
GROWTH POINTS

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Changing Careers: Part 1

Pastors don't like to think of ministry as a career. Yet, some aspects of pastoral ministry are similar to a career, and it's wise to give heed to practical aspects of changing roles, locations, or, yes, even a complete change of career.

Two Types of Calling

Pastors tend to think of their calling in two parts: *General Call* and *Specific Call*.

A *General Call* to ministry implies that a pastor feels called to make their financial living from the gospel. While a *Specific Call* implies a pastor feels called to serve in a definite role, location, or position.

While a *General Call* to ministry may not change for most pastors, it's common for a *Specific Call* to change throughout a lifetime of ministry, with pastors often having three to six specific calls in their lifetime.

Allow me to give a personal example. Throughout my life, I've felt called to work in some field of ministry (*General Call*). I've served in at least seven different ministry roles—youth pastor, Christian education director, pastor, consultant,

professor, speaker, writer—(*Specific Call*). Throughout all of these, my place of ministry changed from Colorado to Oregon to California to national and international locations. As you can see, my *General Call* played out in several *Specific Calls*.

Life Changes

It was common centuries ago for a pastor to experience a *General Call* and a *Specific Call* as one. In the 1700s it was rare for pastors to change churches in their lifetime. Travel was not easy, and fewer ministry roles existed. Travel today, of course, is easier, and there are numerous and various opportunities for ministry.

Life change impacts ministry in other ways, too. A ministry position that once appeared perfect may now seem all wrong. Pastors may need a change due to family situations, or perhaps they've outgrown the current role, or they desire to pursue new interests.

Some pastors just fell into their positions at some point without much thought. Now, after ten to twenty years of experience, they find themselves stuck in an ill-fitting position, with no satisfaction in what they're doing.

Changing a General Call

Let's consider for a moment the major challenge of a complete career change, i.e., a change in the *General Call* of ministry.

If you feel you've made a mistake in understanding your *General Call* (career?), it's important to take some time *now* to think about who you are, and what are your gifts and passions?

Consider some . . .

Valid Reasons to change—

- You've been haunted for years by a vision or passion for work outside of traditional pastoral ministry.
- You don't fit in ministry positions even though you've tried for years.
- Your love for ministry is not there, and you dislike going to work.
- You've been fired or let go from ministry positions two or more times.
- Your values are not in sync with ministry work.

Invalid Reasons to change—

- Because security or money is the motive.
- Because you've experienced a bruised ego and are hurt.
- Because a friend or relative has a fabulous or lucrative career you could join.
- Because you're tired or burned out.
- Because you're running away from problems that are likely to surface in a new career.

In short, you shouldn't jump careers just because you're facing tough times or fantasizing about a different position.

Prior to making a major change, evaluate your *General Call* to ministry.

First, spend personal time in prayer asking God to guide you.

Second, talk and listen to close family members and key friends.

Third, find a ministry or life coach to walk with you as you consider a change.

(Continued next issue.)



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