

Pastoral Ministry: Some Reflections.

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I have served as a pastor for about seventeen years. I have learned much and I still have boatloads still to learn. But one thing I can say with great confidence is that I love pastoral ministry. Recently I was on vacation with my family and I found myself repeatedly considering pastoral ministry. As I reflected on pastoral ministry, my mind returned to a few important elements that I do well to rehearse in my own mind.

1. Ministry is a calling.

To truly serve in pastoral ministry means that God has called that man into the ministry. Far from being a self-propagated call, the true call into ministry must consist of a supernatural call. God calls the man. God summons the man. God makes the man. God humbles the man. God, by His own prerogative, raises the man and replaces the man according to His sovereign will. As I reflected on pastoral ministry, I found my heart repeatedly giving thanks to God that *He* has called me into ministry. He has summoned me. He has arrested my soul and drawn me to serve in His ministry. It is a calling *from God*. I did not choose this on my own. No man, no committee, no seminary, no self-generated intuition or feeling or vote or coercion directed me into ministry. By God's grace, He has called me into His service. Thus, I'm owned and His for He called me into His ministry and service.

2. Ministry is humbling.

My mind reflected on the humbling nature of pastoral ministry. It is quite frequent that I go for prayer walks and find myself utterly begging God for wisdom and insight as I feel like I'm in way over my head. As a young man serving Christ and His people, I often find myself humbled and inadequate for the work that lies before me. And strangely enough, I am humbled but I am still being humbled. I feel like I live in a state of a progressive humbling humility. God is humbling me. Often this comes in the form of dependence upon God, the precious saints of God, expectations that go unmet, and a plurality of leaders and godly men that surround me and help me in my progressive growth in Christ. Christ has enrolled me and continues to test me in the school of humility. And for that blessed pain, I rejoice. May He humble me deeply to use me greatly.

3. Ministry is all-consuming.

There is simply no way around this. True ministry, true pastoral ministry, the life of a shepherd, is all-consuming. It never ends. A shepherd may sleep but in a sense he can't sleep. He must always be watching and stand on alert. By God's grace, I serve and shepherd the most precious flock of God in the whole world as they are near and dear to my soul. I love them. I pray for them. I long for their maturation in Christ and I grieve when sin invades. My consumed heart often can say with Paul: Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? (2 Cor 11.29). Indeed, I joyfully praise God for the all-consuming nature of pastoral ministry. With this, I thank God for a special help-mate that He has given to me to support and encourage me in the ministry. The consuming ministry is not only for the man but also his family. This reflection is not negative, but a positive affirmation that the life of an under-shepherd must

emulate that of the Chief Shepherd — who knows His sheep, calls them by name, and cares for them.

4. Ministry is a **delight**.

Most frequently, I thank God for the ministry of being a pastor. I absolutely love it. Amazingly and stunningly, I get paid to do this. But I would indeed work and *pay money* to do what I get to do. What an honor to serve the Lord by praying for the saints, by studying His Word, by preparing sermons, by counseling the flock with the all-sufficient Word, by discipling and mentoring men, by visiting and encouraging the saints on this journey to heaven. No greater joy in the world exists for me than to rest my soul in the hands of a Sovereign God and know that even amidst my weakness, God's purposes will stand. And, in fact, God will use me for His glory in His ministry. What a delight to be caught up in God magnifying Himself in this little church where I serve. God passionately pursuing His own glory and I am swept in to point eternal souls to this glorious Christ, to this delightful God, to this precious Word, and to the joy of holiness. May this delight in God sustain me in the ministry of the Lord. Like John, I have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in the Truth (3 John 4). May this delight in God propel me to even greater service, in greater faithfulness, for God's greater glory!