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Test of a Pastor's Calling

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We find a number of tests of a pastor's calling in Scripture. These can help a man determine if God is calling him to be a pastor, and these can help churches to examine men before ordination.

1. The test of desire ([1 Timothy 3:1](#))

[1 Timothy 3:1](#) ("If a man desire the office")

This speaks of a strong, compelling desire; a passion; a zeal. It could be translated "if a man *reach out to grasp*"

(John Economidis). The Greek word is *oregomai* which is elsewhere translated *covet*. In [1 Ti. 6:10](#) it refers to coveting money and possessions. In contrast, the qualified pastor covets the work of God. In [Hebrews 11:16](#) it refers to pilgrim Christians who "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

Paul speaks of this strong calling in [1 Co. 9:16](#) when he says, "for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

- Those in Israel who did the work of building the Tabernacle were men "whose hearts stirred them up, to come unto the work to do it" ([Ex. 36:2](#)). Likewise, men who lead the churches must be men whose hearts have been divinely stirred for this great task. This desire must be more than a mere interest; it must be a passion, a powerful, divine summons. It has been said, and rightly so, that if a man can refrain from preaching and from church leadership, he should refrain, because God's call to such ministry is attended by a powerful, unmistakable summons. A man might say no to God's call, as Jonah temporarily did, but he will not mistake the call or ignore it lightly!

- Charles H. Spurgeon, in addressing the men in his Pastor's College, warned, "If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way ... If on the other hand, you can say that for all the wealth of both the Indies you could not and dare not espouse any other calling so as to be put aside from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then, depend upon it, if other things be equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship."

- This is the type of calling I experienced after I was saved in 1973. I was consumed with the desire to study and teach the Bible. That's all I wanted to do. Immediately I started witnessing to my old friends. Within the first year I started printing little booklets containing the spiritual truths I was learning. I was working as a printer at the Florida Citrus Commission in Lakeland, Florida, and I did my work well and had a good testimony on the job, but I wasn't satisfied. I just wanted to study the Bible and pursue God's calling, and the Lord soon gave me freedom to do that, and I've done it ever since. I couldn't be happy doing anything else.

[Psalm 37:4](#)

- God imparts the right desires to those who love Him. He imparts His will into that individual's life. Then He fulfills those desires.

- The verse does not say that whatever an individual desires he will have. Desire itself is not evidence of God's leading and calling, because there can be many wrong desires in a man's heart. The promise is for those who delight in the Lord, those who love the Lord and love His Word and abide in Him and pursue His holy will.

- To delight in the Lord is a passionate thing. It is not a casual, half-hearted thing. It is not lukewarm. Delight in the Lord is first-love passion ([Re. 2:4](#)). It is the passion of Psalm 1.

- Delight in the Lord is fed by God's Word. Through Scripture the mind is renewed ([Ro. 12:1-2](#)) so that we know the mind of Christ ([1 Co. 2:15-16](#)). Through studying God's Word and through the preaching of God's Word, God's people are stirred to do His will. His desires are put into their hearts. The coveting after the world is replaced by the coveting after God and His business.

2. The test of life (1 Ti. 3; Tit. 1)

Desire is important, but this, in itself, is not enough. The individual's life must also meet the requirements for the calling. Some people who desire to be pastors, deacons, or missionaries are deceived about God's call, because they don't meet the standards that God has laid out.

Examples of how the test of life restricts the calling.

- If a woman, for example, feels God is calling her to be a pastor or deacon, she is wrong, because the Bible says plainly that this is a man's work.

- If a man has a poor reputation in his community, or is given to wine, or has an angry, combative spirit, or loves money, or does not have faithful children and a good home life, or has more than one wife, etc., he can be certain that God does not want him in the pastorate until such issues are solved.

- In 1980, I was invited to teach a group of pastors in Nepal in an all-day Bible conference, and I chose the book of Titus as my outline. After we had gone through the standards for pastors in chapter one, I was informed that one of the men had three wives. He maintained three families on three properties that he owned and he visited them on sort of a circuit. I told the national pastors that this man could not be a pastor because of his marital status. He spoke up and said that he knew that God had called him to pastor because he had a vision. The entire group chose to ignore the Word of God in favor of the man's vision!

We would note here that the call to preach is not necessarily the same as the call to pastor. A man can preach in many ways without being a pastor: in the highways and byways, in the jails and nursing homes, on the street corners, from house to house, in a bus ministry, etc. Men who are not qualified to be a pastor or deacon can still preach the Word of God in many ways if they are faithful to Jesus Christ and have a good Christian testimony.

3. The test of ability ([Tit. 1:9-11](#); [1 Ti. 3:5](#); [1 Pe. 5:2](#))

When God calls, He equips. He will never call someone to do something without giving that person the ability to do it.

When the Lord wanted the Tabernacle built in the time of Moses, He prepared men for this work. "See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" ([Ex. 31:2-3](#)). We see here the main aspects of God's call for special service. First, it was *an individual call*. God called Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur. Second, it was *a call to a particular work*. Third, the call was *accompanied by the ability to perform that work*.

It is true that God loves to use the weak things of this world for His service. In this way Jesus Christ receives the glory. God often calls men to preach who seem unlikely candidates by man's natural standards. He will not, though, call a man to be a pastor who cannot do the work of a pastor.

No man without such ability is qualified to be a pastor, even if he has a strong desire and a good Christian testimony. Such a man should heed [Romans 12:3](#) - "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Consider some of the things the pastor must be able to do:

- The pastor must be able to feed and shepherd the Lord's sheep ([1 Pe. 5:1-2](#)). He must be apt to teach God's Word ([1 Ti. 3:2](#)). He must be able to preach God's Word effectively ([2 Ti. 4:2](#)). He must be able to teach all the counsel of God ([Acts 20:27](#)). The man called to be a pastor must, therefore, be able to read and study well enough to do this work. The qualified pastor is a studious man, a man who "labours in the word of God and doctrine" ([1 Ti. 5:17](#)). He must be a serious student of God's Word ([2 Ti. 2:15](#)).

- The pastor must be able to make disciples by teaching the believers "to observe all things" ([Mt. 28:20](#)). This involves more than teaching facts. It involves teaching how to walk with Christ, how to live the Christian life, how to do the work of the ministry.

- The pastor must be able to take oversight of the church. He must have the ability to lead and oversee and supervise all areas of church life and ministry ([Ac. 20:28](#); [1 Pe. 5:2](#); [Heb. 13:17](#)). The qualified pastor is a leader, a manager, an overseer, a supervisor. He must have leading ability and planning ability. He should be a man of ideas. He has to lead the church in accomplishing everything Christ has commanded. He has to take God's commands and apply them to his cultural setting and figure out the best way to do God's work in that particular situation. He isn't a man who blindly follows tradition. That is not a leader. Yet many pastors don't rethink the tradition they have inherited. They don't analyze the services and programs to see if things could be done more effectively.

- The pastor must be able to protect Christians from error ([Tit. 1:9-13](#); [Ac. 20:28-30](#)). This includes rebuking when necessary ([Tit. 1:13](#)). It requires the exercise of discipline ([Tit. 3:9-11](#)). It requires the courage to confront sin and error. It requires spiritual discernment to know true believers from false ([Tit. 1:16](#)). The qualified pastor is the opposite of the simple man who "believeth every word" ([Pr. 14:15](#)). The pastor must have keen doctrinal and spiritual discernment and a shepherd's heart for protecting and watching over the sheep. He must be informed about any danger that his church faces, such as New Evangelicalism, charismaticism, ecumenism, contemplative prayer, and contemporary music, and he must be able to protect the church from such things.

- The pastor must be able to train Christian workers and leaders ([2 Ti. 2:2](#)). A qualified pastor is a serious educator.

The man who lacks the ability to do the work of a pastor is not qualified to be a pastor, even if he has a good Christian life and testimony and even if he has the ability to do *some* of the work of a pastor.

There are many good Christian men who can preach and teach, but they don't have the gifting to be pastors. They might not be strong enough to exercise discipline as they should and to deal with error. They might not be able to reprove and rebuke. They might not have the spiritual wisdom to deal with people effectually in a pastoral way. They might not be good leaders and overseers.

4. The test of recognition ([Acts 13:1-3](#); [16:1-3](#))

When God called Paul and Barnabas to a particular missionary work, their church recognized that call. This is an important test. The normal Bible pattern is for an individual's call and burden to be recognized by the church which knows him best. The same was true when Timothy was called to accompany Paul on his journeys ([Ac. 16:1-3](#)).

Consider this statement by Spurgeon to the preachers in his Bible college: "Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. *Yet this appeal is not final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and piety of those consulted.* I remember well how earnestly I was dissuaded from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed; the value of her opinion I endeavoured to estimate with candour and patience--but it was outweighed by the judgment of persons of wider experience ... I have noted ... that you, gentlemen, students, as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom if ever wrong. There

has hardly ever been an instance, *take the whole house through*, where the general opinion of the entire college concerning a brother has been erroneous. Meeting as you do in class, in prayer-meeting, in conversation, and in various religious engagements, you gauge each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house” (C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*).

As Spurgeon noted, there are exceptions to this rule. When a church is controlled by unsaved or carnal men, the church's judgment can be wrong. There have been instances when God called a man or woman to a certain work, but the church refused to recognize the call or support the ministry. In fact, there are examples of this in the Bible. Jesus was rejected by His own people ([Joh. 1:11](#)). Paul was rejected by the Galatians and by some in the Corinthian church ([Ga. 4:15-17](#); [1 Co. 9:1](#); [2 Co. 6:11-12](#); [3:1](#)). John and other men of God were rejected by the proud Diotrephes ([2 Jo. 9-10](#)).

5. The test of proving ([1 Ti. 3:10](#); [2 Co. 8:22](#))

The Scriptures show that churches must be careful in ordination. Men should demonstrate their zeal and faithfulness *before* ordination, not *by* ordination. This is true for every position of service in the church. The believer should show by his manner of life that he is qualified for a special place of service, regardless of how “lowly.”

The Scriptures warn about hasty ordinations ([1 Ti. 5:22](#)). Timothy was instructed to be cautious about ordaining men to positions of leadership. The context of [1 Timothy 5:17-25](#) concerns leaders in the church. By laying on of hands, those performing the ordination are testifying publicly that they are convinced God has called the person being ordained. It is a recognition of divine call. Those performing the ordination are identifying themselves with the one being ordained. If the church makes a mistake because of hastiness and failure to prove the person by God's standards, they become partaker of the sins of the man wrongly ordained.

6. The test of fruit

The Bible emphasizes the importance of fruit. “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper ([Ps. 1:3](#)).

Note that the fruit is personal and individual (“his fruit”). Fruit is different for different people. There are different gifts and callings, but there will be fruit.

If you are called to a certain ministry, you should have some fruit, some success, some evidence. The blessing of God should be evident in some tangible way. “... make full proof of thy ministry” ([2 Ti. 4:5](#)).

There are pastors who are never successful in the ministry. In fact, there are pastors who only kill churches. They always have an excuse for their failures, and the excuse might sound reasonable, but there should be some evident blessing and fruit if a man is called of God to that ministry.

Many men simply don't have the ability to do the work of the pastorate. They are good Christian men. They have a good testimony and a good family, and they love Christ and love the Word of God, but they don't have the gifting and wisdom and ability and discernment to lead a church.

One fruit of a pastor should be more preachers. Many pastors do not reproduce themselves, do not raise up and train more preachers, do not send out preachers to start new churches. After 25 years, there are no more preachers in the church than when his ministry began. We don't see this in Scripture. The missionary church that is put before us in Scripture is Antioch. Paul and Barnabas worked together to establish the foundation of that church ([Ac. 11:22-26](#)), and by the time God called them to go out from that church as foreign missionaries, there were already other preachers in the church ([Ac. 13:1](#)).

Fruit is an important test in all areas of ministry. There are missionaries who never start sound, self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches. There are Sunday School teachers who do not grow their classes either spiritually or numerically. There are song leaders who do not raise the standard and blessing of the church's song service.

A God-called pastor will show evidences of his calling in all of the aforementioned ways: by the test of desire, the test of life, the test of ability, the test of recognition, the test of proving, and the test of fruit.

A man who does not have the biblical evidence of God's calling should be content with doing something other than pastoring. There are many ways to preach without being a pastor.

Churches must be very careful in ordaining men. They must measure men by God's standards, not by human standards. By ordaining the wrong men, they are doing both those men and the churches a disservice, and this business will doubtless be addressed at the judgment seat of Christ.

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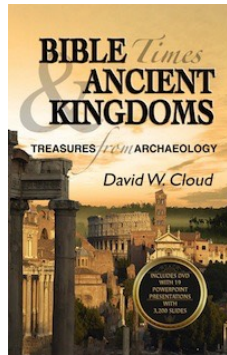
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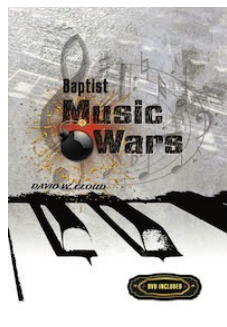
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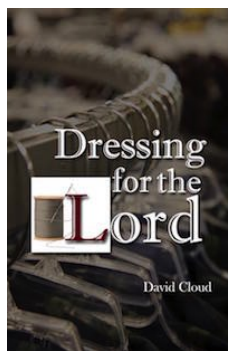
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