

IS IT A CAREER OR IS IT A CALLING?

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

I think the answer to that question makes all of the difference in the pastoral ministry. I see many people entering the pastoral ministry as a career instead of as a compelling call. I hear pastors talking about their need for a change because they have lost their passion, vision, fruit or sense of call. Pastors become hesitant to make a move for several reasons:

- The market is down
- They are upside down on their mortgage
- Their spouse is close to retiring or they won't be able to find as good of a job
- Their kids are now in high school
- They like their home
- They want to retire in Florida
- They live close to their parents (children or grandchildren)
- They need their current health care

I have heard all of these reasons and many more for not following a call. They all seem more like career issues than calling issues. Don't hear me say these are not important issues, but hear me say the God who calls is much bigger than any of these.

In past generations, the pendulum swung such that your call had to come in the form of Paul's Road to Damascus bolt of lightening (Acts 9) rather than Timothy's Invitation (Acts 16). In fact, I had someone tell me 30 years ago, that I wasn't called because I couldn't point to such a traumatic event in my life. But, like Timothy, my call grew over the first few years and the rest is history. A call isn't about the amount of emotional trauma experienced at a specific moment in time; but about the confirmation deep in your soul through extended intimacy with God.

There are big differences between a career and a calling:

1. Who originates it?

In a career you make the decisions, but a call clearly originates with God. If the call originates with God, then we should act accordingly. The call may be clouded with issues like those already mentioned or many others. But, if one is struggling with a call, the first place to go to get clarity is God. When struggling with a career, we go to others who have insight and wisdom. Obviously, we seek God in careers as well as in a call, but the emphasis is **primacy**. Where do you go FIRST?

2. What sacrifice are you willing to make?

With a career, most of us are willing to pay a cost; we know there is no perfect career. But, we reach a point where the cost is no longer worth the benefit, and we will leave that career. We often measure the cost and benefits in different ways, such as: personal comfort, family harmony, financial benefits, emotional safety, ego needs, sense of satisfaction, future options and so forth. But, a call is simply weighed against obedience. We will obey in spite of the cost (or even the benefits). We leave when we know God is done with us regardless of what may or may not happen in the future. We know that God will take care of our families, the church and us.

To learn what Paul had to endure for his call, read in 2 Corinthians 11 & 12. In Paul's case, cost wasn't an issue, obedience was. There have been many times in my life that the only reason I stayed in a position was obedience, and God never abandoned me. I knew God wasn't done with me in

spite of the lack of fruit, relationships and even financial hardships.

An excellent process that I have borrowed from the Quakers is called the clearness committee. This is a group of individuals that know you and are willing to be used by God to confirm His call. This group is called together when you need resolution in sensing your call. AFTER you have wrestled with God and still are in a quandary, you tell this group what you are wrestling with and they listen. Then they are NOT allowed to give advice or offer judgment. They are only allowed to ask questions or probe possibilities. This is a helpful process in understanding a call because it leaves the work to be done between the individual and God...and that is where a call must be settled.