



Ministers' Fraternal Study Guides

The Minister's Personal Walk with the Lord

Ken McIntosh

Introduction

How would you finish the following sentence: My people's greatest need is...? The godly young Scottish minister, Robert Murray McCheyne once wrote, 'My people's greatest need is my personal holiness.' He once wrote to a friend, 'It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.'

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, 'Whatever 'call' a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.' What is our current state of spiritual health? How closely are we walking with the Lord at the moment? This is arguably the most important subject we could be honest with one another about.

Behind a public life like ours there needs to be a life which is privately devoted to the Lord and walking with him daily. As ministers we are constantly exhorting others to spend time with God, yet how vitally important that we practice what we preach in this respect. Our primary calling, before our calling to the Ministry, is to be disciples of Jesus Christ and sons of God. We are to be growing in our likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the hazards of pastoral ministry is to be so busy caring for the souls of others that we neglect our own. We are not unaware of the devil's schemes and therefore we must constantly remember that who we are is more important than what we do.

God has called us into fellowship with himself before calling us into the pastoral ministry. He is after quality of life rather than quantity of service and so the priority of our lives must be to love God with all of our being.

Key Biblical Data

Psalm 1
Matthew 6:6; 7:7-11
Luke 10:28-28
John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:5
2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Philippians 3:7-11
1 Timothy 4:16
James 1:21-25
1 Peter 5:7
2 Peter 1:5-8
Revelation 3:20

Overview

In his book, 'Pastors and Teachers', Derek Prime suggests that there are four main aspects to our devotional life: worship, Bible reading, prayer and reading Christian books.

1. Worship

We were created to worship God. Our worship of the Lord cannot be separated from the other three aspects of devotion listed below, yet it should be at the heart of all we do. If we are to lead people to God in public worship then we must first worship the Lord when we come before him in secret. Some find it helpful to meditate on an attribute of God or a verse of Scripture. Some make use of a hymn book in their private devotions.

2. Bible Reading

It's easy to fall into the trap of reading the Scriptures only with our next sermon in mind. But we must apply the Scriptures first to our own lives. As ministers we must know the whole of the word of God and many recommend reading the whole Bible through in the course of a year. But as we do so we read not so much to gain knowledge for its own sake but to allow God to speak to us personally and reshape us through his word.

3. Prayer

All great servants of God have been men and women of prayer. It's easy to feel discouraged when we read of their prayer habits, yet prayer has a unique place in our devotional life. As we come to the Lord in prayer we come as a child to a perfect Father, able to talk about everything. Our prayers are shaped and prompted by the word of God but also by our needs. Some people find prayer lists helpful, others do not, but the important thing is that we learn intimacy with God as we pray. Time spent in private prayer then gives reality to our praying in public.

4. Reading Christian Books

The reading of Christian books can help us in our devotion to the Lord Jesus. In reading books we allow others to minister to us. Good books can feed the soul and stimulate our own thinking.

Areas of agreement/disagreement

A. W. Tozer once wrote, 'We of the nervous West are victims of the philosophy of activism... if we are not making plans or working to carry out plans already made we feel that we are failures, that we are sterile, unfruitful, eunuchs, parasites on the body of society. The gospel of work has crowded out the gospel of Christ in many Christian churches... (but) the centre of attraction in a true church is the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Is it possible to be more devoted to the work of God than to the God for whom we are working?

Discussion

- What benefits overflow to families and congregations when a minister is walking closely with the Lord?
- What other aspects are there to our devotional life? What part should retreats or fasting have, for example?
- Should we keep a spiritual journal?
- What are the obstacles to having quality time with God? How do we overcome these obstacles?
- In spiritual oversight, who pastors the pastor?
- What should we be praying for? How should we divide up our prayer time?
- How do we keep our reading of Scripture fresh?
- John Wesley used to say that he thought very little of a man who did not pray for four hours every day. Discuss.
- Are there devotional Christian books that should be read by every minister?
- How can we encourage one another to read good books?
- How important is it to vary our reading?
- How can we help one another when we are feeling spiritually barren?

Suggested further reading

Peter White, *The Effective Pastor*, chapter 4. Christian Focus, 1998.

Derek Prime, *Pastors and Teachers*, chapters 2 and 5. Highland Books, 1989.

Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, Zondervan, Lecture 1: The Minister's Self-watch.

Sinclair Ferguson, *A heart for God*, Banner of Truth, 1987.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, Book 3, chapter 20 on prayer. Eerdmans.