

# G P S

## For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

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### The Junctions in the Road

Life is a series of intersections which demand a choice of one direction over another. Paul found this true on the beginning of his second missionary journey in Acts 16. He wanted to turn left to Asia but was “forbidden by the Holy Spirit” (vs 6). Then he wanted to turn right toward Bithynia but “the Spirit did not permit them” (vs 7). He ended up in Troas until God called him to Macedonia (vs 10). God knew that the right turn at the right time would make a world of difference in Paul’s ministry. It would be nice if we all had the advantage the apostles had of direct revelation from God for even the smallest decisions. But we don’t.

The greatest junction in any person’s life is the decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. This, of course, will change everything in a life. The second greatest choice is the choice of whom we marry. Young people cannot see all the changes and directions that being married to this person will bring. Your children will be the life-long image of you and this person. The relatives with whom you spend the rest of your life will be determined by this person. Where you live, the occupation you have, the life-style you choose, even the way you worship, will be determined by this choice of a marital partner. Choose wisely!

Robert Frost began his famous poem by writing, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both and be one traveler, long I stood and looked down one as far as I could to where it bent in the undergrowth.” We can stand at the junction in the road and look a little ways down that road but we cannot see past the first turn. Beyond that is the unknown. Fortunately for the believer, God sees it all and knows which way is best. But we must be in prop-

er fellowship with Him if we are going to know His will for this choice. God can work things out for good wherever we go, but there is still that “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The job of parents and grandparents is to advise and counsel our children through these turns in the road. Even if we made mistakes ourselves (and who hasn’t?), we have learned and become wiser. We cannot make the decisions for our adult children, but by keeping the communication lines open we can be the help that makes the difference.

Once we start off down the chosen path, there is a point where we cannot go back. This can be a blessing or have difficult consequences. Choosing the right partner in marriage, answering God’s call to ministry, going to the right school for education, are examples of blessings in our choices. A deserting partner in marriage, an offer of a drug or drink, a conviction of a crime, are choices that carry life-long consequences or an un-reversible change of direction.

But I also believe there is a point where the decision of a certain direction can be reversed. In the Bible it is called repentance. God can bring immediate conviction and discomfort to your heart that warns you of a wrong direction. He may bring someone into your path with good advice that warns you and changes your mind. Jesus told the church at Ephesus that they should remember where they took the wrong turn and then repent and go back to that point and start again (Rev 2:5). Part of our job as parents is to catch the child in a wrong direction while there is still time to turn around. This can require tender or tough love because our child cannot see very far ahead. You can. You’ve been there. If any of us lack wisdom, let us ask of God, Who gives it to all of us liberally.

## Book Review

*The Vanishing Ministry in the 21st Century.*

By Woodrow Kroll

I have been following a series of articles on the shortage of ministers needed to fill ministry positions. These articles referenced this book by Woodrow Kroll, the former president of Back to the Bible Radio Program and former president of Practical Bible College (now Davis College). Kroll wrote a first edition in 1991 on the 20th century need, and followed that by this second edition in 2002. Kroll, being a college man himself, spends a lot of time in the book relating the history of college trends that have hurt ministry rather than helped. The foremost of these is the watering down of “vocational” ministry majors with non-ministry majors. This has been primarily due to the need of tuition income but it has also caused the percentage of ministry majors to decline. Kroll devotes chapters to his reasons for a decline in ministry-minded men: Secular self-interest; upwardly mobile parents; misguided Christian school teachers; social mission work rather than gospel work; false calls to the ministry as well as call to ministry without follow-through. Among his few solutions is the return to preaching the call of God on a young man’s life and the challenge of ministry as a vocation to our young people. At the end of the book (in 2002) he presents the new millennial generation as a bright hope for the future. Sadly, Kroll’s optimism at this point has failed to materialize. In fact, Barna points out (in 2017, see below), “The lack of leadership development among millennials and Gen-Xers and the lack of succession planning among Boomers” have contributed to the lack of ministers today.

## Statistics

George Barna’s article “The Aging of America’s Pastors” (March 1, 2017) gave some interesting statistics on the diminishing ministry. There are currently more pastors over the age of 65 than under the age of 40. In 1968 55% of pastors were under 45 years of age, and in 2017 only 22% are under 45. When Barna did his first study on this in 1992, only 6% of pastors were 65 or older but 25 years later 17% are over 65. Barna attributes the rising number of sen-

ior-aged pastors to longer life span, economic need, and to “second-career clergy,” i.e., men entering the ministry later in life, and also to the lack of younger men taking their place. In addition to these declining numbers, Brandon Crawford (*Baptist Bulletin*, Su ‘22) relates that 80% of college and seminary ministry graduates will quit within 10 years.

Kroll cited a number of statistics in his book concerning the “vanishing ministry.” In giving a history of the problem he quotes *Higher Education in Transition*, “While the majority of college graduates of the 17th century entered the ministry (as preachers or missionaries), this percentage dropped to 50% in 1750, 22% in 1801, and 6.5% in 1900. This trend continued throughout the 20th century. Among freshmen who entered college in the fall of 1980, for example, less than half of 1% indicated ‘clergy’ as their probable career occupation.”

## What Can Seniors Do?

Most solutions for the reduction in ministers available to churches have to do with schools, finances, and mentoring young men. These are all important. We have a growing percentage of seniors in our churches as well, so some of the responsibility falls on us. 1) We can encourage our older pastors to remain longer or be more proactive in guiding the church through the transition period. 2) We can welcome the ministry offered to us by younger men in the church. Younger men might see the call of God on their lives if they had opportunity to minister in various ways within the church. 3) We can also rely more on ourselves for lay leadership from within the church, even in the area of pulpit supply, visitation, and teaching. The immediate future may demand that the older, godly saints do many of the things paid staff once did. 4) Finally, we can encourage our own children to encourage their children to listen for God’s call on their lives. This will take living as examples in ministry, believing that a life in ministry is greater than an upwardly mobile secular life, and praying specifically and diligently.

*Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious; Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way; Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious; And all thou spendest Jesus will repay.*