

Commendations

The wisdom contained in this captivating catalog of true ministry stories could only come from a person as unique and special as Pastor Rick. When people who have a common connection with Rick Davidson get together, invariably their conversations turn to the amazing but true tales involving Pastor Rick and his willingness to serve others, his church, and ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ. As I read through *The Life of an Associate Pastor*, I found myself laughing out loud and wiping away tears as I reflected on the unlimited ways God uses people who are simply willing to serve and be used. Rick Davidson might be one of the most willing people I've ever known, and the examples of his willing service and what he's learned along the way will hopefully rub off on all of us.

Joseph R. Crider

Dean and Professor of the Church Music and Worship
School of Church Music and Worship
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, TX

This short book by Rick Davidson is long—it is long on practical ministry and meaningful reflection on God's providence in preparing His ministers. I have heard him preach frequently, lead Bible studies in adult groups, moderate church family discussions (some of them fraught with po-

tential difficulty), and engage in conversation with first-time visitors to our church. I served as his assistant in repairing a fractured curb at the bottom of my driveway. He shows a mature and friendly wisdom in each delicate part of this variegated bouquet of ministerial responsibility. Also, I have been regaled with an amazing variety of stories arising from his life experience in seemingly incongruent vocations and virtually impossible situations. His insight, however, in how God used all of this in calling and preparing him for the pastoral tasks that claim his time and energy has constituted blessed instruction. Many times, after hearing another story, or another story, I suggested that he write a book about these things so that others might celebrate the wisdom and providence of God in the divine preparation of a minister. One day Rick stopped me in the foyer and said, “I have started that book.” And here it is! Its rich narrative of life situations and pertinent remarks about the spiritual and doctrinal relevance of God’s providence of preparation will be an encouragement to every reader and a bit of godly entertainment in observing and contemplating ministry opportunities very few of us have or would even attempt to engage.

Tom J. Nettles

Member, LaGrange Baptist Church

Ministry mirrors the Christian life in that there is never a moment when ministers are truly “off duty.” God is sovereign over the mundane as well as the sublime moments in life and ministry. There’s not a single molecule or atom, no

circumstance, no person or personal encounter that stands outside His all-wise governance. I have counted it a privilege to call Rick Davidson a friend (and one of my pastors for a wonderful season) for many years now, and there is no man better qualified than Rick to write about the “every moment” nature of ministry. These deeply personal—and sometimes humorous—stories from Rick’s decades in local church ministry will edify, teach, challenge, convict, and encourage church leaders and laypeople alike and, like Help in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, put strength in your stride as you serve God’s church enroute to the Celestial City. My dear friend Rick here shows that every moment—mundane or not—matters for God’s glory. As one who spends much of his time writing, editing, or reviewing books on ministry, I can assure you will not find another book like this one in circulation. Don’t miss it!

Dr. Jeff Robinson

Longtime Pastor

President and Editor-in-Chief, The Baptist Courier

I have seen Rick’s life from many different angles—I have been led by him as a church member, served under him as a youth pastor, and now serve alongside him as a senior pastor. Each angle has shown the light of Christ shining through Rick’s personality and gifts. The variety of stories and truths you encounter in this book will encourage you with what God can do when the light of the gospel shines through the prism of our lives. May we each, like Rick, learn to live with

an open-handedness, trusting the Lord and serving others wherever He may lead.

Cam Potts

Senior Pastor

LaGrange Baptist Church

Rick Davidson has been a blessing to so many people. He has blessed me and my family. I was blessed again reading this book. It's a compendium of his extensive experiences in ministry. At the same time, it's simply a testimony of God's love in Christ. It's a testimony of a sinner saved by grace—of a believer loving other believers—of a minister serving as a chaplain, as an associate pastor, and as an executive pastor, trusting in God's grace and serving where God called him. It's a testimony also of God's faithful care of one of His churches, LaGrange Baptist Church, and of His mercy to them and through them. It contains many lessons for serving Christ through His church, especially for those who are called to serve as ministers of the gospel. Rick's experiences in ministry range from the grave to the utterly ridiculous. In his telling, each experience is a ground of encouragement and instruction. I have loved and respected Rick for many years. Reading this, you'll understand why. Read it and be encouraged. And go and serve.

Dr. Greg Wills

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

THE LIFE OF AN
ASSOCIATE PASTOR

*HOW GOD USED MY VOCATIONAL TRAINING TO
PREPARE ME FOR MINISTERING TO HIS CHURCH*

THE LIFE OF AN ASSOCIATE PASTOR

*HOW GOD USED MY VOCATIONAL TRAINING TO
PREPARE ME FOR MINISTERING TO HIS CHURCH*



RICK DAVIDSON

The Life of an Associate Pastor
How God Used My Vocational Training to Prepare Me for Ministering to His Church

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To my wife and children:

*Penny, Amy, and Megan—May the Lord bless you and
keep you forever.*

I love you all.

Dedicated especially to Penny:

You have always been ready to give the critiques I needed and the encouragement to move me forward. The Lord has shown His wisdom in pairing us for life. This work is dedicated to you, my love.

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Galatians 6:9–10

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Foreword

The book you are holding will prove to be a delight and a challenge. The delight will be in reading the story of how God chooses and shapes a man for ministry. The challenge will be the revelation of what real pastoral ministry may involve a man in. It was my privilege to be a part of Rick's story. Like his father, Rick is a fine storyteller. I am sure you will be drawn into the story as Rick tells it.

You will find this to be a conventional story. In fact, it is original—like all our stories should be. Your path may not at all be like Rick's in the specifics, but it will be like Rick's in that God will use what is best needed to shape you into the man He wants you to be. From tenant farmer to construction laborer to running the entire construction company, God was shaping Rick for a role that Rick had no idea of. I am certain no one in Rick's life would have dreamt of Rick becoming a “preacher” either.

When Rick determined that God was calling him to ministry, he came forward in a church service and told me. My response to Rick was, “Rick, if you can do anything else and be happy, do that.” After Rick's shock and disappoint-

ment in my comment, he still wanted to tell the church. You need to know that, well over two decades later, Rick still has not found anything other than gospel ministry that he can do and be happy.

Rick soon found himself on our church staff in a part-time position. Not long after that, Rick became our full-time executive pastor. He brought a set of gifts to our staff that I did not have. We matched like two puzzle pieces. Rick was an implementer and a doer. He made things happen. Rick's experience in life convinced me that every man training for ministry should have a minimum of two to three years in the secular work force before having a pastoral role in the church. Working for someone else, having to take orders, doing everything you are told to do whether you like it or not is excellent training for serving in the church. Few things can build grit and humility as well as such work.

I have said enough. The story is Rick's to tell, and he can tell it far better than I can. Read it and be blessed. Oh yes, read it, and you will probably be convicted also. Because Rick learned his work ethic in environments that did not allow the phrase "I can't," the things he said yes to under the call of God may make you squirm. Rick could never rationalize saying no to God if God is indeed sovereign.

Tony Rose

Retired Pastor,
LaGrange Baptist Church

Acknowledgment

I want to thank my good friend Tom Nettles. If not for his constant encouragement over a long period of time, this book wouldn't have happened. I have said often throughout this project that I am the last person on the planet to publish a book. But here we are, the Lord taking the most unlikely of things to reveal His ability to accomplish His desires. What He plans to do with this work I do not know, but I do know only He could have done this. As you read the events and stories that follow, please know none of it could have been done without my wife, Penny. She has sacrificed so much to allow me the freedom to serve knowing I had her support. At times she was in the thick of it with me. I have been on emergency calls 24/7 for over two decades. Penny has had dinners at restaurants disrupted, family events changed, being alone much of the time, and almost never complaining. We have shared in God's call to ministry from the beginning. I praise God for her and the many years we have had. My daughters, Amy and Megan, also had their lives impacted significantly by God's call on me, changing careers mid-stream, and hav-

ing expectations put on them because of my being on staff at church. I thank them for their encouragement and the love they have shown.

Executive Pastor Rick Davidson

1

Called

GOD'S GRACE MADE ME RICH IN WORK, MARRIAGE,
SALVATION, SERVICE, AND A SURPRISING CALL TO MINISTRY.

About the Author

Growing up on the farm taught me great lessons in work and work ethics. It also taught me that there is no task too great to overcome. While these seem like simple ideas, they have served me very well across a span of fifty years of different types of work. In my earliest days waiting to go to college after high school graduation, I worked in a welding shop in Louisville, Kentucky, as an apprentice welder. The money was not bad for that day—\$3.75 an hour—and as a nineteen-year-old, I thought I was making my fortune. Then one night in the small town of Crestwood, I re-met a young blonde lady named Penny; we “went out” when we were

fourteen and fifteen when our parents could take us around, but this meeting, I knew, was different. As it turns out, it was love. We have been married now for over forty-six years. Oh, just so you know that I remember: the date was July 23, 1977.

Her dad was a master mechanic for a large construction company, and they needed a welder for a sight crew. I was hired on at \$9.27 an hour and left the concept of college in the dust. Over the next several years, I began to grow in the construction business, starting as a laborer/welder in 1977 then moving to equipment operator/mechanic. Over time, I was called to serve as a utility operator, which meant I might be doing any part of any craft. This was a very educational time for me in the industry, and while I did not understand it all, this was growing me into leadership positions.

By the early 1980s, I was a foreman running crews, building a reputation, and looking forward to being superintendent of a project. In the middle of this career, I was thirty-one with two young daughters, our work was dependent upon the weather, and my lack of managing our affairs left me with poor credit, interest rates through the roof, and high rent. My father-in-law agreed to help me by cosigning a construction loan for a one-acre tract and house package. I, along with my family, had the entire house finished in five months. When I sat down with Randall, my father-in-law, to settle my obligation to him, his response was a surprise. He said, "If you will take my granddaughters to church, we are even." In my mind, I did not need God, nor did I want the church; it was an easy way, however, to pay my debt.

So, we started attending LaGrange Baptist Church, also known as DeHaven Memorial Baptist Church, and I received much more than I ever imagined. In June 1989, my wife, my oldest daughter, and I were baptized at the same time. Penny was coming from the Methodist church. This set me on an incredible journey. I began to develop a new appetite for the things of God, and the appetite for the things of the world began to diminish. My walk with Christ was sure but often confusing. I loved construction but was plagued with a desire to do more. I even went forward one Sunday morning at the altar call and confessed my desire for vocational ministry, which came as a great shock to my wife and family, considering I had never discussed it with them. You will read more about this later.

Over the next two years, we struggled through the concept of vocational ministry, not understanding what it even looked like. I had not been to college, I had already started a career and a family, and it seemed impossible to go back to school—who would ever hire me? So, I kept working on my construction career (which was doing great, by the way) while serving as a Sunday school teacher, serving on committees, serving as a deacon and as chairman of the deacons, and teaching Bible studies at nursing homes.

This is where the Lord threw us a curve ball. In 1999, Steve Sparrow was a newly elected sheriff and I was looking for a ministry; he was looking to start a chaplain program, and the Lord was at work putting us together. The church ordained me into the gospel ministry, and I was sworn in as a chaplain/reserve deputy and began building a new chaplain-

cy program for the sheriff's office while serving as a project manager over many projects for a large construction company. And I was growing, by God's grace, in my love for God and had an increasing hunger for His Word. With the chaplaincy just getting started, the church invited me to serve part-time as Minister to Senior Adults, and I said yes. Working full-time as project manager, serving as chaplain/reserve deputy for the sheriff's office, and working part-time as Minister to Senior Adults, I quickly began to understand that the Lord had been preparing me for years before this. While I am not sure I understood at the time, the Lord had just enrolled me into the Baptist Seminary School of Hard Knocks. I was in the process of becoming a churchman.

My heart has been encouraged to recall the variety of backgrounds of the disciples: four fishermen, one political sell-out, one political zealot, one over-confident doubter, one betrayer, and, judging from the parables of Jesus, probably several farmers. God prepares us for His call in many ways.

This is My God Story

Looking back, this seems to have been the hinge point in God's plan, because while He was working on me and my family, He was also working on our senior pastor, Dr. Tony Rose. He was at my house one evening and asked me to pray about serving side-by-side together in ministry. He said that our gifts together would be like a well-matched team of horses pulling a wagon. Not too long after this meeting was when the church called me to serve as part-time Minister to Senior Adults, in December 2000. After serving in this capacity for

eight years, the church asked me to transition from part-time to full-time as the Pastor to Christian Care Ministries and Pastoral Care in November 2008. After some unexpected staff changes, I was asked to serve in a new position for the church in October 2009. It combined my role as Pastor to Christian Ministries and Pastoral Care with education and administration and created a new position of Executive Pastor. The minutes read: “On behalf of the Personnel Committee, Mike Wood presented a two-part recommendation. The first was to recommend a new position of Executive Pastor. The second was to recommend Rick Davidson to the position of Executive Pastor. Both recommendations were approved.”

All these events were a giant curve ball that neither my wife nor I had expected. For nearly eight years, I had been working full-time in heavy highway construction, serving as chaplain/reserve deputy for the sheriff’s office and working part-time at our church. But during that time, my wife and I both recognized that the Lord had removed the love for construction and replaced it with a love to serve Him. So, in 2008, the church officially offered me a full-time position.

After much prayer with my wife and family, we all knew that if we were ever going to be truly happy, it would be in serving the church. So here we were, with me serving as chaplain/reserve deputy and executive pastor/elder at Lagrange Baptist Church. Pastor Tony mentored me for over twenty years as we served together. My experience in the construction industry has been a valuable asset as I continue to serve the Lord and the community.

Over these years, I have been trained as an executive pastor and have served as an associate pastor and church administrator and also as a chaplain/reserve deputy sheriff. I have received training in many areas and have learned to be a crisis counselor and a preacher/teacher of the Word. I am CIT (Critical Incident Team) certified, and I am trained in crisis response through ICISF (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation), PTSD recognition and treatment, QPR (Question, Persuade, and Refer) Gate Keeper suicide prevention, grief counseling, marriage counseling, and suicide intervention. I can also repair your car, fix your leaking pipes, repair your electrical circuits, build you a new driveway, or build a tunnel under your creek or a bridge over it. I am being trained, even now, by the Lord to love Him, love my brothers and sisters in Christ, and love my neighbor more and more.

This is my God story. It probably wasn't on the top of your reading list, but I believe these details are important for you to know as I share many events that have occurred over the twenty-plus years I have served the church through great times and really difficult times.

My range of gifts is very wide due to growing up on the farm, serving in heavy highway construction, building houses, and doing home repair on the side for extra income. By God's providence, these experiences served as a useful complement to the patient teaching of my pastor. He was a mentor in real time, teaching me what being a biblical churchman should be. What follows is a host of learning experiences that I hope will be helpful to you as you strive to be a godly churchman or a godly person in Christ.

My Growth from New Believer to Churchman

My education as a churchman certainly has taken a different track than most. Like in my career in construction, I learned through the hands-on approach. As an example, I was on a bridge project in northern Kentucky and a man named Max was my state inspector. I took the plans I had been provided and was doing my own survey work that I had learned from watching others. Max was so impressed that he encouraged me to study up and take the Professional Engineer exam. At that time, if you could pass the test, you would be grandfathered in as a PE. So, he began to give me study materials, and even his boss became involved. They made a pet project out of me.

After several months of study and mock tests, I was sent to take the exam. I was very excited to become an engineer, and when I arrived, they informed me that the grandfathering process had just been halted, that to take the exam would now require a bachelor's degree. Well, with a family in tow and a job that consumed my time, I would have to be satisfied with the knowledge I gained rather than the credentials I could acquire.

This is also my story as a churchman. I was invited to come on staff by the church and was surrounded, step-by-step, by theologians like Tom Nettles, Greg Wills, Tony Rose, and Eric Johnson, who were members of our church. I began to learn by listening, reading, and studying. Just imagine the number of staff meetings—after twenty-two years, it would be over 900—with nearly everyone bringing a deeper learn-

ing experience to the table. In these meetings, we would regularly have an open Bible as we developed strategy, resolved church issues, found ways to reconcile disruptions, or took steps for church discipline. We often would work through the theology of the issues and bring reconciliation based on the Scriptures.

Living and leading in the life of the church provides an unending education. Sitting as an elder seeking to resolve theological and doctrinal issues continually demonstrates the perfect wisdom of biblical revelation and the unending process of transformation by the renewing of our minds. Many aspects of my learning—especially regarding funerals, weddings, members on their deathbeds, families caught up in deep sin, dealing with individuals that are self-appointed rulers of the church, and a host of other practical areas of church life—can't be taught effectively in classrooms. Rather, they are hammered out on the anvil of service.

Sitting with such educated men, each one specialized in their own right, has caused me at times to want to take a step towards seminary education; then I remember that the Lord brought me here and has given me all I need to serve Him. I must keep my eyes on Him and not on me and continue to serve Him as He has called. How else could this redneck construction worker find himself as an executive pastor in a church like this?

Having LBC as my first and only church home was a benefit, but it also presented difficulties. While I knew everyone and had great relationships, it also made me feel

more like a child of the church rather than a leader in the church. In my early days on staff, when I had opportunities to preach, it would create great anxiety. I had such a feeling of inadequacy. Of course, this was all within me. I had to digest emotionally the New Testament reality that its elders also began as children of the church. The congregation never promoted or even sensed my anxiety. With time and much experience, the Lord helped me see and know servant leadership and the proper sense of authority that is given by Christ to a pastor.

God Using A Twenty-One-Person Pastor Search Committee to Grow My Faith

In 1992, while I was a new church member and a new Christian, the church was going through the loss of a pastor under difficult circumstances. It was really hard for me personally, because this pastor who led me to Christ was now being accused of mishandling funds. He gave a blistering sermon admonishing the whole church for allowing a handful of deacons to bring unfounded accusations, and while he gave this sermon, he gave the church his two-week notice (which would be his vacation).

It was a difficult time, and many changes were made by the interim pastor. I was greatly perplexed, even more so when the church in her great wisdom while putting together a search committee asked me to sit on it because I was a new Christian. Also in her great wisdom (sarcasm intended), she established a twenty-one-person search committee, and that committee determined it would have to be unanimous in her

recommendation to call a pastor. To say this was an eye-opening experience for me is an understatement. We were very strategic in our planning by dividing into three groups of seven—one group to go through the resumes using the group’s established filter, the second group dedicated to prayer, and the third committed to going and visiting prospective men at their churches. While I would never recommend this as a pattern for search committees, God’s providential hand was at work despite us.

We had over forty-five resumes to go through, plus a letter that had been sent to us by someone indicating that they knew of a person that would be a good fit for our church. We discussed it and laid the letter aside, already having a box full of resumes. We worked and prayed and eventually presented the entire team with six candidates. All twenty-one members studied the resumes and prioritized them. Team three was assigned to go and hear the men preach the Word and come back with a report. All went well, and we were able to start personal interviews. The first candidate was a fine man—very articulate, organized, and having the right answers. We took a vote, and it was 18–3. Because it had to be unanimous, it was a no. This happened five more times: 19–2, 16–5, 17–4, etc. We had been at this for over a year.

Finally, the interim pastor came and met with us, explaining that our standard of unanimity was too high. We later had a long difficult meeting with tempers flaring and frustrations being displayed; by the end of this meeting, the room was filled with grace, and we prayed together for what was next. At the next meeting, we had a committee mem-

ber tell us of her brother who had a church in Florida. He was on vacation here in our area, and if we were interested in talking to him, she would step off the committee and arrange an interview. We did the interview, and it went great; our third team went to Florida to hear him preach, and upon their good report we took a unanimous vote to recommend him to the church. The church voted yes, and he served there until he retired twenty-six years later.

I would never recommend such a committee, but clearly, God's sovereign providence was being accomplished despite us. What revealed God's work and our blindness was that the letter we had received along with the numerous resumes (and had rejected) was referring to Tony Rose, the pastor we eventually called. As a new Christian, I had the opportunity to see the Lord at work, and it grew my faith significantly through this process called search committee. The Lord did many other things over the next years to grow my faith and to prepare me for a plan He had that He would ultimately reveal.

My Call to Vocational Ministry that Surprised Everyone, Including My Wife

My family and I were in worship just a couple of years after that search committee experience, and during the invitation, I was moved to step out and pray with Pastor Tony. I told him that I believed that the Lord was calling me to some form of vocational ministry. Of course, he turned and announced this decision to the whole church, which brought several amens and a few hand claps. You might be saying, "Good for you!"

Well, the problem is, I had not said one word about this to my wife or my family; they were in total shock. My wife's first words when we stepped outside away from everyone were, "I did not marry a pastor, and I am not a pastor's wife." Well, after much counsel from multiple trusted sources, I was told if God was calling me, He would call my wife also. So, I began discussing this often with my wife and teasingly asking if she had received the phone call yet. She eventually informed me of the weight that I was applying to her and the unfairness of what I was doing. Like a slap in the face, I did realize my error and determined not to bring the issue up again.

I continued to serve the church, growing in faith and practice. I served on committees, was elected to the office of deacon, then chairman of the deacons, and served as lay director of the youth ministry. To reach the community, I began taking the youth and other adults to the nursing home and holding Sunday afternoon worship services, where I would do a short sermon and the youth would be the choir. After several months of this, I started a Tuesday night Bible study with a handful of folks from the nursing home, and the Lord blessed it and it grew to be a large group. I grew up with my grandparents very close, spending nearly as much time in their home as my own, and I loved working with this older people group.

Two years after my ill-advised declaration of a call to ministry, my wife very unexpectedly announced, "You know, I do believe we are called into some type of ministry." I was surprised, encouraged, fearful, filled with joy, excited, and anxious all at the same time. In a very short time, the newly

elected sheriff and I crossed paths, which led to my starting the chaplaincy program in our community shortly after the church recognized my ministry at the nursing home and offered me a part-time position as minister to senior adults. I was ordained into the gospel ministry and have served the church ever since. My impulse to jump out of that pew was true, but the timing was in the hand of the Lord. His providence is certain, and His timing is perfect.

The Transition from Construction to Full-time Vocational Ministry

At this point, I had been on staff as a part-time pastor to senior adults for just over eight years. The church approached me about coming on full-time. This proposed opportunity forced me to discern my call to full-time vocational ministry. Particularly in this area, I hope to bring clarity, because I have heard so many describe their difficulty with understanding their call to vocational ministry.

What I have learned through my own experience, along with twenty-two years of listening to others in their struggles, is that our call to vocational ministry is not a mystical feeling that we are waiting for from the Lord. In fact, in my case, I would not say I was called but rather was driven to full-time vocational ministry. During the beginning of my part-time service as a minister to seniors and running a construction company, I was thrilled to serve the Lord this way; but as time moved on, my overactive work ethic began taking its toll. I so loved my role at church and missed it when at the construction company. When I was at church for

a staff meeting, doing a funeral, or leading an event, I felt enormous guilt because of all the things that were happening at the construction sites. My superintendents would call about this issue or that, and it would apply more weight to my conscience. Both the church and the construction company were aware of my situation and had given full approval. That approval, however, did not settle the issue of the need to focus, to concentrate all my energies in the sphere of my calling from the Lord. The longer I served this way, the more difficult it was to manage the struggle.

Just when the tension seemed unmanageable, the communication came from the church about becoming full-time Pastor of Christian Care Ministries and Pastoral Care. This put us in the throes of the practical struggle: I had been well paid in the construction career and only received part-time pay from the church. So now, I would be giving that up for about half of what I was making in construction. My wife and I struggled with the financial abilities that we would give up regarding grandchildren and other activities. I had been living on a large budget, and there was debt that would be a problem.

After much prayer and many discussions, it was my wife, Penny, who said it first. “If you are going to be truly happy, it will be working at the church. We will sell the house, get out of debt, and start over.” I was shocked at her response. This was the house I had built for us—stood up every wall, built it from the ground up; I had never considered selling. The Lord taught me that I can’t love those things more than I love Him. As a matter of fact, it was as if He reminded me,

“You can’t keep this house and follow Me.” So, we did just that. We sold the house and accepted this new position as full-time pastor.

I went to the owner of the company to tell him I was leaving to serve the church, and he said no one could take that kind of cut in salary and survive. I explained to the owner what I was doing, and he started paying me a part-time salary while the church paid me full-time until a replacement for my position could be found for the company and a transition could be made. After that was complete and I had to turn in my company Tahoe, the owner bought me an SUV as a gift. Oh, how the Lord confirmed the decision for my wife and me! I have said many times that I have made less and had more than I could imagine. Was I called to vocational ministry? No, I was driven. I had no choice but to follow Him. Over the eight years, He had removed the love of construction and replaced it with a love for serving Him.

The transition from leadership in the secular workforce to full-time vocational ministry was quite a learning curve, and most opportunities were from trial and error. And to be sure, error, though hard, was the better teacher. Coming from the construction industry with a CEO mindset, there were many times when pastor Tony, during a variety of committee and leadership meetings, would have to intervene and say, “Now this is what Rick really meant.” This would be after I had become frustrated at our taking an hour and a half to make a decision that could have been made in a couple of minutes, and I had blurted out the direction we should go. As it turned out, learning to be patient and leading the

church to make good choices was my role, not making the choices and moving on.

Another area of leadership-style transition (to be honest, it is still a struggle) was in the area of setting and achieving goals. When I first started (and particularly when I was called full-time), setting goals and achieving them was my number-one priority. In my previous career, this was always the mark of success. Getting awarded a project and getting it finished on time and under budget was always the goal. I designed the road map to get there and measured the success weekly, and the reward for success was always a good one. I learned, and am still learning, that this process does not always transfer very well into the church. In part it does. For example, goal setting and achieving are great if we are planning an event or establishing a new ministry. The big difference is the journey to achieve that goal. In the secular construction industry, achieving the goal by any means within the law was commendable. Such an impersonal, project-centered approach is not to be transferred into the church, this seeking to achieve the goal at all costs. Bowling over people as if they were obstacles, and moving them out of the way to achieve the objective, is not our calling. In Christ's church, the journey and the people we encounter in the process of achieving the goal may be the very purpose for which the Lord sent us on the journey.

Similarly, in the same area of achieving set goals, I always am filling up the pages of my red book diary with my daily plans. I have many years' worth of my daily diaries, showing how structured my personality is. I always fill my diary with

my to-do list for the next day, because if I am called out in the evening for a crisis in the community and it takes my mind into a completely different space, I will be able to get back on track the next morning when I sit down at my desk. But with all my plans made, so often the Lord brings things or people my way and I must move those plans to the next day and to the next day. In my mind's eye, I had a five-gallon bucket of things to get done and I often found myself feverishly trying to empty the bucket. The problem is, the Lord and everyone else were constantly filling my bucket faster than I could empty it. In time, the Lord has taught me as a churchman that emptying the bucket is not my job. As a matter of fact, the bucket does not even belong to me. Yes, make your plans, but when the Lord changes them, be glad that He is so close and willing to use you for His purpose.