

Question: I realize that I was viewing State Ministry trends in an extreme way, and also out of some personal fear. Here's something that I'm having great trouble reconciling. It's a more personal question that comes from the depth of my soul:

"After having once valued highly, praised, supported, and stressed the importance of pastoral gifts; pastoral care; and shepherding (in it's most Biblical sense) at state level - why the seeming sudden abandonment, almost as if to say `that's a waste of time'?"

I am a pastor. My Strengths Finder results verify that, and so does my gift mix. Am I a waste?

I don't believe that I can be more personal than that.

Response: For me, the issue isn't gifts, it is roles, models and context. I believe your gifts and strengths wonderfully equip you for the role God has called you. In fact, they are exactly perfect for what you are called to do and be. I believe the paradigm of what we have now as a typical church and therefore church pastor is in the midst of changing (almost cries of change). Look around. What institutions or organizations aren't changing as our culture is reeling from radical social, moral and value changes.

As a result, we need to go back to the Biblical principles of what a church and pastor are. I would suggest that the prevailing concept of church and pastor for the past 80 years has been developed out of our western cultural needs at the time of the early 20th century and these same Biblical principles. We no longer live in a Christian culture. Our current culture (in population centers) is way beyond it. In smaller cities, it is more slowly growing beyond where we were even 20 years ago. As a result of our societal needs being dramatically altered, how will the form of the church need to adjust? It's the form mind you, not the function.

Let's admit, the Bible simply doesn't give us a form of church with 150-200 people who have a senior pastor and an associate (or two) in a building that is used primarily one to three times a week. The concept of a shepherd (as Elton Trueblood pointed out 30 years ago) is too easily culturally defined. A shepherd was a very rough and tumble kind of guy. They were the lower status of careers. Shepherds fought wild animals, and they didn't feed the sheep. They pulled, prodded and pushed sheep to where the sheep needed to be. They created productive environments for sheep to feed themselves. They took away obstacles for sheep to find their nourishment and safety from dangerous prowlers. In most traditional congregations, when someone wants a shepherd, they don't want such a leader.

The Biblical principles of the church leadership needed today are given in Reggie McNeal's book, *Revolution in Leadership*. We are called to lead mission outposts. Places where people can come to Christ and be built up in him so they can go out and introduce others to Christ.

Your gifts uniquely equip you to love, care for and motivate followers of Christ. You will

best do this in conjunction with a team of leaders; the argument isn't size, it is effectiveness. You can do it wonderfully where you are, but you will have to embrace change, conflict and help others transition into a mission outpost mindset. These are more difficult for you just as organization and focus are difficult for me. But neither of us are allowed to dismiss the need for each in our lives for the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is too important to be impeded by our own limitations. I have to be organized and focused so that the Kingdom can be expanded. This is not a criticism of you; so don't hear it as such. Just as it not a criticism of me to say I am not good where I am weak.

Your challenge will be to allow someone to come beside you and coach you through the tough transitions required in the church to help those loving people embrace a mission outpost mentality. This is where the consultation comes in. It is an honest look at where the church is not a mission outpost. It simply points the issues out, and then allows the church to honestly face them and decide what to do with them. Your church may never be a mega church...it doesn't need to be to expand the Kingdom of God. You can significantly change the spiritual landscape there, if the church is willing to make some fundamental changes. Obviously, as you reach people for Christ and grow them into missionaries, eventually you will need to figure out what to do with the growing numbers. Given your gift mix, you may choose to plant or build...that is in God's hands.

I sincerely appreciate you and your gifts, passions, and perspective very much. We need people exactly like you in the Kingdom of God, and specifically Florida Church of God Ministries. We will only build healthy churches as you function passionately within your gifts in the Body of Christ. The great news is that God needs you (and all of us) in the Kingdom. The bad news is because things around are changing so fast, to be effective missionaries, we also must change the way we do ministry.