

Pastor, Preacher or Disciplemaker

When it comes to **calling**, most pastors feel very confident about their calling to pastoral ministry. I have that experience in my journey to pastoral ministry. I remember the old warning back in College, “if there is anything else you can do, do it” – the pastorate can be thrilling but if you don’t feel you are called by God to serve Him in this way, you will struggle, and at times wonder if this is really what you should be doing.

There is no way I would ever diminish the compulsion of the Spirit of God to the pastorate; I would not still be doing this unless I felt this is exactly what the Lord wants me to be doing. But the question has arisen in my journey – Is this my only calling or is it the most important one? We could go back and forth discussing the nuances of the pastoral calling, called to preach or the appointment to be an Elder to shepherd the flock. There are numerous ways and contexts where many process this somewhat differently.

But the one calling or commission that often gets ignored is Christ’s command to be *Disciplemakers*. While there are over 250 references to disciples in the Scriptures, the heart of this “*calling*” rests with Matthew 28:18-20 –

*“Go therefore and make **disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Being *called* to be a pastor (lead/senior) includes many things, but it can, in the business of life, be pressed into the primary responsibility to be preaching each week. We all know we do many more things, but that is one of the key responsibilities that is a key to our community and it becomes pretty obvious if you neglect it. Other things might not come together but preaching has little wiggle room.

My point is that I see my calling to be a Disciplemaker just as significantly as my calling to pastoral ministry. My preaching is driven by my calling and my gifts. Being a Disciplemaker is driven by simple obedience, not so much giftedness. My preaching, while important, could be considered a diminishing skill. If I lose my voice or get injured I may not be able to keep on preaching. This does not mean I cannot teach through writing, but standing up to proclaim the message has contingencies.

Part of pastoral ministry, in my thinking, is about making disciples, followers of Christ. Some may not use this language, but we all have the desire that the whole point of preaching, teaching, shepherding and so on is to help individuals become fully committed followers of Christ – disciples!

Being a Disciplemaker often trumps our programing and giftedness. Some churches have reduced disciplemaking to a class or program but Christ’s command was given to his disciples to invest in people through the gospel and use their own life to equip and empower others to become (not just) disciples of Jesus but to become disciplemakers of Jesus. I know some of you will believe I am making an artificial distinction – and in part you are correct. But I have discovered that most people I interact with see a disciple who spends their whole life just trying to figure out how he or she can better *follow* Jesus. Sometimes our own preoccupation with our own growth becomes the grandest obstacle to sharing the gospel with others and developing the heart, vision and know-how to help others become rooted in Christ; discipleship often gets dumped as being the pastor’s job, not everyone’s job.

No matter what stage of life, I always have a divine purpose to be a disciple-maker. At some point I will be asked to retire from preaching; at some point my own limitations may keep me from formal pastoral ministry; at some point I may struggle to keep up with the pace of church responsibilities – but I will never outgrow the divine calling to make disciples.

For your consideration,

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