

## Time to Move or Stay?

In living out the call to ministry leadership, there are moments when it is time to move. It is time to move when the call that placed you where you are is superseded by a new call. When you know for certain that the move is from the Lord, then you move. Period. No looking back.

But often it is not time to move. It is time to stay despite the difficulties. It is time to stay even though the fruitfulness you desire is slow in coming. It is time to stay where the Lord has planted you trusting that he will produce a harvest in his time and his way and his amount. As the Lord teaches us at John 12:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (ESV). Note the connection between dying – submitting to the Sovereign Lord right where you are - and fruitfulness. Yes, sometimes the Lord moves us. More often, though, he calls us to die where he has planted us.

To die where you are planted, you will have to overcome Greener Pastures Syndrome. Greener Pastures Syndrome is when you think that a move is going to solve a contentment problem. It won't. If you are not happy in the Lord where you are, you will not become happy in the Lord by changing environments. Either your security and satisfaction and joy come from who you are in Christ or you will not be secure or satisfied or joyful anywhere. Either your definition of success is obedience to God's call or failure awaits you wherever you go. Sure, you will have a short honeymoon period at the new place, but moving will not make you a contented soul. After the honeymoon, you will find out that this new relationship calls for a lot of slow, tedious work just like the last one. You will be confronted again with the choice between dying where you are planted and Greener Pastures Syndrome.

Vision distortion is inherent in Greener Pastures Syndrome. When we are experiencing frustration or boredom we become particularly vulnerable to this vision distortion. We start seeing only the things that dissatisfy us where we are and only the things that excite us in other places. We forget that familiarity breeds contempt. Looking at a dreamy new place from a distance, we do not see the flaws. There are many places that look better from a distance than the present place we see up close. Deep in our hearts we know that every place has lots of problems, but maybe, just maybe the next place will be the perfect one. We soon find out that it, too, falls short. Greener Pastures Syndrome claims another victim.

As I have written before, church health correlates strongly with pastoral tenure. There are many factors that contribute to long pastoral tenure, not all of which are under the pastor's control. But in my conversations with long-tenured pastors I have discovered that pastors who stay have learned to be contented souls right where they are. It does not mean they will never go anywhere else or they lack ambition. It means if they do move it will be because of call, not Greener Pastures Syndrome. These men have learned to be contented souls right here, right now. They have fallen into the ground and died where the Lord has planted them.

Do you desire to escape the allures of Greener Pastures Syndrome as a ministry leader? Would you like to serve as a contented soul right where God has placed you? Then consider these suggestions for practicing a die-where-you're-planted ministry lifestyle.

1. Memorize John 12:24 and recite it often. It will reset your thinking biblically in those moments when Greener Pastures Syndrome is particularly strong, such as

- When you have poured your heart into a sermon and received no visible response.
- When a frustrating meeting fails to reach a productive decision.
- When your prayer time is interrupted by a church member who is annoyed that someone else at the church touched their stuff.
- When folks assume poor motives on your part because a decision did not go their way.
- When a large, complicated change is required and you must lead it.
- When the ugly, anonymous letter arrives in your inbox.
- Nearly any Monday!

2. Remember how highly God values you. He values you not for what you can do for him, which is nothing, but for who you are, his child. Calvary proves it. Praise him for that and rest in his love.

3. Recall God's faithfulness in the past when you were at a difficult point. Remind yourself that he has not changed. Give thanks and express your faith in the Lord's faithfulness.

4. Get some perspective by talking with peers and mentors. Isolation breeds vision distortion. Do not isolate yourself. Build your support network. Ask the Lord to shape your understanding and vision through these brothers and sisters.

5. Remember specifically what God has called you to do in the current place. Remember that success is defined as faithfulness to God's call. We oppress ourselves by adding weight that we were not designed to carry – the weight of results, the weight of pleasing everyone, and the weight of being impressive. Lose the weight! Focus on what God has called you to do and jettison the rest.

6. Feed your soul through prayer, rest, and recreation. Be the human being God created you to be, not some workaholic robot. Soul care, too, is important work. Do not neglect it in the pursuit of "success."

Dear brothers and sisters, beloved souls called to lead the church, my prayer is that you will be obedient to the Lord when he tells you to move and when he tells you to stay. Staying takes practice. It takes work. It is a developed discipline that the Lord equates with dying. But take heart! With the dying he promises us much fruit.