



Pastor Appreciation Month—Some Reflections

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I've been thinking about all the pastors I've had over my lifetime and how each one has played a role in my own faith journey.

L. Joe Miller was my first pastor at East Harrison Street Church of God in Charleston, Illinois. I'll be honest; I don't remember much about his ministry there because I was three when Joe left for another assignment. I was fortunate to get to know Joe and Wanda as I got older and have a better sense of their ministry in the CGGC. Joe was one of our true prophets and was often years ahead of others in understanding our culture and the need for change and repentance in the church.

Lyle Tippit was the pastor who baptized me as a young person. Pete Wood was my pastor through most of my "growing up" years. Bill Milligan was the first pastor that I related to as more of a friend or a peer (and that's not meant to disparage the others listed here but was probably more a mix of Bill's gifts and my stage in life as a late teen-young adult).

Clarence Thornton was an interim pastor at my home church and had a profound impact on my life and ministry. He gave me opportunities to serve, modeled servant leadership and invested in me. I still remember Clarence taking the time to show me how he developed a sermon while at the same time stressing that "just because it works this way for me doesn't mean it will be the right fit for you, find what works for you."

David Ellis was my pastor during my college years and also had a profound influence on me as I began to prepare for my own pathway to vocational ministry. To this day I know that Dave prays for me and is such a source of encouragement to me when we have the all too rare opportunity to see one another.

In my time in Findlay I've also had some pastors: Larry White, Adam Zaslavsky, Bill Reist, Will Miller, David Welker and Matt Ginter all have served as my pastor in the congregations where I've invested my gifts and talents. Bill Reist presided at our wedding, dedicated our kids and baptized Carter this past Easter. Very different styles and personalities, but men who have loved Jesus and loved me in very practical and genuine ways – I'm proud to call them friends.

Some of these individuals have gone on to receive their reward, many are still serving faithfully today, and a few no longer serve in "vocational ministry" but still serve Jesus and His kingdom. Some of these men had very long tenures in my life and others were brief by comparison. Some listed here are true shepherds/pastors while others have had stronger gifting as apostles, prophets, teachers or

evangelists (Ephesians 4:11-13). All of them have had their own unique flaws, strengths and personal weaknesses and I'm grateful for them and the role they've had on my own faith.

We know that "ministry" isn't just reserved for those who do ministry as their vocation. We also know that shepherding/pastoring isn't just a gifting given to those who do vocational ministry (although I believe this is one of the big misconceptions of the past 100 years and we're just beginning to understand that and move away from that limited understanding). I've had lots of "pastors" who didn't preach at a local church, draw a paycheck from a congregation or have the title of Pastor before their name. With that being said, these men have been my pastors who not only nurtured my faith, but often equipped and challenged me to follow and serve Jesus more faithfully. I'm grateful for each of them and the impact that they've had on my own life and journey. I'm grateful that they responded in obedience to God's call on their lives. I'm grateful for their faithful service to Jesus and His Kingdom.

As I look to the future of what will come in the church in North America, it's clear that we have a desperate need for men and women who will recognize their gifts and serve Christ and His kingdom, whether or not they get a paycheck as a result of that service. While we may call some of these folks "pastor", it's vitally important that we develop a much greater mix of pastor/shepherds, apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists to accomplish God's mission!

Take time this month to show gratitude to those who have served you in Jesus' name. Take notice of the men and women around you who have been given gifts to serve and encourage them to respond to God's call. Join with me in praying that God would continue to raise up pastors, apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists to serve Jesus the king!

Christ's Peace,

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