

BiVo

A Manifesto

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Help wanted: Desperate
sinners transformed by
Jesus to start a revolution.
Inquire within.

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Preface: A Manifesto for BiVocational Ministry

Six years ago, I stopped "full-time" ministry to become a mental health social worker and keep doing student ministry at our growing church. My wife, who is much smarter than I, had secretly been praying that I would experience what she did.

Little did I know how grateful I would be that God answered her prayer.

People didn't get it. Some were appreciative, but pushed us toward other salaried church positions. Some asked why we were leaving. Some told us we were crazy, even that we weren't doing real ministry.

Five years later, our now former student ministry is in the hands of some very capable, homegrown, "unschooled ordinary men that had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13) who are seeing more growth than we had. We are bivocational simple church planters in Philadelphia. I've never in my life been happier in ministry.

When I first began our journey, I asked for help in every form. I looked for books and resources, but couldn't find any. I talked to other full-time pastors, but, since many of them hadn't experienced it, I was given little advice. Google was a fad, and AOL showed only results from Geocities.

This manual comes from my experience on what it means to be bi-vocational (BiVo) in ministry, meaning working a "secular" job and being on staff at a church. I want to make my experience available to you as a resource, not as an expert, but

really as someone who is just a few steps ahead in the journey God is calling you to.

Here are a few more reasons why.

I'm Uber-Passionate About BiVo

This one experience has changed my ministry more than anything but Jesus Himself. There will be lots of reasons why. In addition to this being a manual, this is my manifesto and call to many Bible students, full-time pastors, and “normal people” to step up. God has called us to pray for “more laborers” (Luke 10:2); my

prayer is that the manifesto-esque portion of this manual will help answer this prayer.

I May Be the Only One

Not the only BiVo guy, but the only one making resources about being BiVo. While there is value in the other limited resources I have found, I want to make something that can be immediately available to as many people as possible.

The Economy Is Terrible

Not too long ago, we were days

from reaching the debt ceiling and the Canadian dollar being worth more than the American. We can see that our economy is hovering around "don't look now" and "can I eat out of the trash" levels. A number of my friends have lost their ministry jobs, and a lot of churches are having trouble supporting full-time staff.

There is also, in our culture, an ever-increasing gap between the little church (under 250) and the mega church (greater than 2000). Many of the individuals who have started in little churches have made the jump to larger churches or

raising budgets for church plants. This leaves smaller churches with an incredible opportunity, but neither the resources nor people to accomplish it. Granted, God will do whatever He wants. But, every church begins small and would benefit from the expertise of trained people who are willing to raise up workers and set a good example of hard work.

What if you can do everything God has called you to in your ministry context and get paid elsewhere? How will that revolutionize how we do church? How we reach people

with the Gospel? If this manual helps some pastors, both present and future, to save their local church body money, then it's a win.

I'm UBER- UBER-PASSIONATE About BiVo For Mission's Sake

I never reached a single person with the Gospel from inside my church office. Now, I have Jesus-focused conversations every other day.

If we want to see the Gospel go to every man, woman, and child within and without our culture, full-time church ministry does not make sense.

I am convinced more and more every day that BiVo ministry is the single greatest way to move yourself and your church into mission.

Because, you and I are not the heroes. We are the called.

Introduction: Our Story

Probably the best way for me to start is to tell you about my story.

I grew up a godless heathen.

My parents hated church, and by proxy, Jesus. Not only did they hate church: They were both excommunicated from their respective churches. So early on, I had a very rebellious, outsider perspective of church.

I only remember going to church twice in my entire life: Once with an

aunt (I cried the whole time), and once in my neighbor's yard next door (they had goldfish crackers). In fact, the neighbor's yard was the first place I had ever heard the Gospel. It wasn't that I was interested; I just hate bowing my head and closing my eyes.

My best friends at the time and my sister all started following Jesus. The life change was radical and immediately noticeable. My new goal was to make their lives hell (literally) because of it. Every logical question I had about God and the evil in the world, the economy,

the alternative worldviews, I threw at them.

They invited me to a Geoff Moore and the Distance concert where I heard the Gospel the first real time. The first time it made sense. I didn't pray, I didn't bow my head. I just decided to follow Christ.

About six months in, I knew there was nothing else in the world I could do but tell people about Jesus. Every non-sleeping second of the day (and a few sleep-talking episodes) became devoted to that.

I decided to go to Valley Forge Christian College outside of Philadelphia to pursue a degree in Youth Ministry. I met my beautiful wife-to-be, and we started volunteering at a church. Two weeks from graduation, and five weeks from our marriage, they offered us a full-time position as a youth/worship/tech/administrative assistant pastor.

Ministry was most things I dreamed it to be. I sat in an office. I drank coffee. I hung out with teenagers. I got long lunches. I got to make my own schedule (to an extent).

Everything was done as I was taught in the college, right out of the box. I made calendars and tried to form a leadership core. I changed our youth night to Sunday (and almost sunk our church) and went to everything.

In addition to this came a bunch of things I wasn't preparing for.

Gaining 100 lbs. in three years.

Huge fights from parents. Ministry almost ripping apart our marriage.

Seventy-hour work weeks for little reward. Days of boredom with no purpose or plan.

One of the smartest things I did was

get involved with a local trading card game club. I did this to get myself out of the walls of the church and into the world. Though we never saw a lot of people come to church (or Christ for that matter) through outreach events, we saw a number come from the TCG club.

Then there would be the slow days. I would do my study and have a movie on. I would be in my office from 9 AM - 2 PM when kids were all in school, and would feel like I'm missing out. I very well couldn't make disciples with people I only saw one day a week.

Everything was about to change.

One of the hardest things I ever did was lead our church through a pastoral transition. It was in these moments that I developed rhinoceros-style skin I was praying for, though it came at a great emotional price. You develop hard skin by getting beat repeatedly.

The new pastor started, a brilliant guy with an amazing family. I was glad to be an armor-bearer to such a godly man.

About six months in, we came to a

startling conclusion. The church had no money. It wasn't for a lack of giving; there were much more terrible things involved that I can't go into here.

Plain and simple, we were \$50K in the red. Or, as I was about to interpret it, my salary plus benefits.

It happened one night at worship practice, a few days after finding this out. Forty-five minutes into worship practice, no one had shown up. Not a single member. I was frustrated. I remember praying, "C'mon God...there is no way

working a job and making it to one practice can be this difficult."

As clear as day, the Holy Spirit spoke, "You're about to find out." And from there, our BiVo journey began.

I went to my wife that night and mentioned getting a job. Usually, my wife freaks out at my big ideas (again, she is much smarter than me). She was calm as a cucumber, and stated I should do it. Much discussion ensued as we went through how it would effect finances and family, ministry and mission. At

the end of the day, we said “Yes!” to God and took the plunge.

I went to our senior pastor and stated that, in order to help the church out of this financial situation, I would find a part-time or full-time job. The look of relief still makes me chuckle; I think it avoided the “we-can’t-pay-you-anymore” talk. After deliberation with our board, it was recommended to leave our current church and find another ministry job.

Much to our chagrin, we interviewed at one church. Their adult volunteer team was as big as our student

ministry at the time. The conversation was brief on the way home: Did God tell us to stay or leave? If God wanted us to stay, then God would have to make a way.

Over the next month, I applied for 193 jobs. I applied for everything from grocery clerk to secretary to high finance guru to massage therapist to computer programmer to world domination specialist. There were a lot of interviews, a few shady positions that were rejected, and a whole lot of "no's". Even Starbucks and grocery stores turned me down, which I did not take as

representative of my skills.

Finally, my best friend told me about the company he was with. I would be working with mentally ill people, helping them do something with something. A shaggy, tubby version of myself interviewed, and, with a little help from my friend, got the job.

Keeping a job is more difficult than getting a job, especially when there are two. Some wise coaches advised me to take a look at my duties and start dividing them up. I was encouraged to look toward Acts 6,

where the apostles delegated the hands-on work to devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-4 ESV). Some ruthless cutting of responsibilities occurred, and I focused myself on preaching, praying, discipleship and strategy.

I got a lot of confused questions in that time. People kept asking why we were leaving, and why not live by faith. The conversation kept coming back to, “I’m not leaving, and faith isn’t being dumb.” We encouraged people to express their concerns and helped them develop a more healthy

theology of being the people of God. It wasn't just them person up front making "church" happen; the Church is a people who work actively together to make mission happen.

I started Intensive Case Management in April of 2006. My first day was awkward, filled with questions of, "Where did you get your psych degree?", "What was your last job?", "YOU'RE a PASTOR?" I had to get used to hearing a lot of swearing and new accountability standards that I didn't have in ministry.

As it hit me what I got to do, my heart got excited. There was a moment in my first week where I walked into a social dance at our local long-term State Hospital, and said, “We get PAID for this?” The case manager I was shadowing laughed me off and drove me home.

You become a master juggler when you force yourself to do so.

Ministry, work, and family became the new routine. I had to change everything about what I do. More accurately, I course corrected from everything I was doing in my office all day. We develop a lot of bad

habits when we have nothing but time. All of these had to be unlearned, and new ones put in their place. God drew out of me new desires, crushed pieces of me that needed to die, and helped me develop new skillsets that became essential to both work and church.

There have been some major challenges. There have been juggling acts that I have not handled well. There have been moments where I am exhausted beyond all belief. I've had near drive by shootings in ministry and been nearly stabbed a few times in mental health.

What impressed me the most was the vast fruitfulness that occurred in every area of our lives. Socially. Missionally. In my family. Financially. Ministerially. God had given us favor as we followed Him into the harvest.

And we haven't looked back.

Principles

How BiVo Saved My Ministry

We love stories where the unlikeliest of heroes faces the unlikeliest of problems and saves the planet. Frodo in Lord of the Rings faces a huge mission to destroy the ring. Neo in the Matrix finds he is the chosen one, and joins the Matrix to fight against the evil within. Football team A overcomes great personal odds to turn the season around and win the big championship.

Never would I have thought that BiVo would be the liminal force that turned things around for me. A job is normal. A job is boring. There is little epic adventure, and little danger.

But the force is life-changing. I credit the force of BiVo ministry with saving my ministry. There have been few other life decisions that have shaped who I am and how I minister as going BiVo.

There were major changes that occurred in me, that had to happen for me to progress in my life. Not

just employment or ministry, but life itself.

What Did I Do All Day?

I was in youth ministry for years, reaching a group of students that (was supposed to be) between grades 7-12. These were amazing students, and many of them are still following Christ to this day, some thanks to us and some in spite of us. These students were reaching their friends at their lunch tables, giving testimonies and reports in classes, and becoming leaders in our growing little church.

And I was sitting in an office, wondering what to do while they were in school. Sure, I would prepare events and message. I would do some administrative stuff. But, I had a devastating hunger for more: personal outreach and evangelism, group discipleship, connecting with teachers and school events.

While I did my best to get into the schools, we were closed out from being on campus for a great many reasons (the local high school is Abington High, where prayer was removed from schools). We didn't have a lot of sporty kids who had

games, just a lot of study-ers. So I tried to connect with everyone (and I mean, everyone) after school. It wasn't working. We plateaued at 15 or so students, and you know how we exaggerate our numbers.

I also didn't have a lot of time to meet neighbors and bring them closer to Christ. During the days, they were working. During the nights, I was with students or my family.

All of this changed when I got a job. It had to change. I had to change.

Here's what changed to the glory of God:

I Multiplied Mission By Becoming Missional: I was surrounded by and paid to be with people who knew nothing of Jesus. I was having conversations about whether Jesus would smoke marijuana. I had never felt so alive in ministry before. Not only was I reaching friends and co-workers for Jesus, but I was bringing stories back to our students who then got inspired to do the same.

“Missional” gets thrown around a lot today, as did “small group” in the

2000s and “relevant” in the 90s. But this word holds power: Missional means on mission with Jesus. It means being about the very mission of God the Father, the mission that Jesus was sent on, and sent the Holy Spirit to work through the Church (big C) to complete.

Mission needs to take us outside the four walls of the church. It needs to come out from the social networking and the blog, out from behind the pulpit and coffeehouse studies. Missional, by nature of definition, means that it is the Church (big C) leaving the church (little c) and

being the Church (big C) in the world.

Besides BiVo giving us new opportunities where Jesus is working in the world, BiVo also gives us a chance to model this for our people. More on this later.

I Multiplied Ministry By Giving It Away: I couldn't do everything anymore, though I was pretty good at running a one-man show. I was forced to rely on student and adult leaders who would "do the work of the ministry".

I often found myself forcing myself to justify my paycheck. There wasn't enough work, so work had to be created. If I couldn't create it, I would take it from someone else. This is a destructive pattern that you and I know all too well.

My role became simply to empower the workers to do what God had given to them. We more than doubled in numbers in a year. In a church of 85, we were running 35 at our highest. Students made events that I couldn't do, lead them, and brought even more to Christ. Today, those leaders are running the

ministry.

I Multiplied Disciples By Becoming A Discipler: Jesus never commanded the apostles to preach, or to run events, or to play worship songs. His parting words were, “[As you] Go, and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19).

But too often, we don't do this at all.

Today, our youth ministry that we left a year ago is growing substantially. Those in charge are two leaders that we discipled closely for a year to take over in our

stead. By being forced to spend more time with a few people, they could do the same. The growth is more than numerical; it's spiritual depth. Those same leaders are raising up leaders to become what Christ had called them. It's becoming viral.

In fact, that's key. The crowd allures us, but Jesus calls us to the few. I liked numbers: Numbers offered me a lot more comfort and purpose. When this began to change, I began to change. The allure of the crowd began to dissipate, and the calling to the one mattered more and more.

The numerical growth you may or may not experience is not worth that much. Crowds killed Jesus, and they will try and do the same to you and me. The growth that matters is when someone you disciple starts to disciple someone else.

Ministry Is About Empowering People

We live in a world where we love celebrity. Though I'll never admit it publicly, I do too. I love watching young stars rising to the top and then come crashing down (consider this my public repentance for both loving

and hating celebrity).

We do this in our churches too. We tend to want to hire the triple threat: You can preach, you can use a computer, you can play a guitar.

Here was the problem for me: I could do everything myself. I knew I shouldn't, but I could. And, because I could, I did. Everyone else was working, so it was fine for me to set up all the audio, get worship together, prepare my messages along with all the multimedia, lead worship, run all of the technology, preach, pray for students, hangout

with students, then tear down.

Every Wednesday. For three years.

Once I went BiVo, it hit me like a ton of bricks that this needed to change. I got down to preaching, praying, and hanging out. Someone else was empowered to do the rest.

I think we all know this is the healthiest a church can be, when the people of God are doing "the works of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). Loving God by offering themselves to serve. One person shows set up the rest of the "cast" for disaster.

People don't "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

One of the Scriptures that challenged me the most about this was Acts 6:4: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." I was doing everything, so I chose to cut off everything else to the best extent I could.

I found others who could do the work. They may not be better than me or you, and that's ok. God doesn't

use the most talented; He uses the most available.

The most difficult part is to actually allow them to do it. Get yourself out of the way by serving them. Allow them to have a vision. Allow them to have the tools necessary. Make your role about giving them what they need for their role. Then show them how to expand their own influence.

Cloistered Mission Is Not Mission

The smartest thing I ever did as a youth pastor was learn to play a Trading Card Game. The one where

a bunch of pre-teen guys (no girls...trust me) sit around a table for 6-8 hours, throwing down cards with strange drawings and weird rules, and hearing every swear word in the book (even new ones I believe they invented). This lead to hundreds of conversation about God and _____ (fill in the blank: drugs, clothing, sex with girls, sex with self, the game itself). A large number of guys heard the Gospel; some became Christians and are still serving Jesus today.

Besides this, my mission was almost non-existent. While I had been very

passionate about "evangelism" in college, I found that my office walls would close in on me. In fact, I was required to be in the office for extended periods of time; it was written into my job description.

Have you ever seen an ant farm? They are tiny little glass or plastic environments that ants can do all their little farming and provide entertainment for those outside. They generally don't populate much more than what they already have implanted; the only way to get more is to throw more in.

This is drastically different than an ant colony. You throw a queen and a few workers somewhere, and pretty soon you are inundated. They keep mating, and keep hatching. They keep working, and growing until you're calling Terminex or being eaten alive, depending on where you are reading this from.

To be missional is simple. Get out of your office. Go out with people. Walk up to a random stranger and introduce yourself. Pick up a hobby. Take your kids somewhere.

In fact, the easiest way to do this is

to go to a job where you have to be with people who don't know Jesus for 40+ hours/week.

Why I Probably Won't Go Back

My heart has always been for those who haven't known Jesus. Literally, since the moment I became a Christian, God birthed something in me. I want them to know Jesus. I make 98% of my life decisions based on this call.

I used to think a calling was a guarantee of certain things. When I first knew I was called in ministry, I

imagined leading thousands of teenagers by preaching to them. When I was in college, I imagined leading thousands of teenagers to Christ by loving relationally on them, and making a great name for myself, a nice cushy life. When I was in full-time ministry, I imagined doing this to the most rejected people in our area, and I was getting paid to do it.

God caught me, and I had to ask His forgiveness for a long time doing ministry so my name could be great. I started making His Name and His fame primary. This meant taking a

step back from getting paid to do so. A part of me died, which means a greater part of Jesus could be born in me.

I know I can make a much bigger difference in the lives of people who don't know Jesus by working full-time. I know I can serve a lot more people when the money that would pay me can go to sending missionaries. I know I can make Jesus' name greater by working and doing ministry.

I know many of you are making God's name great in your paid

position. But there's more. I promise you.

Which makes this a good lead in.

Calling Is Not About a Paycheck

"The stamp of the Saint is that he can waive his own rights and obey the Lord Jesus." ~ C.S. Lewis

One of my students, now leading our former youth ministry, told me a story of one of our ministry classes in school. As she sat with 40 of her fellow students, the youth director for a prominent school in our denomination posed two questions.

The first was, "How many of you are

called to student ministry?" Instantly, every hand in the room shot up. Every face was aglow with the bright hope of meeting, loving, and discipling students.

Directly following that came the second question: "How many of you would do it for no pay?" Only one hand in the entire room stayed up, that of our former student. She sat stunned, though the youth director seemed to welcome the low response. He asked, "Why?" The student simply responded, "I've seen it done."

This is not to our credit at all, and I'll tell you why.

Calling is never about a paycheck. True, we do need to provide for our families, and eating food is generally enjoyed. But our calling to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19) is not contingent on how much we are being compensated to do so. It's not based on a benefits package or the amount of vacation we get.

It's based on following Jesus alone. What has He told you to do? Now do it.

The Apostle Paul is a prime example. In Philippians 4:11-13, he tells us "I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." In 1 Timothy 6:8, Paul tells us that "if we have food and clothing, we will be content." Jesus already promised these things (Matthew 6), so we don't need to worry.

Now all we have to do is get busy. Learn to be content with who Jesus is and doing what He has given you to do. He'll work out the details as you are faithful.

Eckhard Schnab said, “A missionary tackles the task at hand, using every opportunity for preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, and striving to nurture new believers in any way necessary.” If you and I are called to be missional (read, missionaries), then this is where it starts.

What Am I Entitled To?

In a recent segment on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, a news reporter returning from maternity leave, Jon showed some back to back clips of the reporter defending her maternity leave to another radio reporter who called it "a racket". These were juxtaposed next to clips of her throughout the past few years stating maternity leave and other entitlement programs were steps toward socialism.

Rightfully, Jon summarized: "This is the problem with entitlements: They're only really entitlements when they're something other people

want. When it's something you want, it's the hallmark of a civilized society."

One of the things that surprised me when I went BiVo was how many pastor friends and colleagues of mind said that I was no longer in "real ministry" because I wasn't getting paid. I was stealing the opportunity from individuals to "bless the man of God" and reap the reward otherwise.

A lot of discussion I hear happens around, "I'm the pastor, and the man of God must be paid." Others say,

"A pastor should NEVER be paid and not use those rights!" Many quote Scripture around each of these points, and the argument can get pretty contentious.

Paul brought balance in 1 Corinthians 9. "Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher

thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, *is it too much if we reap material things from you?* If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, *we have not made use of this right*, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 9:8-12 ESV, emphasis mine)

Paul lays out a two dissonant pieces of theology. Each plays well with the other, but always causes an internal struggle in us.

First, it's Biblical for church leaders to receive support. The Bible prescribes this from Old Testament time. Paul says that it is right to pay a Gospel leader, in a number of different ways. A soldier taking a salary, a farmer who eats from his crops, a shepherd who eats his own animals. Even the Old Testament alludes to compensating leaders; Paul reminds us that these laws about the oxen were written for you and me, as a reminder that those who serve should receive reward from their service. A local church body, or series of bodies if that is the case, should seek to support the leader in

whatever way is deemed necessary and able.

And it doesn't look like it's just cash though. Paul received housing from Priscilla and Aquila, financial gifts from other churches like Philippi, and even employment to be BiVo. It seems most of it was not requested, offered willingly from those Paul had ministered to. So Paul set up that the support a church leader in any role should receive does not mean cash at every chance.

Then Paul introduces the dissonance.

After making a very strong argument that Paul should be paid for the constant hard work he does, he tells the people he will not take it. Paul immediately sees payment as a barrier to the Gospel advancing, and thereby lays his right down.

What barrier did he see financial gain creating? Verse 3 gives us a clue when Paul tells us that he is defending his own apostleship to the church he raised. The defense comes after a bunch of self-proclaimed “super-apostles” come through town, demand a lot of money, and cause a load of trouble. Because of the

requirement that they be paid, the Corinthian church, along with numerous others, began doubting the call of ANY apostle. Though Paul could say that, “You are the seal of my apostleship” (1 Cor. 9:2), they still reacted out of their negative experience to the charlatans.

The financial side also gets lumped in with two other physical comforts, food and drink and spousal support. You begin to see a picture that things that make life comfortable can, in and of themselves, create barriers to the Gospel by creating an internal barrier. There is nothing wrong with

have physical comforts, as Paul mentions Peter having a “believing wife” (1 Cor. 9:5). However, when we are comfortable, we lose urgency, and a loss of urgency is a loss for the Gospel.

Paul also reminds the people that this is a Gospel privilege and a demand placed upon Paul by Christ. Paul calls it a “necessity laid upon” him (1 Cor. 9:16), painting the picture in the original language of being strong-armed into something. So, the calling and the “grace and apostleship” (Romans 1:4) Paul had was not an entitlement; Paul was

graciously mandated by God.

Therefore, for our purposes, getting paid for ministry is a right we have but not one that we should utilize. As Paul laid down his rights for the sake of the Gospel, we should consider our rights. In America, we have the right to life, liberty, and property (thank you John Locke). In Christ, we have the right to receive grace and obey endlessly. All other "rights" are privileges and gifts from God.

In Christ, we have the duty and responsibility to lay all of those

rights before the cross. If our number one is making Christ known, then our number two is everything else. This means marriage, living in a safe neighborhood, a church based paycheck, etc., all comes under submission to Jesus. And, we give up everything we can and should in order to make His name known.

Paul's theology in a nutshell:
Demand money and limit the Gospel.
Lay down your rights and all limits are gone. He seems to say that the only limits to the Gospel are the ones we place on ourselves in proclaiming it.

There Is No Such Thing as a Secular Job

*“We must let go of the life we have
planned, so as to accept the one
that is waiting for us.”*

~ Joseph Campbell

You've been a deacon for a few weeks now. You were chosen with a number of others who will be responsible for taking care of those in need of food. Never before were you recognized.

God has been showing up in your

ministry as you serve the poor,
healing bodies and broken lives.
Without provocation, the religious
men rise up, accuse you of
blasphemy, and bring you in to have
you scheduled for execution.

The people who want to kill you
believe God is for them and against
you. God loves them and does not
love you. God meets them in their
place, but refuses to meet anyone
else where they are. God loves their
law, which is technically His law,
and hates your grace, which is
technically His grace to you.

This is called duality: Two things coexisting in separate states. Sounds fine on the surface. The issue is when you put this into our lives with Jesus.

Which is exactly what the religious folks did to Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. The religious leaders who wanted Stephen dead believed God could only move in the Temple. The accusation of blasphemy against the Temple was a serious one; you were supposedly saying that God's house, the only place God would accept your worship, was wrong.

Duality is a plague on American religion. We partition our spiritual lives to our existence in one place, the church (little c), and one day, Sunday. We separate our religion from our relationship with Christ, separating our words about Who we follow and live a lifestyle different than the one He asks of us.

The problem comes with our position as well. People separate the “man of God” from the regular guy, assuming that God can only use the preacher. Ministry is then segregated to what we as pastors assign for people to do in our church building.

Mission is set for events created by the church and held within or around the church. To reconcile the internal discrepancy, people begin to assume that God is not interested or cannot move in their places of business. “God wants to stay in His home. He doesn’t come to my job with me.”

BiVo then can become a lesson in the nature of who God is. Rather than a God who is distant, God wants to show up wherever you are. It is a perfect example of how we can set up our lives to model holy living and mission before the congregations we serve.

The story of Stephen gives a great theological base against duality. We'll see that Stephen's life is a living sermon against the man of God versus the regular man and the holiness of places and lifestyles versus others.

Back to Stephen. Stephen is falsely accused of talking dirty about the Temple. The jealousies of the religious leaders, now shadowed by the grace of God and the miracles shown in the Holy Spirit, are obvious. Could you imagine being a religious leader and seeing a food server come to more "fame" than

you?

It is vital to remember that Stephen was a normal guy. When he is first introduced in Acts 6:5, we are only told that he is “full of faith and the Holy Spirit”, and we can assume he would make a good food server. We have no other history prior to this. All we know is that God chooses to use Stephen to show His glory.

To show how big this is, notice how similar Stephen’s martyrdom is to Jesus’ own crucifixion. Religious leaders could not stand the wisdom of God through each (Acts 6:10).

Both were falsely accused (Acts 6:11-14). Both are given chances to speak against their charges (Acts 6:15-7:1). Both saw God the Father (Acts 7:55-56). Both cried out to God to receive them (Acts 7:59). Both cried out for the forgiveness of those murdering them (Acts 7:60).

God chose a normal guy to be comparably martyred as Jesus was.

You see, God doesn't care who we are. He can use anybody, and has. He isn't looking for those who are most clean, or most religious, or most talented, or smartest. He is

simply looking for those who will obey Him wherever they are.

From a duality standpoint, the dialectic between “holy men” and “regular men” begins. God isn’t interested in martyring an apostle first. The very first person to die for the cause of Christ is waiting tables. More than Jesus is interested in the “high and mighty” showing His glory, He does so through Joe Schmoe who works on the pipes, or installs cable, or sells car. Really, anyone who will submit themselves wholly to God.

BiVo helps those we serve break this internal dichotomy. You, as the pastor or Gospel leader in whatever form, get to bring your workplace to church and church to the workplace. Sermons and teachings now carry more gravitas because YOU get to model the things you teach about in your own workplace. The stories we gather become less about sitting in a coffeehouse studying and more about meeting real “sinners” in their environment, the very thing you want to see from your people. You become the normal person and show them that normal people can be used by God.

The message that Stephen preaches is a very important one as well. The accusations came that “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us” (Act 6:13-14 ESV).

Moments before his inevitable execution, Stephen is given a chance to justify his words. He does a bad job of keeping himself safe, and a really good job of refuting their poor theology.

Stephen paints this picture for the people in the arena:

God met Abraham far away from the Promised Land, before Abe knew God. He told Abraham to go to a place that HE would meet him, a place that Abe had never been before and had no idea where it was.

God met Abe's descendants as slaves in a far off land.

God met Joseph as a falsely accused rapist in prison and used him as a servant to a Pharaoh "god" (yes, he was worshipped), and saved the

world.

God met Moses as a fleeing murderer where his people were slaves. God met Moses through a burning bush on an, up until then, unimportant mountain.

God met His people in a tent that moved everywhere. It wasn't one set location that the people had to go; God lead the way and met them wherever they followed Him.

God met David by telling him NOT to build the Temple just yet. The archetypal messianic king was told

to hold off on building the very Temple Stephen was accused of blaspheming. And yet, God still met with him.

God meets us through His word telling us that "Heaven is [His] throne, and earth is [His] footstool" (Psalm 11:4). God is not limited to any one location because He Himself owns the world and can go wherever He pleases.

God meets us in Person through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the duality between

where God “lives” and where He actually lives is destroyed. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the Temple standing between the court and the Holy of Holies, between the High Priest and the regular people, is torn. Thus, God didn't need to meet us in a "sacred" place, because wherever He is IS sacred.

Do you wonder why you have trouble helping your people see this? You preach about talking to people about Jesus, about being “Jesus in your workplace”, but there is a disconnect. I would like to suggest

that our systems are set up to maintain the very duality that Stephen preached against.

You see, our systems tell the end of our story. The systems that we have created to our churches around ultimately lead to these things that cause lack of growth and lack of mission. It's organizational bias: Every system creates exactly what it is set up to create.

A zoo is a self-sustaining system. Each animal lives in its own little habitat. It exists for the appreciation of the outside. People make money

off of others viewing the animals. Therefore, those same people must continually care for the animals. A birth is a rare event, and the animals typically become tame. If you take away the animal, you don't need the zoo very much (though I'm sure there are lots of uses for empty cages).

You get the result you set out for: To see an animal. Sure, it's tame. Typically doesn't do much. Typically doesn't do what it naturally should.

The wild is much different. You see a lion in a cage, that's one thing. You

see a lion in the wild, and it may be because it was stalking you the entire time. Lions in the wild don't need your permission to reproduce. Lions in the wild can and will go where they want. You get spontaneous reproduction of lions. You get much more exciting video footage.

The "system" of the wild is set up that way.

If the results are not what we expect, it is usually because the system is broken. So, when our system tells people that vocational, paid ministry

inside the church walls is the end-all be-all of the Church (big C), is it really a wonder we have gotten the results we have?

In part, your paid position fosters this dual mindset. Since people understand you as the “man of God”, they see themselves as less. And wherever the “man of God” is, there it is holy. Since such impetus is put on Sunday morning services, we separate the God of Sunday and the God of the church (little c) from God Himself.

BiVo breaks down this dichotomy.

No longer is the “man of God” elevated, and thus the church (little c) is no longer elevated. A mindset can begin to emerge, one where God is able to work through anyone, anywhere.

How would our world change if we lived this out? How would our churches change if our people could experience this freedom? Beyond the naysayers who want to stone you like they stoned Stephen, the people who desire God to be God, to live outside the box we have falsely built, will begin to see that Jesus is working in and around them on their

commute, in their break room,
behind their desk, under the car they
are repairing, on the bus, in their
school.

So, stop calling the bank/mental
health/construction/etc. job
"secular". If God is there, it is holy
ground and He can use you and me.

The Benefits of BiVo

“It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it.”

~ Upton Sinclair

*I, Candidate for Governor: And
How I Got Licked*

“What’s in it for me?”

I hate when someone begins to sell me something. If you grew up in the 80’s, you know the picture of the

sleazy car salesman, who is willing to tell you anything to get you to buy this lemon. We are told, “This product will change your life! Things will never be the same. You need this!” At the end, you are stuck with buyer’s remorse.

My heart is not to sell you something that I don’t believe will change your life and your church. Nor do I want to paint the picture that this model of ministry is for everyone; it’s not. All I want to help you answer the question, “What’s in it for me?”

The benefits of BiVo are vast.

Beyond the dualistic mindset that begins to collapse, there are many practical benefits that can come from you achieving gainful employment outside the church.

The People of God Learn to Work

One of the most frustrating things as a pastor is getting people to work. We've all been there: It's ten minutes before Sunday morning service, and your Kids Worker calls out. You've been planning an outreach for months and can't find someone to run a particular area. Your Welcome Team leader comes to you because

they are the only person being welcoming. Everyone else left.

Referring back to part of my story, I was in a terribly similar circumstance. I was sitting with my guitar and my microphone at worship practice. I had arrived early to set up and tune the instruments for others coming in straight from work. Sheet music was printed hours before. I had begun to pray and seek God for His presence at the practice and in the service on Sunday.

And then no one showed up.

I sat there for about 45 minutes past our start time, mouth agape with awe that anyone would commit to something verbally and not fulfill their promise. It wasn't the first time it had happened this way, but it was the first time I found myself asking, "What in the world is wrong with these people?"

Some of this (not all) changed when I got a real-world job. For some reason, people began to look at me differently. People made special efforts to get to practices, to get to events, to go the extra mile. They began to see that it is possible to

serve somewhere while maintaining their employment, their family, and their sanity.

There is something powerful that is modeled to the people of God when you and I go BiVo.

You're Empowering People: No longer are you able to do all of the work of the ministry. You don't have the time, and you shouldn't be spending your time doing so. Your most important work responsibilities become Acts-6: Seek God and make disciples. You can find those people who can lead in the other areas you

serve, and train leaders to be mildly competent and to grow into it, and eliminate needless waste.

You're Modeling For People:

Nowadays, there is so much negative attention that the ministry gets, particularly if you are in an area or generation that people have been burnt by the church. They see you as paid to spend time with them. They are paying for you to care for their souls, to sit in the office looking pious so if someone comes in they see they are getting the money's worth. We've also seen those that have sinned by following the cash

instead of the Christ.

Our working shows people that it can be done and it should be done. It shows that a 40 hour/week job does not relieve individuals from the work of the ministry. In your modeling, others learn the life skills that come from a Christ-centered mindset.

You Begin To Understand People: I didn't realize it, but I just didn't know what we ask of our congregation. It is hard to work a full eight hour day and then come to lead something at night. Some days

have been easy for me to do so; some have been ridiculously difficult. You can't anticipate every aspect of your day, the angry customer, the difficult staff, the boss who comes down on you, the technology that fails, the heavy expectations.

Not only are you modeling that it's possible and it should be done, you are learning that it is difficult. Your character begins to change as you allow God to shape you. The demands you put on the people who serve around you become more realistic.

The People of God Learn to Sacrifice

You've probably heard of the Pareto, or more commonly the 80/20, Principle. This principle tells us that "roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes."

We see this a lot in the church. Generally speaking, most of the work is done by those faithful few. There are those who are willing to give every last cent, every second of their time, every talent they have, and many that they don't. We give them heavy loads to carry, and they

rise to take them on. They may be able to lead a few others, or a bunch of key areas. We begin to rely on them for everything, because we know it will get done.

The problem is cyclical. First, these heavy hitters begin getting hit by balls we're throwing at them. They begin to slip while our expectations begin to rise. We tend to find ourselves upset at those who have been giving most, who begin struggling because of the continued burden of ministries they weren't created for. Because we don't often show them how to empower others,

we get stuck approaching others to help them. This puts an even greater burden on them. They stumble, they fall, they burnout, or worse.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9 tells us "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we

worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to *give you in ourselves an example to imitate*” (ESV, emphasis mine).

We don't do it so we can get attention for our sacrifice, stealing it from Jesus. However, people watch us. We begin to model how to give of our time and talents outside of our paid role (your people do that anyway; it's not usually sacrifice), and people take notice. Our people begin to reflect our work ethic, our passion, because they see that it is

worth suffering for.

Get out of the office. Get a job. Then show the people how to sacrifice.

The People of God Learn to Suffer

I was talking to a lady the other day at my bus stop. We jumped onto the topic of a recent Catholic school strike in Philadelphia. As we were talking, she said that nuns and priests used to teach, but stopped because of lack of work.

My bus stop friend came up with a

good point: Why not cut some (salaries of priests, etc.) to save the many? She kept saying how this would speak volumes to the neighborhood, but was less than confident they would ever do it.

Think of some of the greatest leaders in your life, in the world even. Have they been the ivory tower sitters? Have they been the ones who fell into money, or worked hard for it? Have they inspired you through sitting in an office all day, or making their way on the front lines?

Ghandi was persecuted endlessly.

MLK Jr. was imprisoned and sprayed with fire hoses. Those entrepreneurs in your church are bootstrapping finances to make their vision happen. That single mom is working three jobs.

But, we in the pastorate often sit in our offices. Yes, we pray money comes in (strange that we have to pray that God's people would obey Him). We join alongside those who are struggling. But often what draws us to ministry is that it's an easy job where we can drink coffee all day and avoid heavy lifting.

BiVo shows people how to suffer, because our suffering is for their good (2 Corinthians 1:6). We can show people how to be persecuted for their faith in the marketplace. We can show people how to live pure in a world of temptation. We can show people how to deal with that difficult boss. Our sermons become powerful because they have practical backing to it.

In fact, this is part of the reason we exist. "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves,

because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:6-8)

How are we modeling suffering to

our people today? How are we showing ourselves to the world as the Suffering Servant's suffering servant, serving the suffering as the Suffering Servant served and suffered?

Outsiders Pay Attention

Outsiders don't pay attention to your church. If they did, they would come more often.

It's not because there is necessarily something wrong with your church. It's not because you need to change this or that, get better music or kids

programs, or make something more fancy-schmancy. To be honest, they really just don't care.

They don't have much reason to, unless something goes horribly awry. The world has much better music and kids programming, it's easier to access, and it speaks to a side of themselves they are much used to.

As a full-time paid staff, you don't spend key time with outsiders. You spend 40+ hours/week in your role, which typically focuses on the care of those already involved in the

church (little c) and the running of programs. During this time, outsiders are working and avoiding work, loving on or hiding from their families, making money legally or illegally. The thing that we would like them to do, namely, knowing Jesus, is the thing they cannot do because they haven't been introduced to Him yet.

Outsiders have a pretty bad taste toward insiders anyway, especially paid ones. Sadly, TV preachers and megachurch pastors who have misused their platforms have helped to set a high bar for those in

ministry. Outsiders no longer want to see a pastor who drives a BMW; they want to see one who serves the poor. Outsiders no longer want to see a leader who owns a house bigger than theirs.

And isn't this what Jesus did? Jesus didn't commute to Earth, He moved in. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 ESV). What gave Jesus more authority in front of people was that He stooped with them, played with their children,

lived life with them, something the religious leaders of the time refused.

When the staff steps into the outside, the outside takes notice. All of a sudden they can see that not all "pastors are in it for the money" (if only they knew, right?). They get to see how insiders live rather than how media portrays them. It becomes more about being a servant of all rather than a staff member to some.

Insiders Pay Attention to Outsiders

My daughter's first pets were two fish named for famous Pixar fish that can't be named here. They had their own little plastic aquarium complete with shiny jeweled rocks and tiny fake plants.

The problem with domesticated fish is that they only see the world from the inside. My daughter, who had been around many other animals that were much more fun to play with, quickly grew bored. The fish, apparently, didn't care very much about it either; they kept swimming and staring and doing nothing.

In the dualistic mindset, when you as an insider work only on the inside, the insiders mimic you. The insiders focus only on the inside because that is their primary concern. They are tiny, domesticated fish that only see the aquarium as their planet. In fact, the world outside the “aquarium” becomes an evil, scary place that people can fall prey to all sorts of dangers.

But fish weren't meant for aquariums. They were meant to swim.

And when the metaphorical fish in

your pews on a Sunday morning (enjoy that mental picture) find that you venture out into the scary ocean and not only survive but thrive, you slake their thirst for more. Insiders then become adventurers, willing to do all of the things that Jesus commands us, the things you speak about on a Sunday morning about mission and evangelism.

Counting the Cost

I've lately become enamored with the story of Hudson Taylor. Hudson Taylor prayed that, if he would be forgiven, he would give his entire

life to bring the Gospel elsewhere. It was in that moment that God spoke, telling Hudson that he was going to be a missionary to China.

His heart burned with an unstoppable passion for reaching those in China who were without the Gospel. China was virtually unreached; most missionaries were only allowed near the coastal cities, if they were allowed at all.

Hudson knew that his going to China was inevitable, though he had no plans, no money, and few skills. But wisdom came immediately: The

planning for China had to begin now.

Hudson moved himself into the slums. He changed his diet, at one point eating only a loaf of bread and some fruit per day. He was given a Chinese Bible and began to painstakingly teach himself the language by comparing passages and words in both the English and Chinese Scriptures. Sundays were spent among the poor, bringing the Gospel and raising up new Christ followers.

At one point, Hudson recognized that prayer alone would change things in

China. He is quoted having said:

“To me it was a very grave matter... to contemplate going out to China, far from all human aid, there to depend upon the living God alone for protection, supplies, and help of every kind. I felt that one’s spiritual muscles required strengthening for such an undertaking. There was no doubt that if faith did not fail, God would not fail. But what if one’s faith should prove insufficient? I had not at that time learned that even ‘if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.’ It was consequently a very serious

question to my mind, not whether He was faithful, but whether I had strong enough faith to warrant my embarking in the enterprise set before me.

“‘When I get out to China,’ I thought to myself, ‘I shall have no claim on anyone for anything. My only claim will be on God. How important to learn, before leaving England, to move man through God by prayer alone.’” (Hudson Taylor in early years, pg 131)

There is a cost counting that comes with any and every move we make in

Christ. If there is not, we are either not counting correctly or not following Christ as closely as we thought.

There is a cost that comes with going BiVo. There is a personal crunch on your time and energies. There are new pressures and responsibilities, new areas of learning that you must grasp quickly. There are new people you will have to learn about, people who are not interested in you like your church people are.

But counting the negative is only one half of counting the cost. As you

begin your BiVo journey, more and more of the benefits begin to stand out. People are catching what you are modeling. Your stories about your job encourage others to live out the Gospel in their day-to-day.

Those who are already inside the local church begin learning to give of their time and of themselves.

Those you meet in your new job begin to see your interactions in the “normal” things.

At the end of the day, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Here are some thoughts to help move you along a little further.

Some Questions: A New Old Mindset

For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

~ Steve Jobs

Trends come back around. One of my favorite repetitious trends is

fashion.

My mom and dad started dating in the 70's. Neither of them were fancy people, but they did go out dancing. My mom had apparently gotten my dad this polyester brown patterned shirt for just such an occasion.

Of course, the 70's came and went and the shirt went into the closet. From the closet it went to the floor. From the floor it went to a box. That box was moved to my bedroom closet on a high shelf far from peering eyes, even before I was a twinkle in their newlywed eyes.

As a middle-schooler in the 90's, I began digging through my closet and stumbled upon this glorious box. I pulled out the shirt in awe, as I imagined looking exactly like one of the grunge rockers I idolized. And I was the hit of the school.

The story wasn't the same when I wore it to college. Apparently, styles vary greatly from state to state, or even city to city. MTV dictated what was cool, and it was no longer me.

I had simply stopped asking what was good looking. And I paid for it

dearly. It's the same way with our systems. We often get entrenched in systems without knowing it. We stop asking the important, formative questions.

And because of this, we endanger ourselves. The danger ranges from being laughed at, such as the church that only plays hymns in a very young environment, or scoffed to the possibility for major societal damage, such as the Catholic sex scandal.

Our current view of church in our Western context is one that needs to

be questioned. Though this isn't the book to do that, BiVo lends itself to ask a number of system challenging questions.

Where Is Your Money Going?

When I first got married, we were dumb with our money. We bought a GameCube two years before they came out with the Wii. We ran up our credit cards, knowing we could pay them back. We would eat out constantly, which lead to some ministry weight gain (read: 80 pounds).

This isn't anything particular to us; I'm pretty sure this is America. The metaphorical ball dropped when the housing market tanked. Then we fell into a recession. Then the job market began shrinking exponentially. We still continue to struggle daily.

I've never known a church who hasn't had moments where giving has decreased. But even the most faithful givers can't give when they lose their jobs as major company players and can't get hired at McDonalds. You can encourage people to tithe on their state-funded cash assistance (formerly \$214/mo in Pennsylvania),

but that won't really pay the church bills.

When the giving decreases, the true priorities, whether intended or not, begin to show. Wisdom dictates that you can't pay for what you don't have the money for. However, our written and unwritten priorities begin calling us to cut ministry before we cut the person in charge.

It becomes a question of stewardship. When giving goes down or church attendance goes down, we often feel the need to spread the Gospel or invite others to

our Sunday morning services or increase the quality of programming we run. These things generally and programmatically take money. When that money is going to pay a staff member, we often have need to neglect those other areas. We end up shooting ourselves in the foot: We need to increase quality by getting quality curriculum but can't afford it because we're paying a staff.

It may be helpful to ask: Where did giving go in the book of Acts? Giving is clearly a spiritual discipline, the overflow hearts changed by Jesus. But where did the

cash actually flow to?

Meeting the Needs of the Poor

When people began spontaneously coming to Jesus, they began spontaneously giving to each other. The Book of Acts tells us that people sold their property so that those who have none would have their needs met. "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." (Acts 4:34, 35

ESV)

Paul tells the people in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to give generously to the needs of those involved in the famine in Jerusalem. "God loves a cheerful giver" becomes a mantra of "Sunday morning tithes and offering" when initially it was a call to give so saints in Israel could eat. The churches (little c) in the New Testament even gave to each other, so that those in the area could continue to exist (Acts 11:27-30).

Thinking about stewardship of God's funds that He brings for our use

should beg the question: Are we serving the poor? Are there needs among us or among our community that have not been met?

Too often we end up reenacting the scene from Dumb and Dumber. Harry and Lloyd are basically stranded in Aspen, Colorado, after driving all the way across the US. They are cold and on a mission. Harry is trying to warm his hands by the fire, to little avail.

Harry tells Lloyd, "My hands...are....freezing!" Lloyd turns, takes off a pair of mittens to give to

Harry, revealing he was wearing two pairs the entire time. He tells Harry, "You can have a pair of mine. My hands were starting to get sweaty."

Tragically, most of the funds we raise in our churches stay in our churches. Some of them go to help the poor, but most of it goes to paying salaries and operations costs. Is this what Jesus had in mind?

Sending the Workers

The other big operations cost we see in the New Testament is sending

workers to areas that have not been touched with the Gospel.

Look at Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. They hear from God in prayer to send Paul and Barnabas to the nations to make Christ known. The local church in Antioch becomes the resource, making it possible for the Gospel to make headway into numerous areas that hadn't been penetrated.

You also see guys like Epaphroditus in Philippians 2, sent to serve those who are sent. He comes bringing gifts to serve Paul, and also finds a

way to make a living by himself there for a bit. Even Paul was looking to do a trade, desiring to send Timothy out there way.

John said it this way: "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church, and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. **For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men,** that we may be

fellow-workers with the truth" (3 John 5-8, emphasis mine).

It is making use of the finances in established bodies of Christians to take care of those sent to expand the Kingdom outward.

One of the things I was guilty of in full-time ministry was adamantly guarding my pay package. This meant, to my shame, at time encouraging others to refuse missionary support. I heard it a lot: "Gotta take care of our own bills first."

Today, I realize my shortsightedness. Even if our church building shut its doors, I could find ten more in ten minutes. If these missionaries left, there would be no Gospel penetration.

And maybe that's it: Shortsightedness. We forget that you and I are temporary and God is eternal. We forget that our needs in the moment are taken care of, as long as we keep His Kingdom and His Righteousness primary.

Are You Content?

We are taught in our American, consumer culture to NEVER be satisfied. We are told to hunger for more and more and more until we can't get any more. Then we're told to rent a storage space to accommodate all the stuff we can't fit.

In fact, marketing is geared today toward our sense of purpose, not the product. This is why a car commercial will feed on our sense of importance, or a make-up commercial focus on our need to feel sexy. A soft drink will address your sports ability, and toys are for the

"cool kids".

I had to fight against discontentment a lot in my life. My family was never affluent growing up; in fact, my parents were some of the most sacrificing, giving people ever. However, I wanted it all. I wanted to rule the world. I would grab catalogs to make my Christmas list and pull out the 1-2 things I DIDN'T want. This continued way into my adult life, and is still something I struggle with.

As do our congregations.

They see the same commercials. They're bombarded by the same preaching from advertisements, telling them to get a strong sense of meaning from their product. They want to have the same comforts the unrighteous wealthy get with ease, and will struggle and fight to get it.

Sadly, this commercialization of life seeps into ministry too. We tell people that they need to have the most hi-tech gadgets to do church right. We sell our products, our events, as if they alone will change our congregations' lives. We tell people that God's people should

sacrifice, but see pastors driving around in BMWs taking a huge salary.

Paul was a BiVo minister at times in his career. He made a point of seeking to be happy by knowing how to "be brought low, and [knowing] how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

BiVo ministry helps us learn contentment. The work of God is no

longer about making ends meet. You can do what God called you to do, whether or not you get paid for it. You don't have to worry about offending big givers. You can send more resources back into the mission field, both local and global. Giving, as we speak of it from the pulpit, becomes less about "We need it" and more about "It's the grace of God that allows us to give". Less about hero worship, more about Jesus worship.

Are You In "Doing" Ministry or "Being" Ministry?

If you are a preacher, there's no doubt that, at one time or another, you've said this:

"Being is more important than doing."

It's easy to do this when you are a non-clergy; it's near impossible to do or to model as a paid staff.

When you are paid to do a role, even for something you love, things generally change. We tend to settle in far too easily. Just tonight, I was on a Facebook page for ministers (not saying where). The question

came about personal conversations with a non-believer about

Jesus. The overwhelming majority framed it the same: "I don't have much now that I'm in full-time ministry." We, far too easily, get used to the posh office, the schedule of church people, the "paperwork", the "busyness".

Then people look at us differently. We tend to swing to two extremes. One side thinks they own the pastor. He is there to respond to every phone call, email, Facebook message or tweet, go to every party,

graduation, doctor's appointment, have dinner with every family, every week, preach exactly what they want to hear, and SO HELP ME if you do anything differently. Rather than rely on the people of God to be the people of God, we demand that one person, who our tithes pay for, do it all.

The other side sees it as the pastor's role, since he/she is paid for it, and are disillusioned when he/she doesn't do it. Throw in all of the things above, minus the angry people. This time, the pastor has an opportunity to empower the people

of God but is held captive by expectation. Maybe it was bad DNA that came in, or maybe it was an unhealthy attitude that was held under the former regime. If this-or-that person is not seen in the hospital by the paid pastor, they feel they have been slighted. If you miss a party to be with your family, then you have disgraced them. Then, they leave the church.

Sadly, we often seek to keep both of these kinds of people because they are tithers, and we rely on their income. These are generalities, but I know you have felt it. I've felt it.

This is "doing" ministry: You have a role to fill that's written on your job description, whether you like it or not. "Being" ministry is different: You have a role that you have been called to, and there is no other driving, external motivation.

Which, is liberating. Your job description is still there, but you are not relying on the discharge of your duties to pay the bills. You are free to preach and to serve and to send, knowing that people will leave and you will not feel the financial pinch personally (trust me, I know it still hurts like crazy).

In fact, now you can "be" a Christian in public. Your people get to SEE what a Christian looks like, especially the one that always talks about it from the pulpit. There's something powerful about that.

You also get the benefit of showing what "being" a Christian in the workforce is all about. Rather than merely serving the people in a building, you model the "sentness" of Christ. You model what it means to be smack dab in the middle of what Jesus is doing in the harvest.

Neil Cole describes it this way in

his book, "Journeys To Significance". On Paul's first journey, he found made new disciples and gathered them together. He built some weak churches, and needed to visit frequently to help them on to maturity. His second journey started with a larger team of leaders that he left in locations to continue to shepherd and build the church.

The third journey was significantly different. After the leaders were left in their location, Paul was left alone. Paul got a job as a tentmaker with Aquilla and Priscilla. His mornings

and evenings were spent meeting people, creating tents, and discipling them two. His afternoons were spent finding new disciples, teaching them to obey Jesus, and sending them back to their homelands to do the same.

Though there were important results on the first two journeys, it was near the end of this journey that we see "all of the residents of Asia heard the Word of The Lord" (Acts 19:10).

Imagine showing people what a missionary looks like in the workplace. No longer just telling people what to do ("doing"

ministry), but providing an example and real life experience and results.

So, does our doing justify our being today? Or does our being justify our doing?

Are You The Top Or The Bottom?

Part of the "doing" versus "being" is shown in how ministry is perceived. Is the "pastor" of the church the one in charge or the servant and empowerer of the people?

If I wanted to grow an orchard, I typically wouldn't climb a tree and

yell at it to grow. A tree with roots and adequate rain and sunlight will grow without me doing a thing (read Mark 4:26-29).

If I want to grow an orchard, I get on the ground. I make an atmosphere of growth. I plant lots of seed, and cultivate the soil. I guard against animals that may ruin it, and prune the trees appropriately.

When ministry begins from the top and aims down to the people, we find that we create followers of us. People may know what we will tell them to do, but will only do what is

modeled to them.

When ministry begins from the bottom and serves and empowers people to be who God calls them to be, then we create leaders who do the same. They've seen how it's done, so they know how the training goes. The people don't seek their own good because they've seen what it is to serve. They don't seek to get paid for doing what God has called and gifted them to do in their lives.

How Are You Modeling Mission?

Kids do what they see their parents

doing. I learned this when my daughter learned to spit, and I learned to stop (spitting in front of her, that is).

My tiny tempest of a toddler doesn't hang around many other grown men, a few here and there during churches that we visit. I just happen to be clogged up, and needed to clear my sinuses (pleasant, I know). A few times out the car window, and I started hearing "ppft, ppft" from the back of the seat. I turn my head to find my daughter with a spit string hanging out her mouth. Since then, we've had a number of discussions

around how ladies don't spit. We've curtailed it, but she still has her moments.

I couldn't blame it on anyone else. She was reflecting me, for better or worse.

Since I became a staff member at a church, I never understood why people weren't becoming Christians. I couldn't understand why more invitations to our church were coming from our website than our people. Even the students I was leading were just floating along.

Then God started giving me new people in my life to share the Gospel with. Things ranging from the mundane (a conversation about radio) to the extreme (getting attacked by a man with a sword). I was able to show people what mission looked like, from someone who was actively making it a part of their everyday.

Churches do what they see their pastors doing. I learned this when my students learned to bring Jesus to their friends. We saw an increase in our numbers, not because we were doing anything different, but because

people were passionate about reaching people for Jesus. We had students reaching friends in their living rooms, creating and leading new mission events.

They reflect us, for better or worse. What are they reflecting today?

Why Do People Think You Do What You Do?

1 Corinthians 9 is incredibly convicting for me.

Paul takes an extended length of text to PROVE that he is called. Verse 3

lays it out: "This is my defense to those who would examine me."

There were quite a few people walking around saying, "I'm an apostle! I'm an apostle!" for all the wrong reasons (see Philippians 1:15ff). Some wanted a ton of cash, some wanted to be like Paul for all the wrong reasons, some (apparently) just wanted to make trouble for the church.

Paul had a lot to prove.

Then Paul lays out a detailed description why he doesn't use this right. He is removing barriers to the

Gospel (v12), boasting in the Lord (v15), his stewardship of the Gospel (v16-17), his own reward (v18).

He then makes his calling clear. "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (v22). And why does he do it? For the money? For the attention? "I do it all for the sake of the Gospel" (v23). He calls it the greatest win too, a greater reward than the pros get after the Super Bowl.

I know why you do what you do. You love Jesus, and He changed you to the basement of your soul. You

love people enough to give your life for them. As a fellow leader, I can see that. You don't do it for the attention or to make a point. You don't do it for the cash, whether much or little.

But, if you had to prove it, what evidence would people see?

BiVo and the Priesthood of All Believers

*How we view the follower of Christ
can make all the difference in how
we go about doing church.*

~ Neil Cole

I'm sitting at the Aramingo Diner in the beautiful Port Richmond section of Philadelphia, waiting for a friend to drive through the first real snow of the year. This friend of mine is crazy/man enough to brave the ice and the snow so we can hang out and

talk and pray.

He is not your typical "pastor". He has no formal training. He has never been to Bible college. He fixes fire trucks for a living. But he has a heart for God and a heart for people, a learner and a burner. He loves students and equips them to love Jesus with everyone they got (see Ephesians 4).

Before he got involved with our student ministry, I used to believe I needed to do everything. Even with my limited skill set, I would do it all at every chance I could get. Some of

this was pride, but much of it was guilt: I was the one who was paid, and I had a lot of schedule to fill with activity to make my salary worth paying.

Our talk and our walk about "the priesthood of all believers" are usually much different things. We tell everyone that everyone has their part, but then often take much of the work of the ministry on ourselves. Much of the time this sends the message to our congregation: "We get paid, so we'll take care of it."

This is an Old Testament Model.

One particular sect of people could minister and everyone needed to come to them for anything. If you wanted to meet with God, you went to the priest. If you want to make a sacrifice, you went to meet with the priest; he made the sacrifice you brought, and you passively accepted his (no "her" involved) work.

Jesus fulfilled this. When He died, the veil of the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies (the presence of God), the place only the High Priest could go once a year, was ripped in two (Mark 15:33-39). Anyone could walk in, and (as some would see it)

the presence of God could "get out". All of a sudden the high priest wasn't the only one in the presence of God. The temple servant, the beggar outside the temple gates, the family living far away.

Not only that, but all peoples were equal. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is the promise for everyone (Acts 2:38-39). Paul tells us that people would receive gifts from the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:4-9) and use them as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12-14). Paul tells us that peoples are on the same level (Colossians 3:11). Jesus tells us that

the greatest in the Kingdom is the servant of all (Matthew 23:11), not the most up-front person.

BiVo tells a different story. BiVo tells our people that everyone has their part because no one person can do it all. Rather than one person doing the work of the ministry, you get to EQUIP others to do the work of the ministry. BiVo tells people that the Church struggles if everyone is not involved, just like a body where a thumb is not working.

The Brotherhood of All Believers

Think about it: We generally have elevated platforms for speaking on. We encourage the "cream of the crop" to take work beyond even their capacity while most sit passive on a Sunday morning. We even have Pastor Appreciation Month (for which I have gladly accepted peoples' gracious gifts).

Imagine a body that worked like that. The brain worked hard all week. The mouth spoke for one hour a week while the arm watched over all the fingers and toes, and helped clean up the other parts. The stomach and liver sat and listened to the

mouth, but they are a little "burnt out" and couldn't do their load this week. The foot says they want to do what the foot does for the body, but the mouth and 1 index finger point out that it hasn't matured yet.

If this is your body, you are struggling.

BiVo levels the playing field. When a pastor or leader says, "I'm dropping my pay, and you need to step up", it calls on the people to become the body of God. Every person has an important part, a part no longer played by one paid person.

It is vital to the body, and it cannot be delegated away by paying someone.

Every person is a co-laborer with Christ, a mindset that CAN and MUST be rebuilt in our church today.

It reminds me of a woman Betty (not real name) at a church we visit from time to time. She has developmental disabilities and has struggled with mental illness. When she arrived at the church, she was a mess and few gave her hope. She wasn't attractive to most, wore frumpy clothing, and

was loud...constantly loud.

A couple in the church took her under their wing. They disciplined her and saw God grow her. She fell in love with Jesus, and the couple encouraged her to use the gifts God had given.

Today, she is a full-time hospital chaplain. She serves her church body with fervor completely unmatched. If the church is blessing lost people, she's there with the loudest voice.

All because someone (a BiVo

minister with no formal training) told her she could if God said.

The Class Separation Of All Believers

I remember visiting one of our former high school students at their job. He was working as a tree cutter's assistant, so there was an element of danger involved every day. His boss belayed down the 70' tree to meet his "youth pastor".

The first words he said, through alcohol-scented breath, were, "Where's you collar?" I told him all

my collars were at the cleaners. He wasn't used to seeing a "pastor" in baggy jeans and a t-shirt.

Pastors are held to a higher class. When someone introduces you as a pastor, you get that grandmother coo: "Oh, isn't that precious!" Then you move immediately to church questions or strange impromptu counseling.

Because everyone automatically assumes a "pastor" or clergyman is a higher class of people. And part of this comes from the pay.

We preach this royal priesthood, but only some of us get paid to be Christians. We tell people that we are all the same and have the Spirit in us, but our message is clouded by our practice.

BiVo again levels the playing field. Take out the dollars and people begin to see you are the same. But, if the Bible says that we are a "royal priesthood" and we all have the Holy Spirit in us, then why treat any one person as lower than another? Why exalt one person over another?

Salary blurs lines of the royal

priesthood. Shed the dollar signs and watch the line disappear.

The Fivefold Ministry Gifts to the Church

When I've spoken to some about bivocational ministry, I've heard specifically, "I am called to VOCATIONAL ministry. That's what Jesus has gifted me to do. You've read Ephesians 4, right? These are the people that God has put in charge of the church."

To answer the question, yes. I've read Ephesians 4. I've read it a

number of times. And there are a lot of discrepancies that concern me between what I've read and what others have described.

Let's read it together:

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to

your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all

things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into

him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:1-16, emphasis mine)

Most of the time we speak of these verses, we focus on the highlighted portion above. We understand that God has given some individuals gifts to specifically equip the church for maturity. However, to we need the whole picture to see the whole picture.

Paul was writing this from prison after the Gospel penetrating Ephesus and all of Asia. He had tried multiple methods of ministry at this time, and had finished the work by empowering others to ministry. He had taken the offering to Jerusalem and was taken prisoner by those he had formerly called “brother”.

After laying out a beautiful picture of the Gospel in chapters 1-3, Paul changes course and begins to talk about the mature Christian life.

The primary picture Paul gives is unity. You recognize a group of

people are changed by the Gospel by their unified love for God and for each other. This is not uniformity, as to say that everyone becomes automatons. It is “bearing with one another” (4:2), and recognizing the call to “one”: “One another” (v2), “one body” (v4), “one Spirit” (v4), “one hope” (v4), “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (v5-6).

But unity comes in diversity, and diversity comes with the gifts of God’s grace in verse 7-10. These gifts exist in the body to bring about unity for the glory of God. God gives

through Jesus different gifts to bring about the unity of the body of Christ and to equip saints toward maturity in the faith.

Paul lists some of the gifts in Ephesians 4:11: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Though it is not an exhaustive list of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament, it is a list of gifts listed with a very specific purpose in mind. These gifts are here to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son

of God” (4:11).

The funny thing about gifts in general is that gifts are there to serve. Gifts serve the Giver by blessing the gifted. Gifts serve the gifted by honoring the Giver.

Same goes for the gifts given in Ephesians 4. Apostles, prophets, and the crew are given to the Church to serve the Church, to help bring about the unity of all the Church for the glory of God. It transcends local church bodies and denominations to serve believers, both local and global.

The power of these gifts lies in how they empower the people of God to do the work of God. Nowhere in these verses do we see that any of these are professional Christians; rather, we see a group of people sent to a “sent” people to train, energize and enable them to be who God has created them to be.

So, when you take an honest look at Scripture, and this passage in particular, there are a bunch of questions you have to wrestle with.

Where does it say these people get paid?

How can we justify a professional ministry grade of people when Jesus gives grace and gifts to all?

What rights do we have to demand to be taken care of when we are sent to serve?

And, most of all, what are you going to do about it?

A Plea

There are some movies that most people ignore that simply mess me up. *Accepted* is one of those movies.

Bartleby Gaines has been rejected from college, and ends up trying to fake a college experience so as not to disappoint his parents. He and his friends accidentally offer this college to over 300 students who had been rejected from every other university and college. They create an experience unlike other schools, where students serve as faculty and create their own learning

experiences.

Toward the end, the dean from the rival community college challenges their education model and school accreditation. In front of the state board of education, Bartleby pleads the case for something different. The dean from the rival school challenges him, saying, “Your curriculum is a joke, and you, sir, are a criminal!”

Bartleby replies: “You know what? You're a criminal. 'Cause you rob these kids of their creativity and their passion. That's the real crime!”

Our current system is unsustainable and somewhat irresponsible. We've relied too heavily on those who are formerly trained, whether they are passionate about Jesus and His Kingdom or not. We've built religious systems that keep people in the pews rather than unleashing them on the world. We've sustained tradition, whether it is effective or ineffective, or worse.

My humble plea is this: Pray. Hear from God and His Word. Consider following the Lord of the Harvest into the harvest by leaving your fulltime position and finding non-

church oriented employment. Seek to serve your people and the Kingdom by saving resources and setting an example.

Because, in faith, you will receive a reward beyond imagination. Faith increases as you trust God to do what He says in His Word. You join those who step out, believing God, and become those of who the world is not worthy (Hebrews 11:38).

My hope and prayer is simply that Jesus will send workers into the harvest (Luke 10:2). And that, as His word sits in your souls, you will be

the answer to that prayer.