



The Work of Shepherds

Readings, Meditations, and Prayers

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The Work of Shepherds
Readings, Meditations, and Prayers
*Columbanus, Gregory the Great, John Calvin,
and J. Gresham Machen on Shepherding*

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Foreword

God calls us to build Christ's Church, and to do so His way, not ours.

Christ's way of building His Church involves shepherding the flock of God, providing pastoral leadership and oversight so that all members increase in the image of Christ, and the local church grows in unity and maturity in the Lord.

If we try to grow our churches in any other way, we will not succeed. We may add lots of members or attenders, offer many interesting and perhaps useful programs, and provide an overall sense of wellbeing for many people. But we will only build Christ's Church in the way He intends if we follow His directions and shepherd the flock over which He has appointed us as overseers.

What that work entails is the subject of this *Morning and Evening* series. Using excerpts from four widely-respected shepherds of God's flock, we will discover more of what God expects from shepherds today as they exercise diligence in knowing the condition of, and caring for their flocks.

We hope you find these readings helpful, and that you will share them with other shepherds. The Good Shepherd calls us as shepherds together with Him, and in His Spirit, to grow His churches through this important and indispensable labor. May His blessings abide on you as you consider more carefully through these readings what the work of shepherding requires of you.

T. M. Moore

The Work of Shepherds

Day 1: Morning

Take Heed to Yourself

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. 1 Timothy 4.16

Sermon IX

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“Wherefore let us know nothing more profitable for ourselves than to examine ourselves daily, every day of our life reviewing that dubious life, and keeping account of our words and thoughts, and shuddering at human life, to ponder without ceasing this aforesaid end of the roadway, that is our life, while we spurn the pleasures of the world.”¹

The work of shepherding begins in our own souls. A shepherd must watch over his mind, heart, and conscience to ensure that he is growing into the mind of Christ, maturing in the heart of God, and valuing the priorities of righteousness. We cannot properly care for the flock of the Lord if we aren’t caring for the little flock which is our soul. It’s a good idea to include in our regimen of spiritual disciplines an ongoing self-watch, so that we are diligent in heeding Paul’s exhortation to make the best use of our time (Eph. 5.15-17). A workable self-watch will involve careful planning, waiting on the Lord in prayer, and being accountable to others for our lives and ways. The shepherd who will not practice a self-watch will be in danger, both personally and in his teaching, of straying from the way of the Lord or, at least, failing to realize His fullness in life and ministry. And such straying can only redound to the detriment of those we are called to serve. Take up a self-watch, brethren, examining yourself daily, spurning the pleasures of the flesh as you seek the Kingdom not of this world.

How do you practice a self-watch? Do you have people around you who hold you accountable for your walk and your work?

Lord, send me a soul friend with whom I can...

¹ All quotations are from G. S. M. Walker, ed., *Sancti Columbani Opera* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1957), pp. 61 ff.

Day 1: Evening

Live to Christ

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians 2.20

Sermon X

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“Thus let us live to Him Who while He dies for us is life; and let us die to ourselves that we may live to Christ; for we cannot live to Him unless first we die to ourselves, that is, to our wills. Let us be Christ’s and not our own; for we are not our own, for we are bought at a great price, and truly a great one, when the Lord is given for a slave, a King for a servant, and God for man.”

The work of a shepherd is to lead and direct the Lord’s flock into the green pastures and beside the still waters that are found in the presence of Christ. As Paul reminds us, we are to teach, admonish, equip, and make disciples, so that we might present all those entrusted to us “complete in Christ” (Col. 1.28). But we must make sure that we ourselves are growing into Christ, so that those who follow us will not be led astray. Living to Christ means that we live for His Kingdom, by His Word, in His Spirit, and within His walk. We seek the lost as He did. We lay down our lives for the sheep. We deny ourselves and take up the form of a servant to defend and care for His flock. We devote ourselves to building His Church. We seek only the Father’s glory, and none of our own. We proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom and pray daily, “Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, O God, be done.” Let living for Christ be the hallmark of our lives, and that hallmark will be more likely to mark the lives of those we shepherd as well.

Are you living to Jesus? How do you prepare each day to die to yourself and live to Christ?

As I reflect back on this day, think about living for You, Lord Jesus, I...

Day 2: Morning

Dying to Live

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Romans 6.1, 2

Sermon X

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“What ought we to render ourselves, if the Creator of the universe for us ungodly men, yet His creation, is unjustly put to death? Do you think you ought not to die to sin? Certainly you ought. Therefore let us die, let us die for the sake of life, since Life dies for the dead, so that we may be able to say with Paul, I live, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me...”

We are no longer surprised by reports of yet another shepherd who has fallen into sinful behavior. Scandals created by pastoral leaders in recent years have made the Church an object of scorn among the lost and an excuse for the faithful to keep a low profile in their witness for Christ. God calls us to pursue holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 7.1). The failure of pastors to take this call seriously is a primary reason for the Church’s increasing marginalization. Peter and Paul both commanded the shepherds of God’s flock to pay close attention to their own lives, that they might present examples of holiness for the Lord’s sheep to follow. By being continuously filled with the *Holy* Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21), and meditating day and night on the *holy* and righteous and good Law of God (Ps. 1), we may expect to die to our sinful selves, learn Jesus, and be clothed with Him day by day (Eph. 4.17-24). This alone is the proper garb of shepherds.

How do you guard yourself against the many temptations that assail pastors today? Are you pursuing holiness in the fear of God?

Keep me alert to temptation today, Lord, and help me to...

Day 2: Evening

Forcing the Kingdom

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.” Luke 16.16

Sermon X

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“Thence we now force the kingdom of heaven by strength and violence, and this we snatch somehow, as it were, from amidst our enemies’ hands in the middle of the field of strife, and as it were in the blood-stained soil of battle, while we are too hardly assailed not only by our foes but by ourselves, while each loves himself ill, and in the act of loving hurts himself; for he loves well who hates, that is, disciplines himself savingly; but he who makes terms with his foes is not said to love himself aright.”

Jesus described the true Kingdom-seeker as a “violent” person who takes the Kingdom “by force” (Matt. 11.12). He saw people “pressing” to get into the Kingdom, striving mightily to lay hold on the promises of God that result in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1.4; Rom. 14.17, 18). Would we describe today’s Christians as “violently” “pressing into” the Kingdom, seeking it as the highest priority in every area of their lives? And if they’re not, could it be because we aren’t leading them there as shepherds in the Lord’s flock? Columbanus applied this idea of pressing into the Kingdom to the disciplines we take up for subduing heart, mind, and conscience to Christ, and for training the members of our churches for godly living. The old self in us is set in its ways, and wants to persist in ruthless and destructive self-love. The Kingdom-dweller knows the destructive ways of the self, and bridles self with grace and truth, that it may be serviceable to the Lord and others. And this is a struggle, requiring a kind of spiritual violence and daily pressing that is not all that common among the members of Christ’s Body today.

When was the last time you reviewed your practice of spiritual disciplines, to enhance or improve the disciplining of your soul?

Today, Lord, I could have been more “violent” in...

Day 3: Morning

The Image of Christ

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.18

Sermon XI

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“Let us not be the painters of another’s image; for he is the painter of a despot’s image, who is fierce, wrathful, proud...For righteousness and unrighteousness, peace and disagreement are opposed to one another. Then lest perhaps we should import into ourselves despotic images, let Christ paint His image in us, as He does by saying, My peace I give you, My peace I leave to you. But what advantage is it for us to know that peace is good if it is not well preserved?”

Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit – these are the hallmarks of the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17). This is that glorious and holy *shalom* which Isaiah promised would increase without end, once King Jesus began to exert His rule on earth as it is in heaven (Is. 9.6, 7). These are the hallmarks of that Kingdom for the simple reason that they reflect the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose very *being* we partake of as we live toward the precious and very great promises of God (1 Pet. 1.4; 2 Cor. 1.20). As we pursue righteousness in the fear of the Lord, rest in the peace of Jesus that passes all understanding, and rejoice in the victory that is ours in Christ, He “paints” His own image on the canvas of our lives, and we show Jesus to the watching world. Thus we become true shepherds, and the flock of the Lord can follow us to the green pastures and still waters of His joyous, pleasurable presence (Ps. 16.11).

In what specific ways have you observed growth in the image of Christ in your life over the past year?

Lord, as I think about the day ahead, let Your image come through in me by...

Day 3: Evening

Love is No Trouble

Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
Romans 13.10

Sermon XI

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“Love is no trouble; love is more pleasant, more healthful, more saving to the heart. For if the heart has not become enervated in its vices, love is its own health, besides being what is dear to God; yet nothing is dearer to God than love, especially spiritual love, since it is the sum of His law and of all His commands, according to that saying of the Apostle, But he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.”

Paul reminds us that the outcome we seek from all our preaching, teaching, and disciple-making – all our shepherding – is love (1 Tim. 1.5). Love is the hallmark of discipleship (Jn. 13.35), the first of the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5.22), the greatest of Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13.13), and the fulfillment of all the Law and the prophets (Matt. 22.34-40). It’s not enough for the people we serve merely to know sound doctrine, or to have their personal needs met, or to feel comfortable and content about their participation in church. We must fit them for love, shepherding them *by* love and *into* love, so that they might live *in* and *for* love in all their ways. And this should be “no trouble,” since it’s what the Lord is seeking, what the Spirit works to bring forth, what all people desire, and what we find to be the most fulfilling and satisfying way to live in relationship with others. Love is no trouble; it’s impossible – unless the Spirit of God works in us, beyond anything we’ve ever dared to ask or think, making us willing and able to love as God does (Eph. 3.20; Phil. 2.13). Because to love is no trouble for Him, Who is love itself (1 Jn. 4.8).

As you prepare to preach or teach, how do you remind yourself, and what do you do, in order to seek love as the outcome of instruction?

I want to love as You love me, O Lord. Thinking over the day now past, I see Your love to have been...

Day 4: Morning

Seek Our True Home

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God? Psalm 42.1, 2*

Sermon XIII

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“So still, my dearest brethren, give ear to our words, in the belief that you will hear something needful, and refresh the thirst of your mind from the streams of the divine fountain of which we now wish to speak, but do not quench that thirst, drink, but be not sated; for now the living Fountain, the Fountain of life, calls us to Himself, and says, Let Him that is athirst come unto Me and drink.”

Pastors sometimes complain to me that their people don't seem very hungry or thirsty for the things of the Lord. Sated on the junk food of getting-and-spending, generously ladled with pop culture, and a side of convenience and savory self-interest, God's people have little appetite for Christ or His Word. The solid food which Christ serves up to those who are mature is just not to their liking. And who would dare, like the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 5.12-6.9), chide their childishness and insist they press more diligently into the life of the Kingdom of our Lord? What about us, who are called to shepherd these lambs? Does our hunger and thirst for Christ make them long for the same? Do they see in us that earnest desire to be with the Lord, that tells them they're missing something of great moment? Do we extend the shepherd's crook of preaching and teaching to direct them to lush, green pastures and still waters of spiritual growth into Jesus? Or are we content to let them bleat for the milk of the Word, afraid we might bruise or alienate them by insisting they follow us along the upward path?

Who makes you hungry and thirsty for more of the Lord? How can you be help to encourage your people to drink deeply of Him?

Guide me today, Lord, to some brother I can encourage to...

Day 4: Evening

Art of Arts

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 1 Timothy 3.1

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intense meditation, learnt it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskillful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts! For who can be ignorant that the sores of the thoughts of men are more occult than the sores of the bowels? And yet how often do men who have no knowledge whatever of spiritual precepts fearlessly profess themselves physicians of the heart, though those who are ignorant of the effects of drugs blush to appear as physicians of the flesh!”²

The Greek word in our text which is translated *bishop* is *episkopos* and means *overseer*. It refers to those who are entrusted with shepherding the flocks of the Lord, watching over the souls of His people for their edification and God’s glory (Heb. 13.17). Because caring for the souls of God’s people is a good work – “the art of arts” – a pastor should at all times make certain first, that in his own soul, he is growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18), and second, that He looks to God’s Word for counsel in doing the good work of shepherding (2 Tim. 3.15-17). The “spiritual precepts” we need to flourish as shepherds will be found in Scripture, not in the best ideas of social science. Gregory’s handbook on pastoral rule is full of sound Biblical insight to guide us in the work of shepherding, and we will take an extensive look at his counsel there.

Are you confident that your present practice of spiritual disciplines is helping you to grow as much as you might or should?

Thank You for this day, Lord, and for the disciplines that help me...

² All quotations are from Gregory, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 12 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1895, 1995).

Day 5: Morning

Know the Lord!

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17.3

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“The unskillfulness of shepherds is rebuked by the voice of the Truth, when it is said through the prophet, *The shepherds themselves have not known understanding* (Isai. lvi.11); whom again the Lord denounces, saying, *And they that handle the law knew Me not* (Jer. ii.8). And therefore the Truth complains of not being known of them, and protests that He knows not the principality of those who know not Him; because in truth these who know not the things of the Lord are unknown of the Lord...”

The work of shepherds consists of helping the people of God connect with Him – to know, love, fear, and serve Him in every area of their lives. The shepherd leads his sheep into the green meadows and beside the still waters which are in the presence of Christ, where we know fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11), and are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3.12-18). This work of shepherding cannot be fulfilled by one who is merely a good speaker, an effective organizer, or an inspiring motivator. This work must be done by one who *truly knows the Lord*. For only those who know the Lord, and enjoy regular and deep communion with Him, can lead others into His presence, and teach them to delight in Him. Let us press on then, brethren, to increase in the knowledge of God and Christ (2 Pet. 3.18), for this is eternal life, and the *sine qua non* for fruitful shepherding.

What do you consider to be the bare-bones components of a life of growing in the knowledge of God?

I want to know You better, Lord, beginning today. Help me throughout this day to...

Day 5: Evening

Leading to the Precipice?

And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." Luke 6.39, 40

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

"There are some who investigate spiritual precepts with cunning care, but what they penetrate with their understanding they trample on in their lives: all at once they are teaching the things which not by practice but by study they have learnt; and what in words they preach by their manners they impugn. Whence it comes to pass that when the shepherd walks through steep places, the flock follows to the precipice."

The Apostles acknowledged three tools for doing the work of shepherding: The Word of God, prayer, and personal example (Acts 6.4; 1 Pet. 5.1-3). These three must be used effectively, and in balance. We cannot shepherd the flock of God by the ministry of the Word alone. Preaching is important, but preaching alone will not get the Lord's flock to where He wants it to be. Nor will prayer, or prayer and the Word alone, enable us to fulfill the noble task and good work of shepherding. We need to live the life of faith with vision, joy, power, courage, consistency, and holiness, so that what we preach and how we pray will lift the flock we serve to the heights to which we aspire, and toward which we journey together. What do you long and pray for your people to become? To know of the Lord? To do in serving Him? See to it these things are in your life, then preach them and pray for your people to follow as you lead.

How does your own personal example figure into the work of making disciples in your ministry?

Lord, looking back on the day, I think my example for others was...

Day 6: Morning

The Example of the Savior

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“For who could so blamelessly have had principality over men as He who would in fact have reigned over those whom He had Himself created?...He fled from the offered glory of pre-eminence, but desired the pain of an ignominious death; that so His members might learn to fly from the favours of the world, to be afraid of no terrors, to love adversity for the truth’s sake, and to shrink in fear from prosperity; because this often defiles the heart through vain glory, while that purges it through sorrow; in this the mind exalts itself, but in that, even though it had once exalted itself, it brings itself low...”

Jesus set the example for the shepherds of His flock by following a course of self-denial, sacrificial giving, and devoted service to the needs of others. He eschewed all honors of men and never sought any material advantage from His efforts. He cultivated and sustained a rich spiritual life, and resisted every temptation to sin. He laid down His life for His sheep, and loved them to the end of His days. Paul followed in His example, and he commanded us to do the same. Shepherding God’s flock is hard work. It requires firm commitment, daily revival, and growing attention to all the skills and demands of the work. We must guard our hearts and lives against seeing pastoral ministry as a means to personal gain. Instead, let us always be emptying ourselves, dying to ourselves, and sacrificing our own convenience for the sake of God’s flock (Phil. 2.5-11).

In what specific ways do you try to follow the example of Christ in shepherding His flock?

Today, Lord, I will have many opportunities to deny myself and serve others. Help me to keep in mind that...

Day 6: Evening

Seek the Gifts of a Pastor

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 2 Timothy 1.6

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“For there are some who are eminently endowed with virtues, and for the training of others exalted by great gifts, who are pure in zeal for charity, strong in the might of abstinence, filled with the feasts of doctrine, humble in the long-suffering of patience, erect in the fortitude of authority, tender in the grace of loving-kindness, strict in the severity of justice. Truly such as these, if when called they refuse to undertake offices of supreme rule, for the most part deprive themselves of the very gifts which they received not for themselves alone, but for others also; and, while they meditate their own and not another’s gain, they forfeit the very benefits which they desire to keep to themselves.”

Read over again that list of “virtues” and “gifts” required of those who are called to pastoral ministry. Do these describe you? Charitable to a fault? Abstaining from the lusts of the flesh? Feasting on doctrine? Patient, wielding authority justly; gracious and kind? Gregory sought such men to serve as pastors in the Church, and he urged those already serving as shepherds to work hard at seeking and cultivating these virtues and gifts. What guidelines do you pursue for your own growth in the Lord and in His calling? Which virtues are you working to cultivate? How are you increasing in love for God and your neighbors? Which gifts do you strive always to improve? How are you growing into Christ? We who are pastors and shepherds must diligently seek such virtues and gifts as Gregory commends, for the work of shepherding God’s flock requires them.

What plan for ongoing personal growth and pastoral development do you presently follow?

As I reflect on the past several weeks, I think I’m growing in...

Day 7: Morning

The Character of a Shepherd

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous... 1 Timothy 3.2, 3

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“That man, therefore, ought by all means to be drawn with cords to be an example of good living who already lives spiritually, dying to all the passions of the flesh; who disregards worldly prosperity; who desires only inward wealth; whose intention the body, in good accord with it, thwarts not at all by its frailness, nor the spirit greatly by its disdain: one who is not let to covet the things of others, but gives freely of his own; who through the bowels of compassion is quickly moved to pardon, yet is never bent down from the fortress of rectitude by pardoning more than is meet; who perpetrates no unlawful deeds, yet deploras those perpetrated by others as though they were his own; who out of affection of heart sympathizes with another’s infirmity, and so rejoices in the good of his neighbor as though it were his own advantage; who so insinuates himself as an example to others in all he does that among them he has nothing, at any rate of his own past deeds, to blush for...”

I have for many years participated in ordination counsels and examinations for men wanting to become ministers of the Gospel. We ask many questions, some of which are focused on their experience of Christ, but most of which are directed at their knowledge of Scripture, theology, and church order. Gregory did not begin at that point. He wanted men of excellent spiritual character and demonstrated gifts. Such men, he knew, could grow in knowledge; men of *mere* knowledge, however, might easily ruin a flock by their faithless lives.

Do you have anyone in your life who holds you accountable for spiritual growth?

Today, Lord, help me to focus on improving my walk with you by...

Day 7: Evening

Take Heed to Yourself!

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. 1 Timothy 4.16

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“Wherefore let every one measure himself wisely, lest he venture to assume a place of rule, while in himself vice still reigns unto condemnation; lest one whom his own guilt depraves desire to become an intercessor for the faults of others...For that man is blind indeed who is unacquainted with the light of supernal contemplation, who, whelmed in the darkness of the present life, while he beholds not at all by loving it the light to come, knows not whither he is advancing the steps of his own conduct.”

Paul insisted that maintaining a healthy self-watch is every shepherd’s duty – not merely for his own sake, but for those he is called to serve. By persisting in keeping a close watch over our own lives, as well as our teaching, we may expect the Lord to bring more of the fruit of salvation to us, and to His people through us. Absent such a diligent, persistent self-watch, what hope can we have of His blessing? That self-watch requires time in silence before the Lord, immersed in “supernal contemplation” and listening for the Spirit to convict, counsel, and direct us for growth and service (Ps. 139.23, 24; Jn. 16.8-11). When we love and keep this time of waiting on the Lord, we may confidently expect Him to bring forth of His goodness into our lives and work (cf. Ps. 27.11-14).

How do you practice this discipline of the self-watch?

Tomorrow, Lord, let me begin or improve my discipline of the self-watch. Show me how to...

Day 8: Morning

The Conduct of a Pastor

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock... 1 Peter 5.2, 3

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“The conduct of a prelate ought so far to transcend the conduct of the people as the life of a shepherd is wont to exalt him above the flock. For one whose estimation is such that the people are called his flock is bound anxiously to consider what great necessity is laid upon him to maintain rectitude.”

Pastors have three tools to employ in the work of shepherding: The Word of God, prayer, and their personal example (Acts 6.4; 1 Pet. 5.1-3). The skillful pastor knows how to use these tools consistently, appropriately, and in the proper combination in every situation. Our work may be *informed* by other resources beyond these – books, courses, conferences and the like – and we may, indeed, *employ* such resources in equipping the flock of God. But any tools beyond prayer, the Word, and our personal example must always be extensions of our pastoral tools, and not substitutes for them. The first discipline of shepherding, as Jesus explained, is knowing those entrusted to our care, and being known by them (Jn. 10.11). No shepherd can know all his sheep. He needs other shepherds, whom he shepherds, to work with him, so that the shepherds know all the sheep, and all the sheep know a shepherd. As we use the tools of prayer and the Word to hone the tool of our personal example, we may expect the rectitude of Jesus to be increasingly visible in us. Thus, as those we shepherd come to know us, they grow in the knowledge of Jesus as well.

Do the people you shepherd see enough of your life to know whether they want to be like you in following Jesus?

Let me talk with another shepherd today, Lord, about...

Day 8: Evening

Chief in Action

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 2 Timothy 4.5

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“The ruler should always be chief in action, that by his living he may point out the way to those that are put under him, and that the flock, which follows the voice and manners of the shepherd, may learn how to walk better through example than through words. For he who is required by the necessity of his position to speak the highest things is required by the same necessity to exhibit the highest things.”

The function of a leader, Jim Kennedy used to say, is to lead. In leading we must know where we’re trying to go, what obstacles or hindrances threaten our journey, and how best to bend all our efforts to achieve our objective. If the goal of our instruction is love (1 Tim. 1.5), and the pursuit of our lives is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6.33), then the people we serve should be able to see the *evidence* of these priorities in all our demeanor. And if we want the people we serve to be *active* in sharing the Gospel with their neighbors, friends, and co-workers, then we must show ourselves to be “chief in action” here as well, making time each week for seeking the lost and proclaiming the Good News. If we set the right example, the people who follow will mark their paths by the trail we blaze.

Meditate on 1 Timothy 1.5, Matthew 6.33, Acts 1.8, and 2 Corinthians 7.1. To what extent do these great objectives describe the example you set for the people you serve?

I look back at my actions today, Lord, and I realize that...

Day 9: Morning

Defending the Sheep

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." John 10.11-13

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

"Now to go up against the enemy is to go with free voice against the powers of this world for defence of the flock; and to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord is out of love of justice to resist bad men when they contend against us. For, for a shepherd to have feared to say what is right, what else is it but to have turned his back in keeping silence."

Every day the people of God are assaulted by false worldviews and dangerous temptations. Unless they are equipped to recognize and resist these, they may fall prey to unbelieving ways – if not in what they profess, then in what they practice. The pastor's job is to defend his sheep against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to confront all false teaching and lies with the truth of God. In prayer, we seek the Great Shepherd's care for His flocks, as the Spirit works to form Jesus in them. By the Word of God, we preach, teach, counsel, and otherwise equip God's people for good works to His glory. And our example of hating sin and loving truth will certainly affect those we serve in positive ways. We must make sure that we know the people entrusted to us, and that we understand the times, or we will not know what to do in defending the flock of God (1 Chron. 12.32).

How do you keep up with the worldview developments of our secular and unbelieving age?

Lord, help me to pay more attention to ways of the world, but only so that...

Day 9: Evening

Things Weak and High

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6.2

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“The ruler should be a near neighbour to every one in sympathy, and exalted above all in contemplation, so that through the bowels of loving-kindness he may transfer the infirmities of others to himself, and by loftiness of speculation transcend even himself in his aspiration after the invisible; lest either in seeking high things he despise the weak things of his neighbours, or in suiting himself to the weak things of his neighbours he relinquish his aspiration after high things.”

Pastors need a lot of time for contemplating the exalted Christ, seeking the face of Jesus and the glory of God revealed there, so that they might have the strength to minister to the needs of those in their charge (2 Cor. 4.6). How much time do you spend contemplating Jesus during the week? To give ourselves so much to the work of ministry that we neglect contemplation will ultimately not help those we serve. To be merely contemplative, without also living out the kindness and love of Christ, is equally unacceptable. The minister must strive to maintain a balance of each, but that balance must begin in seeking the face of Jesus, and the glory revealed there (Ps. 27.8; Col. 3.1-3). From the high and lofty things of Jesus, we may descend to the weak and needy lives of those we serve, to lift them upon that Rock on high once again.

Is the amount of time you spend contemplating Christ sufficient to give you the loving-kindness you need for ministry?

Lord, let me lay down tonight in a bright and increasingly clear vision of You, exalted and...

Day 10: Morning

Trustworthy

You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe... 1 Thessalonians 2.10

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“But those who are over others should shew themselves to be such that their subjects may not blush to disclose even their secrets to them; that the little ones, vexed with the waves of temptation, may have recourse to their pastor’s heart as to a mother’s breast, and wash away the defilement they foresee to themselves from the filth of the sin that buffets them in the solace of his exhortation and in the tears of prayer.”

It takes trust to come to your pastor with the deepest needs and fears of your soul, and trust does not come naturally. Trust must be earned, and it is earned by showing ourselves to be trustworthy. What kind of person are you most likely to trust? A good listener? One who is instant in prayer, and who depends on God’s Word for insight, direction, comfort, and hope? A reliable confidant? Pastors must build trust through faithful prayer, careful preaching, an exemplary lifestyle, and a devotion to shepherding as their ministry template. As those we serve get to know us, they will realize that they can unburden themselves to us, and be assured that we will help them bear that burden before the Lord together. By working hard to get to know our flock, and letting them know us, we may hope to gain their confidence, so that we may serve them at just those moments when they most need our counsel, exhortations, and prayers.

Meditate on Paul’s word to the Thessalonians: Is this how your people would describe your relationship with them?

How can I become more worthy of the trust of Your people, Lord? Show me today, and give me an opportunity to...

Day 10: Evening

Correcting in Love

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3.16, 17

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“Supreme rule, then, is ordered well, when he who presides lords it over vices, rather than over his brethren. But, when superiors correct their delinquent subordinates, it remains for them anxiously to take heed how far, while in right of their authority they smite faults with due discipline, they still, through custody of humility, acknowledge themselves to be on a par with the very brethren who are corrected; although for the most part it is becoming that in our silent thought we even prefer the brethren whom we correct to ourselves.”

Part of the ministry of the Word requires that we correct those who are in error – whether they are staff members, elders or deacons, teachers, or people in any leadership role, and whether the error be of doctrine or of life. But we must not do this in an imperious way, parading our superior knowledge or showing-up someone before others. Rather, we most effectively correct others when we do so by loving them as ourselves. Thus, we will approach them with humility and encouragement, looking not so much to indict a shortcoming as to reveal a path to fuller growth into the Lord. We may ask a question, to make sure we’ve rightly discerned the need for correction. Then we should look to the Word together, and let it speak into the situation which needs amending. Let the Word and Spirit do the hard work, while we surround our errant brother with support, affirmation, and love.

What have you found to be helpful ways of approaching those who are in error, so that they receive your correction and take up a more Biblical pattern of behavior?

Thank You, Lord, that when I need correction, You...

Day 11: Morning

Within, Without

*Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life.* Proverbs 4.23

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“The ruler should not relax his care for the things that are within in his occupation among the things that are without, nor neglect to provide for the things that are without in his solicitude for the things that are within; lest either, given up to the things that are without, he fall away from his inmost concerns, or, occupied only with things that are within, bestow not on his neighbours outside himself what he owes them.”

This advice applies both to our own growth and ministry, as we saw in an earlier excerpt, and to what we seek to nurture in others as well. Frequently, we might think that getting someone through some program, so that he gains some outward skill or ability or qualification, is what matters most. But without the *inner* strength to deny himself and take up the work of ministry, his *outer* skills won't be worth the effort he made to acquire them. And if we neglect to direct the flock in specific *outward* ways of loving one another, all their *inner* growth will be consumed on themselves and without abiding fruit. The more we work at this in our own lives, the more we will insist, encourage, and lead those we serve to do the same. As Paul explained, practicing an ongoing self-watch can benefit both us and those we serve (1 Tim. 4.16).

How do you determine whether the people you serve are growing inwardly? In their personal ministries?

Am I growing inwardly, Lord? I'll know that I am today as I...

Day 11: Evening

The Love of Men

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 1 Thessalonians 2.4

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“Meanwhile it is also necessary for the ruler to keep wary watch, lest the lust of pleasing men assail him; lest, when he studiously penetrates the things that are within, and providently supplies the things that are without, he seek to be beloved of those that are under him more than truth; lest, while supported by his good deeds, he seems not to belong to the world, self-love estrange him from his Maker. For he is the Redeemer’s enemy who through the good works which he does covets being loved by the Church instead of Him...”

Shepherds always face the temptation to want to please the people they serve. We should please them, of course, but only to the extent that our ministry brings them into the presence of Him Who is the fullness of joy and pleasure forever more (Ps. 16.11). We go awry when we bend our efforts and instruction to draw the love of church members principally to ourselves, rather than to God, or when we love their plaudits and compliments more than God’s truth. Only the Spirit can bring life to the people of God, and He does so through the ministry of truth, selflessly employed by shepherds seeking nothing more than the edification of God’s flock and the glory of His Name. Do you know how to recognize the signs of man-pleasing?

How do you guard against wanting to be loved more by the people you serve than the Truth by which you serve them?

Show me, Lord, if in any area of my life I am seeking to please people rather than You, and I...

Day 12: Morning

To Expose the Enemy

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. Ephesians 5.11

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“For indeed it is the duty of a ruler to shew by the voice of preaching the glory of the supernal country, to disclose what great temptations of the old enemy are lurking in this life’s journey, and to correct with great asperity of zeal such evils among those who are under his sway as ought not to be gently borne with; lest, in being too little incensed against faults, of faults he be himself held guilty.”

There has been a drift in preaching these days away from confronting sin toward comforting and encouraging the faithful. We prefer not to *unsettle* the saints any more than is necessary, lest they *settle* themselves in some other congregation in town. But comforting and confronting must go hand in hand; for we can give no true comfort or encouragement to those who insist on holding to their sinful ways. Unless pastors are willing to preach against sin, they will, Gregory says, bear the responsibility for all the sin that ravages the souls of their flock. And they may find themselves falling prey to the very faults they tolerate in others. Better to face sin boldly, and call for repentance, than to allow it harbor in the heart of the Church (Ps. 66.18).

Why do you think pastors are reluctant to “correct with great asperity of zeal” the sins of their people? Could this be related to yesterday’s warning against wanting to be loved by men more than by God?

Lord, correct the sin in my life! Help me today to...

Day 12: Evening

To Love the Spiritual Country

Oh, how I love Your law!

It is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119.97

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“But all this is duly executed by a ruler, if, inspired by the spirit of heavenly fear and love, he meditate daily on the precepts of Sacred Writ, that the words of Divine admonition may restore in him the power of solicitude and of provident circumspection with regard to the celestial life, which familiar intercourse with men destroys; and that one who is drawn to oldness of life by secular society may by the aspiration of compunction be ever renewed to love of the spiritual country.”

Pastors need daily time for meditating on Scripture, apart from any of their work of preaching and teaching. It often happens that a pastor's time in the Word becomes so commingled with his preparations that he fails to hear the voice of God speaking to his own soul. His time in Scripture lacks the personal focus he needs to keep growing in the Lord. Consequently, what he offers the flock of God will be little more than information, without much in the way of transformation. We must ever renew our vision of the unseen realm, and listen in silence as the Spirit, using the Word, teaches us what we must do to further prepare for our journey to eternal glory.

How would you explain your practice of meditating on Scripture to one just embarking on pastoral ministry?

*I long to see You more clearly, Lord, and that heavenly City for which I am bound.
Help me to...*

Day 13: Morning

Discernment in Teaching

...to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9.20-22

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“Since, then, we have shewn what manner of man the pastor ought to be, let us now set forth what manner he should teach. For as long before us Gregory Nazianzen of reverend memory has taught, one and the same exhortation does not suit all, inasmuch as neither are all bound together by similarity of character...Therefore according to the quality of the hearers ought the discourse of teachers be fashioned, so as to suit all and each for their several needs, and yet never deviate from the art of common edification.”

This quote introduces a lengthy section in which Gregory, with great wisdom, explains how to apply the Word of God to various types of people. His focus here is on application, and on leading Christians to a fuller experience of eternal life through the ministry of the Word. Gregory assumes that pastors will know their flock well, and thus be able to apply the Word to their situations and needs with great care and effect. Being effective in the application sections of a sermon requires that we “preach through to the ground,” to where our people live and serve day by day. And we cannot do this unless we know our people, and something about their individual callings, challenges, opportunities, and struggles.

How specific are the applications you make of your preaching and teaching? Specific enough to induce real change in those needing it?

Today, Lord, I would take steps to know the people I serve better. Help me as I...

Day 13: Evening
Stir Up Love

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...
Hebrews 10.24

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“Differently to be admonished are they who do not even begin good things, and those who in no wise complete such as they have begun. For as to those who do not even begin good things, for them the first need is, not to build up what they may wholesomely love, but to demolish that wherein they are wrongly occupied. For they will not follow the untried things they hear of, unless they first come to feel how pernicious are the things that they have tried...”

Gregory understood that redemption is unto good works (Eph. 2.10), and he knew it was the pastor’s job to stir up those who were not inclined to good works in such a way as to get them started. First, he insisted, you must show them that they’re wasting their time on useless, even “pernicious” matters, if they are not occupied with the good works of the Kingdom. Then you can begin to exhort them to the works God has prepared for them from of old. Gregory did not hesitate to instruct his pastors to urge and exhort and direct and *insist* their people take up good works as the proper expression of God’s grace and truth.

Preachers who do this are often gossiped about as “meddlers” because they call their people to lives of good works. Are you a meddlesome preacher? Should you be?

Thank You, Lord, for the good works of believers I have seen today, especially...

Day 14: Morning

Finish What You Start!

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. 2 Corinthians 9.5

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“But, on the other hand, those who in no wise complete the good things they have begun are to be admonished to consider with cautious circumspection how that, when they accomplish not their purposes, they tear up with them even the things that had been begun...If then the strong hand of the worker carry not on to perfection the good things begun, the very slackness in working fights against what has been wrought.”

The Corinthians had promised to help with the relief of the believers in Judea, but they had not performed their promise. Like many believers today, who make all kinds of confessions and pledges, but carry through on precious little of any of them. People don't typically do what you *expect*; they do what you *inspect*. So Paul was sending “the brothers” ahead of him to get the gift ready and help the Corinthians finish what they had started. Believers need to be continually exhorted to run their race, not to grow weary in doing good works, and to persevere in obedience. We know how easy it is to start something new, but how hard it can be to bring it to completion. True shepherds will continue to lead their flocks until the good works God is looking for come increasingly to light.

What does your own example say to the people you serve about finishing what you start?

Lord, I have some unfinished business today, so help me...

Day 14: Evening

The Ministry of Example (Again)

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Peter 5.2, 3

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“But in the midst of these things we are brought back by the desire of charity to what we have already said above; that every preacher should give forth a sound more by his deeds than by his words, and rather by good living imprint footsteps for men to follow than by speaking shew them the way to walk in.”

Life is a mine field, strewn with temptations, trials, and potential disasters of various kinds. The skilled shepherd knows his way around these obstacles, and he will “imprint footsteps for men to follow” so that they can continue on the path of the Lord. The Word of God, prayer, and our personal example: these are the tools pastors have for ministry. These are the resources we bring to bear on the task of equipping the saints for the work of ministry unto the building-up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4.11, 12). We must wield them all consistently and effectively. Yet if we do not excel in the use of our own example, our use of prayer and Scripture will not have as much power as they otherwise might.

In what ways do you lead by example in your own ministry? How do the people know that you walk with the Lord?

As I think back on the day, Lord, show me any ways I have...

Day 15: Morning

The Work of Ministers

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... Ephesians 4.11, 12

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“As to the pastors, whom the Scripture also sometimes calls elders and ministers, their office is to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and private, to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly corrections along with the elders and colleagues.”³

In 1538, after three stormy years in his first pastorate, John Calvin was run out of Geneva when he tried to impose order on the churches there. It was an inauspicious beginning to what would become a glorious ministry. Three years later, the situation in Geneva had so deteriorated, and the failure of the Gospel effort was in such disarray, that city leaders pled with Calvin to return from exile and help them. He did so, reluctantly, and immediately set about to bring order to the churches in the city. He composed the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* to outline a program of edification and pastoral care for the Christian people of Geneva. The next 26 years of his ministry made a worldwide impact for the Kingdom of God. Nothing good happens where things are left to chance or whim. Ours is a God of order, not chaos. He tells us what our work is, and how we should do it. And He has called us to shepherd His flock, equipping the saints for ministry as their daily calling in the Lord.

What are the most effective aspects – for the edification of the members of your church – of the order by which your church leaders conduct the ministry of your church? What needs improvement?

Lord, You have called me as a shepherd. Help me to be faithful in...

³ All quotations from John Calvin, “Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in J. K. S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises in The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 58ff.

Day 15: Evening

Qualifications of Ministers

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. Titus 1.7-9

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“The examination [of a candidate for ministry] contains two parts, of which the first concerns doctrine – to ascertain whether the candidate for ordination has a good and holy knowledge of Scripture; and also whether he be a fit and proper person to communicate it edifyingly to the people. Further to avoid all danger of the candidate holding some false opinion, it will be good that he profess his acceptance and maintenance of the doctrine approved by the Church...The second part concerns life, to ascertain whether he is of good habits and conducts himself always without reproach.”

As we have seen, the work of shepherding involves the use of three tools: The Word of God, prayer, and one’s personal example. Calvin understood this well. Men called to be shepherds (“bishops” as our text translates the word *overseer*) must be competent in the whole counsel of God, and consistent in their teaching with what has been handed down by our forebears in the faith. They also must be pious, gracious, and generous in giving of themselves for the care of God’s flocks. And – note that word, “maintenance” and the present tense of “conducts” – shepherds must be diligent to improve in these qualifications all their lives. We cannot shepherd the flock of the Lord in any way other than what He prescribes, and this means keeping a close and prayerful watch on our lives and teaching, and thus keeping all our tools in good working order.

What rule or procedure do you follow to be always improving in the Word, prayer, and your personal example?

Tomorrow, Lord, I plan to sharpen my tools by...

Day 16: Morning

Mutual Accountability

And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Galatians 2.2

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“Now as it is necessary to examine ministers well when they are to be elected, so also it is necessary to have good supervision to maintain them in their duty. First, it will be expedient that all the ministers, for conserving purity and concord of doctrine among themselves, meet together one certain day each week, for discussion of the Scriptures; and none are to be exempt from this without legitimate excuse.”

The Record of the Company of Pastors in Geneva during the time of Calvin provides fascinating reading and offers penetrating insights into the work of a body of ministers as they cared for the flock of God in their city. Ministers need other ministers for friendship, counsel, spiritual and moral accountability, and for improving their use of the various tools and gifts of ministry. In the local church, pastors and elders, or those who are called as shepherds in the flock, should pray, study, and worship together regularly. They should set goals for growth and ministry, and help and encourage one another in pursuing them. And they should show the way to the whole congregation by encouraging one another in love and good works (Heb. 10.24). Beyond the local church, shepherds within the larger community should find ways of being similarly accountable to one another. Where such accountability is lacking, the wellbeing of the Body of Christ suffers.

Do you meet with other ministers for ongoing mutual accountability? Would other ministers benefit from your meeting with them?

Lord, to whom am I accountable as Your shepherd? Help me to find...

Day 16: Evening

Shepherds of the Flocks

“But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the LORD.” Jeremiah 23.3, 4

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“[The] office [of the elders] is to have oversight of the life of everyone, to admonish amicably those whom they see to be erring or to be living a disordered life, and, where it is required, to enjoin fraternal corrections themselves and along with others.”

The people of Geneva elected the elders who would visit them in their homes and watch over them pastorally in their daily lives. Along with the pastors, the elders of Geneva were God’s shepherds over His flock in that city. Elders were to relate to their flocks “amicably” and in “fraternal” ways, not lording it over them or bullying them about. Elders are shepherds, and through Jeremiah, God signaled His intention of using shepherds to care for His sheep and build His Church. Churches that do not have such shepherds are not operating according to the order God intends for His churches. In John 10, Jesus outlined six important disciplines that He followed as the Good Shepherd. These must guide the work every shepherd in caring for the flocks of God.

Meditate your way through John 10. Can you identify the six disciplines of the work of a shepherd? Are your shepherds doing this work?

Lord, I pray for the shepherds of our church, that they...

Day 17: Morning

Servant Shepherds

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business...” Acts 6.3

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“There were always two kinds [of deacons] in the ancient Church, the one deputed to receive, dispense and hold goods for the poor, not only daily alms, but also possessions, rents and pensions; the other to tend and care for the sick and administer allowances to the poor. This custom we follow again now for we have procurators and hospitaliers.”

The word, *diakonos*, originally referred to those who waited tables, and who kept a close eye on the diners in their charge, to make sure that they lacked for nothing. Deacons are also shepherds, serving with pastors and elders, but their primary concern is with the *physical* and *material* needs of the congregation, whereas the pastors and elders pay attention to the *spiritual* condition of the people. Caring for the Lord’s flock requires shepherds of both sorts, as we see throughout the New Testament. Tim Keller’s excellent book on diaconal ministries, *Ministries of Mercy*, is must-reading for every pastor, deacon, and elder. His vision for the diaconate reflects the way Calvin practiced it in Geneva. Shepherds lovingly care for the needs of the flocks, and they are the model God chose to use in establishing the order by which His churches should grow.

How do the deacons in your church help with the physical and material needs of the congregation?

Lord, today I want to encourage our deacons. Help me to...

Day 17: Evening

Duties of the Deacons

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3.13

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“It will be [the deacons’] duty to watch diligently that the public hospital is well maintained, and that this be both for the sick and the old people unable to work, widowed women, orphaned children and other poor creatures...Moreover, care for the poor dispersed throughout the city should be revived, as the procurators may arrange it. Moreover, besides the hospital for those passing through which must be maintained, there should be some attention given to any recognized as worthy of special charity.”

We sometimes hear disquieting and foreboding comments about where the doctrines of Calvinism can lead. Harsh. Cold-hearted. Stern and puritanical, but without love. But looking at Calvin’s ministry shows us a more charitable, pastoral, and efficient work of caring for God’s flocks. Under the oversight of deacons, working with the pastors and elders, care for the poor, the sick, the elderly and orphaned, and the widowed came through the offerings of the people of God, not the civil government. Calvin worked all his ministry in Geneva to keep the magistrates *out* of the business of the Church, and he worked just as hard to make sure that the Church cared for her own. When all the shepherds work together according to God’s order, grace flows to and throughout the community, and the Body of Christ is more visible to the watching world.

Is there a correlation between the Church’s lack of effective order, community by community, and the growth of civil government?

I thank You, Lord, for the shepherds who serve Your flock in our town, that they may...

Day 18: Morning

Shepherds as Overseers

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 1 Timothy 3.1

Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances

John Calvin (1506-1564)

“The ministers must on their side enquire whether there be any lack or want of anything, in order to ask and desire the Seignury [civil government] to put it in order. To do this, some of their company with the procurators should visit the hospital every three months, to ascertain if all is in order.”

Notice that shepherds in Geneva were responsible to make sure that all was well with the flocks of God. As they visited people in their homes, they would discover spiritual and material needs, and then they could recommend courses of action or search out resources to help. They helped fathers instruct their wives and children, and they enlisted deacons, where required, to alleviate material needs. Their work also included advising the civil government where help was needed in areas related to their responsibilities. Mostly, however, the churches took care of matters on their own. This system of pastoral oversight and ecclesiastical order – shepherding the flocks of God – helped to make Calvin’s Geneva one of the great Christian cities of 16th-century Europe. Churches require effective pastoral care to flourish, and pastoral care cannot be exercised apart from the order God Himself prescribes in His Word.

What goals for growing the church under their care have your pastors, elders, and deacons adopted? How do they oversee their work to make sure those goals are being met?

Today, Lord, show me how I can encourage our church’s shepherds. Let me...

Day 18: Evening

History and Doctrine

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures... 1 Corinthians 15.3, 4

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name ‘gospel’ or ‘good news’ implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. ‘Christ died’ – that is history; ‘Christ died for our sins’ – that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.”⁴

It is fashionable among some Christians these days to minimize the importance of doctrine in favor of personal experience of the life of faith. But without sound doctrine, we have no basis for hoping that any true personal experience can be realized. And if the doctrine is faulty, the experience cannot be genuine, for we shall be seeking something other than what the apostles taught us to seek. It is the duty of shepherds to keep a close watch over both themselves and the doctrine informing those in their care (1 Tim. 4.16). Where sound doctrine is wanting, false doctrine will inevitably creep in, leading the Lord’s sheep not to green pastures, but to barren wastes, incapable of sustaining life.

Why do you think so that many believers today want nothing to do with doctrine?

I know doctrine matters, Lord, and I want to make sure the right doctrine is sustaining my ministry. So...

⁴ All quotations from J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1923, 1974).

Day 19: Morning

A Kingdom Gospel

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4.17

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

"The gospel which Jesus proclaimed in Galilee consisted in the proclamation of a coming Kingdom. But clearly Jesus regarded the coming of the Kingdom as an event, or as a series of events. No doubt He also regarded the Kingdom as a present reality in the souls of men; no doubt He represented the Kingdom in one sense as already present. We shall not really succeed in getting along without this aspect of the matter in our interpretation of Jesus' words."

The gospel preached in some quarters of the Christian Church comes a bit short of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God – the arrival in history of a new realm, a new era, and a new economy, ruled by a new King and administered by a new power, Who dwells within those who believe in Him. The gospel many proclaim today is directed at a kingdom of man, more specifically, of individual men and women and their wants, needs, or fears. It is a gospel of human wellbeing, rather than divine victory and glory – a gospel of "near" rather than "mere" Christianity – a gospel of "near Christianity" and not the Gospel of the Kingdom. Anything short of the Gospel of the Kingdom is not the Gospel Jesus preached, but another gospel altogether. They are not true shepherds who fail in urging the Kingdom on those entrusted to their care. By omitting, neglecting, or postponing the Kingdom, today's shepherds bar entrance to it on the part of God's sheep. To such shepherds, Jesus says, "Woe!" (Matt. 23.13)

What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? How consistent is your church in declaring this whole Gospel to the people you are called to serve?

Lord, seeking Your Kingdom and righteousness first today means...

Day 19: Evening

Dependent on the Past

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Romans 15.4

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“When it is once admitted that a body of facts lies at the basis of the Christian religion, the efforts which past generations have made toward the classification of the facts will have to be treated with respect. In no branch of science would there be any real advance if every generation started fresh with no dependence upon what past generations have achieved. Yet in theology, vituperation of the past seems to be thought essential to progress.”

Machen’s complaint was against liberal theologians, who dismissed the history of Christian doctrine and worked to recast all of Christianity into, first, a modernist, then, after Machen’s day, an existentialist mode. Now the fashion among many Christians is to dismiss the past contributions of our Christian forebears and to fit the faith into a postmodernist mindset, where relativism, individualism, narcissism, and tribalism define the terms of belief and practice. Paul insisted that the teaching of our forebears should be heeded, and we need the doctrinal work of those who have preceded us to understand the Scriptures aright. To neglect or dismiss the history of theology is as grave an error for shepherds in our day as it was in Machen’s.

But this means that shepherds have a duty to keep in touch with sound instruction from the past. How do you do this, to improve your walk with and work for the Lord?

I thank You, Lord, for those great thinkers and leaders from the past, who have...

Day 20: Morning

The Truth – All of It

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1.8

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“When a man takes his seat upon the witness stand, it makes little difference what the cut of his coat is, or whether his sentences are nicely turned. The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If we are to be truly Christians, then, it does make a vast difference what our teachings are, and it is by no means aside from the point to sit for the teachings of Christianity in contrast with the teaching of the chief modern rival of Christianity.”

Today, some church leaders want to present Christianity *in the garb* of Christianity’s chief modern rival, either in its rationalist or post-modernist expression. We embrace the trappings and tools of our secular age – management, marketing, pop culture, psychology, sociology, and so forth – and seek to live the life of sheep in the garments of wolves. But this is merely to confirm a preference for the spirit of the age over and against the timeless Gospel of the Kingdom and the Spirit and Word which alone bring life (Jn. 6.63). We must bear witness to the truth *against* the spirit of the age, and call the world to repentance from sin and folly to renewal in Jesus Christ. The truth is sufficient to equip us for every good work, but if we choose to do our work with the tools of our secular age, we should not be surprised when our churches prove ineffectual in turning our world rightside-up for Jesus.

Like the sons of Issachar, shepherds need to understand the times, so that they will know how to equip and lead their churches for the progress of the Kingdom (1 Chron. 12.32). How do you equip yourself to discern and respond to the spirit of the age?

How can I guard against the spirit of the age become for me the guiding spirit of my life? Lord, teach me to...

Day 20: Evening

Sin Matters

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2.38

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“According to the Bible, man is a sinner under the just condemnation of God; according to modern liberalism, there is really no such thing as sin. At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of the consciousness of sin.”

According to certain sectors of contemporary evangelical Christianity, sin exists, but we don’t need to get too worked up about it. After all, the Christian faith is all of grace. God knows we’re sinners, and He accepts us anyway. We should do the same for one another, without making people feel guilty by calling them to repent of their sins. Pastors who preach the Bible will not deny that such a thing as sin exists. But by neglecting to *preach* sin, and to call people to *repentance* from sin, we push the *consciousness* of sin to the back burners of people’s minds, and encourage them to think about other, more relevant, matters – such as feeling good about themselves. But there will be no progress in the life of faith apart from ongoing detection of and repentance from the sins that so easily beset us – whatever those sins may be. Sin is a cancer in the flock of the Lord, and faithful shepherds will work hard to eradicate it.

How would you counsel a young pastor to keep the matter of sin before the minds of his people?

I see plenty of sin in my own life, Lord. As I think back over the day...

Day 21: Morning

Reviving the Consciousness of Sin

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Romans 3.20

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“But how can the consciousness of sin be revived? Something no doubt can be accomplished by the proclamation of the law of God, for the law reveals transgressions. The whole of the law, moreover, should be proclaimed...But if the consciousness of sin is to be produced, the law must be proclaimed in the lives of Christian people as well as in the world. It is quite useless for the preacher to breathe out fire and brimstone from the pulpit, if at the same time the occupants of the pews go on taking sin very lightly and being content with the moral standards of the world.”

Sin is not just an abstract concept or a catalog of transgressions. It's not just a sense that something's wrong in my life, or that I'm in need of moral improvement. Sin is a lingering presence in the life of each one of us, and will continue there until we are taken up to glory. Thus, we shall have to struggle with sin daily, in very specific ways. It is the shepherd's responsibility to equip his people for this struggle and, when they are neglectful in this struggle, or find it difficult or distasteful, to attend them as a physician of their souls, so that they might repent and be restored. The shepherd who does not preach sin is leading his flock astray. And the shepherd who neglects to preach the Law of God will find restoring consciousness of sin a Sisyphean endeavor.

Do you agree? Are shepherds supposed to expect their people to grow past their sins into greater fullness of Jesus Christ? How should they help in this?

I want to be more conscious of my own sin, Lord. Today, help me to...

Day 21: Evening

Based on Doctrine

When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Matthew 9.13

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

"The fundamental fault of the modern Church is that she is busily engaged in an absolutely impossible task – she is busily engaged in calling the righteous to repentance. Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin...Even our Lord did not call the righteous to repentance, and probably we shall be no more successful than He."

We are not righteous by nature. We are not good by nature, or even good enough. We are called to be righteous, but that can only happen through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. People cannot make progress in righteousness – which is, after all, the Christian's calling (2 Cor. 7.1) – unless they are first made aware of the areas of *unrighteousness* that are holding them back. The Word of God is powerful to expose even the deepest of sins, but it must be proclaimed with that as one of its primary objectives. If people are not convicted of sin, what incentive will they have to press on for the upward prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? This is basic doctrine. This is life-changing doctrine.

In your understanding, what is involved in "bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God"? How does your church equip its members for this high calling?

Help me, Lord, to make the pursuit of holiness a more consistent part of my walk with You, beginning by...

Day 22: Morning

Different Foundations

*Your words were found, and I ate them,
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
For I am called by Your name,
O LORD God of hosts. Jeremiah 15.16*

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.”

Experience matters in the life of faith. To know Jesus Christ is to experience Him in us, with us, and through us in the everyday situations and circumstances of our lives. But to know Jesus so that we can experience Him this way, we must resort to the Scripture, which is all about Jesus (Jn. 5.39). We do not seek the *experience* of Jesus apart from the *knowledge* of Jesus, and we cannot hope to know Jesus apart from His Word. We are in danger of trying to make God in our own image when we allow the spirit of the age to dictate the terms of the faith. This was the mistake many liberal thinkers made in Machen’s day; it’s the same mistake certain evangelical pastors and thinkers are making in our own. We must not read the Bible with the eyes and passions of the world; quite the opposite. The duty of shepherds is to ensure the Lord’s flock is feeding on the Word, then joyfully living that Word for a changed world.

How would you advise a young preacher to include both knowing Jesus and experiencing Jesus as part of his preaching?

Lord, as I seek You in Your Word, help me to...

Day 22: Evening

The Object of Faith

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1.12, 13

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“The modern liberal preacher reverences Jesus; he has the name of Jesus forever on his lips; he speaks of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God; he enters, or tries to enter, into the religious life of Jesus. But he does not stand in a religious relationship to Jesus. Jesus for him is an example of faith, not the object of faith.”

It will do no good for people merely to admire Jesus as a good man, a shining example of pious and honorable living. Or to project into the contemporary social arena how we think a loving Jesus might feel and act with respect to this or that social or moral situation. Following Jesus begins in worshiping Him. It proceeds from there via obedience to His Word. Unless we fall down before Him and worship Him, we have no part in Him or His Kingdom. Unless we receive His Word and abide in it, we have no part in Him. No one ever had a higher regard for Jesus than the devil, but in refusing to worship Him, he condemned himself forever. Jesus is not merely our example; He is our Savior, King, and Shepherd. The shepherds of God’s flock must make sure that His sheep hear *His* voice, and follow *Him*.

How does your service of worship point people to Jesus as the object of their faith, and not just an example of it?

Heavenly Father, I would see Jesus more clearly, more consistently, and more truly. Help me to...

Day 23: Morning

Not Merely Our Inspiration

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 1 Timothy 1.15

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Saviour, not by virtue of what He said, not even by virtue of what He was, but by what He did. He is our Saviour, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross.”

We cannot follow Jesus if we will not face up to the fact of sin – our sins and the sins of our world. If we refuse to talk about sin in our preaching and teaching, we separate our doctrine, such as it will be, from the central aspects of the saving work of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life, to overcome sin and provide the righteousness we require to stand before God. He bore the punishment of our sins in His own body on the cross, that we might be free and forgiven in Him. He followed the holy and righteous and good Law of God to show us the path of righteousness and the way of Kingdom greatness (1 Jn. 2:1-6; Matt. 5:17-19). If we do not preach these central components of the work of Jesus, then we are preaching Jesus merely as an inspiring example or a trusted friend. And that’s *another* gospel, not the Gospel of the Kingdom.

How consistent are you, in your preaching and teaching, to bring in the work of Jesus as it relates to our sin?

Help me to encourage my fellow believers to look to Jesus for everything in life. Today let me...

Day 23: Evening

Keepers of the Narrow Way – or the Broad?

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8.4

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“...the Christian way of salvation is narrow only so long as the Church chooses to let it remain narrow. The name of Jesus is discovered to be strangely adapted to men of every race and of every kind of previous education. And the Church has ample means, with the promise of God’s Spirit, to bring the name of Jesus to all. If, therefore, this way of salvation is not offered to all, it is not the fault of the way of salvation itself, but the fault of those who fail to use the means that God has placed in their hands.”

The “come/see” attitude of many churches toward their neighbors makes the Gospel a *narrow* rather than a *broad* way. Instead of actively and consistently seeking the lost – as Jesus did (Lk. 19.10) – we try to encourage the lost to seek us, and we make adjustments and adaptations to our worship and church life so as to minimize the obstacles to their finding their way in. If the only way someone can hear the Good News is by coming to church, that’s a very narrow approach to evangelizing the lost. If instead we equip our people to go everywhere talking about Jesus, testifying about His grace, speaking of His Kingdom and rule, giving a reason for the hope that is within them, and calling on others to consider Him, then we have considerably broadened the ways that people may come to the Lord. The gate to eternal life is narrow, but the way must be broad. We must begin to recover our “go/tell” paradigm for reaching the lost, and the shepherds of the Lord must lead the way (cf. Jn. 10.16).

How are you training and leading your people to go everywhere preaching the word?

Am I faithful in seeking the lost, Lord? As I think about tomorrow, I pray for...

Day 24: Morning

Good Humor Men?

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 2 Timothy 4.2

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“The truth is, the God of modern preaching, though He may perhaps be very good, is rather uninteresting. Nothing is so insipid as indiscriminate good humor. Is that really love that costs so little? If God will necessarily forgive, no matter what we do, why trouble ourselves about Him at all? Such a God may deliver us from the fear of hell. But His heaven, if he has any, is full of sin.”

The first sermon of the Christian era left hearers deeply convicted and stabbed to the heart. They cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” They were desperate to be relieved of the burden of guilt for having participated – if only by ignorance – in the murder of God’s Son and Messiah, and in the practice of sin. Today people aren’t much convicted by our sermons. If they are, they might go somewhere else, where the preaching comforts and affirms, and does not presume to call them to repentance. So we try to be good humor men in the pulpit, telling stories, offering comfort and assurance, and being careful not to suggest that someone or some practice might be sinful. And even if sin is in our midst, we preach a Jesus of grace Who knows us and loves us anyway. And we do this, calling ourselves Bible-believing, evangelical Christians. We are not. We cannot lead the sheep to the green meadows and still waters of Jesus if we allow them to continue wallowing in filth of sin. Where are the shepherds who will lead us back to the right path?

How can you tell when your preaching is designed to convict people of sin? How can you tell when it actually does?

Show me my own sin, Lord, so that...

Day 24: Evening

A Gift that Moves Us

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2.10

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“Faith, then, according to the Christian view, means simply receiving a gift. To have faith in Christ means to cease trying to win God’s favor by one’s own character; the man who believes in Christ simply accepts the sacrifice which Christ offered on Calvary. The result of such faith is a new life and all good works; but the salvation itself is an absolutely free gift of God.”

Where true faith has been exercised, and the glorious gift of forgiveness and eternal life genuinely received, there a life of good works will follow. That our preaching these days does not urge this upon believers is obvious by the absence of abundant good works within the Christian community. We cannot truly know ourselves – wretched, blind, rebellious enemies of God – to have been saved by grace through faith, and not be overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and a desire to please and serve. Good works *issue* from salvation; they do not *eventuate* in it. But if good works are *not* issuing, then how can we know for certain that we have been saved (Heb. 6.1-9)? Liberals had it wrong by suggesting we could be saved by good works. Certain evangelical preachers and teachers have it wrong by suggesting we can be saved without them. Faithful shepherds know better.

Where do you point the people you serve in order to help them discover those “good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”?

Tomorrow, Lord, let me stimulate other believers to love and good works by...

Day 25: Morning

Continued by a Process

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling... Philippians 2.12

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“Thus the Christian life, though it begins by a momentary act of God, is continued by a process. In other words – to use theological language – justification and regeneration are followed by sanctification. In principle the Christian is already free from the present evil world, but in practice freedom must still be attained. Thus the Christian life is not a life of idleness, but a battle.”

Paul and Peter were insistent that true Christians will grow in their faith. Paul especially emphasized this. He was so concerned for the Corinthians, in fact, that, after two letters and two visits he still called on them – mere babes in Christ – to examine themselves and see whether they really had faith in the Lord (2 Cor. 13.5). Where the evidence of sanctification is lacking, we have both grounds and responsibility to ask about the genuineness of salvation. It is the duty of shepherds, watching over the souls of those entrusted to their care, to urge and lead and show and guide the Lord’s sheep into a greater experience of our great salvation, and bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1). The Christian life is a process, and faithful shepherds will work to make sure all the Lord’s sheep are in the process and moving along.

What is the danger in failing to urge church members to work out their salvation – engage the process of sanctification – in fear and trembling?

I want to encourage my fellow believers to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. Today, Lord, give me an opportunity to...

Day 25: Evening

Faith Working by Love

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. Galatians 5.6

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“...when it is said that faith works through love that means that through faith the necessary basis of all Christian work has been obtained in the removal of guilt and the birth of the new man, and that the Spirit of God has been received – the Spirit who works with and through the Christian man for holy living.”

The mark of the Christian, Francis Schaeffer explained, is love. Machen is correct in saying that love is the “necessary basis of all Christian work.” Any ministries, programs, workshops, or activities in our church not motivated *by* love and devoted to *promoting* love in those who participate, cannot be justified. Our redemption is unto good works (Eph. 2.10), but God’s sheep must be equipped for such a way of life by faithful shepherds who themselves walk in the way of love (Eph. 4.11, 12). The Spirit has been given to teach and empower us for good works of love, according to the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Rom. 7.12; Ezek. 36.26, 27; Matt. 22.34-40). Good works of love are not an option for the believer; nor can they be fulfilled by occasional participation in a program of the local church. Good works, in the power of God’s Spirit, are our calling as followers of Christ (Tit. 2.11-14). As shepherds, we must lead and equip God’s sheep for good works of love in every area of their Personal Mission Fields.

What opportunities for doing good in your community exist for the members of your church? How are you equipping them for these?

Lord, thank You for opportunities to do good works of love each day. As I think back on this day...

Day 26: Morning

Useful Things

And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 8.18, 19

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

"Christianity will indeed accomplish many useful things in this world, but if it is accepted in order to accomplish those useful things, it is not Christianity...if you seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness *in order that* all those other things may be added unto you, you will miss both those other things and the Kingdom of God as well."

Believing in Jesus is not a means to some temporal end – good health, prosperity, new friends, doing good, happiness. Believing in Jesus is an act of obedience to a divine command which insists that we desist from our self-seeking, self-serving ways, and give ourselves wholly to Jesus for whatever He desires to do with us. Anyone who comes to the Christian faith with any other motive is not coming to Christ, but to himself. And any shepherd who leads people to the Christian faith for any reason other than to see, know, love, obey, and serve Jesus our Good Shepherd and King, has got his priorities in a mess. The good works Christians do produce many useful things to help others know the touch of God's grace. But these are not to be sought as ends in themselves. Rather, we must seek Jesus and His Kingdom and righteousness; good works will flow when we are connected to and immersed in Him. Lead the sheep to Jesus, and teach them to feed there; He'll take care of the rest.

How do you, in your preaching and teaching, keep from allowing the benefits or fruit of Christian faith from becoming ends in themselves? How do you keep Christ central?

Keep me close to You today, Lord, by...

Day 26: Evening

Cast Behind Us?

But to the wicked God says:

"What right have you to declare My statutes,

Or take My covenant in your mouth,

Seeing you hate instruction

And cast My words behind you?" Psalm 50.16, 17

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

"...the evangelical Christian is not true to his profession if he leaves his Christianity behind him on Monday morning. On the contrary, the whole of life, including business and all of social relations, must be made obedient to the law of love. The Christian man certainly should display no lack of interest in 'applied Christianity.'"

Good works of love are not something we do merely as part of some program at church. The programs of the church must equip us for lives of good works in every arena, and with all the people among whom we have our "as you are goings" (Matt. 28.18-20). How much of what we teach in Sunday school, Bible study group, or other church programs has staying power on the ground in the everyday lives of God's sheep? As in ancient Israel, so today, there are people sitting in our pews each week who listen politely, sing along with the rest of the congregation, greet the pastor at the door, and promptly forget everything they've heard and done. Monday morning comes, and off the sheep go into their world, completely unchanged and hardly ever thinking about the application of the Gospel to the daily activities of their lives. God confronted such misguided sheep, to correct them, and to help them know the way to full and abundant life. Do we?

What means does your church employ to help your members live out their walk with the Lord day by day?

Help me live my faith out day by day, Lord. As I look ahead to tomorrow...

Day 27: Morning

How to Change the World

“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Acts 17.6

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“It is upon this brotherhood of twice-born sinners, this brotherhood of the redeemed, that the Christian founds the hope of society. He finds no solid hope in the improvement of earthly conditions, or the molding of human institutions under the influence of the Golden Rule...Human institutions are to be molded, not by Christian principles accepted by the unsaved, but by Christian men; the true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have themselves been redeemed.”

A primary responsibility of pastoral ministry must be discipling the men in the church to live and bear witness for Christ. This cannot be done in classrooms or by preaching alone. While these have their place, making disciples is much more personal, intensive, practical, and prayerful than what typical church programs provide. It's what Jesus did, and what He expects the shepherds of His flock to do, beginning with the men of the church. This is not to say that women don't matter; they do, and, in general, they respond to discipleship opportunities much more readily than men. Jesus chose men. Paul surrounded himself with men. Today's shepherds must do the same. If we want to change the world we must change the men of the church. And if we want to change them, we must change the way we are seeking to equip them for following Jesus.

Are the men of your church being equipped to turn your community upside down for Jesus Christ?

Lord, I pray for the men of my church, that...

Day 27: Evening

To Answer Each Person

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Colossians 4.6

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“There may have been a day when there could be propagation of Christianity without defence. But such a day at any rate is past. At the present time, when the opponents of the gospel are in control of our churches, the slightest avoidance of the defence of the gospel is just sheer unfaithfulness to the Lord...In such times of crisis, God has always saved the Church. But He has always saved it not by theological pacifists, but by sturdy contenders for the truth.”

Everywhere the Gospel of the Kingdom is under assault or being betrayed. The secular, unbelieving world cries out against the Gospel with scorn and alarm. And in the churches, various forms of “near Christianity” promise to satisfy human wants and needs, but do not necessarily or primarily honor Christ. Christians today have believed the Lie that their unsaved neighbors and associates are not interested in spiritual matters. We have become ensnared in a spiral of silence that prevents us from speaking boldly and consistently for Christ. And worst of all, we’re comfortable there, enjoying our spiritual hot-tub while the world goes to hell. Where are the men who will stand up for the Gospel of the Kingdom, in every situation and at every opportunity, speaking with grace to defend the honor and truth of God? They’re sitting in our pews, waiting for shepherds to equip them as witnesses.

What would you suggest as an approach to equipping men to be able to declare and defend the Gospel of the Kingdom?

Help me, Lord, to be more alert to opportunities to talk with others about You. Like today, when...

Day 28: Morning

On Fire with the Cross

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. Philippians 1.18

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“The people are perishing under the ministrations of those who ‘do not deny’ the Cross of Christ. Surely something more than that is needed. God send us ministers who, instead of merely avoiding denial of the Cross shall be on fire with the Cross, whose whole life shall be one burning sacrifice of gratitude to the blessed Saviour who loved them and gave Himself for them!”

Would you describe yourself as “on fire with the Cross”? Would those who know you describe you this way? The Cross is bloody and shameful. The Cross points out our sin and calls us to humility and self-denial. The Cross reminds us that the world will resist the Gospel when we come living and proclaiming it. The Cross is a place of sorrow, suffering, and shame. The Cross is the ultimate symbol of God’s love for lost people. Is the Cross, and bearing it daily, the central issue in our preaching and teaching? The Cross is also the place of glory and salvation. If we want these, we must preach the Cross, live for the Cross, and call people to consider Christ’s work on the Cross. No shepherd should rest until he’s sure that in every way the sheep entrusted to His care are bearing and proclaiming the Cross with fire.

Why do you think many pastors minimize the place of the Cross in their preaching these days? Is this wise?

Ahead of me this day, Lord, I can see opportunities for bearing Your Cross. Help me to prepare for them, and to...

Day 28: Evening

To Remedy an Evil

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. 1 Timothy 1.3, 4

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“The growth of ignorance in the Church is the logical and inevitable result of the false notion that Christianity is a life and not also a doctrine; if Christianity is not a doctrine then of course teaching is not necessary. But whatever be the causes for the growth of ignorance in the Church, the evil must be remedied. It must be remedied primarily by the renewal of Christian education in the family, but also by the use of whatever other educational agencies the Church can find. Christian education is the chief business of the hour for every earnest Christian man.”

The “chief business of the hour”? Do we know many Christian men who would say that overcoming their ignorance of doctrine and being more fully instructed in Christ is the “chief business” of their lives? And why is that? How has it come about that the men of the church are so zealous for work, avocations, and who knows what else, yet have little inclination and less time to devote to the work of knowing Jesus and living for Him? Paul expected Timothy to redress this situation in Ephesus. We must do the same. Many winds of false doctrine are wafting over the church today, teaching people to think about themselves and their needs, and not to get too exercised about good works and such matters. “It’s all grace, friends.” Indeed – grace for salvation unto good works of love and witness. As shepherds, let us lead and equip His flock for every good work of service, witness, and love, by leading them to Jesus and teaching them to live there.

Are the Christian education ministries of your church equipping your men to live and bear witness for Christ? How’s it going?

Lord, I know that a disciple is a learner, and for me this means...

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.