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Presentation Transcript
Ministering for God
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In this series, *Relating to God*, we've shown we all have a relational style. And this style begins to develop at birth – almost immediately – and is based on our relationship with our parents. How they treat us – whether they engage us or not – sets the course for our other relationships in life, including our relationship with God. So, if you've not heard the other installments of this series, we suggest you go on our Website – www.liferesource.org – and listen to or read them.

We've also pointed out huge implications for parents as they work with their children, because of how our relationship is formed early has so much of an effect all through our lives. We've also shown that our relationships with others also impact our relationship with God, too. That's what we've been working on lately in this series.

Let me just give you an example of that. Last time, we talked about our relationship with church people and how those relationships strengthen our relationship with God. So, as with all our material, we also showed four specific things to do to improve those relationships.

So today we're going to consider our relationship with those *outside* the church and consider the inner workings of how those relationships not only strengthen our relationships with them, but also our relationship with God. Then we're going to take a look at the roadblocks that sometimes hold us back from engaging others. We want to make this something practical.

Let's first look at what we mean by the term *ministering* – the title is *Ministering For God*. It's about taking care of and helping other people who need help. That's what the word means. There's nothing really overtly religious about it. And that could include those within and without the church. The word *minister*, in the Bible, just means a servant. Ministering means serving. It doesn't mean being in charge. It doesn't mean having any authority. It doesn't mean being more important than others. And that's what Jesus said a minister was.

If ministering means helping, what kind of helping are we talking about? Well, let's look in Matthew 25, verse 34, to begin – breaking into this parable.

Matthew 25:34 – *Then the king will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food. What kind of help is that? Well, that’s taking care of somebody’s physical needs, right? This is a parable about what Jesus Christ thinks is important and what He’s going to judge us on in the judgment. And part of that is giving people food. When was the last time you did that? Right? I was thirsty and you gave me drink. Oh, well, water’s free, isn’t it? And yet, that’s what we can give people. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. That’s a different kind of need, isn’t it? What kind of need is that? That’s an emotional need that we have – to be included and to be respected. I was naked and you clothed me. There’s another physical need – clothes. It may be emotional, too. I don’t like to be naked in public. I was sick and you visited me. Lonely and sick. I was in prison and you came to me. So there are emotional needs, right? And then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink, and when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you, and when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the king will say, “Truly I say to you, ‘As you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.’”*

So that’s the key to understanding the connection between how we treat others and how that affects our relationship with God. There have been a few times in my life when I really was helpless and people helped me. And that made me really grateful and really appreciative of them. So that’s how God feels when we help other people – when we help His other kids. Right?

Another example – Acts 8:26. This is the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Acts 8:26 – *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise, and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” It says this is a desert place. So he arose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasures. So this guy had some clout, right? He was a pretty high official in the government of a powerful queen. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning – seated in his chariot – and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join his chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and he asked that relevant question, “How can I understand unless somebody guides me?” He was totally mystified by what he was reading. He was lost in it. And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Why did he invite him up there? Because of the question Philip asked. Was that nosy? Well, it might have seemed that way to some people, but it was probably an answer to this guy’s prayers, since he was guided by the Spirit. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe this generation, for his life is taken away from the earth?” And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom does the prophet say this? About himself or about someone else?” It’s interesting, isn’t it, how we all know the answer to that question, but*

he didn't, because the good news hadn't been preached yet. *And then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?"* So he was all gung-ho after he learned about Christ.

So, when we obey God, it draws us closer to Him. How do you think Philip felt when that guy wanted to be baptized? Do you think he thought it was all about Him? I don't think so. I think he felt like God was kind of leading him every step of the way – right? – to the right place at the right time. Does that make us feel closer to God? I think it does, doesn't it? When we obey God, it draws us closer to Him. Reaching to people outside our circle is something He tells us to do. We were told to make disciples. And when we do it, we're told, in this area of God's concern, we become partners with Him. He's involved with us. I believe the term I read in the New Testament is *fellow laborers*. Right? Wouldn't that be a partner – people working together?

1 Peter 2:12 – another example.

1 Peter 2:12 – *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* When is that? Well, it's not right now. It's later.

It isn't that we're always looking for immediate responses – like the eunuch – but we're sowing seeds that will grow later. It's not always about change now. People *will* remember. That's a promise. All we have to do is what we can and then we go about our business, knowing we've done what God wanted us to do, and the results are up to Him, not us. We do our part. And then that's good. What was it Paul said? "I planted, Apollos watered, *God* gave the increase." A lot of times, Paul was long gone by the time the increase came. So God is going to take care of the results and cause the miracle to happen. All we have to do is what we can – what we've been told.

I kind of preempted myself here – on this next point – but Philip got the feeling – or maybe he actually heard words to tell him – to go to that Ethiopian. When he got there, he saw that he had something to offer. He knew the answer to the man's question. He probably had a great time expounding to somebody who wanted to know.

I run into that experience in my practice sometimes. Some of the folks that I deal with don't know enough to get better, so there has to be education as well as therapy. And some of them start yawning and tuning out, because they're really not interested in changing and doing anything. They thought they could come in and just take a pill and I was going to fix everything for them. That's not how it works.

So this eunuch was really interested, because he was hearing the answer to the question he asked. And then immediately, he wanted to be baptized. So when this happens, it makes us feel very humble, because we realize we're just there and we're being used to deliver a message that isn't ours. It came from somebody else – and that's God – and that God is working through us. That makes us feel like we should feel – like we're just a small part of

things. And we get to pass on the blessing that God gave us, so that's good. It makes us feel good, but it also makes us realize that we wouldn't have anything to pass on if God hadn't given it to us. So that draws us closer to Him.

I remember that feeling years ago, when I was a ministerial trainee in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the church I was in, in the three years, four years I lived there, doubled in size – from 330 to 660 people. My job was to go visit all the new people that wanted to become a part of the church, and invite them in and baptize them. So I heard and saw so many things that made me understand that this is all outside of my control. I was just the implement, not the mind behind it all.

So the issue is, then, we're talking about what kind of helping, and the answer is, "Well, any kind of help that's needed – physical, emotional, spiritual." It all counts with God. Physical help is the next step to emotional help is the next step to spiritual help. So we minister any way we can. Some people are better at one kind of helping than others. Some people are especially good at praying for other people. It's a gift. Other people are especially good at writing letters or cards to people. It's a gift. Praying is a good thing. I don't mean to denigrate that by what I'm going to say. And we all ought to be good at that. Some of us are better than others. But God also wants us to go further than that and actually get out there and not just pray, but *do* something interactively with other people. He wants us to go further than just pray.

It reminds me of that movie, *Million Dollar Baby*. I don't know if you saw that movie, but there was this young woman that wanted to learn how to box. She had talked this grumpy old boxing coach into taking her on as a pupil. His first little speech to her was, "Don't ask any questions. Just do what I tell you." He was kind of really grumpy with her. And then he said, "Take an athletic position! Look like you're actually going to throw a punch!" At some point we have to stop talking about it and actually *do* something. That's the point. And God does tell us this – that He gives us the gift.

So all of us, if we have that gift that He's given us, are going to be naturally good at meeting somebody's needs in some way. None of us is good at meeting every need, however. So we need to figure out what needs we can supply to others. Some people are good at spiritual needs. Think about the Ethiopian. Philip recognized that need. Even though he had to be steered to the right chariot, he knew what to say when he got there. Right? He was equipped to meet it.

Think about your children. What do they need to learn about God? Is that a spiritual effort? It absolutely is! We've already covered some of that in this series, but they do need to hear our faith stories. You have one of those, don't you? Take a story telling position and look like you're going to tell one.

I love my job. I get to help people become better people. And I think, sometimes, that might be considered a spiritual activity. But I'm thinking about one my clients – a young woman who grew up with an alcoholic father and an enabling mother. This lady was neglected, especially in the emotional area of life. Her needs were not met. She struggled with other siblings for attention. She talked about all sorts of heart-rending situations from

her past in a very emotionally disconnected manner – like she didn't know or understand the little girl that she was describing, which was herself. She had built a wall around her heart to protect herself from the pain of neglect that she'd experienced as a child. And I was sitting, listening to her talk, and I thought, "How is she ever going to learn how to love God when she is so totally closed off to other people?" So, in my own fumbling way – and it seems like I invent a new way to fumble every time I do this – but I just approached this issue head on early. I asked her, "Do you remember that our therapy will eventually get down to you and me at some point – how we relate to each other?" She said, "Yes." And I said, "Do you remember telling you that that's going to be part of the key to your healing?" And she said, "Yes." I said, "Okay, so your experience with love is that it is scarce and that there's not enough to go around. It's like a commodity that can get used up and then there isn't anymore. So you had to compete with your sister to get love, because, if you didn't, she would get more than you would. And then that would be it." And she said, "Yeah, that's exactly how I felt." Of course, I knew that she felt that way, because she'd just explained it to me. But when it comes back to us in other people's words, it's like it's new. I said, "Okay, so you come in here and you share hurtful stories about neglect, and abuse, and isolation and loneliness and it's heart-rending to me to hear them. And you have the audacity to want something better for yourself, and the courage to come here seeking help, and the commitment to step forward and do that. So how do you think that makes me feel?" She said, "Respect?" I said, "Yes. And what else?" "Well, you feel bad about what's happened to me." I said, "Yeah, I do. What else." "Well, you want to see me get over my depression, my anxiety, my agoraphobia and all that." I said, "Yes. And how will I feel when that happens?" She said, "You'll feel good." And I said, "I will. I'll feel really happy for you. And I'll feel happy for me, too, because I got to participate in helping you." And I said, "Well, what is all that?" She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, respect, understanding, feeling with you, being happy when you feel better... what is that?" She said, "I don't know." I said, "I think you do, but it's just really hard to say it." She said, "Is that love?" I said, "Yes, it is. You're pretty brave. You could say it. No, it's not like love for my daughter or my wife, but love for somebody who inspires my respect because of her desire to change. And it's not just for you. I feel that kind of love for lots of people." She said, "I know." I said, "And that doesn't take anything away from how I feel about you. It's not a commodity that gets used up. Love is an attitude. It's limitless. Every time you come in here, I'm not going to judge you for any mistakes you make. There isn't anything I want from you, except to see you feel better. I will be hoping the best for you. And I will always be happy to see you when you come in the door."

So every week, when she comes in, she's going to notice those things from now on and she will gradually begin to feel accepted and respected, and she will accept and respect me. And when that happens, her therapy is going to rocket forward. In that, I'm supporting her. I'm modeling being open, like I want her to be, and I'm equipping her with a new outlook about what love is. And that outlook is going to be the foundation for trust and change. My hope is that she can learn how to love, because she's closed herself off from that. If she can do that – and I believe she will – when God calls her, it will be a bit easier for her to understand God's love, because she has learned to understand mine and, I think, from others, too. So, in helping her with her emotions and also helping her with her spiritual need – the need to recognize and accept and feel love from God – she's going to be

benefited. So I kind of crossed the line between spiritual and emotional there, but they go together.

Let's talk more specifically about emotional needs. And, again, it's hard to separate the two, for me. There's a man in the Bible – one of the disciples – his name is Barnabas. Do you know what Barnabas means? It means *encouragement*. So the account in Acts of the disciples, learning that some of the scattered brethren had been so forward as to talk about Jesus Christ to Gentiles.... What a way out, weird, unheard of concept to them, because they only kept it within the Jewish community. So when they heard this happen, they were astounded that Gentiles could actually conceive of Christ, and they sent Barnabas to check it out. So he went up to Antioch and observed what these unordained people were doing, and he said, "You people are going to mess it all up. You aren't ordained. You need to leave it to the spiritual giants in Jerusalem." No, he didn't say that, did he? Somebody said that to me once. That's where that came from, actually. He said, "You should leave the spiritual to those that have authority..." No, he didn't say that either. Somebody said that to me, too. "How dare you do something without permission!" He didn't say that either. "How presumptuous you are – to talk about your experience with Jesus to these Gentiles!" He didn't say that either. What's wrong with him? "By the power vested in me by the spiritual control center in Jerusalem, I command you to desist immediately!" He didn't say that either. He didn't. I think I just confused him with a couple of people that talked to me once. What did he say? Well, let's read it in Acts 11, and verse 19.

Acts 11:19 – *Now those who were scattered – because of the persecution that arose over Stephen – traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them – men of Cyprus and Cyrene – who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. You know, you just can't argue with the results. And, sometimes, when the Holy Spirit does stuff, you just can't make It do what you want. And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad. He wasn't afraid of the Holy Spirit and what it could do. He didn't say, "Oh, you've opened Pandora's box. This is going to get out of control fast. We've got to keep the lid on this thing. We might lose control." He didn't say that. He exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*

We might also remember that Barnabas was the one who took Paul and stood up for him when everyone else was afraid of him. So he wasn't just the kind of guy that said a lot of nice things to people – whatever they wanted to hear. He had some real fiber. He wasn't afraid. And he encouraged Paul, as well, didn't he? – a helping hand of support when he needed it the most. After Paul's experience on the Damascus Road, I don't know that it entered his mind that he wouldn't be accepted by Christ's own people when he got there. But that was the way it was. They were afraid of Paul, because he had persecuted the church severely. But Barnabas saw him as an ally rather than an enemy. So he was a guy who could think outside the organizational box, couldn't he? So that's something about emotional needs, too. Sometimes you just have to think about things a little bit differently.

Physical needs – another area where some people have tremendous gifts. I’ve talked to some people who think, because they’re not as good with emotional needs or spiritual needs as those so gifted, that they’re on the lower end of the gifts spectrum, but the first thing that the judge looked at was, “Who’s going to feed me?” Right? When God talks about helping other people, most often He talks about physical needs – a cup of cold water, food, clothing, shelter – that kind of thing. That said, please don’t give money to people on the street. They just spend it on drugs. Some of us...we want to be helpers, but we’re just more enablers, really. We’re enabling their addiction – wasting money. If you want to help people that are addicts, buy them food. Don’t give them money. Or buy them clothing and not money.

I know a lady who cleans houses, and she, somehow, turns the conversation into things about God. Seed planting, right? So she uses the “taking care of people physically” as her work to actually deliver a message. We don’t see any people here as a result of her effort yet, but there is a day of visitation coming, where all these people are going to meet her again, and promises they won’t forget. So physical needs are the doorway into that.

One of the big issues we have is being able to identify the needs that people have. We should give people what they need, not what they don’t. If we give people what they don’t need, there’s really no impact, because they’re not really appreciative. If you give somebody, who is able-bodied and just too lazy to work, money for food, they don’t really appreciate that. They think it’s owed to them. Have you ever seen children that have so many toys that to give them another is meaningless? They can’t appreciate it, because they don’t need it. They’re already overloaded in the toy department.

So how do we determine what they don’t need? Well, anything that people can do for themselves is not a need. If they needed it, they’d get up and go do it. You see a street person, living under a freeway bridge, and he has a blanket and some cardboard, if it’s July, he’s probably good. If it’s January and it’s supposed to hit 10 below, he might need some help. So you get on 911 and call the police. Here in Albuquerque, they gather up everybody and take them to a place where they can keep warm – everybody they can find. So, if you see somebody that hasn’t been found, it might be a good idea to let somebody know about that. That would be a way to help.

Another thing is to think about equipping people. I do some marriage counseling from time to time and people come and say, “We have all these problems we need to solve and we need somebody to help us sort it all out.” I say, “Well, I can help you do that, but I’m not really big on being a perpetual referee. If you come to see me, I’m going to teach you how to fight your own battles fairly, so that you can solve your own problems, and you won’t have to have a counselor forever, because you’ll know what to do. Deal?” And the ones that really want to learn how to do that, stay, and the others ones go away, which is fine with me. But I equip them with some of the tools they need to be married. And once they learn that, then they are able to function effectively on their own.

So who do you know that needs equipping? And what do they need to be equipped with? Well, the biggest population in the church, of course, would be the children and teenagers

that we have. Sometimes they just don't have enough information, because they haven't lived long enough.

An example from my counseling life: I saw a boy once, who was angry with his stepfather. His mother brought him for counseling – you know, “Fix the kid.” I listened to him talk and I realized, “I’m just getting his perspective on things. And I’m sure that his stepfather and his mother would each have a different perspective.” But in listening to him talk, when we got down to the actual facts of what happened, he had a good reason to be angry. And he wasn’t alone. The rest of the siblings in the family had issues with the stepfather, as well. This young man – the reason he was brought and not the other siblings – was because he had a worse temper than the others. So he would take it out on his stepfather. He had no idea how his angry demeanor was affecting his mother and his stepdad. So I told him that his temper would moderate as he got older to some degree, but that he could control it now by controlling his thinking and his breathing. So we did some practicing on that. And we did some EMDR to remove any triggers that were causing him to go off on his stepdad all the time. When he would tell me things that he would say to his stepfather and his mother, I would say, “So, if you were your stepdad, how would that make *you* feel?” So then we would rework that and learn how to say it in a way that he could still be honest without being offensive. The question was, “How could you say it to get the result you want?” So I was equipping him with some tact and some self-control. That’s what he needed to learn. He knew what I was doing and he appreciated it, and in a pretty short amount of time, began to really get a grip on himself and become a lot more responsible in what he said.

So, think about who needs equipping. It isn’t always just about food, clothing, shelter, company. We know some stuff. That’s what Philip was doing, wasn’t he? He was equipping the eunuch with spiritual knowledge.

Okay, road blocks. What are the things that keep us from doing what God tells us to do in this area? What holds us back? Well, besides the fact that we’re all challenged time wise and money wise, and whatever else, let’s take that a little bit deeper and let’s call attention back to the three insecure attachment styles that we talked about earlier in this series.

Let’s first think about the disorganized style, characterized by fear and confusion of relationship. The outlook there is, “It’s dangerous to help people, because life was dangerous when we were little. It was scary. So let’s not do that. Let’s just let them mind their own business – go their own way.” If the good Samaritan had had a disorganized attachment style, he would have crossed the road just like the priest – to get away from the guy lying on the side of the road. We’ve talked a lot about how to get over that – not our point today.

The second one that we want to look at – of three – is the ambivalent attachment style, which is characterized by strong opposing feelings about relationship – the desire to help, but doubt that we can make a difference, so we get stuck in “I don’t know what to do. I’m torn between....” We get paralyzed by ambivalent analysis of the situation.

Then the third attachment style that is insecure is called avoidant. The belief is that “it’s not going to work out, because I was never able to get it to work out when I was a kid, so

why try. I've got to take care of myself. Nobody's going to take care of me." It's not going to work out, so why try? It's not going to make a difference. You know, the story about the guy that saw the Mexican throwing the starfish back in the ocean? He says, "You can't possibly make a difference." That statement, "You can't possibly make a difference," comes out of the avoidant attachment style. And the old Mexican man's answer was, "Well, I made a difference for that one" when he threw it back in. "It's not going to work. You can't make a difference." That comes out of the way we were brought up and what happened to us early in life. And I'm only getting to the very surface of that. We covered this earlier. So, if you want to know how to get out of that attitude, go back and listen to the earlier parts of this presentation.

Then, do you remember the fourth style? It was called secure. We talked about it earlier in the series. Because of our experience in the crib and following, this life style believes that life is good. Things are going to work out – that we are loveable, what we do makes a difference, so we are willing to go toward people and to reach out to them. How do people get that way? Well, it has to do with your story. You might not have started out secure, but, in Christ, we can be secure. As He gets added to the story, we can change.

Let's look at a scripture. It's in Philippians 4:8.

Philippians 4:8 – *Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned, and received, and heard and seen in me, practice these things. And the God of peace will be with you.* Everything is going to work out. "All things work together for good to those that love God."

Any effort that we make to help somebody is going to yield results eventually. One of the most important things that we can do is to think like a secure person, even if we're not. We know what that's like. It's modeled for us in the scriptures.

I was watching a TV show about autism one time. There was a teenage boy...he was autistic, but he realized that, if he stayed autistic, he was not going to be accepted by his peers. And since he was a teenager, he wanted to have friends. So he started pretending that he wasn't autistic. He started modeling the attitudes and behaviors of the kids around him, even though that wasn't what he was. And at the end of the interview, this is how they closed it: the interview said, "You know, you've been so successful at this – I'm standing here talking to you – it's hard for me to even think of you as autistic." And he said, "I am." And the guy said, "How would I know that?" He said, "The color yellow is still intensely painful to me." So that's autistic, isn't it, and yet he was acting like he wasn't autistic.

So, if you're insecure, if you're avoidant, if you're ambivalent, if you're disorganized, just act secure. Just do it. It'll all work out. And then you won't feel so bad.

So the greatest road blocks to doing what God tells us to do always come from within. Those, ironically, are the ones that we have complete control over and nobody else does. So we have no excuses. There's always a way to work together with God to reach out to

those who need help. And they're all around us all the time. If we do that, then we're partners with God in His great work of salvation.

So that's a little bit about the connection between our relationship with those outside our church circle and how it enhances our relationship with God. Next time we're going to begin a new series – also about relationship, but from a completely different aspect. It's called *Getting Real* and it's about the biblical values of sincerity and truth within and without. You can watch the first installment of that on our Website or you can wait until it's published in CD, MP3, or written format. And that will probably be out in the late fall. So I hope you'll engage that topic. You know, in our culture, we're starved for what the Bible calls "truth in the inward parts" – something that God values. So we're going to dig into that one next.