



Prologue

As the son of a minister, I knew the one thing I didn't want to be when I grew up was a preacher. Even though I loved my dad, and thought he was really great at what he did, I dreamed of being an attorney, a physician, an athlete, a teacher ... anything but a man who spent his hours studying the Bible and telling people how to live. But somewhere during those college days filled with sports, classes, papers, musical tours and Cherylyn, God drafted me and put his appointment on my life. I didn't fully understand it at the time; neither did I enjoy those first thoughts about devoting my life to the preaching of his Word. Looking back I see now that God first drafted me, and then put me through a customized boot camp specifically designed to fit me for his service. During my personal ten-year 'basic training', He not only changed my heart, but shattered my definition of success and reformed my whole understanding of life in Christ. And while I am not suggesting that everyone entering the preaching ministry needs to repeat my experiences, my years of pastoral ministry have confirmed this conviction: *when God calls a man to pastoral ministry, he also fits that man with the necessary character, desire, knowledge, and ministerial gifts to do the tasks assigned.*



As a local church pastor it has been my privilege to sit on numerous ordination councils examining men determined to enter the preaching ministry. I wish I could say this has always been a pleasant and encouraging experience. But, sadly, far too many men entering pastoral ministry today have great deficiencies in character, biblical knowledge, theological understanding, and ministerial gifts. Often they seem academically lazy, their biblical and theological knowledge is superficial, and they can't preach their way out of the proverbial paper bag. Years of serving on a Credentialing Council of the Evangelical Free Church of America (Southwest District), combined with the work done preparing this book, have brought me to a second fundamental conviction that serves as a corollary to the one stated above. *When God fits a man with the necessary character, desire, knowledge, and ministerial gifts for pastoral ministry, these essentials will clearly be both identifiable and, when measured by Scriptural standards, commendable.*

Throughout the history of the church, men who desired to enter pastoral ministry have been examined to see if their desire was a result of God's divine appointment on their life. While it differs slightly from one ecclesiastical community to the next, this process of ordination has acted to help the church in two ways. First, it has helped the church by protecting it from those who were unqualified to lead and feed the church, even as it maintained the value and honor of the pastoral office. Secondly, by affirming his divine call, it has given the ordained minister the boldness to be God's man while holding him strictly accountable to proclaim God's message and live up to God's standards. Where ordination was held in high esteem, and the expectations placed on candidates were great, the church benefited tremendously. But today all too often ordination has been drastically down-sized in the mind of both candidate and church. While there are some notable exceptions, many



denominations today confer ordination on men whose lives they really do not know well, whose knowledge of the Bible and theology demonstrates no depth of thought or breadth of understanding, and whose abilities to communicate God's Word and counsel His people are either unknown or sadly lacking.

My purpose in writing this book is not that I think I can change the world, or even that I think solving the problems I see in ordination councils will put everything right and usher in revival. I merely want to encourage those involved with pastoral ministry to re-think the area of ordination, and I offer a philosophy and model of ordination that, if put into practice in some manner, I believe will help our churches one at a time, one man at a time, to the glory of God.

If the ministry of the Word to God's people has always been a priority in God's plan, if the health of the church depends upon being nourished by the truth of God's Word, and if God has promised that He will give gifted pastors and teachers to the church for her well-being and the expansion of His kingdom on earth, then we ought to care deeply about who these men are, how they live, and what they know of God. In short, since it is in our best interest as the church to identify God's divinely appointed pastors, ordination matters. It matters to the church; it matters to the candidates; and it matters to God.

