

The Call and the Resignation

A call to pastor another church can stir many emotions. Some are healthy, while others are not. It may prove to be a distraction, or it may be God's will as part of His plan for our lives.

Need to watch our motive for responding

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. When ministry is difficult, it can be tempting to look for a way out. But hardship does not always mean it is time to leave. How we finish one pastorate often shapes how we begin the next.

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. A healthy response is often marked by humility—an awareness of personal inadequacy for the task, yet also of the great need and opportunity in the new setting. Humanly speaking, the role may not seem attractive, but there may still be a strong inner sense that it is the right step.

Points to consider

A *long-term* pastorate is usually more effective than a short one, yet many people leave too soon. Staying longer may lead to greater fruitfulness in ministry. It is also best to leave a pastorate *free of hurts*, because unresolved wounds can shape how we respond to people and situations in the next one.

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.

Your *spouse and children* should be a key part of any decision to move. Children may struggle with a move at first, depending on their age, and it is especially important that your spouse is fully at peace with the decision. That may take time, so do not rush or pressure 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 decide 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. Normally the calling church does need to know what your decision is by a certain date.

Often it is useful to visit the church first you have been called to pastor, particularly to meet with the leaders. Do not be afraid to ask them open ended questions, where they must 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 provide?). 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 church house if they provide one. Also, negotiate expenses for the vehicle, books, annual leave and attitude to a housing allowance if you buy one.

Above all, we need to know what *God* is saying. I have found that *Scripture*, the right *circumstances*, at times *prophetic* words, and an underlying *peace* are among the clearest ways to discern His leading. Make sure, however, that you discern rightly, because when difficulties come, it helps to have the inner assurance that God led you to accept the position. At times, several calls may come at once and cloud the issue but remember that God is even more concerned than you are that the right decision is made.

In leaving a pastorate

If possible, it is wise to give three months' *notice* before leaving the church. This gives the church time to seek another pastor and allows space for the grieving process that many, including you, may experience.

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 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 time of transition, it can be difficult to serve with energy and *motivation*, but we still owe people our best. Recognising that this is a natural feeling can help you manage it. If we do not do this well, it can leave a poor final impression of our time with the church.

Resigning

If you are forced to resign, do not leave with bitterness. Seek counsel from a trusted and wise friend to help you through this difficult season. Depending on the circumstances, you may still have a future in some ministry.

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' Romans 15:13.