

Tool #5: Theological Principles for Ministry

Following are ten foundational biblical principles for the church's calling to holistic ministry. Read the principles, then discuss or journal on the reflection questions at the end.

1. **Following Jesus means imitating his example of love in action (Eph. 5:1-2)**
 - As dearly loved children of God for whom Jesus gave his life, we are called and empowered to follow Christ's example of sacrificial servanthood (Matt. 16:24, John 14:12, 2 Cor. 5:14-15, Phil 2:5-8).
 - Jesus commissions his followers (John 20:21) to continue his kingdom work of calling people to repentance (Matt. 4:17) and restoring those who are broken in body, soul and spirit (Luke 4:18-19).
2. **If we love God, we will love people "in actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18, 4:7-8)**
 - The Great Commandment and the Great Commission link passionate love of God, servant-love of neighbor, and the mandate to make disciples (Matt. 22:38-39, 28:19).
 - Neighbors to love include those who need mercy (Luke 10:36-37), who are sinners (Matt. 9:10-13), who are in distress (James 1:27), who are different from us (Col. 3:11), and who are enemies (Matt. 5:44).
3. **Proclaiming and demonstrating God's love in action go hand-in-hand. (Luke 9:1-2)**
 - Jesus' ministry modeled integration of word and deed—preaching good news, healing the sick, and breaking the power of evil (Matt. 9:35-36, Luke 7:20-22).
 - Actions without words are insufficient (Rom. 10:14), but words without actions lack credibility (Jam. 2:15-18). The church's good deeds amplify its witness, drawing people to the light (Matt. 5:16, Acts 2:42-47).
4. **God values each person as His precious creation (Ps. 139:13-16)**
 - Each person has worth as God's unique handiwork, made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), beloved by God (Rom. 5:8) and destined for eternity (John 3:16), regardless of their social status (Jam. 2:1-4).
 - Jesus showed us how to love and value others as whole persons—caring for their physical and spiritual needs (Matt. 9:1-6), seeing their potential (Luke 19:1-10) and welcoming their gifts (Luke 7:37-50).
5. **God has a special heart for those who are poor and vulnerable. (Jeremiah 22:16)**
 - God identifies with those in need: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord" (Prov. 19:17). If we love God, we will share God's concern for those who are suffering (Isa. 58:1-12, Jer. 22:15-16, Matt. 25:40).
 - God's anger is aroused by those who take advantage of the powerless for their own profit (Isa. 10:1-3, Amos 8:4-7) as well as by those who have plenty, yet neglect those in need (Eze. 16:49, Luke 16:19-25).
6. **God desires His people to cultivate healthy communities and just societies. (Jeremiah 29:7)**
 - God created a good world (Gen. 1:31). Though fallen, the world continues to be the object of God's love and redeeming actions (John 3:16, Rom. 8:21, Col. 1:19-20), and will one day be renewed (Rev. 21:1-5).
 - Inspired by God's good design for creation, God's people pursue *shalom* (Godly wholeness, peace, well-being) in their social context (Gen. 1:28, Isa. 61:1-4, 65:17-25, Ps. 72, Mic. 4:1-7, Rom. 12:).
7. **God's people are to be an instrument of blessing to the world. (Genesis 12:2)**
 - God's people are commanded to be open-handed toward those in need (Deut. 15:10-11, 2 Cor. 9:8), to practice justice and compassion (Micah 6:8, Zech. 7:9-10), and to be "rich in good deeds" (1 Tim. 6:18).
 - Like salt and light, the church has a transforming influence (Matt. 5:13-14). As the "aroma of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15), the church offers a taste of the goodness of God's kingdom to be fulfilled in the life to come.
8. **The church's ministry is incarnational. (John 1:14)**
 - We serve an incarnational, relational God who chooses to work through relationships (John 17:21). We share God's love and power not just by giving aid, but also by giving of ourselves in Christ (2 Cor. 4:5).
 - Following Jesus' example, the church is called to enter into human brokenness and redemptively embody God's presence (Phil. 2:1-8). We love people on God's behalf (2 Cor. 5:20).
9. **The church's ministry is the work of the kingdom of God. (Luke 10:9)**
 - God's kingdom is where God's will is done and God is glorified (Dan. 7:14, Rev. 1:5-6) The kingdom brings repentance (Matt. 4:17), redemption (Col. 1:13-14) and transformation (2 Cor. 3:18)
 - As people sent to proclaim and model God's reign (Matt. 10:7, John 17:18), our mission is guided by the question, "What does it mean for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven?" (Matt. 6:10)
10. **The Spirit empowers us to participate in ministry. (Ephesians 2:10)**
 - God gives each believer gifts to share within and beyond the church (1 Cor. 12:7, Eph. 2:10, 1 Pet. 4:10).
 - We rely on God for the wisdom and endurance (Col. 1:9-11), power (Eph. 3:17-18), authority (Matt 28:18-19), strength (1 Peter 4:11), hope (Rom. 15:13), and love (1 Thess. 3:12) to be fruitful.

(Tool #5, continued) Theological Principles for Ministry (continued)

Questions for reflection on the theological principles:

- a) Are there any principles you would add to this list?
- b) Which of these ten principles resonate most strongly with you at this time? Which are you not sure about? Which do you find personally challenging?
- c) Highlight the principles that you currently see embodied in your church.
- d) Put a question mark next to any principle you think your church may not embrace. Does the church have a different theological view? Or does your church agree in principle but struggle to put it into practice?
- e) Select one of the biblical principles or Scriptures that you will seek to make a focus of meditation, prayer and practice in your own life. What would it look like to increasingly apply this principle in your context?