



Affinity Ministers' Fraternal Study Guide

Where are the pastor-teachers?

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Introduction

Over the past few years a concern for the lack of men coming forward to the ministry of pastor-teacher has been swelling. An editorial in *Evangelicals Now* (October 2002) was followed by an article in the FIEC *Together* magazine (Autumn 2003), and then in September 2003 (at Oak Hill Theological College) around 40 to 50 ministers gathered for a Free Churches Consultation on Training for Ministry where the concern was once again raised. The survey by FIEC in 2003 revealed that only one quarter of its churches sent men into the ministry over the past five years, and just two out of ten churches had men in training for the ministry; over half the churches had no regular training for any others in the church. Clearly there is very little planning for succession. I emailed a cross-section of church leaders to ask their opinions on the subject: 'Where are all the pastors?' What follows is a collation of their responses (italicised) – complete with some quotations that will help us discuss this major issue.

Why are men leaving the ministry early?

Some of the responses gave an interesting twist to the question. Not only are there fewer men coming forward for the pastor-teacher ministry, but also it seems men are not staying in the ministry as long as they used to and are leaving the ministry earlier.

Men are leaving the ministry earlier: The pressures in the ministry are probably greater than ever before. Significantly more and more men are leaving the pastorate for some form of 'mission administration' around the age of 55 plus. So there are more vacancies and fewer men to take up the slack.

Stress is making men leave the ministry earlier.

Discussion points:

- From your knowledge is this true or not?
- If this is the case, why?
- What can we do to encourage each other to stay in the ministry?

Why is there a lack of men coming forward for the ministry of pastor-teacher?

Could it be that we ourselves, are not inspiring a future generation of preachers?

How many men are in the ministry today because they saw an example and model of preaching on fire, accompanied by a life sold out for God? George Verwer once said, 'Most men who are on fire for God caught the spark from another man on fire.' There are dozens of men in the ministry today because of the examples and inspiration of men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Dick Lucas and John Stott. Through these preachers, younger men saw how powerful preaching could be; they saw what it can do to effect transformation in churches and individuals, and they thought the ministry of the word was something worth giving their lives too!

Discussion points:

- Are we inspiring or uninspiring in our preaching? Are we inspiring a future generation of preachers?
- Do young men who sit under our ministry think 'I want to do that!' 'I want to give my life to that!'
- Is the fault with us? Are we dull, boring and dated in our preaching? Do our sermons sparkle?
- Are we keeping our expositional style of preaching but managing to adapt it to a post-modern generation?
- In 1 Thessalonians 1:4–10, Paul speaks of the gospel coming with 'power'. Do the men in our congregations sense this in our ministries?

What effect is the rise of other ministries having on the pastor-teacher ministry?

It is encouraging to see the diversity of ministries now recognised by the church and even given the status of full-time employment, but some correspondents questioned whether younger men are being lured away from the pastor-teacher ministry to these other ministries.

The low status 'the ministry' currently has. Even in 'Reformed circles' young men tend to want to 'work with students' or in publishing or indeed in any full time work that is not preaching.

More specialist roles in the church eg youth pastors.

Worship leaders, and singers/players in the church band seem far more exciting, engaging and 'difference making' than being a preacher.

Discussion points:

- To what extent is this true?

- How can we help people to see the ministry of pastor-teacher as the key ministry – from which all these other ministries spring?
- Does Ephesians 4:11,12 teach the priority of word ministry? How should other ministries in the church benefit from a faithful word ministry?

Has Western 21st Century style living invaded the church?

In every generation Christians have needed to rise above culture and values and attitudes that are wrong; every generation also has its own peculiar problems; are our young men (and us!) being sucked into today's values, culture?

Back in 1792 William Carey wrote in his *Enquiry*: 'A Christian minister is a person who in a peculiar sense is not his own; he is the servant of God, and therefore ought to be wholly devoted to him. By entering on that sacred office he solemnly undertakes to be always engaged, as much as possible, in the Lord's work, and not to choose his own pleasure, or employment, or pursue the ministry as a something that is to subserve his own ends, or interests, or as a kind of by-work. He engages to go where God pleases, and to do, or endure what he sees fit to command, or call him to, in the exercise of his function. He virtually bids farewell to friends, pleasures, and comforts, and stands in readiness to endure the greatest sufferings in the work of his Lord, and Master. It is inconsistent for ministers to please themselves with thoughts of a numerous auditory, cordial friends, a civilized country, legal protection, affluence, splendour, or even a competency. The flights, and hatred of men, and even pretended friends, gloomy prisons, and tortures, the society of barbarians of uncouth speech, miserable accommodations in wretched wildernesses, hunger, and thirst, nakedness, weariness, and painfulness, hard work, and but little worldly encouragement, should rather be the objects of their expectation.'

Discussion points:

- Is this mentality in the next generation of pastor-teachers (even in ourselves)?
- Is there a slack Christianity around, a shortage of sacrifice and surrender to God? Are young men unwilling to commit their whole lives to this task?
- Read Acts 16:1–3. What did it mean for Timothy to enter into the ministry?

Some correspondents spoke of a success-orientated, performance-related-pay society grabbing the mindset of the next generation.

A lot of hard work goes in to pastor-teacher(ing) and the results are not always encouraging. At the same time we are living in a success-orientated society and have been brainwashed to believe that numbers and programmes equals success and vision. Men are not keen to get in on the act when nothing much is happening on stage.

Discussion points:

- Do young men see the ministry as 'unsuccessful' and therefore they stay out of it?
- Read Mark 4:1–20. How much 'success' are we to actually expect?

Other correspondents spoke of the love of money and career that abounds.

The attraction of high paid jobs for young graduates makes the thought of a perpetually low salary (by comparison) very unattractive. In the world the potential in some professions is very great, in the ministry you will never get rich.

There was a day when we simply just would not ask what my salary would be, let alone tried to negotiate it. Yet now there is a persistent concern about 'the package'. Younger men feel a justifiable right to make sure that the employing church will take proper care of family and provide the right housing, car deal, pension provision etc.

Thatcher's children have grown up!

Discussion points:

- Are young men shunning the ministry because of its hardships money-wise?
- If so, what can we do about this?
- What does, 'not a lover of money' in 1 Timothy 3:3 mean?

Is the problem a lack of vision?

Do we ourselves have a vision to train men for the word-ministry? This is time-consuming and risk-taking but do we do it?

Discussion points:

- Do we single out certain young men and spend time with them and give them opportunities for preaching?
- Are we proactive in doing this? Are we pushing men towards the ministry? What are the full implications of Paul's word 'entrust' in 2 Timothy 2:2?
- How does this fit in with the idea of 'if you can keep out of the ministry, keep out.'
- What does Acts 13:5; 15:40; 16:3; tell us about Paul's method of training a future generation?

Do our churches have a vision for training men for the word-ministry?

- Do we set aside budgets for training?
- Is Matthew 9:38 being prayed at our church prayer meetings?
- Are churches willing to go without hearing 'The Minister' for a service so that a young, untrained, man can 'have a go'?
- How do we discern whether a man has latent gifts for ministry?

Is the crazy-mixed up nature of what people expect from a pastor putting off a younger generation?

In many churches pastors are expected to do everything, to be gifted in everything. They run around trying to meet the expectations of the church and end up overtired, miserable, frustrated, and hardly showing the joy of the Lord. Do young men see this and think, 'I can do without that!'

Discussion points:

- How can churches be educated on what a pastor is/does? How can we educate the church on what a pastor doesn't/shouldn't do?
- Eugene Petersen suggests that pastors should be subversive and be 'unbusy'! Is this possible?
- How can we teach the church not to expect one man to be: The leader, The teacher, The carer, The visitor, The counsellor, The trainer?
- Do we come across to our people as 'miserable' and 'over-burdened'? We have heavy responsibilities (2 Corinthians 11:28) but how can we show the 'joy of the Lord' (Philippians 4:4) in our ministries?
- Is it right to be 'overtired' in the Lord's work (Isaiah 40:29–31)? What unspoken message are we giving to a younger generation about the work of pastor-teachers?

Are there are simply not enough men?

One correspondent put it down to this:

The fundamental problem is a lack of conversions! There are not many men being converted, and so fewer going into the ministry!

Discussion points:

- If this is so, should churches be radical and only concentrate on reaching men?
 - Can we therefore do *anything* about the situation?
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