

The Call to the Ministry

“Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel” (Amos 7:14-15).

If you would ask me how I was called into the ministry of God’s Word, I could hardly do better than to quote and apply to myself these words of Amos the prophet. For like Amos, I was no minister, nor was I a minister’s son; but I was the son of a farmer: the Lord took me as I was following a certain path, and he said to me, “Go, preach to my people Israel.”

In this article, I will tell you how it happened.

But first some background. I was born on December 21, 1982 in Grand Rapids, Michigan to James and Kathi Holstege. I am the first of their four children. My three siblings are Nate, Lynn, and Joe. We were raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches, as were both our parents, because our ancestors left the Christian Reformed Church with Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof in 1924 and continued in the PRC up to this day. I was baptized in Southeast PRC and remained a member there until entering the ministry. My parents fulfilled their baptismal vows by sending me to Adams Street Christian School and Covenant Christian High School. In the summers, my dad put us to work on his celery farm plowing, planting, weeding, harvesting, and doing other jobs. When he sold the farm and transitioned into a greenhouse business in the mid-1990s, I transitioned too. After high school I began to pursue a two-year degree in business management at Davenport University with a view to joining the family business. But after one year of college, that changed...

The Lord took me and said, “Go, preach to my people Israel.”

Let me tell you a simple little story of a day I will never forget. What happened on that day was not a mystical experience, not a special revelation, not a vision of God or Christ. But it was certainly a moment in which the Lord took me. It was a day in the summer after my first year of college. I was working in an empty greenhouse, cleaning up after a busy spring season. I was alone, sweeping the dust

off the floor. I had a lot of time to think. I must have been thinking about how I had not enjoyed my first year of college. Or perhaps I was fretting over the high tuition expenses that I faced in my second year (I had grants and scholarships to pay for the first year). I began to feel deeply disturbed. I did not want to go into debt for a college education that I did not value or enjoy. And I was very troubled by my lack of enthusiasm about my current path. What happened next was a decisive moment. Yet it will sound very simple. In my mind, I heard my own voice say these words: “*You know you have to do it.*” That is, you know you must discontinue your current path and pursue the ministry of the gospel. The words were absolute. I do not know *how* I knew I had to do it. But I knew. And that’s the story.

What happened that day was *dreadful* to me. I wanted nothing to do with the ministry. I never considered the ministry as a child. I felt no urge or desire to be a minister. In fact, I felt an urge *not* to be a minister. I did not feel bold or brave enough to preach. I was somewhat shy as a child, and the thought of standing in the pulpit in front of all those people terrified me! I felt the fear of Moses when he said, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

Yet the call was *overpowering*. I could not resist it. It still strikes me how inexplicable it is that I became a minister. Like Amos, I was not the son of a minister, nor a relative of any minister, but I was the son of a farmer. Like Amos, I was just going about my business pursuing a life in the greenhouse industry, not wishing to preach the word. I had no reason to pursue the ministry. I was not drawn to any particular aspect of the ministry. I did not have close interaction with any ministers. I *was* told by my childhood pastor Rev. Dale Kuiper on a number of occasions that I should consider the ministry. When shaking his hand after a worship service, or after catechism class, he would say, “You really ought to consider the ministry.” I always smiled and brushed his comment aside. I did not agree, and that was that. I was going to enter my dad’s greenhouse business, and that was all there was to it. But I could never fully shake off Rev. Kuiper’s simple words. I was haunted by them. I suppose he planted a seed in my heart, unknown to me, which the Lord later caused to sprout into an irresistible urge to go and

preach to his people. Beyond that, I cannot explain what led me to leave the path I was on and to pursue the ministry. But it was the right decision. I never once looked back or doubted the decision in the least. On the contrary, I grew more and more convinced of the call.

Soon I told my parents (who somehow already suspected it). I did not return to Davenport, but I took one semester of classes at Grand Rapids Community College, and then transferred all my credits to Calvin College. God enabled me to succeed and to enjoy my studies. He helped me learn Latin at Calvin, then Greek at our seminary. He helped me finish college and graduate from Calvin in 2006. He helped me through four more grueling but happy years of study at our seminary. In my fourth year the professors sent me to Randolph, Wisconsin for my internship with another Rev. D. Kuiper (not Dale, but Doug). Then God brought me my wife too. I met Leah Regnerus not long after moving to Randolph. We dated throughout my internship and became engaged in the spring of 2010. That summer God confirmed my internal call with two external calls. I accepted the call from First PRC of Holland and was ordained into the ministry in October. In November Leah and I were married, and one year later we were blessed with a son, Gabriel James. Last August the Lord blessed us again, this time with twins, Kirsten Leigh and Kiley Danielle.

If I would give any advice to young men considering the ministry, among other things, I would say this: If you can with a free conscience pursue any other career, do it. If you have a desire to do any other kind of work, do that. And this too: If you were pursuing the ministry, but did not feel compelled to do it, and are now pursuing some other form of work, you made the right decision. You need not feel any guilt or shame about leaving the path that leads to the ministry. If you are called to the ministry, you will know. You might not know with absolute certainty right away, as I did. But that certainty will grow stronger and stronger if you are called. Contrariwise, your doubts will grow greater and greater if you are not called.

Another way of putting it is this: Pursue the ministry only if you feel compelled to do so, only if you can do nothing else. Do not pursue the ministry because someone is pressuring you to do so. You

must not be called by a man, but by God! Do not pursue the ministry because you want the attention and praise of men. You must not seek to please men, but God and Christ (Gal. 1:10). Do not pursue the ministry because you enjoy public speaking and are good at it. There are other ways you can use that gift, and that is not even the essential gift of the ministry (I Cor. 2:1-4). Do not pursue the ministry because you love the intellectual life that you see in the ministry. You will find that much of the work of the ministry is of a practical nature (visiting, counseling, meetings). Do not seek the ministry because you want to prove that you are somebody to your parents or grandparents. Even if you do prove it, you will then be stuck in a position in which you never wanted to be.

Pursue the ministry only if you cannot do anything else. If you have the urge to preach the word of God to his people, pursue the ministry! If you feel the longing to reprove, rebuke, and exhort them with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2), pursue the ministry! If you feel compelled to instruct the church in the truth of the Scriptures and to call them to repentance and faith, seek the ministry! If you can find no rest until you have declared on behalf of Christ, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), then pursue the ministry of the gospel. Pursue the ministry if you want to follow Jesus in the office of minister of the gospel. Pursue the ministry if you long to have God glorified through your preaching. Pursue the ministry if you love God, love his truth, and love his church. Pursue it if you long to comfort God's people (Isa. 40:1). Pursue it if you are ready and willing to deny yourself many things and to give yourself fully for your whole life to this work.

If you are truly called, the Lord will take you and say to you, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." Woe unto you if you do not give heed to that call!