



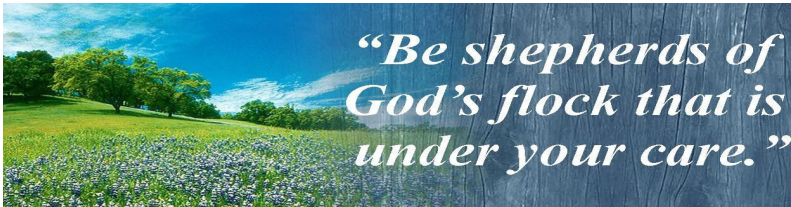
# EQUIPPER

The monthly e-zine of the U.S. Church Administration and Development team of Grace Communion International.

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Dear pastor,

This issue of *Equipper* addresses the important topic of a pastor's calling. We do so because serving as a pastor—whether as a senior, associate or assistant pastor—is both rewarding and challenging.



*“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care.”*

For me, the greatest reward is the privilege and joy of sharing in people's lives—seeing them turn to Christ in faith, then seeing their lives transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As they say, “It doesn't get any better than that.”

Other rewards include teaching people from Scripture the truths of the gospel; helping people reach out to non-believers with God's love and then disciple believers; praying with people in times of struggle and celebration; counseling people who are facing difficult challenges. For me, these privileges are profoundly rewarding.

But, as you well know, pastoral ministry also brings many challenges. Paul wrote about the “pressure” he felt due to his deep concern for the churches in his care (2 Corinthians 11:28). I think all pastors relate to his feelings. The deep concern we have for the church(es) we are assigned to shepherd can grow into a sense of “pressure.” That pressure often is intensified by such factors as unsupportive members, a lack of resources (human and financial) and unrealistic demands on our time (a particular challenge for our bivocational pastors). I'm sure you can add to this list.

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For me, in times of challenge (sometimes bringing discouragement), I'm helped by returning to the bedrock truth that God called me into ministry. I'm not a pastor (in my case a regional pastor) by personal choice alone. Rather I experienced a compelling call from the Holy Spirit to enter vocational pastoral ministry back in 1987. Certainly my own choice was involved (no one forced me), however, I experienced a clear sense that God had assigned me.

Whether we serve in pastoral ministry full or part time, employed or bivocational, I think that it is good (even essential) to remember and reflect on our calling. Doing so reassures, strengthens and renews us. On page two I share a bit of my story in order to encourage you to refresh the memory of your own. If such remembering causes you to doubt or question your calling, I urge you to speak with a trusted friend, mentor or supervisor. It's important to know that there is no “one size fits all” way in which our calling to ministry is experienced. Sometimes, particularly in tough times, we need others to help us confirm our calling.

In Christ's service,  
Ted Johnston, *Equipper* editor and U.S. regional pastor

*Outfitting GCI churches and ministries for a mission-focused journey with Jesus.*

## My story by Ted Johnston

Following graduation from high school in Indiana, I entered Ambassador College in California. As a student, I started working part-time as a landscape draftsman. My boss noted my ability and requested that I pursue a degree in landscape architecture so that I could serve the church in that way full time. I agreed and transferred to Cal Poly, earned a degree and entered the profession of landscape architecture where I worked for 15 years (first at Ambassador, then elsewhere). I found that vocation to be quite satisfying, and I believe God called me to it for a time. However, as sometimes happens, God was preparing me for another calling—to vocational pastoral ministry.

God's call into landscape architecture came to me through the advice and counsel of friends and associates who knew me well. That's how God often speaks. But in the case of his call to pastoral ministry, God spoke to me in a more direct way. Though I did not hear an audible voice, I "heard" him speak to me with clarity. There was a deep, compelling sense that this is what I *must* do.

For a time, I tried not to let that voice dissuade me from the career I was pursuing. It's not that I had anything against being a pastor (I was participating in pastoral ministry already as an elder), it was just that vocational pastoral ministry was not on my "radar screen" at the time. However, that inner voice never quieted. In fact, it grew louder, until I could no longer ignore it.



Leaving a successful career mid-life made no sense "on paper." It meant halving my salary, pulling up roots and moving my wife and two children. In short, it meant great upheaval. But God would not let me rest. And so I began discussing the issue with my wife Donna and trusted friends—some who were pastors. Donna was supportive, though some friends tried to talk me out of it—they were concerned that the disruption and sacrifice were too great. I respected their concerns, but God's call was louder than their advice.

To help clarify his will for me, God sent circumstances that presented the proverbial, "fork in the road." The company where I had been working for nearly 15 years asked me to move from Colorado to start a new branch office in Arizona. And so my family was looking at upheaval no matter which fork in the road was chosen.

Clearly, God was nudging me—not forcing my choice, but directly influencing it. I'm convinced that either choice would have worked out for good. But I felt deep within that God's will for me was to enter vocational pastoral ministry. So, that's what I did, 27 years ago this month. And that choice changed everything. Has it been easy? No. Has it been rewarding? Yes; and in many ways.

### Your story

Is the way God called you to pastoral ministry the same as mine? Not likely—God works with each of us in deeply personal ways, even as he works with us collectively. He knows you better than you know yourself, and so he speaks to you accordingly.

When times are good—and particularly when they're tough—I urge you to remember how God spoke to you originally concerning your calling to pastoral ministry. As you do, I pray that you will be reassured and strengthened. I have found in my own life that when I have practiced the discipline of "focused remembering," that God has given me special grace to remain faithful to his call—to not "throw in the towel"—to remain steadfast and patient, despite pressure to do otherwise. For that I give God thanks, and I ask that he grant you the same grace. I trust that he will.