

CHAPTER I

The Pastor and His Work

The Pastor as a Person

The call of a pastor is an awesome experience. When God lays His burden on the heart of a man, He intends to lead the church through that undershepherd. The fact that the call is awesome in its source and ultimate intention necessitates faithful and honest reflection on its meaning and cost. Such signal honor is not handed out carelessly by the Great Shepherd. He chooses whom He wills to do that which is His will.

The initial experience may come in great and dramatic circumstance:

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. . . . Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. (Isaiah 6: 1, 8)

On the other hand it may be in humble surroundings and not so eagerly heard. In the case of Jeremiah the call fell on reluctant ears and a reticent heart:

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou

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shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. (Jeremiah 1:6–7, 17)

In each case the tone of the call and response is different, but the purpose of God to use a man to rebuke, warn, and exhort His people is the same. Regardless of whether the call comes while one worships in the temple or looks at the new buds of an almond bush, the living out of that call comes where God encounters men through His servants.

The pastor lives where the action is. Only those who know nothing of his life would ever say that God's man lives in an ivory tower far removed from reality. In fact, he lives with people, working through the deepest forms of human need. No matter what a person's station in life, there are times when he hurts and needs a friend. To the side of the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the believer and the nonbeliever the pastor is called. When he arrives, he hears life as it really is.

The face that smiles before the public often weeps before the pastor. Marriage on the threshold of divorce, economic disaster, children in rebellion against parents, alcoholism, drug addiction, serious illness, or loss of loved ones—any of these or a score of other problems can strip away the needy person's mask of pride when the pastor arrives. When people hurt the pastor must be there, because there is no one else who can fill his place in their lives.

On one occasion this writer was the pastor of a strong city church that was attended by many who worked in executive positions. One of these men called for an appointment. This man, who guided the business pursuits of hundreds of other people, said he was in need of personal

help. As the pastor thought about the appointment, he wondered what he could contribute to such an influential church member. When the visit was over, however, the pastor had been reminded that regardless of a man's wealth or position, his spiritual needs are like those of all people. Money and position are not enough when a real friend is needed.

As he works with the people of God, the minister deals with matters both temporal and eternal in their nature. He must lead in planning the church budget, building new buildings, forming and operating adequate organizations, and guiding a staff; but he must do more. The pastor must lead those who are not Christians to a right relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and he must instruct others how to do the same thing. Not only is he to devise ways and means of making disciples, but he is also under divine mandate to disciple those who accept Christ. His is an irreplaceable role in the lives of many people. God has endowed each servant in unique ways to do certain things that another may not be able to do. The thought that a given person will respond to the witness of one pastor and perhaps to no other is both frightening and humbling.

The pastor has a place in the epochal events of human life. In a recent seminary survey, no student had any problem remembering the names of the ministers presiding at his baptism and wedding, and at the funerals for his loved ones. In these times of great importance the pastor is asked to play a vital part, and he is enshrined in the affections of those whose lives he helps.

The unique man and his call

God told Jeremiah that he had been set aside for the ministry before he was born (Jeremiah 1:5). The intention of the Lord is firm in His mind for each of us from the beginning of life to its end. This does not, of course,

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preclude choice on man's part, but determines that his refusal to do God's will will result in the waste of much native endowment.

To say that each person is special is not enough. In the divine economy there is only one of a kind. No two people are designed to be exactly alike, and no two can do the same job with equal facility. Since there is only one of a kind, the importance of the individual whom God has designed, endowed, and chosen for service can hardly be overemphasized.

In the realm of providence each man accumulates experience and knowledge that equip him for ministry. A pastor's background affects all that he is and all that he is able to do. A person is truly able to improve and grow, but his action is colored in many ways by his past. His geographical origin, the cultural level of his family, the economic factors of his life, his education, military experience, and a multitude of other influences make their contributions. All of this affects his personal attitude, decisions, ability to relate to people, preaching style, word choices, and the types of illustrations used in sermons and in conversation. In a word, he is a part of all that he has met; all of his encounters with life have made him the person he is.

Whether or not a pastor is able to communicate with people depends in part on their background and his own. One pastor was invited to speak to a group of ten-year-old Sunday school children on how to become a Christian. He chose to begin with Matthew 7:13-14 and then began talking about two possible roads that life can follow. Being from a strong rural background, the pastor spoke of the time for personal decision as the time when a young person reaches a "fork in the road" and must choose either God's way or the way to destruction. The message moved along well until he used the expression "fork in the road." One child with questions written all over his face timidly

raised his hand and asked why the fork was lying in the road in the first place. Not until he changed his analogy to a "street intersection" was the pastor able to communicate the proper message. His rural background had not provided the right word picture for urban children.

All ministers must be willing to grow and to adjust to times, places, and conditions where they serve. Each must look at himself and his people and make those adjustments necessary for effective communication and ministry.

The pastor and his family in light of his call

A strong and secure family base is essential for effective pastoral work. The pressures of working with others are too great for a man to endure over extended periods unless he has a refuge at the end of each day.

Extra care must be taken by the minister to be the kind of husband and father that he pictures as the ideal of the Scripture. This is no easy task. Wives and children do not understand all that goes on in the average working day of a pastor. Tensions from the church are too frequently imported into the home. If one is not careful at this point the children may see a loving, kind man at the church and a growling tyrant at home. A wife may see a smiling, affable type in the pulpit and a caustic critic at the table with the family. These differences will not be easily understood or accepted by those who see the pastor not as a professional man but as a husband and a father.

During the years that this writer has taught in the seminary, he has tried to caution young preachers about giving adequate attention and love to their families. In the anxiety to get through with school and move out to a church, the students sometimes forget that there is a constant and ongoing responsibility to those whom they love. A man must take the time and care necessary to help his wife de-

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velop with him as he grows in the Lord's work. It would not be fair for her to work all day in a secular job to enable him to go to school and then be criticized for not knowing much about the Bible or the work of the church. The task is not simple, but the pastor and his wife must devise ways for the two of them to grow together. The wife must feel included in her husband's life if she is to avoid developing feelings of resentment toward him and his work.

The preacher must always remember that regardless of how successful he may appear to the outside world, if he is not loved and respected by those in his home, who know him for what he really is, he is a failure. No man can afford to fail at this point. The cost of failure is too severe, and the incentive for success is too great. The man of God must be Christlike wherever he finds himself, and especially when he finds himself at home.

The assurance that comes with the call

The minister may be set apart, uniquely endowed, and heartily supported by his family and yet have times of doubt and discouragement. For a minister to endure with all that is involved there must be within his soul a bedrock assurance that this whole business is from God. Without such a sense of certainty there are too many reasons and opportunities to quit.

Those who believe the ministry to be easy have never served as pastors. The very nature of the position calls upon the shepherd to bear burdens that are not his own. The average man may see a church member on the street and think of him only as a friend and neighbor. The pastor sees the same person and is immediately conscious of a whole set of problems or heartaches known only to the two of them.

A deacon once light-heartedly greeted his pastor, "Preacher, tell me what you know." The pastor responded

in similar tone but with weighted words, "Deacon, if I told you what I know we would both have to leave town." That pastor was keenly aware of burdens that could not be shared with anyone. Without the abiding assurance that this is all in the hands of Him who has placed the pastor in the ministry, the weight of other people's problems can become oppressive.

Because a man is called of God does not always mean that he is accepted by all people. The pastor lives with the hostilities of others. Some people are difficult by nature, some are hostile because of temporary problems, and others are difficult because of unseen and perhaps unknown factors. One wise denominational leader says he tries to be patient when people are not very kind to him. "There is always a reason," he says. "It may be nothing more than a rock in his shoe or it may be a cancer in his stomach, but there is always a reason."

When he senses the animosity of another, a wise pastor finds good counsel in the words of Paul: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4: 31-32).

When a pastor moves from one church to another, he continues to serve the same God, but he quickly learns that all of God's churches are not alike. Of course, there are many similarities, but there are also great differences. Each church has its own personality, and programs that work well in one place may not be suitable for the next. Some churches are almost self-operating while others need far more direction and supervision by the pastor. One congregation may expect and demand many hours spent in pastoral visitation of the sick, aged, and shut-in, and another congregation may have very few such needs.

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In one situation this writer found a great need and desire for a church-sponsored day care center for the children of working mothers. Such a work was begun and has enjoyed phenomenal success for almost twenty years. The need was there, resources were available, and a large reservoir of good staff people was in the area. Both the pastor and the church enjoyed operating the program. In his next church, however, that pastor investigated the need and found it minimal. Adequate facilities were not available, and the right kind of staff help was almost nonexistent in that community.

Each church must have its program tailored to minister effectively in its own area. While the pastor is learning by trial and error what will work in each situation, he needs the constant assurance that comes from knowing beyond a doubt that he is God's man in the place where God has sent him for that particular time.

The challenge of the pulpit demands the assurance of God's presence and power. No pastor can face such a responsibility alone and survive. How is one able to communicate with an audience that is diverse in background, education, culture, emotional temperament, vocational interests, age, sex, intellectual achievement, and spiritual development? Each person has a different set of needs, and each attends the worship service in hope of hearing something from God which will help with those needs. Apart from the genius of the Scripture and the ability of the Holy Spirit to inspire the preacher and the hearer, the equation of effective communication would be impossible.

Another need for the assurance that stems from the minister's call from God arises as he becomes aware of his position in society. Status seekers are not interested in the ministry. Most ministers recognize quickly that the place of the pastor in society is no longer as prestigious as it once was. In an earlier era a man was recognized in the commu-

nity if he was the local minister. That is no longer the case. Any influence the preacher has must be earned on each individual scene of service. Respect is no longer automatic; on the contrary, the mere fact that a man is a member of the clergy may make him the target of criticism or humor of an uncomplimentary nature. If an ego trip is one's goal, the ministry is not the path to follow.

The realization of financial wealth is seldom found in the ministry. Most churches have made great strides of progress in recent years in upgrading salaries and benefits, but much remains to be done in this area for decades to come. In some places the resources or the will to provide for the minister's financial needs are lacking. Some men are forced to subsist at almost poverty level, and others have found it necessary to go bivocational in order to live. Even when a church makes every effort to pay a pastor adequately, he still finds it difficult to live and educate his children in the present days of spiraling inflation. Those who continue to serve under financial hardships must claim the promise of the Lord with a determined faith. His contract with His workers is found in Matthew 6:33: ". . . seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Under the provisions of this contract the man of God must strongly believe until he receives. Then with God's help he goes on.

The pastor and his theology

The servant of God must be very sure of his personal beliefs about God. Without a firm conviction of God's presence and power in his life the preacher will not dare to attempt more than a man can do in his own strength. Unless he is sure that the Bible is God's inspired word he may soon yield to the pressures and fads of the times and begin to preach "thus saith my opinion" rather than "thus saith

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the Lord.” Only when he has experienced the living, victorious Christ can he share the faith that proclaims the living Savior who gives victory to all. If the conviction burns in his soul that sin is real and ruinous, he will be concerned for sinners. Evangelism will cease to be a burden and become a joy as the man of God develops a compassion like that of his Savior. The nurture of believers will not be an irksome chore if the pastor enjoys seeing growth in people who aspire to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The theology of the pastor on the nature and mission of the church must be biblical if he is to be its leader. There are many good organizations—some with religious missions—but the church is the only institution established by Christ, and it is the only organism through which He has obligated Himself to work. The church is the body of Christ, and in it Christians are to function as integral parts.

When one clarifies and solidifies his personal theology, he must then seek divine strength to remain steadfast on scriptural teachings. The pendulum of popular opinion and faddism will swing back and forth across the position of the stable leader many times. This author has seen it happen a number of times. There have been periods when the social gospel advocates were in the ascendancy and looked upon his position as being extremely right wing. When the pendulum moved in the direction of the emotional, charismatic persuasion, he was regarded as something of a moderate or liberal. His stance actually did not change at all. Basic biblical theology was followed, and an honest effort to emulate the spirit of Christ was made.

When one believes something very strongly he may not always be popular, but he can always be consistent. A world that is already head dizzy and soul weary is not attracted to a vacillating ministry.

The pastor's philosophy of ministry

The ministry of a pastor is a ministry of love. No man can perform this ministry without a shepherd's heart as a gift from God.

And He gave some . . . as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12 NASV)

Jesus pointed out that the disposition of a true shepherd is to lay down his life for his sheep. The "laying down of life" can occur in more than one way. There have been pastors who have become martyrs and heroes of the faith by sacrificing their own lives in the work of Christ. There have been far more who have given up life day by grueling day in selfless service. When a man has been given the heart of a true shepherd, he is there for the best interest of the flock regardless of personal cost. If one's life purpose is service to others, then he will not mind being needed.

The pastor's preparation

Before one can give he must first receive. A pastor is constantly asked to give of himself, his knowledge, his strength, and his experience. The drain is always there. Others come to him in private and in public seeking the word that he brings from God.

All that the minister has to offer stems from his own experience with God and His written and Incarnate Word. The preacher has no tangible goods for sale. Those who come to him can never carry away what he offers in shopping carts. The only vessel for transporting his wares is the human heart. For this reason, his faith must not be merely that of intellectual assent but must be a burning, heartfelt conviction.

The pastor must give evidence of three experiences in

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his own life: a genuine experience of *regeneration*, a continuing experience of *sanctification*, and an anticipated *glorification*. These are basic to all that he professes and teaches. With the foundations in order, he faces a daily discipline of preparation as he leads the people. They will hear his voice and follow him who loves Christ supremely, loves the Book devotedly, loves the people sincerely, and loves the church and its ministry sacrificially. Only the pastor who so loves will be willing to keep on laying down his life for the sheep. Without repeated preparation “in the secret place with God” such love will wane and grow cold.

The Work to Be Done

The singular role of the pastor

The importance of the pastoral office is emphasized in Scripture. In both catalogues of ministries given by Paul in Romans 12:6–8 and in Ephesians 4:11–12 the function of the pastor is mentioned. The overarching purpose of ministry is spelled out in Ephesians 4:12–13:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we [the church] all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The word *pastor* is one which indicates leadership of a group in similar fashion to the shepherd’s leadership of his flock. The pastor is to be closely and constantly identified with the local church family.

The office may be perverted or exalted. The sacred role of the pastor may be perverted by those who are insensitive and pleasure loving (Isaiah 56:10–12), negligent and divisive (Jeremiah 23:2), filled with error (Jeremiah 50:6), selfish (Ezekiel 34:2–3), and unloving (John 10:12). The servant role of the minister is exalted and made

effective by those who prove themselves wise and gentle (Matthew 10:16), given to selfless service (Matthew 20:26), diligent in work (2 Corinthians 4:1–2; 6:1–10), spiritually qualified (1 Timothy 3:1–7), and adequately equipped for the work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The gifts of God for functional ministry look to one purpose, and that is the building up of the body of Christ. The office of ministry is not designed to honor a man, but to provide responsible leadership in preparing all the people of God for service to others.

The duties of the pastor are varied but most can be grouped under three general headings. In the first place, the pastor must oversee and feed the flock of God:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Secondly, he has the responsibility of guarding and instructing the people:

I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night; ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence. (Isaiah 62:6)

Thirdly, the pastor must be a teacher of the Word by precept and example:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. (Matthew 28:20)

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2)

One needs to do no more than give casual attention to these and other portions of scripture to note some rather comprehensive words. Terms such as *flock*, *Holy Spirit*, *overseers*, *feed*, *watchmen*, *teaching*, and *blameless* carry with them great depth and breadth of meaning.

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The varied needs to be met

The longer a pastor lives with a given church the more he understands the varied needs of the people. As he ministers to them over a period of time he becomes many things to many people. During the writing of this book the author was preaching in a series of revival services in a church he had served in as pastor twenty years before. It was interesting to hear how they remembered him. Some commented on the preaching ministry; others remembered a mission which was established and has now become a growing church; one couple thought back to the time when their small child was critically ill and the pastor's car became an ambulance. The warmth of such memories serves as a fresh reminder of the multiple functions of a pastor.

While the man of God may be many things to different people, he cannot be all things to all people at all times. He must exercise personal discipline and decide what he wants most to be. If he is to be a strong preacher there is a price of isolation and study that must be paid. Early in his ministry he must establish some priorities and ration his time and energies accordingly. A preacher with no sense of direction in his own life cannot effectively lead others.

The privilege of burdens

The man of God frequently walks a lonely path in the midst of masses. There may be people who seek his counsel, listen to his preaching, learn from his instructions, and follow his administrative leadership, but there are few who really understand the nature, burdens, and complexity of his task. There are things known to him that can be shared with no one but God. The cares of others are never completely out of his mind. The fact that God has chosen him

as one through whom He loves and ministers is a high honor and an awesome responsibility.

Another load that he carries originates in the nature of his message. His is a word that is frequently out of step with the times and contrary to human desires. The preacher is human. He would like to be popular, but that is not always possible. The fact that self-preservation is the first law of the human race must be challenged by what he has to say. Self-renunciation is one of the basic laws of the kingdom of God. The burden of preaching the latter when the former is more popular leaves the man of God in a unique and sometimes lonely position. He is strengthened, however, in the knowledge that he never stands completely alone. There is for every such time of estrangement that eternal reassurance: “. . . I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”