

Equipped *for* Good Work

“That the man of God may be adequate, equipped
for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:17)

Also by Joe H. Cothen

Come to Bethlehem: The Christmas Story, Pelican (1975)

The Preacher's Notebook on Isaiah, Pelican (1983)

The Pulpit Is Waiting: A Guide for Pastoral Preaching, Pelican (1998)

Also by Jerry N. Barlow

*Studying and Serving with Success: Integrating Academics
and Ministry, a Workbook*, Pelican (1999)

Equipped *for* Good Work

A Guide for Pastors, Third Edition

*By Joe H. Cothen
Edited by Jerry N. Barlow*



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*To Hazel,
whose love never fails;
who always understands
and constantly sustains.*

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Preface

“The pastor is the key.” These words or expressions very similar come across the pastor’s desk hundreds of times. They may appear in correspondence, bulk mail, or periodicals, but the message is always the same: the man of God in the local church is told that he is the person who can get things done.

When such challenges or flatteries—interpret them as you will—move into his consideration, the minister must be honest with himself, his church, and the cause at hand. No man can meet all of the expectations of other people. If one is to lead in an effective pastoral ministry, he must recognize who he is, what the priorities should be, and where the “handles” are in getting the job done in the right way.

This is no easy or simple assignment. Many qualities must be resident in the pastor if he is to minister consistently and effectively. These gifts are to be discovered and developed in the lives of God’s undershepherds, and when this has happened they will be recognized and appreciated by churches. Most congregations realize, however, that no

single preacher can be strong in every area. Such an understanding is easier to find in the church when diligence is evident in the pastor.

The fact that problems often arise between pastors and congregations has been documented throughout Christian history. The debris of heartbreak and disillusionment lines the roads of church development. The stories of hurt and discouragement are too numerous to tell. Churches seem to survive and recover to work another day, but the minister does not always fare so well. Some have died discouraged and sick at heart, while others have left the ministry to languish in the limbo of unfulfilled dreams.

No one has a final answer to this problem, but some help along the way is available. The purpose of this work is to provide insight, encouragement, and practical suggestions for those who are beginning their ministries and for those who continue in spite of the problems encountered. Somewhere between Elijah's juniper tree (1 Kings 19:4–8) and Simon Peter's proposed three tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8) can be found the realm of constructive, daily work in ministry. For every prophet there is an occasional juniper tree and cave of loneliness, but he must never fail to hear the "voice" that urges him on after the stormy winds of pressure, the shattering earthquakes of crises, and the testing fires of adversity have run their courses. In the midst of every problem and doubt, there is God.

The false impression that the ministry is a constant, spiritual mountaintop experience is even more dangerous than the time of discouragement. One must be reminded that while our Lord blessed His closest followers in allowing them to go with Him to the mountain, He did not al-

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low them to remain long enough to establish squatter's rights. Life is not to be lived always on the peaks or in the deep valleys. Both are to be experienced periodically, but between them are to be found the hills and plains of daily work in the master's vineyard.

There is an old cliché that reminds us: "The test of a man's spirituality is not in how high he can jump but in how straight he can walk when he hits the ground." The purpose of this book is to help the pastor find his footing and direction in a path that leads to purposeful, constructive ministry. A right understanding of himself—his weaknesses, strengths, and opportunities—is prerequisite to successful service. The responsibility of each day must be faced in the light of what God will be able to do through the ministry of a truthful and committed man.

This writer makes no claim to have discovered anything that is exclusively his own. The converging influences of growing up in a pastor's home, marrying a preacher's daughter, and pursuing thirty-three years of ministry together with many of God's elect have come to focus on these pages. The lives of many have made their contributions and are shared here in the hope that they, in His name, may continue to bless.

The Baptist background of these sources and influences will unapologetically come through. A great group of people has made its investment, and it will always be deeply appreciated. Such an investment can never be repaid, but if a token of gratitude to those who have meant so much can be of help to others, it is here offered with a grateful and hopeful heart.

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