

Ten Red Flags Indicating Ephesians 4 Might Be Turned Upside Down at Your Church

I don't think my pastor understands what I do or believes my work and ministry matter.

This oft-repeated, sad comment reveals bad theology and, more sadly, the neglect of church leaders. **How can we ignore the ministry and work of so many people, often leaving them to believe their lives, work and ministry are less important than the paid staff?**

I just returned from a weekend retreat to discuss "vocation" with Steven Garber of the [Washington Institute for Faith](#), Vocation and Culture. We discussed this issue at length and why the church still has so far to go in valuing people's work and calling in the ordinary everyday world.

Garber's work addresses the whole range of what it means to be alive and engaged in the world with our whole being. [Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good](#). He says "vocation" includes our occupation, but is so much more. It includes "also families, and neighbors, and citizenship locally and globally" and that "faith shapes vocation, and vocation shapes culture."

Speaking specifically about our occupations, Garber mentions friend and pastor Tom Nelson, author of "Your Work Matters," as one who gets it right, a leader who needed to repent before his large congregation of his ignoring *their* work and not supporting *their* ministry.

Here's a few minutes of his story and why he wrote the book.

Does your work matter to your church leaders?

Here are **10 red flags** suggesting there is a problem and that maybe Ephesians 4 has been turned upside down.

- 1 – **The staff consistently pleads for more volunteers to help them do *their* work.**
- 2 – **You are asked to give more money so "we (the staff) can get more ministry done."**
- 3 – **Announcements are filled primarily with "what is happening here" and "how you can get involved and serve here" with the ministries "on campus."**
- 4 – **"Success" is measured primarily by attendance at services, dollars donated, buildings completed, and how staff members have met *their* ministry goals.**

5 – **When there’s more ‘ministry’ to be done, plan A is hire more staff who recruit people to *their* team.**

6 – **You hear more about the staff members’ lives and work (often the pastor’s family, ideas, vision, writing, travels, etc.) that vision, ministry, lives and callings of people in the church.** (We hear, ‘pray for pastor as he travels...’ yet there are so many members who travel the world each week for their work. Who prays for them? I wonder what they think when they hear such a plea.)

7 – **The “pastoral prayer” almost never includes a blessing or intercession for people who labor in the name of Jesus each week in their daily work, except maybe on Labor Day weekend.**

8 – **“Ministry” is defined primarily as that which is done in programs officially sponsored by the church.**

9 – **Reports about “how we are doing as a church” are limited to updates about finances, building programs, or peak attendance at holiday services.**

10 – **High capacity people and influential community leaders (particularly the wealthy who “have the gift of giving”) are only viewed as potential board members or donors, not as people to partner with as they use their vast influence, skills and experience to impact to shape our world for the gospel.** (One executive said, “Basically, the message I get is, ‘leave your work at the door, but be sure to bring your wallet.’” – Yikes!

Turn This Around

To turn this around leaders and members alike must recover a biblical understanding of vocation, work and “ministry.” And we must pray with and for those who labor in *their* ministry – their calling—every day, everywhere.

*God of heaven and earth, we pray for your kingdom to come, for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Teach us to see our vocations and occupations as woven into your work in the world this week. For mothers at home who care for children, for those whose labor forms our common life in the city, the nation and the world, for those who serve the marketplace of ideas and commerce, for those whose creative gifts nourish us all, for those whose callings take them into the academy, for those who long for employment that satisfies their souls and serves you, for each one we pray, asking for your great mercy. Give us eyes to see that our work is holy to you, O Lord, even as our worship this day is holy to you. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. (by Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, p. 239)*

LEADERS: For one pastor's journey into this transformation that helped him reframe how he viewed his calling and the work of the congregation, [please read this short article in Christianity Today.](#)

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