

THE Stewardship OF OUR Calling

By Jim Beaird



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I enjoy spring and summer – yes, even the heat. I relish watching things grow and the beauty produced by the process. I am involved in that process – if I want a worthwhile product when the growing cycle produces its fruit. As the “garden guardian,” I eliminate pesky weeds that compete with my plants and keep up with the watering and fertilization required for successful gardening. When I leave the results to chance, healthy plants cease to be healthy and weeds gain dominance where beauty once flourished.

As with healthy plant growth, personal development always precedes public anointing. What a person does in private determines what he or she will become in public. The response to God's call must be a measured, careful consideration of the cost – both in terms of personal growth and in an unwavering commitment to be a good steward of the call.

Ministry requires a calling – God's calling. Surely nobody would choose the ministry on their own if they knew what it entailed! Nonetheless, as with Nehemiah, if He called us, He will supply us and keep us safe. That is His part of the deal.

Our part is the stewardship of that calling. We need to ask ourselves several penetrating questions that can help us determine if we are growing weeds or fruit.

How have I regarded my calling? Do I have a deep-down feeling that God is lucky to have me working for Him? Do I “hold it over His head” that I could have done something else and been more successful? Am I inwardly angry God has not blessed me more?

How have I responded to my calling? Have I prepared adequately or have I felt that if God called me, He would somehow make me successful as a minister? Do I regard biblical education and mentorship as necessary?

How have I refreshed my calling? Yes, *refreshed*.

Do I seek periodic times of retreat to “clear my head”? Have I become a slave to the urgent and find myself “merely surviving” the grind of ministry? Do I believe in continuing education? Am I aware that I am “out of date” after being out of college or seminary for only three years?

We find it necessary to pull weeds once in a while, like bad habits that sap our energy and spiritual focus. Otherwise, ministry becomes a mundane exercise of willpower. It is incumbent upon us, as leaders, to become better stewards of our calling. A healthy pastor is the prerequisite for growing a healthy congregation. There are no shortcuts, no alternate routes, no exceptions.

To gain and maintain health, a pastor needs to take inventory.

Reestablish the priority of

your calling. If your family is forced to take second place to the demands of ministry, your priorities are misplaced and potentially harmful. Most pastors initially respond to the call in full-time ministry because of a passion for God and a desire to win the lost. However, full-time ministry ranks as the most stress-producing vocation in our country today. Spiritual leaders are constantly under attack from the enemy.

Consider the following statistics:

- 85 percent of Pentecostal churches are experiencing a plateau or have declined in attendance.
- 1,200 pastors in America leave the ministry each month; 1,300 are fired each month. That equals 2,500 fewer pastors each month.
- 80 percent of the ministers who graduate

from ministry training or college do not stay in ministry beyond 5 years. Fifty percent who graduate from seminary do not stay in ministry beyond 10 years.

- 65 percent of clergy in America divorce.
- 71 percent of clergy have significant financial difficulty.
- 16 percent of those who start in ministry finish well.
- 310 churches close each month in America.

If you have the mindset that says, “I’m going to stay in this until it kills me,” it probably will. But if you determine to reestablish the priority of your calling, you must know that your staying power will not come from willpower. (Maybe that’s why you are tired right now.) You take His calling seriously. So does He.

Regain supernatural eyesight.

Ministry has a way of putting blinders on its leaders, much like those found on a plowhorse. The blinders prevent the leader from seeing to the sides. His or her gaze is fixed on the unplowed path directly in front. Some would say this is noble – what God demands of His leaders. Actually, it only worked for horses.

Leaders need to know the resources available to them more than ever before. Supernatural eyesight demands an understanding of the times in which we live. Otherwise, how can we see the harvest through eyes of faith? How can we be aware of the spiritual priorities that God – only God – demands of us? Spiritual eyesight is the only cure for the nearsightedness that robs us of perspective.

God is not a respecter of persons, but He is a respecter of faith. When there is no spiritual eyesight, there is no faith. When there is no faith, there is no vision. When there is no vision, there is empty leadership. People are unrestrained.

Reevaluate present activities. The leader should ask himself, “What am I doing now that I need not be doing?” Work-compulsive leaders content themselves by duct-taping their hands to the endless treadmill of thankless duty –

hoping someone will notice and appreciate their great sacrifice for the cause.

To be busy is not to be spiritual. To be busy is to be busy. Spiritual leadership comes from aligning oneself with God's master plan – not trying to write the plan *for* God. Sooner or later, every leader must ask himself if he or she is leading or just taking a walk. Misplaced priorities and unfruitful activities not only detract from a clear sense of direction but also become the very objects of ministry validation. “To-do” lists need to be replaced by “to-become” lists – penned by the Holy Spirit on a debris-free heart.

Release harmful self-concept. The man or woman of God is not a worm. He or she is a person whom God has chosen and validated by nature of His calling – not destined to live according to a poverty vow nor required to sacrifice family upon the altar of ministry. Neither is the man or woman of God a King Cobra, with an inflated ego. Leaders must be aware they can do nothing of value in their own efforts – even though most try. They will succeed only if they do not allow God's blessings to be replaced by a harmful self concept. Leaders need to find a middle ground that knows neither unhealthy depravity nor self-exaltation.

Reach revelation through humility. God doesn't play favorites, but there are people who have His favor. We can only do what we do if we have His favor. The key to obtaining God-given favor is to possess a clean heart that is humble before God. God gives grace and favor to the humble.

Doors swing open wide and opportunities abound when heaven sees a heart that is broken and utterly dependent upon the Father. Once favor is imparted and influence multiplied, the task is to remain humble.

Leaders possess a special place in God's heart. He loves to bless them and watch how they respond to His blessing. Some refuse His provision and others gratefully accept it. Leaders acquire the respect of those they lead when they appropriately interpret God's plan and diligently frequent His presence to genuinely know what is in His heart.

As predictable as a garden with a bountiful harvest, growth is inevitable.

