



HELPING CHURCH LEADERS MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM THE PRESENT TO THE FUTURE

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FOUR CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR 21st CENTURY PASTORS

“Being a pastor today is more difficult than anytime in memory.” This is the first sentence to an outstanding new book, *The 21st Century Pastor**, by David Fisher, senior pastor at Colonial Church in Edina, MN. Published by Zondervan (1-800-727-3480, \$12.99), it is a book that will be of value to pastors and other ministerial staff, lay persons, theological educators and others concerned about leadership in ministry for the 21st century. With insights from the ministry of the apostle Paul, the book is divided into two parts. Part 1 asks four critical questions that lie at the heart of pastoral life. Part 2 paints a portrait of the pastor from a biblical or apostolic source. The following are thoughts from Part 1.

1. WHO AM I? The Question of Pastoral Identity

The literature on contemporary pastoral ministry is remarkably diverse but tends to agree that we are at a crisis point and that at least part of the problem is pastoral identity in our modern society. Paul’s metaphors taken together provide a compelling and powerful portrait of a pastor. Paul and other first-century apostles and pastors lived in circumstances similar to our own. They represented a faith on the very margin of life in their world. More often than not, their message was despised by the larger culture. Paul’s strong pastoral identity was rooted in God. Our identity must be filled with Christian content--that is, rooted in God, formed by Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

2. WHAT’S MY ADDRESS? The Significance of Geography

We need to become experts at reading and understanding cultural maps. Over the years, I have come to recognize the power and importance of cultures in the life of the church. I now realize that every church is made up of overlapping cultures, and each culture must be understood and interpreted for effective ministry. Our calling demands that we incarnate ourselves into our churches and their communities. The Incarnation is the heart and soul of pastoral ministry...and Incarnational ministry always has a specific address.

3. WHAT TIME IS IT? The Question of Date

Effective ministry depends on pastors knowing what time it is and knowing what to do about it. Most of us are discovering that we live on a mission field. We need missionary churches and missionary leaders. Many Christians will reject this vision for the church and its ministry. They will prefer comfort over engagement with our world.

4. WHOSE CHURCH IS THIS? The Question of Ecclesiology

Both the church and its ministry are being rethought in terms of the mission of the church in a post-Christian society. Somewhere along the way, ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, got lost....was placed on the theological back burner.

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