

DYING A THOUSAND DEATHS

Discovering Christ's life in the
challenges of pastoral ministry



JOE WYROSTEK

Dying a Thousand Deaths: Discovering Christ's life in the challenges of pastoral ministry.

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Dedicated to Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, and all
the shepherds who die a thousand deaths in ministry
but get back up and keep serving in Jesus's
resurrection power.

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Introduction: <i>The Called, the Few, the Chosen</i>	9
Chapter One: <i>Dying a Thousand Deaths</i>	15
Chapter Two: <i>Dying to Sin, Living in Holiness</i>	23
Chapter Three: <i>Dying to Self-Reliance, Living Dependent on the Holy Spirit</i>	31
Chapter Four: <i>Dying to Celebrity Culture, Living the Soul Winning Life</i>	41
Chapter Five: <i>Dying to Nice-ianity, Living the Discipleship Life</i>	51
Chapter Six: <i>Dying to Pragmatism, Living the Doctrinal Life</i>	61
Chapter Seven: <i>Dying to Disorganization, Living the Disciplined Life</i>	71
Chapter Eight: <i>Dying to Discouragement, Living the Joyful Life</i>	83
Conclusion: <i>Make Our Weak Hearts Strong and Brave</i>	93

Preface

A Unique Writing Partner

Ephesians 5:16, “Making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil.”

After writing over twenty books the old-fashioned way, this book is the product of collaboration between me and Chat AI, a language model developed by *OpenAI*. As an artificial intelligence tool, Chat AI can generate text based on prompts and instructions provided by creators.

In writing this book, I utilized Chat AI to help me generate content and ideas. However, all the ideas and concepts presented in this book have been reviewed and approved by me as the author. While Chat AI may have provided the raw material for some of the content, I have edited, refined, and expanded upon it to ensure that it aligns with my vision for this book.

As an author, I am passionate about exploring the topic of pastoral ministry and leadership. With the help of Chat AI, I have been able to delve into this topic and explore it from unique angles because of the vast resources it contains. I believe that this collaboration has allowed me to bring a unique perspective to this important subject matter. Likewise, the Holy Spirit guided me in applying this technology to such an important subject.

It is my hope that this book will serve as a valuable resource for anyone interested in pastoral ministry and leadership. Whether you are a seasoned pastor or someone who is considering entering the ministry, my goal is to provide you with practical insights and actionable advice that will help you navigate the challenges and opportunities that come with serving in the church.

I pray you enjoy reading this unique book just as much as I did writing it!

Introduction

The Called, the Few, the Chosen

Matthew 22:14, “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

The calling to pastoral ministry is a high and holy calling. Pastors are called to shepherd and care for their congregations, to teach and preach the Word of God, and to lead their communities in worship and mission. Yet, despite the importance of this calling, the life of a pastor can be incredibly challenging and often comes at a great cost. According to a report by *Lifeway Research*, as many as 4,500 churches in the United States close their doors each year.¹

This staggering number represents a significant loss for the communities that these churches served, as well as for the pastors and church leaders who invested their lives and resources in these ministries. Furthermore, the same report states that the number of pastors leaving the ministry is increasing. While some pastors leave due to retirement or other personal reasons, many leave due to burnout, disillusionment, sin, and lack of support.

In fact, according to *Barna Research*, 50% of pastors feel unable to meet the demands of their job, 75% say they are inadequately trained to cope with stress caused by ministry demands, and 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter ministry will leave within the first five years.²

Despite these challenges, the need for qualified pastors has never been greater. Cities around the world are growing at an unprecedented rate, and many of these cities lack a strong Christian presence. In fact, according to the *Joshua Project*,

¹ Lifeway Research online, *Protestant Church Closures Outpace Openings in U.S.*, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/05/25/protestant-church-closures-outpace-openings-in-u-s/>, accessed April 26, 2023.

² Gitnux Blog online, *The Most Surprising Pastor Burnout Statistics and Trends in 2023*, <https://blog.gitnux.com/pastor-burnout-statistics>, accessed April 26, 2023.

over 3 billion people in the world have little to no access to the Gospel.³ This presents an urgent need for pastors who are willing to go to the unreached places and share the love of Christ. However, the need for more pastors must be met with the recognition of the challenges that pastors face.

Many pastors struggle with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, with some even contemplating suicide. The pressures of pastoral ministry can also take a toll on the pastor's family, as they often sacrifice their time and energy to support their loved ones in ministry. Despite these challenges, there is hope. The Gospel message is still as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago, and there are many pastors who are serving faithfully and making a difference in their communities.

By sharing their stories and insights, we can learn from their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the joys and struggles of pastoral ministry. For example, Jim Cymbala was once the pastor of a small church in Brooklyn, New York. However, through the power of prayer and a heart for reaching his community, he grew that church to reach thousands of people. His book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, is a testament to the power of God to transform lives and communities through the faithful work of pastors.

Many people have a desire to serve God, but only a select few are called to lead as pastors in the church. The pastoral calling is a unique and challenging one, requiring a deep sense of commitment, sacrifice, and dedication. Consider the following as you look at your calling into the pastorate:

1. **The Called:** All Christians are called to follow Jesus, but not all are called to serve in pastoral ministry. The Bible tells us that God has appointed certain individuals to be five-fold ministry leaders in the church (Ephesians 4:11-12). These leaders are to be examples to the flock, shepherding and guiding them in their faith journey. Pastors are called to a life of service, sacrifice, and selflessness, just like any

³ Joshua Project online, *What is the 10/40 Window?*, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/10_40_window, accessed April 26, 2023.

other Christian, but with the added responsibility of leading a congregation. *Are you called by God to love and pastor His people?*

- The Few:** The pastoral calling is not for everyone. It is a narrow and challenging path that requires a deep commitment to God and His people. According to the *Barna Group*, 38% of pastors have considered leaving ministry within the past year due to burnout or discouragement.⁴ These numbers highlight the fact that being a pastor is not an easy calling, but one that requires great perseverance and strength. Remember, Peter command qualified elders to shepherd God's people not out of compulsion or for dishonest gain, but to please the Great Shepherd Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:1-4). *Are you willing to stick through the hard times?*
- The Chosen:** Despite the challenges, those who are called to pastoral ministry are chosen by God for this task and they are chosen to accomplish a specific task. Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers of all time, felt the call to ministry at a young age. He started preaching to small congregations and eventually became pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, which grew to be one of the largest churches in the world at that time. Aimee Semple McPherson, another notable pastor (yes, I believe in women pastors), felt the call to ministry after a personal crisis. She started small with a tent revival and eventually founded the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, which now has thousands of congregations worldwide. *Are you committed to the being successful at whatever God has called you to do- big or small?*

Before we move on, please take time to prayerfully confirm your calling by honestly answering these seven questions:

⁴ Barna Group online, *Leaders & Pastors Well-Being*, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being>, accessed April 26, 2023.

1. Do you have a deep love for God and His people?
2. Do you have a desire to serve and care for others?
3. Are you willing to sacrifice your time, comfort, and desires for the sake of the gospel?
4. Do you have a passion for sharing the message of Jesus Christ and making new disciples?
5. Do you feel a sense of inner conviction or leading from God to pursue pastoral ministry?
6. Will you be like Jesus and die so that others can live?
7. Has your calling to be a pastor been confirmed by qualified leaders in the church?

Being called to pastoral ministry is not an easy road in the natural, but it is one of the most rewarding paths a person can take. Likewise, Jesus said He would make your heavy burdens light because He would carry the load with you (Matthew 11:29-30). If you believe that God has given you this calling, take time to pray, seek guidance, and consider the responsibilities and challenges that come with it. If you are already pastoring, re-commit yourself to the work of God in a new and fresh way.

Remember that you are not alone, and God will equip and guide you every step of the way. As Jesus said in Matthew 9:37-38, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” If you are among the few called to this work, trust that God will use you mightily for His glory.

In this book, we will explore the life of a pastor- the good, the bad, and the glorious! We will delve into the joys and struggles of pastoral ministry, the pressures of leadership and administration, the toll of crisis and trauma, and the importance

of self-care and renewal. Along with the joys of serving alongside Jesus in His amazing Church. Through the stories and insights of pastors who have lived and served faithfully, we will gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards of this vocation, and the enduring message of hope and faith that pastors bring to the world.

Reflection

1. Are you one of God's called, few, and chosen leaders to serve as a pastor?
2. According to the Bible, what does God promise He will do for you during your challenges? Do you trust these promises as they relate to your calling?
3. Do you believe that whatever path God has for you in the pastorate that you can be successful in accomplishing His goals- despite the ups or downs?
4. Can you be happy being the best pastor God made you to be without comparing yourself to others?

Chapter 1

Dying a Thousand Deaths

1 Corinthians 15:31 (KJV), “I die daily—”

In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul declares, “I face death every day-- yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The King James Version, translates the phrase for “I face death every day” as, “I die daily.” This passage highlights the struggles and challenges that Paul faced as an apostle that shepherded God’s people. Though you may not be an apostle like Paul that pastors many congregations, I believe each of us in the pastorate can relate to this kind of sentiment. In this chapter, we will explore some of the difficulties that pastors may encounter in their ministry and offer encouragement to those who may be facing similar struggles.

As Paul started and led churches his ministry was marked by immense challenges and difficulties. He faced persecution, imprisonment, beatings, and even the threat of death. These kinds of situations can be referred to as “dying a thousand deaths.” This phrase helps us to explain what it sometimes feels like to be in ministry- especially as a pastor when we face uncomfortable times and mistreatment.

On one hand, there are those who suffer more than others so we should not be so quick to allegorize what Paul went through because it was very literal and intense for him. Much like what our brothers and sisters suffer regarding Christian persecution around the around. On the other hand, Jesus taught that each of His disciples were to carry their cross and be ready to face the sufferings tailored to their own life.

Furthermore, I do not believe “carrying one’s cross” or “dying daily” is primarily in reference to avoiding sin even though it can include it, but rather it primarily refers to the suffering one endures while serving Christ. For example, in 2

Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul listed many of the struggles (i.e., “deaths”) he faced:

“...I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.”

Despite all these struggles, Paul did not give up on his calling as a pastor and apostle. He continued to preach the gospel, plant churches, and mentor young leaders. His perseverance and faithfulness to his calling are an inspiration to pastors today. Though fighting against temptation is real for us in the ministry, we must be able to learn how to live in victory and take head on the tests in front us without the extra baggage of a sin-stained conscience.

As pastors, we will face various struggles and challenges in our ministry. We may encounter opposition, criticism, and even persecution. We may struggle with feelings of inadequacy, burnout, or loneliness. We may face financial difficulties or personal crises. However, just like Paul, we must remember that our struggles and challenges are not in vain. They are part of our journey as pastors, and God can use them to shape us and mold us into better leaders. In fact, Paul declared in Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

As a pastor, can you relate to any of these challenges in ministry?

1. **Feelings of Emotional Burnout:** The demands of pastoral ministry can be overwhelming, leading to physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. Paul himself wrote about being “hard pressed on every side” and “perplexed” in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.
2. **Loneliness:** Pastors may feel isolated and alone, especially if they lack a supportive community. Paul experienced loneliness during his imprisonment, as he wrote to Timothy, “Do your best to come to me quickly...only Luke is with me” (2 Timothy 4:9-11).
3. **Criticism:** Pastors may face criticism and opposition from within and outside their congregation. Paul encountered criticism and false accusations from his opponents, as he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:5-6.
4. **Financial Struggles:** Pastors may struggle to make ends meet, especially if they serve in smaller churches. Paul worked as a tentmaker to support himself during his ministry, as he wrote in Acts 20:34.
5. **Balancing Family and Ministry:** Pastors may find it challenging to balance the demands of ministry with their family responsibilities. Paul advised Timothy to have a healthy family life, as he wrote in 1 Timothy 3:4-5.
6. **Church Conflicts:** Pastors may encounter conflicts and disagreements within their congregation, leading to stress and tension. Paul addressed several church conflicts in his letters, such as the divisions in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).
7. **Temptation:** Pastors may face temptation and moral struggles, especially if they lack accountability and support. Paul was honest in 2 Corinthians 11:29 when he confessed, he burned at times with temptation to sin.

8. **Spiritual Warfare:** Pastors may experience spiritual attacks and opposition from the enemy, leading to discouragement and fear. Paul said that at different times he was prevented from going places by Satan and had a messenger of Satan sent to torment him. I believe this was a human agent persecuting him (1 Thessalonians 2:18, 2 Corinthians 12:6-10, & Numbers 33:55).
9. **Feeling Inadequate:** Pastors may struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, especially if they compare themselves to other pastors or leaders. Paul admitted his weaknesses and shortcomings, as he wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.
10. **Lack of Spiritual Growth:** Pastors may feel stagnant or unfulfilled in their spiritual growth, leading to discouragement and apathy. Paul encouraged the Philippians to press on towards spiritual maturity, as he wrote in Philippians 3:12-14.
11. **Lack of Numeric Growth:** One of the most common struggles that pastors face is the desire for their church to grow numerically. They may feel pressure to attract more attendees, increase giving, and expand their outreach. However, this can lead to stress, burnout, and a focus on numbers rather than the spiritual growth of their congregation. Paul may have faced a similar struggle as he planted and oversaw numerous churches throughout his ministry. He mentioned in Galatians that many were “bewitched” in the congregation and leaving biblical Christianity (Galatians 3:1-6).
12. **Comparison:** Pastors can also struggle with comparing themselves to other pastors, churches, or ministries. They may feel inadequate, insecure, or jealous of others’ success, and this can lead to feelings of discouragement and frustration. Paul might have been responding to unhealthy

comparisons of others in 2 Corinthians 10:12-13, when he wrote, “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us.”

Considering these challenges before us, here are seven faith-boasting habits for pastors to consider when facing struggles in their ministry:

1. **Keep Your Focus on Jesus:** Do not lose sight of the reason why you became a pastor. Keep your focus on Jesus and his mission to seek and save the lost. Remember that God is the source of your strength, wisdom, and joy.
2. **Remember Your Calling:** Reflect on the moment when you first felt called to ministry. Remember the passion and conviction that stirred in your heart. Hold on to that calling, and let it motivate and encourage you in difficult times.
3. **Never Leave the Basics:** Dedicate your life to prayer, study of God’s Word, worship, and always prioritize street ministry so that you can remember what Jesus did as He preached the Gospel in the open air.
4. **Seek Support:** Do not face your struggles alone. Seek support from other pastors, mentors, or counselors. Find a community of believers who can pray for you, encourage you, and offer practical help.
5. **Practice Self-Care:** Take care of yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Make time for rest, exercise, foster healthy relationships, and follow the whispers of the Holy Spirit to get alone in your secret place.

6. **Pursue a Fresh Outpouring of the Holy Spirit:** As a Spirit-filled Pentecostal pastor I am reminded of how even after Pentecost Luke recorded in Acts 4:31 that the disciples were filled again with the Holy Ghost. This must be our habit as Paul said in Ephesians 5:18 to be “filled and continually filled with the Holy Spirit!”
7. **Persevere in Faith:** Finally, remember that God is with you in every struggle and challenge. Don’t give up on your calling, but persevere in faith, trusting that God will use your struggles for his glory and your good. Everything in your life is “Father-filtered.”

Therefore, just as Paul faced many struggles in his ministry, pastors today may also encounter various challenges and difficulties. However, we can take heart and find encouragement in the example of Paul, who persevered in his calling despite facing great opposition and hardship. By remembering our calling, seeking support, practicing self-care, keeping our focus on Jesus, and persevering in faith we can navigate the struggles of pastoral ministry and emerge stronger and more effective leaders.

A great example of a pastor who overcame his challenges was David Wilkerson. He was an American evangelist and pastor who founded the Teen Challenge program and the Times Square Church in New York City, but he had a small beginning. He was born in Indiana in 1931 and began his ministry at a young age, preaching on street corners and in small churches.

Wilkerson’s ministry only gained national attention in the 1950s when he traveled to New York City to help the troubled youth who were involved in gangs and drugs. As documented in his famous book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, David reminds us that our greatest testimonies primarily come after our greatest tests. Through many trials and tribulations God enabled him to start Teen Challenge, a ministry that provides a residential program for young people struggling

with addiction. This ministry grew to become an international organization that has helped thousands of people overcome addiction and find hope in Jesus Christ. In the early 1980s, Wilkerson founded the Times Square Church in New York City, a church that has become known for its dynamic worship, powerful preaching, and commitment to serving the community.

Despite facing many challenges and setbacks, including financial struggles and opposition from city officials, Wilkerson remained committed to his vision for the church and saw it grow into a thriving ministry that has impacted countless lives. Throughout his ministry, Wilkerson remained focused on the message of the gospel and the power of God to transform lives. He believed that even small ministries could have a significant impact when they were grounded in faith and committed to serving others. His life and ministry serve as an inspiration to pastors who may be struggling with a small ministry or facing difficult circumstances.

David Wilkerson's life and ministry demonstrate the power of faith, perseverance, and commitment to serving others. As pastors, we can learn from his example and be encouraged to remain faithful to our calling, even in the face of adversity. Whether our ministry is large or small, we can trust in God's provision and guidance to lead us forward and make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Though facing a thousand deaths in a lifetime of pastoral ministry can seem daunting. The truth is, like with Paul, with every death we face, we experience in a new way the resurrection power of Jesus (Philippians 3:10). We get the honor of experiencing the crucified life so that we can experience the beautiful, abundant life of Christ.

Certainly, all Christians get such a privilege, but those in the pastorate share a unique brotherhood with Jesus, the Great Shepherd, and have a special sense of his sufferings (Colossians 1:24). Therefore, it is through our momentary discomforts we co-labor with Christ to produce life in others. This is the beauty of dying a thousand deaths so that a thousand souls may be birthed and developed in the Kingdom of God.

Drink deeply from Paul's inspired introduction to the church at Corinth and find your motivation in Christ to suffer so that others may be comforted.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7, "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

Like Paul, a godly pastor does not deny the reality that many deaths and sufferings will come with ministry, but instead of quitting, they boldly say, "Jesus is worth it!"

Reflection

1. Can you relate to any of Paul's struggles in ministry? If so, which ones?
2. How do you feel when you hear the sad statistics about pastors dropping out of ministry because of suffering? Do you believe God has a better way to overcome?
3. Pray and ask God to show you what faith-boasting habits you should do regularly to support your ministry success and longevity.
4. Explain what the phrase, "dying a thousand deaths, so a thousand souls can be saved and disciplined" means to you.

Chapter 2

Dying to Sin, Living in Holiness

Romans 6:6, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him...”

As pastors our primary horizontal responsibility is to shepherd the flock of God entrusted to us, pointing them toward the saving grace of Jesus Christ. However, our role as spiritual leaders does not exempt us from experiencing the same struggles and challenges faced by our congregation. To be effective and authentic leaders, we must embrace our vertical identity in Christ and learn to die to sin and live in holiness. This chapter explores the biblical foundations of dying to sin and living in holiness, offering practical guidance for pastors to develop and maintain their identity in Christ.

First, understanding how our sinful nature was crucified with Christ was a foundational truth that Paul wrote about in Romans 6:6-7, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.” As pastors, we must understand that our old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ and we have been set free from sin’s presence, power, and penalty. This truth should be embraced daily, as we continually surrender our lives to Christ. Once you believe your old sinful nature is dead to sin, you can die to sin daily and not give into temptation. Likewise, when you believe at salvation Jesus made you sinless, your goal will be to live sinless fulfilling Jesus’s command to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 6:48). Our confession should be, “Jesus made me holy to live holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

Second, recognizing that your old sinful self has been replaced with a new saintly self will keep you focused on living free from all sin. Remember, Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “31 If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then

you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” As a result, knowing the truth about who Jesus said we are as His disciples has a life-transforming impact on our daily battle against sin. Your spirit alone was not made holy (purified) at salvation, but also your soul (i.e., “mind, will, and emotions”).

Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22-23 (KJV), “22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 22 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Notice that your soul was purified and made new when you were born again. That is why Paul prayed that your whole spirit (your source of life), soul (your inner person), and body (your physical body) be kept blameless until Christ comes back (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Your default state of being is without sin.

On one hand, as pastors, we must not forget the state we were in before our transformation. Understanding our old self helps us empathize with those we serve and realize the importance of ongoing growth. On the other hand, embracing the new self will inspire others to follow you as you follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” What is this new creation like? Paul explained further in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In other words, Paul is saying, “To the extent I was a sinner without Christ, is to the same extent I am a saint in Christ.” When we put our faith in Jesus, we become new creations. As pastors, we must actively choose to live in this new identity, recognizing that as Jesus is righteous, so are we in this world! (1 John 4:17, KJV)

Third, sanctification is not a process, but spiritual growth is. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:11 you were fully sanctified at the same time you were justified before God and washed clean of all your sins. He wrote regarding your past sinful life, “And that is what some of you were. But you were

washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” Also, Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:14 (KJV), “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Therefore, as a Christian you are no more working on your sanctification and spiritual perfection than you are working on your justification.

As a result, since we were sanctified at salvation the continuation of this one-time event is ongoing spiritual growth. This kind of growth is not pertaining to our nature but our behavior. Consider my son, does his nature change the more his behaviors change? Does he become more of a Wyrostek by acting more like a Wyrostek? Certainly not. He is by nature already a Wyrostek (a human being from the Wyrostek family), but his behavior (learned habits and ways of thinking and acting) change the more he learns to behave in a way that represents a Wyrostek.

The same is true with our spiritual nature. The moment we were born again by grace through faith we were made a righteous, sanctified, perfect, new creation- God’s masterpiece (John 3:3 & Ephesians 2:8-10). It is very key you believe that believe that fully. Thus, our battle of faith is to believe we are who God said we are and that we can do what He said we can do. As pastors, we must strive to live out of our holy, righteous, and perfect nature. When we live out from our new nature, we not only benefit ourselves but we set an example for our congregation.

Fourth, spiritual growth comes from abiding in Christ. Jesus taught in John 15:1-8 that apart from Him, we can do nothing, but in Him we can bring forth much fruit that glorifies the Father. This fruit comes in the way of our character, also known as the “Fruit of Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-25) and in our obedience to God’s commands, this is called the “Service of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:11-13). All this growth comes by faith. Sometimes pastors sadly think that the faith message only applies to salvation and so after a person is saved everything moving forward is based on works. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are saved by faith, called into the ministry by

faith, do good works by faith, and finish our race by faith. From beginning to end and everything in-between the pastor's life is one marked by faith in God. Remember the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11? Every good thing they accomplished was by faith in God.

At the same time, biblical faith is not dead or merely mental ascent. God-inspired faith is fresh, active, growing, and always present. Just like how Paul said in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is!" Faith is always in the now for God's people. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:3-11 how to grow in faith, which is to believe and receive God's promises by adding to our faith all that is good:

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as pastors, we must be diligent to grow in our faith so that the fruit of the Spirit will be bountiful in our lives and our service to God in ministry will abound with commandment keeping disciples making new disciples that make new disciples until the nations are won for Christ!

Consider the following three ways to strengthen your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, commonly referred to as, “Entire Sanctification” and “The Finished Work Doctrine.”

1. **Focus Your Life, Ministry, and Preaching on The Completeness of Christ’s Work on The Cross:** The Finished Work Doctrine emphasizes that Christ’s work on the cross was sufficient to bring salvation and sanctification to all who believe in him. Pastors can embrace this doctrine by emphasizing the completeness of Christ’s work on the cross and encouraging their congregations to rest in the finished work of Christ rather than trying to earn their salvation or sanctification through their own efforts.
2. **Encourage Believers to Identify with Christ in His Death and Resurrection:** The Finished Work Doctrine teaches that believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and that this union is the source of their sanctification. One day count how many times Paul mentioned, “In Him” or “In Christ” in his epistles. Pastors should help their congregations embrace this doctrine by encouraging them to identify with Christ in his death and resurrection and to live “In Jesus” while serving “in ministry.”
3. **Focus On the Work of the Holy Spirit in Sanctification:** The Finished Work Doctrine teaches that the Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies believers and enables them to live a holy life. Pastors can help their congregations embrace this doctrine by focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification and by encouraging their congregations to yield to the leading of the Spirit in their daily lives. This can

include teaching on the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the importance of prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Likewise, understanding that because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and made us partakers of the divine nature, nothing can separate us from the love of God. We can cry out, “Abba, Father” to God as His sons and daughters.

Lastly, prayerfully consider how to implement these five practices of spiritual growth that will help you foster your sanctified Christ-centered identity:

1. **Prioritize Personal Devotion and Intimacy with God:** As a pastor you are never greater than your devotional life. A pastor’s relationship with God is the foundation of their identity in Christ and spiritual growth. To nurture this relationship, we must prioritize personal devotion, including prayer, Bible study, and meditation (and memorization) of God’s Word. This daily time with God enables us to receive guidance, wisdom, and strength for their ministry. Likewise, as a Pentecostal pastor I cannot over emphasize the importance of daily praying in the Spirit (“tongues) and making room for the gifts of the Spirit to operate in both your personal life and ministry (Jude 1:20 & 1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Truly the baptism of the Holy Spirit is our greatest asset in ministry.
2. **Engage in Regular Fellowship and Spiritual Mentoring:** All the pastors I know who have longevity without reproach have pastors over them and alongside of them who love and care for them by always pouring into them and keeping them accountable to their first love. Pastors need the support of fellow believers and mentors who can offer encouragement, advice, and accountability. Regularly engaging in fellowship with other pastors or spiritual leaders can provide a safe space to share challenges, insights, and victories. Spiritual mentoring relationships can help you

gain wisdom, receive guidance, and develop a deeper understanding of your identity in Christ.

3. **Practice Spiritual Disciplines Consistently:** Failures in ministry (in the way of burnout, sin, and the like) are the result of failures in being disciplined. Consistent practice of spiritual disciplines, such as fasting (consecration), solitude, soul-winning and acts of charity, can help you cultivate your Christ-centered identity and grow spiritually. These disciplines provide opportunities to draw closer to God, deepen your understanding of Scripture, and develop Christlike character traits. Also, remember Jesus spent most of His time in public preaching to the lost and making new disciples. Never underestimate the power of God's refreshment that comes when we go out and refresh others (Proverbs 11:25). Pastors are called to be like monks who spend time in our prayer closets so we can be like missionaries who go out to preach the Gospel to the lost!
4. **Embrace Vulnerability and Authenticity:** You will never be more successful as a pastor than when you are exactly who God made you to be. Pastors should pursue authenticity in their ministry, allowing their congregation to see their humanity, struggles, and dependence on God. By embracing vulnerability and sharing their experiences, pastors can foster genuine connections with their congregation and encourage others to embrace their Christ identity. You should always have a fresh testimony of what God is doing in you and through you to display Christ's victorious Kingdom on earth.
5. **Continually Seek Personal and Professional Development:** Ongoing personal and professional development is crucial for pastors who want to grow in their Christ identity and ministry. This can include attending conferences, outreaches & mission trips, reading books, or taking courses related to theology, leadership, or counseling.

Continual learning helps pastors stay informed, inspired, and equipped to lead their congregation effectively. Always have 2-3 books around that you're reading and a couple podcasts (or YouTube channels) that you're current with so that your iron is always being sharpened by iron. The holy life is a fruitful and growing mental life, as well as a spiritually growing life!

Now is the time to know your identity in Christ, live it out in holiness, and call all those around you to follow you, as you follow Christ!

Reflection

1. Meditate on how your sinful nature was crucified with Christ. Describe three ways growing in The Finished Work Doctrine will impact your ministry.
2. Do you believe sanctification is not a process, but spiritual growth is? If so, how does this help you do good works by faith.
3. What spiritual disciplines help you stay sharp against your battle with sin and temptation?
4. How are you applying 1 Peter 1:3-11 to your faith muscle so it can grow and lead to more fruit of the Spirit and service in the Spirit?

Chapter 3

Dying to Self-Reliance, Living Dependent on God

1 Corinthians 3:5, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

Most pastors I know do not struggle with laziness but rather over working to the point of burnout. It is easy to fall into the trap of self-reliance because we want to please our Master and serve those around us. Waiting on the Lord and being patient does not always come naturally because our tendency is to make things happen. This temptation can lead us to think that we must have all the answers and do everything ourselves. However, the truth is, we are nothing without the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, we will explore what it means to die to self-reliance and live dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Self-reliance can lead us down a dangerous path. When we rely on ourselves, we can become arrogant and prideful. We may start to think that we are the “King of the Castle” and that we do not need anyone else- including God! This kind of thinking can lead us away from God’s plan for our lives and our ministries. And if we are not careful, burnout can lead to walking not only away from ministry, but the Lord. Remember, King Saul? He thought he could lead God’s people without the leading of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, he lost the Holy Spirit, the Kingship, and became a demon-possessed suicidal loser (1 Samuel 16:14; 31:4). God makes winners, sinners make losers. When Jesus walked the earth, He perfectly followed the Holy Spirit and became our greatest example to be a winner (Luke 4:1). Do not be a sinful loser like King Saul, be a Holy Ghost following winner like Jesus!

God’s Kingdom is “upside down” compared to the world. If we want to be great, we must become servants of all. If we want treasures in heaven, we must give our lives away on

earth. The same is true with doing the “work” of the ministry. If we want to accomplish all that God has for, we must learn to rely upon Jesus to carry our yoke. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, “28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” This passage not only relates to our walk of salvation, but it also pertains to our work in ministry. We are always to trust that Jesus is with us and that He is carrying our load. When we do that, we will have rest for our souls. Sadly, many pastors preach about a Jesus who loved them enough to carry their sins, but they do not trust Him to carry the ministry.

Below are some examples of how pastors live self-reliant lives in the ministry:

1. **Relying On Your Own Wisdom:** Pastors may be tempted to rely on their own intelligence and knowledge rather than seeking God’s wisdom. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” *Would you rather have a ministry that corresponds to the peace of God because you follow His instructions, or do you want a mega-mess that can cost you your soul?*
2. **Prioritizing Your Own Agenda Over God’s Agenda:** Pastors may be tempted to prioritize their own plans and desires over what God wants for their ministry. Yet Jesus reminds us in John 15:5, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” *Do you want to run your race with God’s strength, or burn yourself out trying to make things happen with your own abilities?*
3. **Neglecting Prayer:** Pastors may be tempted to rely on their own thoughts rather than seeking God’s help through prayer. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without

ceasing.” Your ministry will never be greater than your prayer life. *Do you just want to do ministry for God, or do you want to do ministry with God?*

4. **Failing to Seek Counsel:** Pastors may be tempted to make decisions on their own without seeking counsel from others. Proverbs 15:22 states, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” *Are you the kind of person that wants to be “self-made” in the ministry, or do you want to allow others to help you along the way?*
5. **Taking Credit for Successes:** Pastors may be tempted to take credit for the successes of their ministry rather than recognizing that it is God who is working through them. God’s Word in Psalm 115:1 reminds us, “Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.” *Are you doing ministry for your glory, or God’s glory?*
6. **Not Delegating:** Pastors may be tempted to do everything themselves, rather than delegating tasks to others. In Exodus 18:17-23 God reminds us of the importance of delegation, as Moses’s father-in-law advised Moses to delegate tasks to capable leaders. By delegating tasks, pastors can avoid burnout and allow others to use their gifts and talents to serve the church. *Do you want to burn out alone, or burn up with on-fire disciples of Christ?*
7. **Lacking Patience to Wait on God:** Pastors may be tempted to rush into decisions rather than waiting on God’s timing. The Lord said in Isaiah 40:31, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” By waiting on God’s timing, pastors can avoid making hasty decisions and trust that God will lead them in the right direction. *Do you want the right thing at the wrong time, or the right thing at the right time?*

We see the dangers of self-reliance in the story of King Saul. In 1 Samuel 15, God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites and everything they had. But instead of obeying God's command, Saul decided to spare the king and some of the best livestock. When Samuel confronted him about this, Saul tried to justify his actions, saying that he had kept the best livestock to sacrifice to the Lord. But Samuel rebuked him, saying, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). Saul's self-reliance led him to disobey God's command, and it ultimately cost him his kingdom. As pastors, we must be careful not to fall into the same trap of thinking that we know better than God. We must be humble and willing to submit to His will for our lives and ministries.

The only way to break free from self-reliance is to surrender to the Holy Spirit. When we surrender, we acknowledge that we need Him to guide us and empower us. We recognize that we cannot do anything apart from Him. In the book of Acts, we see the disciples surrendering to the Holy Spirit and being empowered to do great things for God. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and they began to speak in other tongues (i.e., "unlearned languages"). This was a miraculous event that drew a large crowd, and Peter used it as an opportunity to preach the Gospel. Through the power of the Holy Spirit 3,000 people were saved that day.

This story reminds us that we can do nothing apart from the Holy Spirit. When we surrender to Him, He empowers us to do things that we could never do on our own. As pastors, we must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit for everything, from preparing sermons to leading our congregations. Living dependent on the Holy Spirit means seeking His guidance in everything we do. We must learn to listen to His voice and obey His leading. This requires a constant awareness of His presence in our lives. In the book of John, Jesus told His disciples, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing"

(John 15:5). This verse reminds us that we must remain connected to Jesus if we want to bear fruit in our ministries. We must be constantly aware of His presence in our lives and seek His guidance in all that we do.

One way to cultivate a dependence on the Holy Spirit is through prayer. We should make it a habit to pray throughout the day, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us and give us wisdom. Consider continual prayer as filtering your thoughts through the *Mind of Christ*. Likewise, we should always be reading and meditating on God's Word. As pastors, we call these things, "The Basics of Christianity." But truly, the basics are always essential to our walk with God. If you're like me, often times the busier you get the less you pray and read your Bible. That is the exact opposite of how we should function. We should be like John Wesley who said, "Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone; only God is here."

When we do these things, we position ourselves to hear His voice and follow His leading. When we live dependent on the Holy Spirit, we will see the fruit of His work in our lives and ministries. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." These are the qualities that should characterize our lives as pastors. When we live dependent on the Holy Spirit, we will exhibit these qualities in abundance. Have you ever noticed how when you stop relying on the Holy Spirit, the fruit of Spirit in your character stops as well? We become touchy, quick to anger, and easily embittered. This is because we were never called to do the work of the pastorate away from God's presence and His presents (gifts of supernatural power).

Take the next few moments to prayerfully read Psalm 23 and while doing so ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to shepherd others as Jesus shepherds you. As pastors, we can find great comfort and guidance in the way that Jesus pastors us through this psalm. In the opening verse, we are reminded that Jesus is our shepherd: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." As our shepherd, Jesus guides us, protects us, and

provides for us. Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus cares for His people, leading us in the paths of righteousness and providing for our every need.

In verse two God reminds us that Jesus provides for our physical needs: “He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.” Just as a shepherd provides green pastures and quiet waters for his sheep to rest and refresh themselves, Jesus provides for our physical needs so that we can be refreshed and renewed for the work He has called us to do. Then in verse three God tells us that Jesus restores us when we are weary and in need of spiritual renewal: “He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.” As pastors, we can become weary and tired, but Jesus is the one who refreshes our souls and guides us along the right paths. He gives us the strength and wisdom we need to continue in our calling.

In verse four God reminds us that even in the darkest of times, Jesus is with us: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” As pastors, we may face difficult times and challenges, but we can take comfort in the fact that Jesus is with us, guiding us through the darkness and leading us to safety. In verse five God promised us that Jesus will provide for all our spiritual needs: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” We need to be fed spiritually so that we can continue to pour into others. Jesus provides for our spiritual needs through His Word and His presence, and He anoints us with His Spirit so that we can overflow with His love and grace.

Lastly, verse six declares that Jesus is with us always, and we will dwell with Him forever: “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Below are ways to apply the shepherding of Jesus as described in Psalm 23 to your ministry:

1. **With Jesus as Your Providing Shepherd, You Can Care for Your Congregations’ Needs (Ps. 23:1):** As pastors, we

need to remember that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and He is the one who provides for our every need. Just as He cares for us, we need to care for our congregations, ensuring that they lack nothing and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. *Application:* Do all the good you can to as many people as you can and then rest in knowing you used God's resources to the best of your ability. Don't suffer from a "savior/martyr" complex. You may not be able to help everyone, but you can help someone.

2. **As Jesus Gives You Rest, Facilitate Grace and Space for Your Congregation to Rest and Be Refreshed (Ps. 23:2):** We need to create spaces of rest and refreshment for God's people under our care. We need to help them find the green pastures and quiet waters that will restore their souls and provide the physical, emotional, and spiritual rest they need. *Application:* Make ministry schedules that have different options for people's busy lives where they can have a balance of family, work, and church. Do not pressure people to give more than their faith can handle. Spur people onto good works without manipulation or guilt.
3. **As Jesus Guides You on His Path of Righteousness, Help Guide God's People on the Right Path (Ps. 23:3):** As pastors, we need to refresh the souls of our congregations by guiding them along the right paths. We need to lead them in righteousness and provide guidance and wisdom that will help them grow in their relationship with God, avoiding the pitfalls of sin and temptation. *Application:* Live a blameless life that is an example of right living and correct doctrine. If you should sin or make a mistake, be the first to repent and make it right. Your sermons and leadership must match your life and be an inspiration of holiness to God's people under your care.

4. **As Jesus Comforts You in Your Valleys, Comfort the Saints in Their Times of Darkness and Fear (Ps. 23:4):** We need to comfort God's people in times of darkness, fear, and despair. You need to remind them that God is with them, even during the darkest valley, and that they can trust in His unfailing love and protection. *Application:* Do not be a "fair-weather friend." Love God's people even when they are not at their best and cannot build your ministry. Be there for them when everyone else leaves them. Stick by their side like David did when the ravenous beasts came to devour his sheep.

5. **As Jesus Provides Spiritual Nourishment and Empowerment for You, Freely Give it Away to His Church (Ps. 24:5):** Pastors should always prepare a feast of the Word of God and help our congregations feast on His goodness and love. We need to impart spiritual gifts to the saints by the laying on of hands, biblical teaching, and generous giving; empowering them to overflow with His grace and love. *Application:* Give all your wisdom away for free, host conferences that do not require a paid registration, offer your pastoral counseling without charge, make your books and sermons available for free, and even sponsor from the church budget those who cannot afford to go on needed retreats, mission trips, or conferences. Do not restrict access to God's anointing- freely you have received, now freely give.

6. **As Jesus Welcomes You into His Home, Welcome People into Your Home and Remind them of God's Eternal Dwelling with His People (Ps. 23:6):** As pastors, we need to remind our congregations of the goodness and love of God, and of the promise of eternal life in His presence. We need to encourage them to live their lives considering this promise, striving to serve and honor God in all they do, knowing that one day they will dwell in His house forever. *Application:* Your hospitality and welcoming heart should

remind people of God's promise to dwell with them forever upon the new earth. Make your home a place where God's people can experience heaven on earth!

In conclusion, we have explored various aspects of pastoral leadership and ministry, drawing insights and inspiration from the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ as our ultimate Shepherd. We have examined the dangers of self-reliance, and how pastors can avoid this by relying on the Holy Spirit, seeking accountability, delegating, and waiting on God. We have also seen how Psalm 23 provides a powerful reminder of how Jesus pastors us as pastors, and the lessons we can learn from this for our own ministries.

In closing, as pastors, we have a great responsibility to care for and shepherd God's people, guiding them towards spiritual growth and transformation. Nevertheless we cannot do this alone and must rely on the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. We must also be intentional in creating spaces of rest and refreshment for our congregations, guiding them on the right path, comforting them in times of darkness and despair, providing spiritual nourishment and empowerment, and encouraging them to live in light of eternity. May we all continue to seek God's wisdom and guidance in our pastoral ministries, always relying on His strength and grace to lead us forward in our calling to shepherd His people.

Reflection

1. In what ways have you been relying on your own strength in pastoral ministry, and how can you better rely on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you?
2. How can you create spaces of rest and refreshment for your congregation to encourage them to rely upon the Holy Spirit in ministry?

3. Think of ways you can delegate vital ministries to people around you and empower them to succeed.
4. What areas can you grow in as a pastor from the many ways Jesus pastors you?

Chapter 4

Dying to Celebrity Culture, Living the Soul Winning Life

1 Corinthians 9:22, “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”

In a world captivated by the allure of celebrities, pastors often find themselves grappling with the temptation to emulate the glitz and glamour that comes with fame. The pressure to pursue popularity and build a brand can easily overshadow the true essence of pastoral ministry—winning souls and making disciples for the Kingdom of God. In this chapter, we will explore the vital importance of embracing the role of a servant and refocusing our priorities on reaching souls rather than seeking fame.

Below are ten signs a pastor has become more focused on winning the approval of people, rather than the approval of God:

1. **Preoccupation with Self-Promotion:** A pastor who is more concerned about building their personal brand, gaining followers, or seeking publicity rather than focusing on the needs of the people and the message of the Gospel. *Heart Check: When was the last time you did something great for God and did not publicize it?*
2. **Neglecting Personal Discipleship:** A pastor who fails to prioritize their own spiritual growth and neglects spending time in prayer, studying the Scriptures, and seeking intimacy with God cannot give to others what they do not have. *Heart Check: When was the last time someone said to you that your personal involvement in their life resulted in their spiritual growth?*

3. **Superficial Relationships:** A pastor who primarily seeks relationships with influential or well-known individuals for the sake of personal gain or recognition rather than genuinely caring for and investing in the lives of their congregation members. *Heart Check: When was the last time you befriended someone in your every-day life and preached the gospel to them?*
4. **Manipulative Preaching:** A pastor who uses manipulative tactics, sensationalism, or shallow messages aimed at garnering attention, applause, or emotional responses instead of faithfully teaching and applying the Word of God. *Heart Check: When was the last time you preached verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible and let the Word of God speak?*
5. **Exploitative Financial Practices:** A pastor who prioritizes financial gain, excessive materialism, or lavish personal lifestyles over responsible stewardship, transparency, and sacrificial giving. *Heart Check: When was the last time you announced to your congregation that the church's finances could be viewed by anyone interested in seeing where the money goes?*
6. **Lack of Accountability:** A pastor who avoids or resists accountability structures, surrounding themselves with “yes-men” and avoiding constructive criticism that could help them grow in humility and effectiveness. *Heart Check: When was the last time someone said you were wrong and had both the authority to stop your bad behavior and the wisdom to help you avoid it?*
7. **Shallow Theology and Teaching:** A pastor who prioritizes entertaining or popular teachings over solid biblical doctrine, neglecting the depth and richness of Scripture for the sake of popularity or easy answers. *Heart Check: When was the last time you preached a sermon on the doctrines of*

the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son, Justification by Faith, Final Judgment, Sanctification, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the Second Coming of Jesus?

8. **Absence from the Lives of the Hurting:** A pastor who avoids engaging with individuals or communities in need, failing to demonstrate compassion and practical support for the marginalized, broken, and hurting. *Heart Check: When was the last time you spent time in the most troubled areas of your community preaching the gospel on the streets?*
9. **Resistance to Servant Leadership:** A pastor who demonstrates a reluctance to engage in humble acts of service, delegating responsibilities to others while seeking personal recognition and position of authority. *Heart Check: When was the last time you did manual labor for the benefit of the church or someone in need?*
10. **Neglecting the Great Commission:** A pastor who overlooks the call to actively share the Gospel, make disciples, and engage in public outdoor evangelism is always in danger of prioritizing personal fame and accolades over the eternal destiny of souls. *Heart Check: When was the last time, by God's grace, you won a soul from public evangelism and made a disciple?*

In 1 Corinthians 9:22-33, Paul demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the mission of spreading the Gospel and making disciples. He declared, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." Paul's approach exemplifies his willingness to adapt, connect, and relate to diverse individuals to effectively communicate the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. Paul's motivation is clear: "I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." His sole purpose was to see people transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. He willingly set aside personal preferences, cultural barriers, and even his own comfort for the

sake of reaching others with the love and truth of Christ. This passage challenges us as pastors and followers of Christ to adopt a similar mindset. It calls us to sacrificially engage with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives, adapting our approach to effectively communicate the Gospel. May we be inspired by Paul's passion and commitment to share in the blessings of the Gospel by being all things to all people for the sake of their salvation.

Likewise, we learn from Matthew 20:28 where Jesus declared, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" that we must always see our lives as an instrument God wants to use to reach others. This passage serves as a powerful reminder for pastors to follow Jesus's example of sacrificial service. As Jesus willingly laid down His life for the salvation of humanity, pastors are called to give their lives for the spiritual well-being and growth of their congregation. They are to serve with humility, selflessness, and a genuine love for the people they minister to.

Pastors, as representatives of Christ, must embrace their role as servants rather than seeking personal recognition or prominence. We are called to prioritize the needs of others, humbly ministering to the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of their congregation. By putting others before ourselves, we as pastors can create an atmosphere of love, compassion, and authentic care, mirroring the servant heart of Jesus.

Consider John 13:14-15 when Jesus washed His disciples' feet and set an example of humble servanthood. This act of love and humility challenges us to imitate Jesus by willingly engaging in the most menial tasks, considering no act of service beneath us. By demonstrating servant leadership, we as pastors create a culture of humility and inspire others to serve one another. In this way, we can foster an environment where people are encouraged to grow in their faith, serve others, and ultimately impact the world for Christ. And what is the greatest

way we can serve people? It is by winning them to Christ and discipling them in His commands.

Proverbs 11:30 in the King James Version states, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise.” This verse encapsulates the profound significance of a pastor’s role as a servant leader in winning souls for the Kingdom of God. As servant leaders, our primary focus is to cultivate righteousness and bear fruit that brings life to others.

The fruit of righteousness reflects a life lived in obedience to God’s Word and is characterized by love, compassion, and integrity. It is through this righteous living that a pastor becomes a tree of life, providing spiritual nourishment, guidance, and transformation to those they lead. However, the verse goes on to highlight that the pinnacle of wisdom lies in winning souls. The act of leading others to salvation and reconciliation with God is the greatest accomplishment a pastor can achieve.

By sharing the Gospel, guiding individuals to a personal relationship with Christ, and nurturing their spiritual growth through relationship, pastors fulfill their calling to bring eternal life and hope to those in need. In the context of servant leadership, winning souls encompasses not only evangelism but also discipleship and mentorship. A pastor who invests in the spiritual development of their congregation, equipping and empowering them to reach others with the Gospel, demonstrates wisdom and fruitful service. Ultimately, as pastors embrace their role as servant leaders, they recognize that the greatest fulfillment and impact come from the pursuit of winning souls for Christ. By faithfully carrying out this noble task, they contribute to the expansion of God’s Kingdom and participate in the divine wisdom of leading others to the abundant life found in Jesus Christ.

I truly believe that much of the mental anguish that pastors face and the resulting depression, anxiety, and suicide is because these pastors have forgotten their first love and primary reason for being in the ministry- to win souls and make disciples. You were not called into ministry to be a celebrity or

be popular; you were called to plunder hell and populate heaven! Do not think it strange when people hate you or dislike you for the sake of Kingdom of God. You were made for adversity and come from a long line of world changers that faced the worst their culture could throw at them and they overcame those demonic attacks because the blood of the Lamb kept them holy, their personal testimony reminded them that they had a life-changing encounter with Jesus, and by not loving their own lives even unto death they were fearless in the face of persecution (Revelation 12:11).

Be encouraged by the following verses to preach the Gospel no matter the cost:

1. Proverbs 11:25, “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”
2. Matthew 10:28, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”
3. Luke 6:22-23, “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.”
4. John 15:18-19, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”
5. Acts 4:23-31, “23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the

earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’ 27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

6. Acts 5:29, “Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’”
7. Acts 20:24, “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.”
8. 2 Timothy 4:2-5, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

Can you say a loud “Amen” with me to every one of these powerful verses? “AMEN!” To break free from the allure of celebrity culture, pastors must rediscover the essence of their calling: to be soul-winning disciple-makers. We must align our hearts with the Heart of God, not “hearts” on Instagram. As pastors, we are called to imitate Jesus’s boldness, selflessness, and humility, always placing the needs of others above our own ambitions. And there is no greater need than the need of the Gospel reaching the ends of the earth. As servants of God, our primary focus must be putting our faces in God’s book, not Facebook.

Though it may be true today’s culture idolizes celebrities, making it easy for pastors to fall into the trap of seeking popularity and emulating the ways of the world. However, all of heaven is waiting for you and I in Jesus’s name to bring the Kingdom of God to earth! Yes, some pastors may be tempted to measure their success by the size of their congregation, the number of social media followers, or the recognition they receive. But as for us, the momentary rewards of fame cannot compare to the heavenly treasures that will endure forever! John Wesley wrote, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth.”

Consider implementing these three disciplines so that you can be a soul-winning pastor, fulling the command Paul gave Pastor Timothy, “keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5):

1. **Accept the Calling to Being a Soul-Winning Pastor:** Just like you do the work of a cook by making yourself a meal, but are not a full-time cook, do the work of an evangelist as a pastor by winning souls in public and in private, even though you’re not called to be a full-time evangelist.

2. **Prioritize Soul-Winning in Your Schedule:** Do not just wait to bump into people at the grocery to share your faith. Set specific days and times to go out and lead teams of disciples in public to preach the gospel (“go into the highways and byways”). Also, be aware while in your daily life who needs the Gospel, and ask God to use you to preach to them.
3. **Never Stop:** Do not base your decision to be obedient to Jesus’s commands based on pragmatism; be obedient because Jesus’s commands are life giving to the soul. He who refreshes others will be refreshed and we will reap a harvest if we do not faint! (Proverbs 11:25 & Galatians 6:9)

Remember, winning souls for Christ requires genuine love, compassion, and a willingness to go beyond the comfort of the pulpit. It means engaging with people in their struggles, reaching out to the lost, and showing them the transformative power of the Gospel. And it means at times suffering and being rejected by the world. In a world obsessed with numbers, accolades, and external validation, pastors must resist the temptation to measure their success solely by worldly standards. Instead, we should celebrate the faithfulness of our congregation in living out their faith publicly and preaching the Gospel. By focusing on the faithfulness of God’s people, we can find fulfillment and joy in our calling, knowing that true success lies in the eternal impact made on souls. May the great pastors and missionaries of the past inspire us to touch heaven and change earth one soul at a time!

Reflection

1. How do you personally define success as a pastor? Are your metrics aligned with worldly standards or with the eternal impact made on souls?

2. In what areas of your ministry have you felt the temptation to seek personal recognition or popularity? How can you refocus your priorities on serving and winning souls for the Kingdom of God?
3. Are there any points on the celebrity pastor trait list that resonate with you as potential areas of improvement in your pastoral role? How can you address those areas and cultivate a servant heart?
4. How can you emulate the examples of Jesus and the apostle Paul in prioritizing the proclamation of the Gospel, even in the face of persecution or rejection? How can you maintain a bold and unwavering commitment to winning souls for Christ in your ministry?

Chapter 5

Dying to Nice-ianity, Living the Discipleship Life

Matthew 28:19, “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

In the journey of pastoral ministry, it is all too easy to fall into the trap of being preoccupied with being nice rather than being wholeheartedly devoted to the mission of making new disciples. While kindness and compassion are essential virtues, when they become the primary focus, they can inadvertently hinder the transformative impact of a pastor’s ministry. This chapter aims to shift the paradigm from niceness to discipleship, urging you as pastor to embrace your calling as disciple-makers who can lead others to follow Christ passionately.

Niceness, though often perceived as an admirable trait, can subtly erode the essence of discipleship. Pastors who prioritize being nice may find themselves more concerned with maintaining a positive image and avoiding conflict, rather than challenging and inspiring their congregations to live out the radical call of Christ. Jesus did not call His disciples to be nice; He called them to take up their crosses, deny themselves, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). As pastors, we must embody this same radical discipleship and invite others into it.

To shift the focus from niceness to discipleship, pastors must first embrace their own calling as disciples. It is impossible to lead others on a journey we have not traveled ourselves. This requires cultivating a vibrant and authentic relationship with Christ, characterized by personal growth, deep prayer, and diligent study of Scripture. Only then can we model true discipleship, becoming living testimonies of God’s transformative power.

Disciple-making is at the heart of pastoral ministry. Instead of being consumed by a desire to be liked or avoiding discomfort, pastors should intentionally invest in the lives of a

few individuals at a time and then equip and empower them to become disciple-makers themselves. This involves a deliberate shift from merely providing “easy” answers and “self-help” solutions to inviting others into a transformative process of relying upon God’s Word, experiencing spiritual growth, and cultivating a missional mindset.

Creating a culture of discipleship within the church is essential for sustainable growth and impact. Pastors must foster an environment where the pursuit of Christ-likeness and the mission of making new disciples are deeply valued and prioritized. This can be achieved through intentional preaching, small group discipleship programs, mentorship relationships, public evangelism, and empowering others to use their unique gifts and talents in service to the Kingdom.

Transitioning from niceness to discipleship often requires pastors to embrace boldness and accountability. Discipleship involves challenging individuals to confront their weaknesses, sinful patterns, and complacency. This may lead to discomfort or even resistance. However, pastors must remain steadfast, trusting that true transformation happens when people are pushed beyond their comfort zones. In this journey, accountability partners and fellow pastors can provide support, encouragement, and challenge as we all strive to become better disciple-makers.

Below are recommended steps to ensure your church is discipleship-based church:

1. **Align the Church’s Vision and Priorities:** The first step in transforming your church into a discipleship-based church is to align the vision and priorities to Jesus’s Great Commission for the church. As a pastor, you must clearly communicate the shift in focus from attracting and entertaining seekers to making disciples who passionately follow Christ. This involves helping the congregation understand the biblical mandate for discipleship and the urgency of embracing it as the core mission of the church.

2. **Cultivate a Culture of Discipleship:** Building a culture of discipleship requires intentional effort. Provide opportunities for biblical teaching, small group discipleship, and mentoring relationships that challenge and equip individuals to grow in their faith. Encourage accountability, prayer, and the practice of spiritual disciplines. Foster an environment where genuine relationships are formed, discipleship happens organically, and people are encouraged to live out their faith daily.
3. **Empower and Equip Leaders:** Transforming a church requires equipping and empowering leaders who are passionate about discipleship. Identify and invest in individuals who have a heart for mentoring and training others. Provide leadership development programs, training resources, and ongoing support for those who will be instrumental in leading discipleship initiatives within the church. Empower them to create discipleship pathways and structures that facilitate growth and transformation. Also, consider reading, *Discipleship Based Churches* that I wrote to help pastors structure their church for biblical ministry.
4. **Shift the Focus of Worship and Preaching:** In a discipleship-based church, the focus of worship and preaching should be on the formation of believers rather than catering solely to non-Christians. While unbelievers are welcome in our large Sunday gatherings, the teaching and worship should nurture and challenge believers to grow in their relationship with Christ. Incorporate teaching series and sermon themes that delve deeper into Scripture, discipleship principles, and practical application of biblical truths in daily life.
5. **Outreach and Evangelism:** Even as the church transitions to a discipleship-based approach, it is vital to maintain an outward focus and a heart for evangelism. However, the approach to outreach should now be centered on making

disciples rather than merely making new converts. Equip your congregation to engage in intentional and relational evangelism, where they share their faith while also inviting others into a discipleship journey. Encourage them to be authentic witnesses who demonstrate the transformative power of Christ's love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, through his classic work *The Cost of Discipleship*, and George Barna, in his modern book *Growing True Disciples*, offer unique perspectives on discipleship that can be harmonized to provide a comprehensive understanding of this vital aspect of the Christian faith. By examining the teachings of Bonhoeffer and the research findings of Barna, we can glean valuable insights for cultivating a culture of discipleship in our churches and personal lives.

First, Bonhoeffer emphasizes the cost of discipleship, highlighting the radical call to follow Christ. He challenges believers to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom. This resonates with Jesus's own teachings on discipleship (Luke 14:25-33). Barna's research echoes this sentiment, suggesting that true discipleship requires a commitment that goes beyond mere attendance or surface-level engagement. It demands wholehearted devotion and a willingness to prioritize following Christ above all else.

Second, both Bonhoeffer and Barna recognize the significance of relationships in the process of discipleship. Bonhoeffer emphasizes the importance of community and accountability, urging believers to engage in authentic fellowship that fosters growth and discipleship. Barna's research underscores the impact of meaningful relationships on discipleship, revealing that individuals who experience transformative discipleship often credit influential relationships within the church. Combining these insights, we understand that intentional discipleship requires a supportive community where believers can learn, grow, and be held accountable.

Third, for Bonhoeffer, discipleship is deeply rooted in the study and application of Scripture. He emphasizes the transformative power of God's Word, urging believers to immerse themselves in its teachings and allow it to shape their lives. Barna's research reinforces this notion, indicating that consistent engagement with the Bible correlates with increased spiritual growth and maturity. The harmonization of these perspectives reveals that discipleship must be grounded in the regular study, meditation, and application of Scripture to foster genuine transformation.

Fourth, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that true discipleship is not merely an intellectual pursuit but an active obedience to Christ's commands. He stresses the importance of tangible expressions of faith through acts of service and love. Barna's research supports this idea, suggesting that discipleship is most fruitful when individuals actively engage in serving others, sharing their faith, and living out the Gospel in their daily lives.

Combining these insights, we understand that discipleship involves both internal transformation and external action, as believers respond to Christ's call with obedience and selfless love. The works of Bonhoeffer and Barna provide valuable perspectives on discipleship that, when harmonized, offer a comprehensive understanding of this transformative journey. By embracing the cost of discipleship, cultivating transformational relationships, prioritizing the study and application of Scripture, and actively living out our faith, we can create a culture of discipleship that reflects the teachings of Christ. Let us heed Bonhoeffer's call to costly discipleship and incorporate Barna's research to nurture genuine, transformative disciples who impact the world for the glory of God.

Be inspired by the following principles concerning discipleship and their Scriptural backing:

1. *"True discipleship demands a commitment that goes beyond comfortable Christianity. It requires a radical abandonment of self and a wholehearted devotion to following Christ."*
Luke 9:23, "Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be

my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

2. *“Discipleship is not a solitary journey; it thrives in the context of authentic community and accountable relationships.”* Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”
3. *“To be a disciple is to immerse oneself in the transformative power of God’s Word, allowing it to shape our thoughts, actions, and character.”* 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
4. *“True discipleship involves not just intellectual assent, but active obedience. It is through our actions that our faith becomes tangible and impactful.”* James 2:17, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”
5. *“Discipleship is a journey of radical transformation, requiring a willingness to let go of our own desires and embrace God’s will for our lives.”* Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
6. *“Discipleship flourishes in the context of authentic relationships, where believers sharpen one another and hold each other accountable in the pursuit of Christ-likeness.”* Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

7. *“To be a disciple is to actively engage with the Scriptures, allowing its truths to penetrate our hearts and guide our actions.”* Joshua 1:8, “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”
8. *“True discipleship involves surrendering our own desires and ambitions, choosing to follow Christ’s commands with unwavering obedience.”* John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commands.”
9. *“Discipleship is not a passive endeavor; it requires active engagement, sacrificial love, and a commitment to serving others.”* Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
10. *“Genuine discipleship is marked by holiness and a desire to express the image of Christ.”* 1 Peter 1:15-16, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

In pastoral ministry, the temptation to prioritize niceness over discipleship can lead to detrimental consequences for both the pastor and the congregation. Merely seeking to be a “nice” pastor, one who avoids confrontation and prioritizes popularity, neglects the transformative power of discipleship. The life and ministry of John Wesley, along with the Methodist movement he ignited, serves as a profound example of the rewards of embracing and fostering a thriving discipleship movement.

John Wesley, as a passionate disciple maker, understood the importance of true discipleship that goes beyond surface-level niceties. He recognized that being a pastor meant more than just being liked; it involved the responsibility of shaping lives for Christ. Wesley’s commitment to intentional discipleship led to the formation of small groups, known as

class meetings, where believers gathered to grow in their faith, study Scripture, and hold one another accountable. This approach fostered genuine transformation and empowered ordinary people to become faithful disciples and influential leaders.

The Methodist movement (named for being “methodical” in their approach to ministry), under Wesley’s discipleship-focused leadership, flourished because of this intentional approach. Disciples were not only transformed but also actively engaged in spreading the Gospel, caring for the poor, and seeking justice. This movement deeply impacted communities and transformed lives, leaving a legacy of discipleship that continues to inspire and challenge us today.

Scripture affirms the kind of ministry and churches Wesley led. Jesus Himself emphasized the cost of discipleship, calling us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). He commissioned us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:19-20). Furthermore, Paul reminds us that the work of ministry is to equip the saints for the work of discipleship, fostering spiritual maturity and unity (Ephesians 4:11-13).

As pastors, we must heed the warnings of merely being nice and leading a generation to hell and embrace the call to be disciple makers. The rewards are immeasurable - lives transformed, communities impacted, and a legacy of faith that extends beyond our time. By prioritizing discipleship, we can lead our congregations into a deeper relationship with Christ, equip them for their calling, and empower them to impact the world with the love and truth of the Gospel. Let us not settle for niceness but strive to be faithful disciples and disciple makers who leave an indelible mark on the Kingdom of God.

Take some time and note the differences between Disciples of Christ and Church Consumers and decide if you think being seen as “nice” is worth the cost of pastoring a church full of self-centered consumers.

1. **Commitment:** *Disciples of Christ* demonstrate a deep commitment to following Jesus and living out His teachings. They prioritize their relationship with Christ above all else. *Church Consumers* tend to lack commitment and quickly jump from one church to another, seeking a self-centered experience that caters to their flesh, rather than long-term discipleship that develops their spiritual soul. They would rather be an inch deep and a mile wide, than take the time to grow deep roots to bear much fruit.
2. **Teachability:** *Disciples of Christ* possess a humble and teachable spirit, eager to grow in their faith and learn from God's Word and wise mentors. Whereas *Church Consumers* approach church with a "know-it-all" attitude that exalts their limited knowledge and inexperience above the Word of God and Jesus's ordained leadership. They would rather "teach the teacher" than be taught.
3. **Engagement:** *Disciples of Christ* actively engage in their faith, participating in worship, prayer, evangelism, and serving others. They seek to use their gifts and talents to further God's Kingdom. *Church Consumers* have limited engagement in the life of the church, attending sporadically and do not invest deeply in relationships or community. Yet they will complain that they feel left out or that the church does not do enough for them.
4. **Accountability:** *Disciples of Christ* embrace accountability because they love to grow and be held to a higher standard. *Church Consumers* avoid accountability and commitment to good leaders because they do not want to be honest in their shortcomings but rather point out the mistakes in others. Often those who run from accountability need it the most.

You can be nice according to the world's standard and have a church of consumers or you can be loving according to the Word of God and have a church of disciples. The choice is

yours. Remember, God has not called us to be rude, but He has commanded us as pastors to speak the truth in boldness and love. We as pastors should not shy away from organizing a local church based on the commands of Jesus out of fear of losing people. Jesus lost people and got more in their place! (John 6:66 & Acts 2:41)

We must passionately teach the flock under our care to be committed to Jesus's Church as His disciples. Consumerism is a cancer in the church, thankfully, Jesus's path of discipleship is the cure. Die to nice-ianity and live for making disciples that make disciples until the nations are won for Jesus!

Reflection

1. How can you align the vision and priorities of the church your pastor to prioritize discipleship as the core mission?
2. What intentional steps can you take to cultivate a culture of discipleship within your congregation, fostering genuine relationships and accountability?
3. How can you empower and equip leaders within your church to be passionate disciple makers, providing them with the necessary resources and support?
4. In what ways can you shift the focus of worship and preaching to prioritize the formation of believers and the practical application of discipleship principles in daily life? Are you willing to learn from successful discipleship pastors?

Chapter 6

Dying to Pragmaticism, Living the Doctrinal Life

1 Timothy 4:16, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

In a world consumed by trends, fads, and quick fixes, the role of a pastor demands a steadfast commitment to doctrines of the Bible when making ministry strategies, not shallow gimmicky growth methods. While it may be tempting to adopt pragmatic approaches that promise immediate results, true effectiveness in ministry can only be achieved by grounding our strategies in the sound teachings of the Bible. This chapter aims to inspire you to prioritize the timeless truths of Scripture over fleeting pragmatism, highlighting the benefits of a doctrinally driven ministry.

While it may be true that methods may change while the message remains the same. However, if the way in which we change (or adjust) the method loses connection with the core of Jesus’s methodology we are in danger of also losing the message. In other words, I always notice that before pastors change Jesus’s message of the gospel, they first disregard Jesus’s methods. Remember, the Scriptures are not just beneficial for doctrine, but for everything the Christian minister does. The God-breathed Scriptures, with the empowerment and leading of the Holy Spirit make the people of God “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). Sound doctrine must be present in our message and methods lest we offer up strange fire.

Consider the main methods Jesus and the early church used to do ministry:

1. **Street/Public Preaching:** Both Jesus and the first disciples often preached in public spaces, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and calling people to repentance (Mark 1:38-39 & Acts 2:14).
2. **Home Visits:** Jesus and His disciples frequently visited people's homes, engaging in personal conversations, teaching, and healing (Mark 1:29-31 & Acts 2:46-47; 10:24-48).
3. **Large Outdoor Gatherings:** Jesus and the disciples attracted large crowds in open-air settings, delivering profound teachings and performing miracles to the masses (Matthew 5:1-2, Matthew 14:14-21 & Acts 8:4-8; 17:16-34).
4. **Religious Settings:** Jesus and the apostles regularly participated in synagogue gatherings, where they expounded on the Scriptures and engaged in dialogue and debate with religious leaders (Luke 4:16-30 & Acts 13:14-16; 19:8-10).
5. **Personal (Friendship) Evangelism:** Jesus and the disciples made time for individuals based on their love for all of God's lost sheep (John 4:1-26 & Acts 8:26-40).
6. **Missionary Journeys:** In the book of Acts, the apostles embarked on missionary journeys, traveling to different cities and regions to spread the Gospel and establish new communities of believers (Acts 13:1-52).
7. **Acts of Charity:** Jesus and the disciples were sensitive to the needs of those around them and blessed them with vital resources (Matthew 14:13-21 & Acts 6:1-7).

Let's admit it, we all knew these methods before reading them. However, no matter how successful we are in ministry there is always a temptation to sugarcoat or water down these methods

to draw in more crowds. For example, you might feel less likely to preach against sin at a food outreach if you know the mayor is coming for a photo opportunity. Or your church will have to choose what it does in its after-school program if to receive state funding they say you cannot preach or pray while teaching local students from the public school. Do not fall for it brothers and sisters. Never compromise the sound doctrine needed to ground every method. Our first and primary call as pastors is not to draw crowds but make disciples. The church was not built to entertain goats but feed God's sheep.

What are you building your ministry methods and strategies on- God's Word or pragmatism? Evaluate your ministry based on the characteristics below:

1. **Foundation**

- a. *Doctrines*: A ministry built upon sound doctrine establishes a solid foundation, providing a framework that remains unwavering amidst changing cultural tides.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Relying solely on pragmatic methods can lead to a shifting foundation, as strategies are molded to fit current circumstances rather than the unchanging Word of God.

2. **Authority**

- a. *Doctrines*: A ministry grounded in sound doctrine recognizes the ultimate authority of God's Word, offering a clear and unwavering message to guide the flock.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatic approaches tend to place human wisdom and popular opinion above the authority of Scripture, diluting the message and compromising its integrity.

3. Discernment

- a. *Doctrines*: A doctrinally driven ministry fosters discernment, enabling pastors to evaluate ideas, trends, and practices against the unchanging truth of Scripture.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatism often lacks discernment, as it prioritizes what “works” in the moment without considering whether it aligns with biblical principles and values.

4. Longevity

- a. *Doctrines*: Ministry strategies rooted in sound doctrine have stood the test of time, transcending cultural shifts and societal changes, ensuring the longevity of the impact.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatic approaches tend to be short-lived, fading away as new methods emerge, leaving pastors in a constant cycle of chasing the next big thing.

5. Growth

- a. *Doctrines*: A doctrinally focused ministry prioritizes the spiritual growth of individuals (not the size of the crowd), equipping them with a deep understanding of God’s truth and fostering a genuine relationship with Him.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatic approaches often prioritize numerical growth or outward success, potentially neglecting the essential aspect of nurturing spiritual maturity in the congregation (“a mile wide and an inch deep”).

6. Focus

- a. *Doctrines*: Embracing sound doctrine ensures that God remains at the center of ministry, honoring His character, purposes, and ways in all aspects of service.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatic approaches can easily shift the focus away from God, placing emphasis on human strategies, marketing techniques, or the pursuit of personal ambitions.

7. Truth

- a. *Doctrines*: A ministry founded on sound doctrine acknowledges the unchanging nature of God's Truth (with a capital T because it is the grounding for all knowledge), providing a stable anchor in a world of shifting opinions and cultural relativism.
- b. *Pragmatism*: Pragmatic approaches often adapt to the ever-changing cultural landscape, compromising the timeless truth of God's Word to accommodate popular opinions or societal norms.

Certainly, God can give us practical ways to be successful while being biblically grounded in doctrine (just like on the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 were saved). However, doctrine will always be the foundation and its methods will forever be right, even in times of decline or temporary failure. Remember Jesus losing many of His disciples in John 6:66? I'd rather have Jesus for me and the crowds against me, than the crowds with me and Jesus against me!

Take for example a declining home Bible study that has been faithful to teach the Word of God and reach out to its neighbors, even if the attendance goes down at times or if it needs to join with another nearby Bible to ensure stability, it is

better than a group that has exploded in growth because they merely offered BBQ each week and did a 15-minute devotional style teaching based on popular movies.

Therefore, God's desire for us includes being both doctrinal and successful. He desires to shape us into individuals who embody both qualities. When we surrender our lives to Him and allow His transformative power to work within us, God can mold us into individuals who are firmly rooted in sound doctrine and who also experience success in accordance with His purposes.

First and foremost, God can make us doctrinal by illuminating our understanding of His Word. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, He reveals the depths of Scripture, guiding us into a comprehensive understanding of His truths. As we seek Him earnestly in prayer and study His Word diligently, our doctrinal foundation strengthens, enabling us to discern His will and align our lives with His principles. These very principles will be what gives us success. Consider how God gave Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, and many others a godly blueprint for success while they remained faithful to His Word.

Simultaneously, God's definition of success differs from the world's standards. True success in God's eyes is not measured by wealth, popularity, fame, or achievements (or in the church world, "nickels and noses"), but by our obedience and faithfulness to Him. As we surrender our ambitions and desires to Him, God aligns our hearts with His purposes, leading us down paths that may not conform to worldly expectations but bring forth eternal impact. When we allow God to shape us both doctrinally and victoriously, we find that these aspects are not mutually exclusive.

Sound doctrine becomes the compass that guides our decisions, strategies, and pursuits, ensuring that our success is rooted in the truth and character of God. Likewise, as we pursue godly success, we remain anchored in sound doctrine, avoiding the pitfalls of compromise and worldly allurements. And we protect our churches from false doctrines taught by "sneaky snakes." Ultimately, it is in surrendering to God's Spirit,

embracing His Word, and aligning our hearts with His purposes that we can experience the harmony of being both doctrinal and successful. By seeking His guidance, relying on His strength, and walking in obedience, we can reflect His truth while fulfilling the unique purposes He has for each of us.

Be encouraged by the following doctrinally based examples in ministry that prayerfully can lead to success in ministry:

1. **Street Preaching:** Setup a time to weekly go with the church downtown and deliver powerful sermons that explain key biblical doctrines such as salvation, forgiveness, and God's love. Consider using a sound system that is in accordance with the city noise ordinances. While disciples are taking turns preaching and testifying from the microphone, have people in groups of 2-3 witnessing one-on-one. Hand out fliers to the church, free Bibles, and offer prayer for all those in need.
2. **Home Bible Studies:** Encourage all your leaders to open home Bible studies with 2-6 people as the minimum. Each meeting should have a time of worship, Bible study, prayer, and testimony. As they meet, they can set times to go door-to-door to invite the neighbors to join. Once every three months hold special house parties that encourage everyone to invite a friend and give a gospel presentation at the end.
3. **Outdoor Events:** Organize an event that includes worship, preaching, testifying, special music, skits, and prayer for those in need. Use the church parking lot, set up a tent in a nearby park, or meet on the corner of a busy street. Have times of evangelism before the event that let the community know what you are doing and hand out fliers that explain the details. Have VBS style activities for children 3-10 years old.

4. **Charity:** Offer free services and gifts to the community. These gifts and services can be incorporated into street preaching, home Bible studies, and outdoor events. For example, while street preaching downtown hand out food and clothes to the homeless. At an outdoor event give away school supplies or at a home Bible study do a drawing for gift cards to local clothing or grocery stores. Likewise, find a need in your community and meet it on a regular basis. If there is a large population of single moms offer free daycare one night a week to give the moms an evening off. If there are troubled teens in the neighborhood, set up games at the church to get them off the streets. In all acts of charity make time to present the gospel. God can save and deliver anyone who calls on Jesus's mighty name!

By integrating biblical truths into methods such as street preaching, home visits, outdoor events, and acts of charity, pastors can align their ministry with God's purposes and experience true success. Pastors can be successful in all aspects of ministry as they rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and prioritize the timeless truths of Scripture. David wrote in Psalm 1:3 that the blessed man who follows God's Word prospers in whatever they do. I believe this is possible when we die to pragmatism and live for the doctrinal truths of God Word and incorporate them into all the work of the ministry!

Reflection

1. Are there areas in your ministry where you have prioritized pragmatic methods over sound doctrine? How can you realign your strategies with the timeless truths of Scripture?
2. Do you evaluate ideas, trends, and practices against the unchanging truth of Scripture? How can you foster greater discernment in your decision-making process?

3. How do you incorporate the gospel and the doctrines of God's Word in your acts of charity?
4. What doctrines do you regularly teach and base your ministry on? How do you believe sound doctrine and ministry success relate to each other?

Chapter 7

Dying to Disorganization, Living the Disciplined Life

1 Corinthians 9:26, “I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.”

In the realm of ministry, we often find ourselves immersed in the spiritual aspects, seeking divine guidance, and relying on the power of faith. Indeed, spirituality lies at the core of our calling, but we must not overlook the importance of natural and practical skills- some that the world does even better than us in the church. For example, in the military, discipline is the cornerstone of success. It permeates every aspect of a soldier’s life, from training to combat. Military personnel must adhere to strict schedules, follow orders without question, and maintain impeccable attention to detail. Their lives depend on their ability to stay organized, focused, and disciplined. Whether it is meticulously caring for their equipment, executing tactical maneuvers flawlessly, or displaying unwavering commitment to their comrades, the discipline instilled in the military ensures mission success and fosters a culture of unity, trust, and unwavering dedication. With all that in mind, sometimes I think if most pastors had to lead their church into a literal battle with the same methods of how they lead the church, they would get slaughtered. God have mercy! The Christian life is not one of “make-believe” but rather a life of victory because of what we believe.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul described the Christian life as that of a soldier who is committed to a higher cause. He encouraged Timothy to endure hardship, stay focused, and avoid being entangled in civilian affairs (2 Timothy 2:3-4). Similarly, just as soldiers in the military display unwavering discipline in their training, obedience to commands, and readiness to face challenges head-on; so too must Christians be

trained and ready to fight victoriously. Soldiers prioritize the mission above personal comfort and exhibit resilience in the face of adversity. By embracing the soldier's discipline, believers are reminded to remain steadfast in their faith, to be disciplined in their spiritual training through prayer, studying God's Word, and engaging in acts of service. They are called to renounce worldly distractions and pursue a life that aligns with the mission of advancing God's kingdom. We are called to be God's mighty warriors who establish His Kingdom on this earth.

Likewise, athletes striving for peak performance understand the significance of discipline. Whether in team sports or individual endeavors, athletes must exhibit discipline in their training regimens, nutrition plans, and mental preparation. They adhere to strict training schedules, push their physical limits, and sacrifice indulgences that could hinder their performance. Discipline is seen in their commitment to practice, their ability to follow coaching instructions, and their unwavering focus during competition. It is the disciplined pursuit of excellence that separates extraordinary athletes from the rest, allowing them to achieve their full potential and inspire others with their dedication, skill, and triumphs.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, draws an analogy between the Christian life and a race. He encourages believers to run in such a way as to obtain the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24). Athletes competing in sports demonstrate discipline through rigorous training, strict adherence to rules, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. They endure physical and mental challenges, maintaining focus on the goal of victory. In the same way, believers are called to exhibit discipline in their spiritual race. This involves cultivating self-control, perseverance, and a single-minded focus on the eternal prize that awaits them. They must cast off anything that hinders their progress and run with endurance, fixing their eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). The runner's discipline teaches believers the importance of pacing themselves, setting goals, and maintaining a steadfast commitment to the race of faith. Otherwise, if

Christians don't take as serious their spiritual race, as Olympic runners take their race, they will lose.

A disciplined life is the key to unlocking our full potential in ministry. By eliminating disorganization, we pave the way for success and become a shining example for the church we serve. As spiritual leaders, we carry the responsibility of representing the church and the gospel. Our actions, both in and out of the pulpit, speak volumes about our character and dedication to the Lord. When we allow disorganization to reign in our lives, it becomes a reproach to the church. Without structure and order, we struggle to fulfill our responsibilities, meet deadlines, and provide the necessary care for our congregation. This leads to missed opportunities, unresolved issues, and a lack of trust from those we are called to shepherd.

A disorganized leader is perceived as unreliable and incompetent. When we fail to manage our time, tasks, and resources, it reflects poorly on our ability to lead and guide others. Imagine if doctors or pilots were as irresponsible and as many pastors are, the airport would be a mess and people would be dying on the operating tables everywhere.

The church looks to us for direction, and our disorganization sends a message that we are ill-prepared and unreliable, undermining the trust and respect we seek to establish. While some may perceive discipline as restricting, it is, in fact, liberating. By embracing discipline, we position ourselves for growth, impact, and the fulfillment of our purpose in ministry. Consider the three following ways to live a disciplined life in ministry:

1. **Time Management (God's Calendar):** One of the essential elements of discipline is time management. A well-structured schedule allows us to prioritize our responsibilities, allocate time for study and prayer, plan meaningful interactions with the congregation, and nurture relationships. With effective time management, we create a space for personal growth and maintain a healthy work-life

balance. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:15-16, “15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” This passage serves as a powerful reminder to be wise in our time management. The days in which we live are filled with distractions, busyness, and the constant pull of worldly concerns. However, as spiritual leaders, we are called to rise above these challenges and make the most of every opportunity that God places before us.

2. **Organizational Systems (New Wine Skins):** Implementing organizational systems is crucial in the pursuit of a disciplined life. By establishing routines, setting goals, and employing tools such as calendars, to-do lists, and project management software, we bring order to our ministry. These systems help us streamline our efforts, delegate tasks when necessary, and stay accountable, ensuring that nothing falls through the cracks. Jesus said in Mark 2:22, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” This passage provides a valuable lesson for us as we seek to make organizational systems that serve the growth of the church. Just as new wine requires new wineskins, the growth and vitality of the church require adaptable and efficient organizational systems that can accommodate the work of the Holy Spirit.
3. **Relational Priorities (Loving & Healthy):** Discipline is paramount in the relationships pastors have with their family, church, and friends. In their families, pastors are called to sacrificially love their spouses and raise their children in the ways of the Lord. Within the church, pastors must exemplify integrity, self-control, and diligence, while fostering a community of love and accountability. In friendships, pastors should choose wise companions who

sharpen and encourage them in their faith. Through discipline, pastors cultivate healthy and flourishing relationships that honor God, nurture spiritual growth, and create environments of love and support. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:17, “Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers.” This verse reminds pastors to demonstrate discipline in their relationships with their family, church, and friends. They are called to show respect to everyone, including their loved ones, fellow believers, and those in authority. This respect is exemplified through sacrificial love in the family, integrity and self-control within the church, and the choice of wise companions in friendships. Through discipline, pastors honor God, foster spiritual growth, and create environments of love, support, and accountability.

Now let us go in-depth into each of these principles and give useful insight to grow in discipline for the sake of God’s Kingdom on earth:

1. **Time Management (God’s Calendar)**

- a. *Prayerful Planning*: Seek God’s guidance and wisdom as you plan your schedule and set priorities. Allow the Holy Spirit to shape your days and guide your steps, ensuring that our time is aligned with His will.
- b. *Focus on the Essentials*: Identify the core responsibilities and activities that align with your calling as a pastor. Prioritize personal prayer, study of God’s Word, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and disciple-making, recognizing that these are the primary areas where we can have the greatest impact.

- c. *Eliminate Time Wasters*: Be vigilant in identifying and eliminating time-wasting activities that distract you from your mission. This may include excessive social media usage, unproductive meetings, or excessive busyness without a true purpose.
- d. *Delegate and Empower*: Recognize that you cannot do everything on your own. Delegate tasks to capable individuals within your ministry team, empowering them to contribute and share the load. This will free you to focus on the areas where your unique gifts and calling are most needed.
- e. *Protect Rest and Renewal*: Guard your personal time for rest, self-care, and renewal. Prioritize moments of solitude, prayer, and personal reflection, allowing yourself to be refreshed and rejuvenated in the presence of God.

2. **Organizational Systems (New Wine Skins)**

- a. *Prayerfully Set Clear Goals and Priorities*: Effective organizational systems begin with clear goals and priorities. Pastors should identify the key objectives of their ministry and align their organizational systems accordingly. By establishing clear Holy Ghost appointed goals, pastors can prioritize tasks, allocate resources, and ensure that their efforts are directed towards the most significant aspects of their ministry.
- b. *Develop Efficient Processes and Workflows*: Pastors should develop efficient processes and workflows to streamline their work. This involves breaking down tasks into manageable steps, identifying potential bottlenecks, and finding ways to optimize efficiency. By implementing standardized processes, pastors

can eliminate unnecessary steps, reduce errors, and maximize productivity.

- c. *Utilize Technology and Tools:* Pastors should be experts at leveraging technology and organizational tools to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. There are various software applications and digital platforms available that can assist with scheduling, task management, communication, and collaboration. By utilizing these tools, pastors can centralize information, automate repetitive tasks, and improve communication within their ministry.

- d. *Invest in Staff Development:* Pastors should prioritize staff development as a crucial component of building and maintaining disciplined organizational systems. This involves providing training, mentorship, and opportunities for personal and professional growth to the members of the ministry team. By investing in staff development, pastors empower their team members with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to contribute effectively to the ministry. This not only fosters a culture of continuous learning but also enables pastors to delegate responsibilities with confidence, knowing that their team is equipped and capable. Through staff development, pastors build a strong and cohesive team that shares the vision, values, and commitment to disciplined organizational systems, leading to a more productive and impactful ministry.

- e. *Regularly Evaluate and Adjust:* A disciplined organizational system requires regular evaluation and adjustment. Pastors should regularly assess the effectiveness of their systems, seeking feedback from team members and congregants. This feedback

can help identify areas for improvement and adjustment. By continuously evaluating and adjusting their systems, pastors can ensure that their organizational processes remain relevant, efficient, and aligned with the evolving needs of their ministry.

3. Relational Priorities (Loving & Healthy)

- a. *Establish Clear Boundaries:* Set boundaries in your personal and pastoral life to create a healthy balance. Clearly define and communicate your availability to your family, church, and friends. This helps prevent burnout, ensures dedicated time for each area of your life, and allows for intentional engagement with your loved ones, congregation, and friends.
- b. *Set Realistic Expectations:* Establishing realistic expectations is essential for organizing a disciplined life with your family, church, and friends. Recognize your limitations and ensure that you set achievable goals and commitments. Avoid overcommitting yourself and learn to say no when necessary. By setting realistic expectations, you can better manage your time and energy, reduce stress, and maintain a healthy balance between your personal and ministry life. It allows you to prioritize effectively, maintain consistency, and honor your commitments to your loved ones, congregation, and friends.
- c. *Learn the Circle of Friendship:* Understanding the concept of the Circle of Friendship can greatly contribute to organizing a disciplined and balanced life with your family, church, and friends. The Circle of Friendship recognizes that different relationships hold varying levels of intimacy and closeness. Embrace this concept by recognizing the different

layers of relationships in your life, allowing people to freely move in and out of these circles. In the outer circle, you have acquaintances and casual friendships that may not require as much time and investment. These relationships are important but may not be as close or demanding. As you move towards the inner circles, you encounter closer friends, confidants, and trusted individuals with whom you share deeper connections. By understanding and embracing the Circle of Friendship, you can allocate your time and energy appropriately. Recognize that not every relationship requires the same level of attention and investment. Set boundaries and prioritize accordingly, ensuring that your time and resources are allocated to the inner circles where the relationships hold greater significance and require deeper engagement. This approach allows you to maintain balance and organization in your life. It ensures that you have dedicated time for your family, the core members of your church, and close friends, while also nurturing other relationships within the appropriate circles. By acknowledging the varying levels of intimacy and freely allowing movement within these circles, you create an organized and disciplined approach to managing your relationships in a way that honors the depth and significance of each connection. Remember, this is not forming “cliches” or showing favoritism but rather it is understanding how Jesus was able to bring people closer to Him like Peter, James, and John for important moments while at the same time allowing those in the crowd to have space to grow at their own pace.

- d. *Regular Communication:* Maintain open and consistent communication with your family, church members, and friends. Regularly update and align

with your family on schedules, commitments, and important events. In your church community, communicate clearly about expectations, plans, and ongoing projects. Keep in touch with friends and ensure that you nurture those relationships through regular interactions. Clear and transparent communication fosters understanding, minimizes misunderstandings, and promotes an organized approach to your relationships.

- e. *Practice Self-Care and Reflection:* Take intentional time for self-care and reflection. Prioritize activities that replenish your physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Engage in practices such as prayer, Scripture meditation, exercise, and hobbies that rejuvenate you. Regularly reflect on your priorities, evaluate your commitments, and make necessary adjustments to maintain a balanced and disciplined life. Caring for yourself allows you to be more present, focused, and organized in all areas of your life.

A disciplined and organized life is essential for pastors to effectively grow the church, maintain a balanced life, utilize new wine skins, and be relationally effective. By implementing the principles discussed in this chapter, pastors can navigate the complexities of ministry with clarity, purpose, and balance. Managing time wisely, setting realistic expectations, and establishing clear boundaries are vital for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. As Proverbs 16:3 reminds us, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” By surrendering our schedules and commitments to God, we can trust in His guidance and experience His peace as we strive to live disciplined lives.

Paul encouraged us in Galatians 5:13, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly

in love.” By dying to disorganization and living for discipline and organization, pastors can humbly serve others in excellence, creating an environment of love, support, growth, and accountability. Through the pursuit of a disciplined life, pastors can honor God, nurture spiritual growth, and effectively advance His kingdom on earth. By committing our lives, relationships, and ministries to the Lord, we can trust that He will guide and establish our steps.

May we, as pastors, embrace discipline and organization in our lives, recognizing that they are essential tools for effective ministry. They are our “New Wine Skins” inspired and created by God to hold the blessings of heaven. As we do so, let us rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of Scripture, and the support of our fellow pastors to ensure we do not “beat the air” or “run aimlessly,” but rather may our disciplined lives be a testimony of God’s grace and power at work in and through us, bringing glory to His name and impacting the lives of those we serve.

Reflection

1. How can you better prioritize your time and align it with God’s will to make the most of every opportunity for ministry?
2. What organizational systems and tools can you implement to streamline your work and ensure that nothing falls through the cracks in your ministry?
3. Are you setting realistic expectations for yourself in terms of your commitments and goals, and are you effectively balancing your personal and ministry life?
4. Do you understand and embrace the concept of the Circle of Friendship, allowing for appropriate allocation of time and energy to different levels of relationships in your life?

Chapter 8

Dying to Discouragement, Living the Joyful Life

Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

In the journey of shepherding a flock, one of the greatest challenges we face is the battle against discouragement. We as pastors pour out our hearts and souls, investing countless hours into our ministries, only to face setbacks, criticism, and moments of self-doubt. However, we must remember that discouragement is not the final chapter of our story. In fact, it is in those very moments of discouragement that our faith and commitment are tested, and our resolve to live a joyful life in service to Jesus is strengthened.

In this chapter, we will explore the importance of dying to discouragement and embracing the transformative power of joy. We will discover practical strategies to overcome discouragement, deepen our faith, and find renewed purpose in our calling. Let us embark on this journey together, knowing that our hope rests in the One who strengthens us.

First, we need to understand the nature of discouragement. Discouragement can be likened to a silent thief that robs us of our joy and hinders our effectiveness as pastors. It manifests in various ways—through criticism, unmet expectations, personal failures, or the overwhelming weight of responsibilities. Most of the time it is temporary and not based in reality, but rather it is based on F.E.A.R (False Evidence Appearing Real). Though God can use discouragement to realign us to His perfect will, discouragement is never God’s will for us. God does not want to discourage you but encourage you to fulfill your calling. Recognizing the nature of discouragement is crucial, for only then can we confront it head-on and prevent it from defining our lives and ministries.

The devil will tempt us to believe that our temporary circumstances have the power to change our God-given calling and identity. However, we must resist these lies and remember that we are who God said we are and can do what He said we can do, no matter what troubles come our way. There is a major difference between God's conviction and the Devil's condemnation; one brings life and the other brings death. Likewise, God's discipline is not the same as Satan's discouragement. When you know the difference between these, you can grow and learn from one and resist and rebuke the other.

Second, we must nurture a resilient mindset which is rooted in the fruit of the Spirit known as forbearance and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). By nurturing a resilient thought life, we equip ourselves to bounce back from setbacks, grow through challenges, and remain steadfast in our joy. Paul understood in his times of trials that no matter how great the suffering was, nothing could separate him from the love of God and that all things would ultimately work for his good (Romans 8:28-39). Why? Because he knew that God's power was greater than his temporary setbacks. Paul chose to set His heart and mind on Christ, rather than the disappointments he was facing (Colossians 3:1-4).

Third, we need to learn how to foster joy. Below are some great ways to guard your thought life and ensure your joy will remain throughout your ministry and even grow during hardships.

1. **Anchor Your Identity in Christ:** Your identity as a pastor is not determined by the approval of others or the success of our ministries. It is rooted in being a beloved child of God—nothing the enemy throws at you can change that. When we ground our worth in Jesus, we find strength and security beyond the circumstances that may lead to discouragement. Paul always remained confident in his calling; despite the losses he was facing. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6, “4 Such confidence we have through Christ before God. 5 Not

that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

2. **Speak Life in All Circumstances:** During personal struggles and challenges, pastors have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to speak life from the Word of God. By choosing words of encouragement, empathy, affirmation, forgiveness, and proclaiming God’s truth, we can bring hope, healing, and restoration to those we minister to and ourselves. Even in our hardest times, we must always choose to speak God’s Word of life over the circumstances we face. Complaining, being bitter, and acting out of anger will not bring about the righteousness of God. Find 3-5 verses in the Bible that address the challenges you are facing and make them the meditation of your heart and confession of your lips. King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 18:21, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”
3. **Pray & Meditate with God’s Promises in Mind:** Recalling the great promises that God has given you will increase your joy in times of hardship because they enable you to soar above the troubles you are facing. Enjoy prayer walks and times of worshipful prayer where you engage your Holy Ghost inspired imagination to picture yourself in the Promise Land. If only the Israelites had seen themselves enjoying the fruit of the land instead of allowing their fears to overcome their mind, they would have been able to enjoy their life. However, because they focused on the negative, they reaped what they sowed in fear- disappointment and destruction. Think of all the imagery in the Psalms that give us ample things to picture in our minds when we pray: being a sheep in God’s care that has plenty of grass and still waters (Psalm 23), being a young bird under the large wings

of our mother (Psalm 119), and being a tree planted by living water that flourishes in every season (Psalm 1). God said in Isaiah 40:29-31, “30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

4. **Face Your Fears:** Fear can be a paralyzing force that hinders our effectiveness and robs us of the joy and peace that God desires for us. As pastors, we are not exempt from facing fears and uncertainties, but we have the power and assurance to overcome them. By acknowledging our fears, seeking God’s guidance, and stepping out in faith, we can experience His strength and victory in the face of every challenge. The fear of my fears has always been worse than facing my fears. In other words, once I took my fears head on, they were never as dark to my soul as they were in my mind. This does not mean the worst case did not occur, on the contrary, I have seen situations turn worse than I originally thought. However, going through it felt better to my soul than the torment of the fear in my mind. Corrie ten Boom said, “You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have.” Often, we think as pastors that delaying tough meetings or avoiding confrontation will be better, but those delays steal our joy. Whereas, when we take those situations head on, we allow God to strengthen us with His joy. Nehemiah wrote in Nehemiah 8:10, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”
5. **Rejoice in the Lord Always:** As pastors, we are called to be beacons of joy and hope in a world filled with challenges and uncertainties. Rejoicing in the Lord always is not just a suggestion; it is a command that reminds us of the abundant blessings and promises we have in Christ. By cultivating a spirit of rejoicing, we can inspire others, strengthen our own faith, and experience the transformative power of joy in our

lives and ministries. Paul said in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” In this verse, Paul encourages believers to rejoice in the Lord always. It is not a conditional statement dependent on favorable circumstances, but a command to find joy in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our rejoicing is anchored in the unchanging nature of God, His faithfulness, and the salvation we have through Christ. Cultivate a heart of gratitude by intentionally counting your blessings and acknowledging the goodness of God. Take time to reflect on the ways He has worked in your life and ministry. Express gratitude for His provision, guidance, and faithfulness. Engage in regular times of worship and praise, both individually and corporately. Lift up your voice and offer songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. Let your heart be filled with awe and reverence as you acknowledge His greatness and goodness. Keep an eternal perspective in mind as you navigate the challenges of ministry. Remember that our ultimate joy is found in the hope of eternal life in Christ. Fix your gaze on the eternal rewards that await, and let it sustain and inspire you to rejoice, even in difficult times. Remember, joy does not mean the absence of trials; rather, it is a deep-seated assurance of God’s presence and faithfulness amid trials. Choose to rejoice and find joy in the opportunity to grow in faith, rely on God’s strength, and experience His grace in difficult circumstances.

As you navigate the demands and challenges of ministry, prioritizing your joy becomes essential for maintaining good mental health. When pastors guard their joy, they cultivate a positive mindset and emotional resilience that contributes to their overall well-being. Research in the field of mental health highlights the link between joy and emotional resilience. Joyful pastors tend to develop a strong emotional foundation that helps them withstand stress, setbacks, and emotional challenges. This resilience contributes to improved mental health, enabling

pastors to bounce back from difficulties and maintain a positive outlook.

Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of joy and positive emotions experience reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression.⁵ Guarding joy equips pastors with effective coping strategies to navigate the various stressors of ministry. When pastors prioritize their joy, they cultivate a mindset of gratitude, hope, and optimism, which facilitates adaptive coping mechanisms. By focusing on the positive aspects of their ministry and nurturing a sense of fulfillment, pastors can better manage the pressures they encounter. Research has found that individuals who engage in positive emotional regulation strategies, such as focusing on gratitude and positive reappraisal, experience improved mental health outcomes.⁶

Joyful pastors tend to create an environment of positivity and warmth within their congregations and communities. Their joy is contagious and fosters strong relational connections. This, in turn, positively impacts their mental well-being. Individuals who guard their joy often report greater satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships, leading to reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation. Studies demonstrate that positive social support is a protective factor against mental health issues.⁷ When pastors prioritize their joy, they experience higher levels of life satisfaction, which has a significant impact on mental health. Joyful pastors tend to have a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their ministry, leading to greater overall life satisfaction. Research suggests that those with a high sense of life satisfaction experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.⁸

⁵ NCBI online, *The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3122271/>, accessed July 5, 2023.

⁶ APA PsycNet online, *Regulation of Positive Emotions: Emotion Regulation Strategies that Promote Resilience*, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-08053-002>, accessed July 5, 2023.

⁷ NCBI online, *The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review*, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16952717/>, accessed July 5, 2023.

In summary, guarding joy has a profound impact on the mental well-being of pastors. By prioritizing joy, pastors cultivate emotional resilience, develop effective coping strategies, strengthen relationships, and experience increased life satisfaction. Recognizing the connection between joy and mental health empowers pastors to take intentional steps to guard their joy, not only for their own benefit but also for the well-being of their congregations and the fulfillment of their ministry.

Below are some of the most popular ways pastors get discouraged in ministry with practical tips to overcome them with the joy of the Lord. By actively implementing these practical steps, pastors can overcome discouragement and cultivate a joy-filled approach to their ministry. Remember that true joy comes from aligning your heart with God's purposes, embracing His grace, and finding contentment in His presence.

1. **Unrealistic Expectations:** Set realistic short-term goals and prioritize them based on your values and calling. The ole' saying is true, "Most pastors quit right when things are about to change." Seek guidance and accountability from mentors or trusted colleagues. Celebrate progress and focus on the impact of your ministry rather than perfection.
2. **Criticism and Conflict:** Cultivate humility and a willingness to learn from feedback. Practice active listening and empathy when engaging with others. Respond with grace and love, remembering your identity in Christ and seeking reconciliation when possible. Solve problems quickly, but wisely, with church discipline.
3. **Loneliness and Isolation:** Build a support network by cultivating authentic relationships within and outside the church. Seek out mentorship or join pastoral support groups

⁸ APA PsycNet online, *Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions*, <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-08033-003>, accessed July 5, 2023.

to connect with peers. Prioritize quality time with loved ones and engage in activities that foster community.

4. **Burnout and Overwork:** Set healthy boundaries and learn to say no when necessary. Prioritize self-care by incorporating regular periods of rest and renewal. Delegate tasks and seek assistance from volunteers or staff members.
5. **Financial Challenges:** Seek financial counsel and create a realistic budget to manage resources effectively. Focus on gratitude for the provision of God and trust in His faithfulness. Explore additional income sources or seek assistance from financial support programs if needed.
6. **Spiritual Dryness:** Prioritize personal spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, praying in tongues, intimate discipleship, regular street evangelism, and Scripture study. Seek spiritual mentorship or attend retreats and conferences to rejuvenate your spiritual life. Embrace vulnerability by sharing struggles with trusted individuals and seeking their support and encouragement.
7. **Unrealized Expectations:** Shift the focus from immediate outcomes to faithful service and personal growth. Celebrate small victories and milestones along the way. Trust in God's timing and sovereignty, knowing that He works all things for His purposes. We often overestimate what we can do in one year, and underestimate what God will do in a decade.
8. **Personal Challenges and Failures:** Seek appropriate support through counseling, mentoring, or accountability relationships. Embrace vulnerability and learn from mistakes, allowing God's grace to bring healing and growth. Remember that God's love and acceptance are not based on performance, but on His unconditional love for you.

9. **Comparison and Envy:** Focus on your unique calling and the giftings God has given you. Celebrate the success and achievements of others without comparing yourself to them. Cultivate gratitude for your own journey and the opportunities God has provided for you.
10. **Lack of Vision:** Spend time in prayer and reflection to discern and clarify your vision for ministry. Seek wisdom and guidance from trusted mentors or spiritual leaders. Break down the vision into actionable steps and set goals to work towards its realization. Regularly review and evaluate your progress, adjusting as needed. Faithfully and passionately share God's vision with your congregation and challenge them to support it.

In the face of discouragement, we as pastors can find renewed strength and joy, ultimately leading to a successful and fulfilling ministry. By prioritizing joy, seeking support, staying grounded in God's Word, remaining faithful to personally winning souls and making disciples, and embracing a positive mindset, pastors can navigate challenges with resilience and grace. Through the transformative power of God's love, pastors can find renewed strength and joy that not only sustain their own well-being but also bring life and transformation to those they serve.

As you travel on your pastoral journey, remember the stories of the Bible when great men and women faced their times of discouragement and the valuable lessons they learned. Guard your joy and calling. May you be inspired to embrace the challenge to die to discouragement and live a joy-filled life in the ministry. Your testimony as a pastor can be one of longevity, faithfulness, vibrant mental health, spiritual vigor, and fruitfulness.

Reflection

1. How does understanding the nature of discouragement help you confront and overcome it in your life and ministry?
2. In what ways can you nurture a resilient mindset rooted in longsuffering and faithfulness, enabling you to bounce back from setbacks and remain steadfast in joy?
3. How can anchoring your identity in Christ and speaking life in all circumstances contribute to guarding your joy and overcoming discouragement?
4. Reflect on the practical steps provided to overcome common sources of discouragement in pastoral ministry. How can implementing these strategies help you grow in joy and maintain mental well-being?

Conclusion

Make Our Weak Hearts Strong and Brave

Proverbs 28:1, “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, wrote a powerful song called, *Send the Fire*. The lyrics resonate deeply within the hearts of those who have dedicated their lives to serving God and spreading His message of love and salvation. The last verse boldly declares, “To make our weak hearts strong and brave, Send the fire! To live a dying world to save, Send the fire! O see us on thy altar lay Our lives, our all, this very day, To crown the offering now we pray, Send the fire!”

I believe the first part of that verse speaks directly to what it “feels” like often when doing ministry. Ministry can make the strongest among us feel weak, however, the Holy Spirit is able to make us strong and brave. The journey of a pastor is not an easy one, but Jesus said His yoke and burden were easy when we let Him carry it (Matthew 11:28-30). Therefore, to be successful in ministry it requires unwavering faith in Jesus so that we might have unwavering bravery to confront the obstacles and difficulties that arise.

In the realm of Christian literature, few authors have captured the essence of courage as powerfully as C.S. Lewis. Known for his profound insights and imaginative storytelling, Lewis held a unique perspective on courage, seeing it as a foundational attribute that gives rise to other godly virtues. For Lewis, courage was not merely the absence of fear, but rather the triumph over it. He believed that true courage emerged when individuals faced their deepest fears and overcame them, relying on a strength greater than themselves. Lewis understood that this inner fortitude was a vital component in the Christian journey and a catalyst for the development of other virtuous qualities. In his famous book series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*,

Lewis skillfully weaves courage into the narrative, depicting it as a fundamental trait among the story's heroes. Characters like Lucy, Peter, Edmund, and Susan demonstrate courage in the face of daunting challenges, enabling them to fulfill their destinies and stand against the forces of evil. Through their courageous acts, Lewis presents a powerful message that resonates with pastors and believers alike – that when fear is confronted with faith, remarkable feats can be achieved.

Lewis believed that courage not only emboldened individuals to face external trials, but it also empowered them to confront their inner struggles. He understood that the battles fought within the depths of the human soul were just as significant as the external battles fought in the world. It was through courage that one could confront doubts, wrestle with faith, and ultimately grow in their relationship with God. Moreover, Lewis saw courage as inseparable from other godly attributes. He argued that true courage led to the development of virtues such as humility, love, and self-sacrifice. Lewis observed that it takes courage to admit one's faults and weaknesses, to ask for forgiveness, and to extend grace to others.

In his book *The Four Loves*, Lewis wrote, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point." In the context of pastoral ministry, Lewis's perspective on courage holds significant relevance. Pastors are called to lead and guide their congregations through challenging times, to address difficult questions, and to provide comfort and encouragement to those in need. Such endeavors require immense courage, the willingness to step outside one's comfort zone, and the strength to confront the various trials encountered along the way.

By embracing the transformative power of courage, pastors can cultivate a faith that is dynamic, resilient, and authentic. They can confront their own fears and insecurities, relying on God's strength to overcome any obstacles they face. Moreover, pastors can inspire and encourage their congregations to live lives characterized by courage,

exemplifying the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. C.S. Lewis's understanding of courage as the source of godly attributes offers a profound perspective for us in the ministry. By embracing courage, we can tap into the wellspring of strength that enables us to navigate the challenges of leadership, confront our doubts and fears, and inspire our fellow disciples to live courageous lives of faith. As we embody the spirit of courage, we as pastors become instruments of transformation, exemplifying the transformative power of God's grace and love in the world.

As a result, in the face of a world that seems to be gaining speed towards utter destruction, pastors are called to be a beacon of hope, to breathe life into a dying world. It is a noble task that requires immense dedication and self-sacrifice. Like the individuals who approached the altar in Booth's song and those who fought bravely in Narnia, we as pastors must lay down our lives, hopes, dreams, and fears before God. It is in this surrender that we will find the strength and courage to persevere so we can fight the good fight without giving up. Dear pastor, you must offer your entire being and be fully committed to God's call on your life, knowing that your life is not your own, rather you're an instrument in the hands of Jesus. Through prayer and seeking the fire of the Holy Spirit, you will be renewed and empowered to face the challenges that come your way.

The fire of God represents the cleansing and purifying presence of God, igniting a passion within you to carry out your ministry with zeal and fervor. As pastors we should pray for the fire to descend upon us daily, inviting the Holy Spirit to equip us, guide us, and embolden us in our mission. When we seek not our own glory but desire to be vessels through which God's love, grace, and redemption can flow into the lives of others revival will come.

Think of it like this; you are an important character in a movie (God's movie) that requires courage to face the enemy (the devil) and complete the task before you (fulfill your calling in the pastorate). The task seems impossible and will certainly

bring you to the end of your natural abilities. However, on this journey there is a Helper (the Holy Spirit) who will never leave you and will give you courage to face the scariest times. This Helper will guide and instruct you along the way, even as you travel through dangerous places where hideous creatures are waiting to devour you (demons of temptation). However, in every situation when defeat seems imminent, you will be given a way of escape and shown a path to success. Sometimes the successes will come with applause, other successes will be shared only with your Helper. You will follow your storyline until the sun sets and you go to be with those who went before you.

I believe seeing yourself in God's storyline was intended in Hebrews 11 when the author recounts the previous heroes' stories and says they are now a "cloud of witnesses" watching your life. This chapter highlights the remarkable faith and courage of numerous individuals throughout history and the incredible acts they accomplished through their trust in God. We as pastors can draw inspiration from the examples of faith, courage, and endurance to inspire us to be brave in our own journey.

Whatever challenges you may be facing as a pastor, Hebrews 11 gives you the answer- faith in God. It emphasizes that faith is the foundation of a vibrant relationship with God. God recounts the stories of various biblical figures who exemplified extraordinary faith to infuse courage into you during the trials you face. Abel offered a pleasing sacrifice to God, displaying his faith to give God his best and trust Him with His finances. Noah, by faith, lived a holy and obedient life despite everyone around being evil. This encourages us never to compromise. Abraham, the father of faith, journeyed to an unknown land, looking forward to the city whose architect and builder is God. Here we are reminded that no sacrifice for God goes unrewarded. Sarah, though advanced in age, conceived a child because of her childlike trust in God's promise. She encourages us to hold onto God's Word even in the most desperate circumstances.

Moses, by faith, chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of Egypt. He reminds us that God's ways are always better. Joshua and the Israelite army saw the walls of Jericho come down. This encourages us to know that no matter how big of a challenge we face, God's power is always greater. Rahab, the prostitute, believed in the God of Israel and protected the spies, leading to her inclusion in the lineage of Jesus Christ. She reminds us that our past mistakes can't hold back God's destiny for our lives. Hebrews 11 concludes by emphasizing men and women of faith who conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong in weakness, and displayed remarkable endurance in the face of persecution and hardship. All these heroes of the Bible possessed unshakable faith and inspire us to boldly face insurmountable odds and accomplish extraordinary feats.

Now it's your turn to have the angels in heaven record the story of your faithfulness to God and the courageous victories you will accomplish in Jesus's name. Though it's true in ministry you will face a thousand deaths, however, the beauty of dying to the flesh so many times is that you are given the honor to rise stronger every time in the life of God! I am praying that you will experience God's best and His success as you put this book into action. God is with you mighty warrior! I'll see you in heaven when our journey here is over and we hear Jesus say to us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Reflection

1. What challenges are you facing in ministry that require your heart to be strong and brave?
2. Meditate on C.S. Lewis's perspective on courage as the foundation of other godly virtues to inspire you to confront your inner struggles and develop humility, love, and self-sacrifice.

3. In what ways can you embody the spirit of courage and become an instrument of transformation in your ministry, exemplifying the transformative power of God's grace and love?

4. How does the example of faith and courage in Hebrews 11 provide you with the assurance that, despite the challenges you face, your labor is not in vain, and your courageous acts of faith will bear eternal fruit?