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**SPIRITUAL  
LEADERSHIP**  
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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Testament also uses the words *bishop*, meaning "overseer," and *elder* for this office. (See Acts 20:17-28; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4.) The believers of each city were members of one church even though they met in multiple private homes. In Paul's day the church at Rome apparently consisted of at least five different groups. (See Romans 16:5-15.) The New Testament thus speaks of the "elders" (plural) of a city. We might regard them as the ministerial team of an assembly with a senior pastor or the group of pastors of various house meetings in a city. (For further discussion of the authority and role of the pastor, see my book *The Apostolic Church in the Twenty-first Century*.)

Finally we have the *teacher*, or instructor. Both the Greek and English constructions of verse 11 indicate that these two roles overlap, for instead of saying "some pastors and some teachers" as with the other offices, it says "some pastors and teachers." While not every teacher is a senior pastor, in a sense every pastor must be a teacher. The pastor, as overseer or leader of the local assembly, must at times do the work of an evangelist in order to reach the lost (II Timothy 4:5). Yet as a shepherd, the pastor must have a strong teaching ministry or be able to facilitate one (I Timothy 3:2).

The roles of pastor and teacher can refer not only to the senior pastor of a local church but to various ministers who assist in the oversight, care, encouragement, instruction, and feeding of the flock. Ultimately, all are undershepherds under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (I Peter 5:4).

Ministries can overlap; a person may fulfill more than one role, and a person's ministry may shift over time. The important thing isn't to seek a title or to fit into a rigid mold but to recognize the call of God and to fulfill the ministry He has given. (See Colossians 4:17.)

As we have indicated, these ministers are stewards of people. They are not to be dictators, monarchs, mediatorial priests, or solo performers. Instead, they are leaders, trainers, teachers, coaches, motivators, encouragers, and facilitators. Their task is to inspire and encourage people to grow; to help them identify their gifts and callings; to equip, develop, and train all believers for service. Not everyone is called to be a preacher or a pastor, and not all pastors are called to be senior pastors. Nevertheless, everyone is called to serve in the body of Christ. There should be a continuum of ministry in which everyone participates.

## **A Specific Calling**

Since every Christian is called to serve, we can serve the Lord no matter where we are. If life places us in less than ideal circumstances, we can still be productive. Sometimes job, family, or health issues limit our options.

Sometimes doors close due to circumstances beyond our control, due to our own poor choices, or due to the actions of carnal people. Nevertheless, if we turn to God and seek His will, God will open doors for us. When we love God and are called according to His purpose, He will work all things together for good (Romans 8:28). If Plan A is blocked, God can give us Plan B, C, or D. As in the case of Joseph, it may seem that the actions of others have maneuvered us completely out of God's plan, but in the end we will be where God wants us. Ultimately our ministry isn't in the hands of people but in the hands of God.

At the same time, we should actively seek the will of God, and in order to enter the fivefold ministry there must be a call of God upon our lives. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers of the New Testament were called by God, and their call was recognized by the body of believers. They had the joint approval of God and the church. (See Acts 13:1-3; Galatians 2:7-10; I Timothy 4:14; Titus 1:5.)

We need a sense of God's long-term call for us and a sense that we are fulfilling this call. We also need God's direction to fulfill our ministry in the short term. The will of God isn't mystical or mysterious. He wants us to know His will (Ephesians 5:17). It isn't merely for the remote future but also for the present. We seek God's will in our present circumstances and follow it to the best of our ability. As we do, the will of God unfolds for the future. Regardless of physical location, we can attain a place of consecration, communion with God, and personal development so God can lead us where He wants us to go. Most of the will of God consists of doing what we already know to do. As we fulfill His will for the present, He opens doors of opportunity and provides fresh direction. We continue in the will of God. We place ourselves in God's will and let it unfold and develop.

There should be a definite call to the ministry of the gospel. Throughout the Scriptures, God's spokespersons received a divine call, including the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. Barnabas and Paul received a definite missionary call (Acts 13:2). Paul alluded to the call of an otherwise unknown minister: "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it'" (Colossians 4:17).

Everyone's call is different. Some may have a more dramatic experience than others. Generally it's a process in which God deals with people, gives them a burden for souls, and develops them, but there comes a time when they clearly understand that He wants them to preach the gospel. Not all ministries are the same, but in each case there should be awareness that

the person has received a ministry and a mandate from God. Sometimes we may feel a "holy dissatisfaction" in which God is preparing us for change. At first we may find things to criticize in our current circumstances, but they aren't the problem. Rather, God wants to move us out of our comfort zone and further into His plan.

Not only do ministers need a divine call, they need divine direction in the exercise of their ministry. Barnabas and Paul were already ministers of the gospel, but while serving as leaders in the Antioch church they received a missionary call, apparently through a vocal gift of the Spirit. This call came from God, but the church leaders recognized it and approved it by the laying on of hands. "As they [the prophets and teachers in Antioch] ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

If a call isn't recognized by the church, then the person who feels a call should continue to demonstrate faithfulness and fruitfulness in his or her present area of service until God opens a new door. A call doesn't mean an automatic qualification. Those who are called may need to qualify themselves for their call until their preparation is evident to leadership, for leaders have the responsibility to ensure that ministers meet the proper biblical qualifications. (See chapter 3.)

We find further examples of God's direction in Paul's missionary work: "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:6-10). Paul and his missionary company had planned to go into the Roman province of Asia, part of modern Turkey, but the Holy Spirit forbade them, whether by impression, spiritual gift, or other means. Then they attempted to go to Bithynia, but again, through the work of the Spirit, they discerned it wasn't God's will. Eventually Paul received a vision instructing him to go to Macedonia. The members of the missionary team were already called as preachers and as missionaries, but they received further direction from God that they accepted as a call to preach the gospel in Europe.

At different times in life we need direction from God. Our ministry, focus, or location may change. While we can minister effectively wherever we are, we need God's specific leading to know what God wants us to do and where He wants us to go. We need assurance that we are at the right place at the right time in the will of God for our ministry. When we face trials, opposition, and spiritual attack, we need confirmation from God that we are where He wants us to be and are doing what He wants us to do.