How Do You Know When It Is Time to Go?

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Leaving a ministry setting is often fraught with mixed emotions, varying opinions, and spiritual doubts. Knowing when to leave is not always clear. To bring some clarity to the issue, the following suggestions merit serious and prayerful consideration.

Calling
Ideally, leaving a place of service is a matter of God’s calling. Even if things are growing and meaningful, when God pulls at you to leave, pay attention. If that pull is strong, clear, and persistent, it may well be the Lord’s signal that it is time to leave. Seek counsel before deciding. There is safety in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 24:6). When your family, friends, and colleagues confirm your sense of calling, it may well be that God is leading you to a new field of service.
**Circumstances**
Circumstances sometimes make it necessary to leave. Family health problems, special educational needs for your children, financial necessities, persecution, and safety for your family may require that you make a move.

Be careful not to use circumstances as an excuse to do what you choose to do. If there are extenuating circumstances and it is God’s will that you stay where you are, you can be confident that He will give you the strength and the guidance you need to deal with difficulties.

**Tenure**
Sometimes the length of a minister’s stay can reach a point of diminishing returns. When you and the church lack vision, and enthusiasm and zeal are waning, relocation may be the best thing for you and for the church. If your leadership is no longer being followed, the membership is eroding, and the redoubling of your efforts fails to produce anything positive, a fresh start somewhere else may give you renewed quality in your ministry and allow the church to move to another level.

**Doctrine**
Doctrinal unity is essential for a healthy church (Acts 2:41–47). If your theological and doctrinal beliefs are fundamentally counter to those of the church to the degree that it threatens the fellowship of the church, then integrity may call for you to leave. A church’s sustained opposition to your theological conscience is a strong signal that leaving may be best for all concerned.

**Environment**
Not all environments can be adjusted to or tolerated. The environmental context of the church may be destroying your family. Such an environment may be economical and social, cultural and racial, or geographic and climatic. If you and your family cannot adjust and the environment cannot be changed, leaving is a viable option. Your and your family’s inability to adjust make you a hindrance. Leaving, therefore, is sensible.

**Livelihood**
Ministers must make a living to minister. If the church cannot provide a livelihood, then you must either leave or enter bivocational ministry. Caring for your family is a high and biblical priority (see 1 Tim. 5:8). Thousands of wonderful ministers are bivocational. Don’t hesitate to consider this honorable way of doing ministry.

In the final analysis, no one of these factors, taken alone, should cause you to leave a place where God has called you to serve. The Holy Spirit of God may overrule every suggestion in this article and instruct you to stay just where you are. Do your best to determine prayerfully the will of God, and follow His plan. These suggestions may help you determine what He wants you to do.