

WHEN ANOINTED MEN STRUGGLE

Cornelius Staples

SAMPLE

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CHAPTER 1: WHEN ANOINTED MEN STRUGGLE WITH MINISTRY

Testimony of Ministry

When I was fifteen years old, I was the typical youth doing everyday things: going to school, playing sports, interested in girls, and playing video games. My life was pretty much the normal life for a teenager. However, it was during this time my life also changed forever.

It all began as my family was introduced to a new local church. I had been raised within the church, but with this particular congregation, my siblings and I took delight in their children's programs. The name of this house of worship was the New Mission Missionary Church.

This was where I accepted Jesus as my savior. I was so proud to have given my life to Christ, but don't get me wrong; for the next few years I was still the typical teenager. This meant that although I was a young evangelical, I still had the same juvenile problems. Nevertheless, it was within this particular congregation where my life changed. There was a senior pastor who also came from New Mission and often ministered there during the church's annual anniversaries. When he preached, he often said one particular phrase year after year: "It was at the cross where I first saw the light but it was at New Mission where I first saw the cross!" In a way, being raised within this church, I agree. It was at the cross where I first saw the light but it was also at New Mission where I first saw the cross—and for that I am forever grateful.

Accepting Jesus was a great turn within my life, but little did know that the projection of my life was soon to turn again. While working at an amusement park that summer, something bothered me. I couldn't place my finger on it but it just wouldn't leave me alone. I began to speak to myself as if I were preaching the gospel. I have to admit, at the time, I thought this was a little weird. Furthermore, these messages within my head just wouldn't stop. It was then when I realized that maybe the Lord was calling me to preach.

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To my surprise, I was just a teen playing PlayStation games but now I felt an urge to minister the gospel. My first thought was that I was too young, so I told the Lord that I would preach later in life—perhaps my early twenties. Shortly after, I told one friend concerning my experience and in no time he went and informed the pastor. Talk about keeping a secret! My pastor wanted to meet and then we soon began my ministry training. After preaching preliminary sermons, by the age of eighteen, I was a licensed minister.

I would never forget the first sermon I preached before the church (my text was taken from the Gospel of John chapter 10). I would forever remember preaching about the good shepherd and his sheepfold. It was precisely at that moment I felt as a fish within water: I was in my element. There's nothing like being assured that you are within the right place at the right time, and doing what you believe God has called you to do.

Not only did preaching align with my natural abilities, but there was also something else that I couldn't quite place my finger on. Even to this day, when I minister, it is as if my natural preparation is met with supernatural help. This was and is much more than just natural talent. It is the aid and endowment of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, I can only describe this as being the *Anointing*.

We will discuss the *Anointing* in greater detail, but for now, let's define it as the divine endowment given by God that spiritually empowers the believer for the purpose and task for which we have been called to perform. This means that in order to do that which the Lord has called upon us, he will also spiritually equip us to perform the service. In other words, the task will not only coincide with our natural talents but it will also be the particular area where the Lord has anointed us to function.

Our natural abilities and spiritual endowments will assist and navigate us in discovering our true place within ministry. For instance, before I was called to preach, I really wanted to sing as most of my peers within the church. The only problem was that although this was my desire, I could barely hold a note. Consequently, I was not a very graceful singer. My voice would often strain and crack as I would struggle to hit notes that I could not reach. I had to be truthful and admit that singing just wasn't my talent, and deep down I had known from the beginning.

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Unlike singing, I am assured and know without a shadow of a doubt that the Lord has called and anointed me to preach the gospel. He has validated and confirmed my ministry again and again. I am forever grateful to see God's hand moving upon my life. On that account, I know that I am greatly respected within the community and church. The elders within the congregation admire me and the younger ones look up to me. I am considered a leader and a gifted pulpiteer. I know that I am anointed, but what if I told you that even anointed men struggle?

Struggling within Ministry

Some may say, "How can an anointed man like you struggle? You have been faithful within the church from your youth!" Good question. Personally, I feel as if the Lord has always kept me close. However, this isn't any reason to boast. I strongly believe that the reason God has kept me so near was due to my tendencies and potential for immoral behavior.

Some may believe that the Lord has kept us close because we're that good, but could the reason perhaps be so He could keep an eye on you? It's like a parent who is about to leave the house but their one child has a strong tendency to misbehave. For this reason, the parent decides to take that child with them.

Augustine of Hippo, a third century theologian, is possibly considered one of the greatest theologians who ever lived. Nevertheless, he wrote a book entitled *Confessions*. Within this book, he is transparent and shares his own shortcomings. One of the things that he shared was his womanizer ways. However, before we ridicule, he proclaims:

"Let them not laugh at me as they read my account. I have been healed by the same Physician whose care has kept them from falling ill at all, or at least not so severely" (1).

Personally, I believe that when the Lord keeps us close to him, it is not because we're better. At times, it could be that God knows that we cannot resist the allurements of such great temptation. So, in his great wisdom, He limits our exposure and opportunity to certain wrongdoings. This means that although we were all born with a sin sick soul, the Lord has kept some of us from becoming *severely* sick.

Similar to a weak immune system, the Lord knows that if some of us were ever exposed to gross sin, we may never recover.

We can mostly all agree that Augustine was indeed an anointed man, but even this great theologian struggled. Yes, it is possible to be spiritually gifted yet have vices—even anointed men have their challenges! It is even possible to battle with immorality yet be called to ministry.

Called to Ministry

If you are in Christ, then you have been called to ministry. Yes, you have been called! Now I know what you may be thinking: "I'm not called to be a deacon or pastor!" You may be correct. You may not be called to be a minister of the word; nevertheless, you are still called to ministry.

You are called to ministry because it is much more than just preaching or pastoral duties. Ministry can be defined as the wide variety of assignments that God has placed us on this earth to accomplish—whatever your God-ordained purpose may be within this world.

At times, our ministry can be much more than just our vocation. Vocations regard livelihood but our ministry regards our life's calling. For instance, the Apostle Paul's vocation was a tentmaker. This was how he made his livelihood, but his ministry was his calling to apostleship. The Disciple Peter's vocation was a fisherman but his ministry was to call men to be fishers of men. Jesus' vocation was a carpenter, but his ministry was to take away the sins of the world.

Sometimes our vocation and ministry can be one in the same. For example, let's say I sense that my ministry is a calling to work with troubled youth. If I have been blessed to work for a Youth Detention Center, then we can say that my vocation is in strong alignment with my ministry.

Being that our ministry is our life's calling, it is detailed and particular with every individual. Now, how do we discover our ministry? A great starting point is to pray, asking, "Lord, what is my

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ministry? What have you placed me on this earth to do for your glory? What is my life's calling?"

It is of extreme importance to discover your particular ministry because it is possible to partake in ministry work but this does not necessarily mean that it is *your* ministry. In other words, it is possible to be doing many good things, but the deeds you are accomplishing are not what you have necessarily been called to do (Acts 6:2).

The good news is that if we are in Christ, then we have already answered a call. This is true because we have answered the call of salvation in accepting Jesus as our savior! Here is what the Apostle Paul says:

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are *the called* according to *His* purpose" (Romans 8:28 (KJV)).

Did you notice how "the called" is used in the past tense? This means that there was a call that we Christians have already answered. Concerning this verse, within the past, I would quote it wrong. I would say, "To those who are *called* according to his purpose." If you noticed, I used the term *called* within the verb form. However, when I studied the original Greek version of the verse, the term "called" is not a verb, but actually an adjective used as a noun. As such, this term is talking about the group of believers who have answered the call. For this reason, the translation places a "the" in front of the term "called". Therefore, the expression is changed from the verb form to the noun form. All because we the saints are *The Called!*

The verse goes on to say, "To those who are *the called* according to his *purpose*." This means that after we answered the call of salvation, yet there remains another calling waiting before us concerning God's plan. This can be viewed as our ministry because it is the God ordained purpose for our lives. So, let us all ask ourselves, "What am I being called to concerning my purpose? What is my ministry?" A good illustration of this biblical truth is Samson, the one who was spiritually endowed with supernatural strength. His story can be found within the book of Judges.

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman and said unto her, Behold now, you are barren, and bear not: but you shall conceive, and bear a son... And he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines"(Judges 13:35(KJV)).

Before Samson was born, there was a calling on his life. However, this was a call in regards to his purpose, listing the details concerning his ministry. Samson was already a part of *The Called* because he was an Israeli, and Israelis were already a called out people (Hosea 11:1). Being that he was called concerning his nation; the angel now appears in regards to the call concerning his purpose. Similar to Romans 8:28, there was a call behind him concerning the salvation [deliverance] of his people, yet also a call before him concerning his life's ministry.

As mentioned, Samson's life purpose and ministry was to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Therefore, the Lord anointed him for this work. Remember, as previously stated, the anointing is the supernatural strength of the Holy Spirit that aids us in what God has called "the believer" to perform. For this reason, the Lord literally endowed Samson with supernatural strength for this particular work.

Samson's great strength was given because, within those days, the Kingdom of Israel suffered violence. Therefore, the violent man had to protect it by force. Samson's supernatural strength is a great illustration of how the Lord anoints the saints for our particular purpose. So, Samson was not just called to ministry but he was also *anointed* for ministry!

Anointed for Ministry

Within the bible, the Hebrew word used for the term anoint is "*mashach*". It means to smear, rub, or to pour oil. Within Jewish ceremonial law, it was customary to pour oil upon the head. For instance, when a prophet poured the oil upon someone's head, this signified God's calling on the individual's life, and the oil being poured served as a symbol that the particular party was set apart for a particular work or office.

The oil poured wasn't just any oil; it was considered to be sacred and holy ointment. The Patriarch Moses was given specific instructions concerning how this particular oil was to be made (Exodus 30:23-25). For this reason, this oil was not to be poured for the common use- all because it was symbolic of the Holy Spirit empowering and authenticating an anointed party for a particular work.

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Being that all Christians are called to a particular work, we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit. This is when the spirit empowers us, and this empowerment authenticates and reconfirms the particular calling that is upon our lives.

"And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him [Samson] at times" (Judges 13:25).

The spirit moving Samson displayed and authenticated the anointing that was upon his life. The Lord began to validate Samson among the Israeli congregation. This serves to illustrate that when we are anointed for a particular work, it will show forth.

One of the things that the anointing does is make that which is improbable possible. Can you imagine Samson slaying 1,000 Philistines with only the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15-16)? Within his natural strength this was improbable but through the power of the Holy Spirit it was easily possible. The spirit made Samson's ministry work look easy. Could you imagine seeing Samson carrying the gates of Gaza upon his shoulders as if they were light (Judges 16:3)? This means that when we have been called to a ministry, although it may be challenging, the anointing makes the task appear effortless.

This gives outsiders the false impression that our ministry work does not have its challenges. Even Samson felt close to death and had to drink of the brook after slaying 1,000 Philistines (Judges 15:19). What if others thought that they could do the exact same task as Samson? It probably wouldn't work out too well!

We must not believe that just because one person is anointed for a particular ministry that everyone else is as well. The Holy Spirit will not empower you for every ministry, but only for the particular work that you are specifically called to perform.

"He anoints my head with oil" (Psalms 23:5 (KJV)).

Continuing with the subject matter, every man with a family has been called to be the head of the household (Ephesians 5:23). This means that this particular task is our ministry. As such, it is a task for which the Lord will anoint every husband. The spirit will equip and aid us as we lead our families.

Being that husbands are called to be the head of the family, the imagery of the head being anointed within Psalms 23:5 fits well: the head is anointed and the ointment begins to flow downward (Psalms 133:2).

This does not mean that God is a chauvinist. It was the Lord who placed Christ as the head of the husband and then placed the husband as the head of the wife. This is not due to men and women's self-value, but solely for order and function. If the household is to run smoothly, someone has to be given the headship.

Women must respect their husband's position as the head. Just because one has a husband does not necessarily guarantee that one has accepted his headship. This means that just because he is the husband, this does not mean that the wife has allowed him to be her covering.

The anointing of the head further displays the direction for the family. The Lord will always give such insight to the head. Again, this is so because God is a God of order. Concerning the direction for the home, the Lord will not bypass the head and give the vision to the wife. Similar to how He first anoints the head, the vision will always flow down from Christ, then to the husband, and then to the wife.

I know what you're asking: "Can you show me precisely within the scriptures?"

Before Joseph took Mary (Mother of Jesus) as his wife, the angel appeared to them both concerning the child. However, after Mary was married, the angel only spoke to Joseph (Matthew 2:13).

When the baby Jesus was in danger from King Herod, the angel of the Lord gave Joseph detailed instructions concerning the direction of the family. He was instructed to move his family to Egypt. However, what if his wife chose not to respect her husband's headship? I'm sure the Lord would have still made a way but Jesus' very life could have been in danger. Therefore, husbands are called and also anointed for headship. For this cause, their wives and also their children are their ministry!

She's my Ministry

What does a blessing look like to men? Even when they are looking for a wife, what is their ideal image? If their potential wife was to be the metaphor of a tree, what kind of tree would she be? Better yet, what would the tree look like? Personally, I imagine my

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wife being a great tree who is a strong encourager. Yes, this is the ideal tree and my ideal wife! Now what if I was then to pray that the Lord would send me this woman? What if the Lord answered that he had already sent her? We may respond that we don't see a tall tree bringing forth encouraging fruit. Then the Lord answers again that he sent what we were asking for but in seed form!

It is good to know that it is the characteristic of God to bless us within seed form. When men are looking for a wife, they should not discount women who may not be fully pruned. She may be in seed or stem form and what she shall become has yet to appear.

Take this example: There was a middle aged man who went to a pawn shop to sell his childhood bike. The particular bike was a BMC Pedal Tractor. Now this tricycle bike was not pretty to the eye. It had some dents but most of all it was greatly rusted. When looking at the bike at face value, it appeared that this bike needed to be thrown away. Nevertheless, the pawnshop owner knew the history of the bike's origin and saw value beyond the dents and rust. While others may have seen the bike as trash, the pawnshop owner saw what the bike could become.

The owner paid \$150 for the rusted and dented bike because he knew that the tricycle could be restored and become something great. However, he knew that after the purchase, he would also have to invest in the restoration efforts. The price to restore this bike ranged from \$500 to \$600. After the tricycle was restored, it was a glorious site to behold! When it was placed on the shelf in the store, the price went up to \$1300. What was once considered trash was now coveted by many. This is the blessing that we all seek. We say, "Lord, why can't you bless me with a bike like that?" The Lord responds, "I did but you couldn't see past the dents and rust!"

Let's say that your blessing and future wife is similar to this tricycle. The initial investment is the wedding ring and marriage. However, there is also an investment concerning her restoration. Are you willing to pay for such an investment? You said you wanted to be blessed with a fruitful wife!

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman" (Judges 13:3a (KJV)).

I remember dating a particular woman who was very career oriented. For this reason, in my opinion, she at times undervalued the rare opportunity of having a good man. Once she was around my

step-mother when she said, “I’m focused and I don’t need no man!” She may have been right but my step-mother warned, “Be careful not to pass up on a good man because good men are far and few between.”

Samson’s mother was visited by an angel. Angel visits do not happen every day. For this reason, she could not undervalue the opportunity. Similar to good men, angel visits are rare. When there is a good man who loves you and treats you how you deserve to be treated within Christ, don’t let a good man pass you by!

“And said unto her, behold now, you are barren, and bear not” (Judges 13:3b (KJV)).

I want to take the time to address the subject of a barren woman. This is a woman who cannot conceive or bear children. This is a wife who, although she is being sown into, she does not have the ability to respond.

If a woman is to give birth, then a seed must first be planted—and only when the seed has been received can a fruitful baby be yielded in return. The imagery is very similar to a farmer and a garden. Within the scriptures, the man is referenced to as the “husbandman”, which was the name given to a farmer. The scriptures also refer to women as a garden (Song of Solomon 4:16). Further, scripture also compares the wife to a fruitful vine (Psalms 128:3). Can a man imagine such a wife? She is as a wonderful and glorious garden and a beautiful and fruitful vine!

Be that as it may, when the Lord finally gives you this wife, this is not how your garden appears at all. There remain thorns and stones as well as deeply rooted weeds. Not only that, but it appears that your garden has been damaged by previous trespassers. There is even old baggage that has been left for waste. So, we pray within frustration, “Lord, you knew that this garden was messed up before you gave it to me!”

Nevertheless, the Lord reveals to you that you have been given a blessing in seed form and as the husbandman you must now restore the garden. So you go to plant your seeds but then realize that the garden is nowhere close to breaking ground. This garden is so damaged that it will take years just to uproot and undo the dysfunction. Furthermore, you begin to realize that to just get the garden ready to break ground could take years.

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Personally, when dating, I met women who I considered five year projects. In other words, as a potential husband, I noticed that it would take me some years to clean up a mess and restore what had been damaged. This was when I realized that I was nowhere near breaking ground. Some men have been uprooting for years and just now getting to the place to where they can finally begin to plant.

Even worse, say we spend years getting the garden ready to break ground. Consequently, when we as husbands begin to sow good seeds into our wife, what if she happens to be barren? Just as it is possible for a woman to be physically barren, it is also possible for a woman to be emotionally barren. When a woman has gone through such high levels of emotional hurt, such damage hinders her receptiveness to receive love.

Within the dating process, this is further why we men must be careful with how they treat women. We may not always realize it, but when we severely hurt a woman, there is emotional damage. As a result, many women have been used and abused. There has been so much emotional pain that, even if they are receptive to receive, they just no longer have the strength to give it back. It is as children who have come to the birth, yet there remains no strength to bring forth (Isaiah 37:3)! It's not that they don't want to bring forth [love], but they just no longer have the emotional strength to do so. She's barren!

Dealing with barrenness is not easy. You've been doing everything right, but there remains no produce. You have planted the seed but it has not germinated! It's not easy when a husband has been sowing but not reaping anything in return. It's not easy when you've been putting work into a marriage but are unable to see any fruit for your labor. It's not always easy being a husbandman!

Nevertheless, we realize that this is the wife who the Lord has given, and although the marriage is a challenge, she remains our garden. In other words, she may be barren but she's my ministry. As such, she is my ministry, she is the garden for which I have been called and anointed. Although this garden presents its issues, the Lord has anointed me to handle the struggles.

Any other man would have given up, but the spirit of the Lord God has anointed you to love this barren and broken woman. None other may wish to take up this barren task but God has joined you for this particular garden—and what God joined together, let no man

put asunder. Concerning such men, God has anointed you for such work. He has sent you to bind her broken heart; to give beauty for her ashes; the oil of joy for her mourning; and the spirit of praise for the spirit of her heaviness (Isaiah 61:1). In other words, although unfruitful, she's your ministry.

Fruit of Ministry

You may have been sowing into your ministry for years but have yet to see a return on your investment. You know that this is what you have been called and anointed for but there remains no harvest.

Within your marriage, anniversaries have come and gone. You figured that by this time the marital union would be within a more productive place but sadly, there yet remains no fruit. Again, you know that you have been anointed to be her husband but it seems that nothing comes from the seeds you've sown. Your seeds seem to fall by the wayside and never enter her heart. The seeds are sown but are choked by the thorns of her bitterness—and if a seed does find its way to her inner being, her heart remains hardened as a stone and the seed never has the opportunity to penetrate her soul. So, yes, I'm anointed to be her husband. She's my ministry yet I'm struggling.

As in other cases, you know that you are called within the faith and that the Lord has a calling on your life for a particular work. Still, you find yourself struggling with immorality. Yes, you're anointed but there is a particular immoral behavior that has a hold on you. You try to overcome but it's a battle—and although you have sown the good seeds of prayer and bible study, the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) has not yet manifested within this area of your life. It is possible to be anointed for your Christian journey but still finding yourself struggling with immoral behavior.

Similar to the Prophet Jeremiah, the harvest has past, the summer has ended, and our ministry has produced little to any growth (Jeremiah 8:20). Are you a preacher who has been there? Similar to the Disciple Peter, we've been called to be the fisherman of men but we have toiled all night and caught nothing (Luke 5:5). So, yes, you may be anointed to preach but what do you do when you're struggling within ministry?

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To have an area within your life that remains fruitless can be discouraging. Sometimes these areas can be our ministry—the very thing for which we were called and anointed. It's been years and we've yet to reap a harvest, so we conclude that we are barren within this area of ministry. For this reason, our expectations are not set too high so we are equipped to better cope with disappointment. We have concluded that our ministry is infertile but what if I told you that the Lord has the power to yield fruit out of any area of barrenness?

“But you shall conceive, and bear a son” (Judges 13:3c (KJV)).

Samson's mother was barren but the Lord yielded fruit out of her barrenness. Within the scriptures, Solomon's mother was also barren. Isaac's mother was barren too; and The Baptist John's mother was barren as well. Nevertheless, within God's great might, the Lord brought fruit out of barrenness. Now I know what you are saying: “Those are famous bible stories. Am I supposed to believe that such a miracle can happen within my life?” Well I remember an old preacher saying, “There's no secret to what God can do. What he has done for others, he can do for you!”

Therefore, never give up on your calling. Never give up on what you know the Lord has called you to become and to perform. The fruitful harvest will surely come to fruition—and although you may greatly struggle, if you just hang in there you'll behold the fruit of your ministry!