

## What a Privilege!

In 1979 I left my comfortable employment as a Physics teacher at Toronto Hebrew Academy for the uncertain waters of a full-time pastoral ministry. I had been invited to this position by the District Superintendent of the Christian & Missionary Alliance, whom I knew through being an elder in my local church. After much agonised prayer, I accepted this 'call' and was appointed to my first church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, a congregation of about 40 young people with little church experience.

I had never been to Bible School so had little formal training for this new position, but I did have a deep conviction, as my DS evidently did, that the Lord was calling me. I was determined to be 'the best pastor' I could be so, from the first week, I began the practice of going into my small 'office' at the church and converting it into my study. I disconnected the phone, locked the church doors and began to earnestly seek the Lord for what He wanted me to say to these young people on Sunday. I would pray and study the Word throughout that day so that by evening, I thought I had heard from God and would start to prepare the outline for the 'message'. This would course through my mind for the rest of the week until it was written down in outline form on Saturday evening.

In the church were three godly young men – all under 30 – who were the elders in that congregation. Each week one of them would read a portion of Scripture in the early part of the service, dedicated to worship, testimony and the reading of the Word. Imagine my surprise and delight when he would read the context of my text for that week. This happened several times so, on those occasions, I preached with the deep assurance that I had indeed heard from the Lord and that I had His word for that day. I came to realise that, as I waited on Him, He was very willing to lead His church. Further, my teaching was birthed out of my experience with the Lord that day earlier in the week, when I locked myself away with Him. I like to believe that the congregation was blessed as I fed them as numbers were added to the church, but I know that the greatest changes were happening in me as the Lord made Himself known, challenging me to a deeper walk with Him..

A year later, a young man came to the church with a passionate burden for prayer. He would spend long hours in the Lord's throne-room, so I asked him to teach us how to hear the voice of God. We would read Scripture before waiting long in silence to see what the Lord would say to us. Each one shared what thoughts had gone through their minds as they meditated in that silence. Again I was amazed as our 'thoughts' centred in each week on some specific issue, which we then spent the rest of that evening addressing in prayer. God answered those prayers, initiated by Him, by adding to our church so that three years later we had to build a new facility, totally paid for in three years. I had 'entered the ministry' to teach people how to study the Word and pray, but had, instead, been taught myself. I had been humbled to realise that He wants to build His church if I would let Him. I had the great privilege of simply being the avenue through whom He would usually speak, though He had many others in the church who could hear His voice, if they only quietened their hearts and minds to listen.

I have never forgotten those early experiences of ministry as the Lord has led me on into wider fields of service. The journey has been through many valleys and over many high places but never with His hand leaving mine as I cling on to Him. I have come to know Him in a very deep way and count it such a privilege to serve Him. My path has led from teaching (with its security and large salary) to pastoring a small congregation (with little salary), to missionary (with no salary), to itinerant minister. Each step has been a joyful yielding to more revelation of Himself. He has initiated each step of the way, though sometimes I could not see where He was leading.

What a privilege it is to serve Him! My wife and I have not made one 'sacrifice' that we would not gladly do again for the privilege of knowing Him! We have signed our own 'death warrants' and have no intention of revoking that commitment!

If you sense the Lord's calling on your life, seek confirmation through godly eldership, prepare your heart and spend much time alone with God. He will confirm His calling (or otherwise) and equip you for that task. All He asks is that you die so that He might live through you. Have you signed your own death warrant yet?

I would add one caution to this testimony. It is this: There are many who enter ministry without the 'calling' of God. They may be good Christians who see a need, but "the need is not the call". Beware lest you try to do something for God that the Lord has not called or equipped you for. David tried to bring the ark back to Israel by adopting the method that the Philistines had used – with devastating results! (1 Chron 13). God had already determined who should carry the ark (Numbers 4:15). Jesus said that whoever enters the sheepfold other than through him, is 'a thief and a robber'!

Jim Elliot was correct when he wrote "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose!"