all the skills and knowledge necessary to start a ministry.

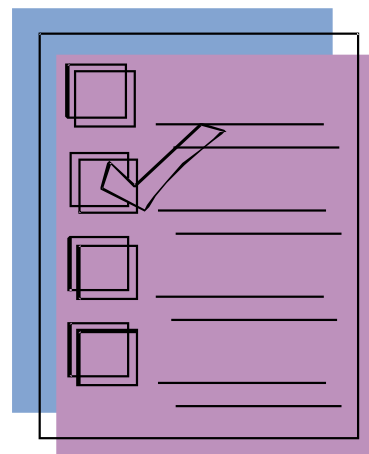
I heard a missionary share that after seminary and about seven years on the field, he still didn't know how to disciple or start churches. I would guess this isn't a rare problem. I've faced it too. I remember clearly wondering how I was going to train new believers in a Taiwan church plant. That was no time to start thinking about these issues!

The training we need is often different from what we actually receive. Don't assume that a seminary degree gives the graduate all the necessary attitudes, moral qualities, skills, and insights into God's Word needed to start effective ministry. **Instead, we adopt another approach that considers what a person needs in a specific ministry situation to be successful.**

If a person wants to be a church planter, for example, what does he need to know to properly start and grow a church? A whole list of skills will come into play, including evangelizing and discipling. This is a good start, but it still remains superficial.

Evangelism should be considered in both personal and public settings, involving children and adults, as well as hostile individuals and cults. Recognizing these specific contexts helps us assess whether we have enough experience and skill development to handle the challenges we will encounter in different situations. For example, taking a course or two on evangelism without having personal evangelism experience is quite inadequate.

## Church Planter Needs:



Let me give another example. We all understand that we need a strong knowledge of God's Word. However, we often study books about the Bible instead of studying the Word of God directly. God's people must realize the importance of communicating with God through His Word and learn how to do it. The Lord speaks to our hearts through His Word. This is how He strengthens and prepares us. If we haven't learned this before ministry, then why are we so confident it will develop later?

Jesus' ministry was greatly influenced by God's Word. We need the same. Practicing meditation on God's Word is essential for spiritual growth and effective service. Of course, different denominations or mission agencies still have their set of qualifications,

and it is wise to consider them. But we must remember the Lord's qualifications for effective ministry.

### **Evaluating the needs of a potential ministry**

Get a piece of paper and write down at the top which ministry you think the Lord might be guiding you toward. Be as specific as you can, but don't worry if it's something general like "cross-cultural missions." As you go through this exercise, you will start to notice areas where you need more information.

Write down all the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and spiritual disciplines needed to be effective in carrying out that ministry. This is a valuable exercise for those in seminary. Many students take expensive courses without ever considering what special training they require. The list might be long, but don't let that discourage you. Some suggestions might relate to personal character, and that's okay. Just jot those down in that category.

The list will continually be updated and refined. We should read and converse with others to deepen our understanding of what a particular position might entail. For example, we might request an hour with a cross-cultural missionary to learn more about what he or she considers important for effective overseas ministry. Don't just accept generic answers. Ask how well prepared they felt for a specific task and how they could have been better equipped. Carefully integrate that knowledge into your own list. We will find that we are quite prepared in some areas but need much more training in others.

This list will help you focus on and prioritize the training you need. It will also serve as your list of prayer requests. "God, if you want me to serve those people, I need You to help me replace my anger with Your kindness and patience." Think of this list as God's training plan for you. Below are several categories, each with their own questions. They can help you better identify areas where we need further training. Feel free to add other questions to suit your situation.

### **Ministry Skills**

- What ministry skills will you require in your first four years of service?
- What ministry skills have you developed through your past experience?
- What ministry skills are you currently missing?
- What practical measures have you taken to develop these skills?
- Do you know anyone with skills or experience that you could learn from?

## **Bible Knowledge**

- How many times have you read the Bible?
- Have you learned and practiced the inductive Bible study method?
- Which Bible books have you studied and meditated on for more than 10 hours?
- Approximately how many Bible verses have you memorized?
- Meditation is essential for successful ministry (Joshua 1, Rom 12:1-2). In what ways have you incorporated meditation into your own spiritual life?

## **Business Skills** (for those in tent-making)

- What qualifications do you possess to serve?
- Are they accepted and well regarded by your prospective host country?
- Are there any special programs that could boost your effectiveness?
- Have you found a way to maximize your 'free' time to serve?
- What lessons have you learned from others who are now doing what you aspire to do?
- Have you mentored people at various stages of maturity?

## (2) Evaluating Our Character and Spiritual Disciplines

Develop and maintain the moral character and spiritual disciplines necessary to foster a close relationship with the Lord and to carry out effective ministry.

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

A person can learn a lot about how to carry out different ministries but still be completely unprepared in their personal and spiritual lives. Perhaps you have met some skilled individuals who have poor marriages, worry, don't seek the Lord in prayer, or have unresolved issues with lust. These personal flaws have, and will continue to be, exploited by the evil one to ultimately ruin a person's ministry.

The Bible emphasizes personal growth for a Christian over skills. It primarily focuses on being filled with and led by the Holy Spirit, rather than achieving a specific level of growth. Without a strong moral foundation, the ministry lacks significance and causes people to stumble.

Character flaws expose issues in our relationship with God and others. It's heartbreaking to see ministries and missionaries with poor marriages, anger issues, or relational struggles with fellow missionaries. Their personal lives undermine their ministries. These problems should be addressed by learning to apply God's Word to build strong marriages, ministries, and lives. (See my [‘Reaching Beyond Mediocrity’](#) book, which offers many practical worksheets to help guide you through the process.) Most of these issues can and should be resolved before entering full-time ministry.

There is both the initial process of receiving a Christ-filled life and then the ongoing effort to maintain it. We will focus on the first aspect of developing moral character. Remember that our greatest challenge will be to identify problems we previously did not notice. We are often blind to our most vulnerable areas. It is crucial that we approach with an eager, humble heart to serve the Lord and let Him reveal those areas.

### Personal character development

- In which areas of your life has God led to significant growth?
- How has God helped you develop in those areas?
- Identify the three most important areas of character development needed in your life.
- Ask two or more good friends, including your spouse, for areas where you need personal development.

- Create a plan to address each item. Use a spiritual journal to monitor your progress. Find at least one mentor in a specific area to enhance your growth.

## **Intimacy with God**

- How much time do you spend in prayer with the Lord each day?
- How much time do you think you should spend?
- Do you look forward to your times with Him?
- What importance do you place on meeting the Lord each day? How do you know?
- How do you respond when devotional times aren't very exciting?

Knowledge of the Bible isn't the same as closeness with God. Prayer time can be religious but not fruitful. Time spent isn't the same as 'good time spent.' Without spiritual habits established before full-time ministry, it's likely you won't have them afterwards.

Many believe that Christian ministry offers more personal time with God. The truth is the opposite. Many busy missionaries and pastors have been 'burned out' simply because they became too busy to meet with God.

## **Issues in marriage**

The way we treat our spouse reflects our beliefs and relationship with the Lord. Marriage problems are serious and need to be addressed. God has solutions. He desires a husband and wife to be close, happy, and peaceful. He doesn't want them to argue but to talk and seek His face together.

Rate your marriage on a scale of 1 to 10 (best). Then, ask your spouse to do the same.

- List any issues you disagree on. How do you resolve these disagreements?
- Do you lash out in anger to get your way?
- If you have a quarrel, do you work to restore the relationship? Do you know how to do it? How long does it take you?
- Do you hold onto bitterness or resentment toward each other? If so, you need to learn forgiveness (which is the core of the gospel – grace).
- As a husband, have you learned to devote yourself to caring for your wife? How do you know? Do you spiritually lead the home?
- As a wife, have you learned to submit to your husband or do you still resent his decisions?
- Are you happy with your spouse, or do you wonder how much better it would be if you were married to someone else?

[‘Building a Great Marriage’](#) is a great marriage resource with study questions for couples to work through.

### **Issues in single living**

Marriage offers a unique testing ground that singles don't experience. If you're single, you can gain insight into your heart by observing how you relate to your parents and roommates. A single person is evaluated by how they respect parents and others in authority, as well as how they behave in relationships with others.

- As a young person, do you humble your will to do what your parents say? How do you respond to them when you disagree? Can you trust God with their judgments?
- As a single person, do you properly honor your parents?
- Have you worked through your singleness with God? Are you satisfied with what God provides?
- Do you feel a little resentful when you see young couples or families with small children?
- Have you learned to manage your sexual urges?

### **Parenting**

Many parents doubt they can raise godly children with the right attitudes. They rely on modern methods instead of biblical instruction. Remember how an elder must keep “his children under control with all dignity” (1 Timothy 3:4).

The key to effective family ministry, in terms of both time and witness, is to train your children to obey as God instructs us.

- Do your children listen to you? (How many times do you have to tell them to do something?)
- Do you have a strong relationship with your children?
- How frequently do you pray and read God’s Word with your children?
- What means do you use to reconcile your children when they are in conflict? Does it include apologizing and forgiving?
- Do other people enjoy spending time with your children?

The Bible clearly addresses not only how parents should discipline their children but also the principles behind it. *Principles & Practices of Biblical Parenting* is a free resource that helps us understand the biblical mindset and apply it practically in our lives.

### (3) Evaluating Our Progress with Mission Agencies & Support Organizations

**Establish the right contacts with a mission or denominational agency and gather the necessary prayer, financial, and other support.**

If someone plans to pursue full-time ministry, whether on a remote mission field or a local pastorate, there are specific steps to follow. When the process is not well understood—something that often happens—delays tend to occur. Fortunately, mission agencies excel at helping potential candidates understand this process. However, candidates often do not communicate their intentions clearly enough or start the process early enough.

While the process is clear to some, others, often because of a weak church background, have no idea how it works. That was true for me when God called me during my freshman year at the University of Maine. God could and did guide me, but it would have been much easier if someone had given me an overview of the process. Let's try to do that here.

Steps to Serving	Explanations
<b>A call to full-time ministry</b>	God gives you an inward sense of call to serve Him. (This, of course, could be earlier or later on in life.) Although it comes about in various ways, it always leaves a sense of burden or drive to guide the person in the direction of ministry.
<b>Affirmation by others</b>	People will observe how God is working through you and will motivate you to serve more.
<b>Recognition by church leaders</b>	Church leaders will give you increased responsibilities in the church.
<b>Personal growth and increased service</b>	You will respond to these matters by growing closer to the Lord and seeking opportunities to serve.
<b>Suggestion for further training</b>	Unfortunately, the church often suggests that you study at a school for full-time ministry. Ideally, they should first provide you with as much training as possible in the local church.
<b>Specialized training</b>	Formal seminary or Bible school training is usually required, but there are less expensive training programs available with proper oversight and deployment.
<b>Link up</b>	Connect with the right mission or ministry organization carefully, like choosing a spouse.
<b>Internship, first ministry</b>	Participate in ministry or internship programs with mentors who can observe and support your personal and ministry growth.

<b>Deputation</b>	Raise support for full-time or specialized ministry, pay off loans, confirm home church, strengthen church relationships, and consider possible ordination.
<b>Appointment</b>	Find the specific location where you can serve with a particular ministry in mind.

Here are several more specific questions you can ask yourself to help you prepare better.<sup>23</sup>

### **Seek home church support and confirmation for this direction**

- Have you talked to your church/pastor/mission director about your desire to minister?
- Has the church scheduled a time to discuss this 'call' with you? What are their thoughts?
- Has the church asked you to take responsibility for any ministry?
- Have you completed it faithfully? Do they believe so?
- Has the church talked more about training?

### **Pay off all loans as soon as possible**

- What loans or financial obligations do you currently have?
- Have you developed a concrete plan to pay these loans off before the ministry?
- If so, consider how you've been doing. How can you improve further?
- If not, develop a plan with the needed guidelines to help you minimize this time of waiting.

### **Contact potential mission organizations and seminary trainings**

- Which potential missionary organizations or training institutes have you reached out to?
- What did you like or dislike about the different organizations?
- What specific suggestions did they give? Have you implemented any of them?
- Have you checked in with any organization?
- What concerns do you have about this organization? Have you shared them with them?

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<sup>2</sup> In the Western world, if someone serves outside their local church, it is nearly impossible to do so without costly and formal specialized training, although this is gradually changing for older candidates. Conversely, world missions require better, more adaptable, and much less expensive training programs.

<sup>3</sup> We propose that ordination should come after a testing of ministry rather than before it.

- Have you spoken to people in this organization? What advantages and disadvantages do they mention about it?

### **Research potential training programs at a seminary or elsewhere**

- What type of training is required by the mission organization?
- What type of training is needed for your expected area of service?
- Have you researched seminaries or other training options?
- What do you hope to achieve from formal training?
- Have you reviewed the classes and class descriptions you're eligible for to see if you can take the necessary courses?
- Have you talked to other students about receiving specific training in this area?

We suggest you spend some time thinking about what you want from a training program. Just a few days ago, I spoke with someone who said that although they attended a seminary focused on missions, they never learned to disciple.

Much time and money are spent in this area of life. The goals of the institution are rarely the goals you personally have. Remember to supplement any formal training with God's training, which always involves shaping your character, understanding God through His Word, and acquiring skills and knowledge.

## **(4) Evaluating Our Communication with our Home Church**

**Maintain healthy and proper relationships with members of your home church. Ensure clear communication is maintained.**

Something is seriously wrong with our training. Many churches are filled with divisive people and focus more on church politics than on following the Lord. Others have experienced real church splits. You're rare if you don't know of such a church.

The Lord, however, wants to raise up leaders like Jesus who are bold yet tender toward Him. The modern spirit of individualism often prevents us from waiting on God when tension arises with those in authority over us.

Part of the problem is that we don't know how to relate to those in authority over us or to rely on the Lord for effective ministry. Because we move around so often, we can easily avoid 'conflict' until we are out in the mission field! That is a mistake.

The Lord is very passionate about training us in this area. Even Jesus' disciples faced this challenge! Let's try to simply describe this training process and then ask some questions to help you reflect on how you can connect with others.

### **Learning from relationships**

Our hearts are shaped by the relationships around us. Learning how to build good relationships should happen within the family as we grow up. In recent generations, many haven't received this training. The problem has gotten worse because few grow up in large families. Others have never seen a good family model. Some don't know how to biblically (rightly) respect authority and care for those under their charge.

The church is also a good place to learn important lessons. For example, when we realize there's a better way to do something, do we follow our own advice or the advice of our elders? Do we see our opinion as equal to or more important than the authority of those in leadership? How do we handle these situations? Do we become resentful or speak out against the leaders?

By respecting our leaders, we can learn from them, even if they make poor decisions. When we learn from them, they will motivate us to excel and pursue ministry. If we insist on doing things our own way, relationships within the church may become strained.

The scriptures instruct us to honor our elders. How we respond to them shows our humility or pride. We must trust the Lord with our big dreams and plans, even when it seems like what we're facing is a dull or ineffective plan suggested by someone else.

This is the time to wait on the Lord and seek His guidance on how to fulfill His ministry. He will wonderfully open doors for us.

### **Respecting your elders**

- Do you attend the church business meetings? Why do they hold them this way?
- Have you ever sat in on an elder, deacon, or coworker's meeting? What did you think?
- How do you react when you think you have a better method?
- What do you do if church leaders ask you to take on a smaller task? How do you respond?
- Do you trust the guidance of the church leaders? What assures you of this?
- Have you discovered the secret to honoring your elders whom you disagree with?

### **Communicate well with your leaders**

- How familiar are you with your church leaders? Name them and remember to pray for them often.
- What specific methods have you used to get to know them better? Make some additional plans.
- Have you shared with your church leaders how God has been working in your heart and life?
- How do they react to your interest in missions or other full-time service? Are they hesitant, moving too slowly, disagreeing with you, or affirming you? What is your response? Why?
- Have you asked them where you could improve your training? Ask and learn from them!

### **Seek accountability and mentorship to keep the vision clear**

- Have you ever had a mentor?
- Is someone currently mentoring you who understands your burden for ministry? Have you shared your full vision with them?
- Have you shared with him or her the different obstacles you face in reaching that goal? Make a plan and identify where they can help you.

### **Summary**

The most effective minister is the one who does not focus on merely completing certain qualifications for the ministry but on consistently pursuing the Lord throughout their training. Persistent pursuit of the Lord is necessary because of our sinful hearts,

forgetfulness, and the temptations we face in life. Seeking the Lord is also vital because of the nature of our relationship with God.

Moses saw the burning bush at the beginning of his ministry, but that was not enough to sustain him throughout his service to the Lord. The Lord knew there was much more to knowing God and dedicated His life to seeking a deeper relationship with Him (Exodus 33:13-14).

“Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee, so that I may find favor in Thy sight” (Exodus 33:13).

An effective ministry is built on strengthening our relationship with a gracious God. Therefore, preparing ourselves for fruitful ministry is an ongoing journey. While there are standards and qualifications to meet, true effectiveness comes from maintaining a continual relationship with God through Christ. The four main areas mentioned earlier each help us draw nearer to Him. Developing skills helps us do things God’s way. Building character enables us to lead a more holy life, bringing us closer to God and helping us listen carefully to Him. Good support keeps us aware of the larger context in which God works through His entire body. Healthy relationships allow us to enjoy working with others through Christ’s love.

How exciting it is to realize that the call to serve Him is also an invitation to get to know Him better!

# Appendix 1 Empty Timeline Chart

## Charting Your Steps into Service

### Inward Direction

"If any man aspires to" (1 Timothy 3:1)

Charting your desire and willingness to be involved in God's service.

### 3) Identify 3 next steps

- Explore missions; read mission biographies
- Develop experience by exercising skills
- Develop character & relational skills
- Spiritual journal; God and you.
- Commit yourself to mission/church.
- Devised a plan of training with mentor
- Speak with mission agencies now.
- Disciple others.
- Maintain excellent daily quiet times.
- Take up extra opportunities to serve.
- Improve relationships with your parents.
- Pray specifically to overcome obstacles.
- Privately study God's Word in depth.
- Confess and repent from sin.
- Commit to right living.

*Inward conviction must be accompanied by outward confirmation. Both are crucial parts to discerning God's will for your participation in missions. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)*

### 2) Confirming a calling

- Contact mission boards
- Short term mission trips
- Active in evangelism
- Received special training
- Meet mission committee
- Disciple others
- Sent by church
- Regular spiritual disciplines
- Regularly pray for lost
- Attended seminary
- Raise support teams
- Other ....

### Outward Confirmation

"An overseer, then must be ..." (1 Timothy 3:2)

Gaining an objective assessment of your call into His service.

Paul J. Bucknell & Hugo Cheng



# Appendix 2 Sample Timeline Chart

## Charting Your Steps into Service

### Inward Direction

"If any man aspires to" (1 Timothy 3:1)

Charting your desire and willingness to be involved in God's service.

### 3) Identify 3 next steps

- Explore missions; read mission biographies
- Develop experience by exercising skills
- Develop character & relational skills
- Spiritual journal; God and you.
- Commit yourself to mission/church.
- Devise a plan of training with mentor
- Speak with mission agencies now.
- Disciple others.
- Maintain excellent daily quiet times.
- Take up extra opportunities to serve.
- Improve relationships with your parents.
- Pray specifically to overcome obstacles.
- Privately study God's Word in depth.
- Confess and repent from sin.
- Commit to right living.

- #### 1) Sense a calling
- Born
  - Saved
  - Burden to serve
  - Mission's Conference
  - Past experience
  - Scripture passage
  - Preacher's message
  - Parent's encouragement
  - Other ....

**Clarify guidance.**  
Talk to parents more clearly after significant prayer and fasting.

*Inward conviction must be accompanied by outward confirmation. Both are crucial parts to discerning God's will for your participation in missions. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)*



- #### Directions for Chart
- (1) Explain the two aspects of seeking and confirming God's will for a person in missions (Inward and outward confirmation). (10%)
  - (2) First fill in lines on top half. Circle relevant items and draw to time line. Add a date if possible. (10%)
  - (3) Then fill in below the time line. Circle confirmation of gifts and recognition by others. Draw lines with dates if relevant. (30%)
  - (4) Highlight two or three next steps they are willing to follow up on from the right. (30%)
  - (5) Together close in prayer for these things. (20%)

**Character training.**  
Get angry easily.

- #### 2) Confirming a calling
- Contact mission boards
  - Short term mission trips
  - Active in evangelism
  - Received special training
  - Meet mission committee
  - Disciple others
  - Sent by church
  - Regular spiritual disciplines.
  - Regularly pray for lost
  - Attended seminary
  - Raise support teams
  - Other ....

**Further training.**  
- Research schools  
- See what mission boards suggest is needed

Gaining an objective assessment of your call into His service.  
**Outward Confirmation**  
"An overseer, then must be ..." (1 Timothy 3:2)

Paul J. Bucknell & Hugo Cheng



# Appendix 3: Author Introduction

Paul J. Bucknell, an active writer and international trainer, has authored more than ten books on relevant Christian training topics. His books are based on the belief that the more we establish our lives on the truth of God's Word, the stronger and more vibrant our faith and lives become. During his international seminars for pastors and church leaders, Paul uses God's Word and powerfully applies His truth to various aspects of Christian living. As the founder of Biblical Foundations for Freedom, Paul offers printed and digital media, along with video training courses and ongoing website ministries, [www.foundationsforfreedom.net](http://www.foundationsforfreedom.net) | [bffbible.org](http://bffbible.org) . Paul and his wife, Linda, are still raising eight children and currently enjoy their two grandchildren.