

LIVING OUT THE CALL

BOOK ONE:

LIVING FOR GOD'S GLORY

Paul Beasley-Murray

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To Caroline

Preface

Hockey can be a tough game. People can get hurt. I vividly remember getting hurt in a school hockey match – blood was streaming from my mouth and the pain was intense – but the headmaster who was refereeing the match simply shouted to me ‘Play on Beasley-Murray, play on!’. And play on I did.

Ministry too can be tough. People can get hurt. Most ministers go through at least one bad patch in their ministry. Indeed, for me the first seven years of my ministry at Chelmsford were pretty lean. For whereas in my first church in Altrincham everything I had touched seemed to turn to gold and as a consequence the church turned round and began to grow, in Chelmsford everything I touched seemed to turn to dust and the church continued to decline. It was tempting to give up, particularly when there was misunderstanding and even rejection. In that context, however, somebody simply shouting ‘Live out your call, Beasley-Murray’ would not have helped. I needed people around me to help me live out the call.

I trust that the four volumes which make up *Living Out the Call* will prove to be a positive resource to those who have been in ministry for a while and are perhaps finding the going tough. Hopefully the lessons I have learnt over 43 years in stipendiary ministry, 34 of which were spent in leading two local churches, will prove of help to some. Hopefully, too, some of the thoughts and ideas will encourage and revitalise pastors in living out the call.

But *Living out the Call* is not just for seasoned pastors. It is also for those who are just beginning ministry. Indeed, these four volumes are based on lectures that I have given to students preparing for ministry. They need to learn that it is not enough to be called – the call needs to be lived out, and that is a constant process. Hence the present participle – ‘living’ out the call.

Please also note that *Living out the Call* is not an instruction manual. I am very conscious that there is no one way to do ministry. Every individual is unique; and what may be appropriate for one pastor may not be appropriate for another. Likewise, every church has its own individual character and its own particular mission to fulfil. God is not in the business of cloning! This does not mean that individuals and churches cannot learn from one another. Indeed, perhaps we can find a Scriptural basis for this, for according to Proverbs 18.15: “Intelligent people are always eager and ready to learn” (GNB), which the *Living Bible* translates: “The intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them.” Over the years I have greatly benefited from seeing how others operate and subsequently adapting the insights gained to my own church. But do notice, there is all the difference in the world between ‘adapting’ and ‘adopting’. To

‘adopt’ an idea from another church fails to recognise the unique character of each church. Each church has its own special calling to be church. We can learn from one another, provided we do not slavishly imitate.

Living out the Call is different from other books about ministry, not least because of the person I am.

- It reflects 43 years of ministry, 34 years of which were spent turning around two declining churches and developing them into the strong churches they are today. There are not many books on ministry written by authors with such experience. As I know well from my six years as Principal of Spurgeon’s College, it is very easy to lose touch with pastoral realities.
- It reflects a love of ministry. I have enjoyed being a pastor. In spite of some tough times, there was scarcely a day when I did not thank God for the privilege of calling me to be a pastor.
- It reflects a critical ability to learn from the experience and writings of others. This is not a book which tells the story of a pastor and his two churches. Rather, I have engaged with what others have had to say. The book reflects an unusual breadth of reading and academic robustness called for by an MA module.
- Not surprisingly from one who is still a member of the Society of New Testament Studies, it reflects a delight in relating much of my thinking to Scripture where that is appropriate.
- As one who is Chairman both of Ministry Today as also of the College of Baptist Ministers, it reflects a desire to offer something which will encourage and stimulate today’s pastors. I genuinely want to help those who are finding ministry tough to live out the call.
- As befits my personality, the style is clear, passionate and straightforward!

The initial intention was to produce just one book with the title of *Living out the Call: Rising to the Challenge of Ministry Today*. However, my enthusiasm for ministry ran away with itself, so that in the end it became necessary to publish *Living out the Call* in four volumes:

1. *Living for God’s Glory*
Ministry today
The passionate professional
The exemplary pilgrim
2. *Leading God’s Church*
The inspirational leader
The empowering team player
The effective manager
3. *Reaching Out to God’s World*
The missionary strategist
The charismatic preacher
4. *Serving God’s People*
The creative liturgist
The compassionate pastor

It has been an interesting challenge dividing up what initially was one large book into four volumes – and not least grouping individual chapters under four different headings. The results, however, have been pleasing.

- In the first volume, *Living for God’s Glory*, the topics of professionalism and spirituality go surprisingly well together and reinforce my conviction that professionalism is all about giving God our best.
- *Leading God’s People* naturally encompasses the different ways in which pastors are called to be leaders.

- *Reaching Out to God's World* proved a little more problematic: along with the need to develop a missionary strategy I felt preaching could also be included, for preaching at its best always has the world in mind.
- Although the leading of worship and the exercise of pastoral care must never be restricted to the church, nonetheless to a large extent the focus for both is on the people of God, and so they are naturally grouped under the title of *Serving God's People*.

Over the years I have enjoyed sharing the fruits of my experience and learning with pastors and theological students in many different countries. Some of the material in *Living out the Call* represents courses I taught in 2010 and 2013 at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon. However, the immediate inspiration for *Living Out the Call* was invitations to teach Master's courses at Laidlaw College in Auckland, New Zealand in 2014; and at the Colombo Theological Seminary in Sri Lanka, and at Vose Seminary in Perth, Western Australia, in 2015. I dare to believe that the diversity of these settings indicates that the principles underlying these four volumes, although for the most part drawn from ministry in England, are of relevance to pastors wherever they exercise their ministry.

One further introductory comment needs to be made. Unless otherwise specified, the version of the Bible quoted is the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV). Other versions used are the *Good News Bible* (GNB), the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *Revised English Bible* (REB). I have also quoted from time to time from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson.

Finally, in producing these four volumes I am most grateful to my youngest son, Benjamin, who has helped with various technical and editing matters.

Paul Beasley-Murray, July 2015

MINISTRY TODAY

A call to excel

Living out the Call began as a radical revision and an expanded re-write of one of my earlier books, *A Call to Excellence: An essential guide to Christian leadership*, which Hodder and Stoughton published in 1995. At that stage, with almost 25 years of ministry under my belt, I felt that I had a good deal of experience upon which to draw. But that was 20 years ago. Life has changed, church has changed and I have changed. I have learnt so much more about ministry – and so much more about life. As a result, *Living out the Call* is a very different book from *A Call to Excellence*.

One significant difference is the change of the title. When I first wrote *A Call to Excellence* the focus was on the need for ministers to excel. In the introduction I wrote:

“Where excellence is a constant pursuit in the practice of ministry, there growth and development amongst pastors take place. It is my conviction that this is the key to coping with the inevitable challenges of ministry.”¹

However, to my surprise I discovered that for many ministers the concept of ‘excellence’ was off-putting. To my consternation, the very title of my book appeared to have been more a threat than an encouragement. Perhaps I should have sub-titled my book *Pathways to Fruitful Leadership* as did Paul Hopkins, when he wrote *Pursuing Pastoral Excellence*. Here the emphasis is on bearing fruit as a result of abiding in the vine.² Or maybe I should have sub-titled my book *Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* as did Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong when they wrote *Resurrecting Excellence* where the emphasis is on living out ‘the more excellent way’ of 1 Cor 13: “Excellent ministry may be revealed in the number of mission trips and outreach projects and the amount of money spent in ministry efforts, and it is also revealed by the power and presence of God reflected in signs of forgiveness and gestures of reconciliation.”³

Initially I struggled to understand those for whom the term ‘excellence’ was a problem. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘excellence’ as “the state or fact of excelling; the possession of good qualities or abilities to an eminent and unusual degree; surpassing merit, skill or worth.”⁴ In the light of that definition, striving after excellence seemed to me to be a very positive goal for ministers.

I checked with *The Professionalism Blog*: “Excellence is... the root of professionalism. It is about putting in maximum effort, not just to get something done but to achieve the best possible result and to do it with passion! An individual’s choice not to accept second rate or second best for themselves or those around them means not just looking at the big ideas and issues but paying attention to the little things too. They all make a difference.” Again, that too seemed a right and proper aim for ministers – as indeed for anybody.

There on *The Professionalism Blog* I discovered that the pursuit of excellence is not a modern idea. According to the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 - 479 BC): “The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential.... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence.” I read with interest that Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher (384 - 322 BC), said: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” General Colin Powell (1937 -), the first African-American to be appointed US Secretary of State, said something similar: “If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters. Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude.” However, this pursuit of excellence is not to be confused with seeking perfection. As Vince Lombardi (1913-1970), the American football player and coach, declared: “Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.” Nor is excellence necessarily about hitting the headlines. “If I cannot do great things,” said Martin Luther King (1929-1968), “I can do small things in a great way.”

¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, *A Call to Excellence: An Essential Guide to Christian Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1995) 6.

² Paul E. Hopkins, *Pursuing Pastoral Excellence: Pathways to Fruitful Leadership* (Alban, Herndon, Virginia 2011).

³ L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2006) 5.

⁴ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 4th edition 2002).

As a result of this research I felt even more strongly that I was right to encourage ministers to excel. In the wider world society applauds excellence. Businesses present awards for excellence to encourage the pursuit of excellence among their employees. Universities proudly set up centres of excellence. Porsche markets its cars through its magazine, *Excellence*. So why then in ministry should excellence not be something to be admired and to be striven after?

I felt all the more justified in my position when I read *Building below the Waterline: Shoring up the Foundations of Leadership* by Gordon MacDonald. There MacDonald listed the ‘pursuit of excellence’ as one of the ‘ten conditions for church growth’: “The work of God cannot be represented by anything less than the standard to which the culture is accustomed. Shabbiness in preaching, music, administration and programming will quench a growing church’s momentum very quickly.”⁵

However, more recently I have begun to understand the difficulties that some have with ‘excellence’. In the first instance, I discovered that some ministers have unfortunately confused excellence with perfection, which in turn is in danger of creating an unhealthy spirit of ‘perfectionism’. Instead of experiencing joy and fulfilment in ministry, they become ‘driven’ and begin to experience all kinds of psychological problems. Australian psychologist Alan E. Craddock, who has spent many years working with people involved in ministry, has distinguished the following features among such church leaders:

- “They try too hard and become so distracted with their real or perceived failures that they become quite dysfunctional in their ongoing efforts. This is a negative and self-defeating cycle. An unreasonable level of self-blame emerges and the ongoing effects of the cycle intensify;
- They become so dependent on positive feedback and so sensitive to negative feedback that they rely too heavily on human ideas of excellence that are part of the church culture at the time;
- They may even become so discouraged and threatened that, as an unconscious form of self-preservation, they begin to unreasonably blame others for their less than excellent performance. Alleged lack of cooperation, questionable loyalty and commitment, spiritual malaise and having unreasonable expectations may be unfairly cited as reasons for failure. In extreme cases this might lead to blaming, bullying, coerciveness and harsh authoritarianism as they attempt to deal with the situation as it is perceived.”⁶

In such a context clearly ‘excellence’ is an unhelpful concept; although I would wish to add immediately that this is very much a misunderstanding of the term ‘excellence’. As Craddock himself admits, what is needed is “a theology of excellence”.⁷ Furthermore, without wishing to deny the reality of the problem, I am not convinced that it is a widespread issue.

A second and perhaps more common difficulty, however, has emerged, and that is that the verb ‘to excel’ can have a slightly different connotation. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, to ‘excel’ is “to be superior to (a person or thing) in the possession of some quality or the performance of some action; out do, surpass”. Within some settings – such as academia – this remains a very positive concept. However, on reflection, I can see that it can be less than positive when applied to ministry. I now understand how for some the term ‘excellence’ can appear to have unhelpful elitist connotations, and this perhaps leads them to feel that a call to excellence in ministry is beyond them. My argument has always been that God does not ask us to be something of which we are incapable – he simply requires us to seek to give of our best in his service. However, if excellence is defined as being ‘better than others’, then this is unhelpful, for it creates a sense of competition where there are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

In this respect the Apostle Paul has something to say to us when he compared himself with the other apostles: “I worked harder than any of them – although it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15.10). Paul here recognises the folly of comparison – for ultimately everything is down to the grace of God. I checked out the commentaries. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner in their magnificent commentary wrote: “Paul does not describe his hard work as a matter of co-operating with God’s grace but entirely as an effect of God’s grace. What was on display was not a manifestation of Paul’s capabilities or efforts, but of the grace of God that was with him.”⁸ Similarly Gordon D. Fee, the American Pentecostal New Testament scholar, wrote: “In Pauline theology, even his labour is a response to grace, it is more properly seen as an effect of grace.”⁹

⁵ *Below the Waterline: Shoring up the Foundations of Leadership*, (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts 2011) 210.

⁶ Alan E. Craddock, *Driven to Despair: Perfectionism and Ministry* (Mosaic Press, Preston, Victoria, Australia 2013) 54-55.

⁷ Craddock, *Driven to Despair* 56.

⁸ *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Apollos, Nottingham 2010) 752.

⁹ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1987) 736.

God's grace does not do away with the need for effort on our part. So David Prior in his popular commentary rightly noted: "The only proper response to grace is total commitment with every fibre of our being. If God's grace does not produce such energetic single-mindedness, there is something seriously lacking in our faith (see Rom 12.1ff; Col 1.27-29)."¹⁰ Or as David F. Johnson said, there is "a needed delicate balance and insight concerning our own intents, purposes, will and labours with absolute reliance on God's supply of grace for all that we do (see Phil 2.12-13)".¹¹

As a result, I can now begin to understand why some dislike 'a call to excellence'. If excellence is all about doing better than other ministers, then this emphasis on excellence is not wholesome.

On the other hand, if the point of comparison is my own performance, then I would argue that excellence is undoubtedly a good thing. Certainly, when I wrote *A Call to Excellence*, I equated excellence with whole-heartedness in the Lord's service; furthermore, such whole-hearted service is inevitably focused on the Lord and not on others. Excellence in this context is about giving our best to God. To use the title of Oswald Chambers' book, it is about *My Utmost for His Highest*.¹² The title of this book was taken from one of his sermons, where he said "Shut out every consideration and keep yourself before God for this one thing only – My Utmost for His Highest." Chambers also wrote: "The great enemy of the life of faith in God is not sin, but the good which is not good enough. The good is always the enemy of the best!"

This understanding of excellence as giving our all to God is found in 1 Cor 15.58. According to the NRSV Paul wrote: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord"; the NIV speaks of "always giving yourselves fully to the work of the Lord"; the GNB translates, "Keep busy always in your work for the Lord." Literally, Paul wrote 'always overflowing' (*perisseuontes*) in our work for the Lord: i.e. we are to excel in our work for the Lord.¹³

As can be seen, I still believe in excellence, but in the light of the present confusion I have changed the title and adopted a different approach, and as a result I believe the book is the better.

A call to ministry

In one sense, all God's people are 'called'. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, we are all "called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Rom 1.6; see also 1 Cor 1.24), "called to be saints" (Rom 1.7; 1 Cor 1.2) and "called according to God's purposes" (Rom 8.28). But for Paul there was a special 'call' to be an apostle (e.g. Rom 1.1; 1 Cor 1.1) which "expresses the thought of divine calling in opposition to human self-appointment – it is not on the basis of presumptuous human ambition, but on the basis of God's call that Paul is an apostle."¹⁴ It is that same kind of call which characterises all those who have been called to serve God as leaders in his church. God has taken the initiative – he has called us.

As Derek Tidball observed: "From at least Victorian Britain on, until relatively recently, the standard model in evangelical churches concerning the call to ministry was that of the heroic call."¹⁵ Silvester Horne, a great Congregational minister and Free Church historian, is a good example of that. In his 1914 Yale Lectures on Preaching he wrote:

"The real romance of history is this romance of the preacher; the sublime miracle of the God-intoxicated soul with vision of an eternal Will, and sense of an Empire to which all continents, tongues, races belong. This man stands serene amid the clash of arms and the foolish braggadocio of Force, asking only for the sword named Truth, for the harness of Righteousness, and the spirit of Peace. This is the world's unconquerable and irresistible Hero. All its most enduring victories are his. It is he who, year after year and generation after generation, in spite of rebuffs, defeats and disappointments, has planted the manner of the kingdom of justice, freedom and humanity on the conquered and dismantled fortresses of opposition, selfishness and wrong."

¹⁰ *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, (IVP, Leicester 1985) 262.

¹¹ *1 Corinthians* (IVP, Leicester 2004) 287.

¹² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (1924).

¹³ So Arndt & Gingrich, *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 4th edition 1952).

¹⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans I* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1975) 51.

¹⁵ Derek Tidball, 'The Call, Training and Leadership: Biblical Reflections' 74 in *The Call and the Commission: Equipping a New Generation of Leaders for a New World* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes 2009) edited by Rob Frost, David Wilkinson, and Joanne Cox.

A little later he said:

“Who shall be proud of their calling if not we? What other history has ever equalled ours? Think of the processions of the preachers! No range of mountains has been high enough to stay their progress; no rivers deep and broad enough to daunt them; no forests dark and dense enough to withstand their advance. No poet has ever sung the epic of their sacrifices. Was ever such a romance? Was ever love exalted to so pure a passion? Was ever in the human soul so unquenchable a fire? Silver and gold they had none. They did not seek to win mankind by materialistic gifts. Such as they had they gave. The alms they distributed were faith, hope, and love. Wherever they went they trod a pilgrim road, and flung forth their faith, often to a sceptical and scornful generation. But what heeded they? They passed onward from frontier to frontier, ‘the legion that never was counted’, and, let us add, that never knew defeat.

Gradually, before their message, ancient pagan empires tottered, heathen despots bowed the head, in the lands of Goth and Vandal stately cathedrals reared their splendid towers and spire, and the battle music of the Christian crusade rang triumphant in chiming bells and pealing organs over conquered races. In the recesses of Indian forests, up the dark rivers of Africa and South America that often flowed in red, along the frozen coast of Greenland and Labrador, the pioneer preachers made their pilgrimage. Let every village preacher who climbs into a rude rostrum, to give out a text and preach a sermon to a meagre handful of somewhat stolid hearers, remember to what majestic Fraternity he belongs, and what romantic traditions he inherits.”¹⁶

I find such writing a tonic to the soul. It accepts that there are difficulties in the ministry, but it does not allow the difficulties to have the upper hand. On the contrary, the pride in the calling to preach “the boundless riches of Christ” (Eph 3.8) puts any difficulty in the shade. However, for good or ill, we belong to a different generation. Much as I count it the greatest of all privileges to be a minister of Jesus Christ, I have never been conscious of that sense of romance. Ministry has been a high calling, but it has been a tough calling and, like the Apostle Paul, I bear many of its scars. Yet, although in that sense I am not a romantic, I do believe along with Silvester Horne that ministry is a calling. Ministry is our response to the call of God on our lives.

The call to ministry varies from person to person. Just as there is no stereotyped conversion experience, so too there is no fixed pattern of call. Donald Coggan, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, reflecting on Paul’s amazing conversion experience on the Damascus Road, when God called Paul also to serve him as an apostle to the Gentiles, made the wise comment: “God has as many ways of reaching our innermost beings with his love as he has of giving us different faces or different finger-prints... Let us remember that, as there is a mystery surrounding the Being of God, so there is a mystery at the heart of his ways with men. Perhaps above every story of conversion we should write the warning: ‘Mystery! God at work!’”¹⁷ Michael Ramsey, another former Archbishop of Canterbury, similarly wrote of the different ways God calls different people: “To some there may be an overwhelming sense of divine impressing upon the conscience. To others, the call may be one which stirs the mind to deep and enquiring thought. To others the call may be to the feeling of compassion for one’s fellows in the world, a compassion shared with the compassion of God.”¹⁸

A call need not be dramatic in nature – the experience of Isaiah in the temple, for instance, is no more typical of a call than is the experience of Paul on the Damascus Road typical of conversion.¹⁹ It may just be a quiet underlying personal conviction; in the words of an Anglican guide to men and women considering the call to ministry, – “the Holy Spirit leading you and bearing witness with your spirit (Rom 8.14-16), the peace of God ruling as umpire in your heart and mind (Col 3.15).”²⁰ But one thing is for sure: God calls. As Ramsey puts it: “Within the people of God who God has called, there are specific calls to particular actions, works and ministry.”²¹

In the case of my own father, his call to ministry was – like the Apostle Paul’s – directly linked with his conversion experience:

“The wonder of God’s love for people like me, the marvel of Christ’s victory over sin and death in his resurrection, the breath-taking hope of his coming in glory to share the power of his resurrection with me, all

¹⁶ Silvester Horne, *The Romance of Preaching*, (Fleming H. Revell, New York 1914) 37.

¹⁷ Donald Coggan, *Paul: Portrait of a Revolutionary* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1984) 36, 37.

¹⁸ A.M. Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (SPCK, London, 2nd edition 1985) 101.

¹⁹ See Isaiah 6; and Acts 9.1-19; 22.6-16; 26.12-18.

²⁰ Robin Toley, ‘Called to the Ministry?’ 20 in *You and the Ministry* (CPAS, London 1979) by Joyce Baldwin, Robin Toley & Alan Wagstaff.

²¹ A.M. Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* 100.

this made a deep impression upon me. When I grasped these things and saw their implications for life, I felt that everybody ought to know about them. More explicitly it seemed to me that since God had made them known to *me*, I ought to make them known to others. I believed therefore that God had called me to know Christ and to make Christ known. He had brought me to Himself that I might be a preacher.”²²

In my own case, brought up within a Christian home, there was never a time when I did not believe that God wanted me to be a minister. I wish that I could say that it was otherwise. I wish that I could not have been so open to the charge of following in the steps of my father. But the truth of the matter is that like Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord,²³ like Jeremiah the prophet²⁴ and like Paul the apostle,²⁵ I have been conscious of God’s hand upon my life from the very beginning of days. True, as a teenager at one stage I sought to make a half-hearted struggle against it, but I quickly gave up. If there was one text in particular which summed up my call to ministry, it was to be found in some words of Jeremiah: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name’, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”²⁶ As far as I was concerned, ministry was not one option among many – I felt that I had never had any other choice – God had laid his hand upon me and there was no escape. God had called me to ministry – and in particular I believed that God had called me to preach.

There are some, however, who question whether this sense of personal calling to ministry is truly necessary. This questioning was most articulately expressed by Francis Dewar.²⁷ Dewar defined vocation in three different ways: first of all, there is the general vocation or ‘calling’ which all of us have to be followers of Christ; second, there are the various vocations or ‘jobs’ which people may have – this category would include the ‘role’ of being a pastor; and third, there is a specific vocation which is unique and personal to each individual to be the kind of person that God has called them to be.

Dewar’s primary concern was with the pastoral calling, which he saw as being a ‘role’ or ‘job’. He disputed the belief that “a candidate for the priesthood should have an inner sense of calling to that office” and argued that in the first ten centuries of the church’s history it was the Christian community that had the chief part to play in the choice of its leader. Ordination at that stage had nothing to do with an inner personal sense of call, but rather to do with the call of the church. Traces of this earlier attitude to ordination apparently still survive today in the Orthodox Church, where the candidate for the priesthood is led forward to be ordained by two clergy who hold him by the arms – in case he tries to escape!

Dewar believed that we need to recover that earlier understanding of the church playing the key role in ordination. “A person chosen for the ordained ministry does not need an inward sense of vocation to the basic task. What he or she does need are the right qualities for it. That is why the choice needs to be made by others, by the duly appointed representatives of the institution. The church in effect says to a person, ‘You are called by God to be ordained’.” Dewar, however, went on to say that the clergy still need an inner sense of vocation, but only in “some aspect of your activities”, which may indeed have nothing to do with one’s job as a minister. This inner sense of vocation links with his third level of ‘calling’, which has no connection with a particular role, but rather with a particular person.²⁸

I beg to disagree with Francis Dewar. The sense of a call cannot be limited to the prophets. It is also present in the New Testament church, as is evidenced by the way in which Paul begins almost every letter acknowledging his sense of calling. True, the church has a role in discerning a call. Thus, if we understand aright Luke’s account of the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas to missionary work, it appears that it was the church which under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit took the initiative (see Acts 13.1-3). Similarly it is noteworthy that in Paul’s list of qualifications for a

²² G.R. Beasley-Murray, ‘My Call to the Ministry’ 37 in *My Call to the Ministry* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London 1968) edited by C.A. Joyce. For an account of my father’s struggle with his sense of call, see Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth: A personal portrait of the life of George Beasley-Murray* (Paternoster, Carlisle 2002) 16-17.

²³ See Isaiah 49.1. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (English Translation, SCM London 1996) 207 noted: “His entire life is affected by the call.”

²⁴ See Jer 1.5. Christopher Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah* (IVP, Nottingham 2014) 50 says of Jeremiah’s call: “He was not forced into this role, but simply being aware that his very existence was for the sake of carrying out this job produced its own inner pressure – which he felt free to resist but could never evade. This was not a task that he had chosen, but a task for which God had chosen him”.

²⁵ See Gal 1.15.

²⁶ Jer 20.9. See Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Jeremiah* (John Knox Press, Atlanta 1987) 10, 11: “It is questionable whether any Christian can know a sense of meaning for his or her life, or ever escape a restless heart, apart from serving that purpose for which God has created him or her in the beginning. God plans us for tasks in church and society, and we know no peace unless we serve that intention.”

²⁷ Francis Dewar, *Called or Collared: An alternative approach to vocation* (SPCK, London, 2nd edition 2000).

²⁸ Francis Dewar, *Called or Collared* 13, 14.

“bishop” or church leader, no reference is made to a sense of call – the emphasis is on personal qualities (1 Tim 3.1-7). In the light of such passages as also in the light of experience, I happily acknowledge that there may well be occasions when individuals within a church may take the initiative in saying that God is calling a particular individual to leadership among his people, not least because of the personal qualities he or she may evidence. However, this does not mean that there is no place for a sense of personal call. Both are needed. Indeed, I wish to argue there are times when only this sense of personal call will keep ministers going.

Without a sense of a divine call, ministry is unthinkable.²⁹ For this reason the Victorian ‘prince of preachers’, C.H. Spurgeon, told his students:

“The first sign of the heavenly call is an intense, all absorbing desire for the work. ‘Do not enter the ministry if you can help it,’ was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgement. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fullness, for a man so filled with God would be utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants.”³⁰

This sense of call has sustained me and acted as a sheet-anchor when difficulties have come my way. I was not in ministry out of choice, but because God had called me. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “An obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I preach not the Gospel.”³¹ Or, in the words of Martin Luther: “Here I stand, I can do no other.” My security was not to be found in the fact that the church had to give me nine months’ notice if it wished to get rid of me, but rather in the fact that God had laid his hand on me and called me to be his minister.

The church may have paid me a stipend, but the church never owned me. In the eyes of the Inland Revenue I may have been employed, but in the eyes of the law as indeed in the sight of God I was accountable to God and to God alone.³² Like the Apostle Paul I had been “sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father”.³³ This is a frightening thought, but it is also a liberating thought. It means that ultimately I am not dependent upon what others may think of me – it is not other people’s judgement which counts, but God’s.

My call to ministry gave me security. True, there is an inevitable degree of subjectivity in the call. A call is always an inward experience. It is an affair of the heart involving only God and the individual concerned. It is an inner conviction arising from a sense that God has laid hold of me – even “overpowered” me.³⁴ I could not in any way prove scientifically my sense of call. All I know is that I did not volunteer, rather I responded: “Here am I; send me.”³⁵ Yet, having said that, there was an objective side to my calling, for the genuineness of my call had been tested by God’s people and found not to be wanting. The very act of ordination on October 10, 1970 was the church’s public recognition of the rightness of my response. I believe that when we are tempted to doubt our calling, there is much to be said to look back to that occasion when hands were laid upon us – just as when Martin Luther was tempted to doubt his standing in Christ he used to reply: *baptisatus sum* (“I am baptised”).³⁶

²⁹ See Derek Tidball, ‘The Call, Training and Leadership: Biblical Reflections’ 76: “Scripture... needs to be our benchmark. It is apparent in the Bible that all major figures who played a part in leading the nation or the Church had some form of call experience. From Abraham in Genesis 12 to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1.6, a call is evident.”

³⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Passmore & Alabaster, London 1875) 23.

³¹ 1 Cor 9.16. According to Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* 418, 419 this sense of ‘compulsion’ is not to be understood psychologically, but rather refers to his sense of divine destiny. Therefore, says Fee, Paul’s “woe to me” is not to be understood “as if he would experience some kind of inner distress if he were to fail to preach. Since this is his divinely appointed destiny, he thereby would stand under divine judgement if he were to fail to fulfil that destiny.” But if he were to have failed to fulfil his destiny, would not this in turn have caused him distress?

³² See Hebs 13.17.

³³ Gal 1.1.

³⁴ Jer 20.7.

³⁵ Isaiah 6.8. It is important to stress that Isaiah did not ‘offer’ to serve God; rather he responded to the call of God. Isaiah’s willing response has often been contrasted with the hesitation of Jeremiah (Jer 1.6; 20.9), but it is wrong to describe Isaiah as a volunteer. Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (English Translation: SCM, London 1972) commented: “Isaiah recognises that as a sinner he had forfeited his life in the sight of God. Consequently, his call seems to be an unmerited grace, to which he is obliged to be faithful throughout his life (cf. 1 Cor 15.8-10).”

³⁶ See Trevor Rowe, *An Easier Yoke? A Perspective on Christian Ministry* (Epworth, London 1992) 10,11: “I remember that at my own ordination Dr Leslie Weatherhead painted the picture... of a visit to the Lake District when Helvellyn was clearly to be seen on the first morning and then covered by cloud for the rest of his stay. ‘Remember this moment when your call has been confirmed. It will hold you steady when there is no clear vision’, we were told. I understand that. It is good to know on some occasions that one is acting on the basis of an authority that has been given. A memory of God’s whispered call does not help so

A call to ministry – or to pastoring

We have just been talking of the call to ‘ministry’. But in some ways such language is misleading. ‘Minister’ comes from a Latin root and means ‘servant’; ‘pastor’ also comes from a Latin root and means ‘shepherd’. Today we often speak of the ministry of all God’s people – and rightly so: we are all called to serve him. So for that reason there is a lot to be said for using the term ‘pastor’. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that it would be a far healthier witness to the New Testament understanding of the church if ‘ministers’ were known by their function term of ‘pastor’.³⁷

In that respect I find it significant that in the register of nationally accredited ‘ministers’ of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, there are five categories of ‘minister’:

1. Pastors
2. Youth Specialist Ministers
3. Evangelists
4. Ministers not serving in categories 1,2,or 3
5. Retired ministers

In so far as this book is written in the first place for pastors of local churches, I should perhaps therefore use the term ‘pastor’ – rather than minister, which in the context of the Baptist accredited list is a much broader term. Furthermore, I like the term ‘pastor’. I agree with Eugene Peterson that compared with the term ‘minister’, the term ‘pastor’ sounds “more relational, more affectionate than authoritarian”.³⁸

On the other hand, there are difficulties in such nomenclature. Among Baptists in Britain the term ‘pastor’ has tended to be used of those who have not been formally trained – for instance, we talk of ‘lay pastors’, while ‘ministers’ are the professionals. Furthermore, one could argue that the term ‘pastor’ is a hangover from a rural society and sounds strange in today’s largely urban world.

So what term should we use? One strong argument for using the term ‘minister’ is that within a British context ‘minister’ is the term favoured by most denominations – and in so far as I am writing not just for Baptists, this is an important point to bear in mind. Yet theologically I am unhappy with the reasoning behind the use of this term ‘minister’. It reflects the Reformed understanding of ordination as a setting aside of a person to ‘the ministry of word and sacraments’. However, although the ‘ministry of the word’ is a vital and important part of any pastor’s calling, there is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this is an exclusive calling. Likewise, although in most church situations the pastor will normally participate in the baptising and preside at the Lord’s Table, neither ordinance – from within a Baptist context at least – is the pastor’s exclusive preserve. The concept underlying the term ‘minister’ tends to be a more sacramental view of ministry, whereby at ordination a new ‘status’, a new ‘way of being’, is conferred upon the person ordained.³⁹ From a New Testament perspective I believe that this is an untenable position.

My own conviction is that ordination is not setting aside a man or woman to ‘ministry’ but rather the public recognition of the fact that God has called a person to ‘leadership’ within the life of the church. This is a ‘functional’ understanding of ministry. In the light of this we could argue that we should speak of ‘the ministry of all and the leadership of some’; and that therefore the best term for a ‘minister’ or ‘pastor’ is ‘leader’, or ‘team leader’, or ‘pastoral leader’.

To save any misunderstanding, let me clarify one point in particular. This discussion regarding the most appropriate ‘title’ for a minister has nothing to do with status. The teaching of Jesus in Matt 23.8-12 is clear: there should be no place in the church for honorific titles. Whatever our role in the life of the church may be, first and foremost we are all brothers and sisters of one another. In such a community of brothers and sisters there is no place for hierarchy – indeed, Jesus said: “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matt 23.11).⁴⁰ In the light of this one might well question whether even the use of the term ‘Reverend’ is acceptable.⁴¹

much, because in the moment when you need support everything conspires to make you distrust such experiences. What matters is the objectivity the church has given to the call of God’s people focussed in ordination.”

³⁷ See ‘The Ministry of all, and the Leadership of some’ 157-174 in *Anyone for Ordination?* (Marc, Tunbridge Wells 1993) edited by Paul Beasley-Murray.

³⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (Harper One, New York 2011) 2.

³⁹ See Paul W. Goodliff, *Ministry, Sacrament and Representation: Ministry and Ordination in Contemporary Baptist Theology, and the Rise of Sacramentalism* (Regent’s Park College, Oxford 2010).

⁴⁰ Alas, in spite of this clear teaching, all the vices attributed to the scribes and Pharisees have been found in abundance in the Christian church. As W.D. Davies and Dale Allison point out: “While Eastern Orthodox bishops have despite Matt 23.6 enthroned

Of course, in the real world beyond the church, at least in Britain, neither the term pastor nor minister carries much weight – the average Briton knows us as ‘vicars’ or ‘priests’! But that is another issue. Whatever, it is important to note that for the sake of convenience, in this book we use the terms ‘pastor’ and ‘minister’ interchangeably.

Nine positive roles

Many years ago Bing Crosby used to sing: “Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative.” The Apostle Paul similarly sought to ‘accentuate the positive’ when he wrote to the church at Philippi: “Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4.8).

⁴² In turn I have sought to ‘accentuate the positive’ in the choice of the adjectives I have chosen to use to describe the various roles of a pastor. In doing so, I have consciously made some changes to the way I described the roles in *A Call to Excellence*. Furthermore, I have added two extra roles:

- The passionate professional [as distinct from ‘the professional pastor’]
- The exemplary pilgrim
- The inspirational leader [as distinct from ‘the effective leader’]
- The empowering team player [a new role]
- The effective manager [a new role]
- The missionary strategist
- The charismatic preacher
- The creative liturgist
- The compassionate pastor [as distinct from ‘the senior caregiver’]

To my mind, the new adjectives create a feeling of greater warmth – and hopefully in turn act as a ‘salt tablet’ for ministers to aim for more!

Unfortunately in *A Call to Excellence* the impression could have been given that a call to ministry is a call to excel as a ‘professional’. Important as it is to be a professional, this is not actually part of a call to ministry. As I seek to make clear in the following section:

God has called ministers to be:

- Exemplary pilgrims
- Inspirational leaders
- Missionary strategists
- Charismatic preachers
- Creative liturgists
- Compassionate pastors

themselves at the fronts of churches, Pentecostal leaders have sat on raised stages during revival meetings; and in the Old American South the pews were often ranked according to status. Christian leaders of all stripes have, against the spirit of Matt 23.7-12, bestowed upon themselves honorifics, including ‘father’ and ‘teacher’ and ‘bishop’, and of course many post Constantine churches have gloried in power and circumstance, with leaders adorning themselves with costly raiment” (*The Gospel according to Saint Matthew III*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1997, 262-263). They go on to say that “one could scarcely find a biblical text less heeded” (278).

⁴¹ See Paul Beasley-Murray, ‘The Reverend’, *Blog* Nov 5, 2011: “‘The Reverend’ is the style most often used as a prefix in the names of Christian ministers. It is for instance to be found on my business card – ‘Rev Dr Paul Beasley-Murray’. I confess that it is not a prefix I happily use – for ‘the Reverend’ literally means ‘one to be respected’ or ‘one who must be respected’. But for ministers not to use the prefix is – in a British context at least – to imply that they have not been ordained, that they are not truly ‘professional’. So in my dealings with people outside the church I use the prefix – it is to be found on my business cards, my headed church notepaper, and is part of my ‘signature’ on my emails. However, when I am dealing with church people, then both the ‘Rev’ and ‘Dr’ handles disappear – I am simply ‘Paul Beasley-Murray’, if not just ‘Paul’.”

⁴² The term ‘excellence’ is of interest. The NIV translates: “if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things”. The underlying Greek word, not found elsewhere in Paul, is *arete* and according to Arndt and Gingrich’s *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* means ‘excellence of character, exceptional virtue’. G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Apollos, Nottingham 2009) 299 perceptively comments: “Paul expects his readers to see how the noblest aspirations and highest standards of Hellenistic culture are uniquely fulfilled in Christ and in those who are in Christ. But his challenge to ‘think about such things’ also calls for a discerning evaluation of all that is virtuous and praiseworthy in their own culture.”

To that end ministers need to be

- Passionate professionals
- Empowering team players
- Effective managers

Five underlying convictions

It has been said that the difference between a belief and a conviction is that beliefs can change but you will die for your convictions. Or to put it another way, a belief is something you hold, while a conviction is something that holds you. Convictions run deep. Running deeply throughout *Living out the Call* are the following five basic and underlying convictions:

Conviction One: God calls men and women to serve as leaders/ministers/pastors in his church.

- The call comes in many and different ways
- The call gives security
- Ordination is a recognition by the church of that call

Conviction Two: God has gifted all his people to serve him.

- The baptismal roll is the ministry roll of the church
- This ministry is to be exercised both in the church and in the wider world
- The effectiveness of a pastor's ministry is dependent upon the degree to which the pastor is willing to empower God's people to serve

Conviction Three: Within the context of shared ministry, God calls pastors to fulfil a number of specialised roles in his church:

- Inspirational leaders
- Charismatic preachers
- Creative liturgists
- Missionary strategists
- Compassionate pastors
- Exemplary pilgrims

Conviction Four: Because God expects pastors to give their best in his service, this means that they need to be:

- Passionate professionals – developing good ministry practices
- Empowering team players – encouraging others to lead and serve
- Effective managers – both of themselves and of the church

Conviction Five: God wants ministers to live out their call

- Staying the course
- Rising up to the challenges of ministry today
- Remaining fulfilled in ministry

Let me elaborate upon these five convictions.

Conviction One: God calls men and women to serve as leaders in his church

The *sine qua non* of ministry is a personal and inescapable sense of God's calling. It is true that there are other components to ministry. The call to ministry, for example, needs to be marked by appropriate gifts ('charisma')⁴³ and graces ('character').⁴⁴ The call needs too to be tested and recognised by the wider church.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in today's

⁴³ Ministers need to be able to communicate effectively (see 1 Tim 3.2) and relate helpfully with others (see 1 Tim 3.3). An ability to think and a facility for self-awareness are equally vital.

⁴⁴ Love, humility, holiness, industry, perseverance – such characteristics are essential for Christian leadership. Gifts without character are worthless. A minister's life must be marked by spiritual authenticity discernible both within and without the church (see 1 Tim 3.7).

⁴⁵ The testing of the call begins with the local church (see Acts 13.1-3), but needs the further testing of the wider church through appropriate selection panels.

church, as part of the ongoing testing process, there needs to be appropriate training. But at the heart of ministry must be that sense of inward constraint.⁴⁶

Conviction Two: God has gifted all people to serve him

All God's people are gifted for serving God. This is the teaching of Paul in Rom 12.4-8 and 1 Cor 12.4-12, as also of Peter in 1 Pet 4.10-12. For example, Paul prefaces the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12.9-10 with the words, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor 12.7), and concludes: "All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one just as he determines" (1 Cor 12.11). It is this belief that all God's people are 'ministers' ('servants') which underlies the old Baptist custom of following baptism with the laying-on of hands. Here prayer is made that the baptismal candidates be filled afresh with the Spirit of God and thus empowered for service.⁴⁷ Or in the words of *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*: "Lord, bless these your servants and strengthen them by your Holy Spirit as we commission them for service in the Church and the world in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴⁸ For Baptists the church membership roll is – or at least should be – the 'ministry roll' of the church. In the words of the old cliché, we are 'saved to serve'. As the prayer from *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* makes clear, ministry is not to be confined to the church. Service in the community and even political action can be valid forms of Christian ministry. However, it must be admitted that in the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament the focus is on the church. In the church all God's people have been gifted for service. Ministers need to note the comment of Paul Achtemeier: "It must be emphasised that while there is a diversity of gifts, there are no negligible gifts of the Spirit. There are no gifts of God the Christian community can afford to ignore."⁴⁹ If the ministry of a pastor is to be effective, it will be to the degree that the pastor is willing to encourage God's people to fulfil their particular ministries.

Conviction Three: Within the context of shared ministry, God calls pastors to fulfil a number of specialised roles in his church.

Although pastors have a key role to play, they are not called to exercise the kind of 'heroic' leadership, where essentially it is the minister who makes the key decisions and does the 'real business' of the church. Along with the minister church members need to be encouraged to take responsibility and ownership for what is going on. The pastor may be called to spearhead the church's ministry and mission, but this can only be done effectively in a collaborative fashion. No pastor has all the gifts for every aspect of ministry – the involvement and leadership of church members can only but enrich the church's life.

Conviction Four: Because God expects pastors to give their best in his service, this means that they need to be passionate professionals, empowering team players and effective managers.

The three roles here are different in nature from such specialised roles as preaching and pastoral care. Technically none of them are part of a minister's calling – or at least not in the way that preaching or pastoral care may be part of a minister's call. No minister, for instance, is called to be a professional. Yet, without being a professional, without being a team player (note: not team leader!) and without being a manager, ministers will not be able to truly fulfil their specialised callings such as to preach and to care. They may be able to make a 'reasonable job' of ministry and pastoral leadership, but they will never be able to give the best that God would have them give. Notice too that these three roles of professional, team player and manager, are not stand-alone tasks, but can and should relate to every aspect of a minister's calling.

Conviction Five: God wants ministers to live out their call

"If only", said the Apostle Paul to the leaders of the church at Ephesus, "I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20.24). Paul uses here two images to describe God's call, one drawn from the world of sport and the other from the world of work. In the first place,

⁴⁶ See *Hearing the Call: Stories of Young Vocation* (SPCK, London 2014) by Jonathan Lawson & Gordon Mursell.

⁴⁷ See Matt 3.16; Acts 1.8; 8.17.

⁴⁸ *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship: a guidebook for worship leaders* (Oxford University Press 1991) edited by Bernard Green on behalf of the Baptist Union of Great Britain 103.

⁴⁹ Paul Achtemeier, *Romans* (John Knox Press, Atlanta 1985) 197.

ministry is likened to a marathon race (*dromos*) where what counts is not the initial sprint, but the stamina to keep going and finish the race;⁵⁰ secondly ministry is likened to a task (*diakonia*) given by the Lord Jesus which must be completed. The emphasis is on the finishing, “not dropping out from exhaustion or getting disqualified along the way”.⁵¹ Here perseverance is called for. It is the man or woman who sticks at it who achieves the task. Nowhere is this better seen than in the life of William Carey, the great missionary pioneer, who disclaiming all other talents, toward the end of his life described himself as a ‘plodder’ to his nephew Eustace. “I can plod”, he said. “This is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.”⁵² What a lot the world owes to Carey because of his persevering plodding.

The challenge of ministry today

The context in which I am encouraging ministers to live out their call is that many ministers are failing to complete the course successfully. Roy Oswald of the Alban Institute has graphically spelt out the perils of ministry.⁵³

“The following are some of the things we should anticipate will happen to the clergy we ordain and send into the ministry:

1. Some will be unable to endure the stress of ministry and will experience physical and emotional breakdown.
2. Approximately a quarter of these clergy will experience a failed marriage.
3. Within the first ten years of parish ministry, roughly half will either be fired by their congregations or forced to move. Another 15% will be forced out of their parishes during the last ten years of ministry.
4. Some will lose their sense of call and begin placing money and status above the goals of the kingdom.
5. Some will lose all sense of physical stewardship and allow their bodies to balloon to double their normal weight – making them far less credible healers in their members’ eyes.
6. Some will get so caught up in ministry successes and workaholic behaviour that they will cease being good models of Grace.
7. Some will enter new parishes and ‘shoot themselves in the foot’ in the first six months through serious mistakes in judgement.
8. Some will burn out and become exhausted, cynical, disillusioned, self-deprecating clergy.
9. Some are simply not suited for parish ministry and will need a way to exit gracefully.
10. Some will experience personal tragedy and be unable to function for a number of months.
11. Some are going to be caught in sexual malfeasance.
12. Some are simply going to die trying to be effective clergy.”

This list of post-ordination perils is confirmed by statistics. In Australia, for instance, in the early 1990s there were 10,000 ex-pastors, about the same number as those serving in parishes of all denominations.⁵⁴ In 2012 Nigel Pegram, a minister in the Churches of Christ in Australia, wrote: “In my experience the majority of people who train formally for ministry are not in that role ten or twenty years later. Of my own commencement year cohort in 1986, of seventeen students I am only aware of two or three still in ministry in 2012 – an attrition rate exceeding 80%.”⁵⁵

In the USA David McKenna in a perceptive article wrote: “Sometimes the ministerial profession looks like a desert over which a cowboy has ridden and moved on, leaving the debris of burned-out pastors on the trail behind. Broken-down, burned-out and cast-off former pastors sit on the side lines in our churches, sell real estate for a livelihood, and serve as guidance counsellors in the public schools. If they could be renewed rather than rejected, there would be no shortage of pastors.”⁵⁶ Thirty years later the situation is no better: in 2011 the Fuller Institute and Focus on the Family reported: “70% of pastors say they will not be in ministry 10 years from now; and 50% of pastors say they would

⁵⁰ The same idea is found in 1 Cor 9.24-27; Gal 2.2; Phil 2.16; and 2 Tim 4.7. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (John Knox Press, Louisville 1997) 156, commenting on 1 Cor 9.24-27, has the delightful paraphrase: “If these athletes push themselves to the limit in training to win that pathetic crown of withered vegetables, how much more should we maintain self-discipline for the sake of an imperishable crown?”

⁵¹ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Christian Ministry* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1993) 144.

⁵² S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1923) 28.

⁵³ Roy Oswald in a foreword to *Caring for the Caregiver* by Gary L. Harbaugh (Alban Institute, Washington D.C. 1992) vi, vii.

⁵⁴ Rowland Croucher, ‘Why clergy are leaving the church’, *Ministry Today* 1 (1994) 41.

⁵⁵ Nigel Pegram, ‘Emotional Intelligence and Ministry Burnout’ 177 in *New Frontiers: Redefining Christian Ministry in 21st Century Contexts* (Mosaic Press, Victoria, Australia 2003) edited by Jon K. Newton.

⁵⁶ David L. McKenna, ‘Recycling Pastors’, *Leadership* I (Fall 1980) 18, 19.

leave the ministry today because of discouragement, but have no other way of making a living.”⁵⁷ According to Eugene Peterson “defections and dismissals have reached epidemic proportions in every branch and form of the church.”⁵⁸

In Britain, although in a 2014 UK Government survey on job satisfaction ‘clergy’ topped the list of 274 occupations in spite of the fact that their average annual income was only £20,568,⁵⁹ a good number of ministers are struggling with their calling.

In 1993 I discovered that 25% of those who had been trained for Baptist ministry at Spurgeon’s College, London for the period 1955-1985 and had subsequently been ordained, had left Christian ministry altogether.

A survey conducted in 1996 of some 250 church leaders drawn from across the mainline Protestant denominations revealed that “most ministers under 45 have considered giving up their calling.”⁶⁰ In 2000 another survey of 754 Evangelical pastors showed that two out of every five pastors felt overwhelmed by pastoral care demands and more than 53% had considered leaving the ministry.⁶¹ In 2001 an analysis of Baptist ministers revealed that over a fifty year period (1946-1995) half of those enrolled onto the list of Accredited Ministers of the Baptist Union of Great Britain did not retire on it. Although this included some who had moved into other areas of full-time Christian ministry, the number who remained on the list but were no longer in paid full-time ministry cancelled out that figure.⁶²

In 2002 the Society of Mary and Martha published a report which stated: “We believe that the problems of clergy stress, sickness and early ill-health retirement are of sufficient magnitude to warrant serious attention.”⁶³

In 2004 in a survey of one major UK denomination, the percentage of ministers who had considered leaving the ministry because of the workload was rated as 39% – and that didn’t include those who considered leaving the ministry for other reasons!⁶⁴

In 2005 Leslie J. Francis reported on a survey of over 1,000 Anglican clergyman in England. Nearly a third felt that they were working too hard (31%) and felt used up at the end of the day in the parish (29%). One in five felt frustrated by their parish ministry (21%); one in six felt that parishioners blamed them for some of their problems (16%); less than half felt they had accomplished many worthwhile things in their ministry (48%) or that they were positively influencing people’s lives in their parish ministry (44%).⁶⁵

In 2005 a survey of 145 Evangelical pastors in the UK showed that 98% of respondents ‘at least sometimes’ suffered from stress; although the figure reduced to 47% who said that they felt stressed ‘often or always’.⁶⁶

A 2001 survey of Baptist ministers in the Baptist Union of Great Britain by Nigel Coles showed that there were four significant reasons people gave for leaving ministry:

1. Isolation, resulting in lack of encouragement: 60% cited this as an issue.

⁵⁷ Pastor’s [sic] Statistics 2011 – www.jimkellync.wordpress.com – published 15/6/2011.

⁵⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor* 3.

⁵⁹ ‘Vicar or publican – which jobs make you happy?’ *BBC News Magazine* (25/04/2014). Chief executives and senior officials were ranked second with an average of £117,700 per year; followed by managers and proprietors in agriculture and horticulture with an average of £31,721 per year, Publicans and managers of licensed premises were last in the rankings with an average of £25,222. Mark Easton in his analysis noted that “while there is a link between earnings and life-satisfaction, some quite well paid jobs are populated by those with low levels of well-being – and vice versa. For example, despite an average salary of almost £39,000 a year, quantity surveyors work in the 41st most miserable occupation out of 274 categories. The average farmer earns £24,500, but they are a particularly chipper lot with the eighth highest life satisfaction of any job.” See also the American *College Salary Report: 2014-2015 Payscale* (www.payscale.com) which concludes: “The major that leads to the most meaningful work is pastoral ministry – 93% of respondents told us their work definitely makes the world a better place. Graduates who chose this path definitely sacrifice income potential for good karma, since the median mid-career salary for pastoral ministry is only \$46,000.”

⁶⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake: Power and Abuse in the Local Church* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1998) 37-39.

⁶¹ *Pastoral Care Today: Practice, Problems & Priorities in Churches Today* (CWR & Evangelical Alliance 2000).

⁶² Nigel Coles, ‘Ministry Fallout: Can we afford it? Can we prevent it?’, *Ministry Today* 24 (February 2002) 22-28.

⁶³ Carl Lee & Sarah Horsman, *Affirmation and Accountability: Practical Suggestions for preventing clergy stress, sickness and ill-health retirement* (Society of Mary and Martha, Sheldon, Dunsford, Exeter 2000).

⁶⁴ *Care for the Family* 2004.

⁶⁵ Leslie J. Francis, ‘Ministry Burnout: Myth or Reality?’, *Ministry Today* 34 (Summer 2004) 6-12.

⁶⁶ The survey was conducted by *Evangelicals Now*: see John Barton, ‘Being a Pastor never was an easy job’, *Ministry Today* 35 (November 2005) 6-9.

2. Marriage difficulties: 33% stated this as very significant.
3. Stress/burnout: over 25% stated this as very significant.
4. Conflict in relationships: over 20% cited conflict with other leaders; over 20% cited conflict with others in the church.

Although normally there was more than one reason why ministers left, more often than not it was isolation which was “the straw that breaks the camel’s back”.⁶⁷

In 2001-2002 a major North American survey of ministers in the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church concluded:

1. Conflict, burnout, feeling unfulfilled, and experiencing family and marriage problems are the main culprits in draining the supply of parish ministers.
2. Ministers are experiencing a lack of support and support systems, especially when they are coping with conflict. We found that pastors commonly experience mistrust in their relationships with denominational officers and even with their fellow pastors. Frequently they need genuine support and assistance from somewhere outside the denominational power structures.
3. It is not just one but rather a combination of stresses and difficulties that influences pastors to leave... Even sexual misconduct was sometimes an indirect result of experiences that left pastors emotionally vulnerable.”⁶⁸

The concern of *Living Out the Call* is to provide encouragement and support for ministers, so that ministers may not just ‘survive’ but also ‘thrive’ in ministry. There is clearly also a need to provide encouragement and support to pastors (and their spouses) who have left ministry. In Australia such support has been offered through John Mark Ministries under the pioneering leadership of Rowland Croucher.⁶⁹ In the USA there is the website expastors.com which exists to encourage pastors who have had, or are going through, a break-up with the church.⁷⁰ Alas, I am not aware of any similar organisations in the UK.

The challenge of a declining church

Ministry is made all the tougher by the decline of the church in the West. For instance, in 2013 there were 5.4 million church members in the UK, 10.3% of the adult population, 0.3 million fewer than 5 years previously in 2008 when the percentage was 11.8%. It is likely to continue to decline at about the same rate for the next 12 years, reaching 10.0% of the population by 2015, 9.2% by 2020 (and 8.4% by 2025 if present trends continue).

The picture is much worse as far as the major denominations are concerned. According to a 2014 report Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists and Presbyterians have not only declined substantially, they are likely to decline more. Baptists have also declined between 2008 and 2013, but are likely to decline less between 2013 and 2020.⁷¹

UK Church Membership by Denomination, 2008 to 2020

Denom.	2008	% change 2008-2013	2013	% change 2013-2020	2020 est.
Anglican	1,436,329	-5%	1,362,855	-9%	1,241,695
Baptist	208,488	-9%	189,152	-8%	174,873

⁶⁷ Nigel Coles, ‘Ministry Fallout’ 24-26.

⁶⁸ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: why clergy leave local church ministry* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2005) 198-200.

⁶⁹ See jmn.org.au. “John Mark Ministries is a counseling, consulting, preaching, mentoring, seminar and writing ministry, especially for pastors, ex-pastors, church leaders and their spouses. Named after John Mark, the young first century apostle who ‘bombed out’ of ministry when it was hard, we try to help/encourage pastoral leaders – and others – who are also ‘in transition’ due to stress and burn-out.”

⁷⁰ See the ExPastors.com’s statement of purpose: “We believe in God. We believe in the corporate church. We believe that we all have issues. But more importantly, we believe in grace. We believe in restoration. We believe in renewed individuals fulfilling the call of God on their lives. Whether it’s serving in a pastoral or lay leadership role as the janitor, we believe the expastor should, once again, become reintegrated back into ministry, into a place where they are fulfilling their calling.”

⁷¹ Peter Brierley, *UK Church Statistics 2: 2010-2020* (ADBC Publishers Tonbridge 2014).

Catholic	1,611,954	-13%	1,399,942	-19%	1,128,800
Independent	232,281	+3%	239,709	+4%	249,273
Methodist	270,832	-15%	231,357	-24%	176,160
New Churches	195,993	+9%	212,911	+10%	234,155
Orthodox	390,659	+19%	464,194	+11%	514,585
Pentecostal	358,370	+21%	432,687	+25%	541,954
Presbyterian	814,669	-20%	649,067	-30%	455,367
Smaller Denoms. excl Fresh Expressions	155,425	+18%	182,723	+16%	211,883
Fresh Expressions	19,300	+273%	71,900	+50%	108,200
ALL Churches	5,694,300	-5%	5,436,497	-7%	5,036,945

What is encouraging is the growth of the so-called Fresh Expressions of Church, with a further increase of some 50% expected in the period 2013 to 2040. Furthermore, if we look at only England, the picture is less bleak, where overall church membership is holding its own. In 2008 there were 3,709,257 members; and in 2013 3,723,327 adult members. It is estimated that in 2020 membership may have declined by 1% to 3,682,424.

In terms of church attendance for England, Peter Brierley has drawn up the following table:

Year	Anglican	Baptist	Roman Catholic	Independent	Methodist	New Churches	Orthodox	Pentecostal	United Ref Ch'h	Smaller Denoms	TOTAL	% of pop
1979	1,257,200 ²	290,000	1,617,400 ²	235,000	463,300 ²	64,000	10,000	228,000	190,000	141,000	4,495,900	9.7
1980	1,240,000	289,300	1,582,300	244,600	458,300	95,900	10,300	228,900	186,600	141,500	4,477,700	9.6
1985	1,179,000	285,500	1,446,800	256,500	434,200	117,800	11,900	233,400	170,700	143,800	4,279,600	9.1
1989	1,149,500 ²	280,900 ²	1,332,600 ²	266,400	415,900 ²	167,000	13,300 ²	236,000	159,300 ²	145,700	4,166,600	8.7
1990	1,142,300	279,700	1,293,500	224,800	411,700	175,400	14,900	236,400	153,200	138,600	4,070,500	8.4
1995	1,045,300	278,400	1,175,400	211,900	391,400	179,000	22,400	236,500	127,700	108,100	3,776,100	7.7
1998	980,600	277,600	1,145,600 ²	191,600	379,700	190,500 ²	25,200	238,400 ²	121,700	93,100	3,644,000	7.3
2000	962,700 ²	270,900	971,400	186,100	372,600	185,500	25,300	272,700	112,000	94,800	3,454,000	7.0
2005	882,900 ²	254,800	952,900 ²	180,500 ²	289,400	183,600	25,600	297,600	72,700 ²	96,100 ²	3,236,100	6.4
2010	815,300 ²	248,300	860,700 ²	176,700	226,600 ²	180,600	28,400	350,600	64,300 ²	116,800	3,068,300	5.8
2012	790,100	245,100	843,800	165,900	205,800	177,400	29,600	377,700	61,000	122,200	3,018,600	5.6
2015E	751,700 ²	242,900	806,700 ²	152,100	172,800	169,600	30,700	407,300	56,500 ²	115,000	2,905,300	5.3
2020E	681,100	238,200	736,700	147,400	121,800	166,300	32,100	433,800	47,300	104,000	2,708,700	4.8

² Revised figure from previous publication E = Estimate

The decline is not uniform over the country as a whole. There is a good deal of church growth in the South East, and as a generalisation one can say that the nearer churches are to London, the more likely they are to be growing. As David Goodhew puts it: "It is a crude but correct, generalization to say that church growth diminishes the further away

you get from London.”⁷² The 2012 London Church Census revealed there is a huge growth of attendance in the capital. The membership of the Anglican diocese of London, the largest Anglican diocese in the country, has grown by 70% since 1990. Much of the church growth in London is related to immigration – black majority churches abound. Many of these black majority churches are independent and a good number belong to the mainstream churches. For instance, Trinity Baptist Church in South London and Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church in East London, both in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, in 2012 had 2549 and 1876 committed members respectively⁷³ – and no doubt by now there has been yet further growth.

Grace Davie, the doyenne of the sociology of religion in Britain, has highlighted the role that ‘experience’ plays in church growth today. She writes:

“In the current period the actively religious are disproportionately drawn to two kinds of religious organisations: charismatic evangelical churches on the one hand and cathedrals or city-centre churches on the other. The former epitomize firm commitments, strong fellowship and conservative teaching, balanced by the warmth of a charismatic experience. The latter allows a much more individual (even anonymous) expression of religious commitment: in ‘cathedral-type’ churches the appeal is often associated with the beauty of the building, the quality of the music and the traditional nature of the liturgy. The important point to grasp is that in both cases there is a noticeable *experiential* element, albeit very differently expressed.”⁷⁴

Overall, however, the picture is not good. What is more, because of the high proportion of attenders currently over 65 in all the mainline churches, save the Baptist churches belonging to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the prospects for future church attendance are dire. Indeed, even the Baptist churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain have been in decline.⁷⁵ According to the *UK Christian Handbook for 2005/2006*:

“If nothing changes, Presbyterian members are forecast to drop 42% in the period 2000 to 2020, Methodists 37%, Anglicans 31%, Catholics 28%, Independents 22%, and the Baptists 17%. In 1980 11% of the British population went to church; in 2000 8%; and is expected to be down to 2% by 2040, with two-thirds of churchgoers then being 65 or over.”⁷⁶

The predictions contained in the 2007/2008 supplement to the *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 7* were even more appalling.⁷⁷ On current trends overall church attendance for Great Britain in 2050 could be down to 899, 4,000: of this number 123,000 could be Baptists; 101,700 Roman Catholics, 87,800 Anglicans’ and just 3,600 Methodists! But as G.K. Chesterton observed: “Five times in the last 2,000 years the church has to all appearance gone to the dogs. In each case it was the dogs that died.”⁷⁸

The Aberdeen-based sociologist Steve Bruce in *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* wrote of the British Church:

“Unless it can find the secret that has eluded it for 50 years of decline or negotiate a reunion with the Church of England, the Methodist Church will finally fold around 2031. The Church of England will by then be reduced to a trivial voluntary association with a large portfolio of heritage property. Regular church-goers will be too few to show up in representative national survey samples.”⁷⁹

After examining the effect of secularisation throughout the West, he ended his learned tome with the statement:

“Where diversity and egalitarianism have become deeply embedded in the public consciousness and embodied in liberal democracy, where states remain sufficiently prosperous and stable that the fact of diversity and the

⁷² David Goodhew ‘Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present Day’ 9 in *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey 2012) edited by David Goodhew.

⁷³ Figures as given in the 2013 *Directory* of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

⁷⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Wiley Blackwell, Oxford, 2nd edition 2015) 8.

⁷⁵ The most recent figures to hand show that in the period 1993 to 2013 membership declined from 156,939 to 132,008. Interestingly the number of young people, as distinct from children, increased from 36,454 to 38,955, although there have been some lows and highs in the intervening years.

⁷⁶ *UK Christian Handbook 2005/2006* (Bible Society, Swindon 2005).

⁷⁷ *UK Christian Handbook 2007/2008: Religious Trends 7* (Bible Society, Swindon 2008) 126.

⁷⁸ G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1925).

⁷⁹ *God is Dead* (Blackwell, Oxford 2002) 74.

attitude of egalitarianism are not swept away by some currently unimaginable cataclysm, I see no grounds to expect secularization to be reversed.”⁸⁰

We are now moving into an era where the Gospel story is no longer known by an increasing number of young people. In spite of the massive Christian legacy of the past, and despite the presence of an established church, Britain has now become a post-Christian society.⁸¹

A post-Christian society, wrote Alan Gilbert, an Australian academic,

“is not one from which Christianity has departed, but one in which it has become marginal. It is a society where to be irreligious is to be normal, where to think and act in secular terms is to be conventional, where neither status nor respectability depends upon the practice or profession of religious faith. Some members of such a society continue to find Christianity a profound, vital influence in their lives, but in so doing they place themselves outside the mainstream of social life and culture. Like the early Christians in a pre-Christian, classical world, they become a ‘peculiar people’, anomalous in their primary beliefs, assumptions, values and norms, distinctive in important aspects of outlook and behaviour. They become a sub-culture.”⁸²

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, has acknowledged that “the era of regular and widespread worship is over.” Britain is now a “post-Christian nation”. Although “a Christian country in the sense of still being very much saturated by this vision of the world and shaped by it”, Britain is no longer “a nation of believers”.⁸³ Ministers are no longer respected as once they were. Many feel marginalised by society and depressed by their ageing and shrinking churches.⁸⁴ They feel like “charcoal burners or alchemists in an age in which the processes in which they were engaged had been rendered obsolete, technically or intellectually.”⁸⁵ Ministry for many is no longer fulfilling. This was brought home to me in 2005 when a senior Christian editor remarked that after a lifetime of involvement in the world of Christian publishing, I was the first experienced minister she had met who was still really in love with ministry!

This then is the challenging context in which pastors are called to live out their calling. It is certainly not easy being a minister today.

The challenge to survive and thrive

On 21 March 1994 together with a group of like-minded friends I launched what we then called the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry. At the time we declared that our intention was “to encourage professionalism, creativity and vision in ministry. In a fast-changing world ministers need regular opportunities to update their personal and

⁸⁰ *God is Dead* 241. Callum Brown, another Scotsman, wrote *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (Routledge, London 1st edition 2001; 2nd edition 2009). See also *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* (SCM, London 2006) edited by Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte & Sarah Williams, where the editors in their introduction note that “Despite such predictions of decay, when the British were asked in the 2001 census ‘what is your religion?’, over 70% identified themselves as Christians. Moreover, issues of religious faith and identity seem to dominate our newspapers, and television programmes on monasticism, spirituality and religious history continue to capture a large viewing audience.”

⁸¹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes 2004) 8 prefers to talk about Britain as a post-Christendom society, rather than a post-Christian society: “Whether post-Christendom is post-Christian will depend on whether we can re-imagine Christianity in a world we no longer control. Christendom is dying, but a new and dynamic Christianity could arise from its ashes”. Although we accept that technically there is a difference between the two, British society is increasingly post-Christian.

⁸² *The Making of Post-Christian Britain* (Longman, London 1980) ix.

⁸³ *The Daily Telegraph* on April 26, 2014. Rowan Williams was commenting on an ICM poll of 2,000 people conducted for *The Daily Telegraph* which revealed that only 14% of respondents defined themselves as practising Christians, while a further 38% said they were “non-practising” Christians.

⁸⁴ New Zealand appears to be a more distinctively Christian society than the UK. Although church attendance peaked in the 1890s, when 30% of the population were to be found in church on a Sunday, still today it is estimated that some 10% to 15% (this higher figure is from Wikipedia) regularly attend church. According to the 2013 Census 49.12% regard themselves as ‘Christian’, while 41.5% said they belonged to ‘no religion’. Philip Richardson, the Anglican Archbishop of New Zealand, said that the decline in numbers of Christians “liberates us from notions of self-importance and turns us back to our fundamental calling”. All the mainline denominations have declined – Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians have declined in large numbers; Baptists have not kept pace with the increasing population: (in 2001 there were 53,613 representing 1.6% of the population; in 2013 there were 54,345 representing 1.4% of the population). The most recent Census figures from Australia (2011) revealed the following: Christians 61.1%; No Religion 22.3%.

⁸⁵ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1966) 98.

professional skills and to engage in theological reflection. The RBIM is convinced that the benefits it has to offer will be far-reaching: ministers will continue to grow and develop and thereby find personal fulfilment and enrichment; churches will be led with greater effectiveness and will enjoy the fruits of a more positive ministry; and the wider church will reap a greater investment from its resources as a result of improved ministerial morale and a reduced ministerial fall-out.” We quoted the words of Richard Baxter: “All churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall – not in riches or worldly grandeur, but in knowledge, zeal and ability for their work.” Although some years later we changed our name to Ministry Today – and more recently to Ministry Today UK – the vision basically remains the same. In the words of our current strap line: Our aim is “to be a supportive resource for all in pastoral leadership, so that they may not only survive, but also grow and develop, becoming more effective in the ministry to which Christ has called them.”⁸⁶ *Living Out the Call* very much fits in with the vision of Ministry Today UK. My purpose in writing this book is to help ministers not just to survive, but also to thrive in the ministry to which Christ has called them.

Ministry today is tough, but has it not always been tough? In my funeral instructions I have suggested that the text for the address be taken from 2 Cor 4.7: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” The fragility of the clay lamps represents the frailty and weakness of those of us who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and in turn our frailty and weakness make a striking contrast with “the all-surpassing power” of God. Paul here reminds us that normally God’s power in ministry is not displayed in ‘signs, wonders and miracles’, but rather in trouble, in adversity and difficulty. When life is tough, I find it helpful to reflect upon the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul knew what it was like to be “hard pressed”, “perplexed”, “persecuted” and “struck down” (2 Cor 4.8-9). Yet Paul was never ‘out for the count’ – in the words of J.B. Phillips’ translation: “We may be knocked down but we are never knocked out.” Paul always managed to get to his feet again, because of the working of God’s resurrection power in his life. As Paul went on to make clear in 2 Cor 12, it was precisely in “weakness” that Christ’s resurrection “power” was “made perfect” (12.9). Paul’s experience of ministry surely provides inspiration for those tough times of ministry.

Ministry is tough because ministry is about people – and people inevitably bring with them problems. “Pastoral work”, wrote Eugene Peterson, “is like farm work. Most pastoral work involves routines similar to cleaning out the barn, mucking out the stalls, spreading manure, pulling weeds. This is not, any of it, bad work in itself, but if we expected to ride a glistening black stallion in daily parades and then return to the barn where a lackey grooms our steed for us, we will be severely disappointed and end up being horribly resentful.”⁸⁷

Ministry is also an amazing privilege. As Thomas Currie, an American Presbyterian pastor and later a professor of theology, wrote in his introduction to his aptly entitled book, *The Joy of Ministry*: “The gift [of ministry] and the task of pointing to Jesus Christ... is literally filled with wonder, which is not to say that it is filled with exhilaration and euphoria, but that its sheer existence is an ongoing miracle whose grace is both relentlessly embarrassing and surprisingly joyful.”⁸⁸ I write as somebody who has not just survived ministry, but thrived in ministry. Ministry for me has been immensely rewarding. There has almost never been a day when I have not thanked God for the amazing privilege of being called to serve him in his church. There have been tough times, but the good times have far outweighed any difficulties I have encountered. I have been surrounded by people who have loved me, encouraged me, supported me and time again have been patient with me. I have been undeservedly blessed – and for that I am so grateful.

A few years ago, as I was approaching the occasion of the 40th anniversary of my ordination, I reflected on my experience of 40 years in ministry. I wrote the following:

“40 years in ministry. Does the Bible have anything to say about this period of time? As I searched through my concordance, the only significant period of 40 years I found was the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness. Those 40 years were years of punishment imposed on Israel for her failure to trust God. At first sight the parallel between 40 years of ministry and 40 years in the wilderness is not the most apt!

Yet on reflection perhaps there are some parallels which can be drawn. For in ministry we never ‘arrive’ at our destination – we are always marching toward the ‘promised land’. There are times when our congregations can seem recalcitrant – when they murmur and grumble, just like the children of Israel murmured and grumbled at Moses. Certainly there have been times in my ministry when life has been tough;

⁸⁶ See www.ministrytoday.org.uk.

⁸⁷ Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1992) 16.

⁸⁸ Thomas W. Currie, *The Joy of Ministry* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky 2008) x.

periods when ministry has been pretty barren. But God in his goodness has brought me through, and as I look back on this lifetime of ministry there is so much for which I am grateful.

It was with these thoughts in mind that I read again the words of Deut 8.2: ‘Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness’. The 40 years were years of ‘humbling’ and of ‘testing’, but they were also years of learning and of experiencing God’s gracious provision.

At this point I consulted a commentary and read these words of Peter Craigie: ‘The wilderness tested and disciplined the people in various ways. On the one hand, the desolation of the wilderness removed the natural props and supports which many by nature depend on; it cast the people back on God, who alone could provide the strength to survive the wilderness. On the other hand, the severity of the wilderness period undermined the shallow bases of confidence of those who were not truly rooted and grounded in God. The wilderness makes or breaks a man; it provides strength of will and character. The strength provided by the wilderness, however, was not the strength of self-sufficiency, but the strength that comes from a knowledge of the living God’.⁸⁹

As I reflected on these words within the context of ministry, they seemed incredibly appropriate. Ministry is a testing experience. There are times when we ministers are tempted to the very limit of our beings – if not beyond. However gifted we may be, we discover that our natural resources are no longer sufficient – we can no longer cope in our own strength. Thankfully, as we cast ourselves upon God, we also discover that his resources are more than sufficient – his grace is all that we need. Sadly ministry can break people – but it can also make people. Indeed, precisely as a result of the ups and downs of ministry, God can refine us and shape us more into the image of his Son.

‘Remember the long way the Lord has led you’, says the Deuteronomist. As I look back, it has been a ‘long way’. There has been a lot of testing and a lot of learning, too. But through all that period God has been there, providing (see Deut 7.8). So, God willing, when I come to celebrate that 40th anniversary, like Samuel after the battle of Mizpah, I will be able to mark the occasion and say ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us.’ (2 Sam 7.12).⁹⁰

The challenge to learn and grow

Ministry has changed enormously since I first began – and no doubt it will continue to change enormously, too. One of the things I have enjoyed throughout my ministry is rising to the challenge of learning new ways of doing ministry. The fact is that to survive and thrive in ministry we need to keep on learning. This certainly has been my experience. The importance of the initial phase of theological and ministerial formation cannot be overstated; but neither can the importance of post-ordination learning be overstated. Throughout my years as a pastor I have always been learning to ‘do the business’.

On the 25th anniversary of my ordination to Christian ministry I wrote an article listing ‘25 Lessons in Life and Ministry’.⁹¹ My 25 lessons in ministry were as follows:

1. The key to pastoring is loving
2. Pastoral visiting has not had its day
3. Everybody is wounded
4. Meaningful fellowship is best expressed in small groups
5. Every church is different
6. Ministers are made by their deacons
7. The local church is the cutting edge of the kingdom
8. The kingdom is not the church
9. Leadership is the task of the ordained
10. Leadership is plural
11. Good preaching entails structured simplicity
12. Great worship climaxes around the Lord’s Table
13. Baptismal services provide the best opportunities for gospel preaching

⁸⁹ Peter Craigie, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Deuteronomy* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1976) 185.

⁹⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, Editorial, *Ministry Today* 49 (Summer 2010).

⁹¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, ‘Lessons in ministry and in life’, *Baptist Times* 12/10/95 14.

14. Transfer growth is a bonus, not a goal
15. An office at church allows home to be home
16. A book a week keeps a pastor awake
17. Monday morning blues are par for the course
18. Thank God for friends!
19. The Spirit is no substitute for hard work
20. Hard work is no substitute for the Spirit
21. A spiritual director encourages ministerial integrity
22. Constant change is here to stay
23. No church is immune from power games
24. Ministry is tough
25. Ministry is a high calling

When I retired from stipendiary ministry in March 2014, I had been an ordained Baptist minister for over 43 years. I decided to add a further 18 ‘lessons in life and ministry’, but in the end I rounded it up to ‘20 lessons in life and ministry’ – in other words, in total ‘50 lessons in ministry’. The 50 ‘lessons in life’ are reproduced as an appendix, but here are the remaining 25 lessons in ministry, many of which will appear later in this book.

1. Evangelism is a process
2. Actions, not words, are what count
3. Leaders are accountable
4. God is in the business of teams
5. Large is also beautiful
6. People need to be affirmed – constantly!
7. Buildings matter
8. A welcome is more than a hand-shake
9. Churches are best passion-driven
10. Staff blossom with supervision
11. Names are important
12. Communicate, communicate, communicate
13. Pastoral care involves organisation
14. Town-centre churches have a special role to play
15. Excellence is a sign of faithfulness
16. Everybody is welcome
17. A multi-cultural church is a sign of the kingdom
18. Make time to dream
19. Vision needs to be translated into strategy
20. Leaders make things happen
21. Sermon endings are key
22. Not everything is black and white
23. Ministry has its stages
24. Never give up!
25. It’s God’s church

PART 1: THE PASSIONATE PROFESSIONAL

1. Pastors need to be professional

Professionals are passionate for Christ

The adjective ‘passionate’ has been chosen carefully. If pastors are going to be effective in the ministry to which God has called them, then they need to be passionate for Christ.

The words of Paul in Rom 12.11 come to mind: “Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.” If we are to serve the Lord as ministers of the Gospel then we must be on fire for Jesus. The NIV translates the phrase “be ardent in spirit” as “keep your spiritual fervour”. John Stott thought the picture Paul had in mind “is not so much of a glowing lamp as of a boiling, bubbling pot” – Christians are to ensure that they are on the boil spiritually.⁹² I prefer the old RSV rendering: “be aglow with the Spirit”. If the RSV is correct then perhaps the idea present is that of keeping the fire of the Spirit burning. As Paul said to Timothy: “Fan into flame the gift of God that is within you... for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1.6,7). Where the Spirit is at work in our hearts, then we will be keen to give our very best in our service to God. C.E.B. Cranfield commented: “The real proof of the presence of this fire of the Spirit is not effervescent religious excitement, but renewed energy and determination in the humble and obedient service of the Lord.”⁹³

This is the background to my description of a pastor as a ‘passionate professional’. According to Ian Stackhouse passion and professionalism do not go together: “The golden rule of professionalism, almost by definition, is a certain amount of emotional detachment.”⁹⁴ A professional is therefore cool, calm and collected. Well that may be true of other professions, but it is not true of ministry. It has been said: “Knowing your purpose in ministry is vital, but you also have to have a passion for it or you’ll never achieve it. Purpose tells us where we are going, and passion gives us the energy to get there.”⁹⁵ This presumably is why G.W.F. Hegel said: “Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.”⁹⁶

Kent Millard has written that purpose comes from the head, while passion comes from the heart. He quoted Charles Powell, a management coach, who maintained that a person with a clear purpose says “I will do this!”, while a person with passion says “I love to do this”.⁹⁷ This means that when passion is linked with a desire to be professional, then a new sense of spiritual energy is released in the heart of the pastor.

God expects pastors to give their best in his service. It is this underlying conviction that causes me to say that pastors need to be ‘passionate professionals’, developing good ministry practices with a view to honouring the Lord Jesus in all that they do and are. Professionalism in this context has nothing to do with a desire for status, but rather everything to do with a passion for service. Without this dynamism, pastors cannot live up to God’s expectation that pastors give their best in his service

⁹² John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (IVP, Leicester 1994) 331.

⁹³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans II* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1979) 635.

⁹⁴ Ian Stackhouse, *Primitive Piety: A journey from suburban mediocrity to passionate Christianity* (Authentic, Milton Keynes 2012) 101.

⁹⁵ See E. Carver McGriff & M. Kent Millard, *The Passion Driven Congregation* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 2003) 17.

⁹⁶ *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, originally given as lectures in 1822, 1828 and 1830; published posthumously in 1837.

⁹⁷ E. Carver McGriff & M. Kent Millard, *The Passion Driven Congregation* 56.

Professionals are misunderstood

Alas, the need for professionalism in ministry is misunderstood. At a ministers' conference some 20 years ago where I dared to suggest that ministers should seek to be more professional, I was howled down. Almost without exception this group of ministers – drawn from a number of denominations – made it clear that for them 'professionalism' was a dirty word. That conviction remains so even now among many ministers. Just a few months ago I was with four other ministers when one of them raised the issue of professionalisation in ministry. To my amazement two of the ministers almost hit the roof as they vehemently decried such a concept. For them the idea of being a professional was anathema.

The same rejection of professionalism is found in a 'best-seller' by John Piper, who served for more than thirty years as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. His book *Brothers, We Are **Not** Professionals* has been re-published in an updated and expanded edition.⁹⁸ It has been accompanied by rave reviews – according to *Preaching Magazine* it is one of the '10 best books every preacher should read'. I beg to disagree. The very first paragraph of the book sets the tone:

"We pastors are being killed by the professionalising of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt 18.3); there is no professional tender-heartedness (Eph 4.32); there is no professional panting after God (Psalm 42.1)."⁹⁹

A little later he writes:

"The professionalisation of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity among the world's professionals) kills a man's belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting spiritual aliens in the world.

The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism.... God, deliver us from professionalisers!"¹⁰⁰

It is all good tub-thumping stuff, but nowhere does Piper define his terms: had he done so, then I suspect that we might discover that what Piper has in mind is something very different when here in the UK we talk about 'professionalism'. His preface to the New Edition attacks "the professionalisation of ambience, and tone, and idiom, and timing, and banter" – but that is not professionalism. With approval he quotes E.M. Bounds, who equates professionalism to "the low, managing, contriving, manoeuvring temper of mind among us". He ends the preface with a prayer: "Banish professionalism from our midst, O God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labour to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord."

As one who throughout his ministry has sought to be professional, I resent the charge that those of us who seek to serve the Lord in a professional manner fail to give their all to God. The reason why I seek to be a professional is because I want to give my very best to God. I wonder, would Piper be happy to engage the services of an 'unprofessional' surgeon? The very thought is a nonsense! The fact is that Piper and his followers are misunderstanding, and therefore in turn misusing, the word 'professional'.

Unfortunately for some ministers the term 'professional' carries two unhelpful connotations. In the first place, it implies unspirituality – a 'professional' minister in their terms is someone paid to do a job, as distinct from someone who sought to live out a calling. In the second place, it implies 'one-man' ministry – a 'professional' minister in their terms is someone who blocks the 'laity' from using the gifts God has given them.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: a Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee 2013).

⁹⁹ *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* 3.

¹⁰¹ See also J.T. Miller, H. Robinson & P.L. Sampson, *So You Want To Be a Baptist Minister* (Baptist Union of Scotland, Glasgow, no date) 9: "A very real danger in the Christian ministry is that of wearing the cloak of professionalism. It is possible for

No doubt there are historical reasons for these twin associations of unspirituality and ‘one-man’ ministry. As far as the former is concerned, the historical roots are to be found in the Old Testament, where the ‘true’ prophet receives a special calling from God and is contrasted with the institutional prophet and priest, who prophesy falsely and act unworthily. This contrast, for instance, is found in Amos’ reply to Amaziah: “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock. And the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (Amos 7.14, 15). Similarly Jeremiah inveighed against the false prophets who have not “stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and to hear his word” (Jer 23.18); “both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness”, the Lord declares (Jer 23.11: see also 5.13; 6.13, 14). Throughout the history of the church there have been many heirs to this tradition: one thinks, for example, of some eighteenth century Anglican vicars, who seem to have been more interested in the gentlemanly pursuits of fishing and hunting than in fulfilling their divine calling.

However, the fact that pastors are remunerated does not necessitate that they have been corrupted. There is nothing unspiritual about being paid for services rendered. As Jesus himself said: “the labourer deserves to be paid” (Luke 10.10). Indeed, one could argue that a true professional is a labourer who is genuinely worthy of his hire. Professionals are people who do not neglect or leave undone what they are being paid to do while they do something else.¹⁰²

With regard to the unhelpful association of ‘one-man’ ministry, it is true that the ‘professional’ ministry has often thought itself omni-competent and in consequence left little to the ‘laity’ to do other than tolling the bell and taking up the collection. In this sense George Bernard Shaw was right when he drily commented: “All professions are conspiracies against the laity.”¹⁰³ However, rightly understood professionalism has nothing to do with restrictive practices, but rather simply seeks to encourage good working practices. Professionalism in ministry does not deny that God has gifted all his people for ministry, but rather seeks to encourage ministers to fulfil their particular role to the best of their ability. In so far as one essential aspect of pastoral ministry is enabling all God’s people to fulfil their particular ministry (Eph 4.11.12), professionalism in ministry should ultimately boost rather than frustrate the ministry of the ‘laity’.¹⁰⁴

Professionals keep faith with their ordination vows

The English word ‘professional’ stems from the medieval Latin word *professio*, which was used of the taking of vows upon entering a religious order. Gradually the word broadened in its usage and came to indicate “a vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in the practice of an art founded upon it”.¹⁰⁵ Here the emphasis is very much upon the term ‘knowledge’ – not so much knowledge for its own sake, but rather knowledge applied in the service of others.

In the context of Christian ministry, therefore, the word professional relates to the solemn ordination vows taken by those of us who are ministers. There we acknowledged afresh our faith in God, and confessed Jesus Christ as our Saviour and our Lord. We promised “with all fidelity, to preach and teach the word of God from the Holy Scriptures, to lead the congregation in worship and administer the gospel sacraments, to tend the flock of Christ and to do the work of an evangelist”. We promised too “to be faithful in prayer and in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures, and to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called”.¹⁰⁶

My desire to be a professional has been rooted in my desire to be faithful to the vows I took at my ordination. For me there is nothing cold and unspiritual about seeking to be professional – rather my professionalism has been an expression of love of and passion for Jesus Christ.

familiarity with sacred things to breed contempt for them in the heart.... The warmth of a close walk with God will ward off the frosts of professionalism.”

¹⁰² See Wayne E. Oates, *New Dimensions In Pastoral Care* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1970) 47.

¹⁰³ George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor’s Dilemma* (London 1906).

¹⁰⁴ In recognition that in some circles professionalism is viewed with suspicion, John Truscott, ‘Reliability in Ministry’, *Ministry Today* 52 (Summer 2011) 14-21 explored the concept of ‘reliability’. If ministers are reliable, then this will affect how they keep confidences, deliver on time, respond to requests, role-model discipleship, respond to needs, promise to pray and learn to say no, and concludes: “When we are reliable others can relax because they trust us, but in doing that, our aim must be to point them to the One who is utterly reliable, whose word is sure and who promises life in all its fullness.”

¹⁰⁵ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 4th edition 2002).

¹⁰⁶ Ernest A. Payne & Stephen F. Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship: a Manual for Ministers* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 4th edition 1967) 219.

Derek Tidball in *Preacher, Keep Yourself from Idols* has a chapter in which he deals with ‘the idol of professionalism’. There Tidball accepts that the technical sense of being a professional is ‘to reach standards of competence suitable to the profession’.¹⁰⁷ With this sense of professionalism in mind, Tidball writes: “God is no more honoured by our bumbling amateurism than he is honoured by a shallow professionalism. He is worthy of servants who reach high standards, who display competence and produce quality work, not slapdash work, as they serve him.”¹⁰⁸ This then leads him to say “All preachers should develop their skills meticulously to the best of their abilities.” He quotes John Chrysostom:

“For though a man has great force as a speaker (which you will rarely find), still he is not excused continual effort. For the art of speaking comes, not by nature, but by instruction, and therefore even if a man reaches the acme of perfection in it, still it may forsake him unless he cultivates its force by constant application and exercise. So the gifted have even harder work than the unskilful. For the penalty for neglect is not the same for both, but varies in proportion to their attainments... You see, my dear fellow, the ablest speaker has all the more need for careful application.”

Or as Jesus put it: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12.48). In other words, there is no place in ministry for people flying by the seat of their pants. Those who decry professionalism run the risk of endorsing mediocrity rather than excellence, sloppiness rather than carefulness, laziness rather than industry, the second-best rather than the best. Professionals, in the right sense of the word, are those who want to give their very best to God.

Professionals seek the greater glory of God

Ministers seeking to be professional have first and foremost God in view. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul says: “Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10.31). Later when writing to the church in Colossae, he says: “Whatever you do... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus ” (Col 3.17). Or as Eugene Peterson renders this verse in *The Message*: “Let every detail in your lives... be done in the name of the Master, Jesus.” Professionalism in ministry is about being passionate for God.

Many an old church building has on it the initials ADMG. Contrary to Google, this is not an acronym for the Association of Deer Management Groups nor for the Art and Design Management Group, rather it is a Latin tag, *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* – ‘For the greater glory of God’. This surely is what professionalism within a Christian context is all about. It is about giving our best for God; going the extra mile for God; always seeking to improve for God; living out our call! ADMG – surely this should be the mark of every Christian’s ministry.

2. Professionalism is to be welcomed

In the light of the above, professionalism in ministry is clearly to be welcomed. Pastors who wish to live out their call to ministry will seek to be professionals – not for any desire for status, but rather out of a desire to give of their best to God.

Professionalism serves others

Although professionalism in ministry has God in view, it also has the church – and indeed the wider world – in view; for professionalism by definition is about serving others. This becomes clear when we examine some of the sociological criteria for professionalism.

For instance, Peter Jarvis in his analysis of ministry draws upon the definition of professionalism developed by Wilensky and Hall:

¹⁰⁷ *Preacher, Keep Yourself From Idols* (IVP, Nottingham 2011) 175n5.

¹⁰⁸ *Keep Yourself From Idols* 178.

“Wilensky suggested that every profession should have four structural attributes. It should: (a) be a full-time occupation, (b) have its own training school to transmit knowledge and skill, (c) have a professional association, and (d) have a code of ethical practice. Hall added five attitudinal characteristics, which were a sense (a) of autonomy, (b) of self-regulation, (c) of vocation, (d) of service ethic, and (e) of having a colleague reference group.”¹⁰⁹

It is important to note the reference to a sense of ‘vocation’ and of ‘service ethic’

James Glasse adopted a similar approach to professionalism:

“A professional is identified by five characteristics. (1) He is an *educated man*, master of some body of knowledge. This knowledge is not arcane and esoteric, but accessible to students in accredited educational institutions. (2) He is an *expert man*, master of some specific cluster of skills. These skills, while requiring some talent, can be learned and sharpened by practice under supervision. (3) He is an *institutional man*, relating himself to society and rendering his service through a historical social institution of which he is partly servant, partly master. Even when he has a ‘private practice’, he is a member of a professional association which has some control over his activities. (4) He is a *responsible man*, who professes to be able to act competently in situations which require his services. He is committed to practise his profession according to high standards of competence and ethics. Finally, (5) he is a *dedicated man*. The professional characteristically ‘professes’ something, some value for society. His dedication to the values of the profession is the ultimate basis of evaluation for his service.”¹¹⁰

Again, let me draw attention to the concept of ‘service’, and how this service should be of ‘value to society’.

Anthony Russell offered a third model and described “the ideal type of profession” as

“an occupational group that has specialist functions; a prolonged training; a monopoly of legitimate performance; self-regulating mechanisms with regard to entry and expulsion; colleague-group solidarity; autonomy of role performance; a fiduciary relationship between practitioner and client; a distinctive professional ethic stressing altruistic service; a reward structure and career pattern; and a research orientation and control of the institution within which the professional role is legitimated.”¹¹¹

Once more, do note the stress on ‘altruistic service’.

It may be that in some respects pastoral ministry does not fully fit into a professional model – not least because Christian ministry is more than simply meeting people’s needs: in the first place Christian ministry is about serving God. Yet, as Joe Trull and James Carter have rightly argued: “There is more to be gained than lost by the minister assuming the designation of a professional.”¹¹² In particular the designation ‘professional’ is to be welcomed because for the sake of serving others – and not least the church – it encourages a more rigorous approach to ministry.

Professionalism brings benefits to ministers

The consequences of a professional approach to ministry include the following five positive benefits for ministers themselves.

1. The concept of professional ministry encourages pastors to develop a clearer sense of their own identity. ‘Full-time service’ is not an adequate definition of ministry. Within the overall context of the ministry of the whole people of God, the professional minister is called to exercise a specialist role as the pastor of the flock. This role includes leadership, teaching (preaching), caring and enabling.
2. The concept of professional ministry encourages people to take training more seriously. A ‘call’ to ministry is not sufficient for ministry to be exercised. Gifts for ministry need to be developed and trained. Education – including continuing education – is vital if the minister is to have expertise to offer. This expertise will clearly

¹⁰⁹ Peter Jarvis, ‘The Ministry: Occupation, Profession or Status’, *Expository Times* 86 (1975) 264.

¹¹⁰ James D. Glasse, *Profession: Minister* (Abingdon, New York 1968) 38. See also Owen Brandon, *The Pastor and His Ministry* (SPCK, London 1972) 99-105.

¹¹¹ Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (SPCK, London 1984) 13.

¹¹² Joe E. Trull and James F. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Being a Good Minister in a Not-So-Good World* (Broadman and Holman, Nashville 1993) 37.

include an ability to handle knowledgeably the Scriptures – but it needs to include much more than biblical and theological competence. Sadly courses in theological education and ministerial formation do not always match the realities of pastoral ministry, with a result that many ministers perform roles for which they have had no real training.

3. The concept of professional ministry necessitates an occasion when those who have been trained for ministry enter into the ranks of the professionals. Whatever else ordination may signify today, it denotes that the candidate has acquired the necessary skills and qualifications to exercise pastoral ministry as a ‘recognised’ or ‘accredited’ minister. Ordination in this sense is a professional rite of passage.
4. The concept of professional ministry involves an acceptance of good working practices. There is no place for an amateurish approach to ministry. Nor is there place for the second-rate. Here is the context for such practices as supervision and appraisal, as also for the development and acceptance of a professional code of ethics.
5. The concept of professional ministry implies some kind of independent professional association of ministers.¹¹³ While it is true that all mainline denominations contain some body responsible for overseeing standards in ministry, such bodies are normally so closely tied into the denominational structures, that at times there is little room for true independency. There is much to be said for a body specifically set up to advocate and defend the interests of ministers.¹¹⁴

Professionalism demands the best

The pursuit of professionalism first and foremost is about seeking to give our very best in the service of God. This does not come automatically, but is achieved through effort and hard work. In the words of John Gardner: “Some people have greatness thrust upon them. Very few have excellence thrust upon them... They achieve it. They do not achieve it unwittingly by ‘doing what comes naturally’ and they don’t stumble into it in the course of amusing themselves. All excellence involves discipline and tenacity of purpose.”¹¹⁵

There is nothing cold or hypocritical about professionalism. Professionalism involves whole-hearted commitment to Christ and his church. A lack of professionalism in ministry is more often than not a mark of laziness rather than of unspirituality. “I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing” said David (2 Sam 24.24). Although the context is very different from that of ministry, nonetheless a parallel can be drawn: David insisted that he paid Araunah the full price, on the ground that “worship that costs nothing is hardly worthy of the name.”¹¹⁶ David was not satisfied with making an offering to God ‘on the cheap’. Such a spirit is the spirit of the true professional.

Precisely because professionalism in ministry springs from a deep commitment to God, it can never limit itself to the institution of the church. True professionalism has at its heart not the furtherance of self, but rather the furtherance of the Gospel. In this respect I disagree with Kennon Callahan when he declared: “The day of the professional minister is over. The day of the missionary pastor has come.”¹¹⁷ As we shall later argue, the professional pastor is at one and the same time the missionary strategist.

The term ‘professional’ is a worthy term.¹¹⁸ The Church of England was right to entitle one of its guides to selection and training for priesthood *Professional Ministry*.¹¹⁹ In 2014 the College of Baptist Ministers was launched –

¹¹³ Glasse *Profession* 144, for instance, recommended the founding of an American Academy of Parish Clergy.

¹¹⁴ An obvious example of the advantage of an independent body relates to the pay and conditions of service. Another example relates to where there is a conflict between a church and its minister: there is an inherent tendency for ecclesiastical hierarchies to come down on the side of the institution rather than of the individual. When the idea of a professional association was first floated amongst English Baptists, it was overwhelmingly rejected on the ground that it “would tend to divide churches from ministers in a kind of ‘them-and-us’ confrontation”: see *The Fraternal* 176 (June 1976). However, with the formation of the College of Baptist Ministers in 2014 there has been a change of mind: see Clive Jarvis, ‘The College of Baptist Ministers’, *The Baptist Ministers’ Journal* 320 (October 2013) 19–21.

¹¹⁵ John Gardner, *Excellence*, quoted by Ted W. Engstrom, *The Pursuit of Excellence* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1982) 24.

¹¹⁶ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Apollos, Nottingham 2009) 548.

¹¹⁷ Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership* (Harper, San Francisco 1990) 1. Callahan caricatures professional ministers when he wrote: “They maintain a sense of presence, dignity, decorum and decency – with a quietly sad regret – much like the thoughtful undertaker who sees to keeping things in good order throughout the funeral” (4). If Callahan were right, then I would be arguing for a new breed of professionalism!

¹¹⁸ My one regret with the term ‘professional’, as over against the term ‘amateur’ lies in the original meaning of the latter. I would like to believe that professional ministers are also ‘amateurs’ in the sense that “they do the work of their vocation for the sheer love of it” (Kevin Eastell, *Appointed for Growth* (Mowbray, London 1994) 30.)

amazingly it is the first professional body for ministers in the UK. Among other things its vision is to raise standards to ‘the greater glory of God’.

Professionalism needs to be pursued

How in practical terms does ‘giving our best to God’ display itself? Daniel Biles in his book, *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry*, listed two sets of principles as “the foundations and the expressions of ministry”.¹²⁰

The foundations of excellence

- a) Mission: “If a parish does not know what it exists to be and do, no amount of ‘busyness’ and ‘quick-fix’ ideas will substitute.”
- b) Leadership: “The creation and articulation of, the focusing attention on and the developing commitment to a vision of what God is calling the congregation to be and to do” (i.e. making concrete the mission of the church).
- c) Lay commitment and ownership: “The laity ‘own’, take responsibility for and are trusted with carrying out the work of the people of God.”

The Expressions of Excellence

- a) Quality worship, which results in worship becoming “a driving desire to speak and to do the Gospel”.
- b) Quality education, which involves members becoming “biblically and theologically literate”.
- c) Quality care and outreach.

A different approach was offered by David Jesset, who tackled the related theme of ‘quality’ by advocating the setting and monitoring of certain measurable ‘standards’ in the church.¹²¹ His suggestions for minimum standards offered to all actual or potential church goers – *A Parishioner’s Charter* – include the following:

Worship: “All worship services will be clearly publicised and will start on time.”

Administration: “All letters to the vicar should receive at least an acknowledgement within one week.”

Pastoral Care: “All relatives of bereaved people will receive at least one visit from a church representative before a funeral and one follow up visit within three months of the service.”

More spiritual ‘quality’: “At least three times a year every home in the parish would receive an attractive leaflet setting out some aspect of the Christian gospel and inviting people to come along.”

Here is room for thought – and development. The key issue is that professionalism does not just come about as a result of a minister joining a professional association of ministers. Rather, professionalism needs to be actively pursued.

Professionalism results in competency

One of the latest buzz-words to hit the ministerial scene is ‘competency’. Now that churches cannot force their ministers to retire at the age of 65, one way to get rid of them is to accuse them of incompetency.

The former Ministry Executive of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in collaboration with Principals of Baptist Colleges produced a list of ‘core ministerial competencies’ it wished to see developed in ministerial candidates during their period of formation.

1. The ability to understand, interpret and indwell the Christian faith for the contemporary context, especially its Scriptures, so that both personally and corporately the church is able to embody the core values of the Baptist Union.
2. The ability to communicate clearly in public and private settings, including small groups, written material and preaching.
3. The ability to offer servant leadership of the congregation/mission initiative in such a way that the ministry of the whole church is developed, establishing good relationships with others both within the church and beyond, especially in the areas of conflict resolution and the management of change and emphasising the need for good team working skills.

¹¹⁹ *Professional Ministry* (Advisory Board of Ministry, Church House, London, no date).

¹²⁰ Daniel V. Biles, *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry* (Alban Institute, Washington D.C. 1988) 8, 9.

¹²¹ David Jesset, ‘Towards a “Parishioner’s Charter”? – Quality in the Church’, *Ministry* 20 (Summer 1993) 1, 2.

4. The ability to offer high levels of informed and compassionate pastoral care and support to individuals, and in particular to know the limits of what might be achieved and when to refer to others.
5. The ability to lead a church or organisation in its mission, both participating in that mission personally and enabling others to do so, with the particular ability to lead people to Christ.
6. The ability to develop and maintain a spirituality that will sustain a life-long ministry, together with an ability to continue to develop personal growth and life-long learning.
7. The ability to manage self, workload and the strengthening of significant other relationships in order to maintain a balance of ministry and life.
8. The ability to lead others in public worship and to administer the sacraments.
9. The ability to use basic IT resources and media effectively.
10. The ability to welcome, affirm and include others in the life of the church in order to lead a just and inclusive church, in particular to promote racial justice and to be aware of issues of gender-balance.
11. The ability to manage child-protection and vulnerable-adult policies, establishing good practice in these areas and promoting policies that counter domestic violence.
12. The ability to exercise ministry in a multi-cultural and multi-faith environment and to understand ministry in an ecumenical context.

It is a strange list, for along with foundational competences it includes the ability to use basic IT resources and the ability to manage child protection. It is not that these are unimportant – indeed, the protection of children and vulnerable adults is absolutely vital. However, I fail to understand why others cannot share such responsibilities.

In defining competency I am more attracted to the list of ‘benchmarks for ministry’ drawn up by the United Reformed Church.¹²² Here a minister of Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church is:

A faithful minister...

...who lives: committed to Christ; a life of prayer and witness; within the community of the church; with integrity, discipline, joy and commitment; in good, flourishing and wholesome relationships with others

...who knows about and understands: his/her own experiences of life and faith

...who has skills in: giving their own account of the Gospel.

A theologian...

...who lives: a life shaped and being transformed by the Bible; inhabiting a particular tradition, but also within the ecumenical world and inter-cultural community of the Church; in a healthy tension between received tradition and present experience and expression; with mind and heart ready to question and to trust

...who knows about and understands: the Bible; the Tradition (including its expression within the URC); the significance of context and culture in the shaping of faith; the importance of being a theologian for particular times and places

...who has skills in: interpretation, listening and critique; analysis and discernment; interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith within particular contexts.

A worshipper and worship leader...

...who knows about and understands: the demands of shaping worship in contemporary cultures

...who has skills in: deepening faith and worship for others.

A pastor...

...who lives: with a depth of self-awareness; with openness to and a desire to live for others; attentive to the safety of all; with sensitivity and responsiveness

...who knows about and understands: ministry as accompaniment; patterns of human relationship; patterns of human community and society; the human psyche

...who has skills in: listening and counselling; understanding and interpreting people and situations

An educator...

...who lives: as one committed to being a learner throughout life; with awareness of own learning style and needs; taking regular opportunities to learn, develop and grow

...who knows about and understands: how people learn and grow; the place of learning in faith

...who has skills in: teaching all ages and all kinds of people

¹²² Updated from 1993 and adopted as a working draft by the United Reformed Church Education & Learning Committee of 29-30 May 2012.

A missionary and evangelist...

...*who lives*: as one on fire with the Gospel; with a message to proclaim; with a love for God's world; with a commitment to community and others

...*who knows about and understands*: how to analyse and understand the contemporary world and particular contexts; the demands of evangelism today; how societies are made; how truth is established and challenged

...*who has skills in*: effective communication; social and political action; inspiring and enabling others in mission and evangelism

A collaborator and community builder...

...*who lives*: always seeking the good of the one; as one committed to the church s/he serves

...*who knows about and understands*: the particular gifts s/he can bring; group dynamics; how community is made and how communities work

...*who has skills in*: animating the gifts of others; community and team building; models of decision making; leadership and management; administration; working with others

A public figure...

...*who lives*: with a commitment to contributing to the world; in the service of wider society

...*who knows about and understands*: social and political worlds; how to support and how to critique society; how power works; human life at the centre and at the margins

A communicator...

...*who lives*: a life open to others and interested in them; with a passion for deep encounter with others; with creativity and imagination

...*who knows about and understands*: interpersonal communication; oral and written communication

...*who has skills in*: preaching and speaking; presentation of text, image and sound; information technology

Professionalism recognises our dependence upon the grace of God

However gifted and skilled we may be, however hard-working and committed we may be, ultimately we are dependent upon the grace of God at work in our lives. "Apart from me", said Jesus, "you can do nothing" (John 15.5). This means, said William Temple

"All fruit that I ever bear or can bear comes wholly from his life within me. No particle of it is mine as distinct from his. There is, no doubt, some part of His whole purpose that He would accomplish through me; that is my work, my fruit, in the sense that I, and not another, am the channel of His life for this end; but in no other sense. Whatever has its ultimate origin in myself is sin."¹²³

John Perry, a former Bishop of Chelmsford, has said much the same thing:

"The hardest lesson to accept and learn about Christian leadership is that it has to be in God's strength and not our own. Other qualifications for leadership are necessary, but the primary qualification is a new recognition that God's work has to be done in his way and with his power. This cuts across the accepted attitude, 'I can do this in my own strength'."¹²⁴

As a result pastors are first and foremost called to be men and women of God, who day by day seek to open themselves to his life-giving and life-sustaining presence. God in his grace has called us to be his ministers, and it is God who by his Spirit who alone can empower us for ministry. "The grace of God", says Timothy Geoffrion, "creates the only sure foundation for personal transformation and dynamic spiritual leadership".¹²⁵ If we are to be effective ministers of the Gospel then we must live lives that are totally dependent upon God.

It is precisely because of our need to fully yield ourselves to God and his grace that this chapter on ministers as professionals is balanced by the chapter on ministers as pilgrims. Ministers seeking to give their very best to God recognise their dependence upon the grace of God. Indeed, our desire to be professional in ministry is our response to the grace of God. The desire for competency in ministry is not to be equated with any sense of self-sufficiency in

¹²³ William Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel: First and Second Series* (Macmillan, London 1963) 251.

¹²⁴ John Perry, *Christian Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1983) 10, 11.

¹²⁵ Timothy C. Geoffrion, *The Spirit-Led Leader: Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles* (Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia 2005) 193-206.

ministry. The pursuit of competency is motivated by our desire to serve God to the best of our ability. Significantly Ronald Sisk's guide to pastoral theology, *The Competent Pastor*, is subtitled *Skills and Self-Knowing for Serving Well*.¹²⁶

Ultimately our competency for ministry is found in God, and in God alone. In this respect Paul's words to the church at Corinth are very apposite. At the end of 2 Cor 2.16 he asks: "Who is sufficient for these things?" – or as we might say, "Who is 'competent' for these things?" In his defence Paul essentially replies "I am". He argued that people only have to look at the church in Corinth to see how the Spirit has been at work in their hearts (2 Cor 3.1-2). And yet Paul is aware of his own weakness. His confidence in ministry is not in his own ability, but rather he says "our competence is from God" (2 Cor 3.5). Over against the 'super-apostles' of his day Paul was conscious of his dependence on the grace of God. Of himself he was 'insufficient'; "the capacity we have comes from God" (2 Cor 3.5 GNB). As Ernest Best rightly commented:

"Paul is not asserting a confidence in his own ability. He is well aware of His own weakness; he also knows the saving power of Christ. His confidence is therefore before and toward God. He needs neither the recognition of human beings nor their opinions to bolster him up, for all is through Christ. Paul's success and his competency come from God."¹²⁷

Murray Harris sees 2 Cor 3.5 as a commentary on 1 Cor 15.9-10: "all that Paul was as an apostle, along with all that he did as an apostle, unfit as he was for the role... was by the grace of God."¹²⁸ However, Paul's dependence upon the grace of God does not therefore mean that there is anything praiseworthy about 'incompetency'.

To argue, as does Ruth Gouldbourne in an essay entitled 'In Praise of Incompetence', that 'incompetence' in ministry is desirable is misleading.¹²⁹ It is true that there are times when ministry "happens at the very edge of (or even beyond) competency".¹³⁰ There are times when we are conscious of God through his Spirit accomplishing "abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3.20). But this is not reason to decry skills and competence in ministry by praising 'incompetency' in ministry. Gouldbourne's concern is that "if skills and competences define our ministry, we run the risk of fearing to go beyond what we know we can do, what we are confident we can accomplish, and our activity and service become what we can do rather than our openness to what the Spirit is doing to us."¹³¹ That openness to the Spirit is surely present in the list of 'competencies' or 'benchmarks' required by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church respectively.

In the parable of the talents it is the incompetent steward who buried his talent, who is rightly condemned by his master. The exercise of ministry in dependence upon God is not to be equated with "a basic commitment to incompetency"; and even less, when incompetence is defined as "the acceptance of what it is to be human; to be weak, created and fallible". This is not the heart of ministry, nor do I believe it is "the heart of discipleship".¹³² The reverse is the case: the heart of ministry is surely the desire by the grace of God to be competent in the service of Christ. The fact is that Gouldbourne unhelpfully stretches language, not least when she declares that "in the incarnation we see the second person of the Trinity embrace and live in the reality of incompetence." To suggest that our Lord was 'inadequate', 'unfit' and 'incapable' (which the term 'incompetent' actually means) would have surprised the Gospel writers!

¹²⁶ Ronald D. Sisk, *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well* (Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia 2005).

¹²⁷ Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (John Knox Press, Atlanta 1987) 28, 29.

¹²⁸ Murray Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes 2005) 268.

¹²⁹ Ruth Gouldbourne, 'In Praise of Incompetence: Ministerial Formation and the Development of the Rooted Person' 168-202 in *Truth that never Dies: the G.R. Beasley-Murray Memorial Lectures 2002-2012* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge 2014) edited by Nigel Wright.

¹³⁰ Ruth Gouldbourne, 'In Praise of Incompetence' 177, 178: "In those moments when the preacher comes face to face with the mysteriousness of Scripture, when having used all the tools of analysis, criticism, rhetoric and all the other skills we develop, there is finally the confrontation with the Living Word that invites us to dare to speak what cannot be spoken and to trust that the Living Word will communicate, there is a moment of ministry. In those moments when the pastor is confronted by the mystery of another person in the reality of question, grief or joy, and when despite all the skills of counselling and care, there is in the end simply the meeting of one human being with another in the presence of the Presence that is greater than them both, there is a moment of ministry... In those moments when the evangelist loses the words, runs out of arguments, cannot engage a response through all the gifts and talents expertly deployed, but gladly and breathlessly observes as the Spirit transforms a life, there is a moment of ministry..."

¹³¹ Gouldbourne, 'In Praise of Incompetence' 178.

¹³² Gouldbourne, 'In Praise of Incompetence' 183, 184.

Professionalism is not to be decried; as we have argued, it serves others, brings benefits to ministers and demands our very best. However, important as it is to pursue professionalism, we need to recognise that all that we are and do in ministry is dependent upon the grace of God.

Sermon: Is ambition in ministry OK? (1 Timothy 3.1)

*Is it all right to be ambitious?*¹³³

Some years ago I was given a book entitled *How to Make a Habit of Success* by the American business guru, Bernard Haldane. There I read:

“If you want to make a habit of success, you will not be concerned with the protection a large company has to offer the man of mediocre talents, nor will you be content with being the big frog if your pond is a puddle. Static security, big frog or polliwog, can produce only stagnation and unemployment. To take advantage of change and progress, to plan to succeed steadily and excitingly, is not a matter of company size but of personal ambition.”¹³⁴

Clearly as far as Haldane was concerned, there was nothing wrong with wanting to be successful – nothing wrong with being ambitious. Indeed, as far as Haldane was concerned, not to be ambitious is tantamount to wanting to fail in life. But was Haldane right? Some would disagree. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodism, once wrote: “Oh beware! Do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing, and Christ be all in all.” The Jewish Talmud is similarly negative: “Ambition destroys its possessor.”

Ambition – an ambivalent term

The roots of our English word ambition are far from edifying. The word comes from the Roman practice of going round town canvassing votes – our English word ambition is derived from the Latin word *ambire*, ‘to go around’, i.e. to go around touting. The touting aspect of ambition is far from pleasing. It involves creeping or crawling – it involves compromise – it smells of the political cesspit. Hence Jonathan Swift wrote: “Ambition often puts men upon doing the meanest offices: so climbing is performed in the same posture with creeping.”

On more than one occasion Shakespeare warned against the dangers of ambition:

“Who soars too near the sun with golden wings,
Melts them; to ruin his own fortune brings.”

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels. How can men then
Made in the image of his maker, hope to win by it?” (*Henry VIII*, III.2).

However, the meaning of a word is not always determined by its origin. An ambitious person may be a political climber – or should I say creeper – but he or she does not have to be that kind of person. Everything depends on the actual kind of ambition which drives a person.

Ambition is essentially a neutral word, with neither negative nor positive overtones. The dictionary defines ambition as ‘an eager and sometimes inordinate desire for something; or the desire to distinguish oneself in some way’. Everything depends on the nature of the ambition. If one’s ambition is to make money for money’s sake, then it’s not a very worthy ambition. But if one’s ambition is to make money for the sake of promoting some charity, then it’s a very worthy ambition. I remember once reading a report by one teacher to our son Timothy’s housemaster, when Timothy was at Eton: “This young man wants neither to be rich nor famous – what’s wrong with him?” We were in fact quite proud of him: he had his values right!

It is not wrong to be ambitious; everything depends upon the goal of our ambition. For instance, General Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, said that he was motivated by “the impulses and the urges of an undying... ambition” to help people in the slums of London. Without that ambition, our country would be a poorer place.

It can be argued, that not to have any ambition, is actually wrong. Not to have ambition is to set out to fail. There was a Latin proverb which said: “The crowd, the world, and sometimes even the grave, step aside for the man who knows

¹³³ I preached this sermon at Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, on February 23, 2003. The Scriptures quoted are from the GNB.

¹³⁴ Bernard Haldane, *How to Make a Habit of Success* (Warner Books, New York, revised edition 1975) 145.

where he's going, but push the aimless drifter aside." Or as Mark Twain put it: "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog." Walt Disney said: "If you can DREAM it, you can DO it." While Martin Luther King advised: "Set yourself earnestly to discover what you are made to do, and then give yourself passionately to the doing of it."

Too many people have no dreams – too many people have no passions. In this regard Thomas Buxton wrote: "The longer I live, the stronger becomes my conviction that the truest difference between the success and the failure, between the strong and the weak, between the big and the small man, that separates the boys and the men, is nothing but a powerful aim in life, a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory."

What does the Bible say?

The Bible has both good and bad things to say about ambition.

The Bible recognises that ambition can be misplaced.

- Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Don't do anything from selfish ambition" (Phil 2.3).
- James spoke about the undesirability of "selfish ambition" (Jas 3.14).
- When James and John asked that they might have the best seats in heaven by sitting on either side of Jesus in the world to come, Jesus turned the tables upside down by declaring that "If any one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of all" (Mark 10.44). As far as Jesus is concerned, there is no place for self-serving ambition.
- John in his Third Letter had nothing good to say about a certain Diotrephes, "who likes to be the leader" (NRSV: "who likes to put himself first") (3 John 9).

Yet, this doesn't mean that Christians are to sit on their backsides and watch the world go by. For instance:

- Jesus said: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt 6.33 NRSV); "Be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and what God requires of you" (GNB).
- The Apostle Paul likened life to a race and said that in this race we should run to win: "Keep striving to win the prize" (Phil 3.12). Some years ago a book was published with the title: *Our Utmost for His Highest* – that certainly summed up the life of Paul.

Ambition is OK

The verse to which I would particularly draw your attention is found in 1 Tim 3.1: "This is a true saying: if a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires an excellent work." Actually, the GNB is misleading in one respect: in the original Greek Paul doesn't speak of a man, but of 'anyone' (*tis*) – as far as Paul was concerned, leadership in the church was not just for males. I therefore prefer the rendering of REB/NEB: "Here is a saying you may trust: 'To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition'."

What caused Paul to make this statement, we don't know. Maybe there were some in the church who didn't think too highly of church leaders. Maybe there were insufficient people willing to accept the responsibility of leadership in the church. Whatever, Paul declares here that 'Ambition is OK'. Indeed, I believe we can go on to say: 'Leaders – and others – are to be ambitious'. If Christians are not ambitious for Christ, then heaven help the church, and heaven help the world.

Let me quote to you from the magazine, *Leadership*:

"Disdain for worldly success can dull awareness of the God-honouring possibilities in healthy desires. The struggle to grow, to stretch one's abilities, can reside in ambition; so too the drive to make great things happen, to promote change. Best of all, the ambitious include those who strive for excellence, who refuse to settle for a job done merely 'OK'. John F. Kennedy said he wanted to surround himself with ambitious men, 'those who possessed the talent to change the world, along with the drive to do it'."¹³⁵

I readily identify with that sentiment. As a leader within the church of God I long to surround myself with men and women whose ambition is to make things happen. I long to see this church become increasingly effective in the service of God. Heaven help this church if its leaders are content with the status quo and are happy to allow things to

¹³⁵ John Crosby.

drift. The kingdom is not best served by laid-back religion. It needs leaders whose hearts are on fire to bring in the kingdom.

Ambition is OK if the ambition centres around the task. “If a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires an excellent work.” The emphasis is upon the “work”, the task of leadership. It is not OK if it simply centres around the office – the title. Ambition which seeks position for the sake of position is wrong – it is self-centred. But ambition which seeks position for the sake of extending the kingdom, is OK – it is Christ-centred. Christ-serving as distinct from self-serving ambition is OK.¹³⁶

I have little doubt that Paul was an ambitious man. Paul in the best of senses was a driven man – driven to serve his Lord. To the Corinthians he wrote: “How terrible it would be for me not to preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9.16). To the Romans he said: “My ambition has always been to proclaim the Good News in places where Christ has not been heard of, so as not to build on a foundation laid by someone else” (Rom 15.20). Paul had an ambition to be a gospel pioneer, and to that end he toiled with might and main.

Ambition involves hard work. I love the way Paul expresses himself in 1 Cor 15.10: “But by God’s grace I am what I am, and the grace he gave me was not without effect. On the contrary, I have worked harder than any of the other apostles, although it was not really my own doing, but God’s grace working with me.” Paul was a hard worker, precisely because he was an ambitious man. It has rightly been said that “ambition never gets anywhere until it forms a partnership with work.”

So, to my fellow leaders I would say: it’s OK to be ambitious. Indeed, I hope that you will be ambitious – that you will strive to fulfil your calling to the best of your ability. But it’s not just leaders who are to be ambitious. All of us, wherever God has set us, are called to be ambitious. “For me to live is Christ”, wrote Paul to the Philippians. (Phil 1.21 NRSV). Christ was his passion – so it is to be ours too. Just as Paul was driven by his passion to live for Christ, so too should we be. Just as Paul was driven by his passion to tell others of Christ, so too should we. This church would be revolutionised – indeed our world would be revolutionised!

¹³⁶ See John Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* (IVP, Leicester 1978) 172 – 173 : Christians could and should be “ambitious for the spread of [God’s] kingdom”, and once that fundamental ambition was in place, they were then free to have “secondary ambitions”, to “develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence, and be given promotion in work – not to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God”. Significantly Alister Chapman entitled his biography of John Stott, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (Oxford University Press 2012).

3. Defining the role of pastors

Pastors need to be accountable

Most ministers do not have an agreed job description: a survey of 141 ministers in mainline Protestant churches revealed that 77% did not have a meaningful job description'.¹³⁷ Actually, the very term 'job description' is suspect, for a job description could suggest that a minister has entered into a contract with a church and thereby is an employee. But currently, in the eyes of English law, ministers are not employees accountable to the local church but they are 'office holders' and are accountable only to God.¹³⁸ For this reason many ministers reject the idea of defining the role. This rejection is disingenuous – for ministers are accountable to others, whether in Anglican terms it be the bishop or in Baptist terms the church meeting.

Some ministers fear that accountability to others could result in their being managed by others, which in turn they believe could compromise their calling. This is a false fear. For ministers to be accountable to a church does not mean that they are being 'managed' by the church. Rightly understood, accountability is about trust and transparency, and not about control and power.

Being an 'office holder' has encouraged an unhelpful independency of spirit. While ministers do have a specialist ministry to exercise, they do so within the context of shared ministry and shared leadership. For instance, ministers do not have exclusive rights on vision: vision needs to be shared and agreed together, first with leaders such as deacons and elders and then by the church as a whole.

A strong opponent of job-descriptions has been Derek Tidball, the former principal of London Bible College (now the London School of Theology). He argued that the job-description approach to ministry "encourages a career mentality" and that this approach contains a number of inherent flaws:

- "The more one spells out, the more one has to spell out. It leads down the road of contracts, sub-clauses, definitions, legalism, and eventually of employment tribunals and the sad spectacle of Christians suing one another."
- "Pastoral ministry is essentially about relationships, not about contract." Like marriage, ministry is about a covenant, characterised by love, self-giving, and of promise to be together 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer'
- "It is sterile and lacks imagination. To be told how many sermons one must preach, how many visits one must make, how many communions one must conduct, how many meetings one must chair, how many house-groups one must teach, and so on, leaves little room for creativity and inspiration."¹³⁹

I strongly disagree with what I can only describe as a 'caricature' of what happens once a job description is developed. In my experience of pastoral ministry, there can be great benefit, both to minister and to church, in defining the role of the minister. Indeed, surely one of the marks of professionalism is a willingness to draw up a job specification, in which responsibilities are clearly identified.

The precise nature of the job specification will vary according to context. Let me illustrate this from the several different job descriptions I drew up for myself over 21 years of ministry at Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford.

The seven-fold task

My first job description in 1995 was heavily influenced by my writing *A Call to Excellence*. A lengthy document, it nonetheless clarified the nature of my role.

¹³⁷ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1998) 58.

¹³⁸ How much longer ministers in the UK will remain 'office holders' is a moot point. It may well be that in the not too distant future the law will change and ministers will become subject to employment law.

¹³⁹ Derek Tidball, *Builders & Fools: Leadership the Bible Way* (IVP, Leicester 1999) 8, 9.

1. *An exemplary pilgrim.* My first responsibility is to be an exemplary pilgrim to my fellow church members. Although of necessity my very humanity means that I will always fall short of the mark, nonetheless the way in which I live and cope with the ups and downs of life must be a spur as also an encouragement to others in their walk with Christ. Something of the spirit of Jesus must be discernible in me. This will mean that in the first instance I must keep watch over my own spiritual life (see Acts 20.28), which in turn entails a commitment to develop my personal relationship with God. On the basis that none of us are called to live the Christian life alone, it also means that I need others to keep watch over me, which in turn entails an openness and willingness on my part to receive encouragement, and if necessary correction, from others. My commitment to a disciplined rule of prayer is a prerequisite for all that I seek to do in the church. My leadership, my preaching, my conduct of worship, my pastoral care – all these activities must in the first place be rooted in prayer, so that my ministry, on the one hand is responsive to the Lord's leading, and on the other hand is exercised in the Lord's strength.

2. *An effective leader.* My second responsibility is to be an effective leader of the church and thereby enable the church to fulfil her God-given calling. Such leadership in the first place involves developing a vision for the way in which the church lives its life together. The values, beliefs, style and culture of the church are dependent upon the kind of leadership that is exercised. Effective leadership must be pastorally sensitive. This in turn requires that as senior minister I seek to live in tune with my people, setting a pace that is appropriate to them, while at the same time encouraging them to fulfil their God-given potential. Effective leadership needs also to be shared leadership. In the first place leadership needs to be shared with my fellow ministers. Leadership needs also shared with the deacons, as also with the various task-oriented teams and activity leaders. This in turn means that an important aspect of my leadership is to encourage and empower others to serve with me in leadership. Effective leadership involves managing the organisational side of the church's life, recognising that good management entails responsible delegation and regular review of people and systems. As senior minister this in particular requires working closely with the Church Administrator and the Church Secretary.

3. *A missionary strategist.* My third responsibility as missionary strategist is closely related with that of being an effective leader, save that as missionary strategist the world as distinct from the church is primarily in view. My task as a missionary strategist involves working with other leaders to constantly define and clarify the church's mission and resultant strategy. In turn this vision of the church's mission needs to be shared regularly with the church as a whole, as also with everybody seeking membership with us. The task also involves building and welding together the church as a team with a view to enabling it to be an effective mission force. Along with others I need to ever be seeking to mobilise the church for mission.

4. *A charismatic preacher.* My fourth responsibility is to be a charismatic preacher: i.e. a preacher whose sermons prove to be a vehicle for God's Spirit to touch and transform the lives of individuals as also the corporate life of the church! Here is a challenge not simply to teach God's Word, but to act as a prophet and an evangelist at one and the same time. Ideally Sunday mornings – as indeed Sunday evenings – will be occasions which people will not want to miss, for they will be coming eagerly and expectantly to hear what God is wanting to say! In so far as the preaching role includes the teaching role, it also means that I am responsible for encouraging the spiritual growth and development of the church: e.g. through Sunday sermons, Wednesday fellowship groups, and baptismal/church membership classes.

5. *A creative liturgist.* My fifth responsibility is to be a creative liturgist, who through the regular Sunday worship as also through occasional pastoral offices enables God's people not only to celebrate their faith, but also discover resources in God for daily living. This will mean along with my ministerial colleagues as well as with others I will work at preparing for Sunday worship – through devising orders of service which give shape and direction to the worship; through choosing hymns and songs which reflect the various needs, ages and cultures present within the congregation; through ensuring that the language and content of the prayers is imaginative and stretching with a view to enriching and broadening the church's prayer-life; and through giving opportunities to others to contribute to worship. It will also mean that along with the assistant minister I will be responsible for the conducting of weddings and funerals, and will also continue to look for opportunities to develop new rites of passage.

6. *A senior caregiver.* My sixth responsibility is to be the senior caregiver responsible for the pastoral oversight of the church. This is a multi-faceted task, for it involves not only caring for the 'weak' and for those going through the various crises of life, but also promoting the spiritual development of the 'strong'. As senior minister of the church I need to know all those in my pastoral charge. Along with general visiting, this

also entails being alongside people undergoing significant change in their lives: e.g. at the point of birth, death, redundancy, divorce. I also see a special responsibility toward my fellow leaders. However, if the full-range of pastoral opportunities is to be seized, then pastoral responsibilities must be shared. This will entail: supporting the pastoral team in their work; encouraging leaders of care groups; helping the church to view fellowship groups as growth groups; and sharing marriage preparation with suitably gifted people in the church.

7. A pastoral consultant/theologian. As one who has now been engaged in Christian ministry for some 25 years and who has had the opportunity to read and reflect on pastoral practice, I find myself in the position of being able to serve others as a pastoral consultant and/or theologian. In the first place I seek to discharge this role by sharing my insights and expertise within the church. In particular I see myself as having a role in the ongoing training of ministerial colleagues. Where required, my services are also available to others. In the second place I seek to discharge this role by exercising a wider ministry beyond the church to other ministers and churches. In the third place I seek to discharge this role by developing and maintaining effective relationships with the ministers of other churches in the town, the ministers of other Baptist churches in the Essex Baptist Association and various external organisations as determined from time to time.

Do note that throughout the job description there is an emphasis on involving and working along with others in the church. Ministry is about empowering others to use their gifts in God's service.

Fourteen principal accountabilities

My second job description – or 'job profile' as it was called – was considerably shorter. The format was influenced by a deacon involved in drawing up strategies for local government.

Job Title	Senior Minister
Special responsibility	Developing and implementing strategy, communicating vision, and embodying the church's core values
Reports to	The Leadership Team
Job Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To excite fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging God's people to embrace others with love of another kind, enabling individuals to change and to grow, and empowering the church for witness and service. With the other ministers of the church to implement the mission policy of the church as agreed in the church development plan.

Principal accountabilities

1. To increase the spiritual maturity of the fellowship through expounding God's Word, Sunday by Sunday in preaching and teaching.
2. To lead worship creatively.
3. To encourage the fellowship to greater missionary/evangelistic outreach.
4. To provide visionary leadership.
5. To provide pastoral care to those who have particular needs and in times of crisis, including being alongside families as they go through the life cycle of birth, marriage and death, as well as the spiritual development of the 'strong'.
6. To develop and enable others to lead the fellowship and contribute to the mission and purpose of the church.
7. To be involved with other churches and to represent our church to the wider world.
8. To be responsible for the development of the ministerial team.
9. To take the lead in welcoming newcomers to church and integrating them into the fellowship.

10. To take a lead in the management of change as this affects the ministerial team and administrative staff, the leadership team and the pastoral team.
11. Although ultimately accountable to the church meeting through the leadership team, in the first place be accountable to the support and personnel group of the leadership team.
12. Every four months to prepare for the leadership team a written account of the way in which he has sought to implement the agreed vision and strategy of the church.
13. Every six months to participate in the performance management review process, setting goals for the forthcoming year at the meeting to be held in the spring of each year with representatives of the deacons.
14. To carry out such other duties which, may reasonably be required from time to time.

Six responsibilities

In 2010 a review of church life by an external consultant revealed that my then style of leadership was in danger of causing me to become ‘the cork in the bottle’, impeding further growth. I realised that if we were to break the 400-membership barrier, then more delegation would be needed, not least in the area of pastoral care. With the encouragement of my deacons I therefore re-defined my responsibilities as follows:

1. Leading the church – not managing the church. I love to spark with fellow leaders and to cast the vision, but I need to be freed of running the church.
2. Expounding God’s Word on a Sunday– but not organising the small group programme.
3. Welcoming newcomers – but not overseeing their integration into church life. I love to visit newcomers – but then pass them on!
4. Pastoring God’s people – but not engaged in routine pastoral care. I want to be alongside families as they go through the life-cycle of birth, marriage and death, but otherwise want to leave pastoral care to others.
5. Growing leaders – not attending meetings. I want the focus in the week to be on developing and supporting my staff in their ministry.
6. Reflecting on ministry issues, writing for and encouraging fellow ministers.

As these three job descriptions make clear, there is no one job description which would fit all ministers. Job descriptions will vary from church to church – and will vary according to a minister’s personality and gifting. Furthermore, it will be seen that nothing in church life should ever be written in stone. There is always a place for tweaking or re-writing a job description.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ As part of their preparation for looking for a successor to me as senior minister at Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, my leadership team were given a list of 23 roles or abilities for ministry prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and asked to score each role or ability on a scale of 1 to 5. The scale was labelled as follows: 5. Essential; 4. Highly desirable; 3. Desirable; 2. Less desirable; 1. No need. When the scores were collated, the following averages – in order of priority – resulted: Bible Teacher (4.93); Visionary Leader (4.86); Team Leader (4.71); Prayer and Spiritual Direction (4.54); Facilitator of Gifts of Others (4.43); Evangelistic Preacher (4.07); Staff Supervisor (4.00); Leadership Development (3.93); Conflict Resolution (3.54); Pastoral Visitor (3.50); Mission Promotion (3.46); Worship Leading (3.36); Social Action (3.08); Ecumenical Contact (3.00); Personal Evangelist (2.93); Administrator (2.92); Trainer (2.85); Counsellor (2.64); Community leader (2.62); Wider ministry, e.g. in local association (2.38); Fund Raiser (1.64); Youth Work (1.43); Musical Ability (1.36). I confess that I was both pleased and surprised with these scores. I was delighted to discover that Bible teaching topped the list – it seems to me that in any church good Bible teaching is important, but particularly so in a larger church. Likewise I was pleased to see visionary leadership came second. It was good too to see team leadership up at the top – in a larger church where there is a ministerial team, the ability to be a good team leader is crucial. I was gratified to see that my leaders recognised the importance of prayer and spiritual direction. I was a little surprised that the gift of evangelistic preaching was not rated more highly, and even more surprised that the gift of personal evangelism was relatively low (I wondered what Spurgeon would have made of that. For him a key qualification for entry into his college was proof of ‘soul-winning’). It is a sign of the times that worship leading was not ranked higher. I would have said that the ability to lead people into the presence of God was vital. I found it interesting that pastoral visiting was perceived as a middle-order gifting or role – for I believe that you can only know people when you have seen them in their homes. I smiled when I noticed how low administration came – and wondered whether my people had any idea of how much time administration takes up in the life of most pastors!

4. Benefiting from appraisal

Pastors need to welcome appraisal

In many – if not most – work situations in Britain, annual appraisals have become a way of life. Once a year employees have an opportunity on an individual basis to sit down with their immediate superior and review their past performance with a view to setting fresh goals for the following year.

This formal exercise gives an opportunity for managers to affirm the person and to say “well done”; to review previously set objectives and set future goals; to provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to express dissatisfaction; to identify training needs; to rewrite the job description with new emphases; and to determine career prospects. It is important to emphasise that first and foremost appraisal is intended to be a positive process. If appraisal involves criticism, then it should be constructive criticism with the well-being of the individual as well as the well-being of the organisation in mind.

It is my conviction that appraisals should also be a way of life for pastors. A mark of a professional pastor is a willingness to undergo annual appraisal, with a view to developing excellence in ministry.¹⁴¹ Appraisal is in the interests of the pastor. Appraisal too is in the interests of the church.¹⁴²

A theological foundation for appraisal was provided by the United Methodist Church of America:

“Evaluation is natural to the human experience. Evaluation is one of God’s ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope for the future. Without confession of sin there is no reconciliation; without the counting of blessings there is no thanksgiving; without the acknowledgement of accomplishments there is no celebration; without awareness of potential there is no hope; without hope there is no desire for growth; without desire for growth the past will dwarf the future. We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic and hopeful look at what we have been and what we can still become. Surrounded by God’s grace and the crowd of witnesses in the faith, we can look at our past unafraid and from its insights eagerly face the future with new possibilities.”¹⁴³

Unfortunately many ministers feel threatened by the prospect of appraisal. Believing themselves primarily accountable to God, they do not want to have to give account of their ministry to another. But if the word ‘love’ is changed to ‘accountable’ in 1 John 4.20 we find “We cannot be accountable to God whom we have not seen, if we are not willing to be accountable to our brother and sister, whom we have seen.”¹⁴⁴ If only ministers were to appreciate that appraisal, properly handled, is a positive experience with their welfare in mind, they would welcome the opportunity for appraisal with open arms.

Ministerial appraisals are not an unhelpful bureaucratic invasion into ministry. They are simply a development of the traditional practice of spiritual direction.¹⁴⁵ From within the British scene David Sheppard, who as the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool had considerable experience of ministerial appraisals, wrote:”

¹⁴¹ Within the context of ministry, the purpose of appraisal was defined by the Methodist Church Division of Ministries in their 1992 Conference Report, *Accompanied Self-Appraisal*, as follows: 1) to affirm their gifts, achievements and personality; 2) to step back and take stock (especially with reference to previous goals and unexpected happenings); 3) to reflect on (a) their personal aspirations and needs; (b) their effectiveness in their daily work; 4) to check out their performance (a) in their immediate work context; (b) in relationship to the institution within which they operate; 5) to improve skills, insights and gifts; 6) to identify areas for profession and personal development; 7) to recognise challenges, identify achievable goals and determine appropriate strategies for future action.

¹⁴² See William D. Horton, ‘Assessment of Ministry’, *Expository Times* 95 (March 1984) 165: “The lack of any regular assessment of ministry affects both the church and the pastor. No right-minded church allows its central heating system to deteriorate through failure to renew the annual service contract.”

¹⁴³ From a pamphlet prepared by the Division of Ordained Ministry of the United Methodist Church, quoted by Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry: Principles & Processes for Clergy & Congregations* (Alban Institute, Washington D.C. 1992) 7.

¹⁴⁴ Likewise from the Division of Ordained Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

¹⁴⁵ See Michael Jacobs, *Holding in Trust: The Appraisal of Ministry* (SPCK, London 1989) 7: “Although [spiritual direction] may historically have concentrated upon the minister’s prayer life, inevitably spiritual life is affected by, and in turn affects, the whole of ministry. Spiritual direction at its best is also concerned with the whole person and the whole ministry.”

“Today’s clergy... are under increasing pressure... Expectations whether appropriate or not, are high and it is all too easy to be lured into an attitude of uncritical and unreflective ‘activism’.

I believe all who exercise an ordained ministry in the Church of God need, somehow, to keep alive and foster the vision, excitement and challenge that fuelled their vocation; ministerial review and appraisal ought to be a non-threatening, yet supportive and creative way of doing just this, ensuring that we remain effective disciples all our lives.”¹⁴⁶

In many ways appraisal is more helpful to ministers than almost any other group of workers, for ministry is by and large a lonely profession. Unlike other professionals, ministers for the most part do not work together in teams. They are on their own. True, they are part of a local church, but not even the lay-leaders of that local church have any real idea of what is involved in the day-to-day ministry of their pastor. In such a context annual appraisal can break down some of the isolationism and in so doing prove to be extremely supportive.

Annual appraisals also provide an opportunity for any difficulties to be picked up at an early stage and dealt with appropriately. Appraisals may be likened to a form of preventative medicine. Within the context of reviewing a person’s ministry, a skilled appraiser can discern areas which without attention might lead to subsequent disaster. Appraisals provide an opportunity for early diagnosis of problems. They also provide a safe place for the kind of straight talking which is not otherwise normally possible.

There are, however, particular difficulties with regard to the appraisal of ministers.

One difficulty, as has already been noted, is found in the fact that all too often there is no written job description. It is assumed that everyone knows what ministers do and what is required of them. But there are a variety of approaches to ministry. There are a variety of ways in which ministers may organise their time and determine their priorities.

A second difficulty is that ministers for the most part are their own bosses. Technically employed by the church, in reality they act as leaders of the church. To whom are they accountable when it comes to appraisal?

A third difficulty is that the ‘performance’ of the minister is intimately bound up with the ‘performance’ of the church. It is difficult to appraise the one without the other. “To separate the ministry of one Christian, namely the pastor, for evaluation”, wrote Jill Hudson, “without considering the ministry of those with whom he or she shares the work of a particular congregation is not only unjust but theologically unsound.”¹⁴⁷ Ideally the work of the church as a whole should be appraised on an annual basis.

Nonetheless there are ways around all these particular challenges.

With regard to the first difficulty my own conviction is that ministers should be encouraged to produce their own job descriptions which might then form the basis for review. An alternative approach adopted by one church was to use Lyle Schaller’s oft-quoted list of fourteen activities of the pastor as a basis for evaluation: viz. administration, community leadership, continuing education, counselling, denominational and ecumenical responsibilities, evangelism, personal and family life, preaching, social ministry, stewardship, teaching, theology, bereavement and crisis visitation, and worship.¹⁴⁸

With regard to the second difficulty, this is a little more problematic. It is true that for the local church to evaluate its own minister is a little like patients evaluating their doctor. Although there is a place for such evaluation, the professional is not actually being appraised by a fellow professional. For this reason in some of the more hierarchical denominations ‘line’ appraisal is the norm, in which the appraisal is conducted by the archdeacon or equivalent functionary. The drawback here, however, is that in so far as this involves an ‘outsider’ the appraisal is inevitably based on second-hand knowledge. An alternative is to engage in ‘peer’ review with another minister or group of

¹⁴⁶ David Sheppard in the Foreword to *Appointed for Growth* edited by Kevin Eastell.

¹⁴⁷ Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry* 3.

¹⁴⁸ Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, DeKalb, Illinois, cited by Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry* 39-42. Interestingly the appraisal process also involved meeting with the pastor’s spouse and family “to show pastoral care”. Lyle Schaller’s list of the activities of a pastor is to be found in *The Pastor and the People* (Abingdon, Nashville, revised edition 1986) 53.

ministers.¹⁴⁹ The least satisfactory form of appraisal is 'self-assessment', for time and again we fail to see ourselves as we truly are.¹⁵⁰ My own preference is for the appraisal to be conducted by the local church with a ministerial facilitator drawn from outside the fellowship.

Likewise the third difficulty is not insuperable. A review of the church's ministry as a whole could be conducted at the same time as a review of the ministry of its pastor. Jill Hudson gave an example of a parish church, where not only does every member of the congregation evaluate the minister by way of a questionnaire, but also where every member is asked to look back on goals established at the last annual meeting of the parish and to rate them as accomplished, partly accomplished or not accomplished. In addition, using a scale of 1 (exceptional) to 5 (needs a lot of work) members are asked to rate the effectiveness of the congregation in 16 areas.¹⁵¹ The draw-back is the amount of work involved, particularly if this were done on an annual basis. The danger here would be that for a significant period of the year the church could be distracted from its task of ministry as a result of this internal-auditing process. On the other hand, one could perhaps envisage such a general evaluation taking place once every five years.

Appraisal: a case study

Let me share what I have learnt from my own experience of appraisal within a local church setting over 21 years.

Appraisal works best when there is an outside ministerial facilitator. From the word go I insisted that along with two representative deacons there be an experienced minister to lead the appraisal process. Over the 21 years I involved three different ministers: the first was a minister based at the Baptist resource centre in Didcot; then when he retired I asked a minister involved in a para-church organisation committed to ministerial development to become the external facilitator; for the final eight years of my ministry the external facilitator was a lead chaplain in one of England's major hospitals. The advantage of external ministerial facilitators is that – unlike deacons – they from their own experience know what ministry is all about. This proved to be important on more than one occasion. By contrast I know of a number of Baptist churches who have sought to appraise their ministers without the benefit of an experienced outside facilitator and as a consequence the minister involved had been obliged to leave their churches.

Appraisal works well when just two representative deacons are involved: in my case we ended up with the senior deacon and one other deacon. Initially I tried to involve all my deacons in the appraisal process, when at the time in question there were 15 deacons. Although they were not all involved in the appraisal interview, I asked all of them to fill in a specially designed review and appraisal form. We even tried to involve people beyond the diaconate: we asked representative members for their reflections on my 'performance' over the past year. As can be imagined, the appraisal process involved great quantities of paper. But it did not take long to realise that few people in the church had any real idea of what I did, with the result that their comments were of limited worth. A further draw-back is that the more people you involve, the more people expect to have some feedback on the appraisal interview – but if the appraisal interview is to have value, then it needs to be confidential.

Appraisal works well when the appraisal interview is limited to no more than a couple of hours – indeed 1½ hours can be quite sufficient. Again, this was something I had to learn. I now look back with some embarrassment at the commitment I initially expected of those appraising me. On one occasion, for instance, we devoted the whole of a Saturday to the appraisal process.

- i) The appraisal began with a breakfast meeting (8am - 10.30am) at which the facilitator met with three representative deacons to explore any areas of doubt or confusion regarding the input of the other deacons.
- ii) The facilitator then met with me (11am - 1pm) not only to explore my submission to the appraisal process, but also to discuss some of the feelings my deacons were expressing.
- iii) After lunch the three representative deacons and I came together with the facilitator. In the light of the two earlier meetings in the morning he had drawn up an agenda, which then formed the basis for our discussions. At the time I wrote: "Although our meeting ended at 6pm, we all felt that the time had been too short!" On reflection, what a self-centred fool I was to impose such a burden upon my deacons.

¹⁴⁹ See Kevin Eastell, 'Survey of Current Use' 30 in *Appointed for Growth*: "Whereas I think that most clergy in the Church of England would find peer group assessment acceptable, they would not respond warmly to external evaluation."

¹⁵⁰ See Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral* (SPCK, London, 2nd edition 1993) 148, who underlines the fact that "people's own evaluation of their success or failure may be wildly at odds with the evaluation of others; hence the phenomenon of people condemning themselves as failures while being celebrated by others for the very thing they think they have failed at."

¹⁵¹ Ashby First Parish Church, Unitarian Universalist, Massachusetts, cited by Hudson *Evaluating Ministry* 13-18.

Appraisal works well when the appraisal papers are drawn up by the minister alone. Although I know that in other contexts all those involved in the appraisal process are expected before the appraisal interview to contribute in writing their own reflections on the performance of the individual in question, this is unnecessarily bureaucratic. It is not fair to ask busy deacons to take time out to prepare written comments, which could easily be shared within the context of the appraisal interview. Much more important is the minister's own self-appraisal of the previous twelve months.

This self-appraisal document gains value – particularly for the minister concerned – when it has been carefully prepared. Over the years I averaged around 5,000 words for each review. The review of the past year always followed the same format – a format which I used with all my members of staff:

A. Statement of purpose: “With all the other members of the ministry team, to excite fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging God's people to embrace others with love of another kind, enabling individuals to change and grow, and empowering the church for witness and service. With all the other members of the ministry team, to implement the mission policy of the church as agreed in the church's development plan. To.....” [The basis of this should be the job specification given to you]

B. Review of last year's objectives and general review of last year. This is your opportunity to give an account of yourself. What, with God's help, did you achieve? What has encouraged you? What has frustrated you?

C. Review of last year's training and development: Courses you have attended; books you have read etc. How have you grown as a disciple of Jesus? How have you developed as a leader in God's church?

D. Key objectives for the coming year: These objectives will need to be agreed and should link with the church's priorities.

E. Standards of performance: What did you feel you did well? What could have been done better?

F. Development plans: How do you hope to grow and develop as a leader in God's church over the next 12 months?

G. Further long-term development: What are your long-term goals?

Appraisal works best when the minister is assured of confidentiality. I discovered that precisely because of its confidentiality, the appraisal process provided a safe space for me to share whatever concerns were on my heart. This for me was important: whether it was in the self-appraisal document or in the appraisal interview itself, I was able to share my frustrations and my difficulties in a way which would have been much more difficult than if I had been meeting with my leadership team as a whole. Very early on in my ministry at Chelmsford I remembered sharing my frustration that the church was not giving me the tools for the job – it had given me a second-hand computer with limited capacity. By the end of the following week I had a brand new computer with all the facilities I needed! Yes, confidentiality is of the essence. We had a rule that nothing would be relayed back to the other members of the leadership team unless the person being appraised had given their express agreement.

Appraisal works best when outcomes are agreed together. In my experience although the outcomes may be agreed at the appraisal interview, there is much to be said for putting these outcomes into writing. This will often mean the minister drawing up an amended list of objectives for the coming year. It will usually involve the external facilitator writing a formal letter to the minister as also to the representative deacons summing up the outcomes of the appraisal.

Appraisals are to be enjoyed

Properly handled, appraisals should always be a positive experience. As I wrote in a blog: “Appraisals are to be enjoyed. I am looking forward to Monday evening 15 April, when for the twentieth year running I shall undergo my annual appraisal as senior minister of Central Baptist Church. It will no doubt be a challenging and searching experience, but God willing, it will also be a good experience. Although it takes time, I find the preparation of the document a useful discipline – not least because of the clarity it gives for the future. As for the appraisal itself, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to express the concerns on my heart, knowing that it is a ‘safe’ place, where things will be kept confidential. I appreciate too the wisdom that is shared, the encouragement and the affirmation that are given. Yes, by the time the evening is over, I will be exhausted – but I know that I will be a better minister as a result.

Sadly, for some ministers, appraisals can be traumatic and unhappy affairs; but thankfully my appraisers have always been kind and as a result of such experiences I have found that appraisals are to be enjoyed!”¹⁵²

Appraisals are helpful in a team context

For most of my ministry, I have worked within a team. Appraisals within a team context have always proved helpful. They are, however, different in one key respect: the senior minister apart, there is no necessity for an external ministerial facilitator, for the senior minister by definition already has a clear understanding of ministry. In some churches the senior minister handles staff appraisals alone – however, I always preferred to involve my senior deacon. In this way, were any of my staff to have had difficulty with me, then they could appeal elsewhere.

My experience of appraisal over 21 years has been extremely positive. It gives those conducting the appraisal of a minister an opportunity to express appreciation for their ministry over the past year. If there is criticism, then it is always constructive criticism with the well-being of the individual as well as the well-being of the organisation in mind. Appraisals should not be viewed as threatening, but rather as challenging and stimulating. Hence the title of this sub-section: ‘Benefiting from appraisal’.

5. Working under supervision

Ministry can be an incredibly lonely experience

Unlike other professionals, for the most part ministers do not work together in teams. They are on their own. True, they are part of a local church, but few if any of the lay leaders of that local church have any idea of what is involved in the day-to-day ministry of their pastor. In such a context ministers need supportive relationships which will promote well-being in ministry. In the words of Scripture, ministers need to find ways and means of ‘provoking’ (NRSV) or ‘spurring’ (NIV) one another on to love and good deeds (Hebs 10.24). Or as the REB puts it: “We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others to love and active goodness.” The cognate verb (*paroxuno*) is to be found in 1 Cor 13.5: love is not “provoked” – but here in Hebs 10.24 it is love which provokes!

Supervision gives insight and produces growth

One form of a supportive relationship is supervision. In the helping professions supervision is the norm. Yet while no professional counsellor would operate without giving account on a regular basis to a trained supervisor, ministers for the most part feel free to operate totally independently. This is not right. Ministers, for the sake of their own well-being as indeed for the sake of the well-being of others, cannot afford to be loners. In the words of one Anglican report: “Clergy can never consider themselves in private practice. All are under authority and accountable to one another as independent members of the body of Christ 1 Cor 12.4ff). Mutual accountability is intrinsic to ministry.”¹⁵³ This accountability can be expressed in various ways, whether it be in terms of work supervision or in terms of spiritual direction. All ministers need to be in some kind of supportive relationship, which enables them to regularly reflect upon the practice of their ministry. Within the context of such a relationship ministers then have a safe place to share their emotions as they deal with all kinds of distress and pain in the course of their pastoral work. This is what it means to be ‘professional’; this indeed is what will help ministers to live out their call.

Supervision is defined by the British Association for Counselling (BAC) in the following terms: “Supervision is a formal arrangement for counsellors to discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced in counselling and supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the counsellor/client relationship. The agenda will be the counselling work and feeling about that work, together with the supervisor’s reactions, comments and confrontations. Thus supervision is a process of consultancy to widen the horizons of an experienced practitioner.”¹⁵⁴ In the counselling world supervision is not an optional extra. It is an essential part of the counselling process. Without supervision there can be no accreditation.

¹⁵² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Blog* April 11, 2013

¹⁵³ *Ministerial Review: Its Purpose and Practice* (ABM Ministry Paper No.6) quoted with approval in *Servants and Shepherds: Developments in the Theology and Practice of Ministerial Review* (ABM Ministry Paper No.19 Paragraph 25).

¹⁵⁴ Information Sheet 8, British Association for Counselling, Rugby.

The functions of supervision have been variously described. According to Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet:¹⁵⁵

“1. The *educative* or *formative* function is about developing skills, understanding and abilities of the supervisees. This is done through the reflection on and exploration of the supervisees’ work with their clients. In this exploration they may be helped by the supervisor to:

- understand the client better
- become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client
- look at how they intervened and the consequences of their own interventions
- explore other ways of working with this and other similar client situations.

2. The *supportive* or *restorative* function is a way of responding to how any workers who are engaged in intimate therapeutic work with clients are necessarily allowing themselves to be affected by the distress, pain and fragmentation of the client and how they need time to become aware of how this has affected them and to deal with any reactions. These emotions may have been produced through empathy with the client or restimulated by the client or be a reaction to the client. Not attending to these emotions soon leads to less than effective workers, who become either over-identified with their clients or defended against being further affected by them. This in turn leads to stress and what is now commonly called ‘burnout’.¹⁵⁶

3. The *managerial* or *normative* aspect of supervision provides the quality-control function in work with people. It is not only lack of training or experience that necessitates the need in us, as workers, to have someone look with us at our work, but our inevitable human failings, blind spots, areas of vulnerability from our own woundedness and our own prejudices.”

A more succinct list of the main aims of supervision has been drawn up by Lynette Harborne:¹⁵⁷

Protect the Directee
 Develop the good practice
 Develop professional competence
 Develop practical skills
 Explore new ideas
 Celebrate ‘successes’
 Learn from mistakes
 Provide support
 Hold practitioners accountable
 Monitor the quality of work
 Create a professional community

Supervision in these terms is a very positive process. The ‘oversight’ offered is not intended to be threatening, but rather is intended to be supportive. Supervision is not about control – but rather is an encouragement to the person being supervised to reflect upon their work and explore how they might handle people and situations different. Supervision helps us to develop skills as also understanding. Supervision therefore offers possibilities of personal growth and development. It enables ministers to gain fresh insights both into those who they are seeking to help as also into themselves. It acts as a safeguard to staleness and serves as a spur to a more creative approach to ministry.

Supervision is not to be feared

Not everybody sees supervision in such a positive light. Many ministers feel threatened by supervision, in spite of all the benefits it has to offer. In spite of their calling, ministers often display remarkable insecurity. Thus Derek Blows, reflecting on his attempts to introduce supervision to pastoral training, wrote:

¹⁵⁵ Peter Hawkins & Robin Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (Open University Press, Maidenhead, Berkshire, 3rd edition 2006).

¹⁵⁶ Hawkins and Shohet 42 draw a parallel with the British miners in the 1920s, who fought for what was termed ‘pit-head time’ – the right to wash off the grime of the work in the boss’ time rather than take it home with them. Supervision is the equivalent for those that work at the coal-face of personal distress, disease and fragmentation.

¹⁵⁷ Lynette Harborne, ‘The importance of supervision’ 132 in *Spiritual Accompaniment and Counselling: Journeying with psyche and soul* (Jessica Kingsley, London 2015) edited by Peter Madsen Gubi.

“The experience of receiving help, and the openness, vulnerability and trust which must accompany it has profound learning value. Indeed, one may ask if anyone can give help who has not also learned to receive it... Helpers, however, are notoriously reluctant to receive help. The need to be the strong, self-giving ‘man for others’, buttressed by a very lopsided development of the Christian tradition which exalts giving help far above receiving it, can make the need to seek help seem shameful and frightening, and only to be followed in dire extremity, preferably of physical illness. This attitude can lead to an emotional impoverishment and isolation that can put the helper and perhaps his marriage and family life at risk.”¹⁵⁸

What precisely can be done to overcome the insecurity of many pastors who find the thought of supervision threatening? Doubtless the sharing by others of their own positive experiences of supervision would be helpful. Perhaps the key lies in the kind of training given at the stage when ministers receive their primary theological education. It is here that the work of John Foskett and David Lyall is helpful, for in their book *Helping the Helpers* they demonstrate how supervision and pastoral care can be helpfully combined in the initial training period.¹⁵⁹ Once people have had good experience of supervision at theological college, they are likely to ensure that their later ministry is characterised by the good practice of supervision.

It may be objected that the difference between pastoral counselling and pastoral care is such that there is less need of supervision. In the counselling situation it is the norm for counsellors to see their clients for a minimum of six sessions; not infrequently counselling may go on for a year or more. By contrast in a situation of pastoral care the pastoral encounter may be a ‘one-off’ occasioned by a pastoral visit. Furthermore, whereas the client usually takes the initiative in setting up the counselling situation, in pastoral care the initiative is usually taken by the pastor or carer. This results in somewhat different dynamics. Thus Foskett and Lyall point out that “in pastoral counselling there is likely to be a greater emphasis upon the unconscious processes. By contrast, pastoral care will tend to focus more upon the conscious forces at work in the pastoral relationship.”¹⁶⁰ This in turn means that, initially at least, the pastoral encounter is less likely to be as deep and demanding as the encounter between counsellor and client.

Yet do such distinctions between pastoral care and pastoral counselling make the supervision of pastoral care less needful? Surely not. If anything, on the contrary, pastors face a greater challenge to break through the superficiality of many pastoral encounters, so that their pastoral care can prove to be a more effective catalyst for personal growth.

How often should a pastor receive such supervision? The minimum requirement for supervision for BAC accreditation purposes is one and a half hours a month. Maybe for pastors the minimum requirement might be lowered to a session of one hour a month – but certainly it should not be less. There is no doubt that if, overnight, all pastors were to seek supervision, the need could not be met. Currently there are just not sufficient supervisors around. Experienced ministers skilled in psycho-dynamics are relatively few in number.

However, supervision does not have to take place on a one-to-one basis. Group supervision is also possible: on such a model the supervisor would meet with a number of ministers, who would take turns in sharing and reflecting on their caseload. Another possibility for those who have benefited from individual supervision over a period of time is peer group supervision: on this model three or more pastors would share the responsibility for providing each other’s supervision within the context of a group meeting.

Work consultancy and spiritual direction are beneficial

There is a good case for extending supervision beyond the confines of actual pastoral care, so as to include the work of pastoral ministry as a whole. Here the supervisor would become a ‘work consultant’, with a watching brief for all aspects of ministry. It could involve a qualified work consultant; however, it could equally involve an experienced minister.

¹⁵⁸ Derek Blows, *Help for the Helpers* (1977) quoted by Ronald Smythe, “‘Oversight’ Or Supervision”, *Contact* 77 (1982:4) 3.

¹⁵⁹ John Foskett and David Lyall, *Helping the Helpers. Supervision and Pastoral Care* (SPCK, London 1988). Foskett and Lyall define pastoral supervision as “a method of doing and reflecting on ministry” (8). They advocate the integrating of theological understanding with pastoral practice by the “narrative approach”: “In this approach it is assumed that theological reflection upon the practice of ministry draws on material from three sources: (a) the historic beliefs of the community of faith contained in Scripture and the theological tradition; (b) the realities of the pastoral situation; (c) the life experience of the one who offers pastoral care” (43).

¹⁶⁰ Foskett and Lyall, *Helping The Helpers* 110.

I am grateful to God for the support given me by one experienced minister, who at one stage had undergone extensive training in counselling and psychotherapy, and who in his early retirement ran a major counselling service. In my first few difficult years at Chelmsford he used to see me on a regular basis, giving not only encouragement but also objectivity, and helping me to reflect on what was going on both in the church and in my personal life.

Another form of support could involve meeting with a group of friends who offer peer mentoring. It does not need much imagination to see how beneficial such an overview could prove. It would certainly help pastors to become more effective in the use of their time.

One side effect of such supervision-cum-work consultancy might be the lowering of the number of ministerial sexual indiscretions, which often find their beginning in a pastor's overzealous attention to the apparently spiritual needs of certain members of the opposite sex. To take an extreme example, the supervisor, in asking to see the whole of a pastor's diary, might discover that the minister had seen the same person four or five times in the week! Such a discovery might be revealed only by the fact that there were time-slots not filled, which were, in fact, used. In such a scenario – and in other less extreme examples too – supervision could prove a form of preventative pastoral care.

Supervision could be given even broader dimensions, and relate not only to the work of the ministry, but also to the spiritual health of the minister. In other words, supervision could include spiritual direction, and hold ministers accountable for their spiritual as well as their personal and professional development.

Some form of spiritual direction is essential. For the sake of their pastoral integrity, every pastor must have someone who can hold them accountable for their spiritual growth and development. In this respect the words of John Henry Newman are still as relevant as ever:

“Perhaps the reason why the standard of holiness among us is so low, why our attainments are so poor, our view of the truth so dim, our belief so unreal, is this: we dare not trust each other with the secrets of our hearts... we keep it to ourselves and we fear, as a cause of estrangement, that which really would be a bond of union. We do not probe the wounds of our nature thoroughly, we do not lay the foundation of our religion in the ground of our heart.”¹⁶¹

However, spiritual direction is more than about integrity and accountability. It is about helping us strengthen and deepen our relationship with God. “Spiritual direction offers an opportunity to be present with another who carefully, slowly and lovingly listens and pays attention; someone who helps the directee to delve into the deeper places of the soul, to begin to address that spiritual yearning.”¹⁶²

There are various ways of experiencing spiritual direction: it can involve seeing a trained spiritual ‘director’ on a regular basis; or it might involve more informal conversations with a ‘soul’ friend; or perhaps belonging to a peer accountability group.¹⁶³ Over the years I have had three spiritual directors, each very different but also each very special, who have deepened and broadened my understanding and experience of the spiritual life. Sometimes my meetings with them were very painful – but also very healing. I remember with particular affection one formidable spiritual director who on one occasion when I was exhausted from the demands of ministry, shocked me when she said: ‘You’re too tired to pray. Go away and have a great family holiday. Don’t bother to do any praying. I shall be holding you before God every day while you are away’!

There is no one way in which ministers can receive the support and stimulation they need if they are to be effective in their ministry. The important thing is that ministers do experience support and stimulation – for if they do not, then mediocrity if not disaster ensues. This is what a professional approach to ministry entails. This is what is necessary if we are to live out the call.

¹⁶¹ John Henry Newman, ‘Sermon on Christian Sympathy’, *Works V* No.IX (1857).

¹⁶² Tim Mountain, ‘Spiritual Direction’, *Baptist Ministers’ Journal* 322 (April 2014) 13.

¹⁶³ See the Order for Baptist Ministry, membership of which involves a commitment to ‘live within the disciplines of this Order, committed to prayer, committed to gather, following the rule of Christ, with hearts set on pilgrimage, makers of peace, pursuers of justice, lovers of mercy, bearing witness to Christ’. This involves not only the use of a daily office, but also meeting in a cell, usually 4-8 times a year, helping members to consider such question as ‘In what part of my life and experience is God particularly addressing me at the moment?’ and ‘What part of my life am I keeping away from God’s gaze and word at the moment?’. See further www.orderforministry.co.uk

6. Developing a code of ethics

Pastors need practical guidance

Any profession worthy of the name has a code of ethics. Rena Gordelin in her book *Codes of Professional Responsibility* drew together thirty-seven codes of professional responsibility – accountancy, advertising, architecture, banking, business management, engineering and many more professions are represented, but significantly, not pastoral ministry.¹⁶⁴ The fact is that, by and large, most ministers do not operate with a formal code of ethics. According to Bishop Nolan Harmon such a lack of a code is unsurprising: “In the very nature of things, nothing like a binding code of conduct can be drawn up, for it would be impossible to get general agreement among ministers... The whole system of Protestantism is bound up with the individual’s rights.”¹⁶⁵ But is this true? Or, if it is true, is it an acceptable state of affairs? Surely it would be helpful to develop some basic guidelines for the practice of ministry.

True, ministers are not left totally without guidance in the area of moral conduct. In the first place they have as their basic textbook the Bible, which is their primary guide for all matters of faith and practice. In the second place, at their ordination ministers make vows, which likewise set some very basic guidelines for the practice of ministry. Yet although the Bible and the ordination vows have much to say about the importance of right relationships both with God and with one another, there are a host of consequences which need to be worked out with the practical realities of day-to-day pastoral ministry in mind. The Church of England has produced some *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*;¹⁶⁶ and the Baptist Union of Great Britain has produced a *Guide to Pastoral Practice and Ministry*;¹⁶⁷ – but neither is a formal code of ethics, and as far as the Baptists are concerned, the *Guide to Pastoral Realities and Ministries* does not have any binding authority on ministers.

Relationships have ethical implications

Let me illustrate some of these consequences by examining the ethical implications of some of the relationships involved:

a) Relationship to God

It almost goes without saying that for a minister this relationship is the most fundamental. We shall explore something of the nature of this relationship in the chapter devoted to the pastor as exemplary pilgrim. Our effectiveness as ministers rises or falls according to the extent we seek to root our life and ministry in God. Any code of ministry must begin by recognising the importance of setting aside “time intentionally directed to God”.¹⁶⁸ Activism is no substitute for a disciplined life of prayer.

b) Relationship to the family

A healthy marriage for a married minister is another precondition for effective ministry. In spite of all the pressures of ministry, ministers need to make time to maintain a healthy relationship with their spouses and children. For those married with families, part of their service to God is making space for quality family life. If this means the end to the traditional seventy-hour and eighty-hour work weeks of a former generation of pastors, then so be it – indeed such a workload is “questionable even on moral grounds”. For, as Gaylord Noyce amusingly puts it: “Love in marriage demands time and care considerably beyond a Dagwood-to-Blondie peck on the cheek between church meetings and pastoral appointments.”¹⁶⁹ It is precisely because many ministers do not make their spouses a priority that ministerial casualties take place in counselling relationships. A secure marriage is always the best antidote to infidelity. Furthermore, in a world where Martin Luther’s question “How can I find a gracious God?” has been supplanted by the question “How can I make my marriage work?”, it is vital that ministers by their very lifestyle show that there is an answer.

¹⁶⁴ Rena A. Gordelin, *Codes of Professional Responsibility*, (The Bureau of National Affairs Inc., Washington D.C., 2nd edition 1990).

¹⁶⁵ Nolan B. Harmon, *Ministerial Ethics and Etiquette* (Abingdon, Nashville, 2nd revised edition 1987) 12.

¹⁶⁶ A *Guide to Pastoral Practice and Ministry* for Baptist ministers serving in the Baptist Union of Great Britain was approved by the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in February 2011; this was intended to earth theological reflections contained in a so-called *Code of Ethics for Baptist Ministry*, which emerged from a consultation at the British Baptist Colleges Staff Conference in 2004. Both are reproduced in the appendices at the end of this book.

¹⁶⁷ *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* (Church House Publishing, London 2003).

¹⁶⁸ Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 31.

¹⁶⁹ Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 189.

c) Relationship to the church

Ministers have a responsibility toward their churches in ensuring that they remain competent in their job. This in turn means that they will make study a priority. John Wesley used to tell his ministers to devote five hours a day to reading.¹⁷⁰ In the first place this means that they will be men and women of the Word. But it also will involve more general commitment to ongoing professional growth and development.

Closely related to study is the preparation of sermons. In terms of ministerial ethics, ministers have a responsibility to ensure that they are faithful to Scripture, that they do not abuse Scripture in order to make their point. The words of the old cliché come to mind: “A text without a context is a pretext.” Interestingly Americans in their writing on the ethics of preaching tend to make much of the error of plagiarism. By all means read other people’s sermons and see how they have sought to apply God’s Word, but let such sermons be a springboard for creativity rather than a template for imitation.

A minister’s leadership style within the church has ethical overtones. Ministers of Christ are called to be servant-leaders: on the one hand this involves not abusing their power by exploiting their position; but on the other hand it also involves not vacating their calling by running away from their leadership role.

So far we have been speaking of a pastor’s relationship to the church as a whole. But clearly there are also ethical implications in the way in which ministers relate to individual church members. One area in particular which is a potential minefield is the counselling relationship. The very fact that secular counselling agencies have their own detailed codes of conduct indicates the need for extreme care in this area. Compassion must always be combined with distance.¹⁷¹ Yet here the minister faces particular difficulties: for example, unlike the professional counsellor the pastor will probably be a friend of the person concerned; nor will the pastor’s interaction with the ‘client’-member be restricted to a predetermined appointment time.

d) Relationships to former churches

According to Noyce, this is probably the issue most in need of commonly enforced rules in ministry.¹⁷² In this regard the quaintly-worded advice of the veteran American ethicist Nolan Harmon is worth attention:

“Above all, when a man leaves a charge, let him leave it. No minister should be constantly going back to gossip with the brethren or hear comments on the work of his successor. Great harm has been done in this way by some ministers. The outgoing pastor should get all his supplies, trunks, boxes, barrels, the piano, the typewriter, the bread box, the garden hose and Willie’s shotgun – everything loaded at one time, should give a good-bye, making it as tearful as desired, but having started the truck, look not back!... ‘Get out and stay out’ is the injunction here.”¹⁷³

Is this a universal rule? Do ministers really need to cut all the deep ties of friendship built up over a long and happy pastorate? These are issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, there need to be agreed policies with regard to weddings and funerals.

In my own case, like a number of other ministers, I find myself living in retirement in the same city in which I exercised a long and happy ministry. The deacons of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, took the initiative to address the issue themselves and wrote me a letter, inviting me (and my wife) to remain in active membership, but on condition that I observed what they called ten commandments for post-retirement.¹⁷⁴ In addition they felt that after

¹⁷⁰ “Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, and at least five hours in four-and-twenty” (John Wesley, *Minutes of Several Conversations between The Rev Mr Wesley and Others, from the Year 1744 to 1789*, Question 32).

¹⁷¹ See W.E.Wiest and E.A.Smith, *Ethics in Ministry* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1990) 185: “Ministers, like physicians, must find ways to protect themselves from the powerful emotion often associated with their ministries.”

¹⁷² Gaylord Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 135.

¹⁷³ Nolan Harmon, *Ministerial Ethics* 72.

¹⁷⁴ The ‘commandments’ were: 1: Thou shalt at all times remember thou art no longer pastor to the members and friends of Central Baptist Church. 2: Thou shalt remember how thou felt 21 years ago about some not ‘letting go pastorally’ of thy predecessor. 3: Thou art free to attend services and other church events. 4: Thou art free to continue personal friendships within the church. 5: Thou wilt only make pastoral visits or otherwise be involved at the specific request of Leesa, Martin [the two associate ministers] or your successor. 6: Thou shalt decline all requests to lead or participate in dedications weddings and funerals etc., but, of course, may do so if requested by Leesa, Martin or thy successor. 7: Thou shalt refrain from negative comments on church personnel, policies or events, but art free to make such comments as will encourage or build up those concerned. 8: Thou shalt not seek, directly or indirectly, to influence people to take a particular stance or have a viewpoint on any

retirement there needed to be a minimum period of three months when we would stay away from the church, in order to “give a clear break to help members and friends in their acceptance of, and adaptation to, the change”. I was deeply moved by the thoughtfulness of my deacons. I wrote and thanked them for their kindness, assuring them of my agreement to abide by the ten commandments, but stated that three months was too short a time to stay away, and that I would wait for six or seven months to elapse before considering a return.

However, eight months into the ‘interregnum’, when the church began to realise that finding a successor for me could take a good deal longer than originally thought, the church leaders had second thoughts about the wisdom of encouraging my return at this point, with the result that they asked me to wait until a new senior minister was in post before becoming an active church member again. Instead we have become actively involved in the life of the local Anglican cathedral, and in doing so have enjoyed broadening our experience of church life.

Not only are there obligations on the part of predecessors; there are also obligations on the part of successors to honour the ministries who have gone before them. As one ministerial code of ethics puts it: “I will refrain from speaking disparagingly about the work of either my predecessor or my successor.”¹⁷⁵

f) Relationships to other ministers and churches

The fact that the Body of Christ is far bigger than any local church has a number of consequences. In the first place, there is an obligation for a minister to develop relationships with other pastors and churches. Isolationism is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Secondly, even where there are deep theological differences, the standing of others in Christ should always be respected. In the words of one ministerial code of ethics: “I will consider all ministers my co-labourers in the work of Christ and even though I may differ from them, I shall respect their Christian earnestness and sincerity.”¹⁷⁶ Thirdly, there is no place for competition between ministers and churches. This means that it is not ethical to actively encourage people to transfer from one church to another. If people do wish to transfer from a neighbouring church, then they should be encouraged as a matter of courtesy in the first place to go and talk their feelings through with their minister.

The above are but some of the issues which might be included in a code of ministerial ethics. The list is not exhaustive. Other areas of concern which might benefit from inclusion relate, for instance, to finance,¹⁷⁷ evangelism¹⁷⁸ and to community relationships.¹⁷⁹

Examples of two codes of ethics

There is no one universal code of ministerial ethics which is right for each and every situation. What I am seeking to encourage is the development of appropriate codes of ethics. Let me give two examples: the first example is a relatively brief but well put-together code developed by the Baptist Union of New Zealand; the second is also a relatively brief code, adopted by the College of Baptist Ministers, a new professional body for Baptist ministers in the UK.¹⁸⁰

church matter. 9: Whilst it may be better for you not to attend formal church meetings, should thou do so, thou shalt only speak if requested by the chair and then only on a matter of factual clarification as to the past. Thou shalt abstain when votes are taken (unless it is a paper vote) to avoid indirect leading of the members. 10: Thou shalt remember and follow these commandments that thy retirement be long and happy.

¹⁷⁵ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ‘My Ministerial Code of Ethics’, quoted by Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 137. See also Charles Bugg, ‘Professional Ethics among Ministers’, *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989) 570, who suggests several ways in which a former minister’s contributions to the church can be recognised: e.g., “Your predecessor can be invited back periodically to lead in some way in the life of the church. Never to invite a pastor back reveals more about our insecurities than anything else. The former pastor has been a part of the life of that church. The pastor has invested in the joys and struggles of that congregation and to treat a former pastor as ‘persona non grata’ is to fail to recognise these contributions to the church”.

¹⁷⁶ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ‘My Ministerial Code of Ethics’ cited by Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 138.

¹⁷⁷ Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 113-131 devotes a whole chapter to ‘Financing Ministry’. He includes matters such as moonlighting and tent making, as also fees and honoraria. His comments on “the simple life” repay thought: “Those clergy who see the church more as an arena of self-employment and self-aggrandisement than a body whose witness can be strengthened through economic humility have missed part of the marrow of good pastoral ethics” (130).

¹⁷⁸ See Noyce, *Pastoral Ethics* 171-181, and his “four affirmations”: (i) the goal of evangelism – increase in faith – is not to be confused with means; (ii) persons are ends, not means; (iii) in personal evangelism, our goal is a person’s ultimate well-being; (iv) evangelism must go hand in hand with witness for justice.

¹⁷⁹ See Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* 155-181.

¹⁸⁰ In *A Call to Excellence* I reproduced a much more detailed ‘sample’ code of ethics proposed by Joe Trull and James Carter, but this is now to be found among the appendices.

1. A code for ministers belonging to the Baptist Union of New Zealand

1. I will love God with my body, mind and spirit.
2. I will seek to minister rather than be ministered unto, placing service above salary and personal recognition; and the unity and welfare of the church above my own.
3. I will model my caring for others on a professional level with skill and wisdom so that others can experience my integrity, and be drawn towards exercising the same care for others.
4. I will hold as sacred, all confidences shared with me.
5. I will not violate another person's body, mind or spirit; and will not participate in the oppression of any person or community. I will not misuse the faith and resources entrusted to me.
6. I will try and live a balanced life: working responsibly and hard; caring for and nurturing family relationships; and not neglecting playfulness, humour and rest.
7. Before any action, I will think how it will appear to God, to my congregation and to my fellow pastors.
8. I will endeavour to lead my congregation without discrediting other churches, soliciting members from them or criticising other pastors.
9. I will, with my resignation, sever my pastoral relations with my former church members, and will not make pastoral contacts among those relating to another church without the other pastor's knowledge and consent.
10. Having accepted a pastorate, I will not use my influence to alienate the church or any of its members from its denominational loyalty and support. Rather I will do all within my power to strengthen the bonds. If my convictions change, I will withdraw from the church.

2. A code for members of the College of Baptist Ministers

As a condition of membership, I commit myself to observing the following code of ethics:

1. I will love God with my body, mind and spirit, and will love my neighbour as myself.
2. In relation to God, I will serve him with all that I am, giving him my very best. I will root my life in Scripture and prayer. My life will be marked by faith, integrity, discipline, and sacrifice – and I will seek to bear the Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace and hope. Arising out of my commitment to God, propriety will mark my sexual conduct and integrity my financial conduct; I will also seek to observe and implement good safeguarding practice.
3. In relation to myself, I will keep the principle of Sabbath rest, however busy I am. I will care for my body. I will delight in the world that God has made.
4. In relation to home life, I will make time and space for loved ones. In this respect I will seek to ensure that my life is characterised by faithfulness, creativity, energy, and play. I will seek to ensure that in my home there is always a welcome to outsiders.
5. In relation to God's church, I will serve people by exciting fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging them to love one another, enabling individuals to change and grow, and empowering the church for witness and service.
6. In relation to those with whom I share leadership in God's church, I will be a good team player, always seeking to be positive and loyal, and I will shun negative talking and thinking. With an open life and diary, I will be accountable to them.
7. In relation to ministers, I will not engage in criticism of or gossip of others, but will affirm and encourage my colleagues. I will pray for those in difficulty, and where opportunity arises, will seek to be there for them. Any confidences given to me, I will respect.
8. In relation to my practice of ministry I will seek to work within my competence, while also seeking always to enlarge and deepen my understanding and experience of ministry. In this regard I commit myself to a life-long learning, not least through working with the College's continuing ministerial development programme.
9. In relation to the wider community of Baptists, I commit myself to the Baptist way of being the church. I will not use my influence to alienate the church or any of its members from their denominational loyalty and support. If my convictions change, then I will withdraw from the church.
10. In relation to the wider community, I will engage with others to seek the good of all. At all times I will seek to exercise a positive Christian witness.
11. In relation to the created order, I will seek to live in ways which encourage sustainability
12. In relation to my ministry, I will hold all confidences shared with me as sacred, unless otherwise compelled by a court of law or by imminent risk of serious harm to another person. If difficulties arise, I will seek help from regional ministers and where appropriate from the College itself; I will never resort to the courts of law for personal justification unless the College specifically encourages me to do so.

13. In retirement, I will honour the ministry of colleagues. In particular I will honour my successors and affirm their ministries. I will not engage in any form of pastoral care without their explicit consent.

The advantages of a code of ethics outweigh any disadvantages

Clearly, with any code of ethics there are dangers. Any code runs the risk of legalism; it also runs the risk of missing out on the heart of ministry.

A powerful exposure of the limitations of all such codes has been made by Walter Wiest and Elwyn Smith: “The figure of the Pharisee warns us: the person who knows how to pray expertly is the Pharisee. Only if there is something of the hopelessly unprofessional publican within can one hope for authenticity in the clergy life....Responsible professional behaviour is the product of a prolonged and continuing process of personal formation.”¹⁸¹ A few pages later on Wiest and Smith hammer home the same point: “The professional character is profoundly formed ‘in Christ’, not forced into the straitjacket of an approved code of ethics. In this world the comfort of knowing oneself to be right is denied to all but the Pharisees among us.”¹⁸²

The positive point that Wiest and Smith make is undeniable. The key to ministerial integrity lies in the individual minister’s walk with the Lord. Yet this fact does not do away with the desirability of a code of ethics. Rather than leave individuals to do their own hermeneutical work and re-invent the equivalent of the ministerial wheel, it surely is helpful to have a code of ethics which develops some of the practical implications for a minister to go the way of Christ. To avoid the charge of legalism, there is a lot to be said for drawing up a simple code of ethics and then accompanying it with a more detailed commentary – somewhat akin to the Jewish *haggadah* – illustrating the way in which the code might be applied.

7. Learning for life

Pastors need to keep learning

Professional pastors never finish learning. There is no such person as a ‘fully trained’ pastor. The three or so years at theological college are only a springboard for a life devoted to learning. Theological college marks only the primary stage of theological education. There are many more stages yet to come, as pastors review and reflect on their ministry and discover fresh resources for ministry. In this process continuing education for ministry is a ‘must’.¹⁸³

Continuing education is a mark of a professional.¹⁸⁴ Christian ministry apart, in almost all professions in-service training is a necessity of life. For example, in order to be able to continue to practise as an accountant, it is necessary to do a pre-determined minimum number of hours further training a year. It doesn’t matter how far one may have reached in the profession – one could be the senior partner in the largest accountancy firm in the country – one could not continue to practise without annual professional updating.

Likewise in a fast-changing world ministers need regular in-service training. Continual updating of personal and professional skills is a ‘must’, if ministers are not to be ‘happy amateurs’. Yet many ministers have received very little training since they left college. Roy Oswald quotes some American statistics to the effect that “only 20% of clergy in the US engage in regular continuing education events of five days or more each year.”¹⁸⁵ Would that we could maintain that the statistics for the UK were any higher!

In recent years all of the British mainline denominations in one way or another are now seeking to encourage continuing education. The Baptist Union of Great Britain recommends its constituent churches to grant its ministers

¹⁸¹ Wiest & Smith, *Ethics in Ministry* 181.

¹⁸² Wiest & Smith, *Ethics in Ministry* 190.

¹⁸³ In this regard the NRSV translation of Matt 23.8 is instructive: “You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.” The actual Greek word found here is “brothers” (*adelphoi*), a translation adopted by the NIV & REB. However, in the context the NRSV translation of “students” gets to the heart of what Jesus is saying: even the so-called ‘doctors of the church’ are but students – or ‘classmates’ as Eugene Peterson in *The Message* renders the term.

¹⁸⁴ See Frances Ward, *Lifelong Learning: Theological Education and Supervision* (SCM, London 2005) 1: “Education is the responsibility of anyone who takes seriously the need to continue to learn and grow through life, professionally and personally.”

¹⁸⁵ Roy Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care* (Alban, Washington D.C. 1991) 12.

not only five weeks of holiday every year, but also a study week a year. The Methodist Church in Britain has had an excellent system of offering further ministerial training at key periods in a minister's life: for example, there are courses for those who have been in ministry for five years, ten years, twenty years and thirty years. Sabbaticals are an increasing feature of the ministerial scene.

An increasing number of British theological colleges have degree courses in practical theology, often along the lines of the long-established American 'Doctor of Ministry' programmes. However, such degree courses, welcome as they are, are not the final solution to the need for continuing education within the ministry. For these degree courses are inevitably limited in time – some can be completed in a year on a full-time basis, others take up to five years on a part-time basis. But a professional approach to ministry, involves learning for life. It means that at every stage of ministry – even right up to and including the sixties – ministers are expected to be engaged in in-service training on an annual basis.

Yet in spite of all that is on offer, many ministers do not avail themselves of any of these opportunities to stretch their minds, to reflect on their ministry, and to discover new resources for the task in hand. Such a claim may sound somewhat extravagant. Sadly, a perusal of ministers' libraries reveals that with the exception of a few paperbacks their personal library has not been substantially expanded since college days.

Pastors need to keep reading

Centuries ago Solomon began his collection of proverbs by highlighting the importance of wisdom:

“A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Prov 1.5 AV) – or in the NRSV translation: “Let the wise hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill”. It is true that in the first place these words are an encouragement to read the proverbs Solomon had collected – “There's something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn” (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*). However, this injunction can be applied to the reading of books in general. Indeed, A.W. Tozer, the American Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor (1897-1963) based a sermon on Prov 1.5 entitled ‘Read or get out of ministry’¹⁸⁶

Tozer in his sermon title was quoting John Wesley, who used to tell his young ministers to ‘read or get out of ministry’. What's more, Wesley modelled what he preached: he always used to ride with a book propped against his saddle pommel as he travelled from one engagement to another. In this connection Tozer quoted an American Indian preacher, who encouraged his hearers to improve their minds for the honour of God by saying: “When you are chopping wood and you have a dull axe you must work all the harder to cut the log. A sharp axe makes easy work. So sharpen your axe all you can”.

Oswald Sanders, a past leader of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, in his book *Spiritual Leadership*, devoted a whole chapter to ‘The leader and his reading’, and also quoted John Wesley with approval. Sanders wrote:

“The man who desires to grow spiritually and intellectually will be constantly at his books. The lawyer who desires to succeed in his profession must keep abreast of important cases and changes in the law. The medical practitioner must follow the constantly changing discoveries in his field. Even so the spiritual leader must master God's Word and its principles, and know as well what is going on in the minds of those who look to him for guidance. To achieve these ends, he must, hand in hand with his personal contacts, engage in a course of selective reading.”¹⁸⁷

It was precisely with this understanding of the importance of continuing learning that ministers used to call the room in which they worked their ‘study’. Today, however, many ministers refer to their place of work as their ‘office’ (which derives from a Latin word referring to the ‘performance of a task’ – I fear that this change of terminology points to a different understanding of ministry. As John Stott similarly reflected: “Many are essentially administrators, whose symbols are the office rather than the study, and the telephone [now we should say ‘the computer’] rather than the Bible”.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ See sermonindex.net.

¹⁸⁷ *Spiritual Leadership* (Marshall Morgan & Scott, London 1967) 95.

¹⁸⁸ John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1982) 124.

Ministers need to read. In the first place they need to read and study their Bibles. However, they also need to read and study more broadly. C.H. Spurgeon, for instance, had a large personal library and believed passionately in the importance of reading. Commenting on Paul's words to Timothy, "Bring the books, and above all the parchments" (2 Tim 4:13), Spurgeon wrote: "He is inspired, yet he wants books. He has been preaching at least thirty years, yet he wants books. He's seen the Lord, yet he wants books. He's had a wider experience than most men, yet he wants books. He's been caught up to heaven and has heard things that are unlawful to utter, yet he wants books. He's written a major part of the New Testament, yet he wants books."¹⁸⁹

Rick Warren similarly believes reading is vital for church leaders: "Leaders are readers. Every leader is a reader. Not all readers are leaders but all leaders are readers. A lot of people read but they're not leaders. If you're going to lead, you've got to be thinking further in advance than the people that you're leading."¹⁹⁰ Warren advances four reasons for reading:

- We must read for inspiration and motivation
- We must read to sharpen our skills
- We must read to learn from others
- We must read to stay current in a changing world

Notice too that Warren does not have in mind ministers simply reading Christian books. We need to be in touch with the world in which we live.

In my list of 'lessons in ministry' I suggested that ministers should aim to read a book a week. I dare to believe that is not too much to aim for. In this regard Southern Baptist pastor Eric Geiger wrote:

"While I would not consider myself a 'reading expert', reading has been a significant part of my development for the last 20 years. I view reading as an opportunity to interact with great thinkers and leaders. I typically am working through multiple books at a time. Before kids entered our world, I averaged reading two books a week. The quantity of my reading has slowed for this season, but I still take reading very seriously."¹⁹¹

If a book a week seems too ambitious an aim, then what about this statement I came across: "Every preacher in normal health ought to read from fifteen to fifty books a year and know them"! The truth is probably that ministry would be revolutionised if every minister read at least one book a month. Sadly, for many life seems too busy. But at the end of the day it is surely a question of priorities. If something is important, there is always time.

So how does this work out in terms of actual time? Oswald Sanders suggested that every minister should 'determine' (I like that word) to spend a minimum of half-an-hour a day in reading. John Stott expected more of ministers. He used to say, "Every day at least one hour; every week one morning, afternoon, or evening; every month a full day; every year a week. Set out like this it sounds very little. . . . Yet everybody who tries it is surprised to discover how much reading can be done within such a disciplined framework. It totals up to nearly 600 hours in the course of a year"¹⁹²

Stott, of course, was writing as a single man, and some might therefore argue that he failed to understand the pressures experienced by ministers with families. But this is no reason to totally dismiss his particular pattern, while recognising that every minister needs to develop a pattern which works for them. I think of a minister friend who used to get up at 5 o'clock every morning to read for an hour or so before the day began. Fred Craddock, a distinguished American Methodist, wrote: "The person who has a comfortable chair in a quiet corner beside which is always a book with a marker and who reads 20 minutes after dinner and before retiring will read dozens of books each year".¹⁹³ In my own case, when as a young minister in Manchester I found myself having to travel down frequently to London for denominational committee meetings, I would always bring a pile of books onto the train and as a result got through many hours of reading. Some ministers finding it difficult to read at home go away every year for a reading week, either alone or with a group of peers.

¹⁸⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, 'Paul – His Cloak and His Books', *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Sermon 542, delivered on Sunday morning November 29, 1863.

¹⁹⁰ Rick Warren, *To be a great leader, you absolutely must be a reader* (internet article October 23, 2014).

¹⁹¹ Eric Geiger, *Read or Get Out of the Ministry* (Blog post May 12 2014).

¹⁹² John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* 127.

¹⁹³ Fred Craddock, *Preaching*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1985) 79.

Although no longer in pastoral charge, I still regard myself as a ‘minister in service’, and therefore I feel duty-bound to continue to read and to continue to learn. I know I cannot stand still, for as Gerard Kelly rightly said: “21st century leaders will find themselves asking constantly, ‘What have I learned today.. this week...this year?’”¹⁹⁴

If ministers, however, are to read regularly, there is one major difficulty, and that is the cost. One possibility would be for ministers to create ‘reading circles’ which share books around – such reading circles might not only cut the cost by as much as 60%, but would also encourage ministers to meet together for reflection on their reading. A further point occurs to me: reading a book a week doesn't mean a new book every week: sometimes returning to a ‘classic’ is helpful. In this respect my mind goes to Bryan Haymes, a former theological college principal, who as a student was so deeply impressed with the vision of ministry in Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*, that as a consequence he read it almost every year of his ministry thereafter.¹⁹⁵

One way or another, if pastors are to keep learning, they need to keep reading.

A condition of ongoing accreditation

What has been needed is a programme of continuing ministerial development in which ministers are expected to engage. Significantly, since the publication of *A Call To Excellence*, to my knowledge two distinct models have emerged among Baptist ministers: on one model continuing ministerial development is a condition of ongoing accreditation of ministry; on the other model continuing ministerial development is a condition of membership of a professional association.

Among New Zealand Baptists every two years registered ministers are required to undertake a ‘ministry development agreement review’. This ministry development agreement is made between the pastor and the Baptist Union and in consultation with the local church. It involves the setting of learning goals and ‘aims at discovery ways to affirm and strengthen the pastor in his/her ministry’. There are three strands to the ministry development agreement: ministers must gain 25 points annually in *all three* areas in order to be a ‘registered’ Baptist minister. The three strands are:

1. Spiritual accountability – 5 points required per year (FT/PT)
Meeting at least once every two months with a mentor (an experienced minister, who may be retired, and who may belong to any denomination), spiritual director (who is professionally trained, qualified, and supervised) or supervisor (who is professionally trained, qualified and recognised as a supervisor). A report is required at the end of the registration process: no personal matters are revealed, but the reports need to show that the minister is committed to the process, and is willing to confront personal growth and ministry issues.
2. Applied practice – 10 points required per year (FT); 10 points required over 2 years (PT)
 - Tertiary level study (10 points)
 - Carey College (the NZ Baptist college based in Auckland) registration courses: not as demanding as tertiary level study, but require written reflective work
 - Applicant’s own reflective practice proposal: this may pick up on some specific area of interest or contextual issue a leader wishes to explore and reflect on. Criteria include:
 1. A clearly identified topic or area of interest
 2. A way of interacting with this topic: e.g. reading, interviews, focus groups, research, overseas mission trip
 3. A way of reporting and/or reflecting on the work done
 4. A supervisor to oversee and reflect with – at least 20 hours contact time
 - Other approved courses
3. Baptist community – 5 points for each one; 10 points required per year (FT); 10 points required over 2 years (PT)
 - Regularly attend a cluster group (at least 70%). Each cluster group is led by a ‘consultant’ or ‘coach’ appointed by mutual agreement between the cluster and the NZ Baptist Union. A typical cluster meeting lasts about 3 hours, and includes an interactive training session of 60-90 minutes. Led or facilitated by the cluster leader, a sharing of church statistics, prayer, mutual support and encouragement, and often eating together. Every month the NZ Baptist Union sends out materials for cluster groups: topics covered include

¹⁹⁴ Quoted by Chris Edmondson, *Fit to Lead* (Darton, Longman & Todd, London 2002) 42.

¹⁹⁵ Brian Haymes, ‘The Reformed Pastor’, *Ministry Today* 1 (Spring 1994) 35.

church growth barriers, prayer, leadership style, leadership character, relationships and conflict, working with volunteers, leadership development, discipleship, and evangelism.

- Attend the annual Baptist Assembly ('The Gathering')
- Attend a pastors conference
- Attend a 'leadership network' event sponsored by the NZ Baptist Union
- Attend a specialist Baptist ministry event
- Attend other Baptist community events

I find this an attractive approach to continuing ministerial development. However, administratively it must be fairly demanding to organise. Furthermore, the compulsory nature of the scheme involves a whole-hearted acceptance on the part of ministers. Among many independently-minded British ministers, for instance, there would at present be widespread rejection of such a scheme. What is needed in the UK is a form of continuing ministerial development which encourages ministers to engage "because it is a worthwhile thing to do."¹⁹⁶

A condition of membership of a professional body

This second model is being developed by the new College of Baptist Ministers. A condition of membership is the creation of a personal online portfolio where members will have to give evidence of continuing development. The College has identified seven strands which it deems to be vital to the well-being of every minister: viz.

Accountability – regularly opening our lives to the supportive scrutiny of one or two others.

Applied Practice – gaining new insights through reflecting on our experience of ministry and church life, learning through failure as well as success, pioneering new ways of doing mission and ministry, creating courses that help our people grow in their faith, becoming more effective as a preacher, developing new skills in managing change, resolving conflict, building team, and in leading God's people forward.

Appraisal – on an annual basis allowing others to help us review our ministries, affirming all that has been positive in the past year, and agreeing the shape of ministry for the coming year.

Collegiality – meeting together with other ministers to strengthen, encourage and support one another.

Learning – through attending courses, reading books, working for a formal qualification or simply going on a broadening sabbatical.

Practical competencies – relating to some of the more practical competencies of ministry identified by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, such as IT skills and safeguarding policies.

Spirituality – sustaining and deepening our walk with God.

The College also states: "Every member will be helped to create a personal online portfolio accessed through the internet – this portfolio will be secure and accessible only to the member and to those charged to monitor the portfolio, unless specific permission is given to others by the member. Members will be encouraged to post regularly brief date-marked entries according to the strands – over the year we would expect members to post something in every strand. Apart from the spirituality strand, which would be difficult to assess, each experience of development would link to a way in which it could be confirmed, for the rare occasion where verification could be helpful to the minister together with the date when they would be encouraged to post entries regularly in their portfolio, at least every two months."

Conclusion

To return to our overall theme: if pastors are to be effective in the mission to which Christ has called them, then a professional approach to ministry is necessary. The professional pastor is the pastor who refuses to be content with the second-best, but rather for the sake of the church and indeed for the sake of the wider world constantly seeks to give his or her best in the service of Christ, and so in turn seeks to live out the call.

¹⁹⁶ So Neil Evans, *Developing in Ministry: Handbook for effective Christian learning and training* (SPCK, London 2012) 13-14.

PART 2: THE EXEMPLARY PILGRIM

8. The call to become

There is in the Christian life an inherent dynamic of the Spirit. When by the Spirit of God we are born again into the family of God, we are born to grow. Conversion may be the end of one life, but it is also the beginning of another. This dynamic may be in part expressed by one of the first descriptions of the Christian faith: “the Way” (see Acts 9.2; 19.23; 22.4; 24.14). This new movement represented not just a way to salvation, but also a way of living. Men and women of the Way were by definition travellers.

Ministers too are travellers. We too are on a journey. Ordination is only a point on that journey. In the ordination ritual of the early church and indeed in some parts of the church today there is a point at which the people cry out, *Axios* (‘he is worthy’) as they acknowledge the fitness of the person concerned to be ordained. Would that were true! As it is, no ministers worth their salt ever truly feel worthy in themselves – sanctification is a process in which we too must take part.

The call to be men and women of God

What pastors do is dependent upon who they are. ‘Being’ and ‘becoming’ come before ‘doing’. The importance of a pastor ‘being’ in the first place God’s ‘man’ or God’s ‘woman’ has been expressed in various ways. The Christian mystic Evelyn Underhill wrote:

“The very first requisite for a minister of religion is that his own inner life should be maintained in a healthy state... The man whose life is coloured by prayer, whose loving communion with God comes first, will always win souls; because he shows them in his own life and person the attractiveness of reality, the demand, the transforming power of the spiritual life... The most persuasive preacher, the most devoted and untiring social worker, the most up-to-date theologian – unless loving devotion to God exceeds and enfolds these activities – will not win souls.”¹⁹⁷

In similar vein James Taylor declared:

“No higher reputation should, or can, be desired by a Christian minister than that possessed by the prophet Elisha in the mind of the Shunammite woman. ‘I perceive’, she said, ‘that this is a holy man of God who is continually passing our way’ (2 Kings 4.9). No matter what other gifts a church fellowship may admire in their minister this is, in the final reckoning, what they most desire him to be. All other virtues are virtually irrelevant and most other faults are forgivable if, to them and in their midst, he is a ‘man of God’.”¹⁹⁸

The Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union in *Forms of Ministry among Baptists: towards an understanding of spiritual leadership*, stated: “The call to be a minister is not only the call to exercise various functions, but to ‘a way of being’ or ‘order of life’. Doing cannot be separated from being, as the functions of ministry shape what a person is, as well as being grounded in a personality which has been ‘formed’ in the process of ministerial training... A way of life is more than a mere job description.”¹⁹⁹ Christopher Ellis develops this call to ‘a way of being’ in terms of the promises made at ordination: “Yes, this involves faithful actions – the studying and expounding of Scripture, the faithful leading of worship and proclaiming of the gospel, pastoral care and spiritual direction – but each of these actions flows from who the pastor is in relation to God.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ *Heaven A Dance: An Evelyn Underhill Anthology* (Triangle, SPCK, London 1992) compiled by Brenda & Stuart Blanch, 85.

¹⁹⁸ James Taylor, ‘A Man of God’, *Fraternal* 156 (April 1970) 23.

¹⁹⁹ Baptist Union of Great Britain, Didcot 1995.

²⁰⁰ Christopher Ellis, ‘Being a minister: spirituality and the pastor’ 62-63 in *Challenging to change: dialogues with a radical Baptist theologian. Essays presented to Dr Nigel G. Wright on his 60th birthday* (Spurgeon’s College, London 2009) edited by Pieter J. Lalleman.

The importance of this aspect of the pastoral calling to be a ‘man’ or ‘woman’ of God cannot be overemphasised. “Vocational holiness”, as Eugene Peterson calls it, is of the essence of ministry: “Pastoring is not managing a religious business but a spiritual quest.”²⁰¹

The call to be a pilgrim

This way of being to which pastors are called, is also a way of ‘becoming’. There is an inner dynamic of growth and development. There is nothing static about the Christian life. We are travellers engaged on ‘the long walk’ to God. This phrase came to mind when I read Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*. There, at the end of the book, he wrote:

“I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made many missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, on my long walk.”²⁰²

It seems to me that there are parallels here with the Christian life.

Not surprisingly with the paradigm of the Exodus, the early Christians came to see themselves as “strangers and pilgrims” (Hebs 11.13 AV; see 1 Pet 2.11 AV), as they made their way home to God. The English word ‘pilgrim’ is derived from the Latin *perigrinatus*, which was originally used to describe somebody who had travelled abroad, but came to be used of people who were on a journey toward God. Modern English versions have removed the concept of pilgrimage and speak of Christians being “strangers and foreigners” (NRSV) or “foreigners and refugees” (GNB) or “foreigners and strangers” (NIV). Indeed, some commentators suggest that we have here a term for ‘resident aliens’. While this may be true, these modern translations lack the sense of movement which is present, where the author says that the heroes of faith were “seeking a homeland” (Hebs 11.14); and “looking for the city that is to come” (Hebs 13.14). As Christians we are on a journey – or in the words of the old hymn, “We are marching to Zion.”

This picture of the Christian life as pilgrimage has been taken up by many Christian authors since. In the early 5th century Augustine of Hippo wrote *The City of God* in which he distinguished between the “city of this world” and the “city of God”. He wrote: “As long as he [the citizen of the heavenly city] is in this mortal body, [he] is a pilgrim in a foreign land, away from God: therefore he walks by faith and not by sight... While this Heavenly City is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages.”

In the 17th century John Bunyan wrote what is the most well-known work of Baptist spirituality, viz. *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which Christian sets out on a journey to the Celestial City. He travels through the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, and Doubting Castle. On his way he meets such people as Evangelist, Mr Facing-both-ways, Worldly Wiseman, the Interpreter, Greatheart, Ignorance, Mr Talkative, Madame Bubble, Vain-hope, and Mrs Know-nothing. Finally he passes through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and in the company of Hope comes at last to the gates of the Celestial City.²⁰³

In the late 1980s the British Inter-Church Process which resulted in the Roman Catholic Church becoming part of the ‘Churches Together’ movement, was entitled *Not Strangers but Pilgrims* – for “we are strangers no longer, but pilgrims on the way to your kingdom.”

In 1994 Cardinal Hume wrote *To Be a Pilgrim: A Spiritual Notebook*, where he said: “We are made to know God, to love Him and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next. This is the point of pilgrimage.”

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²⁰¹ See Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: an exploration in vocational holiness* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1992) 55.

²⁰² Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, (Little & Brown, London 1994) 354.

²⁰³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678; Part II 1684); also Ken Manley, ‘To be a pilgrim: a perspective on Baptist spirituality’, 39–48 in *A Man of God: Essays in honour of Principal Ron Rogers* (privately published by Ray Case, Eastwood, Australia 1990).

²⁰⁴ Basil Hume, *To Be A Pilgrim: A Spiritual Notebook* (SPCK, London 1994) 26.

More recently this image of the Christian life as one of pilgrimage has been developed by the adventurer Rob Lilwall who concludes his account of walking 3,000 miles across China with the following reflection:

“I belong to a faith, at the heart of which is the claim that I am completely loved, and which also calls me to live courageously as a pilgrim. On this pilgrimage of life there will be times when I fall down. But instead of giving up or becoming bitter, I must get up and keep walking and reject the view that life is all about winning. Rather, I must keep a soft heart which, despite the tests and trials, is learning to love.”²⁰⁵

Like the journey made by Lilwall, it is a challenging journey full of twists and turns, ups and downs. It is not a smooth journey. The question arises: how do we – as ministers – cope with those tough times when everything seems to go wrong? Do we become hard and cynical – or will we remain soft-hearted and trusting? Alas, some ministers develop a ‘chip on the shoulder’ and become angry and bitter, as they focus on what they believe to be the ‘unfairnesses’ of life. They forget that life is not about ‘winning’ in the here and now, but about keeping going, whatever, and fail to allow the so-called ‘unfairnesses’ to become opportunities to grow in grace (see Rom 5.3-5; Jas 1.2-4). In our call to be pilgrims, our focus is to be on the future hope, and not on past hurts or present difficulties. In the words of Michael Saward’s modern paraphrase of John Bunyan’s great hymn, “Who would true valour see”:

“Though evil powers intend
To break our spirit,
We know we at the end
Shall life inherit.
So fantasies, away!
Why fear what others say?
We’ll labour night and day
To be his pilgrims.”

The journey can be tough,²⁰⁶ but where there is faith, God can sustain and strengthen. To quote the Psalmist, as the pilgrims pass through “the dry valley of Baca, it becomes a place of springs; the autumn rain fills it with pools” (Psalm 84.6). Dry valleys do not literally suddenly become filled with refreshing pools simply because pilgrims are passing through. But beneath the poetry is the conviction that God makes all the difference to the pilgrim life. Where God is looked to, troubles are transformed, new strength is received. Instead of getting weaker on the journey, the pilgrims actually “grow stronger as they go” (Psalm 84.7).

The call to be exemplary pilgrims

Pastors are called to be exemplary pilgrims. But in what sense? Although ordination does not of itself bring a person nearer to God, nonetheless the rite of ordination contains within it a call to live a life near to God. Pastors, like all God’s people, are called to be men and women of God but, if they fail to live up to this calling, then the rest of their ministry is of little worth – indeed, it becomes counter-productive. In the words of Richard Baxter, the great 17th century pastor of Kidderminster:

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours.”²⁰⁷

It is precisely because pastoring contains within it this call to vocational holiness that the Apostle Paul could write to his churches and urge them to imitate him (1 Cor 4.16; 11.1; Gal 4.12; Phil 3.17; 1 Thess 1.6; 2 Thess 3.7,9). In the secular world of Paul’s day sons were expected to imitate their fathers. Paul, as a ‘father in God’ expected his churches to imitate him. The call to imitation was not a mark of spiritual arrogance on the part of Paul, but rather a function of the pastoral relationship. As a result Paul commanded Timothy to “set the believers an example in your speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4.12). What was true then, remains true today. Pastors are called to be exemplary pilgrims, not least in their relationship to their fellow church members. So Lesslie Newbigin wrote: “A true Christian pastor will be the one who can dare to say to his people ‘Follow me, as I am following Jesus’.

²⁰⁵ *Walking Home From Mongolia: Ten Million Steps Through China from the Gobi Desert to the South China Sea* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2013).

²⁰⁶ See Hebs 11.32-38.

²⁰⁷ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* 63.

That is a terrible test for any pastor. A true pastor must have such a relationship with Jesus and his people that he follows Jesus and his people follow them.”²⁰⁸

Pastors are called to be exemplary pilgrims. The injunction of Hebs 13.7 is apposite where the writer referring to their former leaders, says: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” The implication is that these first generation leaders not only spoke God’s Word – they also lived out God’s Word in their lives: i.e. their lives matched their message. They were people of integrity; and so too must the lives of leaders today be marked by integrity.²⁰⁹ The fact is that our lives speak more powerfully than our words.

This is a sobering thought. How on earth dare any one of us preach, for surely we are all aware of our own imperfections? Yet preach we may, if we are prepared to apply God’s Word to our lives. God does not expect leaders to be perfect, otherwise none could lead. But leaders are called to demonstrate a degree of consistency in the way in which they live their lives. They are called to be people of integrity. Although of necessity their very humanity means that they will always fall short of the mark, nonetheless the way in which they live and cope with the ups and downs of life must be a spur as also an encouragement to others in their walk with Christ. Something of the spirit of Jesus must be discernible in them.

It is because our lives are so important that Paul in his lists of qualifications for church leaders in 1 Tim 3 says almost nothing about gifting, but everything about character. Charisma without character is worthless.

A challenging calling

Cultivating the vital relationships

At the best of times the call to be a man or woman of God has never been an easy calling. In today’s church the multitudinous pressures of church life are such that this fundamental aspect of the pastoral call is constantly under threat. Pastors are so concerned for ‘ministry’, i.e. relating to others in various forms of Christian service, that they do not always make time for ‘spirituality’, i.e. relating to God, which is their prime form of Christian service. Yet without a vital relationship with God our ministry will speedily crumble. Drawing upon his personal experience, Gordon MacDonald, a veteran Christian leader, wrote:

“Today there is a tremendous emphasis on leadership themes such as vision, organizational strategy, and the ‘market-sensitivity’ of one’s message. It’s all great stuff – stuff I wish I’d heard when I was a young pastor. But if it is all about what’s above the waterline, we are likely to witness a leadership crash of sorts in the coming years. Leaders blessed with great natural skills and charisma may be vulnerable to collapse in their character, their key relationships, and their centre of belief because they never learned that one cannot (or should not) build *above* the waterline until there is a substantial foundation *below* it.”²¹⁰

There is actually nothing new in what MacDonald has to say: every minister ‘knows’ that ministers first and foremost need to be men and women of God. Yet it is so easy for the ‘important’ to become secondary to the ‘urgent’. Roy Oswald’s description of his experience as a pastor is true of so many pastors:

“Pastors face unique problems, I believe, in keeping fresh spiritually. For one thing, the spiritual disciplines we learned as children and young adults are now the tools of our trade. For me, scripture, prayer and worship became overfamiliar and lost much of their mystery. It was difficult to read the Bible devotionally when I knew I had to prepare a sermon from those texts. I felt so much pressure to come up with something meaningful to say that I read the Bible as though I were on a scavenger hunt! Everything I read was directed toward others’ spiritual needs and not my own. I was doing so much praying with other people in hospitals, in

²⁰⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd* (Mowbray, Oxford 1985) 14.

²⁰⁹ See Jonathan Lamb, *Integrity Leading with God watching* (IVP, Nottingham 2006) 26: he highlights the following three qualities as essential for integrity: (1) sincerity: pure motives; (2) consistency: living life as a whole; and (3) reliability: reflecting God’s faithfulness.

²¹⁰ Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below The Waterline: Shoring Up The Foundations of Leadership* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts 2011) 2.

homes and prior to meetings that I stopped praying on my own. I failed to recognize the essential difference between nurturing the spiritual journey of another and having a unique spiritual journey of my own.”²¹¹

Developing a personal rule of life

The only answer to this kind of dilemma is the establishing of regular spiritual disciplines. As Henri Nouwen has reminded us, “A spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Discipline is the other side of discipleship.”²¹²

As ever, Jesus is our model. Jesus knew what it was like to be under pressure. A day such as that described by Mark in Mark 1.16-32 would have exhausted even the fittest. Yet Jesus did not succumb to these pressures. Jesus retained his spiritual vitality and authority as a result of a disciplined life of prayer. “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place and there he prayed” (Mark 1.35). The Gospels indicate that this was no exceptional occasion, but rather this retreating for prayer was a regular part of his devotional pattern (see Luke 6.12).

Only in this way could Jesus get his priorities right. So, with Matt 4.31-42 in mind, Bruce Epperly draws upon a modern analogy when he writes: “Perhaps Jesus was tempted by the adulation inspired by his success as a teacher and healer to stay in Capernaum. He needed to still every voice but God’s voice speaking within his own experience to discern the next steps of his journey. Jesus needed to realign his spiritual GPS.”²¹³ What was true of Jesus must be true of us too: we too must pause to discern the direction we need to to.

Jesus lived a balanced life – a life of action and prayer. Likewise the followers of Jesus, and not least pastors, need to live balanced lives. We need to live balanced lives to survive, for otherwise we will be crushed by the pressures of life, our spirits exhausted, our prayer life negligible, and our spiritual effectiveness nil. We need too to live balanced lives in order to be all that God would have us to be.

“The busier life is, the more need there is for a still centre; a place deep within us to which we can withdraw after the day-to-day buffeting and storms; a place where we can reflect on experience and try and make sense of life; a place where we can mull over events and savour them more fully; a place where, above all, we can listen... to what others are saying verbally or non-verbally, to what our feelings and fears are saying to us, and to what God is saying through circumstances, through people, through creation, and his word spoken in the depths of our being.”²¹⁴

The precise shape of a disciplined life will vary from pastor to pastor. Christopher Ellis suggests that pastors adopt seven “good practices and gracious disciplines”: viz. worship, waiting on God, Sabbath keeping, reading Scripture, prayer, spiritual direction, and giving attention to the grace of God.²¹⁵ However, there is no one ‘rule’ of life. There is no one pattern of spirituality. What is vital is that each pastor has a rule.²¹⁶ For, as Frederick Bruner reminds us, “Only the life that gets aside, that closes the door occasionally, is usually able to live the rest of the day prayerfully.”²¹⁷

Making time at the beginning of the day

To “sustain the weary with a word”, we need “morning by morning... to listen as those who are taught” (Isaiah 54.4).²¹⁸ Although some are more ‘owls’ than ‘larks’, nonetheless every pastor needs to make time at the beginning of the day to be consciously in the presence of God. To live the life Christ has called us to, we need to begin the day with prayer. “The prayer of the morning”, wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “will determine the day. Wasted time, which we are

²¹¹ Roy Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care* 93.

²¹² Henri Nouwen, ‘An Invitation To The Spiritual Life’, *Leadership* XII (Summer 1981) 57.

²¹³ Bruce Epperly, ‘Finding Your Spiritual GPS’, *Alban Paper* April 13, 2015

²¹⁴ Margaret Magdalen, *Jesus – Man of Prayer* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1987) 40.

²¹⁵ See Christopher Ellis, ‘Being a minister: spirituality and the pastor’ 64-68.

²¹⁶ See Harold Miller, *Finding a Personal Rule of Life* (Grove, Nottingham 1984) 4-5: “By embracing Rule, we make for ourselves a standard which we would like to attach, by the power of the Spirit, and we are enabled from time to time to do some appropriate assessment of where we have got to... Rule is merely a means to an end, and the end for me is that we might walk closely with God, and live more effectively for him.”

²¹⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2004) 288.

²¹⁸ Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (IVP, Leicester 1996) 198: “The Servant... is a skilled counsellor because he himself has been taught by the Lord. He is a disciple before he is anything else, and as such his outstanding characteristic is attentiveness to God.”

ashamed of, temptations that beset us, weakness and listlessness in our work, disorder and indiscipline in our thinking and our relations with other people, very frequently have their cause in the neglect of the morning prayer.”²¹⁹

My own custom for many years has been to begin the day by using the daily ‘Anglican’ lectionary: sometimes I read the set ‘offices’ of the day, with its two readings from the Old and New Testaments, but normally I stay with the three shorter passages set for ‘Holy Communion’ which always include part of a Psalm. The lectionary gives me a balanced diet, yet does not overburden me in terms of the amount. As I read, whenever a phrase or a verse jumps out at me, I mark my Bible – and then, for a shorter or longer period, I seek to chew over what God may be saying to me. From Scripture I turn to prayer. Here too I find the need for a system: I devised a simple plan for the week, with eight main categories for each day: my family, my colleagues, my deacons, church activities, life beyond the local church, ‘yesterday’, ‘today’ and ‘special needs’.

To pray, we must find a place to be alone, to be silent, to be still. This entails discipline. “It is.... essential,” wrote Kenneth Leech, “that there should be in every pastor’s rule, a built-in dimension of contemplative stillness and reflection. The ‘Sabbath principle’, the law of rest and re-creation is vital, and its deliberate neglect is a grave sin whose results are all too apparent in broken lives and fragmented lives.”²²⁰

Setting aside time for reflection

The pressures of daily life mean that it is not always easy to be truly ‘still’ at the beginning of each day and to ‘centre down’ on God. We may read God’s Word, we may say our prayers, but we do so all too often conscious of the demands breaking in on our day. There is much to be said for carving out an additional chunk of time during the week – a morning, maybe, or perhaps more easily an afternoon – where we can more leisurely give ourselves to study, prayer and re-collection.²²¹ To do so, it is essential to find a quiet place, away from the distractions of phone, visitors, and family. The secret ‘closet’ of prayer (see Matt 6.6) may take the form of a room in a friend’s house, the chapel of a local convent, a sunny spot out on the hills – anywhere, where we can be alone with God and are able to listen to him.²²²

Going away on retreat

A regular spiritual ‘overhaul’ needs also to be built into our lives as ministers. Just as cars need major services, so too do ministers.²²³ Over the years I have been on a variety of personally-directed retreats. Some have been very intensive weeks, where every day has been totally devoted to reading and praying over Scriptures set by the retreat director. Such retreats have proved painful affairs as the retreat director helped me to apply God’s Word to some of the more secret parts of my heart. But ‘no pain, no gain’ as the slimmers say. Doing serious business with God can be painful, but it is also enormously cleansing, healing, freeing. Other retreats have been less intensive; but at the heart of the day has been the reading and reflecting on Scripture (*lectio divina*) which has involved taking up one word after the other, examining it, reflecting upon it, and hearing God speak words of grace and words of direction into my life.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (English Translation: SCM, London 1954) 53.

²²⁰ Kenneth Leech, “The pastor and his devotional life”, *Expository Times* 91 (September 1980) 356. See also Thomas R. Swears, *The Approaching Sabbath: spiritual disciplines for pastors* (Abingdon, Nashville 1991).

²²¹ Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below the Waterline* 34-35 recommends pastors regularly asking of themselves such “tough questions” for spiritual growth as: “Am I too defensive when asked questions about the use of my time and the consistency of my spiritual disciplines? Have I locked myself into a schedule that provides no rest or fun times with friends and family? What does my daily planner say about time for study, general reading, and bodily exercise? What about the quality of my speech? Do I whine and complain? Am I frequently critical of people and institutions, or of those who clearly do not like me? Am I drawn to TV shows or entertainments that do not reflect my desired spiritual culture? Am I tempted to stretch the truth, enlarge numbers that are favourable to me, or tell stories that make me look good? Do I blame others for things that are my own fault or the result of my own choices? Is my spirit in a state of quiet so I can hear God speak?”

²²² See 1 Kings 3.9 where Solomon asks for “an understanding mind” (NRSV) or more literally “a heart with a skill to listen” (REB). See also Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*: “Give me a God-listening heart, so that I can lead your people well”.

²²³ The Society of Mary and Martha based at the Sheldon Centre just outside Exeter, Devon, has for many years run ‘12,000 mile services’ for ministers.

²²⁴ For ministers wanting to engage with the Scriptures on a self-led retreat or on sabbatical, I have written *A Retreat Lectionary*, which suggests four passages a day for a two week period. This lectionary is available from the Society of Mary and is also to be found on my website: www.paulbeasleymurray.com

Such retreats have been opportunities to stand back from the pressures of ministry and as a result gain a new perspective on how God would live my life. They have been times of rest and refreshment, of re-connecting and renewal, of re-evaluation and resolution, of re-imagining and re-envisioning. Time and again I have proved the truth of the welcome card used by the Sheldon Centre for their guests: “Here may you lay aside burdens borne for self and others. May this place be for you a vessel of love, where from you may draw rest, silence, healing and vision. And may the Creator’s love warmly glow from all that you see.”

Meeting regularly with a spiritual director

Spiritual direction is not to be limited to retreats. There is much to be said for meeting up with a spiritual director every two or three months. For we do easily deceive ourselves – even in those times of quiet when with the best of intentions we may seek to scrutinise our motives before the Lord. We need help to see ourselves as we really are. According to Thomas Merton:

“The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a [person’s] life, to get behind the facade of conventional gestures and attitudes which s/he presents to the world, and to bring out his/her inner spiritual freedom, his/her inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in his/her own soul.”

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Spiritual direction, rightly exercised, brings to the surface one’s own feelings and thoughts and in the process can expose false motives. At times such direction can be painful, precisely because the real ‘person’ emerges. However, it is only as the inner self is exposed to God’s light and love that there is any hope for growth and development in the Christian life. For me the fact that I was accountable to a spiritual director for my walk with the Lord gave my ministry integrity. Spiritual direction means an end to ministerial ‘play-acting’. It ensures that the inevitable discontinuity between the public expression and the private realities of my spirituality is kept to the minimum. It keeps us on the pilgrim way.

Making God the priority

Making God the priority involves the disciplined use of time on a daily, weekly, annual basis. Such time is not easily found; it has to be made. To make time involves the disciplined setting aside of time in the diary. This will mean that we will not be free to accept other engagements. We will have to say ‘no’ to people – we are not free; we have another appointment – with God!

These times of quiet with God are not to be regarded as personal time. This is church work. This is part of our calling. In this respect Evelyn Underhill helpfully drew attention to the words of Jesus found in John 17.19: “For their sakes I sanctify myself”: “That text has a most searching application to the priestly members of the Body of Christ. Cold perfunctory, negligent prayer in a minister of religion is not only a personal fault and personal loss. It is a sin against his people.”²²⁶ In other words, we do God’s people a service by limiting our busyness in church things and spending time with God.

Pastors, first and foremost, are called to be exemplary pilgrims. They are not called to be perfect, but they are called to be seen as men and women who are making progress in the journey of faith. As the years go by, it can be somewhat challenging to ask ourselves: What progress in the life of faith have I made? How far have I come since I was set aside with the laying-on-of hands for Christian ministry? How much closer am I now to Jesus, than when I first began? In the words of Henri Nouwen:

“The central question is, Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God’s presence, to listen to God’s voice, to look at God’s beauty, to touch God’s incarnate Word and to taste fully God’s infinite goodness?”²²⁷

²²⁵ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (The Liturgical Press, St Joseph, Minnesota 1960) 16 quoted by Peter Madsen Gubi in *Spiritual Accompaniment and Counselling: Journeying with psyche and soul* (Jessica Kingsley, London 2015) 29.

²²⁶ *Heaven a Dance* 95.

²²⁷ *Heaven a Dance* 92.

9. Handling success and failure

Within the context of being an exemplary pilgrim the themes of success and failure assume dimensions somewhat different from the norm. Success in ministry is often related to numbers. A ‘successful’ pastor is a pastor of a bigger and better church. The larger the church, the more successful the pastor. But is success in ministry necessarily about growing bigger and better churches? In the world beyond the church success is all about productivity: the successful businessman is the man who has extended his business and made his fortune. But what is success in ministerial terms? Is there a different yardstick?

Jesus successfully fulfilled his mission

Our ultimate measure in Christian terms is Jesus. It is at this point we run into difficulties. For in *institutional* terms Jesus was not much of a success. Although at times great crowds followed Jesus, at the end even his disciples left him. Accordingly Don Gilmore claimed that Jesus was the world’s greatest failure:

“He came to his own, and his own received him not. His family did not understand him; the religious authorities hated him; the political leadership was opposed to him; his friends deserted him; a disciple betrayed him; vocal supporters denied him; his congregation spat on him – hurled stones at him; his enemies crucified him... He was a fantastic failure.”²²⁸

Yet was Jesus “a fantastic failure”? Gilmore overstated his case. The Cross was not some unfortunate accident. As the Gospels clearly indicate, long before his death Jesus saw himself as the Suffering Servant of the Lord and therefore accepted his death as part of God’s plan and in accordance with Isaiah 52.13-53.12. For Jesus the Cross was part of the divine strategy for establishing God’s Kingdom on earth. Indeed, Jesus said: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12.32, which in turn echoes Isaiah 52.13). The very strength and size of the church down through the centuries is an indication of Jesus’ ‘success’. Yet it was precisely through a Cross that God worked. The Cross reminds us that ministry, even ‘successful’ ministry, is costly.

Although Jesus never mentioned the term ‘success’, he did anticipate his disciples sharing in his ultimate victory. For, said Jesus, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master” (Matt 10.24). Like Jesus we may know rejection, but there will also be times when we will share in his glory. As Jesus said: “If they kept my word, they will keep yours also” (John 15.20). Many years ago at my ordination my father concluded his sermon with these words:

“The power and blessing of God that was with Jesus is with the disciples of Jesus. See also Luke 6.40: ‘A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully taught will be like his teacher’. This is in contrast to the terrible results of the blind leading the blind: he who knows the truth of Jesus will be able to lead them into the power of that truth just as Jesus did. This is the joyful, reverse side of the principle enunciated by Jesus. If men rejected him, men also listened to him. Even on the cross. And especially through the cross. See John 12.31,32. When was Jesus to draw all men to him? When his servants made him known through the preaching and living of the gospel. If Mark 13.10 puts the mission in a context of suffering, Matt. 28.18 puts it in the context of victory and power. If it be true that the march of the church has been marked with blood stains, it has also known joy and life. So today. Against all the pessimists, let that never be forgotten. And go, expecting to see response to your ministry. Your Lord’s power is limitless. Let your trust match that power – and so will your joy.”²²⁹

This is a helpful corrective to those who suggest that pastors should not look for success in their ministry. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for instance, wrote: “The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.”²³⁰ It is also a helpful corrective to those ministers who seem to have relatively little interest in seeing their churches grow. As William Willimon wrote in his commentary on Acts: “Luke would not know what to make of a

²²⁸ G. Don Gilmore, *The Freedom to Fail* (Revell, Westwood, New Jersey 1966) 21. Similarly Maria Boulding called her chapter on Jesus ‘The Failed Messiah’, and wrote: “The Word was made failure and died among us” (*Gateway to Hope: an Exploration of Failure*, Fount, London 1985, 71).

²²⁹ Ordination sermon preached by G.R. Beasley-Murray at South Norwood Baptist Church (Holmesdale Road) on the occasion of Paul Beasley-Murray’s ordination: Saturday October 10, 1967.

²³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (English Translation: SCM, London 1955) 15.

church no longer in the business of making more disciples. While the mission of the church is more than growth, it is not something other than growth. It is certainly not decline.”²³¹

Jesus wants us to be fruitful

Probably the nearest Jesus came to talking about the concept of success was in his use of the term ‘harvest’. When Jesus spoke of the fields being “ripe for harvesting” (John 4.35) he was speaking of a world rich in Gospel potential. This potential was also expressed in the parable of the Sower (Mark 4). There was unreceptive soil, but there was receptive soil too, for the seed which fell into good soil “brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and hundredfold” (Mark 4.8). This was a bumper harvest. In today’s terms, this was success.

On another occasion, using the image of the vine Jesus made it clear that he expected his disciples to be fruitful. He said that the branches that “remained” in him would “bear much fruit” (John 15.8). He went on to tell his disciples that they had been appointed to “go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15.16). Is this not success?

But success – the ‘harvest’ – can come at a great personal cost. I find it significant that in John’s Gospel, immediately after his so-called ‘triumphal’ entry into Jerusalem, Jesus said: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12.24). ‘Success’ entails sacrifice. The American Roman Catholic scholar, Raymond E. Brown, commented: “The parable is concerned not with the fate of the grain but with its productivity – it either remains barren or bears fruit. This fruit is to be understood in the same sense as in 4.36, where the context of sayings about harvest showed that the fruit consisted in the people who were coming to Jesus and thus to God.”²³² Jesus knew that the death he would die would be no ordinary death – it would affect the lives of many. Just as one grain of wheat when it is buried in the ground and dies produces a rich harvest, so he in dying would produce a rich harvest of life for the world. But Jesus was not just speaking about himself; he was also speaking about his followers. For Jesus went on to say: “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me” (John 12.25, 26a). Here we have the Johannine equivalent of the Synoptic call to “take up the cross” (see, for instance, Mark 8.34, 35), but what is different in John is the context of the harvest. Sacrifice is the way of impacting the lives of others for the sake of the Kingdom. That is an uncomfortable thought! On the other hand Jesus does go on to say: “And where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour” (John 12.26b). Yes we will be rewarded for our labours – but not necessarily in this life. To judge what is a successful life demands the perspective of eternity.

Jesus wants us to be faithful

Jesus appears to have preferred to speak of faithfulness, rather than of success. On one occasion he spoke of the faithful servant (Matt 24.45-47//Luke 12.42-44); on another he picked up the theme of faithful stewards in a parable we know as the parable of the talents or of the pounds (Matt 25.14-30 // Luke 19.11-27). Elsewhere Luke records Jesus as having given a number of maxims on the theme of faithfulness (Luke 16.10-12).

Paul likewise spoke of faithfulness. In 1 Cor 4.1,2 we read: “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (NRSV) [‘faithful’ – (AV/NIV)].

This emphasis on faithfulness turns upside down our values. We tend to be much more interested in success rather than faithfulness. For example, I did a check on one major American seminary library and discovered that they had 217 books listed under success, but no book was listed under faithfulness.

What is faithfulness? The church growth pundit, Peter Wagner, combined 1 Cor 4.2 with the parable of the talents in Matt 25.14-30, and argued that a faithful steward is a fruitful steward: i.e. a faithful pastor is one who experiences church growth.²³³ But Wagner’s equation of faithfulness with fruitfulness is crass. New Testament exegesis apart, church growth is a complex process, which is dependent not just upon the individual qualities of the people involved, but also upon all kinds of national and local factors. On the other hand, to be fair to Wagner, while Matt 25.14-30 has nothing to do with church growth, the parable is about the kingdom of God and about our willingness to take risks for

²³¹ William Willimon, *Acts* (John Knox Press, Atlanta 1998) 127.

²³² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: I – XII* (Doubleday, New York 1966) 426.

²³³ Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Regal Books, Glendale, California 1976) 37.

the sake of the kingdom²³⁴ Within its original focus Jesus through this parable was warning his contemporaries in general, and their leaders in particular, that God would judge them for their failure to share their knowledge of God's salvation with the wider world; they had failed to live up to their calling to be a "light to reveal God's will to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 49.6). In keeping for themselves what was meant for all, they had defrauded God, and for this they would have to answer. Faithfulness in this context means taking risks for God, rather than playing it safe.²³⁵ It means being creative and imaginative in the way in which we engage in mission. If God is going to call us "good and faithful servants", then it will be because the Kingdom of God has been advanced as a direct result of the way in which Christian leaders have lived out their calling.²³⁶

It is interesting to reflect that Paul also likens Christian leaders to "stewards". In the world of his day, owners of large estates would appoint a slave to 'manage' their properties. This position of manager or 'steward' carried a good deal of responsibility, which in turn often required the manager or steward to be pro-active and take initiative. However, when Paul speaks of the need for stewards to be "faithful", the emphasis is first and foremost on accountability. In this respect Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner comment: "The Corinthians were assessing their leaders on the criteria of wisdom, eloquence and impressive personal presence. In stark contrast, God's basis for judgement is very different... Whereas we may be tempted to judge ministers on their success or initiative or giftedness in terms of interpersonal relations or speaking, the sole requirement Paul counsels them to keep in mind is their faithfulness to God."²³⁷ Within the context of 1 Cor 4 a key measure of the faithfulness of Christian leaders is motivation: Paul refers to the day when God "will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Cor 4.5 NRSV), or what the REB calls "our inward motives".

Jesus wants us to seek above all the Kingdom of God

What is the nature of success that pastors desire? Is it success for the sake of self? Or success for the sake of the Lord Jesus? The former clearly would be wrong. Indeed, John Wesley once wrote: "Oh beware! Do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing, and Christ be all in all."²³⁸ But if the desire for success is rooted in a passion to see the Kingdom of God extended (see Matt 6.33), that surely is another thing.

Success need not be a false god. Jeff Wilson was wrong when he wrote: "Faithful leaders do not strive for faithfulness and success. They strive for faithfulness alone."²³⁹ On the other hand, he was right when he said that "sometimes the most faithful task will not be the most successful task... Sometimes the faithful path leads to persecution, neglect, even death."²⁴⁰ Here the words of the Risen Christ to the church at Smyrna come to mind: "Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev 2.10).²⁴¹

In principle there is no conflict between being successful and being faithful. So Derek Tidball writes: "Biblically speaking... I am convinced that faithfulness will normally result in fruitfulness. There may be exceptional

²³⁴ So Lesslie Newbigin, *Open Secret* (London SPCK 1995) 189: "The mystery of the gospel is not entrusted to the church to be buried in the ground. It is entrusted to the church to be risked in the change and interchange of the spiritual commerce of humanity." This idea of risk is developed by Tim Sumpter, *Freshly Expressed Church: Lessons from Fresh Expressions for the Wider Church* (Grove, Cambridge 2015) 8-11 in a chapter entitled 'If It Ain't Broke, Break It – Risk-taking for Mission'.

²³⁵ In his brief exposition of this passage, Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1995) 64 makes the same point: faithfulness is "a willingness to take risks (that require faith) in order to be fruitful".

²³⁶ The emphasis is not about 'talents' per se. In this respect I disagree with R.T. France, *Matthew* (IVP, Leicester 1985) 352 who suggested that Jesus was speaking about "the need to 'live up to our full potential'... The opportunities open to a disciple may differ in character and magnitude, but they are to be faithfully exploited before the master returns."

²³⁷ Roy Ciampa & Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* 171.

²³⁸ The context was Francis Asbury's display of episcopal powers in America. With indignation John Wesley wrote: "In one point, my brother, I am a little afraid you differ from me. I study to be little, you study to be great. I creep, you strut. I found a school, you must found a college. Oh beware! Do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing and Christ be all in all. One instance of your greatness gives me great concern. How dare you, how can you, suffer yourself to be a bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought. Men may call me a knave, or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never by my consent call me a bishop. For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this." See John Wesley's *Letters*, Volume 8 (Epworth Press, London 1931, edited by John Telford) 91.

²³⁹ C. Jeff Woods, *Better than Success: eight principles of faithful leadership* (Judson Press, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania 2001) v.

²⁴⁰ Jeff Woods, *Better than Success* vi.

²⁴¹ The context is very different, for these words are addressed to a church facing persecution. But the call to be faithful, whatever the cost may be, does have parallels for Christian leaders today: it is a challenge to stay the course of Christian ministry, in spite of pressures that come not only from outside the church, but also within the church. That can require a good deal of 'patient endurance' (see Rev 2.2,3, 19).

circumstances when faithfulness will lead the church to experience its own equivalent of exile, but this will not be the norm. The New Testament suggests that its normal state will be one of progress and growth.”²⁴²

Nonetheless, success can lead to all sorts of temptations. To quote Tidball again: “It tempts us to arrogance and to forget the God whose grace has granted us success. It tempts us to pursue the wrong goals for the wrong motives. It tempts us to avoid hardship, weakness, failure, or in other words, the way of the cross. And when success (or growth) becomes the objective to which everything else must bend, rather than the natural by-product of faithfulness to God, it has truly become an idol. The living God has been displaced.”²⁴³

We can equally make a false god of faithfulness. In many churches faithfulness can lead to an unthinking resistance to change; people can be faithful to past church traditions, rather than to call of the living God to make disciples. The fact is that both ‘success’ and ‘faithfulness’ need careful definition. Leith Anderson, a pastor of an American mega church with a clear agenda for further growth, recognised that while numbers are important, much more is needed to determine success or failure.²⁴⁴ He defined success in ministry as “reaching the right goal, using our resources according to a specified standard”.²⁴⁵ Success in these terms is something to be sought and, by God’s grace, achieved. However, Anderson added this qualification: “Success is as individually defined as eye-glasses are prescribed. It is fool-hardy, if not self-destructive, to use another’s prescription.”²⁴⁶

Jesus wants us to fulfil his plan for our lives

This emphasis upon the individual nature of success is important. Churches are not to be measured against churches. If we may extrapolate from John 21.21-22, Jesus has an individual plan not only for our lives, but also for the lives of churches. What Jesus may want to do in one place, he may not want to do in another. Comparison with other leaders or with other churches is not the point: following Jesus is the issue. Every church is different; and thank God that they are different, because it takes all kinds of churches if the gospel is to pervade every level of society. “These differences are not weaknesses of the church; they are deep strengths”, wrote David Womack, “that prove the message of Christ is applicable to any group of people on the face of the earth.”²⁴⁷ There is a place for both the small church and the large church – and neither is intrinsically more successful or more faithful than the others. Numbers are important, but success cannot be measured on a purely external basis.

Some years ago at the height of a Southern Baptist drive for numbers, the Southern Baptist strategist Ernest E. Mosley perceptively wrote:

“A minister can miss the mark in measuring success as easily as the rich fool about whom Jesus spoke missed the purpose of life. The danger is that the minister may measure up to success in terms of bigger membership, bigger budgets, bigger baptismal reports, bigger salaries, bigger houses, bigger denominational positions, and on and on, while the minister as the person becomes depleted and empty. Success can never be adequately measured without considering what the person is doing to the work and what the work is doing to the person. What does it profit a man to lead the whole association or state or convention in some statistical category and lose his own self, or wife, or children, or integrity?”²⁴⁸

Mosley saw the fruit of the Spirit as the basic criteria for measuring successes in all areas of a minister’s life and work:

“When love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are being expressed in any aspect of a minister’s life, success is there. When any one of them is missing, success is limited.”²⁴⁹

A sobering thought! Here, of course, we are back again at the idea of a journey, of a pilgrimage.

²⁴² Tidball, *Preacher, keep yourself from idols* 72.

²⁴³ Tidball, *Preacher, keep yourself from idols* 75.

²⁴⁴ Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* 81-89.

²⁴⁵ Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* 89.

²⁴⁶ Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* 98.

²⁴⁷ David Womack, *The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth* (Bethany, Minneapolis 1977) 41.

²⁴⁸ Ernest E. Mosley, *Priorities in Ministry* (Convention Press, Nashville 1978) 129.

²⁴⁹ Moseley, *Priorities in Ministry* 129.

Ultimately God alone will be our judge

There is far more to pastoral ministry than facts and figures, projections and statistics. Successful pastoral ministry also encompasses growth and development within the lives of individual people and within congregations, as also within the life of pastors themselves. As desirable as spiritual growth is, to limit successful ministry to spiritual growth is misleading, and is not true to the Great Commission, where making disciples involves ‘baptising’ as well as ‘teaching’ (see Matt 28.19).²⁵⁰

A somewhat schizophrenic attitude to success was presented by Darius Salter, who wrote a book which initially seemed to equate pastoral success with flourishing churches.²⁵¹ From a survey of 100 men leading thriving churches with an average Sunday morning attendance of 1,650, he sought to profile “successful pastors”. For example: “Inducement is the honey that covers the dominant-steady person. Instead of repelling people he has an enticing attractive personality. He has a positive optimistic outlook on life, and when presented with a possibility, this pastor’s first response is ‘Why not?’.”²⁵² He discovered that such pastors have a “weekly average 17 hours in sermon preparation and read 20 chapters in the Scriptures”.²⁵³ “Calling people by their first name is important. Compounded by a firm handshake, eyes that make direct contact with others, a warm inviting face, and a look of genuine concern are doubly important”!²⁵⁴

However, in his final chapter he sought to define success “Biblically and Christologically”, and immediately the book strikes a different note. Salter rightly recognised that “eschatology places the matters of this life within the perspective of quality rather than quantity.”²⁵⁵ If the parable of the talents be a guide then all we can say is that “success is extremely relative: ‘to each according to his ability’ (Matt 25.15).” The fact is that “any kind of objective, measurable, absolute standard is, at least in this life, both futile and false.”²⁵⁶ Would that more such honesty were around! God, and God alone, will be the judge of our ‘success’, and on that Day of Judgement we shall all be in for a number of surprises. For his values will be very different to our values. We only have to look at the Risen Christ’s evaluation of the seven churches in Asia Minor to see that Jesus turns this world’s values upside down: “Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Matt 19.30). This calls for humility, not least on the part of those who are pastors of larger churches. Ministry needs to be liberated from the ‘success syndrome’.²⁵⁷

In the meantime, we have to live in the here and now, in a world where some pastors do appear to have successful ministries; and where many pastors do appear to fail. It is not easy living in a world where for some pastors everything they touch seems to turn to gold, whereas for others everything they touch seems to disintegrate. Even worse, perhaps, is experiencing a measure of success, and then experiencing that success turning to disaster. As many ministers know to their cost, pastoral ministry is not all sweetness and light. Church fights develop and forced termination, whether it be in the form of resignation or dismissal, is the result. How do we handle such apparently public failure, in the here and now?

We need to look to Jesus

In the first place, we handle ‘failure’ by going to the roots of our faith and looking to Jesus rather than looking around at others. In spite of the advice of the unknown author of Hebrews to “consider Jesus” (Hebs 3.1), to “look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebs 12.2), when it comes to success in ministry it is all too easy to look to others and compare ourselves with them, rather than with him. When we look to others, the temptation is to believe that success is the norm; when we look to Jesus we realise that human approbation and acclamation are far from the norm. As pastors we often preach on the need for followers of Jesus to “deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus”, but we do not always draw the consequence for ourselves and our ministry. The temptation is to think that by

²⁵⁰ Here we take issue with Simon Coupland, *Success: A Biblical Exploration* (Grove, Cambridge 2002) 19 who argues that “we need to learn to measure our success... by the growth of our relationship with God.”

²⁵¹ Darius Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry: Profiling Pastoral Success in Flourishing Churches* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1990).

²⁵² Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry* 26.

²⁵³ Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry* 51.

²⁵⁴ Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry* 70.

²⁵⁵ Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry* 165.

²⁵⁶ Salter, *What Really Matters In Ministry* 165.

²⁵⁷ See Kent & Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Illinois 1987), who define success in terms of faithfulness, serving, loving, believing, prayer, holiness and attitude.

accepting a lower salary and working longer hours than we might otherwise receive and experience in a secular job, we are going the way of the cross, whereas to go the way of the cross in any meaningful fashion is often to experience sacrifice, apparent failure and pain.²⁵⁸

Certainly the Apostle Paul knew what it was like to go the way of the Cross. If our expectations of ministry were based on Paul's actual experience of ministry, 'failure' would not be a problem for us. He knew what it was like to be "afflicted" and "perplexed", "persecuted" and "struck down" (2 Cor 4.8,9; see also 2 Cor 6.4-10).

In the light of the experience of Jesus and Paul, Stephen Pattison went on to comment: "It would certainly put a question mark against the pastoral care of anyone who found that they never experienced the turmoil, anguish and failure which characterised the ministry of Jesus and the first Christians."²⁵⁹ Yet, we must be careful in attributing failure to Jesus and the first Christians. As we have already seen, in spite of the Cross, the life of Jesus cannot be written off as a failure. Likewise, in spite of the sufferings of the first Christians, one can scarcely describe the Book of Acts as a record of failure of the early church. Although the first Christians suffered greatly, they were also greatly used. In no way can we be justified in attributing 'failure' as a characteristic of apostolic ministry. Rather, the hallmark of the ministry of both Jesus and of the early church is a readiness for willing sacrifice.²⁶⁰

We need to trust God – whatever

In the second place, we handle 'failure' by trusting that in the providence of God good will come out of what at the time may appear to be unmitigated disaster (see Rom 8.28). In the darkness and the pain it may be impossible to discern the hand of God at work. Indeed, much of the darkness and the pain may be anything but God at work: not all suffering is positive. Yet, the experience of God's people down through the ages is that where God has been trusted, good has emerged. They have been able to say along with Joseph: "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Gen 50.20).

One of the benefits of apparent failure is often the deepening of the pastoral heart. It is precisely as a result of failure, weakness, and grief that a wounded pastor is enabled to become a 'wounded healer'. This term 'wounded healer', created by Carl Jung, was taken up by T.S. Eliot, who in *East Coker IV* has the line: "The wounded surgeon plies the steel."²⁶¹ Within the context of Christian ministry, the phrase 'the wounded healer' has been particularly associated with Henri Nouwen and his book *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. There Nouwen wrote: "A deep understanding of his (i.e. Minister's) pain makes it possible for him – with God's help – to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings."²⁶² Stephen Pattison commented:

"The hard, yet joyful lesson to be learnt is that good, and indeed successful, Christian ministry which follows in the steps of its founder is born not from skill, power and knowledge, but from the experience of inadequacy, rejection and sorrow transformed by the love of God and then offered to others."²⁶³

Resurrection can only come out of death. Success may be born of failure. We are the better equipped for pastoral ministry precisely because we have experienced the dark side of pastoral ministry.

²⁵⁸ This is well expressed in a devotional leaflet entitled *Brokenness* – "Sometimes it is asked what we mean by Brokenness. Brokenness is not easy to define but can be clearly seen in the reactions of Jesus, especially as He approached the Cross and in His crucifixion. I think it can be applied personally in this way: 'When to do the will of God means that even my Christian brethren will not understand, and I remember that "Neither did His brethren believe in him" (John 7.5), and I bow my head to obey and accept the misunderstanding, this is Brokenness. When I am misrepresented or deliberately misinterpreted, and I remember that Jesus was false accused but He "held His peace" (Mat 26.63) and I bow my head to accept the accusation without trying to justify myself, this is Brokenness... When my plans are brushed aside and I see the work of years brought to ruins by the ambitions of others and I remember that Jesus allowed them to lead "Him away to crucify Him" (Matt 27.31) and He accepted that place of failure and I bow my head and accept the injustice without bitterness, this is Brokenness'."

²⁵⁹ Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (SCM, London 1986) 160.

²⁶⁰ Morgan Derham in a private communication helpfully wrote: "The older 'Keswick' spirituality made much of 'dying to self'; Gal 2.20 was its 'text', just as 1 John 1.7 was the 'text' of the Rwanda revival. Nowadays in the post-Frank Lake era, it is fashionable to talk of 'self-worth', 'self-affirmation', assertiveness training etc. But I suspect we have lost something. 'Dying to self' can be overdone and produce masochistic Christianity. But unless some such major shift has taken place in our overall awareness of ourselves and God, we are not safe to be trusted with anything, particularly success. *Vide* Swaggart & Co!"

²⁶¹ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Faber & Faber, London 1959).

²⁶² Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Doubleday, New York 1972) 89.

²⁶³ Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* 152.

We need to remember that God's grace is sufficient

Another benefit of 'failure' may be an increased sense of dependency upon God. When all goes well, it is easy to succumb to the temptation of depending upon oneself and upon one's own natural gifts and abilities. But when disaster strikes, there is only one we can lean upon, and that is God. This was true of Paul: reflecting on one of his "crushing" experiences, he wrote: "We felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1.9). As he discovered on another occasion, it is precisely in weakness that God's strength can be revealed (2 Cor 12.9, 10). Our powerlessness and our humility seem to be a precondition for the life of Jesus being made visible in our lives (see 2 Cor 4.7-12).²⁶⁴ For Paul ministry was not a matter of 'grinning and bearing it'; rather it was about experiencing the power of Christ in the midst of human weakness. The fact that Paul was not out for the count, but still on his feet, was due to the working of God's resurrection power in his life and ministry.

It is sometimes only through failure that we learn the secret of successful ministry. As Oswald Chambers wrote:

"All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they had renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources."²⁶⁵

We need to allow the fire of God's Spirit to refine

With God's help, what may appear to others to be failure can prove to be a tremendously liberating and growing experience.²⁶⁶ However difficult the actual circumstances may have been, out of the crucible of pain and suffering a faith has been refined as never before. Christian leaders are the better equipped to serve God precisely because they have been through the fire. There is a depth and a maturity, a humility and a faithfulness, which otherwise might never be there. Failure in a very real sense can be an asset to the pastor in his or her journey as an exemplary pilgrim.²⁶⁷

Yet failure is the last thing we wish to experience. As pastors we long to see "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2.4) in our ministries and so in our enthusiastic idealism we pray "Come, Holy Spirit, come." We believe that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will bless our ministry with success, with all kinds of positive signs and wonders, whereas in fact the wind of God's Spirit may blow apart the structures we have so carefully built, bringing apparent failure rather than success. In this regard William Temple's comments on John 16.8-11 repay consideration:

"When we pray 'Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire', we had better know what we are about. He will not carry us to easy triumphs and gratifying successes; more probably He will set us to some task for God in the full intention that we shall fail, so that others, learning wisdom by our failure, may carry the good cause forward. He may take us through loneliness, desertion by friends, apparent desertion even by God; that was the way Christ went to the Father... For if we invoke Him, it must be to help us in doing God's will, not ours... If we invoke Him, we must be ready for the glorious pain of being caught by His power out of our petty orbit into the eternal purposes of the Almighty, in whose onward seep our lives are as a speck of dust. The soul that is filled with the Spirit must have become purged of all pride or love of ease, all self-complacency and self-reliance; but that soul has found the only real dignity, the only lasting joy. Come then, Great Spirit, come. Convict the world; and convict my timid soul."²⁶⁸

On the other hand we dare not attribute all failure to the Spirit. Failure may well be – altogether or in part – our own fault. Here perhaps is the need for a wise counsellor to enable pastors to face up to the ups and downs of ministry, and learn whatever may be the appropriate lessons.

²⁶⁴ It is possible that Paul's metaphor of common clay pots for Christian leaders reflects the contrast that Jews sometimes made between the Torah and those who taught it. According to a Jewish commentary on Deut 11.12, "as it is not possible for wine to be stored in golden or silver vessels, but only in one which is least among the vessels, an earthenware pot, so also the words of Torah can be kept only with one who is humble in his own eyes" (*Sifre*, Deut 48).

²⁶⁵ Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Moody Press, Chicago 1967) 141.

²⁶⁶ On the other hand, there is nothing inevitable about failure issuing into a greater degree of wholeness and maturity. See Russ Parker, *Free to Fail* (Triangle/SPCK, London 1992) 102-108.

²⁶⁷ There is failure and failure. Here we have been speaking of a devastating personal sense of failure, when everything has gone wrong. Failure more generally is different. Failure can prove to be a productive experience, for we can learn from our mistakes. Before Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, he discovered 1,800 ways not to make it.

²⁶⁸ William Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, Second Series, (Macmillan, London 1940) 288,289.

10. Dealing with Temptation

Ministers are human like everybody else. Ordination gives them no special immunity from the tempter's power. Indeed, the reverse is the case. They become all the more a target for the Evil One. Their very position within the local church causes them to become the focus of the Devil's attentions. For if a pastor falls from grace, the life of the church as a whole can be affected detrimentally.

Ministers need to take heed to the warnings of Richard Baxter of Kidderminster:

“The Enemy hath a special eye upon you. You shall have his most subtle insinuations and incessant solicitations and violent assaults. As wise and learned as you are, take heed to yourselves lest he overwit you. The Devil is a greater scholar than you are and a nimbler disputant. He can transform himself into an angel of light to deceive you. He will get within you and trip you up by the heels before you are aware. He will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you of your faith and innocence, and you shall not know that you have lost them. He will make you the very instruments of your own ruin.”²⁶⁹

Are there particular temptations and sins peculiar to the Christian ministry? According to David Christie the temptations of ministers are three in particular: “to recline, to shine and to whine”.²⁷⁰ According to Thomas Fischer, the ‘seven deadly sins’ of pastors consist of the need to control, repressed feelings, externally-based self-esteem, confused and enmeshed identity, low self-esteem, inappropriate care-taking, and perfectionism.²⁷¹ For our purposes we shall look at the temptations and sins of ministry within the framework of the traditional seven deadly sins.²⁷²

1. Pride

Traditionally pride has been considered the basic form of sin. According to Theophylact, an 11th century theologian, pride is “the citadel and summit of all evils”. In his essay ‘The Great Sin’ C.S. Lewis argued that “Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it is through Pride that the devil became the devil; Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”²⁷³

Pride is to be found everywhere: “the earth is strewn with the exploded bladders of the puffed up.”²⁷⁴ What is true of life in general, is true of the religious life too. We think perhaps of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, where the Pharisee prayed: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income” (Luke 18.11-12). Instead of thanking God for God's goodness, he thanked God for his own goodness. Like little Jack Horner, he told God, and anybody else who cared to listen in, ‘What a good boy am I’. We may well accuse the Pharisee of being a hypocrite and a prig, but the Pharisee would have been very hurt by such an accusation. Almost certainly he genuinely believed what he prayed, and he was glad he was different! What is more, if ever there was a church member most ministers would love to have had, it would have been this Pharisee. He really put all his energies into his religious activities. No doubt the Pharisee thought that God would also have been most impressed, but the opposite was true. For the whole prayer is not God-centred, but man-centred: it is dominated by the horrid little pronoun ‘I’: “I thank you that I am not like other people... I fast... I tithe all that I get.” Lewis observed: “Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good – above all that we are better than someone else – I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil. The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object.”²⁷⁵ Pride is devilish for it not only cuts us off from God, it also cuts us off from one another. For pride is essentially competitive. To quote Lewis yet again: “Pride has been the chief cause of misery in

²⁶⁹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* 74-75.

²⁷⁰ David Christie, *The Service of Christ* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1933) 66-94.

²⁷¹ Thomas F. Fischer The Seven ‘Deadly’ Sins of Pastors, 2004 – a web article found at www.ministryhealth.net

²⁷² The list of the seven ‘deadly or cardinal’ sins appears to go back to Pope Gregory the Great (AD 540-604). They are deadly in the sense that they lead to spiritual death. Oxford University Press in collaboration with the New York Public Library has published a series of seven books on *The Seven Deadly Sins* written by ‘celebrity’ authors: viz. Michael Eric Dyson (*Pride*, 2006), Joseph Epstein (*Envy*, 2003), Phyllis Tickle (*Greed*, 2004), Simon Blackburn (*Lust*, 2004), Robert A.F. Thurman (*Anger*, 2005), Francine Prose (*Gluttony*, 2003), and Wendy Wasserstein (*Sloth*, 2005) – but none of these books were written with ministers in mind.

²⁷³ C.S. Lewis, ‘The Great Sin’ to be found in *Mere Christianity*: see C.S. Lewis, *Selected Books* (HarperCollins, London 1999) 398.

²⁷⁴ Carl Sandburg, *The People, Yes* (Harcourt, Brace & Co., San Diego 1936) 511.

²⁷⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Selected Books* 400.

every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride is always enmity. It is enmity.”²⁷⁶

Pride is probably *the* occupational hazard of ministry. While few ministers are likely to be tempted by all seven of the deadly sins, few are not tempted by the sin of pride. “By way of quick and easy proof”, challenged Andrew Blackwood, “let any reader make a list of able ministers whom he knows to excel in humility. Then let him ask a group of honest friends if he can qualify.”²⁷⁷

Ministers, in a way which does not always seem to be true of others, seem to be obsessed with their ego. Often insecure in themselves, they tend to identify themselves with “their” churches, and are easily threatened. They need to ponder afresh on the words of Jesus: “Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it” (Luke 17.33).

Michael Ramsey gave a wonderful description of the minister’s frail ego:

“If you do well, you can be pleased with yourself, and humility is in peril. If you do badly, you may worry about yourself, and humility is in peril. If people are nice to you and tell you what a good clergyman you are, humility is in peril. If people are nasty to you, you have a grievance and humility is in peril.”²⁷⁸

As followers of the Servant King, we know there is no room for pride. For he who washed his disciples’ feet said: “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13.15). An allusion to this incident of the foot-washing is found in 1 Pet 5.5, where with church leaders in mind, the Apostle Peter wrote: “All of you must clothe must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another”; or as the GNB translates: “all of you must put on the apron of humility.” Why? Because “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5.5b; see also Prov 3.34; Jas 4.6). God, it would appear, opposes the proud because the proud trust in themselves, while the humble trust in God – and God delights in being trusted. Moreover, the proud seek glory for themselves, while the humble give glory to God – and glory rightly belongs to God.²⁷⁹

It is all too easy for ministers to deceive themselves and pretend that they are free of this most basic of sins. But, as Jeremiah said: “The heart is devious above all else” (Jer 17.9). As Paul said to the church in Corinth, “If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall” (1 Cor 10.13). Like the Pharisees of old, we often fool ourselves into believing that we are serving God and others, when in fact we are only serving self.

Sometimes the only way in which God can deal with our pride is to crush our spirits and in that way bring us to our senses. It is sometimes only through pain of grief and disappointment that God brings about the new creation, where fevered ambition and pushy pride are no more. Phoenix-like true humility can emerge out of the flames of crisis.

2. Envy

Ever since the time of Cain and Abel envy has been with us. To paraphrase the words of the Apostle Peter, ‘The green-eyed monster of jealousy constantly prowls around, looking for some Christian to devour’ (see 1 Pet 5.8).

Envy may begin in wanting what other people have, but it always ends up with bad feeling against the person. As William Stafford put it: “Envy is resentment of the good another person enjoys, with hatred of the other person for having it... Unlike avarice... envy does not simply seek to acquire that thing; it resents the other’s possession of it.”²⁸⁰ Harry Williams further clarified the nature of this second deadly sin, when he wrote: “Envy, like lust, is founded on my conviction that I lack something that the other person possesses... and what makes me bitter is my conjecture that the other person is more abundantly alive than I am.”

Envy ultimately wants to destroy others. Envy was the ultimate cause of Jesus’s downfall: Mark tells us that the chief priests handed over Jesus to Pilate “because they were jealous” (Mark 15.10). The chief priests could not stand his goodness. They envied the power that Jesus had to win other people’s hearts, and so they sought to have him put to

²⁷⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Selected Books* 399.

²⁷⁷ Blackwood, *The Growing Minister* 104.

²⁷⁸ Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today* (SPCK, London revised edition 1985) 78.

²⁷⁹ So Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (IVP, Leicester 1988) 194.

²⁸⁰ William Stafford, *Disordered Lives: Healing the Seven Deadly Sins* (Cowley Publications, Boston 1994) 94.

death. It is a fearful thought that the worst case of envy this world has even known involved religious people, who thought they were going God's way. It is amazing how self-deceived religious people can be!

Sadly envy is a cardinal ministerial sin, along with its bed-fellows of rivalry, jealousy, ill will, and what G.W. Byrt once called "the-spirit-that delights-in-the downfall-of-others".²⁸¹ Many ministers delight in making comparisons with other ministers. They delight in listening to gossip about other ministers and then passing it on. It is sad how ministers, who for the most part are good at keeping confidences entrusted to them by their flock, lack all discipline in keeping confidences about fellow ministers. Such gossip is for the most part ill-natured. It is part of the 'cutting- down-the-tall-poppies' syndrome. It is rooted in envy and jealousy.

A wonderful illustration of ministerial envy is found in the story of how the devil was once crossing the Libyan desert, and he came upon a spot where a number of small fiends were tormenting a holy hermit. The sainted man easily shook off their evil suggestions. The devil watched their failure, and then stepped forward to give them a lesson. "What you do is too crude", he said. "Permit me for one moment." With that he whispered to the holy man: "Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria." A scowl of malignant jealousy at once clouded the serene face of the hermit. "That," said the devil to his imps, "is the sort of thing which I should recommend."²⁸²

How can we deal with envy? The encounter of the Risen Lord Jesus with Peter by the Sea of Galilee (John 21) suggests the following ways.

1. We need to focus on God's love for us: Peter had failed Jesus, but Jesus was willing to give Peter another chance, because he loved him. What was true of Peter is true of us. If only people realised the enormity of God's love for them, then so much envy would simply disappear. For by comparison with the undeserved love and grace of God everything else that this world has to offer are but trifles.
2. We need to focus on Jesus and not on others. For when Peter said to him, "Lord, what about him?", Jesus declared: "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me" (John 21.21-22). Our business is to follow Jesus, and not to be concerned with anybody else. One of the temptations of ministry is to be forever comparing oneself with others, and in the process become envious of others and of the way in which God appears to be blessing them. Jesus calls us to forget self, carry our cross, and follow him.
3. We need to accept that God has a distinctive plan for each of our lives. Diversity is a mark of God's creation; it is also a mark of his new creation. Peter died a martyr's death in Rome for his Lord in AD 61; John appears to have lived to a great old age and eventually died in his sleep. Although both Peter and John followed Jesus, both ended up living very different lives. The fact is that there is no one pattern for our lives. God deals with us on an individual basis and calls each of us to live out our particularly calling. There is no point in comparing ourselves with one another. Instead of casting envious eyes at others, we need to follow Jesus and fulfil his purpose for our lives.

3. Covetousness

Courtesy of American Express, MasterCard and Visa covetousness is now made easy. In the words of one advertising slogan, credit cards 'take the waiting out of wanting'. But credit cards often make life more complicated than fulfilling. Even Bertrand Russell, who was far from being a believer, remarked: "It is preoccupation with possessions more than anything else that prevents men from living nobly and free."²⁸³ Or as Jesus said: "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."²⁸⁴

When Jesus warned against greed or covetousness, most of the people he was speaking to were on the breadline. It is good for pastors to remind themselves of this fact, when perhaps they are feeling the financial pinch.

Of course, not all ministers are poorly paid. Some years ago a pastor went to a small church in the South West of the USA and made an agreement with the deacons at the start for 10% of the gross income. At the time I read the story the church had by then a Sunday congregation of more than 5,000. The pastor took home about \$800,000 in the previous

²⁸¹ G.W. Byrt, 'The Temptations of Ministry (1)', *Fraternal* 168 (September 1973) 38.

²⁸² Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* (UK edition: Highland Books, Crowborough 1987) 98-99.

²⁸³ Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (Allen & Unwin, London 1917).

²⁸⁴ Luke 12.15 *The Message*.

year. He was driving a Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud, wore a diamond the size of a pea and was living in a magnificent home!²⁸⁵

No British minister would ever covet such a life-style; it is beyond our wildest dreams. Yet this does not mean that covetousness is not around. In a situation where ministerial stipends are relatively low, it is easy for ministers to covet their neighbour's or deacon's house, car and bank account. At any ministerial gathering the conversation will get back to pay. Andrew Blackwood mentioned a figure of at least 50% of ministers being dissatisfied with their lot, and usually because of a desire for more money.²⁸⁶

In times past the monks dealt with the sin of covetousness by taking a vow of poverty. Such a route is not viable for those married with children – although as a young minister with four children I was once told by one of my deacons that my role was to set an example of holy poverty! Richard Foster more helpfully wrote of the desirability for Christians – and by extension, ministers – to adopt the vow of ‘simplicity’ so that we might be free of covetousness and no longer “pant after the possessions of others”.²⁸⁷

Although financially life can be a struggle for many, pastors need to recognise the privilege that is theirs. Some may feel that they are not paid what they are worth, but surely that has never been the issue. In the UK pastors are not paid a salary, but a ‘stipend’; they are not paid for services rendered, but a ‘living allowance’ to enable them to fulfil their calling. This difference is more than semantic: it involves a totally different way of looking at money. Most pastors do not have to worry about ‘making a living’; rather in way that is not true of most of their members, they are able to focus on Kingdom concerns.²⁸⁸

None of this absolves churches from paying their ministers fairly. What a difference it would make if churches were to take seriously Paul's advice to Timothy as expressed in the GNB version of 1 Tim 5.17: “The elders who do good work as leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double pay, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching”!²⁸⁹

4. Lust

Jesus had some strong words to say about lust: “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart... If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt 5.28-29). But how easy is it for men not to lust? Every look at an attractive woman is combined with some desire – after, all this is a God-given drive rooted in creation (biologists would no doubt call it an ‘animal’ drive). As the underlying use of a Greek present participle suggests, Jesus was not condemning looking, but as F.D. Bruner argued, “staring with the intent to possess or at least to burn”.²⁹⁰ Or to put the issue differently, although we may not be able to keep birds from flying over our head, we don't have to let them build nests in our hair!²⁹¹

How much of a problem is lust for ministers? Andrew Blackwood listed lust as one of the “less common” ministerial sins. Ministers are as prone to lust as others.

²⁸⁵ *Leadership II* (Fall 1982) 126.

²⁸⁶ Andrew Blackwood, *The Growing Minister* 108

²⁸⁷ Richard Foster, *Money, Sex and Power* 72.

²⁸⁸ The Rabbis used to tell a story about King Monobaz of Adiabene, who became a convert to Judaism: “Monobaz distributed all his treasures to the poor in the year of famine. His brothers sent for him and said, ‘Your fathers gathered treasures, and added to those of their fathers, but you have dispersed yours and theirs’. Monobaz said to them, ‘My fathers gathered treasures for below, I have gathered treasures for above; they stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man can rule, but I have stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man cannot rule; my fathers collected treasures which bear no interest, I have gathered treasures which bear interest; my fathers gathered treasures of money, but I have gathered treasures in souls; my fathers gathered treasures for others, I have gathered treasures for myself; my fathers gathered treasures in this world, I have gathered treasures for the world to come.’” Pastors too have the privilege of ‘gathering treasures in souls’: see Matt 6.20.

²⁸⁹ The Greek word *timē* could mean both ‘honour’ (so NRSV, NIV) or ‘pay’ (so GNB). Gordon Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, revised edition 1988) 128-129, commented: “It is clear from verse 18 that ‘honour’ here includes at least pay. But it is highly unlikely that ‘double honour’ means ‘double pay’, implying either twice as much as other who do not teach or twice as much as the widows. Rather it means ‘two-fold honour’, the honour and respect due those in such positions as well as remuneration. Paul thus reiterates a point made elsewhere that those who give leadership to the community in the ministry of the word should be maintained by the community (see especially 1 Cor 9.7-14; also 1 Thess 2.7; 2 Cor 11.8-9).

²⁹⁰ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*, 220.

²⁹¹ This remark is attributed to Jonathan Edwards: see William Stafford, *Disordered Lives* 53.

In a 1988 North American survey of 300 pastors:

- 23% said that since they had been in local church ministry they had done something with someone (not their spouse) that they felt was sexually inappropriate.
- 2% acknowledged that they had had sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse.
- 18% admitted that they had participated in other forms of sexual contact with someone other than their spouse: e.g. passionate kissing, fondling, mutual masturbation. Of this total only 4% said they were found out.

²⁹²

In a 2000 North American survey of 564 pastors:

- 51% said that internet pornography is a possible temptation.
- 43% said they had visited a pornographic site, 21% doing so “a few times a year” and 6% “a couple of times a month or more”.
- 37% said that viewing pornography was a “current struggle”.²⁹³

In a 1996 British survey of 141 mainline Protestant ministers:

- 54% felt they were particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation.
- 21% admitted that they had succumbed to sexual temptation: 7% sometimes; 14% rarely.²⁹⁴

There is nothing new in sexual immorality among clergy. One only has to think of the sexual misconduct of some of the medieval popes. On the other hand, these figures are highly disturbing.

Are ministers particularly prone to sexual temptation? In the North American *Leadership* survey undertaken in 2000, 70% of those responding expressed the belief that pastors are particularly vulnerable. In the British survey 11% felt they were much more vulnerable to sexual temptation than anybody else. Why might be this so? According to Richard Exley sexual temptation for ministers is often rooted not in vice, but in virtue: “What began as legitimate ministry – a shared project perhaps, compassionate listening, the giving of comfort – becomes an emotional bonding, which ultimately leads to an illicit affair.”²⁹⁵

One obvious way of dealing with this temptation is for ministers to establish clear guidelines in terms of their relationship with the opposite sex: e.g. establishing a set number of times one would see a person of the opposite sex before referring them on; never seeing a person of the opposite sex without the knowledge of someone else; and ensuring that the person seeking help is also aware that the pastoral encounter is in this sense not entirely private. An additional way of dealing with this temptation is for ministers to seek supervision. Supervision offers the possibility of confronting ministers not only with how they handle the present problem of the person seeking help, but also of how they handle the issue of their own sexuality. In addition, a supervisor is more able to see and confront the minister’s individual ‘blind spots’.

Equally important as guidelines and supervision is to ensure, in the case of a married minister, that one maintains a healthy relationship with one’s spouse. Unfortunately, comments Peter Brain, “very often churches encourage their pastors to be unfaithful to their spouses, by expecting and applauding hard work expressed in long hours away from family.”²⁹⁶

5. Anger

Anger is not necessarily wrong. Righteous anger, directed against some form of evil, may well be Christian love in operation. Not to be angry about injustice and exploitation in this world would not at all be virtuous. A lack of anger could be a sign of our lack of love and concern for others. There is a rightful place for feeling angry, as Jesus in the Cleansing of the Temple clearly showed. Indeed, God himself can be angry: according to the Apostle Paul, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth” (Rom 1.18). This is not about God ‘getting into a paddy’, but about God being justifiably angry with those who fail to honour him, and who as a result go on to flout his holy laws and end up ruining the lives of many others. Luther

²⁹² *Leadership* XI (Winter 1998) 12.

²⁹³ An article in *Leadership* quoted by Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com).

²⁹⁴ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* 69-70.

²⁹⁵ Richard Exley, *Perils of Power* (Honor/Harrison House, Tulsa, Oklahoma n.d.) 11.

²⁹⁶ Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to stay fit for a lifetime of ministry* (Matthias Media, Kingsford NSW, Australia 2004) 131.

called this righteous anger of God, “an anger of love that wishes no one any evil, one that is friendly to the person, but hostile to sin”.

Ian Stackhouse maintains that this anger on behalf of others (as distinct from anger on our own behalf), “drives our creativity, and often clarifies our thinking”.²⁹⁷ He quotes Martin Luther: “I never work better than when I am inspired by anger; my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temperaments depart.”²⁹⁸

But all too often our anger is unrighteous and egocentric, and has more to do with bruised self-esteem or a failure to get our way, rather than to do with God’s way. According to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount such selfish anger runs the risk of not only destroying others, but also of destroying ourselves too: “If you are angry with a brother or sister you will be liable to judgement” (Matt 5.22).²⁹⁹

Is anger an occupational hazard for ministers? The American psychiatrist A.D. Hart said: “Pastors are among the angriest people I work with.”³⁰⁰ Henri Nouwen perceptively pointed out that anger is very much a professional vice in the contemporary ministry:

“Pastors are angry at their leaders for not leading and at their followers for not following. They are angry at those who do not come to church, and angry at those who do come for coming without enthusiasm. They are angry at their families, who make them feel guilty, and angry at themselves for not being who they want to be. This is not an open, blatant, roaring anger, but an anger hidden behind the smooth word, the smiling face, and the polite handshake. It is a frozen anger, anger which settles into a biting resentment and slowly paralyzes a generous heart.”³⁰¹

Not all ministerial anger is ‘frozen’. A survey of British pastors revealed that only 7% said they had never “preached aggressively”: 4% admitted to often preaching aggressively; 45% to sometimes preaching aggressively; and 44% rarely preaching aggressively.³⁰² Although relatively few admitted to losing their temper with the church in a service or losing their temper with an individual in a service, some 40% admitted that there had been times when they had lost their temper with the church in a church meeting, while 41% admitted that there had been times when they had lost their temper with an individual in a church meeting. Even more ministers admitted to having lost their temper in one-to-one encounters: 16% sometimes, and 45% rarely. The survey did not reveal the degree to which these expressions of anger were ‘righteous’. It could be argued that sometimes emotion needs to be expressed if feelings are to be conveyed; and that the process of healing can be helped rather than hindered by the occasional expression of feelings. On the other hand, such feelings need to be discharged appropriately, both in terms of ‘how’ and ‘with whom’.³⁰³

How should pastors deal with their anger?

1. The Psalmist urges us to “ponder” our anger (Psalm 4.4). Why have we reacted in this way? What has been upset? Our own self-esteem? Our personal preferences? Has something unconsciously hooked into our past and gained a power which it ought never to have had? The first step in dealing with anger is recognising it for what it is.
2. We need to recognise the difference between feeling angry and acting out anger destructively: pastors need to think through what might be an appropriate response rather than simply letting rip. As the popular maxim has it: “When angry count to ten before speaking; when very angry, count to 100 and don’t speak.” As Peter Brain rightly says: “When I simply respond because of my angry feelings, there is every chance that as my feelings of anger increase, other emotions needing attention will be added, and the basic problem will remain unattended to.”³⁰⁴
3. We need to find a ‘safe’ place with, for instance, a supervisor or counsellor, where the roots of the anger might be explored; for only as past anger is dealt with is true freedom gained.

²⁹⁷ Ian Stackhouse, *Primitive Piety* 57.

²⁹⁸ *What Luther Says*, Vol 1 (Concordia Publishing House, St Louis 1959), compiled by Ewald M. Plass, entry no 74, 27.

²⁹⁹ In the AV includes the additional clause, “without a cause”. Although almost certainly a later gloss added by some Christian scribe, it is probably a correct interpretation of the mind of Jesus.

³⁰⁰ Quoted by Peter Brain, *Going the Distance* 83.

³⁰¹ Nouwen, *Leadership* XIII (Summer 1982) 37.

³⁰² See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* 105, 106.

³⁰³ See Eph 4.31: “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice.”

³⁰⁴ Peter Brain, *Going the Distance* 91.

6. Gluttony

As one who enjoys good food and has constantly to fight the ‘battle of the bulge’, it gives me no joy to write about this particular deadly sin! Prov 23.2 with its advice to “put a knife to your throat if you have a big appetite” is not exactly helpful. On the other hand, ballooning out to twice one’s normal body weight is inexcusable, unless there are particular medical grounds.

Ministers are people constantly on show. Theorists claim that only 15% of what we communicate is verbal; 85% comes through non-verbally. If our bodies communicate an eating disorder, what kind of witness is that to the Gospel?

Andrew Blackwood maintained that gluttony is one of the less common ministerial sins.³⁰⁵ But is this so? A 2001 *Pulpit and Pew* study of 2,500 American clergy found that 76% were overweight or obese compared to 61% of the general population at the time of the study. Although I have no objective evidence as far as the British scene is concerned, my impression is that more and more British ministers are seriously overweight.

Why has obesity become an occupational hazard of pastoral ministry?

In the first place, ministry is for the most part a sedentary occupation – the only exercise some ministers get is sweating it out in the pulpit! Secondly, pastoral visiting almost inevitably entails kind people offering not only coffees and teas, but cakes and biscuits too. Thirdly, many church activities centre around the act of eating: prayer breakfasts; seniors’ lunches, and Alpha dinners are but the tip of the iceberg. Fourthly, the demands of pastoral life can cause tiredness, and when we are tired we tend to eat. As I can attest, returning late of an evening after a meeting or visit, it is all too tempting to sit down in front of the television with a glass of wine and some cheese.

It’s a tough life being a minister, but so too are other jobs! Erik Raymond accuses pastors of being hypocrites. “Being a fat pastor is probably a symptom of a bigger spiritual issue. Pastors preach and teach about being disciplined and self-controlled. We talk about doing all things to the glory of God (funny that the verse actually talks about ‘whether you eat or drink’, 1 Cor 10.31). However we compartmentalise our lives to exclude food.”³⁰⁶ My mind goes to 1 Cor 9.24-27, where Paul speaks of the need for ‘self-control’ by drawing upon the analogy of the athlete’s self-control. The Christian life is by definition a disciplined life – and this includes eating.

So how can pastors deal with the temptation to be gluttons?

1. For many Christians fasting has been one of the classic spiritual disciplines. Martin Luther wrote: “The pious Fathers declared that whoever desires to serve God, must root out, above all, the vice of gluttony. That is a prevailing vice which causes much trouble. If this vice is not altogether extirpated, it makes the soul dull even for divine things, even if it should not lead to unchastity and debauchery as among aged men. Hence fasting is a most excellent weapon for the Christian, while gluttony is an outstanding pit of Satan.”³⁰⁷ Is fasting a discipline which ministers in particular need to recover?
2. Another form of discipline is healthy eating. In 2011 Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Community Church in California, became so concerned with the obesity epidemic in his church that he devised the ‘Daniel Plan’. Based on the opening story of Daniel 1, where as a result of eating vegetables and drinking water, Daniel and his companions “looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food” (Dan 1.15 NIV), the Daniel Plan advises on how to eat healthier foods, encourages workout routines, and urges participants to join small groups. At the end of the first year about 15,000 people had registered for the programme and 250,000 pounds had been lost!
3. There is the discipline of regular exercise, whether in the form of power-walks in a local park or going on the tread mill in the gym. Maybe it would help if churches were to offer their pastors gym membership! The fact is that obesity is not just a cosmetic problem. It affects energy levels in the here and now; and it significantly increases the risk of such things as coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, and type 2 diabetes.

Sometimes discipline is not the answer, for obesity is not always the product of gluttony. The temptation to overeat can be particularly strong when people feel unloved and uncared-for. As studies of anorexia show, ‘food is love’. Overeating may be a means to find false comfort. Where this is the case, there is the need to find a proper sense of self-worth.

³⁰⁵ Blackwood, *The Growing Minister* 112.

³⁰⁶ Erik Raymond, then pastor of Emmaus Bible Church in Omaha: 2010 blog.

³⁰⁷ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, chapter 13.

7. Sloth

Of all the seven deadly sins, sloth' is the most archaic of names. The dictionary defines sloth as 'laziness, indolence'. However, there is more to sloth than being 'lazy'. When the monks talked of sloth (the technical term is *accidie*) they did not have in mind the refusal of one of their number to pull his weight in doing whatever might have been his task. Sloth was a term for spiritual apathy; a spiritual listlessness which had more to do with prayer rather than with work. A slothful monk might go through the motions of being religious, attending all the services of the day, but in fact he had given up on the heart of religion, he had given up on cultivating his relationship with God; indeed, he might as well have given up on God himself. In other words, sloth is a refusal to continue to grow in God; it is a form of spiritual laziness.

If sloth is defined in its more modern guise as 'indolence', then it has to be admitted that there are some lazy ministers, and there are even more ill-disciplined ministers.³⁰⁸ But, many ministers suffer from the very opposite of sloth, viz. activism. Activism, however, is not necessarily a virtue. According to Richard Neuhaus, activism is a form of "decadence": "Decadence is the decay that hollows out the forms of life, leaving them devoid of meaning and even more fatally, flaunting such hollowness as virtue."³⁰⁹

Justine Allain-Chapman calls 'sloth' – or *accidie* – "the vice of the pastor". "It is a lack of self-care, lack of attention to growth and struggle and the discipline involved in doing so. Afflicted by this vice, the pastor falls asleep, and so is lazy or throws him- or herself into busyness, often expressed in taking on other people's problems. Both extremes fail to reach those who need a good pastor to discern what is needful for their situation."³¹⁰

Sloth is therefore much more than mere indolence. According to William Stafford, to call sloth 'indolence' is "like calling viral pneumonia a cold".³¹¹ It can perhaps be likened to the 'mid-ministry blues'. Mid-life is a time when idealism meets realism. The former is well characterised by Ray Ragsdale: "Most ministers begin their careers with lofty ideals and high expectations. Their commitment is to serve God and humankind, and there is just enough of the *messiah complex* in the young to believe they are going to change the world before they are done."³¹² But with the passing of the years such idealism normally fails to deliver the goods. Mega-status is not for most of us. The mid-ministry blues is often also linked with seeing one's peers, some of whom apparently less gifted than ourselves, receiving the call to larger churches. To quote one cynical minister: "Thirst for career status, measured in terms of membership, staff size, and church location, makes for a subtle rat race in which ministers vie with one another under a smoke screen of piety."³¹³ It can prove spiritually and emotionally debilitating when one fails to make it in this ministerial rat race.

Alas, there seem to be a good number of pastors in Christian ministry who have succumbed to the mid-ministry blues. Although they may not have physically left the ministry, in their hearts they have opted out. Burned-out and disillusioned, their earlier joy and enthusiasm for pastoral ministry had long since gone. Satisfaction, if gained at all, is found outside the normal routines of ministerial life – whether it be in some special involvement in the community, or in sitting on some denominational board, or engaging in some theological research project. Clearly there is nothing wrong with any such interest. Indeed, there is a lot to be said for pastors pursuing an interest beyond the local church. But if such interests dominate and become the all-consuming passion, then there is cause for concern: the health of the ministry is in jeopardy where pastors are no longer in love with their calling, however busy they may be.

Or maybe 'mid ministry blues' is not the best of descriptions. Maybe we should use terms such as dejection, despair, spiritual depression – which in turn cause ministers to fail to live up to their calling. They have lost their sense of self-worth – or in the words of William Stafford: "some clergy know that they are failures in the deepest sense, paralysed by their own spiritual mediocrity."³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ Australian Baptist minister John Simpson, *Ministry Perspective 51: Lazy Leadership* (emailed out 07/07/00) wrote: "Some pastors do leave themselves open to the perception of laziness through: being demonstrably poor managers of their time; an apparent lack of basic organisational skills (shown, for example, by consistent late arrivals at meetings); developing a love affair with the computer at the expense of building relationships with people; a total lack of interest in visiting those with special needs; being frequently inaccessible for no apparent reason; there being no understood lines of accountability."

³⁰⁹ Richard Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* 225.

³¹⁰ Justine Allain-Chapman, *Resilient Pastors: The Role of Adversity in Healing and Growth* (SPCK, London 2012) 131.

³¹¹ William Stafford, *Disordered Lives* 110.

³¹² Ray W. Ragsdale, *The Midlife Crisis of a Minister* (Word Books, Waco 1978) 40.

³¹³ Quoted by Ragsdale *The Midlife Crisis Of A Minister* 41.

³¹⁴ William Stafford, *Disordered Lives* 112.

What can be done to help pastors to cope with the deadly sin of sloth? The answer is found in an address given to clergy wives by Jean Coggan, the wife of the former Archbishop Donald Coggan, entitled, '*Who helps the Helpers?*' The title was taken from one of Juvenal's satires, where Juvenal literally said, 'Who is to watch over those who are doing the watching?'³¹⁵ In its original context this had something to do with a woman who comes to entice the guard. Jean Coggan applied this to those involved in pastoral work:

"The time comes when we [the helpers] have lifted too many burdens and we really are worn down, exhausted, and depressed. Maybe our faith is cold and also our lives and witness for the Lord. Perhaps we feel we are in a dark tunnel. Depression comes over us. What then?"³¹⁶

In this description of a spiritual sickness which we might call 'sloth' or *accidie*, the answer is clear: friends are needed who will provide help through the dark and difficult patches of ministry; friends who will strengthen our hand in God (see 1 Sam 22.15). Support can also be expressed through 'peer' groups, who support one another not least through holding one another accountable or through what Gordon MacDonald termed the 'Very Resourceful People who ignite our passion for faith and for Christlike performance' – people such as 'soul friends' or spiritual directors'.³¹⁷

There are no easy answers to dealing with temptation. One thing for sure, before we begin to "watch over all the flock" we must in the first instance watch over ourselves (Acts 20.28). We need to take care in the way we live (Phil 4.8, 9).

11. Nurturing virtue

In the previous section we have focused on the 'vices' of ministry in relation to the 'seven deadly sins'. What about the virtues of ministry? Are they summed up by the so-called "seven heavenly virtues" produced to counter the seven deadly sins: viz. chastity (not lust), temperance (not gluttony), charity (not greed), diligence or industry (not sloth), patience (not anger), kindness (not envy), and humility (not pride)? Although all these virtues are desirable for ministry (albeit re-interpreting 'chastity' as 'faithfulness'), none of them were drawn up specifically with ministry in mind.

A draft report produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 2014 suggested that along with the list of agreed ministerial competencies, there should also be a list of ministerial virtues: "these virtues will include courage, humility and obedience; perseverance and self-control, patience and compassion, and above all, the virtue of love (Col 3.12-14)."

On reading this proposed list of ministerial virtues I immediately checked out the Apostle's Paul's words: "As God's chosen ones... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness ['gentleness'] and patience. Bear with one another [GNB: 'Be tolerant'] and... forgive each other... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in harmony" (NRSV). Again, all these virtues are certainly desirable in any minister. Compassion and kindness, humility and gentleness, patience and tolerance – all are essential, while a loving spirit inevitably forgives and sums up every virtue. The commentaries have some helpful insights. Andreas Lindemann defined 'gentleness' as "the power that enables us, precisely in moments of conflict with our fellow, so to meet him that he experiences the criticism of his behaviour (assuming that it is justified criticism) not as condemnation but as help".³¹⁸ Dunn wrote: "Such virtues (graces), particularly as in the combination here, can appear to encourage a 'milk-sop' weakness as in people whose calling in life is to be a doormat to others – at least as those caught up in the cut and thrust of the rat race that counts as strength. But in fact to live out such a character calls for strength which is rarely seen in the market place (as Jesus demonstrated)."³¹⁹

However, desirable as these virtues may be for ministers, Paul was writing not to ministers, but to a church. In this respect the Baptist Union document is misleading. Nor do their proposed virtues of 'courage' and 'obedience' feature in this passage; neither for that matter do 'perseverance' and 'self-control', although perseverance might be implied in the virtue of 'patience', and self-control in the virtue of 'gentleness' (often defined as 'strength under control').

³¹⁵ Juvenal, *Satires* 6, 1:347

³¹⁶ Jean Coggan, *Who helps the Helpers?* (Care and Counsel Publications, London. Date unknown).

³¹⁷ Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* 73.

³¹⁸ Quoted by James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1996) 229.

³¹⁹ *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* 230.

So what virtues should ministers as ministers have? My mind went to 1 Tim 3.1-3 where Paul lists the ‘graces’ necessary for church leaders, but as we shall see later, none of the items there are distinctively Christian. Nothing is said, for instance, about love, faith, purity and endurance, instead the list reflects the highest ideals of Hellenistic philosophy.

I found it interesting that Brian Harris in *The Tortoise Usually Wins* lists the following “virtues” for what he terms “quiet leadership”:³²⁰

- Modesty (see Rom 12.3). “We aren’t responsible for most things that happen – but we can shape and influence some outcomes.”
- Restraint (see Jas 1.19): Restraint is “about ensuring that enough time is secured to be sure that quality decisions have been made”.
- Tenacity: “Without perseverance, few get beyond the realm of daydreaming.”
- Interdependence, which is the recognition that we “are always strongly dependent upon the input and performance of others”.
- Other-centredness, where “the driver for decision-making is not personal comfort, but the good of others.”

Then another thought came to mind: What do mean by “virtue”? According to the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia: “A virtue is a positive trait or quality deemed to be morally good and thus is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral virtue.” Wikipedia goes on to point out that virtue is the opposite of vice. On the other hand, *The Oxford Online Dictionary* defines virtue as “a quality considered morally good or desirable in a person”. This led me to wonder whether virtue can be broader than moral excellence and can include desirable ‘qualities’?

At this point I consulted some fellow ministers. Baptist minister, David Parsons, responded: “What counts is Christian character built on faith, hope and love.” He went on: “Some positives in ministry might be listening to people and taking an interest in them; keeping confidentiality; tact; knowing ourselves; getting on people’s ‘wavelength’; a sense of humour; discretion; availability; hospitality; and administration.”

With reference to the virtue of ‘obedience’ highlighted by the Baptist Union report, Richard Dormandy, an Anglican minister, said: “I would use ‘willingness’ instead of ‘obedience’... There are sometimes damaging problems with obedience and religion coupled together. There is such a need for true freedom, yet so many Christians live in fear. If ministers have obedience instilled into them, they will also expect it in others to them – and that is not usually good in a church setting. However, willingness is ‘the same but different’. It emphasises freedom of action, but willingness. I would rather have (and be) a willing servant than an obedient one – even though the results might be the same, my demeanour would be different.”

Alun Brookfield, a minister in the Church in Wales, with tongue not entirely in his cheek observed: “If we’re talking about ‘characteristics’, the primary ones have to be a thick skin, a big heart and unlimited energy.”

While Baptist minister Peter Thomas listed the following ‘characteristics’ as essential for ministers:

- Holiness – embracing purity, self-control, integrity, chastity, temperance and humility.
- Love – embracing empathy, compassion, kindness and a servant-heart.
- Spirituality – a vibrant personal relationship with God rooted in devotion to prayer and passion for Scripture.
- Wisdom – embracing knowledge of, understanding of and experience of obeying God’s will.
- Steadfastness – embracing patience, perseverance, long-suffering, courage, hard work, faithfulness, reliability, strength of character and ‘stickability’. This will include single-mindedness and focus without excluding the flexibility which is needed when things so often do not turn out as expected.
- A cheerful disposition – surely joy, hope and faith should be outwardly evident, for some of the time at least.

On reflection, I would argue that the six key qualities or virtues desirable for pastoral leadership are:

1. Vision – ministers need to be creative dreams (planning is a competence!)
2. Enthusiasm – ministers need to be passionate for Jesus, for his church, for his world
3. Industry – ministers need to enjoy hard work
4. Perseverance – ministers need to be marked by determination
5. Humility – ministers must be servant-hearted, selfless rather than self-centred
6. Love – where people know they are loved by their ministers, then anything is possible

³²⁰ Brian Harris, *The Tortoise Usually Wins* (Paternoster, Milton Keynes 2015) 45-50.

12. Finding strength to forgive

If ever there is one aspect of the way of the pilgrim where the pastor is called to set an example, it is surely in the area of forgiveness. If a pastor can be seen to have the strength to forgive even the apparently unforgivable, then others too in different areas of life will find the strength to forgive.

Jesus calls us to forgive

Forgiveness is a mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ.³²¹ Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6.12). The debts Jesus had in mind were moral not financial, obligations. Jesus was using a Jewish metaphor for sin, according to which sins are likened to ‘debts’ owed to God; when we sin we fail to live up to our obligations to God. Luke, writing for a Gentile audience did away with the financial imagery and instead used a word (*hamartia*) which originally was used in the world of archery and which referred to the distance by which an arrow missed the mark. To pray “forgive us our sins” (Luke 11.4) is in effect to pray, ‘forgive us for missing the mark’ ‘forgive us our failures’.

Augustine called this “the terrible petition”, terrible because of the condition attached: “as we”. This is the only petition in the Lord’s Prayer with a condition: “God forgives only the forgiving.” Martin Luther said were unforgiving people to pray this prayer they would in effect be saying: “O God, I am your debtor, and I also have a debtor; I am not willing to forgive him, therefore don’t forgive me either; I will not obey you even though you would pardon me; I would rather renounce your heaven and everything else, and go to the devil”!

The ‘terrible’ nature of this petition intensifies if, as most commentators believe, here in Matt 6.12 the Greek aorist tense (*apheken*) is used. It is true that in some manuscripts the present tense is found, but scholars generally believe that the tense was changed, partly by assimilation to Luke 11.4 where the present tense is used, and partly to avoid the challenging requirement that those who pray this prayer must first have forgiven the sins of all others.

This same need to forgive comes to expression on a number of occasions in the Gospels. Jesus said: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11.25). Jesus also taught that the forgiveness of others was to be unlimited: even “seventy times seven” (Matt 18.12: see also Luke 17.3-4). What is more, there are no ‘let-out’ clauses. As C.S. Lewis wrote: “He doesn’t say that we are to forgive other people’s sins provided they are not too frightful, or provided there are extenuating circumstances, or anything of that sort. We are to forgive them all, however spiteful, however mean, however often they are repeated. If we don’t, we shall be forgiven none of our own.”³²²

It is tough forgiving gross injustice

The teaching of Jesus is clear. The putting into practice of the teaching of Jesus is sometimes not so easy. It was not easy for the family of police officer Stephen Oake, who was brutally stabbed to death when a police raid went wrong in Manchester in January 2003. The family were members of my church in Altrincham: I had baptised Stephen, and had married him to Lesley; his father Robin, himself a police officer, who eventually became Chief Constable of the Isle of Man, was one of my deacons. Amazingly, this family found the strength to forgive their loved one’s killer. As Robin Oake said in one of many interviews: “We have been praying for him and we will continue to do that. I have forgiven him. This is why we are not deeply bitter and not angry and thrashing around wanting revenge.”³²³ By contrast, Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, at a ceremony commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz by the Russian army on 27 January 1945 prayed: “Although we know that God is merciful, please God do not have mercy on those who have created this place. God of forgiveness, do not forgive those murderers of Jewish children here... God, merciful God, do not have mercy on those who had no mercy on Jewish children.”

³²¹ As the Old Testament makes clear, forgiveness is also rooted in the very nature of God (see, for instance, Nehemiah 9.17: “You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love”). Jonathan Baker, *How Forgiveness Works* (Grove, Nottingham 1995) 5 commented: “If humankind is made in the image of God, then the ability to forgive is essential for a full and rounded life, because it reflects the attitude of God himself.”

³²² C.S. Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants* (first published in 1975; this edition Fount, London 1998) 39, 40.

³²³ Later Robin Oake wrote *Father Forgive: how to forgive the unforgivable* (Authentic, Milton Keynes 2008).

It is tempting to say that forgiveness is an attribute peculiar to Christianity. Yet it is not. Mahatma Gandhi certainly knew how to forgive. After the execution of Bhagat Singh by the British authorities he told a journalist: “One cannot forgive too much. The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”³²⁴ Yet if forgiveness is not peculiar to the Christian faith, it is certainly a hall-mark of the Christian faith. Jesus calls his followers to forgive, however heinous the crime may have been, however gross the injustice perpetrated.

In the context of needing to forgive even when everything in us cries out against the injustice of the situation, I want to deal with the situation which many ministers may come across at some time in their lives, viz. the experience of enforced termination of ministry.

Let me quote again some statistics quoted at an earlier stage in this book:

“Within the first ten years of parish ministry roughly half will either be fired by their congregations or forced to move. Another fifteen percent will be forced out of their parishes during the last ten years of ministry.”³²⁵

In other words, the majority of pastors in North America will at one time or another find themselves forced to move from a church.³²⁶ In Britain the figures are undoubtedly lower – not least because of the traditional freehold system in the Anglican Church. Nonetheless, in a survey of British ministers, 43% said that their predecessor had left in unhappy circumstances, with the figure rising to 55% for Baptist ministers.³²⁷

Enforced termination is a shattering experience. Not only do ministers experience deep hurt and pain, but also their spouses and families.³²⁸ In comparison with the trauma they are called to endure, the anger, grief, embarrassment or fear suffered by the church is negligible.

The reasons for enforced termination are many and various. Clearly churches are right to ‘fire’ their ministers when they are guilty of such matters as sexual immorality or financial transgression. However, often the issues are much more subjective and relate to things called ‘incompetence’ or ‘ineffectiveness’. Speed Leas did a study of involuntary terminations of ministers within three American denominations and discovered that “40% of the Episcopal churches, 34% of the United Churches of Christ, and 45% of the Presbyterian churches had existing conflict or problems in the congregation before the terminated pastor started his or her job.”³²⁹ In other words, in such situations the ministers concerned were the innocent ‘lightning rods’, who quite unjustly bore the brunt of their church’s longstanding factionalism.

Not surprisingly in situations where an injustice has been done or has been perceived to be done, many ministers experience deep feelings of anger. The injunction of Jesus to forgive is then far from easy, particularly where the offending party refuses to acknowledge that they have been at all in the wrong.

Many maintain that forgiveness is not only not easy, but actually impossible where the offending party refuses to face up to the wrong they have done.³³⁰ David Augsburger, for instance, wrote:

“Forgiveness includes, requires, follows repentance. Forgiveness recognizes what has really happened, owns the hurt incurred, responds to the other person with integrity and affirms new behaviour for the future with

³²⁴ An interview published in *Young India* (2 April 1931) and reprinted in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Online* Volume 51.

³²⁵ Roy Oswald in his Foreword to Gary Harbaugh’s *Caring For The Care Giver*

³²⁶ Daniel Schultz, ‘Forced Clergy Terminations’, *Congregations* 40.2 (2013) 16, 17 suggests the figures are a little lower, but still concerning: “A 2012 study found that 28 percent of Christian ministers surveyed had experienced a forced termination, some three or more times. Other surveys put the figure at anywhere from 19 percent of all ministers to 41 percent in some denominations”. Unfortunately, getting hard data can be difficult: “sometimes, the distinction between a forced resignation and leaving for other reasons isn’t very clear.”

³²⁷ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* 42.

³²⁸ See Myra Marshall with Dan McGee & Jennifer B. Owen, *Beyond Termination* (Broadman Press, Nashville 1990).

³²⁹ Speed Leas, *A Study of Involuntary Terminations in some Presbyterian, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ Congregations* (Alban, Washington D.C. 1980) 11.

³³⁰ Norman Tebbit, the Conservative politician who lost his wife in the IRA bombing of a Brighton hotel, said: “Forgiveness is not a one-way street. The transgressor cannot be forgiven unless he acknowledges the evil of what he has done and shows remorse and repentance... I can no more forgive a sinner who does not repent than a priest.” Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness: Exploring the Bible, Weighing the Issues* (SPCK, London 2011) 8 commented: “I suggest that to offer forgiveness in such a situation is absurd, because the supposed act of forgiveness lacks integrity as a morally reasonable act.”

genuine intentions. Repentance is the central task of forgiving and being forgiven. Where there is no true repentance, there is no forgiveness.”³³¹

My own belief is that forgiveness is possible, even if reconciliation proves impossible. However, before we address this issue, it is helpful to reflect on the principles which underlie the call of Christ to forgive.

Principles underlying the call of Jesus to forgive

1. To forgive is to be forgiven. The lesson of the parable of the unforgiving debtor (Mat 18.23-35) is that an unforgiving spirit on our part indicates that we have never truly repented of our own sin. As John Stott put it: “Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offences of others, it proves that we have minimised our own.”³³² To speak in picture terms, we cannot receive forgiveness if our fists are clenched and our arms folded tightly round ourselves – for “God gives where he finds empty hands” (Augustine).
2. To forgive is not to excuse. This is the lesson of the Cross. When God forgave us, he did not excuse us. Instead he took our sin so seriously that he sent his Son to die in our place, to bear in his own body the punishment due to each one of us. So C.S. Lewis wrote: “Forgiving does not mean excusing. Many people seem to think it does. They seem to think that if you ask them to forgive someone who has cheated or bullied them you are trying to make out that there was really no cheating or no bullying. But if that were so, there would be nothing to forgive. To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”³³³
3. To forgive is to let go. The Greek word ‘to forgive’ (*aphiemi*) literally means ‘to let go, to allow to depart, to dismiss’. Not to forgive is to hold on to the injustice and the hurt. To forgive is to allow the anger and the pain to surface – for we need to face up to the truth of the damage done to us – and then to let go of the anger and pain.
4. To forgive does not always mean to forget. There are times when it is neither realistic nor right to believe that we can forget the wrong done to us. The emotional wounds suffered from an act of wrong-doing may be so deep that it may take years before they can be healed. A scab and then a scar may form over the wound, but there may well always be a tenderness there, with the result that the wound can be re-opened with ease. Furthermore, the effects of a wrong-doing may remain with us. There are times when, as a result of a wrong done, life is never the same. And, of course, it may just not be right to forget. Helmut Thielicke, a German pastor-theologian who endured the darkest days of the Nazi Third Reich said: “One should never mention the words ‘forgive’ and ‘forget’ in the same breath.”³³⁴
5. To forgive often means that we take the initiative. If God had waited for us to say sorry, then there would have been no Cross. We see this too in the cry of Jesus from the Cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23.34).³³⁵ Here we have what William Willimon called ‘pre-emptive forgiveness’, for Jesus prays for forgiveness before the perpetrators of this crime acknowledge their wrong doing.³³⁶ A failure on the part of the offending party to see their need of forgiveness does not lessen our need to forgive. Sometimes it is precisely the fact that we are willing to forgive, which shames the other to say sorry.
6. To forgive often involves a process. We see this perhaps in the use of the present tense in the Lukan version of the Lord’s Prayer, which may be translated as a continuous tense: “as we keep forgiving”. We see this too in the prayer of Jesus from the Cross (Luke 23.34). For strictly speaking the Greek imperfect tense (*elegon*)

³³¹ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough To Forgive* (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania 1981) 66.

³³² John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (IVP, Leicester 1978) 149, 150.

³³³ C.S. Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants* 42, 43. See Desmond Tutu, who in his role as the head of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up to encourage reconciliation between former victims and their oppressors, said: “It is not enough to let bygones be bygones. Indeed just saying that ensures it will not be so. Reconciliation does not come easy. Believing it does not ensure that it will ever be. We have to work and look the beast firmly in the eyes. Ultimately you discover that without forgiveness there is no future” – cited by Terri Spy, ‘Christianity, Therapy and Forgiveness’, 39 in *Forgiveness and the Healing Process: A Central Therapeutic Concern* (Brunner-Routledge, Hove 2004), edited by Cynthia Ransley & Terri Spy.

³³⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer* (Harper, New York 1960) 110.

³³⁵ Scholars debate whether or not these words belonged to the original text of Luke, for these words are absent from some manuscripts. Most commentators, however, believe that Luke did indeed pen these words of Jesus, but that a later copyist omitted them on the grounds that he felt that God could never have forgiven the Jews for crucifying the Saviour – for him as for many other early Christians the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 7 was a clear sign that God did not forgive the Jews.

³³⁶ William H. Willimon, *Thank God It’s Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross* (Abingdon, Nashville 2006) 5, 6.

Luke uses should be translated: 'Jesus was saying', rather than the simple past tense adopted by our English versions ('Jesus said'). The tense suggests an ongoing action in the past, rather than a one-off action. Jesus may have repeatedly prayed for forgiveness of those responsible for crucifying him as each of the nails was being driven in. There may well be a lesson here for us if we are to forgive others. Where pain and hurt are ongoing, sometimes we need to forgive and forgive and forgive. Forgiveness is often an ongoing process.

7. To forgive is in the first instance an act of will: "I will forgive, in spite of the hurt and pain I feel." This is well illustrated by Corrie ten Boom, when she was faced by one of her former SS guards from the Ravensbruck concentration camp where she and her sister, Betsie, had been sent for harbouring Jews and where her sister had died. She had just finished preaching at a church service when the ex-guard came forward. After beaming and bowing, he said: "How grateful I am for your message *Fraulein*. To think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!" He told her that he had become a Christian and he thrust his hand forward to shake hers, seeking her forgiveness as God had forgiven him. Her heart sank and she kept her hand by her side. She could not respond, as the memories of Ravensbruck came flooding back. While anger and vengeful thoughts boiled through her, she saw the sinfulness of them. She prayed for God's forgiveness towards her and for his help in forgiving the guard. She could not feel anything, not even the slightest spark of warmth. Again she prayed a silent prayer asking Jesus to give her his forgiveness. As she felt able to take the guard's hand, she felt in her heart a love and a warmth which seemed to flood her whole being, bringing tears to her eyes.³³⁷ Forgiveness here involved an act of will.
8. To forgive is to be liberated from the destructive forces of our anger and pain. Richard Nixon was right when he said: "Always remember, others may hate you, but those who hate you don't win unless you hate them – and then you destroy yourself."³³⁸ Not to forgive – not to let go – is to allow the past to control us. To forgive is to bring about healing in our own lives, for when we forgive the poison of bitterness and hate leaves the system. To forgive can also bring about healing in the lives of others. Margaret Magdalen, commenting on the prayer of Jesus, wrote "Forgiveness releases a power that can only be described as spiritually therapeutic too... Think... of the marriages healed through forgiveness, the churches united through mutual forgiveness, the friendships remade through forgiveness."³³⁹ We are never the losers when we forgive – we are always the winners.³⁴⁰

Jesus calls us to forgive - whatever

To return to the issue of where the offending party refuses to see their need for forgiveness, although this makes forgiveness much more difficult, it does not make it impossible. One can have the willingness to forgive or the spirit of forgiveness regardless of the attitude of others. This willingness to forgive has sometimes been described as 'forgivingness' as over against forgiveness'.³⁴¹ 'Forgivingness' where it meets with repentance brings about forgiveness; but 'forgivingness' itself is not dependent on repentance. Paul Fiddes, reflecting on the Cross of Jesus, wrote: "Forgiveness must be completed in the repentance of the offender; the offer is unconditional, but the offer is itself a form of judgement awakening the wrongdoer to his offence. Forgiveness aims at reconciliation, and that requires the offender to come back into the relationship in sorrow and penitence."³⁴²

In the context of enforced termination, forgiveness is hard and, initially at least, may even feel impossible. Strangely, one temptation some pastors face as they seek to be exemplary pilgrims is to deny the range of negative emotions which such perceived injustice inevitably arouses.³⁴³ Yet such denial makes true forgiveness impossible. For true forgiveness, far from suppressing, involves surfacing all that has been wrong, and then by God's grace letting go of the anger and of the resentment. Such a letting go is far from easy, especially in situations where the other people

³³⁷ The story is told by Terri Spry, *Christianity, Therapy & Forgiveness* 38.

³³⁸ See Dewey Bertolini, *Secret Wounds and Silent Cries* (Victor/Scripture Press, Wheaton, Illinois 1993) 42.

³³⁹ Margaret Magdalen, *Jesus – Man of Prayer* 136.

³⁴⁰ See also Desmond Tutu: "To forgive is not just to be altruistic; in my view it is a form of self-interest. The process of forgiving does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human. When I talk of forgiveness I mean the ability to let go of the right to revenge and to slip the chains of rage that bind you to the person who harmed you. When you forgive you are free of the hatred and anger that locks you in a state of victimhood. If you can find it in yourself to forgive, you can move on, and may even help the perpetrator to become a better person" (Foreword to *The Forgiveness Project: Stories for a Vengeful Age*, Jessica Kingsley, London 2015 by Marina Catacuzino).

³⁴¹ Anthony Bash, *Just Forgiveness* 37-38 distinguishes between what he calls 'thick' and 'thin' forgiveness.

³⁴² Paul Fiddes, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1989) 185.

³⁴³ According to Paul Tournier, *A Place For You* (Highland Books, Crowborough, East Sussex, 2nd edition 1984) 122, true forgiveness is rare: "It is particularly so, perhaps, among religious people who wish to witness to their faith by their conduct. A committed Christian finds it more difficult than an unbeliever to express resentment and dislike... Then he makes an effort to forgive, and the need for an effort is the sign that he has not truly forgiven."

involved refuse to acknowledge any responsibility for their part in the tragedy. This refusal not only adds to the pain, it also prolongs the resolution of it. Yet forgive they must. For as exemplary pilgrims they are called to go the way of Christ, even the way of him who cried out “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23.34).

In such circumstances forgiveness takes time and tends to be a process. This process begins with a desire to forgive – but at least the desire to forgive is indicative of being on the right path. Forgiveness itself comes to completion only as a gift from God. It is, as Paul Tournier has rightfully observed, “a grace, and not the result of an effort. It is liberation, not a burden.”³⁴⁴ This gift is only received as people let go of their bitterness and allow room in their hearts for God to work.

Going the way of Christ is not easy. The process of forgiveness is painful and costly, just as it was for Christ. Feelings of anger and pain must be released before true forgiveness can ever be offered. But where such feelings of anger and pain are truly liberated, there the victim is liberated to live again. Strange as it may seem, the victim may eventually prove freer than the oppressor, because the oppressor is still caught up in a web of deceit and denial. The victim is free to grow and develop and go the way of Christ; the oppressor remains stuck on the journey, and instead of growing becomes twisted and stunted. Paradoxically it is then the oppressor rather than the victim who succumbs to the troubling “root of bitterness” (Hebs 12.15).

At a time when I was struggling with this issue of forgiveness my father wrote me a long letter, which included the following reflections:

“The heart of the Gospel is that Jesus endured ‘the contradiction of sinners’ (Hebs 12.3 AV) and did not wait for hate to change to love, but continued in love while rejection and hate persisted. The prayer, ‘Father, forgive them...’ was prayed in the act of crucifixion – and persisted in the resurrection. ‘Beginning at Jerusalem’ (Luke 24.47), the place of rejection, was part of the missionary commission implying, ‘for I love them still, though guilty’. You have seen the memorial altar of Coventry in the old ruins of the original cathedral. When it was first erected the words were, ‘Father forgive them’. I saw them with my own eyes. The next time I went, the word ‘them’ was erased. This was clearly due to recognition that *we* are also sinners, for whom Christ died, and having been forgiven for our sins we are called to unconditional forgiveness. That is made possible by unconditional love. The Sermon on the Mount illustrates the principle before the world saw it in action. It’s extraordinarily presented in Luke 6.27-36 where the last sentence is instructive: whereas Matthew has it, ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matt 5.48) – an impossible standard to attain, Luke has ‘Be merciful as...’ and that is *chesed* [a Hebrew word], grace to enemies and sinners, as God shows us all. Certainly to know that grace demands repentance from the sinner, but the overwhelming fact that wins us sinners is to learn that God *still* loves us in our sin and rebellion, for the cross is a demonstration of the everlasting love and mercy of God. And that is what we are called to do.”

All this is seen and observed by those who are without, so that even in a situation of pain and hurt God is able to through the example of the pilgrim-pastor to encourage others to find the strength to forgive, too.³⁴⁵

13. Growing into maturity

Gathering a harvest of righteousness

Pastors as exemplary pilgrims are on a constant journey. They have never arrived. They are always in the process of becoming. Not only as professionals are they developing, but also as sons and daughters of God they are hopefully growing in “the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3.18). With the Apostle Paul they “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3.14). Or that at least is the challenge. But spiritual maturity does not just happen – it needs to be honed and developed.

³⁴⁴ Paul Tournier, *A Place For You* 122.

³⁴⁵ In this section I have been focusing on how pastors might find strength to forgive. In *Power for God’s Sake* 164-167 I focused on how churches might handle the process of forgiveness when a minister has been forced to leave the church and pain abounds. I suggested a four-fold process involving confession, repentance, forgiveness, and a public expression of reconciliation.

Gordon MacDonald speaks about the need of Christian leaders to cultivate five virtues in particular: harvested humility; productive compassion; steadfastness, not stubbornness; faith beyond sight; and self-control.³⁴⁶ He suggests that Christian leaders develop growth plans: “What sort of an old man do you want to be? I looked around and discovered I didn’t know many old men who impressed me... Why? Maybe because most men and women never build a growth plan for the old years. And if you don’t plan for the kind of man (or woman) you want to be when you are eighty (God willing) and begin building that when you are forty or fifty, it’s not likely to happen.” As a result he drew up a personal mission statement: “My life is focused on serving God’s purposes in my generation so that the kingdom of Christ might be more firmly established wherever I go. In my dealings with people, I want to be a source of hope, encouragement, enthusiasm, friendship and service. As a man, I seek the daily enlargement of my spirit so that it might be a dwelling place for Christ, a source of wisdom and holiness unto the Lord.”³⁴⁷

Bruce and Katherine Epperly approached the need for ministers to keep growing in the faith by asking the question, “Can a life devoted to ministry continue to bring beauty to God, our congregations, our families, and ourselves?”³⁴⁸ Their answer was to develop a pattern for ministry development based around the concept of ‘gathering a harvest of righteousness’. These words are taken from Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi:

“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ... And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1.6, 9-11).

Paul, of course, was writing to a church, and not to pastors. His concern was to see the life of the church at Philippi filled with the fruit of attitudes and actions that reflect the attitudes and actions of Christ (see Phil 2.5-8). However, the key point at issue is that righteousness (in the sense of ‘righteous’ or godly behaviour) does not come to fruition overnight – it involves a process of growth. Hansen, who believed that Paul’s metaphor here may have been inspired by “a poetic picture of a beautiful orchard” (see Psalm 1.3), commented: “A fruitful orchard does not happen in one day: it is the result of a long process of planting, watering, pruning, and fertilising.”³⁴⁹

Bruce and Katherine Epperley used this Scripture as the basis to challenge pastors to grow in love, as they constantly seek the good of those in their charge; to grow in discernment, as they seek to nurture and to guide those in their care; and above all to grow in grace, exhibiting the kind of righteousness found in Christ, who emptied himself and became the servant of all.

However, it is not just a matter of pastors, by their own efforts, producing fruit; it is about allowing God to do his work of grace in their hearts and lives. In the words of Paul: “I am sure that God who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1.6 GNB); “God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose” (Phil 2.13 GNB). God it is who brings about the harvest. In the words of the Epperlys: “God’s transforming presence is most often subtle, gradual, and hidden, like the gentle growth of the mustard seed, until it bursts forth in moments of insight and clarity. Like all experiences of grace, one’s call to ministry is lifelong and embraces silent preparation as well as intentional cultivation. God calls pastors to grow in ministry in every moment and season of life.”³⁵⁰

Ministry goes through stages

Ministry on a downward slope

Over against the positivity of the approach adopted by Bruce and Katherine Epperly, some models of ministerial development are a little depressing. The sense of movement, the dynamic of pilgrimage, is not always present. Instead, ministry is on a downward slope. For example, the secular model of professional development described by Donald

³⁴⁶ Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below The Waterline: Shoring up the Foundations of Leadership* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts 2011) 18-22.

³⁴⁷ Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below The Waterline* 29.

³⁴⁸ Bruce G. Epperly & Katherine Gould Epperly, *Four Seasons of Ministry: Gathering a Harvest of Righteousness* (Alban, Hendon Virginia 2008) 6.

³⁴⁹ Hansen 62.

³⁵⁰ Epperly, *Four Seasons of Ministry* 18.

Super³⁵¹ and adopted by Charles Stewart as a model for “career development in ministry”,³⁵² divided the period of active ministry into three stages:

1. Career Establishment (26-45)
2. Maintenance (45-60)
3. Decline (60-retirement).

Commenting on stage three, Super wrote: the mid-careerist “feels no need to break new ground, either because the ground he is already cultivating gives him an adequate living and is such as to keep him fully occupied, or because he has not succeeded in a quarter century of effort to find or break good ground and has no hope of succeeding in renewed efforts.”³⁵³ Stewart added: “The period of forty-five through sixty reveals either fruition or frustration”, as if there is an element of inevitability in life after the first 45 years.³⁵⁴

A little less depressing is the Southern Baptist *Minister's Personal Management Manual* where the adult period of an individual's developmental process is divided into four stages:

1. Start-Up Stage (From about 15-25)
2. Stabilisation Stage (From about 25-40)
3. Summit Stage (From about 40-55)
4. Sunset Stage (From about 55 on)

The fourth stage is perceived as having little “career dynamic”, and seems to be devoted to gaining “meaning and mellowing”.³⁵⁵ There is no real sense of development. Rather the older minister is perceived as very much ‘going over the hill’. This may be true physically; but need not be true in other respects.

Ministry on an upward slope

Thank God, there are more positive models for the stages of ministry.

Bruce and Katherine Epperly divide the seasons of ministry into four:

1. Springtime: “The sense of call to ministry and seminary... when discernment of call and nurture of ministerial identity are central”.
2. Summer: “The first congregational call, marked by adventure and tests of integrity”.
3. Autumn: “Midcareer in ministry, with challenges of endurance and new opportunities for transformation.”
4. Winter: “Retirement and the adventure beyond that require vision and letting go”.³⁵⁶

From my position as one who is no longer in stipendiary ministry, I warm to their description of retirement as an ‘adventure’!

Another encouraging analysis of the stages of ministry was put forward by Andrew Blackwood in his aptly entitled book, *The Growing Minister*, who divided the period of active ministry into three stages:

1. Years full of promise (25-40)
2. A period of transition (40-55)
3. A time of fruition (55-70)³⁵⁷

It is true that Blackwood was cautious about the second stage. For although “a man normally expects to keep maturing throughout middle age”, he noted that “in the ministry the reverse is often true... More ministers seem to make shipwreck, or get stranded, during middle age than at any other period. Much as we talk and think about the perils of a

³⁵¹ Donald Super, *Psychology of Careers* (Harper & Brothers, New York 1957).

³⁵² Charles Stewart, *Person and Profession: Career Development in the Ministry* (Abingdon, Nashville 1974).

³⁵³ Super, *Psychology of Careers* 148

³⁵⁴ Charles Stewart, *Person and Profession* 29.

³⁵⁵ Truman Brown (editor) *Minister's Personal Management Manual* (Convention Press, Nashville 1988) 58.

³⁵⁶ Bruce G. Epperly & Katherine Gould Epperly, *Four Seasons of Ministry*.

³⁵⁷ Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Growing Minister: His Opportunities and Obstacles* (Abingdon, Nashville 1960) 152-166. See also Ray Ragdale, *The Midlife Crises of Ministry* 99, who spoke of the “futile 50s”!

young clergyman, we ought to feel more concern about “the destruction that wasteth at noonday’.”³⁵⁸ Blackwood referred to the “double D.D.” of “Disillusion and Discouragement, Despondency and Despair”. However, according to Blackwood, even for the minister who goes through the mid-ministry crisis, there is hope: “By the grace of God a minister past fifty can right himself and then keep going on to the most fruitful and blessed portion of his entire career.”³⁵⁹ Not surprisingly this led him on to say that “the closing years of a full-time ministry ought to be the most fruitful of all, and the most joyous.”³⁶⁰ Indeed, he headed this section with the well-known lines from Browning’s “Rabbi Ben Ezra”:

“Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made!
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, ‘A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God, see all, nor be afraid!’”

Is this just wishful thinking? From first-hand experience I would argue that the final stage of ministry can be the best of years. Like vintage wine, with the passing of the years there is a richness and depth to ministry which was not there in the beginning.

True, with the ageing process, energy levels are not the same. When I was a young minister in my late 20s if a meeting at church finished by 9.30pm, then I would go out visiting. I reckoned that I could always knock on the door of most people up until 10pm – with my leaders I believed that I would be welcomed up until 10.30pm! But once I became 60, if a meeting ended at 9.30pm I was delighted to be able to go back home and read the paper! I confess that initially I had difficulty in accepting the fact is that my energy levels were no longer what they once were. However, with the passage of time I found myself taking the occasional power nap. If I had had a heavy day, and there was still work to do in the evening, I would often put my feet up and listen to the news, and almost immediately I would be lost to the world for 20 minutes. I used to feel guilty about such naps, until I listened to an Anglican cleric in his late 50s tell of how every day after lunch he went to bed for a siesta!

Bill Hybels, the founding pastor of Willow Creek, told that the day came when shortly before he turned 50, he too had to change his pattern of ministry.³⁶¹ In the first place, he changed the pace of his life: realising that he was in danger of burning himself out, he resolved every summer to take a three week vacation. Amazingly in the States most pastors do not have the luxury of long holidays. Secondly, he changed how he did ministry: instead of speaking at every service, he decided to share the teaching load with others. Thirdly, he made changes to his personal life: he bought a boat and took up sailing.

Although I did not buy a boat, I too accepted the need to change the pattern of my ministry. I began to focus on leading rather than managing the church, which in turn freed me from attending all sorts of meetings during the week. I accepted that on Sunday my responsibility was for the morning service alone, and allowed my younger colleagues to develop the evening service. Many a Sunday evening I was only there to greet the worshippers as they arrived – sometimes indeed I did not turn up at all. Although I still worked hard, I was persuaded to take a more relaxed approach to work. At one appraisal I was told in no uncertain manner that the white-haired are paid not for what they do, but for their knowledge and experience! Far from my ministry being on the downward slope, those final years of stipendiary ministry proved amazingly fruitful and happy years.

In the light of my experience, my three stages of ministry would be:

1. The years of youthful energy and enthusiasm (25-45)
2. The years of growing maturity (45-60)
3. The years of wisdom and fruitfulness (60+)³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Blackwood, *Growing Minister* 156. expanding on Psalm 91.6. The Canadian preacher Leonard Griffith similarly suggested that we may have here “a figure of middle-age which for many people becomes the most critical, most exhausting, most wasteful, most destructive period in their lives” (*Reactions to God: Man’s Response to God’s Activity in the Psalms*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1979, 106). However, it is a moot point whether the Hebrews recognised such a stage in life as ‘middle age’. Some commentators believe the Psalmist may have been alluding to the danger of sun-stroke; alternatively perhaps there is a more general reference to “the evils that kill in daylight” (GNB).

³⁵⁹ Blackwood, *Growing Minister* 157.

³⁶⁰ A reference to Psalm 91.6. See Blackwood, *Growing Minister* 159.

³⁶¹ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* 241-245

³⁶² Alun Brookfield, ‘Ministry Stages: A response’, *Ministry Today* 53 (Autumn 2011) 28-29, within the context of a tough rural parish in South Wales, saw the final stage differently: “Far from a sense of fruition, there is a sense of still searching for answers,

14. Ministry beyond retirement

Is there ministry beyond retirement? No, said Baptist minister Michael Ball. Indeed, to ensure there was no misunderstanding, he went through a ceremony of ‘de-ordination’.³⁶³ This approach to retirement accords in part with the view of Arthur Dakin, a distinguished past principal of Bristol Baptist College, who maintained that only those in charge of a local church could use the term ‘Reverend’.³⁶⁴

A time to rest?

Andrew Knowles, a former canon-theologian of Chelmsford Cathedral, believes that there is biblical justification for treating retirement as an opportunity to live life at a different pace, and to enjoy the rest that God’s servants deserve:

“Many a biblical study on old age offers the Old Testament example of Caleb as some kind of ideal. Hale and hearty, despite his advanced years, he urges Joshua: ‘Give me this hill country – let me drive giants from their strongholds! (Joshua 14.11-12). In most congregations there are to be found these doughty warriors of the Lord, ‘green and full of sap’ as the psalmist says (Psalm 92.14) and, for all I know, as virile as Moses (Deut 34.7). But what about the rest of us – mere mortals who have fought the fight, run the race, and now feel ever-so-slightly-knackered? The ‘Burn Out Rather Than Rust Out’ brigade overlook the provision for the Levites, who were to retire from their duties at the age of fifty, after twenty-five years of service, and restrict their activities to ‘assisting their brothers’ (Num 8.23ff). While some indefatigable Christians argue that ‘the Bible knows nothing of retirement’, I dare to wonder, cautiously, whether is Ok *not* (*per* Caleb) to press on, unflagging, with the battle plans of the past, and whether there might be an altogether different and more spacious approach.”³⁶⁵

Certainly the pace does change. Furthermore, there is another significant change: for the retired, including retired ministers, are no longer members of the “ruling generation”.³⁶⁶ As I said in a sermon on the occasion of a friend retiring after thirty-three years as ‘church leader’ of a large Baptist church in Hamburg, there comes a time when it is right to stand down. In the spirit of the words of the Preacher found in Eccl 3.1-8, I said:

“There is a time to lead, and a time to be led
There is a time to serve, and a time to be served
There is a time to be known, and a time to be unknown
There is a time to do, and a time to be.”

“Here”, I said, “is a call for humility and grace.”³⁶⁷

of a growing sense of inadequacy, and of a sense of desperately hoping there’ll still be a ministry to carry out until we retire”. For him the final stages of ministry were “the years of genuine humility”: “We start by mistaking youthful energy for pastoral ability – wasn’t it great when we thought we knew everything?! The middle stage is that of learning humility through many mistakes. The latter stage is a time of honest, humble realism as we try to manage falling energy levels alongside increasing demands. And yet it’s in this time of struggling that I find God to be more real to me than ever before. At last I can see God at work in the little things; I can rejoice in the ones and twos – and the unexpected, unplanned, unintentional ‘success’. At last, I realise that God never really actually needed me to work so hard – he can do it all perfectly well without me, but it’s really nice that, sometimes, he uses me to bless others.”

³⁶³ In a personal email (12/08/2014) to me Michael Ball wrote: “I had a very strong sense of guidance that this was God’s plan for me... I always believed that while I was in pastoral ministry, it was the whole of me that was called. I wasn’t just doing a job with limited hours, even though I believed of course that it was God’s will for me to have leisure time and family time in adequate measure.”

³⁶⁴ Arthur Dakin, *The Baptist View of the Church and Ministry* (Carey Kingsgate Press, London 1944).

³⁶⁵ Andrew Knowles, ‘Coming in to land’, *Ministry Today* 59 (Autumn 2013) 18-19. See also Jim Hamilton, ‘Do ministers really retire?’ *Ministry Today* 57 (Spring 2013) 18-22.

³⁶⁶ William F. May, quoted by Charles Pinches, ‘The virtues of aging’ 208 in *Growing Old in Christ* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2008) edited by S. Hauwerwas, C.B. Stoneking, Keith G. Meador & D. Cloutier.

³⁶⁷ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Blog* 23 April 2015

A time to serve?

Many retired ministers, although grateful to adopt a different pace of life, are still keen to serve God – and not surprisingly so. As Paul Goodliff, writing in his capacity as Ministries Team Leader of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, expressed it:

“If ministry at its heart is the offering of a life of discipleship in the service of Christ, his church and his world, do we ever ‘retire’? At the very least much of what has been the focus of our way of life will continue in a different shape, tenor and key... prayerfulness, service, witness, care for others. This is the stuff of the common experience of discipleship, and ministers (we hope) do not cease from being followers of Jesus because they no longer draw a stipend... Retirement signifies a greater freedom of choice in how we use our time and talents, while remaining subject to the ‘long obedience in the same direction’ that is the common experience of all who live under the rule of Christ. It reflects, probably, a laying down of the demands of oversight, pastoral charge of a congregation and much of the profound sense of responsibility only ever really understood by those to whom is committed the charge of a congregation of God’s people... One hopes that the sometimes frenetic pace of life that stipendiary ministry... demands will be replaced by a more sedate, and probably healthier, way of life, with more time for family and friends and opportunities to renew old interests and discover new pursuits. All of this is part of the rich pathway of discipleship and ministry.”³⁶⁸

David Sheppard, when he retired from his position as Bishop of Liverpool, drew up a list of principles which he believed were of God. Among them was the following principle:

“Establish a structure – be part of the Christian community in the parish; accept preaching and speaking engagements beyond the parish within a ceiling of 20 a year, expect working weeks up to 25 hours instead of 60-70 hours in the ‘other’ life. Keep three months free each year from public engagements.”³⁶⁹

At this stage I am among those who are still keen to use their experience and energy in the service of God. I am not convinced that my call to ministry ended with retirement from stipendiary ministry. Just before I retired from my ministry at Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, I wrote:

“I shy away from the ‘R’ word. I prefer to speak about stepping down from leading the church, rather than retiring. Is that just a form of denial? The reality is that after 43 years of serving God as an ordained Baptist minister, I will be retiring from paid ministry. But I do not see myself as retiring from ministry *per se*. As my new business cards declare, I remain the Chairman of Ministry Today UK, and have recently become the Chairman of the new College of Baptist Ministers. Psychologically some might argue that the very printing of such business cards is a sign that my identity is too bound up with what I do, rather than who I am. I confess that I see the danger, and indeed the temptation, but I dare to believe that I am secure in myself whatever! So God willing (and I am very conscious of the warning of James 4.15 not to boast about the future, and that our lives are but ‘a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes’) I shall continue to serve God, both in leading these two organisations for ministers, as well as doing some teaching and, hopefully, some more writing.

I remain a passionate follower of Jesus. My life is marked not just by energy, but also by a sense of purpose. The bowls club next door is not for me. I dare to believe that the words of an illuminated text handed down to me from my father remain true for me: ‘God has yet a greater task for you to do’.

On a more sober note, the Swiss medical doctor of an earlier age, Paul Tournier, maintained that ‘acceptance of unfulfilment’ is one of the great problems of the retired.³⁷⁰ He went on: ‘Of God alone can the Bible say (Gen 2.1) that on the evening of the sixth day of creation he had completed his work’.³⁷¹ But is that true? Of course, when I end my ministry here in Chelmsford, there will be loose ends – of course there will be always more to do. Yet in a very real sense I feel that I have completed the task that God gave me to do. The church is on a good trajectory: God willing, my successor will continue to lead the church forward, from strength to strength. Furthermore, as I move into the next stage of life – indeed, into what I term the next stage of ministry – there is still more for me to do.

³⁶⁸ Paul Goodliff, ‘Approaching Retirement’, *Ministry Today* 57 (Spring 2013) 23-24.

³⁶⁹ David Sheppard, *Steps along Hope Street* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2002) 330.

³⁷⁰ Paul Tournier, *Learning to Grow Old*, (SCM, London 1960, pp169, 170.

³⁷¹ *Learning to Grow Old* 173.

Yet there is no denying that this new stage will be very different. In a way in which it has not perhaps been true before, I shall be my own man. Thank God I shall be free of the pressures of the trivia of ministry – no more will I have to worry about supplying news of the fellowship for the weekly bulletin! I shall be free too of the pressure to be out every night – whether attending meetings or visiting people in their homes. In preparation for this new stage of life I have set myself the overall aim: ‘Enjoy the freedom which this new stage of life brings. Continue to grow and develop as a person. Find new ways of serving God and sharing my faith’.”

A year or so later after writing these words I am still in the process of making the transition into retirement. When, if at all, the transition will be complete I have no idea. If I am to believe Nathan and Beth Davis, the transition is never complete: “It is a never-ending process partnering with God to refocus yourself, constantly discovering avenues in which God can use you, and constantly learning new, deeper ways to facilitate communion with God and others.”³⁷²

To my amazement I do not hanker to be back in the pastorate. That era is over! Instead I rejoice in the new freedoms which are mine. In a way that was never before, I am now a free agent – and what a difference that makes. Freedom, however, does not do away with discipline. Most days I am in my library, reading and writing. Along with the writing of these four books, with my grandchildren in mind I have written my autobiography entitled *This is my Story*. Along with the daily discipline of reading Scripture and praying, there is also the weekly discipline of writing a blog.

As very much a social being, I confess that I did find the transition from no longer being at the centre of church life somewhat challenging. Thank God, however, friendships with many have been retained, while at the same time there are new friendships to make. Perhaps not surprisingly, after a long ministry, my former church has struggled to find a minister to succeed me: as a result I have been worshipping at Chelmsford Cathedral where I have appreciated not only the Anglican liturgy with its focus on the Eucharist, but also the opportunity to be part of another Christian fellowship. In addition, since leaving Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, I have been instrumental in bringing together retired Baptist ministers in Essex for occasional lunches, which again has created new friendships.

The first couple of years of ‘retirement’ from stipendiary ministry has offered too new opportunities for service. In addition to teaching an intensive MA module in ministry in New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and Australia, I have been involved in a new Cathedral project entitled ‘Breakfast with the Bible’. Then, of course there is my leadership of Ministry Today and the College of Baptist Ministers. Beyond the confines of the church I have been able to be more involved in Rotary, and will soon be the President of my local breakfast club; even as I write our local MP has invited me to take part in the General Election count. I confess that I enjoy these new opportunities for service in the wider community.

Recently I came across these words of Sir Francis Bacon: “A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds.” I thank God for the new opportunities which have been mine. So far I have thrived in retirement, and so have been blessed with the experience of “successful retirement”, which according to Nathan and Beth Davis, “occurs when an individual is able to thrive physically, vocationally, socially and spiritually in retirement.”³⁷³

A time to be

At my last appraisal the external ministerial facilitator began by saying: “Paul, what are your plans for retirement?” After I had outlined my plans, he asked a second question: “Paul, how will you cope if you have a major stroke within the first year of your retirement?” In a memorable way, he underlined the fact that ultimately God calls us ‘to be’, and not ‘to do’.

Paul Clayton, an American minister in the United Church of Christ develops that point in his book on ministers finding meaning in retirement. He argues that although ministers have been ‘called for life’, the shape of the call changes: the call is no longer to a specific occupation, but to “a pilgrimage in which one venture may lead to another”.

³⁷⁴ Whereas for many retirement can become amazingly self-centred, for ministers “our life’s plan is to do something for others, for the world, for God – that is, we plan to serve, with or without a salary, until we die.”³⁷⁵ He goes on “We

³⁷² Nathan & Beth Davis, *Finishing Well: Retirement Skills for Ministers* (Springfield, Missouri, 3rd edition 2008) 60.

³⁷³ Nathan & Beth Davis, *Finishing Well* 2.

³⁷⁴ Paul C. Clayton, *Called for Life: Finding Meaning in Retirement* (Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia 2008) 14.

³⁷⁵ Paul Clayton, *Called for Life* 87.

are called not only to do God's work in the world, but also to be God's people in the world... That identity is marked by integrity rather than greed, care for others rather than self-absorption, humility rather than arrogance."³⁷⁶

Paul Clayton's comments on 'identity' in the context of retired ministers then raised the issue for me as to whether it would be possible to construct a list of 'virtues' for retired ministers. I consulted with a number of friends who had retired from ministry and received a range of responses, which I have summarised:

- Thankfulness, recognising that we have all received much more than we have ever been able to give; honest memory, involving not idealising the past, remembering whatever we may claim to know now we only gradually *learnt*, from others and through experience; a readiness to let go, but remaining available for service; readiness for the new; discipline; a large perspective; capacity to dream (Keith Clements).³⁷⁷
- Thankfulness, friendship, self-awareness in the sense of being aware of personal weaknesses and past failures, as well as how one comes across to others; meekness and humility, avoiding the temptation to think one knows best; , forbearance in the sense of bearing silently with that which I would never do; quietness and brevity, being aware that one has been too used to the sound of one's own voice; steadfastness in the faith (John Colwell).
- Acceptance that one is no longer at the centre of things; support and encouragement of others; steadfastness of faith; patience when others re-invent the wheel; thankfulness; readiness to step down; listening, rather than talking, to others about ministry (Bryan Gilbert).
- Humility expressed in handing over to others; encouragement of others; hope; discernment of a larger perspective, grace and endurance; adventure (seeking for new understandings and experience), acceptance that one is no longer at the centre of thing (Brian Jenkins).
- Wisdom, humility, insight, courage, faith, contentment, love (Andrew Knowles, who added: Wisdom seems to me to lie at the heart of the older Christian's reflection and ministry. We can seek after wisdom and grow in wisdom, despite advancing years. It also has the advantage that we can do it sitting or lying down).
- Energy, stamina, good health, perseverance, patience, adaptability, wide and deep sympathies (Julian Reindorp, who recognised that some of this not about virtue but 'good fortune').
- Confidence in the Holy Spirit (inner security); humility; open-mindedness, recognising the good in others with new and different ways; compassion; optimism (a determination not to be cynical); self-control; industriousness in any form of continuing ministry, and in the cultivation of one's mental and spiritual growth (Malcolm Smalley).

As John Colwell observed, one of the difficulties in drawing up a list specific to ministers is whether or not one should include the virtues that should be common to all Christians such as faith hope and love. What I found fascinating was the considerable overlap in the responses I received.

In the light of these responses, I offer my own list of seven virtues for retired ministers.

- Wisdom. To grow in wisdom is to look back on the past and make sense of our lives. Hopefully looking back will create a sense of pride in one's achievements, but it will almost certainly involve coming to terms with disappointment and unfulfilled dreams.
- Thankfulness for God's goodness in the past: ministry has been an amazing privilege, and God has blessed us beyond our deserving. Also thankfulness for the present: instead of grumbling about church life today, we should thank God for the new freedoms that are ours.
- Attentiveness. It is all too easy for retired ministers to talk about themselves and their experience of ministry, rather than lending a listening ear to others who are in one way or another seeking to serve God today.
- Encouragement. Ministers need to become angel's advocates, celebrating the achievements of the next generation.
- Patience and forbearance. Even when we fundamentally disagree with new ways of doing church, loyalty in ministry requires that we refuse to criticise others, even to our friends.
- Steadfastness of faith. Even although we are retired, there is still a race to run and a Lord to serve!
- Hope. Let's resist the temptation to be 'sunset' people looking back, but rather 'sunrise' people looking forward – both to this life and the life to come.

³⁷⁶ Paul Clayton, *Called for Life* 88.

³⁷⁷ These 'virtues' have been developed into an article: see Keith Clements, 'Seven Virtues for Retired Ministers', *Ministry Today* 63 (Spring 2015) 40-42.

- Love. Let's radiate the love of the Lord Jesus not just to those of our generation, but to the future generations – and not least our own grandchildren, who all too often do not know of God's love for them.³⁷⁸

A time to begin a new journey

Whatever else retirement is, it is the beginning of a new stage of the journey of life. The sense of adventure is well brought out in some lines of David Adam, called *The Terminus*:

“The Terminus is not where we stay
It is the beginning of a new journey.
It is where we reach out beyond,
Where we experience new adventures.
It is where we get off to enter new territory
To explore new horizons, to extend our whole being.
It is a place touching the future
It opens up new vistas
It is the gateway to eternity.”³⁷⁹

15. The final stage of the journey

The time will come when I need to begin the last stage of life's journey and make my final preparations to meet my Maker. Bruce and Katherine Epperly suggest three exercises for ministers at this stage of life, which I take the liberty of reproducing.³⁸⁰

1. Writing a spiritual obituary

Their first suggestion is for ministers to write a 'spiritual obituary'. “While most published obituaries simply state the facts of a person's life in a dry fashion, a spiritual obituary enables the writer to look back upon her or his life and to look ahead toward the future in a way that enables the writer to see the interplay of the many values that shaped her and his life... The following questions can help you think about God's movements in the course of your professional and personal journey:

- What values have motivated your life?
- What is your image of God and how has it shaped your spiritual journey?
- What was your most heroic moment?
- What do you most want to celebrate in your life?
- What do you most want to celebrate in your ministry?
- Whom have you loved in the course of your life?
- What are your favourite hobbies and pastimes?
- What key phrases, Scriptures or aphorisms sum up your life?
- What do you plan to do in the remaining years of your life?
- What values or counsel do you leave to the next generation?
- What causes have you devoted your life to?”

2. Expressing gratitude

Secondly, they encourage retired ministers to become thankful people. “Thanksgiving is the cornerstone of a well-lived life. We can move ahead to an unknown future with confidence precisely because we have experienced moments of grace and gratitude in the course of our lives. As you look back over your life's journey, for what relationships and

³⁷⁸ See Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Seven virtues for retired ministers', *Blog* 15 January 2015.

³⁷⁹ A verse by David Adam found on a greeting card. See also Adam's prayer entitled *Retirement: a New Beginning* (also found on a greeting card): “The Lord continue to extend your vision to widen your horizons. The Lord continue to awaken your senses, to deepen your experience, that you may enter new life and go forward in joy. That you have new ventures and continue to serve Him in the power of the Almighty who makes all things new.”

³⁸⁰ *Four Seasons of Ministry* 174-177.

events are you most thankful? In your current life, what are the grace notes and joys for which you are thankful? For what persons in your life do you feel most grateful? For what opportunities are you most thankful? For what ‘failures’ are you most thankful?

Take a moment to write a prayer that expresses your gratitude [to God] for all life’s gifts... Gratitude is experienced not only in our relationship with God, but in our willingness to thank all those who have mediated God’s presence to us in the course of our lives. Take time to write a letter or email expressing your gratitude to those who have been pivotal in your life, if they are still alive. You may still write a note to a mentor or friend who is no longer living. If he or she has a spouse, partner, or child still living, you might send a note of remembrance and gratitude to that person.”

3. Expressing forgiveness

Thirdly, they encourage retired ministers to exercise forgiveness.

“As you reflect appreciatively on the highest and best moments of your life, you are also invited to remember – and experience – moments of pain and disappointment. In the course of a ministerial adventure, at one time or another, most pastors have felt misunderstood, attacked, neglected, treated unjustly, or professionally abused... While some wounds are so painful that they require the companionship of a counsellor or spiritual guide, we suggest the following imaginative prayer as a way of placing your wounds in God’s care:

In the quiet of God’s companionship... take a moment to remember a painful moment – experience the event and your response to it. How did you feel? In what ways were you hurt? How has that pain shaped your ministry? Is it still a burden?... As you remember that event, imagine that Jesus is with you... Visualise yourself sharing your feelings about the event and pain with Jesus... Now take a moment to place your burden in the hands of Jesus... Like the man Jesus encountered at the pool of Siloam, how do you respond to Jesus’ question, ‘Do you want to be healed’ of the burdens of the past? (John 9.1-7).”

Clearly, these exercises are a challenge not just to the retired. One Lent I resolved to write forty letters of thanks to people who had meant something to me over the course of my ministry. Some people I had lost touch with and had to search for their addresses. It proved quite a Lenten discipline, but also a joyous task.

Wise and experienced soul-friends still required

The three exercises, suggested by the Epperlys, are challenging. So much so, that it seems to me that ministers need help to think through the implications of their answers. Unfortunately retirement from stipendiary ministry is normally the point at which ministers dispense with the services of a spiritual director. But in many ways the first year or so of retirement is so spiritually challenging for many ministers, that this is just the time when they need, if not a spiritual director, then at least a wise and experienced friend who has already begun to walk the retirement path.

After a life-time of doing, many of us need help with the challenge of just ‘being’. James Taylor, a retired Scottish Baptist minister, commented perceptively:

“It is not unknown for one retired pastor to ask another, ‘How are you filling your days?’ The answer usually describes yet another activity conducted with greater or lesser pace. It is a hard lesson to learn that God, more insistently than ever before, is asking us to use these years to ‘grow in grace’ and become more like his Son. Our meaning lies in being what God calls, and enables us, to be. That is the true spirituality of retirement.”³⁸¹

³⁸¹ James Taylor, *Pastors under Pressure* (Day One, Leominster, 2nd edition 2004) 159.

Sermon: Looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12.1-2)

This morning³⁸² I want to direct your attention to the familiar words of Hebs 12.2: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus.” For those of you who did Greek at theological college, you will realise that we have here a present participle, *aphorountes eis Iesoun*, dependent upon the main verb, *trechomen*: ‘Let us run the race with perseverance, and as we do let us keep looking to Jesus’.

The race in question is the marathon. A marathon by definition is a long-distance race. At this point the runners have just entered the stadium. The “crowd of witnesses” (12.1) are in their seats; or rather they are out of their seats; they are standing up shouting, urging on the runners. The marathon now turns into a final sprint: the runners are giving their all, straining with every sinew to get to the tape. Have you got the picture? Incidentally, the Greek word used for this race is *agon*, the word from which we get our word ‘agony’ – a fitting description for this stage of the race where every muscle is now aching.

Let us run “with perseverance” (*hupomones*). The GNB translates ‘determination’, but there is more to the word than that: it involves ‘endurance’. Goodness, can’t you begin to see the parallels to ministry here? Yes, I know that this was a letter written a long time ago to a church, or to a group of churches; but how this passage is so applicable to us ministers. Or if not to you, then to me. For I have been in this race for 43 years. Or is it longer? In one sense I began the race when I was baptised at the age of 14 on Sunday 17 November 1957, just a stone’s throw from the river Limmatt where the great Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli had drowned Anabaptist women. Or did the race begin that Sunday evening when at the age of 8 I knelt down and asked Jesus to come into my heart to be my Saviour and my Lord? But in the context of ministry, it was at the age of 25 the race began. And here I am in the stadium – just finished. Or have I? Does the race continue? Do I still need to pull out all the stops for Jesus? Do the retired just free-wheel? Or do they still need to go all out?

Forgive my preoccupation with self. Let me seek to apply this Scripture to you. None of you are at the beginnings of the race; although some of you are further ahead of others. One of the challenges of the ministry is to keep going all out for Jesus. We begin with youthful enthusiasm. I remember when I was President of the Robert Hall Society, the Cambridge University Baptist Society, we talked about the possibility of going as a group, all 70 of us, to Brazil and forming a large missionary community there. Those were the days when on a Sunday we began with a prayer meeting; we then went to the morning service; afterwards we had lunch together; later we had a tea –time meeting with a speaker; then I would often attend an ordinary 6.30 evening service; after which I would either go to the CICC sermon at Holy Trinity to hear John Stott or I might wander across the road to the University Church of St Mary’s and hear Martin Niemöller. We were committed!

But the commitment tends to wane. The older we grow, sometimes the flabbier we become. Not just physically, but spiritually too. We become cynical and half-hearted, and begin to through the motions of religion. Or at least, that is the danger. The number of ministers I have met for whom ministry has just become a job.

Let me go back again to Hebrews 12. Let us run... “looking to Jesus” (NRSV). The GNB translates: “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.” A better translation is ‘looking alone to Jesus’. Let me quote Ben Witherington: “When combined with *eis*, the verb *aphorountes* in Hebs 12.2 means a definite looking away from other things and a fixing of one’s eyes on only the goal.”³⁸³ Peter T. O’Brien says something similar: “The author’s appeal calls for concentrated attention that turns away from all distractions with eyes only for Jesus.”³⁸⁴ He goes on: “The verb occurs in the description of the Maccabean martyrs who ‘avenged their nation, looking to God, and enduring the torments to the point of death’ (4 Maccabees).”³⁸⁵

Focused concentration on Jesus is what is in mind. It is what William Lane called “contemplation of Jesus”.³⁸⁶ I am reminded of the Roman Catholic custom of the adoration of the host. If you go into a Roman Catholic cathedral you will see people kneeling before the altar, and staying there on their knees, adoring the host. As Protestants we may not

³⁸² This is the second part of a sermon preached at Pleshey on March 19, 2014 to mark the 20th anniversary of *Ministry Today*.

³⁸³ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Apollos, Nottingham 2007) 327.

³⁸⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* 453

³⁸⁵ Peter T O’ Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* 453 n33.

³⁸⁶ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* 410.

adore the host, but surely we too must learn to adore the Saviour, to focus on him, to concentrate on him. That is what we shall do in a moment when we come to eat bread and drink wine.

Notice that here we are not called to focus on the Saviour, nor on the Lord, nor on the Christ, nor indeed on the Son of God, but on “Jesus”. “The use of the simple personal name ‘Jesus’ shows that the accent is upon his humanity, and especially his endurance of pain, humiliation and the disgrace of the cross.”³⁸⁷ Jesus, in the very way in which he lived life God’s way, has set us a pattern for our living. We need to keep on looking to him, and in looking begin to “imitate” his life.

The medieval German mystic Thomas à Kempis wrote *The Imitation of Christ*, one of the greatest manuals of devotion, which has gone through over 2,000 editions and printings. Thomas began his book by quoting the words of Jesus in John 8.12, “Whoever follows me... will never walk in darkness”, and wrote: “By these words, Christ urges us to mould our lives and characters in the image of his, if we wish to be truly enlightened and freed from all blindness of heart. Let us therefore see that we endeavour beyond all else to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ.” Here are words for us evangelical Christians to “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest”.³⁸⁸ Our temptation has sometimes been to spend all our energies wrestling with the great Pauline doctrines of justification and sanctification, and not spending sufficient time meditating on the life of Christ himself.

But there is more than simply focusing. To quote O’Brien again, it is a “looking away from all others toward one”.³⁸⁹ When I read those words I was reminded of a key ministerial sin: not sex with the organist, but envy of other ministers. Friends, I have suffered from that. I too have been guilty of comparing myself with others. I have not always focused on Jesus. I have sometimes allowed my gaze to wander elsewhere.

Let us keep looking – present tense – to Jesus; looking not just in the sense of focusing upon him, but looking to in the sense of ‘relying upon Jesus’; looking to Jesus for help and strength. My mind goes to what the writer of this letter has to say about Jesus our great High Priest: “Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us have confidence, then, and approach God’s throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it” (Hebs 4.15-16). I wonder, is there a word here for some of us as we come to the Table?

Let me close with Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message*: “Keep your eyes on JESUS, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s THERE, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. THAT will shoot adrenaline into your souls.”

Conclusion

Pastors – like their people – are pilgrims on a journey. The settled life is therefore not for them. In terms of their own personal development as also of the development of their churches, one of the challenges of ministry is to find new and creative ways of continuing with that journey, to stay the course and live out the call God gave them.

³⁸⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* 410.

³⁸⁸ Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662.

³⁸⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* 453.

APPENDICES

Appendix One

Fifty lessons in life learnt by Paul Beasley-Murray

1. Life is a constant adventure
2. Life is to be lived passionately
3. The best is yet to be
4. Mountains are to be climbed
5. Life is about growth
6. Life is a journey in self-discovery
7. Only the self-aware are secure
8. God wants us to be real, not cardboard cut-outs
9. God wants us to be rainbow people
10. Integrity counts for more than success
11. Life can be tough
12. Wounds can make for healing
13. All sunshine makes a desert
14. God is there even in the dark
15. God knows
16. Time brings perspective
17. Friends are often God's agents
18. Iron sharpens iron
19. God's love is experienced in unexpected places
20. Orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy
21. It's OK to be angry
22. One way to inner freedom is to forgive
23. Children are a great education
24. A capable wife is more precious than jewels
25. Families matter
26. Grandchildren are wonderful beyond
27. Work hard, but play hard too
28. Make any excuse for a party
29. Music expresses the soul
30. Even extraverts need silence
31. Special occasions are all the better for dressing up
32. A glass of red wine enhances the day
33. Cooking is a serious business
34. An open table enriches life
35. Seniors need to power-nap
36. Travel broadens the mind
37. Everybody has feet of clay
38. Life is all the better for laughter
39. A grateful heart leads to great contentment
40. Jesus makes all the difference
41. Health is a blessing
42. Holidays matter
43. A critical mind leads to wisdom
44. A positive spirit creates happiness
45. Joy is a sign of the Spirit
46. There is always more to learn

- 47. God wants us to make a difference
- 48. Retirement is not a goal, but a stage
- 49. Retirement offers new freedoms – hallelujah!
- 50. My future is in God's hands

Appendix Two

A Code of Ethics for Baptist Ministry - 2004

This code emerged from a consultation at the British Baptist Colleges Staff Conference in 2004.³⁹⁰

Introduction: The virtues or themes that drew most significant attention were integrity, accountability, community, and spirituality. These categories are neither exclusive nor exhaustive, but together they offer a framework within which to express much that is centrally important. Within each sphere, the ethical commitments follow the sequence above.

These virtues are exercised in five spheres in which ministry is exercised: the self, one to one relationships, a local Baptist congregation, the wider Christian community, in relation to the wider Baptist world, the whole created world.

The code deliberately does not intend to be specific about particular behaviours, such as adultery, fraud or violence against the person. These behaviours are encompassed within the broader categories as unacceptable. The presupposition is everywhere supposed that a broad biblical ethic, described in various parts of the Scriptures both Old Testament (such as the Ten Commandments) and New (such as Paul's lists of virtues and vices as found in Gal 5:14-26; Eph 4:25-32; or Col 3:5-9) is normative to the Christian life.

The Code is not a description of the sanctions that might be imposed when a minister offends against the high ideals that it commends. For instance, if every minister guilty of coveting their neighbouring Baptist church's facilities, members, programmes or success were removed from the Register, few would remain, whereas, in general, those whose sexual conduct breaks the vows of faithfulness in marriage through conducting an adulterous relationship, are rightly removed from the Register, such conduct being unbecoming of any Christian, and especially of a Baptist Minister.

In Relation to Self

- Commitment to intellectual honesty and growing self-awareness, nurtured and sustained through study, reflection and prayer
- Commitment to the disciplines of self-examination and self-regulation under God
- Commitment to growth as a disciple, in community with others who speak into our lives as we speak into theirs
- Commitment to locate our identity and security first and foremost in the Christ-like God

In One to One Relationships.

- Commitment to uncompromising attention to issues of status, power and control, with special attention to gender, age, ability, ethnicity and sexuality
- Commitment to fidelity in personal relationships, anchored in a personal discipline of confidentiality
- Commitment to receive ministry from others as well as to minister to them, recognising strengths in their gifting as well as limitations in our own.
- Commitment to value all people before God, offering to each the honour, attention and respect that is due to creatures made in God's image

In Relation to a Local Baptist Congregation

- Commitment to root out personal prejudices, rejecting the easy temptations of exploitation and manipulation, and a commitment to Baptist identity.
- Commitment to learn and grow with others in a local Baptist congregation, as they affirm and confirm our calling in Christ.

³⁹⁰ This is the third and final draft

- Commitment to encourage the unity of the local congregation in a generous spirit of welcome and inclusivity.
- Commitment to transparency of life, particularly in matters of finance and personal lifestyle

In Relation to the Wider Baptist World

- Commitment to grow in mutual understanding through dialogue within the wider Baptist family, expecting an encounter with ever-greater light and truth
- Commitment to form significant relationships at many levels of Baptist life, in Britain and across the world, walking with and watching over one another in covenant love
- Commitment to enhance the bonds of fellowship and friendship across the world Baptist community
- Commitment to explore the journey of faith by drawing on the rich inheritance of Baptist Christians across time and around the world

In Relation to the Wider Christian Community

- Commitment to learn with and from the wider Christian community as we study the wider history of God's people
- Commitment to receive the ministries of guidance and oversight from others in the wider Body of Christ.
- Commitment to speak honourably of others in the wider community of the world Church, neither undermining nor undervaluing their calling and work.
- Commitment to search out, be challenged and changed by the work of God's Spirit beyond the local congregation and the particular tradition to which we belong

In Relation to the Whole Created World

- Commitment to listen and respond to the real condition of the global community to which we belong, with all the pain of poverty and conflict, together with ecological responsibility
- Commitment to listen for the word which God speaks in every age from beyond the boundaries of the covenant community.
- Commitment to speak and act prophetically into the many contexts of a hurting world, crossing all the boundaries of race and creed.
- Commitment to relate respectfully to all people, those of other religions and of none, upholding the causes of tolerance and religious freedom

Appendix Three

A Guide to Pastoral Practice and Ministry produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain – 2011

Introduction

All that follows recognises that we are a people of grace and compassion, and where expectations seem prescriptive, perhaps, it should be borne in mind that these guidelines are simply that: guidance, not a rule-book. However, if their value is not to be eroded, they should be taken seriously as guidance for the manner of life and practice that is expected of Baptist ministers, especially in the context of those exercising local pastoral charge of a congregation. As affirmed by the Ministry Executive Committee and commended to Baptist Union Council, they do reflect a consensus about the character of Baptist ministry.

In recognising a ‘call’ to ministry and facilitating a process leading to ‘accreditation’ of that ministry, the wider Baptist community rests legitimate, often demanding, expectations on those so called and accredited. At the core of all such expectations is something that is well described as ‘exemplary’ or ‘representative’ discipleship, or a commitment to ‘vocational holiness’. The character of that discipleship is undergirded by the Code of Ethics.

In ministry there is necessarily a distinction between the professional and the private spheres of life, but the boundary between them should be porous, for the private and hidden areas of life suffuse the professional with either grace or corrosion. Effective ministry cannot be maintained where the gap between the personal and the public life becomes too great. Vocational holiness is indispensable for a public ministry that honours Christ.

This necessarily entails the minister in high levels of voluntary accountability, to self and to others, and touches the whole of life, well beyond the exercise of particular public ministries. Phrases like ‘a life of transparent integrity’ or ‘a moderate, hospitable and peaceable lifestyle’ sum up much that Baptists rightly expect of those they accredit and, as such, a calling to ministry will impact almost every aspect of life, not least uses of power and financial and sexual conduct.

In matters of leadership, the work of ministry will normally be oriented towards ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’. As such, ministers of the gospel will not be found feeding prejudice. Ministers will set their faces against the abuse of power by themselves and by others, seeking to expose bullying and other inappropriate techniques for manipulating those for whom they have a duty of care.

In their offering of pastoral leadership to a local congregation, ministers will have a special role in shaping the vision and corporate life of the church, and should do so both by leadership and as an ‘example to the flock’ of love, grace, integrity and courage.

1. Personal Discipline and Integrity

Ministry of this kind demands high levels of self-awareness and commitment, appropriate in all Christian discipleship:

- commitment to a personal rule of life, prayer and the reading of Scripture so as to maintain those disciplines that engender spiritual growth and personal faithfulness to Christ.
- commitment to personal truthfulness, based in continual and open self-examination and reflection;
- commitment to the equal and proper treatment of all people, with special attention to issues of confidentiality;
- commitment to rigorous disciplines of self-management in regard to all sexual relationships, especially relationships to children, young people and vulnerable adults, as set out fully in ‘Safe to Grow’ and guidelines for working with vulnerable adults;
- commitment to financial integrity: taking care to exercise transparent good practice, and avoiding every occasion in which ministry might be ‘bought’ by others who would seek inappropriate dependency; [e.g. ministers need to exercise caution when being offered extravagant gifts from church members, such as the offer of a car. These should be given instead to the church for the use of the minister];

- commitment to engagement with the wider world, and to maintain a sustained awareness of the society and culture within which ministry is exercised, aware of the larger political and social forces that shape society;
- commitment to live in such a way as provides an example of godly living, and thus giving no cause for others to stumble, and modelling good practice. For example, this might be caused by inadequate attention to personal health, physical and mental as well as spiritual, inappropriate addictions, serious loss of work/life balance or other forms of immoderate lifestyle. [e.g. a minister will want to ensure that their own consumption of alcohol or tendency to compensatory eating does not adversely affect the discipleship of others or weaken their own ability to fulfil their discipleship];
- commitment to avoidance of any behaviours that might be described as bullying of others, such as wielding undue influence in the pursuit of personal gain. In general others should be treated with gentleness and generosity of spirit. [Anger can be used as a powerful and abusive weapon. The Scriptures say 'be angry but do not sin', and the uncontrolled loss of temper with others is to be avoided.];
- commitment to the avoidance of those besetting sins of ministry: cynicism, grumbling, gossiping and party spirit. Instead, a careful listening to others should take priority over hasty or prejudicial judgements;
- Ministers should take all due care in being accountable for their life and ministry, using for instance, peer supervision, cell groups or other contexts in which honesty and support can be offered and received. It is folly to think that ministry can be adequately offered by those who deliberately live in an isolated manner.

2. *Training and Development*

Such ministry will also demand a commitment to ongoing training and personal development, so as to sustain a reasonable level of competency. This does not entail an expectation of omni-competency, but rather an acute sense of personal limitations and how to draw on the competencies of others in order to exercise an appropriate ministry of oversight. Habits of continuing study and development, forged in ministry training and probationary period (NAMs study), should continue to inform ministry throughout its ensuing practice. Utilising the tools for continuing professional support (such as spiritual direction, peer supervision, guided self-appraisal or ministers' clusters) is strongly encouraged. Formation involves spiritual, intellectual, emotional and relational development, and all aspects should be developed as ministry unfolds.

3. *Personal Relationships*

Recognising that ministers' personal circumstances vary widely, the commitments of ministry will put a burden on significant others: their immediate circle of family and friends. It is neither appropriate that these relationships always take second place to other professional relationships, nor should they always take precedence. This will lead to difficult decisions: for example, when news of the death of a deacon comes in the midst of a family party. The nurturing of strong family bonds and friendships is part of what it is to be 'an example to the flock', and their neglect is not a sign of professional effectiveness nor personal sacrifice.

4. *Availability*

The minister does not work set hours as an employee, but is called as 'a way of life' to shepherd the flock of Christ. This does not mean that they are required to work beyond what is reasonable to expect, but flexibility and availability are principles of pastoral leadership. Personal and family circumstances are a vital part of the balance of priorities that a minister must negotiate with those among whom they exercise pastoral leadership. In general, the minister should expect to be contactable outside of normal office hours, (and *in extremis*, at any hour,) while the church should respect the expectation of a day per week free from all routine ministry.

5. *Conduct of Worship*

The minister has overall responsibility for the conduct of public worship. They would be expected to participate regularly in the leadership of church services and while gifts will vary, especially in musical ability, it is the minister's oversight of this aspect of the church's life that is expected, rather than their sole delivery of all aspects of the service. Attention should be given therefore, to growth in competency in leading worship (as distinct from the musicianship required of competent worship song leaders) and where this is delegated to others, care should be taken in assessing the competency of those who share in this task of ministry, attending to their development and guidance where necessary. Often the minister will be the 'resident theologian' in the congregation, and her or his understanding plays a significant role in the shaping of public worship.

- Normally this responsibility will be shared with others, who bring their own gifts of musicality and preaching in the service of Christ. The minister's role is to ensure that the proper balance of worship is fostered, to include prayers of confession, praise and intercession, the reading of Scripture, the proclamation of the word and appropriate musical elements. Not every element is expected to be present in every service.
- Normally it will be the minister's responsibility to preside at the Lord's Table (although not exclusively so), conduct baptisms and infant dedications, and be responsible for marriages and funerals.

6. *Mission*

It is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to participate in mission and the minister will lead in this by example, encouraging every member of the church to engage in holistic mission in ways appropriate to their gifts and circumstances. Where people show potential leadership skills in such activities, the minister will find ways of helping them to hone and develop those skills.

- The minister will show concern for the mission of other local Baptist churches through offering practical help where possible, including participation in Association mission projects and Home Mission funded initiatives.
- The minister will engage with “men and women of goodwill” in the surrounding community so that the church is seen to be working towards the harmony, justice and wellbeing of that community. They will work with chaplains and volunteers to improve the availability of access to prayer and pastoral care for people who are not part of a regular congregation.
- Where a new church plant or initiative is envisaged, the minister will first make efforts to consult with other churches that are either already present in the area or have an interest in it, and where possible, work together with them, following the Baptist Union’s good practice guidelines for church planting.
- The minister will make efforts to engage with people of other cultures and faiths both in the local community and more widely through encouraging prayer and concern for BMS World Mission workers and others involved in global mission.

7. *Pastoral Care*

The overall responsibility for the pastoral care of the flock lies with the minister, although it is unlikely that they will be solely responsible for its delivery. In consultation with the church, an agreed pastoral strategy will indicate what is expected of the minister. Often this will include the visitation of the dying and bereaved and those seriously ill at home or in hospital and the house-bound, although in congregations over a certain size, this will of necessity be shared with other pastors. The regularity with which church members are routinely visited in their homes is also a matter of negotiation. [While it might be appropriate to regularly visit every member in a congregation of under 50 members, this would be unwise in a congregation of 500. In the latter case, oversight of a pastoral care team ensures the delivery of this dimension of pastoral care]

Attention should be paid to proper boundaries, and the effective delivery of pastoral care will pay due attention to all safeguarding requirements. It is normally inappropriate to conduct visits at times or in locations that might be viewed as compromising to the integrity of the ministry (late at night, for instance, or in isolated settings), although it is occasionally unavoidable in a time of crisis.

It is normally good practice to maintain strict confidentiality regarding matters of sensitive pastoral information. However, there is no absolute right to confidentiality. Safeguarding legislation will always require that where the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults is threatened, appropriate action should be taken to disclose harmful action (see *Safe to Grow* etc. for more details). Also, where the life of a person is threatened absolute confidentiality cannot be assured, for instance in a real risk of suicide due to mental health disorders, or where others’ safety is threatened. Ministers, when married, should negotiate with those with whom they share leadership, and the Church Meeting, whether they share pastoral information with their spouse. Some may choose to maintain strict confidentiality that excludes their spouse, while others might expect to be able to share more widely with their husband or wife. When assuring others of confidentiality, it should be clear which practice is adopted, and where necessary ministers should adapt their normal practice to unusual circumstances.

8. *Unity*

The minister is a representative and embodiment of the unity of the church, both locally and in wider spheres. They must engage in their leadership responsibilities in co-operative rather than competitive ways, fostering the unity of the whole church of which they are a minister. In particular the ministries of both men and women, those of ethnically diverse backgrounds and both young and old should be honoured rather than excluded.

- Ministers have a special role in the leadership of Church Meetings, although this does not require them to necessarily chair such meetings if more suitable people are available. Ministers, as every church member, are subject to the will of Christ discerned by the gathered church, and have a special role in safeguarding that congregational policy.
- Attention should be paid to participation in the wider councils of the Baptist Union, including Association and Union Assemblies.
- The promotion of mission, locally through co-operation with other churches, nationally through Home Mission and internationally through BMS World Mission and other agencies, is an expectation upon all Baptist ministers. Attention should be given to the promotion of the financial needs of BUGB, BMS World Mission and the Union’s theological colleges in the life of the churches served. Ministers are key gatekeepers to the churches’ responsibilities to support the wider Baptist bodies (Union, Association and Colleges) and it

is expected that they will play a leading role in supporting the policies of churches to appropriately and generously support them.

- Wherever possible, a respectful ecumenism with those who are fellow Christians should be pursued.
- It is expected that ministers will be respectful of fellow ministers, especially those who are Baptist ministers. This is especially important where women ministers are concerned, so that whatever the personal convictions about women in ministry, the policy of the Baptist Union to affirm women's ministry should guide relations between ministers, accepting and supporting others in ministry, and those who are testing their vocation to ministry, regardless of gender, race or age.
- Respecting people of good will and working with them for the good of all is expected, and avoiding those prejudices that fracture society and bring the name of Christ into disrepute.
- When a minister moves to a new pastorate or retires from stipendiary ministry it is expected that they will leave that church and sever all professional ties with it, referring any requests or enquiries to the new minister or moderator. In general, a minister in retirement should not live in the immediate area of past pastorates, except by clear welcome of those involved. There may be occasional circumstances that would require divergence from this expectation (for instance where the retirement locality is governed by the need for personal support from family); but routinely, removal from the locality is a general requirement of retirement. Where a retired minister remains in the locality and continues their membership in the church from which they have retired, it is expected that a schedule of protocols be agreed between the minister, the leadership of the church and their successor as pastor of the church. This would include agreements about responding to requests to take funerals and weddings or other pastoral duties such as the visiting of sick or elderly church members.

9. *Language and Communication*

- Care should be taken in the use of language, avoiding that which brings ministry or the gospel into disrepute.
- Ministers are expected not to speak ill of other leaders or ministers in public settings.
- Attention should be given to the appropriate media through which to communicate, with special care in the use of new electronic media.

In all of these attempts to express ministerial practice as a code of behaviour or a guide to good practice there is recognition, on the one hand, that other professions have also enshrined their aspirations for good practice in similar codes (and the wider culture expects no less from the profession of ministry than it does from those of the law or medicine), and, on the other, that such codification is deeply embedded in a technocratic and bureaucratising culture of modernity. Ultimately, these codes can only express what a community of faith, the Baptists in BUGB, believe about ministry and expect of its ministers. It cannot ensure that such practices are fully complied with or followed with heartfelt and enthusiastic assent. It is the task of churches, associations, colleges, the Union and ministers themselves to shape ministry according to the pattern of Christ, which we believe is enshrined in this guide. This will always be in dependence upon the grace of God and the enabling power of the Spirit.

In the place of self-protection and self-justification, the shape of ministry which most fully follows in the way of Christ, paying attention to his command to take up a cross and follow him, is one of intentional vulnerability, costly sacrifice, unexpected joy and faithful discipleship. This guide understands the call to ministry in those terms. Ministry is not simply a job like any other, one profession among many (although it is hard work, and should be undertaken with a proper professionalism) but rather it is a way of life that seeks to serve out of love for God and his people.

As practices of ministry are learned and the minister's life patterned after the example of Christ and others, then the virtues we have identified become embedded in the minister's life and practice. It is like learning a craft at the feet of a skilled practitioner, as the work is done, so the values of those practitioners are adopted, or incarnated. The formation and subsequent practice of ministry is both the gaining of understanding and skill, and also the forming of a life of character and virtue that is appropriate to Christian discipleship.

These practices and virtues are also enshrined in the ordination and induction vows that express in a significant moment the intention to live after this pattern of life. In promises to 'live a life of holiness and prayer', to 'care for the people of God', or to 'make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'³⁹¹ the way of life offered in this guide is expressed in promise and prayer. God give us the grace so to live."

³⁹¹ *Gathering for Worship*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press and Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2005) 124-5.

Appendix Four

A sample American code of ethics for ministers

The following code is a generic example of numerous American ministerial codes.³⁹²

Preamble

As a minister of Jesus Christ, called by God to proclaim the gospel and gifted by the Spirit to pastor the church, I dedicate myself to conduct my ministry according to the ethical guidelines and principles set forth in this code of ethics, in order that my ministry be acceptable to God, my service be beneficial to the Christian community, and my life be a witness to the world.

Responsibilities to Self

1. I will maintain my physical and emotional health through regular exercise, good eating habits, and the proper care of my body.
2. I will nurture my devotional life through a regular time of prayer, reading of the Scriptures and meditation.
3. I will continue to grow intellectually through personal study, comprehensive reading, and attending growth conferences.
4. I will manage my time well by properly balancing personal obligations, church duties, and family responsibilities, and by observing a weekly day off and an annual vacation.
5. I will be honest and responsible in my finances by paying all debts on time, never seeking special gratuities or privileges, giving generously to worthwhile causes, and living a Christian lifestyle.
6. I will be truthful in my speech, never plagiarising another's work, exaggerating the facts, misusing personal experiences or communicating gossip.
7. I will seek to be Christlike in attitude and action toward all persons regardless of race, social class, religious beliefs or position of influence within the church and community.

Responsibilities to Family

1. I will be fair to every member of my family, giving them the time, love, and consideration they need.
2. I will understand the unique role of my spouse, recognising his or her primary responsibility is as marital partner and parent to the children, and secondarily as church worker and assistant to the pastor.
3. I will regard my children as a gift from God and seek to meet their individual needs without imposing undue expectations upon them.

Responsibilities to the Congregation

1. I will seek to be a servant-minister of the church by following the example of Christ in faith, love, wisdom, courage and integrity.
2. I will faithfully discharge my time and energies as pastor, teacher, preacher, and administrator through proper work habits and reasonable work schedules.
3. In my administrative and pastoral duties, I will be impartial and fair to all members.
4. In my preaching responsibilities, I will give adequate time to prayer and preparation, so that my presentation will be biblically based, theologically correct, and clearly communicated.
5. In my pastoral counselling, I will maintain strict confidentiality, except in cases where disclosure is necessary to prevent harm to persons and/or is required by law.
6. In my evangelistic responsibilities, I will seek to lead persons to salvation and to church membership without manipulating converts, proselytising members of other churches or demeaning other religious faiths.
7. In my visitation and counselling practices, I will never be alone with a person of another sex unless another church member is present nearly.
8. I will not charge fees to church members for weddings or funerals; for non-members I will establish policies based on ministry opportunities, time constraints, and theological beliefs.
9. As a full-time minister, I will not accept any other remunerative work without the express consent of the church.

³⁹² Joe Trull and James Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* 253-255.

10. In leaving a congregation, I will seek to strengthen the church through proper timing, verbal affirmation, and an appropriate closure of ministry.

Responsibilities to Colleagues

1. I will endeavour to relate to all ministers, especially those with whom I serve in my church, as partners in the work of God, respecting their ministry and cooperating with them.
2. I will seek to serve my minister colleagues and their families with counsel, support, and personal assistance.
3. I will refuse to treat other ministers as competition in order to gain a church, receive an honour or achieve statistical success.
4. I will refrain from speaking disparagingly about the person or work of any other minister, especially my predecessor or my successor.
5. I will enhance the ministry of my successor by refusing to interfere in any way with the church I formerly served.
6. I will return to a former church field for professional services, such as weddings and funerals, only if invited by the resident pastor.
7. I will treat with respect and courtesy any predecessor who returns to my church field.
8. I will be thoughtful and respectful to all retired ministers and, upon my retirement, I will support and love my pastor.
9. I will be honest and kind in my recommendations of other ministers to church positions or other inquiries.
10. If aware of serious misconduct by a minister, I will contact responsible officials of that minister's church body and inform them of the incident.

Responsibility to the Community

1. I will consider my primary responsibility is to be pastor of my congregation and will never neglect ministerial duties in order to serve in the community.
2. I will accept reasonable responsibilities for community service, recognising the minister has a public ministry.
3. I will support public morality in the community through responsible prophetic witness and social action.
4. I will obey the laws of my government unless they require my disobedience to the law of God.
5. I will practise Christian citizenship without engaging in partisan politics or political activities that are unethical, unbiblical, or unwise.

Responsibilities to my Denomination

1. I will love, support and cooperate with the faith community of which I am a part, recognising the debt I owe to my denomination for its contribution to my life, my ministry, and my church.
2. I will work to improve my denomination in its efforts to expand and extend the kingdom of God.

About the author

Ordained in 1970, Paul Beasley-Murray taught in the Protestant Theological Faculty of Congo/Zaire from 1970 to 1972. From 1973 to 1986 he was pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire, which quadrupled in size during his ministry. From 1986 to 1992 he was Principal of Spurgeon's College, London, during which time the student enrolment doubled. From 1993 to 2013 he was senior minister of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, which experienced significant growth and he led the church through a £2 million redevelopment programme. He is currently Chairman of both the College of Baptist Ministers and of Ministry Today.

A prolific author, he has over 350 articles to his credit, for the most part reflecting on the practice of ministry. His writings currently in print are *Radical Believers: The Baptist Way Of Being The Church* (Baptist Union 1992, and translated into Czech, German and Norwegian; revised edition 2006); *Radical Disciples: A Course For New Christians* (Baptist Union 1996; revised edition 2005); *Happy Ever After?* (Baptist Union 1996; revised edition Amazon 2016); *Radical Leaders: A Guide For Elders & Deacons In Baptist Churches* (Baptist Union 1997; revised edition 2005); *The Message Of The Resurrection: The Bible Speaks For Today* (IVP 2000: also published in the USA and translated into Burmese, Chinese, Romanian and Korean); *A Loved One Dies: Help In The First Few Days* (Baptist Union 2005; revised edition Amazon 2016); *Joy to the World: Preaching at Christmas* (IVP 2005 – also available in a special OM edition in India, Nepal, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait); *Transform Your Church! 50 very practical steps* (IVP 2005); *Baptism, Belonging and Breaking Bread: Preparing for Baptism* (Baptist Union 2010); *Leading Teams in Larger Churches* (2010): www.teal.org.uk; *A Retreat Lectionary* (Society of Mary & Martha 2012); *Church Matters: Creative Ideas for Mission and Ministry* (Amazon 2016).

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