

HELP

for the

NEW PASTOR

*Practical Advice for Your
First Year of Ministry*

CHARLES MALCOLM WINGARD

Foreword by R. Kent Hughes

“In our increasingly unchurched culture, wonderfully committed pastors are entering church ministry without significant background in the daily life and practices of the local church. With warmth and maturity, reflecting his years of pastoring and training pastors, Charlie Wingard provides this helpful primer on how to go about the care of souls, the duties of a pastor, and the loving rigors of organizing and leading local church practices, services, and people.”

—**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois; President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary; Author, *Christ-Centered Preaching*

“Charlie Wingard was my pastor during my seminary years. I learned from him then, and I am still learning from him today. This book is simply excellent—extremely practical and exceedingly wise. The writing is clear, direct, and full of good sense, just as I would expect from Pastor Wingard.”

—**Kevin DeYoung**, Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, North Carolina; Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“Charlie Wingard is the consummate Reformed pastor. I watch with something akin to astonishment as I see him ministering (seemingly ubiquitously) to our students at Reformed Theological Seminary and to his flock at First Presbyterian Church. I cannot conceive of anyone from whom I would rather receive counsel on the practice of the Christian ministry. Needless to say, then, I am thrilled that he has written *Help for the New Pastor*. Even if you have been in the ministry for a long time, there are things to be learned and relearned here. I have. You will, too.”

—**Ligon Duncan**, Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Charlie Wingard is a pastor’s pastor. He understands the range of demands that insist upon his time and press upon his mind. He

knows the degree to which a pastor must continually be growing in emotional, spiritual, and theological intelligence. He understands that to be useful, the pastor must love people and must highly prize the church of God while at the same time developing his own life with God. All this could easily overwhelm us, but Charlie helps us to negotiate these competing pressures and to emerge with an even stronger conviction that to be a minister of the gospel is the highest and noblest of callings.”

—**Liam Goligher**, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia

“This book is a treasure chest of wisdom from an experienced pastor. Charlie’s love for ministers evidences itself in these pages as he provides practical and godly advice. It will save many young pastors from unnecessary error and heartache; maybe more importantly, it will save the congregations they serve from the same things. As I read *Help for the New Pastor*, I found myself thinking, ‘This is as close as one can get to sitting down with a friendly, older, wiser mentor and learning at his feet, without actually doing so in person.’ Take up and read, young pastors. You will find yourselves encouraged, stimulated, challenged, and equipped.”

—**Jason Helopoulos**, Associate Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan; Author, *The New Pastor’s Handbook: Help and Encouragement in the First Years of Ministry*

“When I was ordained in my first call, I had an experienced pastor as my mentor. As I watched him handle the range of ministry in the life of our congregation, I gained wisdom and insight that I’ve fallen back on time and again throughout my own ministerial life. For those who don’t have the opportunity that I had, Charlie Wingard’s new book does nearly the same thing. Page after page, the young pastor receives sage advice from a more experienced pastor-educator about the kinds of opportunities and challenges that happen in small to medium-sized churches. Not only will you

find help in these pages, but you'll find renewed confidence and zeal for your gospel call!"

—**Sean Michael Lucas**, Senior Pastor, Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis; Chancellor's Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

"A pastor's first few years in the ministry are a bit like buttoning the first button of your shirt: if you get it right, everything that follows is more likely to line up properly; but if you get it wrong, moving forward will be much more difficult. For that reason, I was glad to read *Help for the New Pastor*. It is evident from the very first chapter that Wingard has trodden the path that the young pastor wishes to tread, and he is clearly a reliable and faithful guide. The advice you will find in these pages is biblical, solid, practical, comprehensive, and specific. I look forward to incorporating it into our church's training program for young ministers."

—**Mike McKinley**, Senior Pastor, Sterling Park Baptist Church, Sterling, Virginia

"Many ministries fail or receive fatal blows in their first year of ministry. Often it's because of attempting too many things at once or failing to identify and do the basics of pastoral ministry. That's where this book will prove uniquely useful to new pastors. It cuts through the fog and confusion of the early days in a new church and lasers in on what simply must be done and how to do it well. It's just been added to the required reading list of my Ministry and Leadership class."

—**David Murray**, Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

"Nothing is more valuable to seminarians and young pastors than sage advice from one who has faithfully labored for decades in the vineyard of the Lord. In *Help for the New Pastor*, Charlie Wingard provides it. In this succinct and highly accessible little volume, he dispenses a flood of practical wisdom for ministry. If you are preparing

for the pastorate or just starting out, carefully read and apply this book. Your (future) congregation will be grateful.”

—**Jon D. Payne**, Minister, Christ Church Presbyterian (PCA),
Charleston, South Carolina

“As a young seminary student in the early 1990s, I was a member of the church in which Wingard pastored. I served as his secretary, taught Sunday school, and preached my very first sermon in that church. During those formative years, I watched him preach, teach, study, disciple, visit, evangelize, suffer for, and love an ever-growing congregation. The work was not flashy or fancy. There were no gimmicks or tricks. It was simple, solid, means-of-grace gospel work. If you are preparing for ministry, are in the early stages of your ministry, or need to rethink your priorities in ministry, this book will provide you with wise counsel for your own work. It is biblical, theological, and exceptionally practical. By the end of this book, you will likely count Wingard as your friend and partner in the great work of gospel ministry.”

—**Miles V. Van Pelt**, Alan Belcher Professor of Old Testament
and Biblical Languages, Academic Dean, Reformed Theological
Seminary, Jackson

“Fools learn from experience. I prefer to learn from the experience of others,’ Otto von Bismarck once said. From the wealth of his own experience, Charlie Wingard has provided a valuable resource for the church, an eminently practical volume for those beginning in ministry. Whether you are just starting out, have some wounds that need healing, or want to reminisce about what you now know that you wish you had known when you were younger, pick up this book. Or, even better, give it to a new pastor.”

—**Rankin Wilbourne**, Pastor, Pacific Crossroads Church, Los
Angeles; Author, *Union with Christ*

HELP
for the
NEW
PASTOR

*Practical Advice for Your
First Year of Ministry*

CHARLES MALCOLM WINGARD

R&R

P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2018 by Charles Malcolm Wingard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865–0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All quotations are from the 2011 text edition of the ESV.

ISBN: 978-1-62995-467-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-468-4 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-62995-469-1 (Mobi)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wingard, Charles Malcolm, author.

Title: Help for the new pastor : practical advice for your first year of ministry / Charles Malcolm Wingard.

Description: Phillipsburg : P&R Publishing, 2018. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017048565 | ISBN 9781629954677 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781629954684 (epub) | ISBN 9781629954691 (mobi)

Subjects: LCSH: Pastoral theology.

Classification: LCC BV4011.3 .W564 2018 | DDC 253--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017048565>

For Lynne, who fills my life and ministry
with joy, encouragement, and daily laughter.

Contents

Foreword by R. Kent Hughes	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. Understanding Your Call to Ministry	1
2. Preparing for Pulpit Ministry	13
3. Preparing and Delivering a Sermon	27
4. Practical Advice on Preaching	41
5. Leading Worship	51
6. The Sacraments	63
7. Church Administration	71
8. Growing through Conflict	85
9. Home Visitation	95
10. Practicing Hospitality	105
11. Counseling	113
12. Weddings	121
13. Hospital and Hospice Care	131
14. Funerals	141
15. Your Denominational Duties	155

16. The Character and Habits of Effective Ministers	163
17. Small Things That Yield Big Results	177
18. A Long and Fruitful Ministry	183
Appendix 1: Advice for Student Preachers	187
Appendix 2: Tips for Seeking a Pastoral Position	189
Readings in Preaching and Pastoral Theology	193
Notes	199
Index of Scripture	201
Index of Subjects and Names	203

Foreword

WHAT I WOULD have given, as a young pastor, to sit down with an esteemed, seasoned pastor and learn from him about the ministry. Well, this kind of help is exactly what *Help for the New Pastor* provides! And the pastor-mentor is Dr. Charles Wingard, a man with over three decades of hands-on pastoral experience, who has pastored churches both small and large and has seen it all—and now is Professor of Practical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

This book reads as if you are sitting in his study, coffee cup in hand, as he kindly answers your questions, as well as addressing some important issues that you had never dreamed of. Dr. Wingard's style is warm and genial, down-to-earth, and devoid of ecclesial pretense, though he draws not only from the Bible but from the deep wells of Reformed theology. In a nutshell, this book is unerringly wise, biblically informed, and pastoral, its common sense made crystal clear and utterly accessible.

Help for the New Pastor is laid out in eighteen concise chapters that address the day-in/day-out responsibilities of a pastor's life and advise on cultivating his interior life and disciplines. Again, the chapters are written with a smile—a serious smile. The chapters are, frankly, enjoyable to read. Though I myself have weathered many summers and winters in the ministry, this resource has provided me with many excellent thoughts for my “Pastoralia” files that will be used to enrich my students.

What a gift this book will be to those embarking on their holy call to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and “shepherd the

flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). What pitfalls I would have avoided, and what enrichments I would have experienced, if this book had been in my hands when I began my pastoral journey.

Young pastors, *tolle lege*. Parishioners, kindly put a copy in your pastor’s hand.

R. Kent Hughes

Senior Pastor Emeritus, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois

John Boyer Professor of Culture and Evangelism,

Westminster Theological Seminary

Preface

THIS BOOK BEGAN in 2011 in the mind of my wife, Lynne. She reminded me that I had served as a pastor for more than three decades and that I love working with seminary students. “So why,” she asked, “don’t you write a book about pastoral ministry?”

One good reason is that I’d rather do pastoral ministry than write about it. But she persisted, and this book is the fruit of her loving perseverance.

The book remained largely unwritten until 2014, when I began teaching pastoral theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. What follows is, for the most part, counsel I give my students. I am primarily interested not in where they will be five, ten, or even twenty years down the road (although that’s important), but in where they will be at the end of their critical first year—because this experience will give shape to what I pray will be a lifetime of joyful labors on behalf of Christ’s people. So getting future pastors ready for day one at their first church is the burden of my work.

What follows is some help on how to approach the first year of pastoral ministry. If young ministers find it helpful, then I will be most grateful to God and deeply satisfied.

Acknowledgments

MY FATHER, George Thomas Wingard Jr., taught me the fundamentals of pastoral care. More than anyone else, he prepared me for my first year of ministry. My uncle, John Calvin Wingard, has modeled faithful pastoral ministry during his long life, and even now, at age ninety-one, he continues to pastor and inspire.

I want to thank my congregations: Faith Presbyterian Church, Morganton, North Carolina; First Presbyterian Church North Shore, Ipswich, Massachusetts; Presbyterian Church of Cape Cod, West Barnstable, Massachusetts; Westminster Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama; and First Presbyterian Church, Yazoo City, Mississippi.

My elders encouraged me in the writing of this book, as they do in all my church and seminary labors. I am grateful to God for Bob Bailey, Billy Bridgforth, William Carroll, John Michael Pillow, and Jimmy Sullivan, a godly group of men who care deeply for God's church and for me.

Bill Barclay, Jack Davis, Ligon Duncan, T. David Gordon, Guy Richardson, David Strain, Miles Van Pelt, and Guy Waters provided much-needed feedback and encouragement.

My teaching assistant, Kyle Brent, and my personal assistant, Lindsey Austin, have worked hard for me (and with good cheer).

I am grateful to John Hughes for his consistently helpful feedback.

And Lynne, thank you for reading this over and over again. I love you!

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

—2 TIMOTHY 3:14–17

Introduction

I AM SO thankful that you are preparing for Christian ministry. When men are called and prepared to be pastors, it is a tangible sign that the Lord loves his church. He gives us shepherds.

I don't know your story, but I sensed the call to gospel ministry when I was fourteen years old. Even on my worst days, I don't want to do anything else. After accepting a call to Faith Presbyterian Church in Morganton, North Carolina, I was ordained on August 18, 1985. My ordination date is more important to me than my birthday, and each year Lynne celebrates with a card, a gift, and a spectacular dinner.

The work of a pastor is diverse: leading worship, preaching, teaching, evangelism, missions, home and hospital visitation, counseling, calling on potential members, training leaders, fund-raising, and leading building campaigns. I wouldn't want to do any one of those tasks exclusively, but taken as a whole, pastoral ministry is deeply satisfying and the variety of work is continually refreshing.

Some of my enthusiasm for ministry is due to the temperament the Lord gave me. Even in the most difficult times, when I face intractable problems, I am usually happy. Struggles with grief and disappointment are part of my story, but I have enjoyed the life and work that God has given me. At one critical time, I thought briefly about abandoning my calling, but good friends stuck with me and pulled me through.

I love my calling, in part, because of the way I was prepared for it. My father was a pastor, and he included me in his work. He taught me how to care for God's people. Before and

during seminary, I was assigned churches as a pastoral student. So when I began work in my first ordained position, there were no big surprises. I had experienced it all before: sermon preparation, visitation, counseling, living on a small salary, preparing a budget, working through cash shortfalls, attending session meetings, church conflict, and dealing with criticism and disaffected members. There were setbacks during my first year of ordained ministry—some of them heartbreaking—but I was expecting them.

Joys abounded there, too—far more than disappointments. The Lord gave me the most loving and caring first church. But I knew that “success” is transient and that no period of life or ministry is without difficulties. My evangelical heritage teaches me that where the kingdom advances, Satan unleashes his fury. But we don’t need to look to Satan as the source of our trials. They are the norm in a fallen world, and they come from the hand of our loving heavenly Father, who disciplines us for our good. If I had been expecting a parade of transformed lives, the universal praise of a congregation, and one spiritual victory after another, disappointment would have overwhelmed me. But I knew better—not just intellectually, but experientially.

Perhaps you have not been so fortunate. You sit down at your first session meeting, and you’re the moderator. No one has ever talked to you about a church budget. Seminary may have provided you with helpful homiletical instruction, but instead of preaching a handful of times a year, you now have forty-five to fifty sermons to prepare—and twice that number, if you have a Sunday-evening service. Your family struggles to live on your modest salary. One of your officers wants you to marry his daughter to an unbeliever, and your refusal will disrupt your relationship with the family and maybe divide the church. You’re staring across your desk at a couple whose marriage is shattered by adultery—an experience for which no

classroom can adequately prepare you. Buried under an avalanche of work that is new to you, you face circumstances to which you have had no time to adjust. Without the encouragement of your seminary friends and the counsel of professors at hand, you question your ministerial fitness. Add to this mix your wife and children, who have been uprooted from friends and maybe even family, and who now face their own set of trials. Frustration, turmoil, and doubt are inevitable.

Have you misunderstood the Lord's calling? Realistic preparation for ministry can go a long way toward allaying the doubt and fear that arise during your first year. I pray that my story and reflections will help and encourage you as you plan your pathway to the pastorate.

In 1980, I graduated from college and accepted a position as a student pastor at a tiny church (average attendance: ten). On my first trip there, I arrived just as an ambulance pulled into the driveway across the street. A man had just died of a heart attack at the dinner table. My introduction to his elderly parents, who were members of my new congregation, came as EMTs worked to revive their son, and they were looking to me for help. A short time later, I was counseling two families traumatized by domestic violence, and meeting a father who had just lost his teenage daughter in a tragic accident.

Even after many years, situations like these still send me to the Lord in tears. Because I had a mentor to call upon and had grown up in a pastor's home, I had some sense of what to do. Otherwise, I don't know what I would have done. And it's the *not* knowing that makes ministry frustrating—even miserable.

Your first year brings new relationships, many of them completely unlike any you've known before. Think about your present situation. You and your wife may be very popular. Until now, you have selected your friends carefully, are esteemed by them, and share similar outlooks. You have kept

your distance from others, not wanting to invest yourself. This approach ends with your first church.

You don't select the members of your church. For the first time in your life, apart from your family, you're forced to live close to people you did not choose. Moreover, criticism of your work, some of it severe, comes at a time when you're unsure of yourself and your abilities. As time goes on, you learn to live with your shortcomings, but just out of the starting gate, even moderate criticism can be crushing.

The purpose of this little book is to help you navigate your first year of ministry. It is not a theology of ministry. Many fine books on that are available, and I can't improve on them. In "Readings in Preaching and Pastoral Theology" at the end of this book, I list books on preaching and pastoral care that have been my friends for years; I commend them to you.

This is not a comprehensive book on how to shepherd God's flock. You'll find such works in "Readings in Preaching and Pastoral Theology," too. My focus is on a few critical, nuts-and-bolts issues that will give you a good start. I seek to be suggestive, not prescriptive—sharing what I have found useful.

We will focus on four areas: preaching, pastoral care, administration, and caring for yourself and your family. Conspicuous by their absence are traditional categories like Christian education, evangelism, and community outreach. My reasoning is simple: young pastors try to do too much. Overwhelmed with new responsibilities, they also try to begin new programs. That is a mistake. Instead, we will look at ways that you can incorporate Christian education, evangelism, and community outreach into the routine work of preaching and pastoral care. My goal is to encourage you to focus on a few things, learning both to love them and to do them well.

If you read this book before you graduate from seminary, I want to outline some strategies for maximizing your

ministerial preparation before ordination. If you're reading this during your early ministry, I want to suggest a way to prioritize your responsibilities. Not everything is critical to a good start. I want you to focus on the essentials.

Since my ordination, I have served five congregations. Two were near large seminaries, which gave me mentoring opportunities that have helped me identify and understand the skills that are needed by a young pastor, but that are often not obtained in seminary.

I have also worked for periods of time as a solo pastor—without staff or much in the way of financial resources. If this is where the Lord has placed you, then I understand if you're a bit intimidated or even frightened. I want to challenge you to take another look at your situation. Look clearly at its opportunities to lead and care for the flock, all the time trusting God for his provision. You occupy the single best training ground for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

As you prepare for your first year, I want you to love the work of the pastor as much as I do.

“Whenever a young man comes forward, and tells us that he is called to the ministry, let us examine him rigidly, according to our excellent discipline and the requisitions of God’s word. It is not enough that he tells us God has called him; let him show the evidences of his call.”

—**DANIEL A. PAYNE**¹

“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

—**2 TIMOTHY 2:22–26**

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

—**1 PETER 5:1–4**

1

Understanding Your Call to Ministry

OBJECTIVE: To consider carefully what it means for you to be called to gospel ministry.

BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'll touch first on the foundation—your call to ministry. Unless called by God, you must not enter the pastorate. Each sermon you preach, each act of pastoral care, and each prayer for your flock must be faithful to your calling.

Even if you are already ordained, I recommend that you read this chapter. Both veteran and new pastors need to consider the gravity of God's call. But when you are just beginning to sense that God is directing your steps toward pastoral ministry, careful thought about calling is especially critical. The cares of life and ministry can rob even the most devoted pastor of the urgency that once marked his ministry.

There's never a bad time to think about what it means to be called to ministry.

Since this book has the new pastor in mind, I'll begin with the critical question: "Am I called to pastoral ministry?" My aim is to make sure that you have thought carefully and prayerfully about the life and work of the pastor.

If you're uncertain, I want to help you discern whether

in fact you *are* called. To pursue pastoral ministry without a proper call will hurt you, your family, and the church of God—outcomes from which I want to protect you.

Consider the Office of the Minister

To understand your call to ministry, you must first think clearly about the office. What is the nature of the minister's office?

A good place to begin is with the scriptural titles given to ministers. Each one is a window into the soul of ministry.

As an *elder*, the minister serves as a father in the church, and his life is distinguished by maturity, wisdom, and godly character. As an *overseer*, he skillfully administers the affairs of the church. As a *steward of the mysteries of God*, he handles the Word and sacraments with reverent care. He is a *preacher*, a herald of the gospel, and an *ambassador*, earnestly pleading with sinners to be reconciled to God in Christ.¹

The minister is also a *shepherd* (pastor) and a *teacher*.²

As a shepherd, you will feed, guide, and protect God's church. Your responsibilities will not be discharged from a remote and secure location. Instead, you will place yourself alongside God's people—living in their community, bearing their burdens, sharing their joys and sorrows—all the while interceding before the throne of grace for their welfare. You will take your cues from the Lord himself, the mighty God who tends his flock like a shepherd and gathers the lambs in his arms.³

You will be present with them to instruct, pray, counsel, admonish, and encourage. During your ministry, you may

1. Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Cor. 4:1; Rom. 10:14–15; 2 Cor. 5:20.

2. Eph. 4:11.

3. Isa. 40:11.

learn to use letters, podcasts, blog posts, and emails, but there is no substitute for being physically present with your people.

A minister is a shepherd, but he is a specific kind of shepherd: a *teaching* shepherd. God gathers, saves, sanctifies, and sustains his flock by his Word. Whether in pulpits, homes, hospitals, or jails, you will always be teaching.

Consider the Trials of the Minister

The literal shepherding of sheep is rewarding but arduous work. So, too, is shepherding God's church.

I love my work. I never wish that I were doing anything else; more satisfying work is unimaginable to me. My desire is that you would enjoy the work of the minister as much as I do, but you won't unless you are firmly persuaded of your calling.

Here's why: you will face trials, hardships, and spiritual enemies that will tempt you to run away. There is no escaping adversity. Unless you are firmly persuaded that God has summoned you to pastoral ministry, you will falter, grow weary, become discouraged, and fail.

John the Baptist was not a Christian minister, but the last of the Old Testament prophets—men who were called by God to proclaim his infallible Word. One Gospel writer describes him: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6). Had John not been convinced that he was called and sent by God, he would have crumbled under the privations of the wilderness. Or, fearful of the consequences, he would not have preached repentance to adulterous Herod and Herodias. And had he somehow, through strength of will, persevered in speaking the truth to them, he would have later succumbed to despair in the torments of Herod's prison.

John's suffering was uncommonly intense, far more so than yours and mine will ever be. Nevertheless, the sufferings

that accompany your ministry will be real, and unless you are convinced that God has sent you to your congregation, your work will become unceasingly frustrating, leaving you bitter and burned out.

Consider the Internal and External Call of the Minister

God called John in an extraordinary manner, but he calls his new covenant ministers in a different way. How does God call his ministers?

Students of the Word have long observed that God's call is both internal and external. Internally, God is at work, renovating the life of the one he calls. Externally, the Lord is preparing the church to call and welcome his minister. The internal and external aspects of God's call are inseparable. Throughout the entire process of discernment, you want to examine your life and listen to your church.

Examine your life. Is there evidence of God's internal call? Look for:

- A clear understanding that you possess the scriptural qualifications of those set apart to minister God's Word;
- An awareness that the Holy Spirit has created within you a compulsion to perform the work of ministry; and
- The gifts and abilities necessary to fulfill your ministerial duties: an intellect capable of serious and sustained study, the ability to teach clearly, a love for God's people, and the conviction that gospel ministry must be your life's dominant work.

Listen to your church. What about the external call? As you examine your life, also listen to your church. Do the

elders concur that you are, in fact, called to ministry? Are they willing to recommend that your presbytery make you a candidate for the ministry? Do your seminary professors see the intellectual gifting and godly comportment of a minister? Are churches providing you opportunities to preach, teach, and exercise other ministerial responsibilities? Are they affirming the spiritual value of your work? After the time of testing is complete, is there a congregation ready to call you as pastor? Your calling is complete only when presbytery approves the congregation's call.

Consider the Character and Skills of the Minister

Now let's think about the character traits and skills you must possess. Timothy and Titus were young ministers sent to serve in Ephesus and Crete. In Paul's two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, he establishes the divinely approved pattern for the minister and his work.

Two specific lists of ministerial qualifications are found in these letters, in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. As you read these passages, keep in mind both the internal and the external aspects of your call:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit

and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Tim. 3:1–7)

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5–9)

Let’s examine these qualifications.

Conversion

The minister “must not be a recent convert.” But he must be a convert! An unconverted minister is worse than useless; he threatens the existence of a congregation. His prayerlessness and lack of concern for the things of God and for the spiritual welfare of the people of God are an abomination to the Lord.

Are you converted? Are you persuaded that you are lost and condemned, apart from the mercy of God in Jesus Christ? Have you forsaken all hope of salvation by your own merits? Are you trusting alone for salvation in the righteousness and blood of the Savior? Are you conscious, day by day, of your need for divine forgiveness and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit?

When you were admitted to the communicant membership of God's church, your church's elders examined you. They sought clear evidence of your faith and repentance. Now, at every step in the ordination process—from your first meeting with presbytery to the calling of a local congregation—you will be asked to supply a credible testimony of faith and repentance.

Aspiration

“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”⁴ Do you have an inward compulsion to shepherd God's church? Does ministry shape your heart? Can you echo Paul's testimony: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁵

Someone has said that a man should not be in ministry if he can do any other work. That doesn't mean that you are so wretchedly unskilled that you couldn't support yourself in another occupation. If that were true, we would be a sorry lot. What it *does* mean is that because God's calling has obligated you to ministry, you can never be content in a vocation that precludes gospel work.

When I am interviewing associates, I am always looking for men who love God and the work of ministry. The reason is simple: when God calls a man to gospel work, he creates within him a love for ministry. That passion is evident to the one who is called; it must also be evident to the church that calls him.

4. In the Presbyterian tradition, a distinction is made between ruling elders (those who rule in God's church) and teaching elders (those who rule and teach). The minister serves in the latter role. That distinction, while important, is not the burden of this chapter.

5. 1 Cor. 9:16.

Skilled Leadership

The minister “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” Of course, this requirement includes raising children in the fear and admonition of the Lord—but also much more. Many ancient homes included business operations, complex financial arrangements, and the supervision of personnel (household servants). If a man managed these affairs poorly, he would also be a poor manager of God’s church.

Every job you undertake, every course of study you pursue, and every child you raise reflects upon your fitness to lead. Throughout your preparations for ministry, you build a record. Are you meeting these challenges competently? Do your church and your presbytery recognize your competence?

It may be helpful to reflect upon one area of life that many ministerial candidates find especially challenging: supporting a family financially while in seminary. Navigating this stressful time and leaving seminary without enslaving debt is one indication that you can manage family and church well.

Keep in mind that the church that calls you has every right to expect you to have what the business world identifies as “marketable skills.” That is, you must be able to gather, nourish, and fortify God’s church, and raise money to meet a budget. Only a careless church would call a man without those skills.

Character

Your character counts. The minister must be “above reproach,” which means that no credible charge of false doctrine or scandalous behavior may be brought against him.

Therefore, as you read these passages, ask yourself: Do these virtues describe me? Am I sober-minded, self-controlled, and not arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, or greedy for gain? Am I hospitable and a lover of good? Although a sinner, am I, by the grace of God, upright, holy, and disciplined?

Space does not permit sustained reflection on these virtues. Therefore, take the time to consult solid commentaries on the letters to Timothy and Titus.⁶

Relationships

One aspect of character needs particular attention: strong and healthy relationships. “The husband of one wife” means that the minister’s uncompromising sexual fidelity to his wife is a given. Both adultery and the indulgence of pornographic material disqualify a man from ministry. No man engaged in either can expect God’s blessing.

The minister’s life is also marked by sobriety and self-control, both in his private and in his public life. Conflict is an inevitable part of life and ministry, and the minister must maintain his poise in controversy. He refuses to quarrel; he abhors angry words.

A minister’s relationships must be healthy, both inside and outside the church. A Christian minister is a public figure. He is known in his community. He will interact with people in its activities, shopping centers, schools, and athletic events. Many of those with whom he comes into contact will not be Christians. He must cultivate good relationships with them. He lives in such a way as to “be well thought of by outsiders.”

6. I recommend Patrick Fairbairn, *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), and George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

Before you read further, stop and reflect: inside and outside the church, are you known as a man of sexual integrity, gracious speech, and goodwill?

Teaching Competency

The minister must be “able to teach” and “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Throughout your time of preparation, you will be cultivating your teaching gifts. Do the congregations you teach (and the ministers and professors who hear you preach) affirm your gifts? One of the clearest indications that you have teaching gifts is the desire of people to hear you teach.

Conclusion

Don't expect a heavenly voice or vision to confirm your call to ministry. That is not how God summons his ministers.

Do expect a considerable amount of time to pass as you evaluate your life, cultivate your skills, and look to the church for confirmation of God's gifting of you for ministry.

Be patient with yourself. Study the Bible carefully. Receive the counsel of God's people. Keep yourself before the Lord in prayer, always seeking the gifts and graces you will need to serve his church and crucifying those sins that would mar your life and ministry.

“They that are called to labor in the ministry of the Word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.”

—**WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM 159**

“Dr. Wilbur Chapman has this to say of the handicaps which befall the minister: ‘When trials are many, when burdens are heavy, when tears are blinding, when the heart is almost broken, then, as a rule, ministers come to an experience when effective preaching is possible.’”

—**WILLIAM CHILDS ROBINSON²**

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

—**1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8**

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

—**2 TIMOTHY 2:15**