

Eager *to* Serve

Facing our fears

counting the cost



and stepping up in
gospel ministry

RAY GALEA

Ray Galea has written an engaging and deeply personal book about the call upon every Christian to ministry. Based on Philippians and including short testimonies from a range of interesting people, it is both encouraging and challenging. It was a blessing to read it.

Peter Jensen

Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, 2001-2013

This is a great book for all Christians, especially followers of Jesus who are eager to serve him. Ray, in his usual warm and relational manner, invites us to serve God willingly and gladly, and in deeper ways. *Eager to Serve* is so readable, even for those who don't read. Littered with anecdotes and testimonies from God's work at MBM, the book exhorts us to see that our lives are fundamentally changed by the cross and that now, following in Jesus' footsteps, "every decision you make in your life will be a point at which you will either descend into greatness or ascend into self-centred oblivion". This means different things for different people, of course. Ray takes us on a journey that will reignite our clarity that Jesus changes everything. This passion is so often the missing piece. I commend *Eager to Serve* to all.

Raj Gupta

Senior Pastor, St Paul's Anglican Carlingford and
North Rocks, Sydney

Senior Consultant, Centre for Ministry Development,
Moore Theological College, Sydney

This is one of the best 20 books I have read in my life. Ray takes us for a deep scuba-dive into the divine waters of Philippians. The pages drip with his decades of ministry experience and each chapter ends with profound prayers, wonderful reflection questions and inspiring personal testimonies.

Ben Pfahlert

National Director, Ministry Training Strategy,
Australia

Ray and Sandy are a formidable team in ministry, and God has used them in powerful ways—locally, nationally and internationally. But their ministry has been so impactful because it's always been about Jesus, and it's never been limited to them; it's about multiplying gospel work and gospel workers. With its grounding in Philippians, *Eager to Serve* offers a reminder of what and who captured us in the first place, alongside practical examples. It will challenge us all to rethink our lives and ministries so that we will see the next generation of Christian leaders and churches mobilized and equipped to give their lives for the sake of Christ and his gospel.

Derek Hanna

Director of Church Planting, Geneva Push, Australia

My only problem with this book is that I wish Ray had written it decades ago. There are so many people I would like to have given it to over the years. I'm looking forward to handing *Eager to Serve* to many people in the future. There are three gospel hearts beating in this book. The first is Ray Galea himself, who has been a gospel preacher for over 30 years. The second is the apostle Paul: Ray shows us the heart of the apostle, who wrote to the Philippians about the urgency of the gospel. Both of these men point us to the book's real heart: the heart of Jesus, whose heart for the lost led him to the cross. This book is a clear and passionate call to commit our lives to serving the one who gave his life for us, so we might live for him and for others. There's a clarity, an urgency and a compassion for the lost who need to know Jesus.

Al Stewart

National Director, Fellowship of Independent
Evangelical Churches Australia

Ray has distilled lessons from 30 years of pastoral ministry and longer walking with Jesus into this lovely book. Helpful pastoral wisdom, grounded in the book of Philippians, tumbles from every page. It renewed my eagerness and is a helpful and realistic spur to young men and women considering full-time gospel ministry.

Matt Fuller

Vicar, Christ Church Mayfair, London

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RAY GALEA

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Eager to Serve

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Contents

Preface	3
Introduction: Word and deed	7
<i>Sarah's story</i>	17
1. Single-minded for the cause of Christ	21
<i>Rob's story</i>	39
2. Consider others first for the sake of the gospel	45
<i>Maggie's story</i>	63
3. Guarding the gospel	67
<i>Bruce's story</i>	87
4. Handling anxiety as a gospel worker	93
<i>Iszy's story</i>	113
5. Gospel generosity	119
<i>Matt's story</i>	139
Conclusion: The beginning	147
Acknowledgements	157
Further resources	159

To my brothers and sisters in Christ at MBM,
who have served so faithfully during the 31 years
of my wonderful time as one of your pastors.
You have served willingly, to God's glory and to
my constant encouragement.

The body of Christ "grows and builds itself up in love,
as each part does its work". (Ephesians 4:16b)

Preface

I CLEARLY REMEMBER sitting on my lounge on the first day of what would become 31 years of pastoring the Multicultural Bible Ministry (MBM). The Anglican Diocese of Sydney had funded me to plant a new church, and I had five faithful and eager core members. But how would I fill my week? What did good and faithful ministry look like?

There was one thing I knew I had to do: connect people to Jesus from the Scriptures in the context of loving relationships. Our vision was to see lives transformed through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. I quickly learned that the marks of a faithful and fruitful week were the opportunities to evangelize non-Christians, disciple new believers, and train those who were willing to serve and lead.

As I look back, I see that my constant challenge has been the ‘training’ piece of that puzzle.

It’s so easy to be a mule in ministry and not a donkey. A mule is the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. The result is that a mule can’t reproduce; it’s the end of the line. A donkey, however, can repro-

duce with other donkeys, who in turn produce other donkeys. I have known both the importance and the constant challenge of ‘reproducing’ myself in ministry—raising up and developing leaders who will in turn raise up other leaders. Or to put it another way, to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

I may have been a slow learner when it came to training, but God in his kindness helped us to grow and develop this part of our ministry, especially when we were joined by other staff who were more skilled than I am in this vital area. Recently, as part of filling out paperwork for a funding grant, I was asked to enter the number of student ministers and ministry trainees who have gone through MBM. It warmed my heart to count 105 student ministers and nearly 40 ministry trainees, not to mention the many high-level volunteers who have served so willingly. Under God, we have had the privilege of helping a significant number of people to take their next step in ministry.

I’ve written this book in that same spirit: I want to help you take the next step in ministry.

But the shape of the book is also heavily influenced by this unique moment in my own life and ministry.

As I write this, I have recently finished serving at MBM. It’s been a joy and privilege to serve as one of the elders and pastors of a church filled with people from 70 different cultures. I love MBM and its people, and it’s still hard to fathom that I’ve left.

God willing, by the time you read these words, my wife Sandy and I will have moved to Dubai, where I

will be serving as a pastor at Fellowship Dubai, a growing evangelical church which, much like MBM, has people from many cultures gathered together as a church family under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Sandy and I are excited by this wonderful new (and unexpected) opportunity, even as we grieve leaving MBM.

As I prepared to finish at MBM and move to the Middle East, I hoped to write the story of my time at MBM. I was going to call it ‘Fumbling in a forward direction’, touching on the lessons learned and the many mistakes made. What’s worked, and what hasn’t? How has the gospel grown and borne fruit among us? Where have we seen God’s goodness and faithfulness? But time moves quickly when you’re getting ready to move halfway around the world, and that memoir will have to wait for another day. Even so, I’ve tried to put this book together in a way that I hope will give you a taste of what MBM was (and is) all about.

The heart of the book, though, is a study of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Philippi. I’ll be focusing especially on what this short but majestic letter says to us about the nature of gospel ministry, particularly vocational gospel ministry. But also interspersed through this discussion of Philippians are testimonies from people who have been eager to serve and to take up further opportunities to lead. It’s no exaggeration to say that I, as a church planter and pastor, would have been lost if God had not brought these people, and countless others like them, across my path.

In the end, ministry is about people. It’s about rela-

tionships. It's about opening your heart and your Bible to introduce people to the Lord Jesus Christ, so that they can be transformed in his likeness and live their lives for his glory. It's about standing together as God's united people, contending for the good news of our Lord Jesus before a world that has no idea how much they need a saviour.

Introduction: Word and deed

Philippians 1:1-2

IN ONE SENSE, this is a book for any Christian eager to serve the cause of Christ. But in another sense, it's especially for you if you want more. It's for anyone who has a holy discontent that leads them to want to give more of themselves to the work of the Lord.

I'm not talking about a misguided desire that falsely thinks gospel work or church work is somehow more glorifying to God than the rest of life. That won't do, for we are all to offer our bodies 24/7 as "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1). But if your heart's desire is to be more engaged in Christian ministry than your working hours allow, then this book is for you. There are 1,440 minutes allocated to each of us per day, no more and no fewer. Perhaps you can see the importance and the privilege of investing more of those precious minutes directly or indirectly into the cause of Christ and the building up of his church.

The road before you may or may not be clear. For example, you might already hope that the pathway will result in being a full-time pastor in a church. Or perhaps you're not sure what the ministry future looks like, but you want to take the next step to expand your ministry options in your home church, in another local gospel ministry, or in overseas service. Perhaps your gifts lie in administration, or in gardening, and you want to think about how to use those gifts to serve the Lord and his people. Perhaps you have a spouse who can free you up to invest a few days a week without pay, or you are a self-funded retiree who wants to maximize the next fifteen years of your life in service to the King of kings rather than wasting your retirement collecting seashells on a beach.

Maybe you've even had the gentle 'hand on the shoulder', as someone has asked you to consider either Bible college or a ministry apprenticeship. Others have seen that you are fit to serve and can see you making a difference in God's kingdom. If you're honest, it's both a touch exciting and a touch scary.

Whatever your starting point, the aim of this book is to help you as you contemplate what it looks like for you to step up and give your life in the service of the risen Lord Jesus. The opening verses of Philippians—the New Testament book that will be your guide in this book as you consider the next step—remind us that there are two broad categories of ministry, both of which need to be honoured, and both of which are worthy of pursuing:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at
Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:1-2)

This is the only time Paul opens a letter addressing “overseers” and “deacons” along with the whole church. These two words capture the *two broad categories of ministry*: the ministry of the word and the ministry of deeds, which have sometimes been called the left hand and right hand of church life. Both are vital for a healthy church, and both are necessary for the gospel to be effectively advanced. But sadly, if they are not properly understood, each can diminish the value of the other. Churches often provide a pathway for one but not for the other.

This should confound us, especially when we consider the account in Acts 6, where the apostles found the right solution to a real problem (with its racist overtones): the neglect of widows from among the Greek speakers. This neglect was causing division among God's people and did not make Jesus look good. The apostles came up with a wise solution:

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the

Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2-4)

The solution would not come from the apostles directly. They knew it was not right for them to neglect the priority of prayer and the ministry of the word to engage in serving at tables. This attitude must have seemed counterintuitive, considering that our Lord himself washed the disciples’ feet and called on them to follow this pattern (John 13:1-20). As John Piper has noted, the apostles avoided “the danger of solving the problem in a short-sighted way that would have diverted [them] from the ministry of the Word of God and prayer”.¹ The apostles resisted the temptation to make themselves the direct solution to this problem.

While the seven men appointed were not called ‘deacons’ as such, they were ‘deaconing’ or serving these widows and, very importantly, allowing the ministers of the word (in this case, the apostles) to do what their God-ordained responsibility required: prayer and preaching.² Immediately, Luke tells us the result:

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large

1 J Piper, ‘Serving widows, preaching the word, and winning priests’, *Desiring God*, 17 March 1991, accessed 14 March 2022 (desiringgod.org/messages/serving-widows-preaching-the-word-and-winning-priests).

2 The Greek word translated “wait on tables” is *diakoneō*, which can also be translated ‘to serve’. The Greek word *diakonos*, which gives us our English word ‘deacon’, is usually translated ‘servant’.

number of priests became obedient to the faith.
(Acts 6:7)

The word of God was propelled forward, leading to many more conversions, which surprisingly included some of the least likely to accept Christ: the Levitical priests.

The same principles govern the life of the church today. The church is the body of Christ, and it is built up when each part does its work (Eph 4:16). This involves the mobilization of all gifts and service, including administration. No one individual has all the gifts, and no one gift is given to all the people. We need each other “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Yes, every leader needs to be marked by “the fruit of the Spirit”, the nine Christlike markers listed in Galatians 5:22-23. But there is no such thing as a perfectly well-rounded leader who has every gift. There is, however, a well-rounded church.

By extension, the principle of freeing up people for word ministry is critical. Churches don’t run well unless a wide range of ministries operate well—from IT to policy formation in work, health and safety; from providing meals for the sick to renovating a single parent’s kitchen. In the early church, the appointment of deacons had the dual role of addressing the practical needs of the church and supplying critical support for those equipped to engage in word ministry. In so doing, it freed the word of God to be preached, and it released the pastor-teachers and evangelists to proclaim Christ in all his glory.

The distinction between word and deed can, however, be too rigid and misleading. It must be stressed that every disciple of Christ, regardless of gifting, is required to be prepared to defend the hope of the resurrection (1 Pet 3:15). Each one is called to make the most of every opportunity before a non-Christian world by speaking words full of grace and seasoned with salt (Col 4:5-6). And every disciple is a member of the priesthood of believers who are involved in teaching one another in the body of Christ. It's significant that, among the seven deacons, both Stephen and Philip were very soon also involved in crucial teaching ministries (Stephen in Acts 6-7; Philip in Acts 8:4-8 and 8:26-40).

Nevertheless, churches that are strong on word ministry can at times fail to honour, equip and empower deed ministry. The result is that pastors and evangelists spend their time photocopying and formatting when they should be teaching, which also deprives other church members of the opportunity to serve in good deeds. It also becomes tempting to forget why deed ministry exists: not just to do the 'real work' of love in action, but also to allow the preached word to go out unhindered and with integrity. Both groups, 'word ministers' and 'deed ministers', are ultimately engaged in the fellowship of the gospel, but from different sides of the coin. Just as deed ministry frees people to do word ministry, word ministry will inspire, equip and unleash God's people for gospel-driven deed ministry.

Let me repeat that there is a clear danger in labelling

the two categories of ministry as ‘word’ and ‘deed’. While it’s true that “overseers” (not “deacons”) are required to be gifted to teach (1 Tim 3:2), we’ve already seen in Acts 6-8 that “deacons” certainly could also preach. What’s more, in 1 Timothy 3 “overseers” (vv 2-7) and “deacons” (vv 8-13) share all other attributes in common. Both are to hold on to the truths of the gospel; both are to be tried and tested before being entrusted with more authority; and, most important of all, both are to be above reproach in terms of character and family, and before outsiders.

This gives us a taste of the Bible’s vision of ministry. I hope it’s a vision that puts a fire in your belly. I hope you are excited to take up more responsibility in either word or deed ministry, wherever the pathway takes you.

Sometimes that pathway can change direction midway through the journey. Andy was a Scripture teacher in our local schools who then transitioned into serving as our youth pastor.³ As time went on, it became obvious to Andy that he was not an ideal fit for the role. After stepping down and having a break, Andy started to serve in communications, and he was excellent. He kept teaching Scripture part-time, but his skill in communications was off the charts. He saw himself as providing the platform from which the gospel could go out. He is now back on staff in a new role, very much a round peg in a round hole. During COVID, the whole

3 ‘Scripture’ is the name sometimes given to Special Religious Education (SRE), which is Bible-teaching ministry in government-run schools in some states of Australia.

church was so dependent on him to keep the ministry of the word going out that we couldn't wait to publicly thank God for Andy's awesome contribution. It seems COVID has dragged churches into the 21st century and the connection between word and deed has become particularly obvious.

As I think about the staff team I was privileged to work with for so many years at MBM, I'm so thankful that it was filled with men and women—full-time and part-time, paid and unpaid—who have served faithfully in word *and* deed. The team has included those who *teach* adults, youth and kids, but also those who practically *serve* adults, youth and kids. There was always a real joy in collectively celebrating the wins in each other's ministries. Each week in staff meetings, we would divide into ever-changing prayer groups of four people to hear a celebration and a challenge from each person. We wanted everyone involved in either word ministry or deed ministry across portfolios to hear and rejoice in each other's successes and to support each other in the difficulties of ministry.

At each meeting, we would ask each other, "Who became a Christian during the past week?" We did that because we wanted to rejoice together (as commanded by Christ), but also because we wanted to acknowledge that evangelism is the work of God through the whole team, not just part of the team. Ministries can easily become siloed, which can lead to unhealthy competition within a church. But we are better together. For the gospel to go out and bear fruit and for churches to be healthy, we

need those who will step up and give themselves more fully to both word ministries and deed ministries.

A note about ‘work’

Peter Orr has helpfully made the following distinctions when it comes to work and workers.⁴

1. Work for the Lord

The phrase ‘work for the Lord’ describes the work of Christians who are involved in honourable secular labour (thus excluding illegal employment), with each worker ultimately serving and glorifying the Lord himself who will provide a reward for such faithfulness in their workplace.

Luther was right to remove the sacred–secular divide regarding work, given that God can be glorified in both spheres by Christians. All work in the hands of a genuine believer is a work for the Lord and as such will receive an inheritance from the Lord. This is where Christians in the workforce are indeed working for the Lord and expressing God’s common grace to all humanity.

2. Work of the Lord

In light of the gospel, every Christian is also to be fully involved in the ‘work of the Lord’ (1 Cor 15:58). Knowing that death has been defeated and the bodily

4 See P Orr, ‘Two types of work: work for the Lord and work for the kingdom of God’, *Themelios*, 2022, 47(1):70–80; and P Orr, ‘Abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58): everything we do as Christians or specific gospel work?’, *Themelios*, 2013, 38(2): 205–14.

resurrection is promised to those who believe in the living Christ, every Christian is to give themselves to a special work distinguished from their normal employment. It includes promoting the gospel (1 Cor 9:22) and serving the saints (1 Cor 12:7).

In short, all believers are to play their part directly and indirectly in saving the lost (1 Cor 10:31-11:1) and building up the church (1 Cor 14:12). This kingdom work is not in vain and is given meaning and value by virtue of the resurrection.


3. Workers/co-workers

When a person's work becomes dominated by kingdom work, they are referred to as 'workers' or 'co-workers'. Paul identifies himself, Apollos and Cephas as "co-workers in God's service" (1 Cor 3:9), with the church as the object of their labour. This category of worker seems to extend to Stephanus and others like him (1 Cor 16:15-16) who represent those who work and labour in kingdom work. The language recognizes the fact that they have devoted themselves to the work of the Lord. It is specifically to this group that this book is especially addressed, though not exclusively.

Given that Epaphroditus is described as nearly having died while doing the work of Christ delivering money to Paul (Phil 2:30), perhaps the language of 'workers' or 'co-workers' may include those involved in 'support ministry'—that is to say, those who give themselves over to kingdom work in either word or deed ministry may be viewed as co-workers in Christ's service.

Sarah's story

Sarah is a high-level volunteer at MBM. I invited her to our weekly staff meetings because of both the authority she carries and the time she gives. When I asked her to officially come on staff, she jokingly declined, saying, “I don’t want a target on my back!” It’s been a joy to see her become a Christian and develop into a fully devoted disciple of Christ. Her husband Jono is a hard-working deacon, and they both give their all to the cause of Christ. Sarah takes on full ownership of our largest evangelistic courses each term. I often say I employ people so that they can worry about a ministry instead of me having to worry. That is Sarah. She worries about getting people into our evangelistic courses, making sure those people are loved and supported, and ensuring that they have every opportunity to grasp the good news of our Lord. She has been such a vital blessing to me and to every mission pastor who has served in that role.



MY HUSBAND AND I met while serving together at church—let me say this is a great way to meet your spouse! After three years of leading Kids Church with

him, I had a good idea of who this man was, what was important to him, and how we worked together. We then took these same kids through youth group and continued to serve together until our first child was born. That child is now in youth group, while our two daughters are in Kids Church reaping the benefits of the ministry that others are doing. My heart is so full—full knowing how loved my children are and how much they are growing in their love for Jesus because of the hard work and commitment of their beautiful volunteer leaders.

I have now been serving on the Mission team at church for the past seven years. I coordinate our larger *Explaining Christianity* courses, which introduce people to Christ (we have *EC* running at all of our campuses). I love this role. Most of my time is spent working alongside others in planning and running this course, which takes place four times a year. It is designed to share the truth of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and what that means for us.

There are highs and lows in this ministry. It gets stressful at times, and to be honest I'm not always motivated. But I love that I have a role with purpose, meaning and eternal consequences. I work alongside a great team. I love training others, and have been trained by the very best in my field. Mostly I love seeing God at work in those who don't know him yet. I am privileged and honoured to play a small part in someone's journey.

As a mum of three with a family-operated small

business, I don't really have spare time; there is always something to do. I make my role at church a priority and squeeze the other stuff in around it. I take this role very seriously. Yes, I have people to answer to and a responsibility to my team to do things well, but my biggest responsibility is to God—to give him my best all the time, whether I am a paid employee or not. My commitment to work doesn't depend on my hourly rate, but on the relationship I have with my Lord. I am serving him first. I squeeze the rest of my life around this role, but I know that I am serving him there, too.

As a committed volunteer gospel worker, I can only do the amount that I do because I have a husband who earns enough money so that we can live off one wage. This hasn't always been the case. We spoke about this early in our marriage, and we've made some sacrifices along the way for our family to work like this. I have been so blessed with a husband who encourages me and wants our children to know that serving God and his people is just what we do in our family. The children sometimes whine and complain when we need to go to church early to welcome people at the door, or when we have *another* meeting to go to; if I'm honest, I complain too sometimes. But it's just what we do. We are partnered in all of it.

Looking back, I can see that in all my secular roles—in big corporate organizations, in small not-for-profits, and in working with children—God was preparing me for my time in ministry. I received all the skills and training I needed to serve in the best way that I could

in church. I even think God was preparing my heart. I have never had a strong desire to climb the career ladder; if I'd had that desire, I don't think I'd be doing this ministry. I worked my way up to a certain level in my organizations, then slowly climbed back down the ladder to where I could be the most hands-on in teaching, leading and training others. God was preparing me for the ultimate role: serving his people and serving those who don't yet know him. I love serving my Lord!

Sarah Anderson