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* W H A T M A K E S A P A S T O R " C L I C K " ? *
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* By Roy S. Nicholson *
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WHAT MAKES A PASTOR "CLICK"?

By Roy S. Nicholson

Each pastor who would be a success must appreciate the fact that as a leader in the pastorate there are certain essential qualifications for the "executive" type of leadership which are also essential for him. Election to executive leadership does not of itself endow one with special qualifications. He is chosen because he possesses them.

In our group it goes without saying that the pastor must, first of all, possess a genuine spiritual experience of full salvation. But it does bear repeating that it is not enough to "profess" these as past crises in one's spiritual experience. They must be continued and cultivated and kept as current each new day of life. In view of the conflicts and competitions of modern living, the very "spirit of the age" menaces the pastor's spiritual life. An unspiritual pastor is never a success in the highest sense of the word. But we must guard against an improper misconception of "spirituality" which tends to make it relate almost solely to the emotional life and overlooks reason, right relationships and moral obligations. To be "spiritual" involves far more than liveliness, liberality, loquacity, and so-called "demonstration", or an emotional outburst in a public service which is not followed by proper conduct in private life and personal relationships. Such inconsistency tends to bring the term "spirituality" into disrepute with many people.

Appreciating the Pastoral Ministry

It is disturbing to discover that many seek escape from the pastoral ministry or seek substitutes for it because they do not consider its grandeur. To them it is unspectacular and unchallenging. They consider that it is ordinary and prosaic; and because they fail to see that it is extraordinary and requires consecrated heroism and increasing skill, they fail to appreciate its manifold opportunities that are not possible to any other type of ministry. It is noble work.

The pastor has the opportunity to diagnose motives, analyze emotions, and interpret desires in a way that no other leader can. He can offer help, consolation, and guidance in his pulpit messages, personal conferences in his office and in his calls in the homes. The pastor has ample opportunity to deal with individuals and that calls for "a well-furnished mind and a loving heart." Out of these personal contacts which require prudence, kindness, courtesy - yea, an inexhaustible supply of patience - and friendship for all with flattery for none, the pastor molds the spirit of the Church.

By the continued comradeship in his people's hearts the congregation not only accepts his leadership, but enshrines him in their hearts as their spiritual shepherd. This requires that he possess "the shepherd's heart" and that he lead, feed and defend his flock.

He does not drive them, but leads them; he does not flog them, but feeds them; he does not scold them, but shepherds them. If pity is needed it is demonstrated without self-pity; he is candid without being cynical. He is sincere - even serious, if need be - without being rude; he can deal out stern truth without bitterness, and be outspoken without being blunt and boorish. The pastor who "clicks" must be frank, but unselfish; impartial, but not evasive; and sympathetic, but not "soft".

Watchman, Evangelist and Prophet

The pastor who "clicks" needs the wisdom of a watchman as he guards his flock. As a shepherd he is - as one has said, "God's dietitian" - to feed the hungry souls of his flock. His flock is also a "family" which God has entrusted to his care. While he must "feed" all, including the "lambs", he needs to shepherd, or train and discipline, all. As a wise watchman who guards his flock from intruders he must be discerning enough not to cry "Wolf!" at the sight of the shepherd dog and let wolves remain in sheep's clothing. He will, as watchman, need long-suffering and patience, with tenderness, and a big supply of self-control, poise, calmness and sane judgment. It will be of inestimable value if he has a refined sense of well-controlled humor without being flippant or frivolous, and if he is cheerful without being guilty of levity.

As a watchman the pastor is the greatest representative of the friends of Jesus; therefore, he should take the initiative in fearlessly denouncing sin no matter how popular or customary it is. The pastor should attack the foes of Christian principles by courageously proclaiming, explaining, and enforcing the claims of the gospel.

As a "spiritual specialist" the true pastor needs the grim earnestness of a fervent evangelist who delivers his destiny-determining messages with heavenly authority and unction. This requires the vision of a seer in order that the vital may be discerned from the trivial, that proper consideration is given to all phases of truth and that a proper application is made to individual cases with which he comes to grips. A clear understanding of the divine power, purposes, promises to and provisions of God for man is imperative if one is to "fulfill his calling" and magnify the pastoral office.

The successful pastor also needs the dynamic and accuracy of discernment of such a prophet as John the Baptist, or Elijah the Reformer. He will, at times, be confronted with an army of problems as perplexing as Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. At such a time one wants to know whether to tarry and pray for life to animate them, or to seek another circuit! On the other hand, he will need discernment to know whether those before him are loyal but weary pilgrims, needing food and rest (after a long struggle to survive a succession of crises), or whether they are hypocritical enemies to be put to flight by a tirade of ministerial anathemas from a pulpit pugilist.

Business and Professional Contacts

There are business and professional contacts which the successful pastor must not undervalue. His place in the community entitles him to equal consideration with other community leaders and builders. There is no reason why he should shrink from such or feel that he is inferior to the professional men of his community. Often the indifference of the community to the church's interests may be a reflection of the church's indifference to the community's interest.

These business and professional contacts afford a wider and a close acquaintance with those whose help one may need - or who may need his help - in building bulwarks against the encroachments of sinister interests, or in cultivating a moral, social and spiritual conscience. Out of such contacts there emerges personal and mutual understanding that prepares for the proper and necessary conferences out of which community-wide programs grow. These conferences prevent ready-made plans being imposed without opportunity to express one's views on them. Through these conferences, in which the pastor respects the importance and value of his colleagues in the ministry and the professions, comes a sharing of the burden and responsibility of the work to be done. Thus those who share the pastor's views present many of his plans and labor for their success, thus enabling him to work indirectly, which is always indicative of superior leadership. The true leader is more concerned about results than about the credit for those results.

Through these community contacts the pastor shows that his congregation is alive and active, interested in revealing its position on all moral issues, and never fearing to be found in the front ranks of those who labor for civic and social righteousness, as well as personal holiness. The pastor's expressions on moral and spiritual issues are simple in expression, and intended to influence public opinion, not to be influenced by it. Such a pastor looks upon life as a trust to be used for God and man, and he draws upon his convictions instead of his imaginations, directing his appeal to those who want to hear God's message instead of man's oratory. Such a pastor seeks to combine the instinct of the statesman with the learning of the scholar and the devotion of the saint. His prayer is: "Lord, give me the opportunity to honor Thee, and give me a heart to embrace the opportunity" (Kirk).

The Preaching That Reaches

The successful pastor discovers that his bearing in the pulpit must be: "I have a message of divine truth which I am commissioned to deliver," and he must deliver heaven's message in a manner becoming God's ambassador. His aim should be to interest, to instruct and to move his hearers. He must be studious enough to forego personal comforts to acquire knowledge to use for God's glory. While loyal to his theology, his sympathies must be as broad and as deep as human suffering and needs. This means that his preaching will feed, illuminate, save, strengthen, edify, and unite his flock and .

assist them to courageously face life's crises. But this can be done only by fresh sermons which grow out of his knowledge of God's Word and his people's needs, and not by "revamped theological dogmas decorated with fresh posies." Needless to say, the preaching that reaches must be biblical in content and practical in application. Thus the principles of Christ aid in the settlement of all questions that affect individual duty and social, business and national life.

The pastor's sermons should include meditations on the facts of our faith, enlargement (or elaboration) of those facts, and the application of those facts to everyday life and problems. Perhaps John Matthews, an old-time Methodist pastor who filled some of his Church's greatest pulpits, was not wrong in feeling that his success was due to what he called "leg theology" - or pastoral calling. While the matter of pastoral calling deserves a special treatment of its own, it may be said that in the main the pastor's ministry "clicks" in about the same proportion that he calls on his members.

The pastor's success also depends, in a great measure, upon his church's willingness to respond to his leadership. The church can contribute to his success as well as he to its success. They are vitally related to each other. Some churches are strong enough to float their pastors despite handicaps, while others are so weak that any success (however small) is like rescuing a drowning man. To send a strong man to a weak church that is unwilling to pay the price of growth is to jeopardize the man's present and future success.

The Main Business

Lyman Beecher, one of America's greatest preachers in his day and for whom the Yale Lectures on Preaching were named, was characterized as a great preacher, a great pastor, a great theologian, a great reformer, a great wit, and a great platform orator. When he was asked what he considered the greatest thing in one's ministry, he said: "Not theology, not controversy, but to save souls." He is said to have counted the sermon as being wasted that did not win some one to Christ's way.

The pastor whose ministry "clicks" will give careful attention to (1) building background, (2) laying foundations, (3) sharpening convictions, (4) determining trends, (5) creating atmosphere, (6) keeping his people alert to basic principles and spiritual realities, and (7) hewing "true to the line in the gigantic business of proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Blocker).

The Pastor As Executive

While the pastor's principal work is not as strictly of the executive type as that of some other spheres of leadership, he nevertheless must possess a good degree of business sagacity and tact. As a leader of a group of workers he must have the ability to devise plans, organize the workers and utilize the material resources so as to obtain maximum results in making new contacts and winning new souls.

This will mean that he must be progressive in his adaptation, finding new uses for old resources; and manifesting a growing effectiveness so that he retains the confidence of his congregation as a trusted leader in the moral, spiritual and material realms. He may not be as skillful as some others, but if he is genuinely industrious, husbanding his time and employing his powers and talents to achieve definite and approved goals, he need not fear losing his place in the hearts of those whom he serves.

He will be a spiritual leader whose devotion is beyond question, and by his great faith in God and his love for man he will be able to come to grips with people who need God. Whatever his successes, he will manifest "a becoming modesty", balanced sanely before provocations to anger and unresponsive to carnal appeals. As a spiritual leader he is devoted to principles and not governed by expediency.

One of the secrets of his success is his magnanimity, or freedom from professional and personal jealousy. With divinely-wrought self-control he restrains himself and does not express himself ill-advisedly, so that when he speaks others listen. His self-discipline and his conception of his office lifts him above any trace of selfishness or any tendency to use his position as a vantage point to secure preferment or personal favors. His amiability, or sweet temper and moral excellence, plus his elevation of mind to a plane of noble thinking, and scrupulous regard to time and his appointments convince people that he possesses a character worthy of adoption as their pattern.

The pastor who "clicks" in this day of complex challenges must be a man of multiple resources able to labor at ease at a number of things. His consecration must be unreserved, and he must meet the depressing situations which arise with hopefulness and courage. The wise leader organizes his workers, delegating specific responsibilities to those considered qualified to do it, thus making them feel that the work is "ours", not merely the work of "the pastor". With his ability to organize, the effective leader avoids becoming the slave to details, although he is faithful to minute things and desires each task to be done as exquisitely as possible. Such a leader seeks to be solid without being dull and fossilized, to be deep without being dry, to be brilliant without being eccentric, and to be fervent without being fanatical.

But there is another phase of his work as executive that cannot be overlooked. The pastor who "clicks" must understand and appreciate both the General and the Conference programs and cooperate with them to the fullest possible extent. Neither the Conference nor the General program will violate the rights of anyone, nor will anything unnecessary, impossible or unreasonable be required of any pastor or church. It is only through the cooperation of the General and Conference agencies that a work could be developed to assign him as its pastor. It is not his personal possession to be used as his exclusive property; it is a trust committed to him to be handled according to the terms which his accepting the assignment implied he would fulfill.

Therefore, the pastor who in any wise manifests an attitude of indifference or hostility toward the General and Conference program, or fails to cooperate in it, is sowing tares that will surely spring forth and choke the desired loyalty to the local program. The church is both an arm with which to work as well as a field in which to work, and he who discourages the exercise of the arm in a helpful program that reaches beyond itself will find that in due time creeping paralysis and atrophy of the muscles destroys the ability to do for self, so that "ceasing to share, we cease to have - so runs the law of love."

May the Lord - whose we are and whom we serve - help us to remember that it is required in stewardship that a man be found faithful, and may we as leaders in general or local spheres be faithful to our utmost ability - even "unto death."