

## Called to the Ministry

The task set to me is to explain briefly something of my life and call to the ministry for the purpose of the recognition of the glory of God who calls and sends, and for the benefit of young men whom the Lord may be calling to the ministry.

I grew up in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church. In many ways that means I am a product of the church planting efforts of the PRC. Although my mother is Dutch, on my father's side I trace my family history back to the Volga Germans in Russia, as many in Loveland PRC do. These Reformed Germans immigrated to Russia for free land, but eventually were cast out. Many of them came to the United States, settling in South-Central Nebraska and establishing German Reformed churches. My paternal grandparents were products of this settlement. Eventually my grandparents and others came to the Loveland area intent on preserving the doctrines of sovereign grace, which led them to contact with the PRC. A mission was started which eventually grew into a Protestant Reformed Church. Growing up therefore in a sound Protestant Reformed home, I was taught by God's grace vibrant love for the Reformed faith coupled with pious devotion to King Jesus. The Reformed faith was a religion of the mind and the heart to my parents, and for that I give great thanks to God.

I attended the Protestant Reformed grade school in Loveland, which the Lord used to bolster my understanding of and love for his word and the excellence of all his created world. From there I attended a Baptist high school along with the rest of the youth from Loveland PRC, as there was no Protestant Reformed High School. I grew much in this time, learning to think through the Biblical faith and to defend it with wisdom. From there I attended the University of Northern Colorado where I received a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. This time in a secular university was difficult, as I was confronted with postmodernism and the denial of the authority of God's word on every front. I was not very prepared intellectually to face the challenge and struggled. Yet in God's sovereign providence and mercy He held on to me. The living tether of faith rooted in eternal election is never broken (God be praised!), yet my testimony during the first half of my college years is that of the great Russian novelist, "My Hosanna's have come forth through the crucible of doubt." Looking back, all worked together for good, as the Lord brought me to a position of resting in him and his Christ revealed in Scripture with a greater conviction and devotion than before.

I married my wife Lael before my second year of seminary training, and the Lord has blessed our marriage in His grace. We have four children, two boys and two girls. The first two are the boys and are twins, the third and fourth are the girls.

I knew I was called to the ministry since the time when I was a young boy. The problem for me was not so much in determining whether or not I was called to the ministry, but it was in submitting myself to that call. In my late high school years and college years I tried to flee from that call. Part of the time in college I was intellectually struggling with whether or not God was there. The other times I thought if I went to school to be a teacher God would let me off the hook, so to speak. However, peace was never there in that way, and finally, matured in mind and heart, in my fourth year of college I dropped the education side of my major and submitted myself to what I knew was right.

Once in seminary, I can't say I ever really doubted my call to the ministry. There were difficult times in seminary, but doubt was not the reason. The work load was difficult, and other things going on in my life made it difficult, but I never doubted the call. There were, however, things that the Lord used to confirm the call to me. Working in young people's society before seminary and in seminary did that. Practice preaching did that—not because I was so wonderful at preaching—but simply because I knew there were gifts there that could be molded and developed by the seminary. In addition, once being a part of delivering God's word in that fashion, I knew I could do no other. Of course, receiving the external call to the ministry was the final confirmation from the Lord that indeed this was God's will for me. One may think they are confident of the call before this, but it is at the end of the day the external call that God uses to place his will upon his servants.

Now that I am in the ministry it is enjoyable to do the work that I am called to do to his glory. There are times when it is difficult—much more difficult than seminary. There are joys and sorrows. There are the pains of watching a sinner follow his sin. There are the pains of reflecting on one's own sin in the work. One does not generally see his own sin in the work until after the fact, and one laments that and sorrows over it. There is perhaps the deepest pain of errant young people.

There are the great joys, however, of seeing God's people grow in faith and be restored from ways of sin. One of the greatest joys is the opposite of one of the greatest sorrows, seeing the youth grow in doctrine and life. There is the look on their face when they "get it" in

catechism; the delight in watching them make godly decisions. And there is the joy of growing oneself as one carries out the work. The chief delight, however, in my opinion, is to be deep in the study of the word of God regularly. Just when one thinks he could not delight in the word and the God of that word any more than he has, there is another passage that thrills the soul. There are times when I have stopped in the middle of writing a sermon to pray in joy, sing in joy, shed tears in delight, cry tears of conviction, simply because God's word is so powerful and rich, and I know my fellow colleagues in the ministry have the same delight and experience. The Reformed faith is the biblical faith. And the biblical faith is a beautiful faith to the believing mind and heart, and it is a wonderful thing to discover both anew week after week.

I was asked to give words of advice to those who may think they are being called to the ministry. I will pass on some wisdom granted to me from a sound theologian of a bygone era. He said once that to be an under shepherd of the Great Shepherd requires the God-given natural and spiritual ability to exegete two books. The first book is the word of God. One must be able to lead out of the text what truth is taught and what the Spirit intends to communicate. The second book is the human heart. One must be able to lead out of the human heart the motivations, reasons that lie behind man's sins and hopes and fears. And one must be able to show how the first book one has properly exegeted speaks to the second book one has properly exegeted. Such gifts are God-given. They are developed in seminary and *must be* developed in seminary, but seminary itself cannot give them. If the young man has something of those gifts and delights in the use of them for the glory of God and the good of God's people, and not for his own glory, and if others who are mature in the church see that he has something of those gifts, he may indeed be called to develop that ability in seminary with a view to the gospel ministry. At the end of the day we labor not for ourselves, nor in our own strength, but for him, and in the power of his might. May God continue to grant our churches such young men by his grace, and may God continue to bless our seminary with faithfulness in the development of such young men.