

Not the Pastor's Job

God wants to use *you*.

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

Pastor, I think my friend might be interested in the gospel, but I'm pretty sure she's at the bar today instead of here at church."

We were walking up from the church basement where the fellowship meal had just concluded. I paused for a moment halfway up the steps so she could continue.

"You need to get over there right away and get her out of that place!" she demanded.

"I really do appreciate your concern for your friend," I replied, "and it's nice to have someone in the congregation who cares so much. But let me ask you a question: What do you think would happen if I walked into that bar to confront her?"

"I think that if a *pastor* went in and talked to her, she'd change her mind about drinking and leave!" Tammy brightened up for a moment, confident in her answer and hopeful that it would compel me to go.

Her sentiment was understandable; many people appear to be convinced that members of the clergy have special arguments and phrases they learn in seminary that can be uttered to instantly win arguments or create conviction. While it's true that soul-winning pastors often have more experience than many when it comes to engaging in conversation with people struggling with conviction,

they are utterly powerless to actually *manufacture* it. Generating conviction, it turns out, is something that only the Holy Spirit can do. If someone is ignoring or rejecting the prompting of the Spirit, it is not possible to develop a rational argument that will change things.

"But the natural man," Paul reminds us, "does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

"Tammy," I replied, "I don't think that would work the way you hope. Most of the time, if someone realizes that a friend or family member has sent the preacher—and that visit isn't particularly welcome—it's going to make things worse. I *could* go over to that bar right now, but she's going to know that you made that happen, and there's a real chance it's going to damage your friendship."

"But she's in spiritual danger!" Tammy replied, a little surprised that I didn't think her idea would work.

Why was I hesitant? I'd tried it many times as a young pastor, and I'd seen it backfire too many times to think it would work. Most often, hopeful wives hoped I could find just the right words to convince their husbands to become interested in God. It's often true that if I can casually become friends with that person, I can build enough trust to encourage honest inquiry and create an open environment in which someone would feel comfortable discussing Jesus, but people are generally not *debated* into the kingdom of God.



Consider all those heated arguments you’ve witnessed on social media. How often have you seen them conclude with the words “You know what? I think you’re right!” Pride usually prevents that from happening.

A Different Picture

Quite apart from the risk of angering her friend, Tammy also harbored another widespread misunderstanding: the medieval idea that it’s the role of the pastor—a trained professional—to win souls. It’s an unbiblical notion that has contributed to the slow growth—or even negative growth—of many churches. In the New Testament model you’ll find that the church member is the minister, and the pastor plays the role of a coach—training, equipping, and emboldening the congregation to win souls.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul explains the gifts God has given to each of us: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11, 12).

Notice that pastors have not been gifted in order to *do* the work of ministry on their own; they have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to *equip the saints* for the work of ministry. In some translations of the Bible, the punctuation divides that thought in two, as if the role of pastors is to both equip the saints and to do the work of ministry themselves. The punctuation, however, was not in the original manuscripts; it was added at a time when

the understanding of the role of clergy was still deeply influenced by the way people thought of the Roman Catholic priesthood.

The pastor’s proper role is to get *you* busy doing the task that Christ assigned to all of us.

“All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come,” Ellen White reminds us, “are put in trust with the gospel. ‘We are laborers together with God,’ called to represent Him as ambassadors of love [1 Cor. 3:9].”*

You’ll notice that Jesus did not teach His audience that *some of you* are the light of the world. He was addressing a large crowd, including everyone present. Many of us fear that call, however, wondering if we really have what it takes to lead someone else to Christ. The truth of the matter is that we *don’t*. Neither does the pastor. We are not called to do the job of the Holy Spirit—but we *are* called to be present for those on whom the Spirit is working.

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A Role for All of Us

When you come in contact with someone who might be interested in the faith, it’s natural to immediately think of sending in the pastor—and it’s true that a good pastor can be a helpful resource. But it’s important to choose to believe that God put *this* individual in *your* path for a reason. It’s entirely possible that *you* are the best possible choice to help that individual find a connection to God’s church.

When we understand that God calls *us*, as we are, with the gifts we have (and do not have), it can liberate us from fear. We do not have to adopt the styles, the words, or the mannerisms of ministers we look up to, thinking that in order to win souls, we need to emulate those who are already doing it. By all means, listen to those who are successful in order to learn the principles involved. But at the same time, it’s critically important to believe that God has called *you* for this moment because of who you are. When He needed a Paul, He raised one up. When He needed a Luther or a Wesley, He found them. But now, at this moment, God needs *you* to be a light in this world.

Yes, *you*, with all your faults and personality quirks. He didn’t bring that individual interested in spiritual things to someone else, He sent them to *you* . . . because for the story that’s about to unfold with this new believer, God seems to think you’re perfect for the job. **¶**

* Ellen G. White manuscript 21, 1900, par. 30.