

## The Call or Resignation

Receiving a call to pastor another church can release strong emotions. Some of these emotions are healthy, while other emotions may not be so good. A call to pastor another church can create an unhelpful distraction, or on the other hand it can come in the will of God, as another part of His plan for our life.

### Motives

*Flattery.* We can feel proud that someone thinks that we are good enough to fill their pulpit and the glamour of the position can be harmful.

*Escape.* If we are in a difficult pastorate, or going through a difficult stage it can be tempting to look for a way out, but that is not always the right time to go, as the way we finish one pastorate will have a bearing on the way we begin the next. Make no mistake about it.

*Pride.* It can release a slightly different attitude to that of flattery. Pride in this instance can lead to unhealthy ambitions where climbing the ladder of success becomes important. Remember, 'pride comes before a fall'.

*Healthy response.* Often there is a humble response where one is aware of personal inadequacy to fill the task and yet also aware of the great need in this new situation and the possibilities that go with it. Also it may not be humanly speaking, an attractive opportunity to accept, but there is either an inner pull or push that it could be right.

### Points to consider

A *long term* pastorate is generally more effective than a shorter one and unfortunately too many people move prematurely. Staying longer could have led to greater fruitfulness in ministry.

It is most useful to leave the existing pastorate *free of hurts*, as this can determine how we respond to people and certain situations in the next pastorate.

We need to generally examine our *giftings*, amount of *education* we have received and our *theological outlook* to determine whether we will match the next pastorate. Sharing with people who know us well, will help in this case.

The *spouse and children* are an important consideration in making a move. Children often initially find a move difficult to come to terms with depending on their age, but it is of paramount importance that your spouse is in agreement with the decision made. This may take time so do not rush it or pressurise them.

*Timing* is also important. It may be that the move is right, but it may not be for another year or so. God I find, sometimes works in mysterious ways. Never make a decision in haste. One church wanted to know by that evening whether I was interested or not. I would not give a reply immediately, although finally I knew that it was right for me to shift into that church. On the other hand, do not procrastinate by putting off the decision. The calling church does need to know what your decision is by a certain date.

Normally it is useful to *visit the church* you have been called to pastor, particularly to meet with the leaders. Do not be afraid to ask them open ended questions, where they have to express their opinion about various issues, as for example - what is the vision of the church? What sociological trends appear in the neighbourhood? What do you expect of me and what salary will you pay me? Be aware of any power struggles you may detect and be prepared to acknowledge your own strengths and weaknesses. This is also the time to negotiate matters like study leave and a sabbatical after seven years. It could also be the time to consider alterations to a manse if they provide one. Also, negotiate expenses for the vehicle, books, annual leave and attitude to a housing allowance.

Above all, we need to know what *God is saying*. I find that *Scripture*, the right *circumstances*, sometimes *prophetic* words and an under lying *peace* are the most useful ways in which I determine what God is saying. Make sure however, that you get it right as when the going gets tough, it is good to have the inner assurance that it was God who led you to take up the position.

Sometimes several calls may come at once to confuse the issue, but remember that God is more interested than you are in the right decision being made.

### **In leaving a pastorate**

It is wise to give *3 months notice* if possible in leaving the church. Not only will this give that church time to look around for another pastor, but it will also help in the grieving process,

which many will go through including yourself.

Leadership left behind may want your advice in searching for *another pastor to take your place*, but if not, do not take offence as in the final outcome it must be the decision of the church concerned. This can be an unsettling time for the church, but it can be however, a growing experience for all concerned. Be positive with your input.

During this stage of transition, it can be hard to apply oneself with vigour and *motivation*, but we owe it to people to try to give of our best. Recognising this feeling is quite natural will help you cope. If we fail here it can leave a bad impression of the whole of our time with the church.

### **Resigning**

Sometimes it is right to take a step of faith and to resign from a church, even though you may not be sure of what may happen. However, as I have experienced on two occasions, God has again opened up new opportunities of service, but that is not normally the way God leads most people. Let it be His leading that directs your path, not your reaction to difficulties. Difficult times will pass.

If you are forced to resign, on the other hand, do not leave with bitterness and do receive counsel from a trusted friend, to help you through this most difficult stage. You still may have a future ministry depending on why you had to resign.