

**THE
PASTOR**

**A GUIDE FOR
GOD'S FAITHFUL
SERVANT**

Jim Vogel, Editor
More than 30 contributing authors

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The Pastor: A Guide for God’s Faithful Servant

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Foreword

— John Greening

Learning to behave properly in church as a boy was no small task. That behavioral challenge was exacerbated by the reality that I was a PK (pastor's kid). My conduct was not merely an expression of my individual soul liberty, for which I was accountable. My conduct also reflected on my dad and mom in their roles as parents and as pastor and wife.

I never struggled with outright rebellion. Adolescent defiance would have (whether fairly or unfairly) impacted the credibility of my parents' ministry. My behavioral challenges instead took the form of such problems as "juvenile restless leg syndrome," a malady created by the volatile mixture of too much boyhood energy, cramped sanctuary pews, and church services that never seemed to end. That combination had explosive potential.

During sermon time, I developed overactive "mind and mouth" disease, producing witty comments that popped out effervescently to my high school age friends sitting next to me. Unfortunately my comments had little to do with the message being preached—much to my father's chagrin and older pew members' dismay.

In what was a display of divine irony (or justice), God in His eternal plan had determined that my life's vocational calling was to serve as a pastor. Though my legs continued to be restless at times, and my mind never quite stopped conjuring up some humorous thought, I found that a whole new set of behavioral challenges awaited me as I entered the pastorate.

I was not alone in facing the learning curve for pastoral behavioral. The apostle Paul communicated with his young student Timothy to mentor him in the proper demeanor and execution of church ministry. Paul said to Timothy, "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14, 15, NKJV).

The church in Ephesus that young pastor Timothy was shepherding was like any church. There were constant challenges to face. Here is a short list of what he had to navigate. It may sound similar to the laundry list of challenges confronting you.

- Dealing with deficient teachers using faulty curriculum
- Guarding the centrality of the gospel
- Handling troublemakers in the congregation
- Developing positive community relations
- Providing gender role guidelines
- Establishing leadership qualifications
- Correcting truth distortions
- Establishing credibility as a young pastor
- Maintaining discipline in personal life and ministry
- Communicating properly when under pressure
- Caring for the needs of the elderly
- Determining pastoral salaries
- Responding to criticism
- Managing finances
- Focusing on the right priorities

The ministry is not a vocation for a novice (1 Tim. 3:6). The complexity of pastoral service requires the wisdom and experience of a seasoned veteran. Every young pastor needs a “been there, done that” perspective such as the one Paul provided to inexperienced Timothy as he embarked on his pastoral career. Even veteran pastors can value from wise counsel as well as review and refinement of pastoral basics.

I have known the general editor of this book, Jim Vogel, for many years. He started his ministry under the tutelage of a trusted pastor who groomed him. As Jim gained experience, he invested in the development of young men who went from his church into ministry, and in his staff, who grew under his mentoring. Most recently Jim has been a pastor of pastors, counseling and challenging them to pursue excellence in their work.

Each contributor to this book is a seasoned veteran of pastoral ministry. The compilation of wisdom contained in the pages that follow is a rich treasure trove of ministry guidance that will further equip men for the “good work” of pastoring the church of the living God.

Introduction

— Jim Vogel

I never intended to be a pastor. My father was a successful businessman who served faithfully in our home church for many years and had a great impact for the Lord. Through most of my teenage years, I felt that I would head in the same direction. So in my final year of high school, I applied to a well-known Christian university, thinking I would pursue a business career like my dad.

But God had other plans. Using some unique influences on a student missions trip and the encouragement of a godly youth leader, God redirected me toward ministry, and I have never looked back. After Bible college and seminary, I was a youth pastor and then a lead pastor, serving for a total of thirty years. Now I pastor pastors, seeking to encourage, train, and equip them for the world's most challenging and rewarding work.

As every pastor knows, pastoring isn't easy. It's thrilling and fulfilling to be sure—but also demanding and difficult. Here's why: effective pastoring focuses on three primary responsibilities, each of which seems to require a full-time commitment to accomplish with any measure of success. Allow me to summarize.

Pastors Lead Churches

It's God's design that pastors give overall leadership to congregations. Scriptural teaching is unmistakably clear about this role under God. Peter said it well when he instructed his fellow pastors to "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers" (1 Pet. 5:2, NIV). Additionally, I believe Paul had pastors in mind when he described them as those "who are over you in the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:12, NIV), and later in his first letter to Timothy, he described elders (same office as pastors) as those who "direct the affairs of the church" (1 Tim. 5:17, NIV). God never gives this overarching leadership responsibility to deacons. In Biblical perspective, they assist pastors and serve alongside them as supportive co-laborers.

Much could be said about the nature of this pastoral leadership responsibility, but the following traits of pastoral leaders stand out to me as especially important.

Humble leadership. Biblical pastoral leadership is not harsh and dictatorial, but is instead marked by a humble spirit and a servant's perspective. Again, Peter spoke to this when he instructed pastors to be "eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2, 3, NIV). Additionally, Paul, although not directly speaking of pastors, described the manner of a servant leader and stated that "the Lord's servant must . . . be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct" (2 Tim. 2:24, 25, NIV). Of course, compassionate leadership doesn't preclude confrontation and a willingness to address problems proactively but is always marked by a genuine concern for people and their welfare.

Godly leadership. The responsibility of giving overall leadership to a church with humility and courage requires a foundation of genuine godliness. Effective pastoral leadership is godly leadership. The pastoral task cannot be accomplished with fruitfulness out of a spiritual vacuum. Tim White's chapter in the opening section of this book appropriately emphasizes the spiritual life of the pastoral leader as a foundational priority for all that he does.

Courageous leadership. Being an overseer of a church brings added pressures and closer scrutiny. It carries with it the responsibility of making unpopular decisions at times and of dealing firmly yet lovingly with problems. It often brings criticism and resistance. Effective pastoral leadership means having the willingness to confront sin and work through Biblical principles of restoration. In short, pastors who lead effectively are men of courage.

Visionary leadership. Effective pastors are also forward thinkers. They are the lead "vision casters" for their churches. Steve Viars ably addresses this responsibility in detail in his chapter. But let me emphasize that when such leadership is lacking, churches default to maintenance ministry, continuing programs and activities without a sense of direction and purpose. Christ gave His church a mission and defined its priorities. Pastors who know how to articulate purpose and values, assess their churches' progress, and establish a goal-setting process are sure to see their churches go forward for God's glory.

How does this leadership work out practically in a church? It works when the responsibilities outlined in the chapters of this book are fulfilled. Pastors lead deacons, direct staff, oversee educational ministries, guide worship, strategize outreach, preside over meetings, supervise stewardship activities, deal with conflict, lead in discipline, and much, much more.

Pastors Communicate Truth

The pastor's priority responsibility of preaching and teaching the Word of God is emphasized throughout the Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews had pastoral leaders in

mind when he admonished his readers to “remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you” (Heb. 13:7, NIV). Paul described pastors as those who “admonish you” (1 Thess. 5:12, NIV), and at the end of his life, he charged Timothy to “preach the Word . . . with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV). While others can be enlisted and trained in this Bible-teaching task, pastors have the primary responsibility for communication. The Word of God changes lives, fuels spiritual growth, and equips for ministry. It’s the foundation for all that the church is and does. A few concepts can help us clarify this task.

Expository preaching. Such preaching puts the emphasis on *exposing* the truth of a section of Scripture rather than *imposing* our ideas upon it. It’s an approach that keeps the pastor focused on the Scriptural material and guards him from digression toward (or even obsession with) his own thoughts and ideas. Preparation for expository preaching requires long hours of study but yields the fruit of changed lives! (See Gary Gromacki’s excellent chapter on this topic.)

Priority preaching. Beware of the danger of allowing preaching to become secondary in corporate worship. There are so many helpful and truly uplifting aspects of worship available to God’s people today, and I do not denigrate the use of newer elements that truly draw our hearts to God. But the preaching of the Word of God must remain central, setting the “truth parameters” for the rest of worship, which finds its climactic expression in Scriptural proclamation.

Pastoral preaching. Keep in mind what God desires us to be: pastors, not just preachers. It’s easy to get so passionate about our preaching that our preparation seems to require a weekly hibernation in our offices. If we are not intentional about our schedule, our time for sermon preparation can swallow up most of our available time, and we are then forced to neglect other aspects of our pastoral role. It’s time spent with our people between Sundays—becoming aware of their struggles and helping lift their burdens—that fuels our preaching with practicality and helpful application.

Teaching. On a more personal level, may I suggest that pastors consider active involvement in the teaching ministries of the church beyond their primary preaching role in corporate worship settings. Some may disagree, but I believe that pastors who don’t take advantage of the opportunity to share God’s Word in smaller settings, such as Sunday School classes and small groups, miss out on another level of communication (often a more personal or intimate one) that can supplement their effectiveness in the pulpit.

Pastors Care for People

In Paul’s description of the qualifications of pastors (overseers) in his letter to Timothy, he directly mentioned the responsibility of caring. Comparing the pastor’s role to that of a father, he speaks of the pastor’s commitment to “take care of God’s church” (1 Tim. 3:5,

NIV). The word translated *care* in this passage implies much more than mere governance; it emphasizes caring action. (See the only other two usages of this unique word in the New Testament in Luke 10:34 and 35.) Pastors are to be congregational caregivers!

The shepherding analogy is helpful here because it reminds us that our role as pastors is more than feeding and leading; it involves a compassionate concern that is demonstrated in caring action. Just as shepherds tend the flock, watch over the sheep, and minister to their needs for shelter, safety, and comfort, so a good pastoral shepherd recognizes the importance of responding to the needs of the sick, paying specific attention to the homebound, counseling those with special needs, providing comfort to the grieving, helping couples prepare for married life, and much more.

No pastor can afford to ignore these personal caring aspects of his ministry without consequence. They give power to our preaching and foster genuine community. In larger churches this ministry can be shared with other leaders, but I personally believe that all pastors must be involved in this to some degree.

Since leaving the pastorate, I have been occasionally asked what I miss the most about that role now that I do not have a local congregation to serve. I think I surprise some people when I mention caring ministries. But it's true. I miss visiting those in the hospital facing surgery and sharing the amazing comfort of God's Word at a memorial service. I miss working with couples preparing for their marriages and comforting those in broken ones. It is at these times when our people need us most and our words have the greatest impact.

Despite the variety of ministry approaches and philosophies in churches today, these three roles of leading the church, communicating truth, and caring remain constant for pastoral leaders who wish to follow the Biblical pattern. And in reality, the chapters that follow fall under these categories of pastoral responsibility.

About This Book

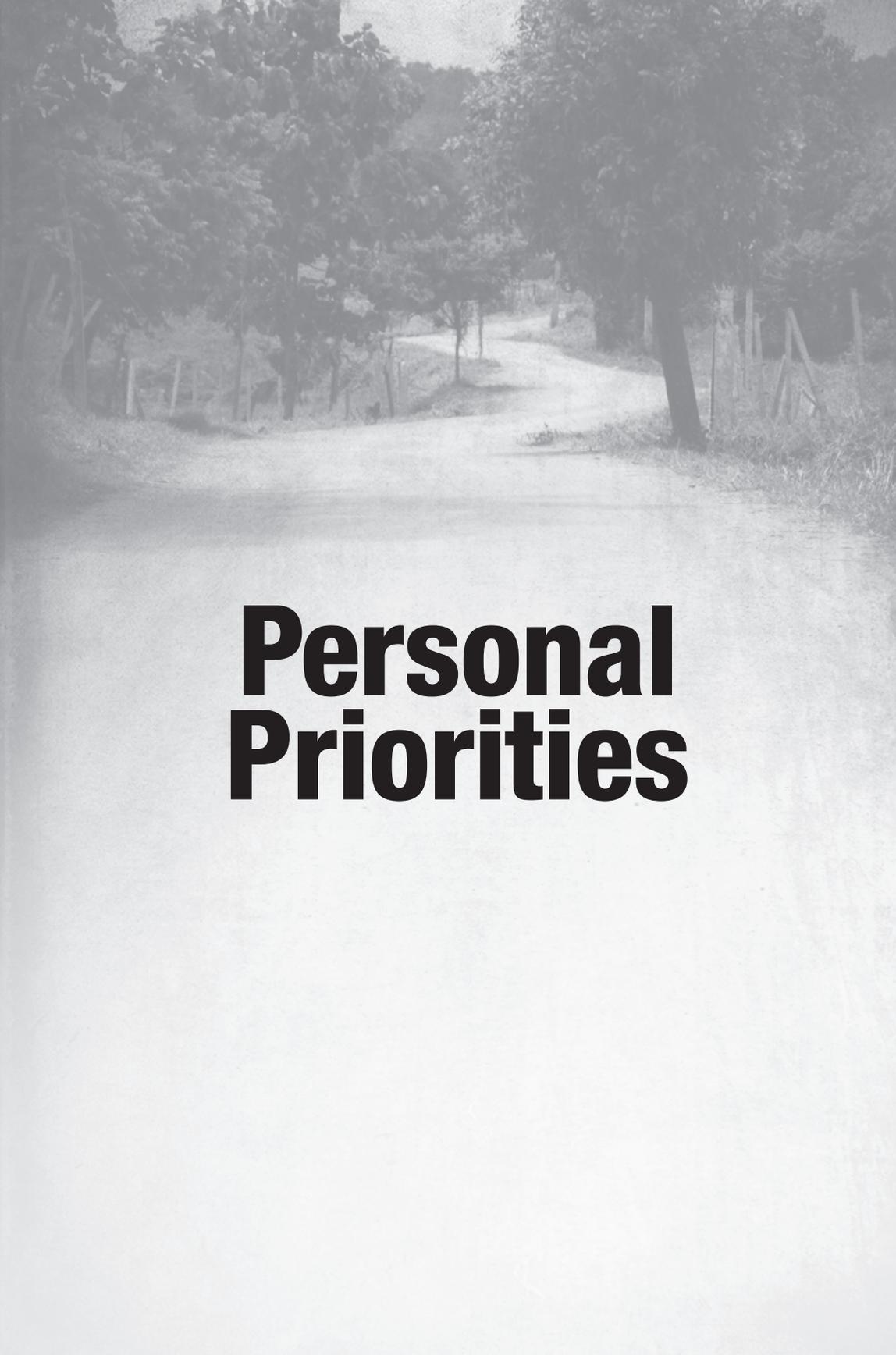
Why another book on pastoring, and what makes this one unique? For one thing, the pastoral ministry landscape is constantly changing. New challenges and opportunities call for fresh ideas and perspectives that today's pastors ought to be kept abreast of. Also, while many excellent materials are available today on specific aspects of pastoral work such as counseling and preaching, not many focus, as this one does, on a broad spectrum of subjects related to a pastor's life and work. This book is not written by a single author, but by many. It is strengthened by the involvement of more than two dozen excellent authors who each share in an area of expertise. While Scripture is referenced throughout, this volume does not focus primarily on Biblical exposition but on practical help for pastors. It's not a book of sermons, nor is it intended to be a technical volume, but a more popular treatment designed to be of value to both the ministry student and the seasoned pastor.

The chapters have intentionally been kept concise to allow for addressing more subjects and perhaps for a wider usage by today's busy pastors.

The book is divided into four sections:

- The initial five chapters address the spiritual and personal foundation of pastoral ministry. An effective pastor builds his public ministry upon the foundation of his private calling and commitments as well as his personal walk with God.
- Chapters 6–12 emphasize what I believe are the seven core responsibilities of a pastor. They represent the essence of a pastoral job description. Few pastors can successfully serve without some understanding and competency in these areas.
- Chapters 13–28 addresses pastoral leadership in sixteen specific church ministry areas with practical suggestions to enhance the pastor's effectiveness.
- Chapters 29–32 deal with four specialized roles that deserve special attention and are increasingly an important part of any discussion on pastoral ministries.

It is my prayer that this volume will have a wide influence and provide pastors with real help in their ministries.



Personal Priorities

1

The Call to the Ministry

— Daniel Davey

What exactly is the call of God, and how is a man to absolutely know that God has commissioned him to the ministry? Should he expect a literal, audible call from Heaven? Or perhaps, should he expect a silent but unmistakable internal impulse from the Holy Spirit? Additionally, if such an experience is necessary, should a young man aspiring to the ministry prepare himself to wait for God to directly call him, such as Old Testament men like Moses (Exod. 3; 4), Gideon (Judg. 6), and Samuel (1 Sam. 3)? Or should he expect a clarion Christ-call like New Testament men such as James and John (Mark 1:19, 20), Nathanael (John 1:45–51), and Paul (Acts 9)? Where does the Word of God fit into all of this?

By asking such questions, I am seeking to prod our minds to discover whether or not the Scriptures have a definite and seamless plan—a Biblical norm, of sorts—of calling men into ministry regardless of how sensational the initial experience may or may not be. To properly answer this question, I think we should begin with the Scriptures and focus on the Biblical term *call*.

The Biblical Term *Call* *Call* in the Old Testament

An examination of the English term *call* in the Old Testament reveals that it is usually a translation of the Hebrew verb *qarah*. Our concern here is to consider only those passages where God is the One calling and mankind is the one being called. From this narrow domain, three observations may provide some helpful insight and background to our study.

God initiates the call. First and most obvious, when God is the One calling, He is clearly viewed as the initiator of the call. Though this is true without exception, this observation is most clearly validated when the man He calls is totally unaware of God's calling yet acts in accord with His purpose. Such is the case with the Medo-Persian king Cyrus the Great (see Isaiah 45:1, 4–6).

The call may be for a specific act of service. A remarkable feature of God’s call is that it may be extended to someone to accomplish specific acts of service for the glory of God. In clear terms, the call of God was not just for vocational ministry roles. This was exactly the case with Bezalel, the skilled craftsman whom God called to build the tabernacle of meeting. Moses chronicled Bezalel’s appointment with the following words of the Lord: “See, I have *called by name* Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Exod. 31:2, 3, NASB; emphasis added).

The call may be for vocational service. This final observation relates to the vocational call of God that led men into a leader-prophet role. Moses (Exod. 3:1–10) and Samuel (1 Sam. 3:1–21) are examples of such a call, and both were taken completely by surprise with God’s choice. Moses, an eighty-year-old man, was called by God from a burning bush left unconsumed by the fire (Exod. 3:2, 4), and Samuel, just a young boy, was called by God four times (1 Sam. 3:4–14). These two examples, as with all the prophets of the Old Testament, were given divine revelation, and that revelation was often accompanied by miraculous activity.

What is important to note from these observations is that God chooses to use men as a means to accomplish His purpose on earth, and this choice rests solely in His sovereign will. When He selects men, He both calls and equips them for either specific acts of service or vocational ministry. In so doing, He receives all the honor and glory when the work is complete.

Call in the New Testament

The abundant usages of the verb *to call* (*kaleō*) and cognate nouns *calling* (*klēsis*) and the *called ones* (*klētois*) in the New Testament seem to support the idea that a person’s salvation call of God in Christ fully encompasses every detail of his life—from his spiritual birth to his future glorification. Paul expressed this very idea with great confidence to both the Roman and the Thessalonian believers. To the Romans he wrote:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called [*tois klētois* “the ones called”] according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first-born among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called [*ekalesen*]; and these whom He called [*ekalesen*], He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom. 8:28–30, NASB)

And to the Thessalonians he wrote: “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. *It was for this He called* [*kaleō*]

you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:13, 14, NASB; emphasis added).

To the Corinthians Paul also noted this breadth of God’s calling with a number of specific statements that include “[you are] sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by *calling*” (1 Cor. 1:2); “you *were called* into fellowship with His Son” (1:9); “those who are *the called*” (1:24); “consider your *calling*, brethren, that there were not many wise . . . , mighty, . . . [or] noble” (1:26); when marriages are struggling, “God *has called* us to peace” (7:15); and “as God *has called* each, in this manner let him walk” (7:17, NASB). The term *call* or *calling* relates to the effective gospel call in the Corinthians’ lives, bringing them into fellowship with Jesus Christ (1:9). Paul considered this call, once received by the Corinthians, a permanent “set apart” relationship in Christ (1:2), being enjoyed no matter what situation of life the believer found himself in as he eagerly waited for the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:7, 8). What this means in practical terms is this: (1) The call of God through the gospel places one in Christ (1:1–9); (2) this gospel call fully embraces every life-detail of God’s set-apart purpose for each saint (7:17–24); and (3) this sanctifying purpose of God, then, includes fitting each saint for ministry within the Body of Christ—whether formal or informal positions (12:1–31).

Assuming my understanding of Paul’s usage of *call* and *calling* are accurate, there are two lingering questions to answer. First, if there is no distinct and separate vocational call to ministry, how are texts like Mark 1:20, Acts 13:1–4, and Romans 1:1 to be understood? Second, can a man absolutely know that he has been fitted by God for vocational ministry to lead the church if no additional call is required? This second question must be set aside until the first question is addressed.

The passages in question—such as Mark 1:20, Acts 13:1–4, and Romans 1:1—are marked by the truth that certain men received a direct invitation from Jesus Christ to be a disciple and, in later days, an apostle (Mark 3:13–19; 6:30). By definition, the word *apostle* means “a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders.” This term can be used in a broad or a narrow sense. In the broad sense it may fulfill the definition as “one sent forth with orders”; however, the New Testament most often uses it in a technical or narrow sense. This narrow sense identifies a small group of men who were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21, 22), specifically called by Jesus Himself (Luke 6:12, 13), and identified in the New Testament as holding a special office, “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1, NASB). In his book *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem explains that these “apostles had unique authority to found and govern the early church, and they could speak and write the words of God” (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 3:1, 2).

Since these apostles met exclusive qualifications, their divine call into ministry is not to be considered a prototype for those who follow them into church leadership. These apostles were uniquely qualified and labeled “first” in the early church (1 Cor. 12:28). Their distinctive call to the ministry, their exceptional gifting, their direct reception of divine

revelation, and their special enabling to write and speak the words of Christ were for the purpose of establishing the early church in truth and grace. Pastors and teachers today are called by the New Testament to trace their doctrine, but never their supernatural office or experiences (2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Tim. 3:10–17).

The Conclusion of *Call* in the Testaments

From the Old Testament, the call of God is acknowledged as sovereignly dispensed upon men for either particular acts of service (e.g., Bezalel, the skilled craftsman) or vocational ministry appointment (e.g., Moses and Samuel). In every case, God fulfills His own purpose as the initiator of the call and man is the responder. In the New Testament, this sovereign initiative continues unfettered, but with two significant points of clarity. First, the call of God is actually His effectual call in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is enjoyed by all believers. Second, this call encompasses all things within the believer’s human existence: from salvation to sanctification, from fellowship to discipleship, from singleness to marriage, and from ministry to eldership. Therefore, the man desiring vocational ministry need not seek an additional call from God beyond what he has already received in Christ. So, with this being said, we may now address the second question mentioned above: Can a man absolutely know that he has been fitted by God for vocational ministry to lead the church if no additional call is required?

The Ministry Call: Objective Requirements and Affirming Observations

There is no doubt that all believers are called to ministry. Paul was clear on this and used the body metaphor to explain this important truth—every member is important, and each is to do his part (Eph. 4:16; 1 Cor. 12:12–25). However, the Body needs leaders—human leaders—identified in Titus 1 as mature men (*elder*), gracious guardians (*bishop*), skilled managers (*steward*) who are appointed as leaders in the church. Paul considered these men “gifts of Christ” to His church (Eph. 4:7–11).

Not only are these men considered divine gifts, but Paul told the Ephesian elders that “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28, NASB). This language of Paul could not be more emphatic, “the Holy Spirit *has made you*.” This verb *has made* carries the idea of “to strategically place or carefully appoint.” It is used in such important passages as Romans 4:17, where Paul quoted Genesis 17:5 and recalled what God had said to Abraham: “A father of many nations *have I made you*” (NASB); and in 1 Corinthians 3:10, where Paul defended his apostolic work and said, “Like a wise master builder *I laid* a foundation, and another is building on it” (NASB). This term was also used by Paul to explain that “God *has appointed* in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Cor. 12:28, NASB). In like

manner, Paul used this word in his Acts message to the Ephesian elders to emphasize their strategic appointment by the Holy Spirit to oversee God's church. More weighty words could not be found in relation to the ministry.

The question remains, how does the Holy Spirit do this? How does the Spirit prepare, fit, and appoint men for church leadership? While this question is not determined by divine revelation or apostolic experiences, it may be unambiguously resolved by a careful analysis of two New Testament ingredients: objective requirements and affirming observations. These Biblical requirements and spiritual observations cooperate as a unified entity, and may both privately (within the heart of the one called) and publicly (within the body of the local church) demonstrate the call of God's Spirit upon a man for vocational ministry.

As you weigh these requirements and observations, you must not think that they are in a fixed chronological arrangement to be checked off as you would a grocery list. In fact, both parts need to be "syncretistically" viewed by the reader. What I mean by this is that each part works in harmony with the other and that within each part there is mutual dependence. So failure in one requirement will obstruct the whole. Therefore, carefully consider the five objective requirements and the five affirming observations as a unit that stands or falls together.

Objective requirements for the man God prepares and fits

The man the Holy Spirit appoints is a man who meets certain Biblical requirements. These may be accurately expressed as objective requirements because they can be seen in a man's life, as well as be evaluated by others. It is important to appreciate that these essential requirements that mark a man's life also allow room for spiritual progress and personal development. Paul made this clear to Timothy when he encouraged him to minister as "an example of those who believe," for in so doing "your progress [*prokoph*], will be evident to all" (1 Tim. 4:12, 15, NASB). In other words, these five requirements do not have to be fully developed in the life of a future church leader, but they must be evident in some form if he is to qualify for vocational ministry.

Integrity of life. The Biblical word *integrity* comes from the Hebrew term *tahm* and is often used in poetic literature such as Job 1:1, a "blameless" man; Psalm 37:37, "mark the blameless man;" and Song of Solomon 6:9, "my dove, my perfect one, is unique" (NASB). The idea of this term is not absolute perfection; rather, it identifies one as being whole, sound, complete, and morally innocent. From this background, I borrow the term to identify the character of the man who is pursuing the twenty-two qualifications named by Paul that are to mark an elder's life. In both 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul began the elder qualifications with an overarching term translated "above reproach" or "blameless." This term, as George Knight writes, identifies "the overall requirement" of the two passages, and "as such, a man would not be open to attack or criticism in terms of Christian life in

general or in terms of characteristics that Paul goes on to name. This does not mean that an elder must be perfect, but it may be fairly said that each named characteristic marks his life." In other words, a man who is blameless is noted by his stubborn pursuit of integrity, for he knows, writes John MacArthur, that "a man is qualified because of who and what he is, not because of what he *does*."

Not a novice. Though this is a qualification found in the 1 Timothy list, it is also highlighted by Paul in the same book with the command, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily" (1 Tim. 5:22, NASB). This idea emphasizes that new converts should not be considered for church leadership, for they must have a proven track record in their Christian life. As we have already seen in the Titus terms (*elder*, *bishop*, and *steward*), to be fit for such an office means to evince a life of maturity, grace, and skill. One vital point needs to be underscored, and this relates to the physical age of the one under consideration. Though Paul's letters do not state a minimum age for a pastor, Gene Getz observed, "It is not accidental that the word *elder* [used by Paul] in itself refers to age." However, several problems may immediately come to mind, such as, being older in age does not ensure maturity, nor does being young in age automatically signify immaturity.

While each of these problems may pose questions about the exact age of an elder, the real question is this: Is this man qualified to lead the church? The question is not about mental acumen or personal abilities, but it must be answered in light of the Titus terms meaning "mature leader," "gracious guardian," and "skilled manager." For these qualities to be observable in a man's life, it will take time, development, and local church experience. In general terms, it might be better (maybe, more Biblical) for men under the age of thirty-five to consider taking an associate position and develop under a godly, older leader. For this to happen, the local church must appreciate the immeasurable value of developing the next generation of pastors and leaders.

Skillful in teaching. The Greek term *didaktikos* is found two times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24) and is best translated "skillful in teaching." This may be the only qualification of the twenty-two that relates to the actual function of the elder, and it clearly distinguishes the office of the bishop from the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3. The ability to teach rests on three pillars.

Pillar 1: Skillful in teaching. This means that the elder evidences a lifestyle that works "hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17, NASB). Any skill of life takes hard work, and no man will acquire preaching and teaching competence without a dogged pursuit of truth. This will mean late nights and early mornings. It will include at times saying no to recreation and entertainment. It will mean a firm and strong commitment to the tedious study of the words, theology, and original languages of the Bible. Therefore, a young man who desires a ministry of the Word will demonstrate a mental and emotional commitment to the study of God's Word alongside his passion to preach it.

Pillar 2: Gracious communication of God's truth. A skilled teacher has learned to couch his communication of the Scriptures with words of gentleness and in a spirit of patience (2 Tim. 2:24). There is firmness in his words by virtue of the word he is speaking (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3), but there is calmness and endurance in his delivery even with those who oppose what he says. This may seem difficult for a young man—maybe impossible—for no one likes opposition. As a young man watches his older pastor demonstrate these qualities, and as he gains ministry experience in such situations, he will learn how to effectively communicate God's truth to hurting souls.

Pillar 3: Sound doctrine and effective use of it. The elder is able “to refute those who contradict” (NASB) with “sound doctrine” just as “he has been taught” (Titus 1:9, NKJV). Paul was not mandating intellectual scholars for local church teaching positions, but he was asking for faithful students—men who hunger and thirst to know God's Word and who have proven their pursuit through study (whether formal or informal). In today's world, this can be most objectively observed in the life of a young man by reviewing his background in college and seminary. However, a college or seminary degree in itself does not qualify anyone to be a pastor. An education degree is accomplished by taking tests and writing papers. Such mental activity may earn academic favor, but it may also mask the spiritual deficiencies of the soul. Yet a plodding student in seminary who is sensitive to the Word, theology, and Biblical languages will usually continue this faithful pattern as he gains ministry experience. Time in ministry will prove the veracity of such a conclusion, but that is precisely the point for young preachers—they need time in local church ministry to develop and mature in their theological mind-set.

Marital and family considerations. Much has been written and said concerning the pastor and his family. It is significant that the New Testament considers the family a priority for the pastor. In fact Paul questioned, “If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. 3:5, NASB). In particular, the pastor must be “devoted to his wife,” implying faithfulness in marriage. In addition, the pastor must have “faithful children” described as “not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Titus 1:6, NKJV). Such a family will model the faith that Dad preaches and teaches. When a man seeks vocational ministry, his family will be the centerpiece of his testimony before the church. If he proves well at home in private, he will lead well in public as he manages the flock of God.

Church approval. The last objective requirement encompasses the other four. Young men who aspire to the ministry must demonstrate their life's commitment within the context of a local church. A young man's integrity, maturity of faith, skillfulness in teaching, and marital and family fidelity must all be viewed and valued by the local body. The church must witness a young man in action to verify that he fits Paul's description of a mature leader, gracious guardian, and skilled manager. The young man must establish that he can

effectively lead people—working with them and not around them. He must demonstrate genuine submission to his own pastoral leadership, whether he personally agrees with every decision and action that is made. When his life displays such qualities in real-life situations, the church will gladly affirm his obvious call to ministry.

These objective requirements are the visible outworking of God’s purpose in the life of a young man whom He has appointed for ministry. It is the high privilege and responsibility of the local church to evaluate and affirm these requirements as the members view the hands-on ministry of a developing elder. When a local church so operates, it works in union with its Head, and it cooperates with the larger Body of Christ preparing qualified men for church leadership.

Affirming observations for the man God prepares and fits

A final word needs to be said concerning the individual heart of the young man who desires vocational ministry. Though the objective requirements are necessary to validate the call of God upon a man, there are also private matters within the man’s heart that he must consider. These are more subjective in nature, but they provide him personal affirmation that God is leading him toward ministry. These private observations work alongside the objective requirements and are subject to them. For example, a man is not called by God into the ministry by a private impression or experience without the consent of the local church. His private experiences may never trump integrity, maturity of faith, skillfulness in teaching, and family fidelity. Accordingly, because a man evidences some of the pastoral qualifications and has successfully completed seminary education does not mean he is automatically suited for a pastor role. Far from it!

We have already seen the indispensability of the objective requirements, but there must also be an internal work of the Spirit wooing and impressing the young man’s heart that God is calling him into vocational ministry. It is true that this “secret call,” as John Calvin called it, is subjective and will vary from person to person depending on each one’s own maturity in the faith; however, as these subjective observations quietly work alongside the objective requirements, the call of God will be confirmed.

Word impression. As a man reads the Word, the Spirit begins to use it to direct his heart toward the ministry. With some men, it has been a Biblical story; with others, a short passage; and with some, a single verse. Yet through this Word impression, the man begins to sense that God’s call for vocational ministry is upon his life. Over time the Word will dominate him—inexplicably capture his heart—and begin its mysterious work of perfecting him for this good work (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Spirit desire. As the Word begins to point a man toward the ministry, the Spirit begins to create and promote an intense desire to pursue the ministry. Paul wrote, “If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (1 Tim. 3:1, NASB).

Paul used the term *aspire* (from *orego*), which is defined as “[to] stretch oneself, [or] reach out one’s hand.” This desire is sourced in the Spirit and seeks to exalt the glory of God in vocational ministry. Spurgeon colorfully made this point with the following words.

Many young men have the same idea of being parsons as I had of being a huntsman—a mere childish notion that they would like the coat and the horn-blowing; the honour the respect, the ease; and they are probably even fools enough to think, the riches of the ministry. (Ignorant beings they must be if they look for wealth in connection with the Baptist ministry.) The fascination of the preacher’s office is very great to weak minds, and hence I earnestly caution all young men not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit.

Godly opinions. No one knows the heart of a man like those who are closest to him. As the aspiring young man converses with godly people around him about his deep longing for the ministry and what he seems to be sensing from the Lord, these folks will play a significant part in affirming his heart’s direction. However, a caution is in order. Spurgeon once recalled a godly lady who tried to dissuade him from entering the ministry; he later wrote that others’ opinions are neither “final nor infallible.” Nevertheless, opinions do matter. Just as Barnabas came alongside John Mark (Acts 15:37–39), so the Lord will use people to encourage and guide young hearts seeking the ministry. It must be noted that those who love the Lord and who care deeply for an aspiring ministry candidate will be granted the privilege to speak into his life and encourage his future direction.

Providential circumstances. This category gets the most attention among those who are seeking the Lord’s direction, and is often the ultimate court of appeal. Make no mistake, God is sovereign and He orchestrates “all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11, NASB). While circumstances and experiences are valid markers in determining God’s purpose, they must be weighed in concert with this entire paradigm. They may not be exalted above the other requirements or observations, and indeed they may not be used by themselves as a man’s ultimate proof of decision. This is very important, especially when circumstances seem to discourage or even oppose his ministry desire. Men such as John Bunyan, Adoniram Judson, and William Cary came face-to-face with incredibly difficult circumstances that seemed absolutely insurmountable. However, none of these eminent saints took circumstances as the final appeal; rather, they appealed to the God of these circumstances. In their appeal they had to exercise patience and even pursue God’s call when death seemed inevitable.

What this all means for the aspiring young man is that he will indeed have experiences—good and bad—but they must be balanced by the other components we have mentioned to properly analyze their value. Paul and Silas quickly learned that God’s will includes both sweet and bitter circumstances, and their call into Europe did not depend on how easy or difficult the way might be (Acts 16). With time and experience, a young man will learn that circumstances have a part in God’s will; however, just as “good circumstances” are not the leading indicator of God’s call, so “bad circumstances” are not the termination of it.

Ministry experience. As stated throughout this essay, no man is prepared for vocational ministry without meaningful ministry in the local church. God uses ministry experience to shape a man, break a man, and encourage (sometimes stop) a man for local church leadership. When a young man gains experience, he develops right before the eyes of the church membership. This growth assures the hearts of all those to whom he is ministering that he is being fit by God for gospel ministry. Someone graduating from college or seminary and entering right into vocational work without having meaningful local church ministry is as strange as a medical doctor graduating from medical school and entering his chosen field without fulfilling an internship. It will not work in the medical field, and it usually will not work in the ministry. Spurgeon had a pastors’ college attached to his church. He viewed it as a place to train men God had *already called*. He did not consider his college as a place where God called men to ministry. In his autobiography, Spurgeon inscribed his heartbeat for ministry-training with the following words, which need to be rehearsed to all those entering theological places of learning:

We laid down, as a basis, the condition that a man must, during about two years, have been engaged in preaching, and must have some seals to his ministry, *before* we could entertain his application. No matter how talented or promising he might appear to be, the College could not act upon mere hopes, but must have evident marks of a Divine call, so far as human judgment can discover them. This became a main point with us, for we wanted, not men whom our tutors could make into scholars, but men whom the Lord had ordained to be preachers. [Emphasis mine.]

Vocational ministry is reserved for men whom God calls. Many are uncertain of what the call of God is, and how it actually is accomplished in the life of a man aspiring to ministry. Most notably, the New Testament does not seem to support the idea that a vocational call to ministry is separate from one’s call in Christ through the gospel. So, this essay is offered to help us think through the manner in which God deals with those He has designed

for leadership in the gospel ministry. There are objective Biblical requirements for ministry leaders, and there are more subjective personal observations that complement these objectives. Taken together in the context of a local church, the call of God will unambiguously be determined in the life of an aspiring minister of the gospel. Ultimately, it is God Who calls, and He will not leave Himself without a witness.

Take Action . . .

1. Evaluate yourself: Are you a man of integrity?
2. Teach a class or Bible study. Invite mature believers to participate, as well as new believers. Ask the mature believers to critique your skill in teaching, according to the three pillars.
3. Find a mentor from whom you can learn about courtship, marriage, and parenting, according to where you are in life.
4. If you are not yet a pastor, meet with your pastor or pastors to express your interest in pastoral ministry and to enlist their guidance.
5. Write your testimony of being led into the pastoral ministry. Include the portion of God's Word used by the Spirit to impress this ministry upon your heart, your Spirit-given desire, any human input, and any influential circumstances.
6. Write your "pastoral resume." Take it to a godly leader, asking where there are holes in your experience. Pursue God's direction for filling those holes.

Discussion

1. In the opening verses of Titus, Paul used three terms to describe the man who would lead God's church: *elder* (*presbuteros*, 1:5), *overseer* (*episkopon*, 1:7), and *steward* (*oikonomon*, 1:7). What is the connotation of each word? What responsibilities are entailed in each role?
2. Do you agree or disagree that Acts 13:1–4 is the Biblical norm for a vocational call to ministry, and that this call is distinct to a man's initial call to salvation? Explain.
3. What qualifies a man for Biblical pastoral ministry?
4. How can a man know the difference between circumstantial opposition to his call to ministry and the Holy Spirit's closing the door to pastoral ministry?

For Further Study

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