LETTERS TO YOUNG MINISTERS

Pastor Dr. Emmanuel Mukisa, D.D.

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Email: books@wotmi.org
Web: www.wotpublishing.com
Tel: +256 742 302 566 / +256 786 821 888

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

These letters are written to encourage, guide and challenge you as you serve God and His people. Whether you are beginning in ministry, leading a congregation, guiding a choir or serving young people, I want you to understand both the privilege of your calling and the responsibility entrusted to you.

Ministry brings opportunities and challenges. You will need wisdom in handling people, humility in receiving correction, and faithfulness when the fruit of your work is not yet visible. These letters address such matters as a father would speak to those he desires to see established in the work of the Lord.

Ministry is not merely about what you do; it is about who you are in Christ. The foundation of your ministry is not your abilities or achievements, but your identity as a child of God. You are a new creation through His finished work. Your service must proceed from that reality.

This is not a step-by-step manual. My purpose is to help you understand the character and conduct that should accompany your calling. God is with you, and His Spirit lives in you. As you yield to Him and act on His Word, His life will find expression in the way you lead and serve.

Do not measure your ministry by the applause of men. Keep your attention on Christ, the truth of His Word and the people He has entrusted to your care. Serve them in humility and love, with a willingness to learn.

As you read, may the Holy Spirit guide you, correct you where necessary, and strengthen your understanding. God has called you to serve faithfully and with excellence. He has equipped you for His work. Let what you have received in Christ govern how you live and minister.

In Christ,
Pastor Emma Mukisa

First Letter: A Call to Honour, Wisdom, and Accountability

Dear Young Minister,

I believe you are doing well, and the work of God in you is prevailing. Today, I write to you with a desire and hope that, through this letter, I can bring you to an understanding of honour, wisdom, and knowledge in your walk with God and help you overcome a snare I have seen robbing many.

As you know, love conquers all, and I have chosen love for myself and my world so that, through it, we can subdue the selfishness and wickedness that is in the world!

We are living in one of the greatest times in human history, where technology has advanced everything—work, service, influence, human relations, and many other things! It is a beautiful thing that we have come this far, and knowledge has increased in wonderful ways.

However, we live in a time when many self-proclaimed authorities and leaders abound. Men have majored in the minors of life, and someone can be treated as an authority because he has a large following, even when what he says is not right. Having an audience does not give a man knowledge or understanding. Accountability is disregarded because it seems everyone has something to say to the world and a right to their claim. You can post and delete what you have posted, but deleting it does not remove your responsibility for what you said. Be mindful of what you say, to whom you say it, and the grounds on which you stand.

The wise man says:

"You who are young, make the most of your youth. Relish your youthful vigor. Follow the impulses of your heart. If something looks good to you, pursue it. But know also that not just anything goes; You have to answer to God for every last bit of it." —Ecclesiastes 11:9 MSG

There is particular accountability in the teaching ministry. It matters where you are leading God's people, whether you see them or not. What you share with them is important.

"Not many [of you] should become teachers (self-constituted censors and reprovers of others), my brethren, for you know that we [teachers] will be judged by a higher standard and with greater severity [than other people; thus we assume the greater accountability and the more condemnation]."
—James 3:1 AMPC

The moment you position yourself as one who shows others what to do and how they should relate to matters, you become accountable for what you teach and for the example you set! This is why we must be taught in order to teach. Only disciples make disciples.

I have seen men who are not under authority trying to teach authority. How wrong that is! I mean, as you teach, what examples will you give? Oh, I know some might say, "All I need to preach is Christ!"
That is very good because our focus is Christ. But that's also why you must learn and follow Him before you can direct men on how to follow.

The scriptures direct us on how to walk:

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."
—Romans 15:4 KJV

How did Paul do it?

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."
—1 Corinthians 11:1 KJV

He tells them to follow him as he follows Christ.
What I'm trying to say is, before you share what your head is thinking, ensure that you are living the talk. That is the way of the scriptures!

Jesus directs His disciples on how to make disciples who follow Him, and He says:

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”
—Matthew 28:20 KJV

You teach what you are taught!
You can’t accurately teach submission if you are not submitted yourself! Do not make yourself a judge over leaders or use correction as an occasion for dishonour. Raise genuine concerns responsibly and with respect. Don’t fall for the idea of a society where nailing men and women of God is more popular than following them. Avoid such conversations as they do not profit. In fact, the scripture says:

“But refuse (shut your mind against, have nothing to do with) trifling (ill-informed, unedifying, stupid) controversies over ignorant questionings, for you know that they foster strife and breed quarrels.”
—2 Timothy 2:23 AMPC

When God teaches you something, it does not mean that you have become an authority over every other minister or every matter of doctrine. I have seen young men use sharp words when relating to leaders, bishops and pastors. I am writing so that you may learn to handle the truth with understanding and honour, and help others do the same.

Now, I want to talk to you about correction and rebuke!

Understanding Correction and Rebuke

Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy:

"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;
The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.
... Against an elder, receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.
Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."
—1 Timothy 5:1-2, 19-20 KJV

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."
—2 Timothy 4:2 KJV

Notice the settings of these instructions. In the opening of 1 Timothy 5, Paul tells Timothy how to address older and younger people in the family of God. Later in the chapter, he addresses elders who lead and teach, the handling of accusations, and the rebuke of those who sin. Respect does not remove accountability.

Timothy was a son of Paul and had been entrusted with responsibility in the church at Ephesus. Paul also commended him in his letter to the Philippians:

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."
—Philippians 2:19-22 NIV

Paul had entrusted Timothy with responsibility among the believers. He also charged the elders of the church at Ephesus to watch over themselves and the flock:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."
—Acts 20:28–31 KJV

These leaders were responsible both for their own conduct and for the people entrusted to them. Their position did not place them beyond the Word's correction.

He gave the same instruction to Titus:

"To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."
—Titus 1:4-6 NIV

Paul left Titus in Crete to put in order what remained unfinished and appoint elders. Titus was acting under the responsibility Paul had entrusted to him. The charge was definite, and so was his accountability for carrying it out.

"For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. … Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith."
—Titus 1:10-13 NIV

"These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you."
—Titus 2:15 NIV

This instruction was given to Titus to correct those who were not sound in doctrine. He was not appointing himself over the churches; he was carrying out a responsibility entrusted to him.

Those entrusted with leadership must guard sound doctrine and correct error. We must recognise that responsibility and honour it. But the responsibility of leaders does not remove the believer's responsibility to examine teaching by the Word.

How Did They Do It in the Book of Acts?

"Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question."
—Acts 15:1-2 NIV

"Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.' The apostles and elders met to consider this question."
—Acts 15:5-6 NIV