

Ten Reasons I Am a Pastor

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I remember reading Iain Murray's excellent biography of Jonathan Edwards. I found much to identify with, especially the personal heartaches Edwards endured as pastor of the same church for 23 years. After all that time his flock voted him out!

I've been the pastor of Grace Community Church now for nearly 35 years. While I don't envision a fate like Edwards's, I know what it is to be the subject of controversy, both inside and outside the church.

Do I ever contemplate leaving the pastorate? Admittedly, there are times when even the prospect of digging ditches for a living has a certain appeal. But I know God has called me to be a pastor, and I have never seriously considered bailing out.

Someone recently suggested that I could leave my church if I wanted to and still have a fruitful ministry preaching on the Bible-conference circuit and through radio, thereby avoiding the hassles of leading a church. But I wouldn't do that either. I can think of at least 10 reasons I remain committed to church ministry.

1. The church is the only institution Christ promised to build and bless.

He said, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Mt 16:18). Christ's purpose in the world is to call to Himself a redeemed people who would live to the praise of His glory. He is building the church. In that I take great comfort and confidence, thankful for having a small part in our Lord's great work.

2. The corporate functions of the Body all take place in the church.

The church is where God has ordained His people to meet together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to worship Him, and to encourage and edify one another. It's my joy to call God's people to worship, just as the psalmist said, "Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (Ps 95:6-7).

3. Preaching is the chief human means God uses to dispense His grace.

The apostle Paul commanded Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). I have the privilege each Sunday of proclaiming God's message to His people—a message of grace, by which God saves people and transforms lives.

4. I can be consumed with study and communion with God.

There's a public side to me that the congregation sees, but there's a private side to me that only God knows. While I might preach three hours a week, I study 30. And those hours spent each week in God's presence are a high and holy privilege.

5. I am directly responsible to God for the lives of the people He has given me to shepherd.

As a radio teacher, I'm not as personally accountable for how people apply God's Word. But as the pastor-teacher of a congregation, I have a relationship with my people like that of a shepherd and his sheep. I watch over their souls as one "who will give an account" (Heb 13:17).

6. I am also accountable to the people in my church.

Everything is exposed to them: my life and family, my personal strengths and weaknesses—everything. I cherish that accountability. It is a constant encouragement for me to reflect Christ in everything I say and do.

7. I love the challenge of building an effective leadership team from the people God has put in the church.

When someone starts a business, he can hire anyone he wants. It's another thing entirely to build with the people God has called, when few of us are wise, mighty, or noble by the world's standards (1 Cor 1:26). God reveals the greatness of His power by demonstrating that the world's nobodies are His most precious resources.

8. The pastorate embraces all of life.

I share the joy of parents over the birth of a child, as well as the pain of children over the death of a mother or father. I help celebrate at a wedding; I also offer comfort at a funeral. There is an inevitable unpredictability that accompanies my calling—an incredible adventure may begin at any given moment. It is at those times that the pastor goes beyond his sermon to stand in the gap for God in the lives of His people.

9. The rewards in this life are marvelous.

I feel loved, appreciated, needed, trusted, and admired—all a result of being an instrument God has used in the spiritual progress of His people. I know my people pray for me and care deeply about me. I owe a debt of gratitude to God for that. I am honored to be a channel through which the grace of God, love of Christ, and comfort of the Holy Spirit can be made real to people.

10. I'm afraid not to be a pastor.

When I was eighteen, the Lord threw me out of a car traveling seventy miles an hour. I landed on my backside and slid 110 yards on the pavement. By the grace of God I wasn't killed. As I stood up on that highway, having never lost consciousness, I committed my life to serving Christ. I told Him I would no longer resist what He wanted me to do, which was to preach His Word.

God has called me to be a pastor-teacher “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service” (Eph 4:12). The reward of being a pastor far surpasses any frustration I will ever feel in ministry. And so I say with the apostle Paul, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).