

On the use of big titles

People already make us bigger than life because of what we do and how well they perceive we know God. We have all heard, "After all, you are closer to God than the rest of us." Or. "I know you never faced this temptation." Oh, right. So when our Reverend Dr. Pastor John Smith elevates us even more in their sight, can that be good? You decide. You know what I think.

We want to be friends with all of our people. I don't mean we go out to eat with one after another, but that I am Knute (choose your own name here) just like he is Ed (I made that one up). He or his teenager can approach us, or ask a favor, and not feel the need to bow or curtsy (if a female). And I hate when someone bows or curtsies in my presence.

Of course we earn respect not by titles or by position but by love and grace while respecting our Lord. I know a church where everyone speaks of "Bill," their pastor (actually his name is John) -- and always with deep respect for who he is and what he does. It is because they love and respect him, and the way they say his name shows that.

Okay, it is healthy for children to use Mr. or Miss or Pastor or Dr., but that is a separate issue.

And here is a call not to correct people when they call you Pastor Smith or Dr. Smith, unless of course that is not your name. I'm just sayin' -- when adults do ask me what to call me, and that is frequent for all of us, I am quick to say Knute. (Not Newt, I hasten to add.)

There is some great advantage to being respected when we preach or lead or have coffee, but it has nothing to do with titles.

When I first started pastoring way back, I put my full name at the bottom of our church stationery: Jon A Knute Larson, Pastor. Yo! Maybe at age 27 I thought it would make me look more like a senior pastor. But I soon became Knute.

There are many issues more important than names and titles for pastors of course --whether we show attention and love, practice the warnings against favoritism in James, love people we do not like, preach across to them rather than down. But I am using this as a symbol of the bigger issue.

Whatever we call ourselves, Jesus our Lord referred to us as shepherds who care for people instead of sheep. Loving care is behind all this. And He contrasted that with the very religious (in their eyes) who delighted in acclaim and applause and who are in the wrong vocation.

For sure we should urge our wives to call us by our first names.

Whatever I say here to warn me against pride and distance from people, should show no reflection on more formal church settings where titles and more formal ritual are important; and no application to cultures or academics where titles or degrees are more important.

Besides, as the referee said in one of the Cavs-Warriors finals games, "Who am I to make this call?"