

THE ILLUSION OF THE HIGHER CALLING

Who decided what counts as “ministry?”

I’ve never been particularly comfortable when someone calls me “*Pastor Steven*.” I know what they mean. They’re being kind. They’re showing respect. And I appreciate that. It just feels strange to me.

Pastoring is something I have done for most of my adult life. Although, to be honest, I’m not even sure pastor best describes how Jesus has gifted me. I’m probably more apostolic by nature. But please don’t start calling me “*Apostle Steven*.” 😂



What bothers me isn’t really the title. It’s what the title can quietly communicate.

We don’t introduce someone as “*Administrator Susan*.”

We don’t say, “*This is Mercy-Gifted Michael*.”

Nobody puts “*Gift of Helps*” in front of Jennifer’s name.

But “*Pastor Steven*” sounds completely normal. Why?

I wonder if somewhere along the way we began creating a hierarchy of gifts and callings. Some started feeling more spiritual than others. Some seemed more important. Some even received titles. And eventually we created something that I’m not sure Jesus ever intended: *a ladder*.

Pastors, missionaries, worship leaders, and other people in vocational ministry tend to end up somewhere near the top. Teachers, accountants, mechanics, nurses, artists, business owners, administrators, and everyone else are somewhere further down.

I don’t think we do this intentionally. I certainly don’t think most pastors want it this way.

But listen to the language we sometimes use. Someone leaves a successful career to become a pastor or missionary, and we talk about how they left everything to “*go into ministry*.” But weren’t they already in ministry?

I’ve written about this a lot with musicians. A musician who loves Jesus stands on a church platform with a guitar and leads worship. We immediately understand that person to be using their gift for God. Another musician who loves Jesus plays that same guitar in a theatre, a restaurant, a concert hall, a school, or a neighborhood bar.

Same gift. Same God. Different audience.

Why is one treated more sacred than the other?

Leading worship carries a particular responsibility. I don't want to diminish that for a second. But I also don't want to diminish what God has placed in the hands of the musician whose stage happens to be somewhere else.

For followers of Jesus, every gift, talent, strength, and role is sacred when it is surrendered to Him. Paul wrote, *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

Whatever you do.

That's a pretty big category.

Administration can glorify God.

Teaching can glorify God.

Running a business can glorify God.

Fixing an engine can glorify God.

Writing software can glorify God.

Caring for a patient can glorify God.

Making music can glorify God.

So can preaching a sermon.

Different gifts. Different responsibilities. Different audiences. Different expressions. Same Jesus.

And this matters because I think the illusion of a higher calling can actually keep us from seeing the harvest around us.

We start looking for something more.

Something more significant.

Something more spiritual.

Something that feels more like ministry.

Meanwhile, a nurse spends twelve hours a day entering some of the most vulnerable moments of people's lives.

A mechanic has people sitting in his garage telling him about their cars, their marriages, their kids, their fears, and their dreams.

A teacher walks into a classroom every morning filled with young people carrying questions, hopes, insecurities, and stories nobody else knows.

A business owner knows employees and customers by name.

A musician walks onto a stage in front of people who might never walk into a church.

And somewhere along the way, we convinced some of these people that the really important Kingdom work was happening somewhere else.

What if it isn't?

The problem isn't that we need more people to find a higher calling? We need more people to recognize the sacred calling already in their hands?

Jesus said the Kingdom is near. He said the harvest is plentiful. If both are true, then we might want to stop looking up the ladder for something more important and start looking around.

The harvest may already be sitting across the desk from you, standing beside you at work, walking into your shop, sitting in your classroom, listening to your music, texting your phone, or eating at your table.

There is no ladder.

There is Jesus.

There is the person in front of you.

There is whatever He has placed in your hands.

And there is the invitation to be faithful with it.