



Ideas for a sermon on administration

TN21 Training Notes series: Administration

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A sermon on administration? Surely not!

On the contrary. It's a biblical theme. It's a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The words 'administration' and 'ministry' share a common root.

Why not celebrate a biblical perspective of the subject and get away from everyone's mistaken views about this much maligned and misunderstood area of church life? It's a wonderful way to encourage your finance officers, office volunteers, event organisers, strategic planners and all the 'behind-the-sceners' in your church. Show them that their work matters to God. Here are ten ideas you might consider for starters.

Seven major themes to explore

1 **Creation**

Genesis 1 shows that this is God's world and his verdict on it is that it is very good. The New Testament's emphasis may well be on new life in Christ, but it takes for granted the goodness of creation. So every aspect of life in this world, even outside faith in Christ, matters for the Christian for it is still God's world (Psalm 24:1). We should therefore never drive a wedge between things that are 'spiritual' and those that are 'practical'. Handling all types of business is a proper activity, for God delegated his world's (and therefore his people's) administration to us (Genesis 1:26-28).

2 **The incarnation**

The incarnation is another great doctrine for Christian administrators. God himself takes human 'flesh' and breaks any divide between the sacred and the secular. Forget the cotton-wool white cleanliness of the Bethlehem stable in art and popular culture.

This was raw life. God comes into our world, choosing the most basic and inappropriate of settings in which to be born and to die (John 1:14, Philippians 2:6-8). He therefore shows that he cares about our whole being: both body and soul. He is concerned with how we handle the basic resources that enable us to live and work.

3 **The character of God**

The concept of order out of chaos is central to the account of Creation but it comes throughout Scripture. Take the tabernacle accounts (Exodus 25-27 & 35-40) which show great attention to detail, or Solomon's administrative wisdom (1 Kings 4:1-19), or even any of the OT lists and genealogies. St Paul picks the idea up in the context of public worship (1 Corinthians 14:33,40). What we must not do is lose the plot like the Pharisees who made detail the end instead of the means; after all the work of the Holy Spirit is not always tidy. We need spiritually sensitive administrators who can see the subject in its correct context and who are ready for God's surprises.

4 **Planning in Scripture**

Some people are wary of churches that plan ahead. Does that not ignore the Holy Spirit's work? Of course it can, but we serve a God who is the supreme planner. Consider his plan of salvation, worked out throughout the whole of the Bible and seen in its highest form in Jesus Christ. Or take a major story such as the whole sweep of the Exodus. Or study how Jesus frequently quotes the Old Testament to show how the Scriptures point forward to him. Or look at how Christians are to live in the light of Christ's Second Coming.

5 **Jesus' strategic thinking**

Take an overview of how Jesus trains his disciples working through, for example, one synoptic Gospel. In Mark there is a period of trying to help them see who he is, followed by a period of trying to help them realise what he has come to do. The pivot between the two is Peter's confession in Mark 8:27-30. There are many other ideas to explore: his driving purpose from which he would not be deflected (eg. Mark 1:38), the clear job description for his apostles (Mark 3:14,15), and so on.

6 **The idea of a steward**

There are a number of Old Testament words translated 'steward' but in the New Testament there are just two: *'oikonomos'* for a house-manager and *'epitropos'* for one who is given responsibility. Both terms are used in Galatians 4:2 to show that the idea applies to the management of people and households as much as to physical resources and finance. The term is also used as a metaphor, so the elders in Titus 1:7 are referred to as those who manage God's household. There is more detail on this idea in Article A46, *Redefining 'management'*, in the Resources section of this website. That also investigates the ideas of the manager as a 'care-taker' and as a 'deacon'.

7 **Biblical characters**

There are several OT characters who were great managers or administrators in one form or other, and a study of any one of them yields much. Top of my list would be

Joseph and Nehemiah. But there are hidden treasures to discover too, such as craftsman Bezalel (Exodus 31:1-11; 35:30 – 36:7, etc.). In the NT how about a study of the use of 'stewards' in the parables of Jesus? Or take my favourite administrator of all, Martha (Luke 10:38-42). She got it wrong but is a wonderful object lesson for all behind-the-scenes people, not to mention caterers! See Training Notes TN68, *Administrators who miss the point*, in the Resources section of this website for further ideas here.

Other themes to explore include:

- The idea of spiritual gifts of administration. See the 1 Corinthians passage in the list below and also Training Notes TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*, in the Resources section of this website.
- The New Testament office of 'deacon'. See the 1 Timothy passage in the list below and the idea is also taken up in Article A46, *Redefining management*, in the Resources section of this website.

Four specific passages to study

1 Church leaders stick to their priorities Acts 6:1-7

Don't make this more than it is, for it is only a case-study, but look at it for the need for dedicated administrators to release front-line workers to focus on their priorities (and note what these were). The church can only grow if leaders and teachers are set free from administrative distraction – which is where far too many of our Ministers are stuck. It is instructive to see that five of the seven are never heard of again, but two of them move on to front-line service (with some desperate results). Look too at the spiritual requirements for these seven; it wasn't a case of anyone will do. And guess who are the first people in the Early Church to be 'ordained'? See Training Notes TN112, *Set my leaders free!*, in the Resources section of this website for more on this passage.

2 Administration as a spiritual gift 1 Corinthians 12:28

This verse needs to be taken in the context of the whole chapter: the gifts are God's to distribute (v6), they are to be used for everyone's benefit (v7), and all are needed (v21). Yet administration is to be regarded as just as spiritual a ministry as any of the others; coming in the central portion of this list, keeping company with some of the most dramatic gifts, it is in no way an also-ran.

Careful: the word translated 'gifts of administration' is probably a leadership term (guiding a ship – the new NIV translates it as 'guidance') and should not be applied to our idea of 'admin'. But the previous gift of 'those able to help others' has as its idea those who 'take their turn', and so might well apply much more to basic administrators. Perhaps there is a spectrum of administrative gifts in mind, from humble helpers to strategic planners. See Article A15, *Christian administration?*, in the Resources section of this website.

3 **The dedication of the temple** 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

This is of course a highly challenging passage about finance, but its underlying assumption is that all we have comes from God in the first place, and it is therefore an exploration of the place of possessions. It certainly gives a different slant on financial giving from what we are accustomed to, which is strange since some of its verses are very familiar to most Christians (eg. vv11,14). But considering this passage in a wider, administrative context gives a rich idea of how we should look after all that we possess. We need to be good stewards of all the resources that God has provided for us.

4 **The ministry of deacons** 1 Timothy 3:8-13

A study of the idea of a deacon in the NT can be useful (the word is not used in Acts 6, contrary to most people's view). There seems to have been a '*diakonia*' of both preaching and administration. We best know the term for its use in 1 Timothy. In church history the administrative usage eventually diversified into variations such as sub-deacons and arch-deacons. Study the 1 Timothy passage to see a person profile for a practical deacon. If this role is so unspiritual (as some feel), why is there an almost identical requirement to that for church elders? See Article A46 again for more detail on this point.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN21. They cover one aspect of a possible training event on church administration. For fuller ideas on some of the Bible passages cited above, see Articles A15, *Christian administration?* and A46, *Redefining management*. Also Training Notes TN68, *Administrators who miss the point*, TN112, *Set my leaders free!*, and TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*. Also TN72/73, *Church administration explained*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN21 under Administration.

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