

SHEPHERD

THE FLOCK

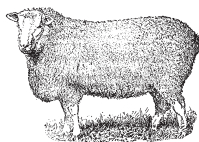


*Eight Questions for
Pastors of God's People*

BY DAVID PLATT

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AN HONEST CONFESSION

There are so many other pastors who should be preaching this message.

I think about my childhood pastor, Don Bouldin, who went to be with the Lord this last year after decades of faithful pastoral ministry. I think about Jim Shaddix, my mentor and the man who faithfully pastored a flock of 150 people Sunday after Sunday during my time in seminary. I think about Cory Varden, a bi-vocational pastor who tirelessly works while shepherding God's people in a traditional Baptist church. I think about Matt Pearson, who moved with his wife to live in a trailer on the church property in a small town to love, lead, marry, and bury saints in ways no one but God would ever see.

Or I think about pastors overseas. Through an initiative called Urgent, Radical is partnering with indigenous pastors and missionaries on the front lines of the most urgent spiritual and physical need in the world. We are focusing on gospel work in countries like Somalia, Yemen, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and North Korea. Pastors in these places know far more about my topic than I do.

On top of all of this, if I could be completely honest, I am in a season right now in which I feel pretty insufficient as a pastor. Without going into details, I have been convicted in recent days about ways that I have not cared well for the church I serve. Preparing this message has only deepened that conviction, further uncovering areas for growth and needs for grace in my own sinful heart.

So, now that I have totally undercut my credibility to preach

this message, I will lean totally on God's Word and God's Spirit to do what I cannot—to speak to you, I pray, in a way that will serve you well as you shepherd the flock God has entrusted to you.



David Phillips

INTRODUCTION

In light of my own pastoral weakness, I am going to draw on a pastoral hero of mine from history. His name is Charles Simeon, and after reading Hugh Evan Hopkins's biography titled *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*,¹ I was moved by God's grace in this man who pastored Trinity Church in Cambridge, England, for fifty-four years. With Simeon's assistance, I want to speak to pastors based on Peter's instructions to pastors in 1 Peter 5:1–4. If you are not a pastor, I hope you will be edified by anything that applies to you, but my aim is to speak specifically to pastors because that's who God is speaking to in this text.

I want to ask my fellow pastors eight questions that I believe this text beckons you and me to ask as we shepherd the flock of God entrusted to our care. Along the way, I want to intersperse insights from Charles Simeon's life and pastorate that I hope will be an encouragement to you.

Here is the apostle Peter's exhortation to pastors, or elders,² in 1 Peter 5:1–4:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

This an appropriate passage during our current pandemic. While the context of 1 Peter is persecution, not pandemic, I believe that many of the principles this passage teaches us are just as relevant today. First Peter demonstrates “the type of shepherd-leadership that is needed to assure the survival of the church in trying times of persecution.”³ The question, then, for each of us is this: *what type of pastoral leadership is needed in the church amidst trying times?*

In the previous chapter, Peter warns the church that God’s judgment is coming and that it begins at God’s house (1 Peter 4:17). Trials test the people of God, and the first to take the test are the elders in the church. The background here is Ezekiel 9, when God tested his people beginning with “the elders who were before the house (Ezekiel 9:6).” In view of trials on this earth and coming judgment for eternity, the church must be ready, beginning with the elders who lead the church.

This setup at the end of 1 Peter 4 provides a sober tone to 1 Peter 5. Peter is essentially saying to pastors, “The Chief Shepherd is coming back, and there will be a reckoning among all his under-shepherds. He will call every pastor in the church to give an account, and each of you should be ready.”

This context is part of why I’m drawn to Charles Simeon. He was twenty-three years old, in the first year of his pastorate at Trinity Church, when he spoke clearly to his congregation about his accountability to Jesus for them. To people who were standing in the aisles one Sunday morning—more on that in a moment—he said the following:

Remember the nature of my office, and the care incumbent on me for the welfare of your immortal souls. Consider whatever may appear in my discourses harsh, earnest, or alarming, not as the effects of enthusiasm, but as the rational dictates of a heart impressed with a sense both of the

value of the soul and the importance of eternity.⁴

Simeon knew that it was a sobering responsibility to shepherd people whom Jesus had purchased with his own blood. He described the pastor like a keeper of a lighthouse, and he painted a vivid picture of a ship that had been wrecked on a rocky shore, with dead bodies floating and widows and orphans wailing. When asked what happened, the keeper of the lighthouse responded by saying that he had fallen asleep.⁵ Charles Simeon knew what every pastor needs to know: life and death, heaven and hell hang in the balance for souls based on how we carry out our calling. So we must not fall asleep.

With this warning in mind, 1 Peter 5:1–4 beckons us as pastors to honestly, soberly, and humbly ask ourselves some questions. Based on this passage, I'm going to highlight eight questions and phrase them as if God is asking them to each of us individually.

QUESTION 1

Do you love your ministry more than you love Jesus?

Peter begins by saying, “So I exhort the elders among you,” and he describes himself as “a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1).

Then in the next verse Peter gives the one command contained in this passage: “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (v. 2). So why this command? Remember Jesus’s last recorded conversation with Peter in John 21:15–17:

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Don’t forget: the call to lead the church flows from love for Christ. There is a direct relationship between loving the Son of God and shepherding the flock of God. Instructions for leadership in the church are given to those with affection for the Lord of the church. I fear we are prone to miss this.

You don’t even have to get past the Sermon on the Mount

to hear of people who are performing miracles and driving out demons in Jesus's name, and yet Jesus says, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). Is that possible? Is it possible to have fruitful ministry for Jesus totally apart from personal intimacy with Jesus?

It's absolutely possible. It's dangerously possible.

As an illustration from my own sinful heart, I can remember a long season in my life as a pastor when the church I was pastoring was growing. A lot of people were coming and a lot of good ministry was happening.

I had written a book, and a lot of people were reading it. And I started getting invited to preach in all kinds of different places. On the outside, it looked like the height of ministry. But on the inside, my time alone with the Lord was inconsistent, at best; the reality is, it was nonexistent most days. Sure, I would prepare to preach a sermon, and I would pray in public, but I rarely prayed in private and never read the Bible simply so that I might know and love God.

Now don't get me wrong: I wasn't lazy. I was working hard, often staying up all night. There were a lot of things—a lot of *good* things—happening in ministry. But I was doing it all completely disconnected from intimacy with Jesus. That's frightening to me. How "successful," so to speak, I could be in ministry, while missing a heart for Jesus. I loved my ministry far more than I loved him.

What about *you*? I'm guessing there are some of you who are right where I was. And God, in his kindness, right now is calling you back to himself. Maybe the word you most need to hear right now from God is this: *I love you, and I long for intimacy with you.*

Others might say, "I think I love Jesus more than I love my ministry," and I do hope that's the case. I want that to be the case in my life—literally, more than anything else. This is where Simeon challenges me. He was not a Christian when he went to

Cambridge, but three days after he arrived there, the provost told him he would have to attend the Lord's Supper. This frightened Simeon out of his mind. He knew enough about Christianity to know that you don't take the Lord's Supper if you don't believe in Jesus, and you definitely don't feign belief in Jesus. This fear drove Simeon to reflection during Passion Week, and he wrote the following in his journal:

As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's Supper, I met with an expression to this effect—"That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, What? May I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer. Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus; and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy; on the Thursday that hope increased; on the Friday and Saturday it became more strong; and on the Sunday morning, Easter Day, April 4th, I awoke early with those words upon my heart and lips, "Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" From that hour peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul, and at the Lord's Table in our Chapel I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.⁶

Decades later Simeon would write, "The light of God's countenance then first visited me, and in his great mercy he has never wholly withdrawn it from me during fifty-six years."⁷ Following his conversion, Simeon walked with God for the next fifty-seven years, and here's what I mean by "walked with God." One man who lived in Simeon's quarters for a time wrote,

Simeon invariably arose every morning, though it was the winter season, at four o'clock; and, after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of the Scriptures.... Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source, and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials and prepared for every duty.⁸

Simeon's ministry *for* Jesus flowed from Simeon's intimacy *with* Jesus.

We are a busy people. There are emails to send, calls to make, sermons to write, meetings to run, people to contact, things to do. And before long, if we're not careful, no matter what we might say, it can easily start to look like we love our ministry more than we love our Master. God's Word is pleading with us as pastors: *don't manufacture a heart for ministry and miss a heart for Jesus.*

Do you love your ministry more than you love Jesus?

QUESTION 2

Are you content to care for the congregation God has entrusted to you?

Peter tells us to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (1 Peter 5:2). Notice that it’s the “flock of God,” which means it belongs to him. It is not *your* congregation; it is *his* congregation. It is not your church but his church that is entrusted to you. Verse 3 refers to “those in your charge.”

Notice also the phrase “exercising oversight.” That’s one word in the original language, and it essentially means “to take care of” the flock. The meaning here is crystal clear and actually quite simple: God has entrusted certain people to you and me as pastors so that we might care for them. Yet, if we are not careful, we can so easily look past them. Instead of being content to *care* for the congregation God has entrusted to us, we start to *compare* with congregations God has entrusted to others.

We look past our own people to the larger church, or to the smaller church. We look out and see other churches that are younger, or others that are older and more mature. We think, “I would like to pastor in the city,” or “I would like to pastor in the country.” Or we might think, “I would love to pastor a church with more money, or one with less problems.” In a variety of ways, we look at other churches with a sense of comparison that starts to affect us in subtly perilous ways.

I think of times as a pastor when “my church” was growing and all kinds of good things were happening, and I began to experience a sinful sense of elation as I thought about how *I* was the leader of that church. Or I think of times as a pastor when

“my church” wasn’t growing and not much was happening. I’d hear reports of all that another church was doing, and instead of immediately having joy over what was happening in that church, I could sense myself starting to justify why it wasn’t happening in our church. I can even start to criticize (even if just in my own mind) all the things that are wrong with that other church, coming up with a list of unbiblical reasons why they are experiencing growth. And I think this way without even realizing I’m doing it!

Just in case you’re thinking, “Well, you’re a pastor of a large church. Certainly you don’t struggle with comparison.” Don’t be fooled. Proudful comparison is dangerously pervasive, and the ecstasy of crowds only increases it. Jonathan Edwards said,

[Spiritual pride] is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of religion. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit, to darken the mind and mislead the judgment. This is . . . the chief source of all the mischief that [the devil] introduces, to clog and hinder a work of God.⁹

I get caught up in comparison, even a sick sense of competition, that robs me of the contentment I should have in caring for the congregation that God has entrusted to me. Maybe I’m alone. But maybe I’m not. So to the extent to which you too struggle with comparison or competition that threatens your care for your congregation, there is much to learn from Simeon’s example.

Upon his ordination as a deacon, Simeon preached during the summer months for Christopher Atkinson at St. Edwards Church. The parish for which Simeon was responsible was pretty small, comprised primarily of all the local butchers. He went door-to-door, caring for each of those individual souls. Not long thereafter, to the amazement of almost everyone, including Simeon himself at twenty-three years of age, he was appointed pastor

of Holy Trinity Church in the heart of Cambridge University. It was a dream job, until it wasn't.

From the very beginning, the people in the church didn't want Simeon. They wanted the former pastor's assistant curate, John Hammond, and they made that clear. Simeon said he would step down, but the bishop in charge of the appointment said that even if Simeon stepped aside, Hammond would still not be appointed. So Simeon remained and the congregation revolted.

Every Sunday morning for the service, parishioners not only refused to attend, but they even locked their pews so that no one could sit in them. Simeon set up seats in the aisles at his own expense, but the churchwardens threw them outside. They did this not for one week, or two, or three; not for one month, or two, or three. They did this for ten years (!), such that every Sunday morning for a decade, Simeon could only preach to people standing in the aisles or sitting in obscure corners of the room.

There was a Sunday afternoon service that was under the purview of the parishioners, but they wouldn't let Simeon preach it. Instead, they paid John Hammond twice the salary Simeon was receiving for Hammond to preach the Sunday afternoon sermon. This went on for five years, at which time Hammond stepped down and the people asked someone else to take Hammond's place for the next seven years. That's twelve years total that Simeon was kept out of the Sunday afternoon service!

Simeon tried to start a Sunday evening service, and many people came, that is, until the churchwardens decided they were going to shut it down. They locked the doors and wouldn't let anyone in. They told Simeon that he had "no right to go into the church whenever he thinks fit."¹⁰ So for the first ten years of his pastorate, Simeon preached to a room full of empty pews in the morning, and for the first twelve years, he was forbidden to preach in the afternoon. And during all this time, he was locked out of the church on Sunday nights. How do you shepherd *that*

flock for fifty-four years?

When Simeon was asked that question, he answered, “In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience. The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was 2 Timothy 2:24.”¹¹ This is the verse in which Paul tells Timothy that “the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil.”

May God make us all content to care well for the congregation he has entrusted to us.

QUESTION 3

Is pastoring a job for you to perform or a passion for you to fulfill?

Peter says that shepherding the flock and exercising oversight is to be done “not under compulsion, but willingly” (1 Peter 5:2). So it *is* possible to shepherd God’s people out of a sense of duty that lacks desire. It is possible to see pastoral ministry as a job to perform instead of a passion to fulfill.

I’m guessing every pastor has faced this temptation at some point. In fact, I’m guessing many pastors are experiencing this emotion right now. For so many different reasons, we can start to see different facets of pastoral ministry as *activities we have* to do instead of *opportunities we want* to take. God is warning us here in his Word: be careful. Don’t begrudge any of the work God has called you to. The care of souls is critically important, and by God’s Spirit, he supernaturally equips you for it and compels you in it, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

I think about Monday mornings, that moment when you wake up and realize that it’s time to start all over again, beginning with preparation for preaching. And if we’re not careful, even preaching can start to become a job to perform instead of a passion to fulfill. Again, Simeon’s example is instructive:

The modern parson is sometimes heard complaining of the fatigue of preaching weekly to the same congregation. Before ten years have passed he will start talking about being ‘preached out’ and needing a move. Such an idea would

have been anathema to Charles Simeon. His remarkable achievement, unparalleled by any other local incumbent before or since, was to hold the attention of undergraduates and townsfolk alike preaching twice a Sunday for over fifty years.¹²

Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16, Simeon couldn't help but preach God's Word—"Woe to me" if I don't!

In 1807, after twenty-five years of pastoring, his health started to fail and his voice was struggling to the point that some Sundays he spoke in a whisper. These physical struggles continued for the next thirteen years, until he was sixty years old, yet he still kept preaching.

On one particular Sunday during that period, a visiting pastor was so struck by Simeon's passion for his people that he said,

Never shall I forget one remarkable instance which I myself witnessed, of his affectionate concern for the souls entrusted to him. He was preaching upon those striking words: "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Romans 10:20-21). And after having urged all his hearers to accept the proffered mercy, he reminded them that there were those present to whom he had preached Christ for more than thirty years, but they continued indifferent to a Savior's love; and pursuing this train of expostulation for some time, he at length became quite overpowered by his feeling, and he sank down in the pulpit and burst into a flood of tears, and few who were present could refrain from weeping with him.¹³

Not long after that, not yet forty years into pastoral ministry, Simeon made a special note in his pocket Bible right next to Jeremiah 20:9: "There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my

bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

O pastors, do we weep over the people to whom we preach? Even *as* we preach? As we look into their faces, do we long for their salvation with fervor? Is pastoring a job for you to perform or a passion for you to fulfill?

QUESTION 4

Are you pridefully concerned about what others think about you or humbly consumed by what God has called you to?

When it comes to exercising oversight willingly, Peter says that this is “as God would have you” (1 Peter 5:2). Not as the world would have you. Not as others would have you. But as *God* would have you. Literally, “according to God.”

Have you noticed how pride lies underneath so much in this passage? The propensity in all of us is to desire the praise of others, or even to please ourselves. It’s so subtle in pastoral ministry that we’ll miss it if we’re not vigilant. At least that’s how it is for me.

Even as I was preparing this sermon, I kept thinking, “What will people think of me when I preach? Will they think this sermon was good? Will they think this sermon was bad? What will this person or that person think? That was my thought process in a sermon in which I am pleading with people not to be concerned about what others think about you. How frustrating is that! And it’s not just preaching—it’s praying.

I can stand in front of a group of people and pray, and I can actually be concerned about what others are thinking about me as I’m praying. How sick is that? My heart swims in a sea that prioritizes *me*, even in the most holy things I do.

When I was a teenager, a mentor of mine challenged me to pick a “life verse,” that is, a verse that you want to mark your life. I chose John 3:30, the place where John the Baptist says about Jesus, “He must become greater; I must become less” (NIV). But

the reality is, that verse does *not* mark my life. I think the first part does: I do want Jesus to become greater. I really believe that I want to exalt Jesus. But my impulse is to take that last phrase and say, “He must become greater, and I wouldn’t mind becoming greater too.”

I have to fight in prayer and in my thoughts all the time in order to say, “No, I want to become *less*. God, please make me less!” I so want that verse to be my life, but the struggle continues. The counsel Simeon received from his advisor, John Thornton, is spot on: “The three lessons which a minister has to learn are: 1. Humility. 2. Humility. 3. Humility.”¹⁴

Simeon was constantly learning this lesson, particularly in those early years at Holy Trinity. This once self-assertive man found himself totally rejected by those he tried to lead. No one would even walk next to him on the Cambridge campus. People threw stones at him through the windows of the church. People threw dirt and rotten eggs on his face and clothes. Even harder to take than that, they smeared him with rumors that questioned his character. So in those early years of the church, Simeon was prone to self-pity. Then, when the circumstances changed, he was prone to self-praise, and he came to know the danger of man’s applause. He once said,

If anything laudatory be mentioned ... about me or about my sermons, I entreat from my inmost soul that I may not have it repeated to me: let me to go heaven as the vilest sinner in the universe ... Satan himself could not be a greater curse to me than the person who would dare to breathe a word upon that subject commendatory of me or anything I have done.¹⁵

That may seem to some like an over-reaction, but Simeon was zealous to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus as his Judge. He said,

The ministers of Christ are generally either unduly exalted or undeservedly depreciated by those around them: but they should discharge their duties with fidelity, without any regard to the opinions of men, and approve themselves to him who will judge them righteously in the last day.¹⁶

Are you pridefully concerned about what others think about you or humbly consumed by what God has called you to? Let us shepherd the flock as *God* would have us.

QUESTION 5

Are you driven by what you get in ministry or by what you give in ministry?

Peter tells us that shepherding the flock and exercising oversight are to be done “not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2). The words “not for shameful gain” are certainly a warning against greed and the misuse of money, and this warning is consistent with the qualifications for elders in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Of course, this doesn’t mean that the church shouldn’t provide financially for various elders; we see a clear pattern in Scripture of support for leaders among God’s people (see 1 Timothy 5:17). Yet the context of 1 Peter 5 certainly seems broader than money, since shepherding for “shameful gain” is contrasted with shepherding God’s people “eagerly.” That word “eagerly” is a poignant word that portrays a zeal to serve others over and above oneself. It seems like the point of what Peter is saying is this: a pastor is driven not to *get*, but to *give*. The posture of a pastor is to *serve*, not to *be served*.

Simeon beautifully illustrates this picture of selfless ministry. He lived a simple life, capping his salary at the same amount most of his life and giving away everything above that amount for people in need, from Cambridge to India, and other places in between. His brother left him a fortune, and he turned it all down. Simeon ended up selling volumes of his sermons, but all his royalties were owned by various societies representing different ministry causes. He said, “If God be honored and my fellow creatures benefited, it is all I want.”¹⁷ One friend remarked that Simeon had “a noble indifference to money.”¹⁸

But Simeon's eagerness went beyond his money. He poured his life into raising up other ministers. He couldn't bear to see so many men going out to pastor churches who had no training in preaching or no understanding of what it means to care for souls. So he made himself as accessible to as many of them as he possibly could.

In his biography of Simeon, Hopkins devotes an entire chapter to telling all that those ministers did as a result of Simeon's influence in their lives:

In the saga of Simeon there is a long roll of honor of really remarkable Christian men who owed their conversion and progress in the Christian faith to the life and witness of the Old Apostle of King's and Holy Trinity church.¹⁹

Those mentioned in this "role of honor" include W. Carus Wilson, Robert Housman (the first undergraduate whom Simeon led to Christ at Cambridge, who later became minister of St. Anne's Church for forty-two years), George Hodson (who became Archdeacon of Stafford), Thomas Lloyd, Henry and John Venn, Thomas Sowerby, Matthew Preston, Charles Perry, Patrick Bronte, and the list goes on and on, all the way to his last curate, William Carus, who took Simeon's place at Holy Trinity. And those were just the men who stayed in England.

Then there were those whom Simeon mobilized to go overseas, namely, to India. These were days when the Church of England was resistant to global missions, when attempts were made to try to convince the well-known missionary William Carey not to go to India. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland carried a resolution affirming that "to spread abroad among barbarians and heathen natives the knowledge of the gospel seems to be highly preposterous, in so far as it anticipates, nay even reverses, the order of Nature."²⁰ Warren Hastings had made it a

fundamental rule of policy “to discourage missionary efforts.”²¹

In the middle of all of this, Simeon was twenty-nine years old, six years into pastoring, still locked out of the church on Sunday nights, forbidden to preach on Sunday afternoons, and preaching to empty pews on Sunday mornings. He obviously had enough problems to focus on, but he knew the need for the gospel among the nations. So he started raising up and sending out missionaries: David Brown, Daniel Corrie, Claudius Buchanan, and Henry Martyn (a well-known missionary to India who translated the New Testament into Urdu and Persian and oversaw its translation into Arabic). All these missionaries started under Simeon’s tutelage. It was said that for a period of about forty years, most of the missionaries who went to India from England were recommended by Charles Simeon.

But Simeon focused on more than India. Through persistent work in partnership with William Wilberforce, he started The Society for Missions to Africa and the East, which later became known as The Church Missionary Society. People went out from Simeon’s care to proclaim Christ in Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. To pastors who said there were enough problems in England to take care of, he wrote,

What would have been the state of the whole world if the same mind had been in Christ that is in us? It may be said perhaps, Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labors of all at home? I answer, It is well for us that the Apostles did not argue thus.²²

Simeon urged his church to pray that God would use his ministry as “the means of diffusing life and salvation to the remotest corners of the globe.”²³ Hopkins wrote of Simeon’s “restless efforts to buy up every opportunity that came his way,” not only for souls in general and for the church but also for “the spread of God’s

kingdom overseas.”²⁴

I ask you, pastor, are you spending restless effort buying up every opportunity that comes your way for the spread of God’s kingdom overseas? Is your church a means of diffusing life and salvation to the remotest corners of the globe?

The opportunity is before us and the resources are among us to take the gospel to every people group on the planet. The question is, will we be driven by what we can *get* in ministry or by what we can *give* in ministry?

QUESTION 6

Is your leadership based on intimidation of others?

Peter says that our shepherding should not include “domineering over those in your charge” (1 Peter 5:3). This is pastoring as if *you* are in charge, when you are not. Jesus’s words to his disciples are surely in the backdrop here:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.
(Mark 10:42–44)

The leaders in the church are the servants of the church. There is no place in pastoral ministry for a sense of entitlement, as if we have earned what has only been given by God’s grace. There is no place in pastoral ministry for an air of superiority, as if we would not be the vilest of sinners were it not for God’s mercy. There is no place in pastoral ministry for oppression or coercion. There is no place in pastoral ministry for personal pressure, sexual provocation, or political plotting. There is no place in pastoral ministry for unrighteous anger or any kind of temper.

In telling the story of Charles Simeon, it’s easy to highlight his strengths and ignore his weaknesses, but he was obviously not perfect. He had a bad habit of getting angry about small things. One day at a Mr. Hankinson’s house, Simeon got so irritated with how a man was stoking the fire that he swatted that man on the back to make him stop. Later that same day, the same man made

another mistake, and Simeon lost his temper with him.

Mr. Hankinson wrote a letter as if it was from this other man, and he put it in Simeon's bag for him to find later.

The letter said he could not see how a man who preached and prayed so well could be so angry and have a temper about such trivial matters. The letter was signed, "John Softly."

Simeon responded directly to the man with a note that said, "To John Softly, from Charles, Proud and Irritable: I most cordially thank you, my dear friend, for your kind and seasonable reproof." Then Simeon wrote to Mr. Hankinson and said, "I hope, my dearest brother, that when you find your soul nigh to God, you will remember one who so greatly needs all the help he can get."²⁵

We should not be domineering over those in our charge. Is *your* leadership based on intimidation of others?

QUESTION 7

Is your life worthy of imitation by others?

Instead of “domineering over those in your charge,” pastors are to be “examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). We immediately think of Paul saying to the church at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Or his exhortations to the Philippian Christians: “Brothers, join in imitating me What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 3:17; 4:9).

What a statement! Whatever you have learned, received, heard, or seen in me—do that, and it will go well for you. The people of God will not be what they cannot see, which means they need to see the life of Jesus in their pastors and elders. Isn’t this why the majority of qualifications for elders are character qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), qualifications that are essentially expected of every follower of Jesus?

Elders and pastors are to lead the church in such a way that members see the life of Christ in them. So let us each ask the question, “If the church I lead imitates my life, what will my church look like?” Let us each examine our hearts, inquiring, “What in my life is not worthy of imitation, and how can I change, by God’s grace, for their good?”

I’ve mentioned William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon’s contemporary, who worked to abolish the slave trade in the British Parliament. Wilberforce once recorded in his journal, “Simeon with us—his heart glowing with love of Christ. How full he is of love, and of desire to promote the spiritual benefit of others. Oh! that I might copy him as he Christ.”²⁶ That’s high commendation,

and it's critical for a pastor. John Thornton once wrote to Simeon, saying,

Watch continually over your own spirit, and do all in love; we must grow downwards in humility to soar heavenward. I should recommend your having a watchful eye over yourself, for generally speaking as is the minister so are the people.²⁷

As is the minister, so are the people. Is *your* life worthy of imitation?

QUESTION 8

*Does the way you pastor make no sense on this earth
and total sense in eternity?*

I phrase this last question this way because of how our text ends: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

The thrust of this command to “shepherd the flock of God” hinges on the coming of the Chief Shepherd with a crown of glory. This charge to pastoral ministry only makes sense in the light of eternity. In other words, if this world is all there is, then to use Paul’s reasoning in 1 Corinthians 15:32, live it up. This is the way of worldly leadership. No need to care for souls—just compete to be better than others, and do whatever you have to do to be better, to promote yourself, to climb the ladder, and to achieve standing in others’ eyes. And gain all you can along the way, for *you*. Be confident in yourself, and cavalier with others.

Here’s the danger: if we’re not careful, we can take the principles of worldly leadership and apply them to our lives as pastors. We can compete to be better than each other and do whatever works along the way in a church world where pragmatism reigns. We can promote ourselves, climb the ladder, and achieve standing in others’ eyes, only we will use the name of Christ to do it. We can gain all we can along the way for our maximum benefit in this world. And God is saying to us, right now, *don’t do it*. This world is not the end. This world is passing away. This world, and all its crowns, are fading.

But the King is coming. The Chief Shepherd of the church is on the way. And he will reckon, and he will reward, which begs

the question, are you ready? Am I ready?

As I think about these questions, I wonder, who of us is? What pastor among us is not prone to pride? What pastor among us is worthy of perfect imitation? What pastor among us doesn't grow weary in this work or falter in shepherding the flock?

None of us is a perfect shepherd, but that's the point. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and he is the "Overseer" of our souls too (1 Peter 2:25). He who humbled himself in a life worthy of total imitation, and with patient love for sinners, gave his life for our salvation and for the salvation of those we lead. So let us look to him in these days of pandemic, and in every other day to come. Let us look to him exclusively; let us trust in him completely; let us become more like him continually; let us love him wholeheartedly. And let us long for the day when he will come back with a crown of unfading glory for all who are eagerly waiting for him, and for those who are laboring with him, like lighthouse keepers caring for souls.

In September of 1836, Charles Simeon preached on 2 Kings 10:16: "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." It was a fitting last sermon from he who had once said that two things matter most: "The one is, to enjoy God in everything; the other is, to enjoy everything in God."²⁸ In October of that same year, as he lay on his bed dying, someone asked him, "What are you thinking about?" Simeon answered, "I don't think now; I just enjoy."²⁹

Finally, on November 13, 1836, on a Sunday when chapel bells were ringing across the Cambridge University campus, Charles Simeon exhaled his last breath in this world. And for every year since then, on November 13, people gather together in King's College Chapel and pray the following prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, who by thy holy servant, Charles Simeon, didst mold the lives of many that they might go forth and teach others also; mercifully grant that

as through evil report and good report he ceased not to preach thy saving Word, so may we never be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, who with Thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth one God world without end.³⁰

A CLOSING PRAYER FOR PASTORS

O God, I pray for every pastor listening right now, that you would help each of us to shepherd your flock among us, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as you would have us; not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in our charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, may we receive his unfading crown of glory. In his name we pray, Amen.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations related to Charles Simeon are taken from Hugh Evan Hopkins's biography, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1977).

2. The terms “pastor” and “elder” are used interchangeably throughout this resource. These terms, along with the term “overseer,” refer to the same office in the New Testament (see 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; Ephesians 4:11–12).

3. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 299.

4. H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: InterVarsity, 1948), p. 46 (as quoted in John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2006], p. 97).

5. Hopkins, p. 64.

6. Hopkins, p. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

8. Moule, p. 66 (as quoted in Piper, p. 106).

9. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), pp. 398–399.

10. Hopkins, p. 44.
11. Moule, p. 39 (as quoted in Piper, p. 104).
12. Hopkins, p. 66.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 156.
15. Ibid., p. 153.
16. Ibid., p. 135
17. Ibid., p. 60.
18. Moule, p. 129 (as quoted in Piper, p. 103).
19. Hopkins, p. 98.
20. Ibid., p. 142 (as quoted in A. Mayhew, *Christianity and the Government of India*, 28).
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 152 (Charles Simeon, Sermon 2145).
23. Ibid., p. 118.
24. Ibid.
25. Moule, p. 231 (as quoted in Piper, p. 103).

26. Hopkins, p. 166.

27. Ibid., pp. 43–44.

28. Ibid., p. 203

29. Moule, p. 172 (as quoted in Piper, p. 113).

30. Hopkins, p. 221.

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ABOUT RADICAL

Radical is an international ministry that mobilizes and equips the church to meet urgent spiritual and physical needs. We exist to serve the church for the cause of Christ—to glorify God by making disciples and multiplying churches among all the nations.

The end goal of God is his glory known and enjoyed among all the nations. Therefore, the end goal of every Christian and every local church is the spread of God's glory among all the nations. The plan Jesus has given us for accomplishing this goal is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–10). The nations are filled with urgent spiritual and physical needs. Billions of people in thousands of people groups are unreached by the gospel, and many of them are suffering in unimaginable ways.

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