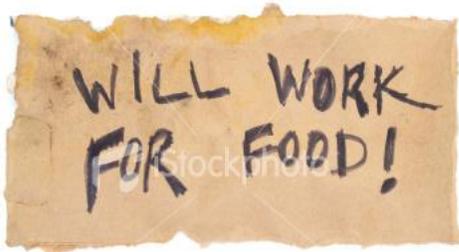


5 Excuses Seminarians make for NOT Getting A (“Real”) Job

David Fitch, May 3, 2011 in his blog, ‘Reclaiming the Mission’
(www.reclaimingthemission.com)



OK, so don't take me too seriously on the title here (the “Real” part) because I do believe full time ministry is a worthy and awesome vocation. But times are changing. Many seminarians aren't interested in ministry within the structures of large established churches. And denominations no longer have the money it takes to fund a full time salaried pastor to plant a “competing” church in a locale. The only option for many is to lead a missionary venture into a place in need of the gospel. This sounds good right? The problem is that this approach demands (most of the time) that the church planter get a job and be bi-vocational. And this is a hurdle for most people coming out of seminary (not that seminarians are the only people who can do this).

Bi-vocationalism is attractive to many seminarians. For them, the vocational full time pastor job in a church can separate you from Mission. You work and hang out with mostly Christian people all day (and night). Today, there are more and more seminary students who find the structures of the larger churches incompatible with their vision for on-the-ground mission and ministry. The culture is not a church culture anymore and this form of church is not reaching that culture. The role of the established pastor seems to be like caretaking existing Christians. More and more seminarians therefore come out of seminary feeling like THEY JUST DON'T FIT.

As a result, more and more seminary grads are looking to an alternative option to ministry – the option to take up residence in a neighborhood and “inhabit” it for ministry. We seek a neighborhood nearby where the need for the gospel is especially evident. We seek God and His call to move there and take up residence. We get normal jobs, live life together, get to know our neighbors, hang out in the coffee shops, the laundry-mats, the McDonalds (wink wink), the bars, the local school meetings, the civic association, the places where hurting people are. Learn to be intentional in the way you organize your life, so that nothing is a burden, just a rhythm. Gather a people into the rhythms of God (worship, fellowship, conflict discernment, serving the poor, prayer for the sick, eating meals of fellowship, etc. etc.). We learn how to come alongside the

poor, vulnerable, broken, hurting. We learn how to minister, pray with, supply support to, encourage and even disciple and be disciplined by the poor in the process. We lead by coming alongside other leaders who also move in and together we use all our leadership skills, and spiritual gifts as well as preaching and teaching to lead this community. Each of us puts in 10-15 hours of work (the equivalent of one full time senior pastor). We do all this as part of a regular sustainable rhythm of life for years and watch God transform people and neighborhoods in Christ. **NONE OF THIS IS A PROGRAM!**

OF COURSE THERE IS ONE HURDLE FOR MOST SEMINARIANS TO THIS PLAN – YOU HAVE TO GO GET A JOB.

Seminarians, and I am primarily talking to seminarians here, for some reasons have a mental block about getting a job. Here are five bad excuses for NOT getting a job and some comments regarding each excuse.

1.) EXCUSE NO. 1 – I CAN'T GET A JOB. I'M NOT TRAINED FOR ANYTHING. For some reason 3 years in a seminary seems to make graduates unemployable except in anything but professional church work. My comment is, and I worked in the marketplace for years, is that seminarians are well schooled in reading, writing, thinking, reading texts critically, appropriating text material, speaking well in front of people. In addition, they should have an acquired spiritual formation that lends itself to kindness, generosity and patience with people. These skills are in demand and much appreciated in our service economy.

2.) EXCUSE NO. 2 - I CAN'T TAKE A JOB FOR 6.50 AN HOUR AND SURVIVE. But the fact is that anyone who starts in any field has to start at the entry level. And it is here where you learn about being poor. It is here where you also gain the entry point to build relationships, learn a skill, and prove yourself as a person with all of the above skills. As far as surviving, missional community planters I know often move in with other people at the beginning. They live 2 or 3 families in a house. Pay much less or even no rent. This allows for the time to get established and take that entry-level job that connects one to living rhythms in the neighborhood.

3.) EXCUSE NO. 3 – I WILL BE SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME ON A JOB THAT IS NOT GERMANE TO MINISTRY. Seminarians think that spending many years in something not ministry related will stunt development of ministry skills. This is mind blowing to me. I suggest that working in the marketplace in whatever capacity is transforming and every pastor should do it in some way. It is also incredible how having a well-honed skill in your back pocket gives enormous freedom in ministry even when more full time ministry is forced upon you. You are no longer locked into the insecurity of having to keep a church going (because you know you can get a job) that can constrain you from acting prophetically.

4.) EXCUSE NO. 4 - IT WOULD BE BETTER TO RAISE SUPPORT FROM CHRISTIANS AND THEN HAVE MORE TIME IN MINISTRY. My comment here is that fund raising is great if you have a ready network of support that you can call on. Go for it!! This will free you up to take time and get a job BTW. The problem with fund raising however is that it is often a full time job. It takes a year making 1000 phone calls, making 200 visits. This is the equivalent man-hours of starting a self-sustaining business. Fund raising of course takes hours to keep up

those contacts year in and year out. You are basically spending your time with Christians. Fund raising, therefore, in a sense, takes you out of the neighborhood and into the Christian ghetto. It is also Christendom based. It depends on already committed Christians who are a shrinking commodity in the developed West.

5.) EXCUSE NO. 5 – I SPENT 3 YEARS (OR MORE) AND A LOT OF MONEY ON A SEMINARY EDUCATION. NOW THIS WAS A WASTE OF TIME! No it wasn't. It hopefully prepared you for ministry. Some of the best missional communities I know have been founded by seminary graduates. They are using their education to the fullest in ways never imagined. And if you've got loans, that's unfortunate. But, I suggest, most of the people following the course of bi-vocational ministry make more money (eventually) than in ministry and pay back their loans faster. On taking out loans for seminary, I suggest the right kind of praxis oriented seminary education (that encompasses Biblical studies, theological studies, cultural studies, church practice studies, leadership studies) is important for bi-vocational missional leaders. But I would suggest you do it slowly and in ways that don't stretch the finances. At Northern we're working on an M.A. CM in Missional Studies that can be accomplished one night a week for five years at a very low cost monthly.

OK I know this isn't for everybody. I've seen this work mostly with twenty-thirty somethings. But the times are changing. For what it's worth, I've lived all this myself and seen it take shape in many different ways in missional communities. What are your biggest hurdles? Do you know of any other excuses? Is this totally out of the question for you? Blessings on the journey!!