



**THE
BASICS**
OF PASTORAL
MINISTRY

VOLUME 2

Character Matters

STUDY GUIDE

“Most unsolved problems in the
life of local churches can be traced
back to defective leadership.”

ALISTAIR BEGG

The Basics of Pastoral Ministry: Character Matters (Study Guide)
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INTRODUCTION

The sermons in this volume are intended to help current pastors, aspiring pastors, and lay leaders to have a greater understanding of their calling and work. These sermons and lectures were not originally delivered together in one cohesive series. There is therefore some overlap in content between sermons. The messages in this volume were selected and arranged in order to provide the most help to those who are training for ministry. We hope and pray that they will greatly benefit you as you seek to glorify God wherever He has set you.

Each lesson includes four main parts:

1) Key Scriptures: important Bible verses that were referenced in the message and are flagged for further meditation and memorization

2) Notes: space (and outlines, when relevant) for you to jot down your key takeaways, thoughts, and questions from each message

3) Going Deeper: quotes and questions to help you process each message's main ideas

4) Ways to Pray: prompts that are meant to help guide your petitions to and your affections for God

Learning Objectives

- Examine the private disciplines and personal convictions that enable the pastor to flourish in public ministry.
- Discover and reflect upon the importance of embracing weakness in pastoral ministry.
- Learn how to provide better pastoral care for those who are under your care.

Getting Started

1. Pastors and ministry leaders must be ever learning and growing. What beliefs and attitudes might hinder—or *have hindered*—your progress and cause you to become content with the status quo?

2. Robert Murray M'Cheyne noted that a minister is "a chosen vessel unto [God] to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."¹ This being so, why are the character flaws of gifted pastors so often overlooked? Explain in your own words why godliness should be prioritized over giftedness in the life and ministry of a pastor.

¹Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (1844; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2014), 282.

LESSON ONE

The Strength of Weakness

As fallen creatures, we tend to think that we are most effective when we are strongest. The Bible, however, reminds us that any spiritual strengths we have are gifts from God and should not become a basis for boasting. Like Paul, we must learn to accept that our weaknesses can and will be used by God. Alistair Begg warns us not to rely on our own power but instead to embrace our utter dependence on our heavenly Father.

Notes

The Futility of Boasting

The Challenges of Paul's Detractors

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Beware Strength, Embrace Weakness

KEY SCRIPTURES

“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Going Deeper

1. *“The great tyranny of the age—one of them—is to seduce us into thinking that we will be at our most useful when we actually are as strong as we can possibly be.”*

In your ministry, what would you identify as your greatest weakness? Your greatest strength? Why should this weakness actually be considered the key to your greatest usefulness in ministry? How might your strength become a temptation?

2. *“You see, it is the [Judgment] Day that will bring our lives and ministries to light For on that day, when all shadows are removed and when all comparisons are obliterated in the searing light of the glory of Christ, what you and I have built with will be found then to be either gold and silver and precious stones or wood and hay and stubble.”*

What we do in ministry is often heavily influenced by what we see directly in front of us, and rightly so. But why should a consideration of “the Day” (1 Cor. 3:13), when your ministry will be evaluated by God, outweigh every other factor in determining what you should do in ministry? And how might that encourage you to overcome the fear of any negative consequences that might result from your faithfulness?

3. *“When will our people fall down and worship before the Lord? When we bow down with our faces to the ground. When will I bow down with my face to the ground? When I know that I must. When I know that I have to. But as long as I have a modicum of belief in my own abilities, as long as I have a conviction about my capacity for getting around it and getting through, then I will stay on my feet when I should fall on my face.”*

It is entirely possible to “do” ministry in the flesh—yet such self-dependent ministry will be devoid of the empowering presence of God’s Spirit. Can you honestly say that you’ve been brought to the place where you realize that faithful ministry is impossible in your own strength? Why is this realization necessary if God is to be glorified through your ministry?

Ways to Pray

- Confess to God your inability to serve Him apart from His help, and humbly ask Him to empower you to do so. Pray that the Lord would bring those who sit under your ministry—both now and in days to come—to the same realization that they are helpless apart from God’s gracious, loving intervention.
- Think of other Gospel ministers that you know who may be encountering difficulties in ministry. Pray that the Lord will freshly encourage them and give them strength to faithfully serve Him in the power of the Spirit.

LESSON TWO

The Weakness of Power

The story of Uzziah traces the success of a man marvelously helped by God—until vain pride caused him to plummet sharply into destruction. If we take God off the throne of our hearts, we are in danger of a similar demise. Alistair Begg urges pastors, as students of the Word, to remain ever vigilant of the dangerous sin of pride, especially in the conduct of religious affairs.

Notes

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.” (2 Chronicles 26:5)

“His fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.”
(2 Chronicles 26:15-16)

Going Deeper

1. *“I don’t think that this [decision] happened overnight for Uzziah. I don’t think he woke up one morning and made a categorical decision to turn his back on God.”*

We are no better than Uzziah, and within us all is the same propensity to wander away from God. What are some of the warning signs that we are beginning to deviate from course? What can we do to catch ourselves before we drift too far?

2. *“[Uzziah’s] heart was puffed up as a result of his own self-focus. ... Somewhere along the line, he stopped being a learner. Somewhere along the line, he stopped being a pupil. Somewhere along the line, he became just the disburser of information. He was the one who knew the answers. He was the one who had sought God. After all, look how successful he was.”*

Why are self-focus and the inability to listen to others common temptations for those who are in positions of leadership? And why is the belief that we know all the answers a lie that we must reject?

3. *“What do we need? Well, we don’t need people around us who flatter us. ... What do we need? Number one, you need a wife. ... If for no other reason, you need a wife to keep you humble. ... Secondly, you need children. ... You need kids who love you. You need kids who, as they grow, will be honest with you—sometimes painfully honest, but honest nevertheless.”*

In this quotation, Alistair shows that a remedy for pride is to allow people who love you but are willing to be honest with you to speak into your life. Are there any people in your life that you have allowed to hold you accountable? If not, consider who you should invite into your life in this way. Why are these relationships necessary for you to be able to minister faithfully over the long haul?

Ways to Pray

- The psalmist prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24). Sincerely ask the Lord to search you and reveal to you any hidden pride or sin in your heart.
- Ask the Lord to give you a teachable spirit—one that is willing to listen to and learn from others.
- Be honest with yourself: Are any aspects of your ministry motivated more by a self-focus than by a love for those you shepherd? Pray that the Lord will give you a great love for those under your care, a love that causes you to put their interests before your own.

LESSON THREE

Transparency, Integrity, Urgency

When a church suffers unresolved problems, the resulting chaos can often be traced back to defective leadership. In this study of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, Alistair Begg uses the apostle's life to illustrate three essential factors of effective biblical leadership: transparency, integrity, and urgency. These virtues aren't a magic bullet against difficulty, though. Even a ministry that is open, consistent, Gospel centered, and Spirit led will still face challenges that require steadfast faith and perseverance.

Notes

Introduction

Transparency

Integrity

Urgency

KEY SCRIPTURES

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there.” (Acts 20:18-22)

Going Deeper

1. *“I’m not going to allow my life, my preaching, my teaching, my leadership to be carried along on the roller-coaster of emotional response to undue compliments on the one hand or undue criticism on the other.”*

Leaders must be willing to receive both the encouragement and the criticisms that come their way—but at the same time, they must not allow the feedback they receive to dictate their emotions. This is much easier said than done. How can you maintain a healthy balance of being open to what others have to say while also not being “carried along on the roller-coaster of emotions” that can come from these same comments?

2. *“Think about inept leadership in a company, in a team, in a school, in a church, and you will find that you can trace the ineptitude in large measure to somebody who has asked the question ‘Do I want to lead these people, or do I want these people to like me?’ and he answered the question by saying, ‘I want them to like me.’ And as a result of wanting desperately to be liked by everyone, he lost his ability to lead them.”*

It is natural to want to be liked, but this desire can become a great hindrance to effective leadership. Why will wanting to be liked by everyone cripple your ability to lead?

3. *“Paul has not succumbed to the temptation ... to trim his message so as to appeal to people’s tastes or to avoid people’s prejudices or to tickle people’s fancies.”*

It will be impossible for a pastor to faithfully expound God’s Word and tell people what they want to hear at the same time. Why is an expository preaching ministry incompatible with a desire to “appeal to people’s tastes,” “avoid people’s prejudices,” or “tickle people’s fancies”?

Ways to Pray

- Pray that the Lord will help you to be both thick-skinned and tender-hearted as you minister and receive feedback from those under your care.
- Ask the Lord to strengthen your commitment to faithfully preaching the Bible and to give you the courage not to curb the message so that it conforms to people’s preferences.
- Pray that the Lord will help you to be increasingly transparent and vulnerable in your ministry, and ask Him to use this to build greater trust and respect between you and your people.

LESSON FOUR

A Good Servant of Christ Jesus (Personal)

Ministers of Jesus Christ have a high calling that encompasses their personal lives as well as their public ministry. In this message, Alistair Begg reminds pastors of important points from Paul's first letter to Timothy. Before Gospel ministers can remind others of the truths of the faith, those same truths must first nourish their own souls. Then, actively putting these truths into practice, they are to train themselves in godliness as they labor, with God's help, to proclaim the good news of salvation.

Notes

Introduction

Dangers of This Passage

Setting the Table

Nourished by the Word

Training in Godliness

Toiling and Striving

KEY SCRIPTURES

“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” (1 Timothy 4:6-10)

Going Deeper

1. *“My responsibility is not so much to inform you of things that you do not know as it is to turn to the Scriptures in such a way that we might remind ourselves of things that we must never forget.”*

Those who teach God’s Word often mistakenly think that in order to be effective, they must come up with something new that has never been heard before. But while Bible teaching should be engaging, it should also be an exercise in reminding Christians of the same truths that they already know. Why is it so important that you keep coming back to the same truths in your Bible teaching? How can you engage in this reminding ministry without being cliché or boring?

2. *“Paul encourages Timothy not to take on the false teachers, not to enter into a ministry of denunciation or of condemnation, but rather to make sure that those who are under his care will be learning from him as he learns from Paul.”*

There will always be false teachers and other issues threatening the church. While these must not be ignored, those in ministry must be careful not to allow these concerns to become the focus of their ministry. Why is it important that your ministry primarily focus on upbuilding the saints rather than on exposing error?

3. *“It’s the personal nourishment that sustains the public ministry.”*

Here, Alistair explains that there is a direct correlation between the quality of our private devotional life and our public usefulness in ministry. Private Bible reading and prayer can easily be neglected in the life of a busy pastor who is already engaged in so many other Bible studies and ministry responsibilities. Why is it imperative that you protect your private devotional time? What can you do to ensure that this time will be protected even with many other life and ministry demands?

Ways to Pray

- Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Pause and reflect upon the greatness of God. Ask Him to help you minister in the strength that He alone supplies, and pray that He will refresh your soul as you meditate upon who He is and how much He loves you through His Son.
- Ask the Lord to help you to have a positive ministry of uplifting the saints rather than a negative ministry of denunciation. Pray now for those in your church, that they would increasingly walk in both truth and love.
- Pray that the Lord will increase your passion for His glory so that you are able to give yourself wholeheartedly to His service.

LESSON FIVE

A Good Servant of Christ Jesus (Public)

Since the early church, pastors—especially young pastors—have faced many challenges. In this message, Alistair Begg explores Paul’s instruction to Timothy on the “standing orders” that are to direct the life and work of a Gospel minister. In growing as an example of godliness, it is important to pay close attention to one’s speech, conduct, and the actual work being done in reading, preaching, and teaching the Scriptures. Patient, consistent practice of these things, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, will result in progress that’s attributed to the power and glory of God.

Notes

Introduction

Timothy’s Character

Timothy’s Work

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:12-16)

Going Deeper

1. *“Command and teach these things. Don’t get up on your high horse, Timothy. Have them look up to you, and to look up to you because they hear your words and they are able to observe your behavior.”*

It is much easier to demand that others follow you than it is to live in such a manner that encourages others to respect you and follow your example. Why must pastors live exemplary lives? How can a failure to model the truths that you preach ultimately undermine your ministry?

2. *“The language that has been primarily given to me is a language that is formed in secret, that demands often isolation.”*

Preaching is one of the primary tasks of the pastor. This being so, why must pastors give much time and thought to the words that they will use? How can you balance the need to prepare sermons in isolation with the likewise important duty of spending time with those to whom you minister?

3. *"I am not the finished article—neither as husband, father, grandfather, pastor, friend, whatever it is. I am flawed. You are flawed. But our congregations hopefully can see a wee bit of progress."*

An exemplary life doesn't mean you are sinless. It is encouraging to know that you don't have to be perfect to be a pastor—but every pastor should still be progressing in their faith. How is recognizing the fact that you are flawed and that you need to grow part of your calling to be an example to God's people? How can the acknowledgment of your flaws actually become an asset in your ministry?

Ways to Pray

- Pray that, by God's grace, you will live an exemplary Christian life, and ask that you will be able to live in such a way that all are able to observe your progress in the faith.
- Ask the Lord to help you grow in humility and grace so that those that you "command and teach" will receive your words as loving instruction from one who truly cares for them.
- Pray that the Lord will protect you from the many temptations that come with the isolation that pastors have the privilege of enjoying. Ask that God may help you to be a good steward of your time alone so that it may be used to edify God's people.

LESSON SIX

Keeping Watch

What is the goal of pastoral ministry? In the face of so many temptations to stray from the instruction given to church leaders in the New Testament, Alistair Begg reminds pastors of their role as stewards of God's people. As pastors seek to feed God's flock and fulfill their ministry of pastoral care, they should encourage, exhort, admonish, and counsel out of love both in public proclamation and individual care.

Notes

Introduction

The Goals of Pastoral Care

Practicalities of Pastoral Care

Key Words in the Exercise of Pastoral Care

Questions and Answers on Pastoral Care

KEY SCRIPTURES

“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27)

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” (Colossians 1:28-29)

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” (Isaiah 40:11)

Going Deeper

1. *“You will seldom have an evangelizing congregation if you don’t have an evangelizing pastor.”*

For better or worse, churches will emulate their pastors. Why is it that a congregation will never rise above what it sees in its pastors? What weaknesses do you see in your church, and how can you strengthen these qualities in your own life?

2. *“It’s important that we take time and we make effort to actually know people. ... We love as a father loves his children, caring for them. And the practical evidence of that love will be seen in the generosity of our time.”*

Would your congregation say that you are generous in sharing your time with them? How can you balance your ministry responsibilities while also showing your church that you love them by the time that you devote to being with them?

3. *“For those of us who are not particularly good at listening, then we need people around us who are good at listening, because people need to be listened to. And the passing off of people to folks who are helpful to them is something that we need to cultivate, not out of a sense of self-preservation but out of a sense of care for the souls of our people.”*

Delegation is an important part of pastoral ministry. What areas of ministry are you weaker in that you should delegate to others? How can an unwillingness to delegate actually be a manifestation of pride?

Ways to Pray

- Pray that you and other leaders in your church will grow in compassion for those you minister to. Ask the Lord to help you provide pastoral care that effectively meets the needs of your people.
- Ask the Lord to help you identify gifted individuals in your church who can help to strengthen your church’s ministry.
- Think through people in your church that you need to get to know better. Pray that the Lord will help you to grow closer to them and minister to them more effectively.

EPILOGUE

Character Matters

Key Takeaways

Answer the following questions based on what you learned from the sermons in this volume.

1. Why should you embrace weakness in ministry?

2. How does a pastor's private life influence his public ministry?

3. Why is it important for pastors to find other gifted servant-leaders in the church and delegate responsibility to them?

Further Reading and Study

- *Spiritual Leadership: Principles for Excellence for Every Believer* by J. Oswald Sanders
- *Faithful Leaders: And the Things That Matter Most* by Rico Tice
- *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* by John Piper
- *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, edited by Andrew A. Bonar
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* by Donald S. Whitney
- *Pastors and Their Critics: A Guide to Coping with Criticism in Ministry* by Joel R. Beeke and Nick Thompson
- *The Pastor and Counseling: The Basics of Shepherding Members in Need* by Jeremy Pierre and Deepak Reju
- *The Pastor's Book: A Comprehensive and Practical Guide to Pastoral Ministry* by R. Kent Hughes

Additional Notes



ALISTAIR BEGG graduated from London School of Theology and has been in pastoral ministry since 1975. He has served as the senior pastor at Parkside Church in suburban Cleveland, Ohio, since 1983 and is the Bible teacher on the daily program *Truth For Life*. He is the author of several books, including *On Being a Pastor* and *Truth For Life: 365 Daily Devotions*. He and his wife, Susan, have three grown children.

THIS STUDY GUIDE PROVIDED BY

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THE BIBLE-TEACHING MINISTRY OF **ALISTAIR BEGG**

P.O. Box 398000 Cleveland, Ohio 44139

ph 1 (888) 588-7884 **email** letters@truthforlife.org **truthforlife.org**