

A  
LABOR  
OF LOVE



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Puritan Pastoral Priorities



J. STEPHEN YUILLE



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FOR THOSE ELDERS

*under whose watch I once grew  
and with whose support I now serve*



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# Foreword



Many are the roles required of a pastor, his duties so numerous that in himself no man is sufficient to fulfill such a high and holy calling. It is only by the enabling grace of God that any minister of the gospel can fulfill the sacred charge laid at his feet. One way that such servants of the Lord are equipped in meeting their shepherding duties is by studying the worthy examples and trusted writings of other faithful pastors, those godly men who have so nobly gone before us.

Perhaps the greatest example of such pastoral fidelity from church history is witnessed in the Puritan divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were devout men, mighty in the Scripture, sound in the faith, grounded in Christ, and devoted to their flocks. The sheep entrusted to their care were constantly on their minds and ever upon their hearts. To this day, the Puritans of old remain enduring models of pastoral devotion, worthy of our careful consideration and personal emulation.

One noted Puritan example was George Swinnock (c. 1627–1673), a faithful pastor, educated at Oxford and Cambridge and made subject to the Great Ejection of 1662. So devoted was Swinnock to the full breadth of pastoral ministry that his major literary work, *The Christian Man's Calling*, contains a section on the sacred calling of a minister. In this portion, he gives sixteen prayers for every pastor to follow in their ministry.

J. Stephen Yuille has done the church a great service by extracting these prayers and placing them under sixteen headings that succinctly describe a unique facet of pastoral labor. Moreover, Yuille

has enlarged upon the central truth contained within each prayer, supporting them with other Puritan quotations and his own development of thought.

Rare it is to find a book that pulls together the pastoral wisdom of a Puritan divine like Swinnock and distills it down into manageable units that are easily digestible. But this is precisely what Yuille has done in this volume. He has surveyed one of the best from the golden age of the Puritans, Swinnock, and has extracted the core teaching from this classic writing on pastoral duty. To learn from this divine is to be well-taught in ministerial responsibilities.

By reading this work and implementing it in your life, I believe that you will be better equipped in your service for Jesus Christ. May He bless you as you do His work, His way, for His glory.

Steven J. Lawson  
Senior Pastor  
Christ Fellowship Baptist Church  
Mobile, Alabama

# Introduction



Why have I written this book? That's a good question. There are a host of reasons, but two in particular merit mentioning at the outset.

First, I've written this book out of concern for *the church's diminished appreciation of pastoral ministry*. I realize this assessment might come as a surprise to some, but I'm convinced that even a casual glance at today's evangelicalism supports it. The fact that pastors act on Christ's behalf seems to rest weightless upon the church, including many pastors. What could be more important than shepherding the ones Christ purchased with His blood? What could be more crucial than watching over Christ's bride? What could be more essential than caring for Christ's body? Contrary to much of what we see and hear, pastoral ministry isn't a career choice. It's a high and holy calling.<sup>1</sup> "The church," writes John Stott, "lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God."<sup>2</sup> It's the instrument by which God glorifies Himself in this world. That makes pastoral ministry of utmost importance.

Second, I've written this book out of concern for *the church's clouded perception of pastoral ministry*. This condition has arisen—at least in part—from our failure to differentiate between success and excellence. In simple terms, success is based upon status: an elevation of our importance in society's eyes. How does our society gauge success? It looks at things such as power, prestige, privilege,

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1. For more on this, see John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002).

2. John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007), 19.

and prosperity. That view of success is ultimately rooted in pride. Sadly, today's church seems incapable (or perhaps unwilling) to acknowledge this tendency in its midst, and many insist on adopting the world's standards of success, thereby skewing notions of—among other things—the nature of pastoral ministry.

What we must grasp is that excellence stands in marked contrast to success because it isn't determined by status, but by faithfulness. In a word, it's based on an unwavering resolve to please God—no one else. As such, it's rooted in humility. Now, here's the thing that's incomprehensible (even scandalous) to large segments of today's church: *excellence is often unsuccessful*. The church needs to recapture a sense of that reality. It must recapture a sense of what's truly excellent in God's sight.

Among his last recorded words, the apostle Paul summarizes his ministry as follows: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6–8). It's difficult to read these verses without my eyes clouding with tears. Paul sits in a prison cell in Rome. His eyesight is failing, and his mobility is declining. He's probably in his early sixties, but likely aged well beyond his years as a result of the multiple beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, and other hardships he has suffered during thirty years of ministry. As Alexander Whyte so movingly writes, Paul is "forsaken, lonely, cold and without his cloak, chained to a soldier, waiting on one of Nero's mad fits for his martyrdom."<sup>3</sup>

As Paul waits, what does he say? To begin with, he talks about the present—a *death worth dying* (v. 6). He describes himself as "ready to be offered." What does he mean? At this point, the *English Standard Version* is helpful. It translates Paul's words as follows:

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3. Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: The New Testament* (London: Oliphants, 1952), 282.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering.” For the context, we turn to Numbers 15, where we learn that the priests in Old Testament times poured the drink offering over the burnt offering in order to complete the sacrifice. Paul’s point is that he has lived his life as a burnt offering to God. Now, it’s time for the drink offering to be poured out—it’s time for him to die.

Secondly, Paul talks about his past—*a life worth living* (v. 7). He provides a threefold description of his ministry: he fought the fight, he finished the course (or race), and he kept the faith. In other words, as he surveys thirty or so years of ministry, he’s confident that he has been faithful. He has pursued excellence. Above all else, he has labored to glorify God.

Thirdly, Paul talks about his future—*a crown worth receiving* (v. 8). He’s able to embrace martyrdom, for he knows that Christ awaits him. He’s confident he will receive “a crown of righteousness.” He fully expects to hear his Master say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

My desire is to see a generation of *Pauline* pastors—men with a clear sense of their calling, coupled with an insatiable desire to please God. In other words, my desire is to see a generation of pastors committed to the pursuit of excellence. With that end in view, what can you expect in the pages that follow? The book is divided into two parts.

Part 1 consists of a series of pastoral priorities. I discovered these close to ten years ago, tucked away in a largely forgotten book: *The Christian Man’s Calling*. The author is George Swinnock—a seventeenth-century English Puritan and Nonconformist (meaning he was ejected from the Church of England in 1662). In his book, Swinnock includes a small section titled “A good wish about the calling of a minister, wherein the several properties and duties of a conscientious pastor are epitomized.”<sup>4</sup> Here he articulates his heartfelt desire for his own pastoral ministry by way of sixteen “wishes”

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4. George Swinnock, *The Christian Man’s Calling*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 1:319–29.

(i.e., prayer requests). In each chapter, I include one of Swinnock's wishes (edited for the modern reader), and then expand on it with a few thoughts of my own.

Part 2 consists of a sermon (also edited for the modern reader) by George Swinnock: "The Pastor's Farewell."<sup>5</sup> He preached it upon his departure from St. Mary's chapel in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, where he had served as pastor for eleven years. In the dedication, he remarks, "There are two things which I have always judged chiefly requisite in a pastor—labor and love. The former is a work of the head, the latter a work of the heart: faithful labor will speak his love, and sincere love will sweeten his labor...both together—as soul and body are the essential parts of a man—are the whole of a minister." In this sermon, Swinnock's love for his church serves as an encouraging example for all pastors who desire to love their people in Christ.

Swinnock's insights have proven to be an invaluable guide to me over the years. My prayer is that the Lord will bless them to you—for the equipping of His ministers, the strengthening of His church, the coming of His kingdom, and the honoring of His name.

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5. George Swinnock, "The Pastor's Farewell," in *The Works of George Swinnock* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 4:53–100.

# PART 1







## ONE



# A Royal Ambassador

*The ministry of the Word is a calling above all others of greatest weight. The ever-blessed God has established it as the means by which He receives the deserved praise of His unique, eternal, and infinitely wise purpose, and as the means by which the Lord Jesus Christ receives the precious fruit of His bloody passion. This is accomplished by turning sinners from darkness to light and from Satan to God. In the ministry, God is pleased to commit to men—duly qualified and rightly called—the Word of reconciliation. He commands them in His name, as His ambassadors, to offer terms of peace, and to persuade and implore rebellious sinners with all earnestness and faithfulness (unless they want the blood of their people’s souls required at their hands) to embrace the offer of grace and pardon. Since my God has counted me faithful, placed me in the ministry, and entrusted me with what so closely relates to His own glory, and so highly concerns the eternal happiness of precious souls, I wish in general that I might take heed to myself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made me an overseer—to feed the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).*



For Swinnock, pastoral ministry is “a calling above all others of greatest weight.” Why? It’s God’s appointed means for spreading His glory and saving His people. As pastors, do we share Swinnock’s conviction? God has appointed us “as His ambassadors,”

and entrusted us with “the Word of reconciliation.” He has called us—as Swinnock expresses it—“to persuade and implore rebellious sinners” to accept Christ’s “terms of peace.” In John 7:37–38, Christ declares, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” In this declaration, we encounter three “terms of peace”—need, invitation, and promise.

First, Christ identifies a *need*: “If any man thirst.” Here, Christ uses the imagery of physical thirst to describe a spiritual longing—what A. W. Tozer calls an “unceasing restlessness.”<sup>1</sup> The cause of this longing is our alienation from God, which Christ describes elsewhere as “darkness” (John 8:12). The assertion that we’re in “darkness” is a difficult notion for many people to accept because their worldview rests on the assumption that humanity is enlightened. They think we’re progressing. Why? For starters, we can communicate with one another using cell phones and BlackBerry devices and access an incalculable amount of information via the Internet. We can travel halfway around the world in a matter of a few hours and transplant hearts and kidneys. We can build bridges that traverse the water below and towers that reach the clouds above and send spacecraft into the far reaches of the galaxy to take pictures. We can harness the power of water and wind and the energy of an atom. Based on these technological advancements, many people assume we’re enlightened.

In reality, however, these things are what David Wells calls “the illusions of progress.”<sup>2</sup> They give the impression we’re moving forward, when—in actual fact—we’re still in the dark. Our darkness is spiritual, in that our lives are alienated from God. Our darkness is intellectual, in that our minds are inclined to error instead of truth. Our darkness is moral, in that our hearts are inclined to evil instead of good. Despite the staggering number of changes around

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1. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Radford, Va.: Wilder, 2008), 26.

2. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 59.

us, our condition remains as it has been since Adam's fall. When we perceive this darkness, the Holy Spirit creates in us a spiritual longing—the “thirst” of which Christ speaks.

Second, Christ extends an *invitation*: “Let him come unto me, and drink.” Christ utters these words in the city of Jerusalem, during the Feast of Tabernacles. As part of the celebration, a priest carried a golden pitcher to the pool of Siloam, where he filled it with water, and then returned to the temple, where he poured the water into a funnel on the west side of the altar. This ritual pointed to what happened at Meribah, when the Israelites grumbled on account of their thirst. On that occasion, God declared to Moses: “Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink” (Ex. 17:6). In obedience, Moses took his rod—the rod of judgment by which God inflicted the plagues upon Egypt—and struck the rock. God stood on the rock, thereby identifying with it. Symbolically, therefore, God bore the judgment, and subsequently, the water flowed from the rock (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 31; Pss. 78:35; 95:1). That's the historical context for Christ's invitation. When He invites those who are thirsty to come to Him, He's claiming to be the true rock—the one who bears the rod of God's judgment.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed in the garden, they—along with all their posterity—fell into bondage to sin and death. By consequence, they fell under Satan's dominion. At that time, God ordained Satan to be the executioner of the sentence of death. Humanity's obligation to death is what gives Satan all his power. Clearly, therefore, the removal of that obligation is the termination of Satan's power. And that's precisely what Christ accomplished at the cross. In His death, He bore God's judgment in our place. In so doing, He destroyed Satan's power. John Flavel describes Christ's sacrifice as follows:

Lord, the condemnation was Thine, that the justification might be mine. The agony was Thine, that the victory might be mine. The pain was Thine, and the ease mine. The stripes were Thine, and healing balm issuing from them mine. The vinegar and

gall were Thine, that the honey and sweet might be mine. The curse was Thine, that the blessing might be mine. The crown of thorns was Thine, that the crown of glory might be mine. The death was Thine, but the life purchased by it mine. Thou hast paid the price that I might enjoy the inheritance.<sup>3</sup>

We enter into the blessings of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice when we "drink" Him (i.e., believe in Him). When we eat food and drink water, we assimilate it, meaning it becomes part of our bodies. Likewise, when we eat and drink Christ, we assimilate Him. "Now we know that food," writes William Perkins, "unless it is received, will not nourish the body. Even so, unless we receive and apply Christ unto ourselves by the hand of faith, all our knowledge and assent will be as food uneaten and undigested."<sup>4</sup> That is to say, faith moves beyond mere intellectual assent to appropriation in the heart.

Years ago, my family and I visited Carrick-a-Rede on the coast of Northern Ireland. There's a rope-bridge, linking the mainland to a tiny island. The bridge spans 70 feet and is almost 100 feet above the sea and rocks below. Thousands of people cross the bridge every month. As I stood at the edge of that bridge, I gave mental assent to the fact that it could support my weight. However, I couldn't claim to believe it until I actually walked across it. Similarly, saving faith involves much more than mere mental assent to the gospel. According to Flavel, it involves, firstly, the understanding of the mind in regards to the truth of Christ as revealed in Scripture; secondly, the appropriation of the heart in regards to Christ as the complete remedy for sin; and, thirdly, the choice of the will in receiving Christ.<sup>5</sup> In other words, faith involves the entire soul. And that's how we heed Christ's invitation to drink.

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3. John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life: A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., London: Banner of Truth, 1968), 1:101.

4. William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition upon Christ's Sermon on the Mount*, in *The Works of William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1631), 3:245.

5. Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, 2:129–34.

Third, Christ issues a *promise*: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” According to the next verse, the “living water” is the Holy Spirit. Once the rock (Christ) is struck, the water (Holy Spirit) flows. When we believe in Christ, we become partakers of the Holy Spirit who brings us into fellowship with God. We rest in Him as the dearest Father, wisest guide, strongest shield, greatest good, closest friend, kindest comfort, finest beauty, deepest truth, and sweetest love. As a result, our longing is satisfied; our thirst is quenched. In a word, we’re “filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

As pastors, we proclaim these “terms of peace.” We proclaim the gospel—the good news that God saves sinners from His wrath for His glory through Christ’s substitutionary death. And this message makes “the ministry of the Word... a calling above all others of greatest weight.”