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IMITATION AS A MEANS FOR STRENGTHENING
PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE

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IMITATION AS A MEANS FOR STRENGTHENING
PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE

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To my wife and love of my life, Shannon.

Your love and support are precious treasures from the Lord that
point me to take heart in the character of Christ.

To our children, Esther, Jonas, and Isaac.

It is a joy to be your earthly father.

May you persevere with the eternal weight of glory in view to the end of your days with
your Heavenly Father!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Familiarity with the Literature	3
Void in the Literature	8
Thesis	8
Outline of Chapters	8
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE	11
Introduction	11
Perseverance of the Saints Undergirds Pastoral Perseverance	11
Perseverance Displayed in All Circumstances of Life and Ministry (2 Cor 4:1-18)	14
Perseverance Displayed in Faith and Practice (1 Tim 1:18-20)	23
Perseverance Displayed through Faithful Preaching (2 Tim 4:1-4)	27
Conclusion	30
3. PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE IMITATED IN JONATHAN EDWARDS	31
Introduction	31
Perseverance Displayed in Life and Ministry	32
Learning from the Weaknesses of Edwards	41
Ministry Applications	44
Conclusion	45

Chapter	Page
4. PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE IMITATED IN CHARLES SPURGEON	46
Introduction	46
Perseverance Displayed through Manifold Sorrow	48
Persevered Displayed in Gospel-Centered Preaching	56
Perseverance Displayed in Fighting for Denominational Purity	59
Learning from Spurgeon’s Weaknesses	61
Ministry Applications	63
Conclusion	66
5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER CHURCH	68
Introduction	68
The Biblical Call to Imitation	68
Imitation Accomplished within the Church	71
Imitation Applied through the Life of Jonathan Edwards	72
Imitation Applied through the Life of Charles Spurgeon	73
Imitation Applied to the Contemporary Pastor	75
The Biblical Model to Suffer with Joy in Ministry	76
The Biblical Mandate to Keep a Close Watch Over One’s Life and Doctrine	78
Conclusion	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

PREFACE

The opportunity to study at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary would not have been possible without several key individuals in my life. I want to personally thank the pastoral staff of Timberlake Baptist Church for supporting me through your prayers, encouragement, and for providing me the necessary time to finish this project. Spending the past twelve years serving alongside you and the wonderful people of our church has been a privilege. Your impact on my life and ministry has marked me profoundly.

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prayers and support. I also want to thank my father-in-law, Doug Chaney, for his words of support along the way and for his faithful service to Christ as a pastor. You are a living example of pastoral perseverance in ministry for me.

I am indebted to the apostle Paul, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon. I have found great comfort in studying these men and seeing how they walked through fiery trials of disappointment, depression, loss, and personal attacks.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Shannon, and to our children, Esther, Jonas, and Isaac, for taking this journey with me. Throughout my sixteen-year marriage to Shannon, eight of those years have been spent in school. Shannon has been by my side to urge me not to lose heart and to persevere each step of the way, pointing me to Christ. This thesis would not be possible without you. I still wonder at the grace of our Savior in giving me such a wonderful wife and children. Above all, I am supremely grateful to the Lord for his sustaining grace and for continuing to complete the good work of the gospel in his saints until the day of Jesus Christ. Soli Deo Gloria.

Stephen Conley

Forest, Virginia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For every pastor in service to the Lord, there are pressures that overwhelm and temptations to despair. One pastor gave this description of a day in his ministry life: “That was really hard. It almost killed me. And I have to do it again tomorrow.”¹ This issue is not new, but one that has confronted the office of a pastor throughout history. While the recent statistics prove a trend that pastors are staying longer in their pastorates, they are not staying the course with joy.² Clearly, there is a perceptible problem and the situation is unhealthy among pastors.

84 percent say they’re on call 24 hours a day.

80 percent expect conflict in their church.

54 percent find the role of pastor frequently overwhelming.

53 percent are often concerned about their family’s financial security.

48 percent often feel the demands of ministry are more than they can handle.

21 percent say their church has unrealistic expectations of them.³

Like the pastors who came before them, they face daunting challenges. As Thom Rainer points out, many contemporary pastors seem to resemble the walking dead that are awaiting their burial due to the pressures of ministry and temptations to burnout.⁴

¹ Elliot Grudem, “Pour It Out: God Doesn’t Intend Pastors to Burn Out; There’s a Better Way,” *Leadership Journal* 37, no. 1 (2016): 35.

² Lisa C. Green, “Despite Stresses, Few Pastors Give Up on Ministry,” accessed January 11, 2017, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2015/09/01/despite-stresses-few-pastors-give-up-on-ministry/>.

³ Green, “Despite Stresses.”

⁴ Thom Rainer, “Autopsy of a Deceased Pastor,” accessed January 11, 2017, <http://thomrainer.com/2016/10/autopsy-deceased-pastor/>.

Each one of these indicators show the symptoms of the problem, but do not get at the root of the issue. Donald Whitney challenges those who aspire to pastor by saying, “No one goes into the ministry to be a casualty, the ruin of almost every minister, it seems, is inevitable. . . . Sometimes it appears that of those who do stay in the ministry, many of them have been ruined in other ways.”⁵

The problem is not that pastors are quitting, but that they are not persevering with joy to the end. The pastor’s perseverance must be rooted in the Scriptures as well as in looking to historical examples of those who have persevered well.

Paul informs this struggle in 2 Corinthians 4, describing his own reality of weariness, affliction, confusion, and persecution. Despite the weighty burdens of ministry, Paul kept his focus on the “eternal weight of glory” that was incomparable to his sufferings. Paul exhorts Timothy in 1 Timothy 1 to fight well and finish well in the battle of the inner man. He exhorts pastors to persevere in ministry, while trusting in God and drawing upon God’s resources. Paul charges Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 with faithfully proclaiming the Word and pressing on to the end regardless of the culture or the circumstances.

The historical examples of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon serve as two exemplary patterns of biblical pastoral perseverance in ministry. These men were no strangers to suffering in ministry and were almost certainly tempted to despair. This thesis will connect the biblical call to persevering in ministry to the historical examples of men who answered that call through every season of ministry. To that end, each historical figure went through deep struggles, but sought to finish their ministry course with God-centered joy.

⁵ Richard Mayhue, “Editorial: The Almost Inevitable Ruin of Every Minister . . . and How to Avoid It,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (2005): 1-5.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was well acquainted with pastoral perseverance. Edwards was a man God used to change the world. Christians still embrace much of what he wrote today, for his writings reach across generations and are still fitting to be read. Edwards became the pastor of one of the most prestigious pulpits in New England at Northampton at the age of twenty-six, but he was voted out of this church after twenty-two years of faithful ministry. Edwards later served as a missionary to Native Americans for a time and he finished his life as president of the College of New Jersey. He dearly loved the people at Northampton and sought to shepherd them faithfully. He committed himself to proclaiming God's Word as opposed to resigning himself to the church political environment that sought to press him into its mold.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) was no stranger to perseverance when he served as pastor to his congregation in England. He faced difficulties throughout his life, both within his congregation and beyond. He fought valiantly for the truth within the Baptist denomination and eventually saw his church leaders participate in his downfall. As Spurgeon saw it, a subtle theological drift had to be confronted. He also dealt with deep personal struggles ranging from bouts of depression and health issues that spanned to his wife as well as to himself. Spurgeon left behind a legacy that will not allow itself to be forgotten.

Familiarity with the Literature

This thesis will enter the conversation of pastoral perseverance through a range of primary and secondary works. The current analysis of pastors failing to persevere focuses on multiple factors: "conflict, family, burnout, moral lapse, and poor fit."⁶ Still, other sources would include discouragement, suffering, loneliness, and the cares of this

⁶ Green, "Despite Stresses."

world to the list of causes.⁷ However, a recent Lifeway Research Survey of 1,500 evangelical pastors discovered that “an estimated 13 percent of senior pastors in 2005 had left the pastorate ten years later for reasons other than death or retirement.”⁸ This survey serves as a corrective to past surveys that claimed pastors were leaving in droves each month.

Peter Scazzero, a longtime pastor and author, offers his solution to pastors who fail to persevere in his work, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, contending that the pastor’s inner life needs to be addressed before the outer life can be changed.⁹ The emphasis of his argument is rooted in improving one’s emotional state of mind so that all unhealthy ministry patterns are eradicated. This work is part of a larger corpus of his Emotionally Healthy Spiritually series.

In *Zeal without Burnout*, Christopher Ash leads with his own testimony of reaching the edge of pastoral attrition and explaining how the pastor can persevere through those struggles.¹⁰ He treats the problem not only with a look within, but also with a focus on resting in God’s sufficiency.

Paul Tripp contributes to the conversation in his work *Dangerous Calling* by calling pastors to live humble, God-dependent lives that are introspective and genuine.¹¹

⁷ Jason Helopoulos, “Why Pastors Quit,” accessed January 11, 2017, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2013/04/18/why-pastors-quit/>.

⁸ Green, “Despite Stresses.”

⁹ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

¹⁰ Christopher Ash, *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice* (Surrey: England: Good Book, 2016).

¹¹ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

He contends for the pastor to address his heart issues through self-examination and reliance upon God's sanctifying grace for the challenges of each season of ministry.

Several recent articles that lend their voice to this recurring problem can be found in the *Leadership Journal*, which speaks to the value of establishing pastoral peer groups and focusing on self-care, family priorities, leadership structure, and spiritual formation.¹²

Donald Whitney provides insight into this issue in sermonic fashion in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, uncovering the inescapability of pitfalls in pastoral ministry and how to avoid becoming a casualty in the process.¹³ Whitney focuses on identifying the warning signs of pastoral ruin and giving oneself to the principles laid out in 1 Timothy 4:15-16.

Several exegetical commentaries provide excellent insight into the biblical foundations of perseverance throughout Paul's letters, specifically in 2 Corinthians and the Pastoral Epistles. One of the key resources for this thesis is George Guthrie's commentary on 2 Corinthians, which provides a comprehensive introduction of Paul as well as highlights the issues within the Corinthian church that ought to be noted.¹⁴ Likewise, Paul Barnett's commentary provides a detailed work on 2 Corinthians that focuses on the theme of Paul's strength being completed in weakness.¹⁵ Murray Harris's work on 2 Corinthians explores the text in a verse-by-verse structure to see theological

¹² Heidi Hall, "Hard Job, High Calling: Reports of Clergy Attrition Are Often Exaggerated, But Pastors Still Face Daunting Challenges," *Leadership Journal* 37, no. 1 (2016): 44-48.

¹³ Mayhue, "Editorial: The Almost Inevitable Ruin of Every Minister," 1-5.

¹⁴ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

¹⁵ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

truths considering grammatical analysis.¹⁶ Mark Seifrid's commentary on 2 Corinthians presents Paul as both unimpressive but boasting in the power of Christ expressed through his life.¹⁷ In regard to the Pastoral Epistles of Paul, Robert Yarbrough's commentary offers careful and thorough exegesis with comprehensive application.¹⁸ George Knight's commentary focuses directly on the Greek text and works through the major issues in each letter.¹⁹ William Mounce offers another scholarly work on the Pastoral Epistles and seeks to deal with the difficult passages and contends for Pauline authorship throughout.²⁰ I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner's work on the Pastoral Epistles takes a thorough approach that seeks to draw out the authorial intent of each passage while taking the reader through technical data.²¹

Several biographical works will be considered in this thesis, including the writings of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon as well as scholarly treatments of their lives. These biographical works will directly inform how they processed and applied scriptural principles of pastoral perseverance. The main sources will also draw out how these men preached the Word to their church and how they trained leaders in how to persevere through suffering. Each of these sources will contribute differently and

¹⁶ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁷ Mark A. Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015).

¹⁸ Robert Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018).

¹⁹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

²⁰ William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2000).

²¹ I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

proportionally to this study. The most significant resources for biographical material for Edwards will be found in his own volumes of writing.²² In addition, George Marsden provides a comprehensive and thoughtful work that speaks to Edwards' personal life and thought.²³ Patricia Tracy displays a fascinating look at the life of Jonathan Edwards.²⁴ Tracy enters the conversation by starting with his predecessor and father-in-law, Solomon Stoddard and traces Edwards' impact amid cultural change as well as showing the tender and tense relationship that he possessed with the congregation of Northampton. Dane Ortlund delivers a helpful resource on Edwards' view on the Christian life.²⁵ He also gives an effective perspective on Edwards' strengths and weakness. Resources for Spurgeon's biographical material come from his autobiography.²⁶ Spurgeon's sermons from the New Park Street Pulpit are an excellent window into his early years as a pastor.²⁷ The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit provides voluminous material from the majority of his preaching career.²⁸ In addition, his recorded addresses to his pastoral

²² Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 26 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

²³ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guide through His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

²⁴ Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).

²⁵ Dane Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

²⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1834-1892*, 4 vols (Chicago: Curtis and Jennings, 1898-1900).

²⁷ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*. 6 vols (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1855-1860).

²⁸ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*. 63 vols (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1855-1917).

ministry students provide insight into his perspective on ministry.²⁹ Along with these great works, Iain Murray's work will also reveal the controversies that Spurgeon endured as he fought the good fight of faith.³⁰

Void in the Literature

The general consensus is that pastors are failing to persevere. Current works seem to focus primarily on the symptoms and how one can address the heart issues that lead to despair. While current works seek to address the problem of pastoral attrition with a call to emotional wellness, a balanced Sabbath rhythm, and a proper understanding of family and ministry priorities, they have overlooked the place of imitation in fostering perseverance. While some solutions vary in their fidelity to Scripture, other approaches to this problem may not necessarily be unbiblical. However, they have ignored the value of imitation.

Thesis

The pastorate is frequently overwhelming and challenging. In this thesis, I will argue that combining a biblical perspective on pastoral perseverance with the historical examples of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon will encourage pastors to persevere in ministry. Therefore, this thesis will address the problem of pastors failing to persevere by focusing on the value of imitation as a means for strengthening pastoral perseverance.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters support this thesis and argue for the place of imitation as a means for pastoral perseverance.

²⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 2 vols (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875-1889).

³⁰ Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966).

Chapter 2: Biblical Foundations of Pastoral Perseverance

Pastoral perseverance is addressed in several passages of Scripture but are most clearly seen in the 1 Timothy 1 and 2 Timothy 4. Paul exhorts believers to press on by fixing their hope fully on God's grace as they shepherd the flock of God. Paul also addresses temptations to despair in the 2 Corinthians 4, which can be applied to pastors. The second chapter will argue for a theology of pastoral perseverance amid suffering through these passages.

Chapter 3: Pastoral Perseverance Imitated in Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards regularly experienced and endured the perils of pastoral ministry during his lifetime. He maintained a God-centered focus throughout his ministry, which provided the necessary anchor point during times of trial. The third chapter will argue for Edwards's unique contribution to pastoral perseverance and how his motivation was sourced in his knowledge of God and bringing glory to His name.

Chapter 4: Pastoral Perseverance Imitated in Charles Spurgeon

Charles Spurgeon was a pastor that consistently battled depression, sickness, and denominational decline. Any one of these areas could provide a challenging environment for the pastor, and yet Spurgeon persevered through them all. The fourth chapter will argue for Spurgeon's unique contribution to pastoral perseverance as he pressed on in the power of the Spirit with a strong sense of vocational calling.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This final chapter will summarize the arguments made in the thesis and focus on the implications of imitation as a means for pastoral perseverance over the duration of a lifetime of ministry to contemporary pastors and the broader church. This chapter will also argue for the biblical call to imitation through five pertinent New Testament

passages that trace the theme of imitation.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR
PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE

Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is to argue for a biblical foundation of pastoral perseverance amid suffering. I will support this thesis through a close examination of three Scripture passages found in 2 Corinthians 4, 1 Timothy 1, and 2 Timothy 4 as they apply to pastoral perseverance from the apostle Paul's perspective. Each passage will be addressed in succession through the second Corinthian letter and in two of the Pastoral Epistles. Paul exhorts believers to press on by fixing their hope fully on God's grace as they shepherd the flock of God.

**Perseverance of the Saints Undergirds
Pastoral Perseverance**

Perseverance in the Christian life and ministry would have no context if not for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Grudem notes "The perseverance of the saints means that all who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again."¹ The doctrine of perseverance is the ground on which pastoral perseverance is built.

**From God-Protected Preservation to
God-Enabled Perseverance**

There is a bandwidth in Scripture for lapses in the believer's spiritual walk, but the direction is pointed toward faith in God and resisting sin. Bruce Demarest displays

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 788.

how perseverance works out in the life of the Christian:

God's eternal purpose to save (John 6:39-40), his perfections of grace, immutability, power, and faithfulness (1 Pet 1:5; 2 Pet 1:3), his promises to keep his own people secure to the end (John 6:37; 10:28-29; 1 Cor 1:8; Phil 1:6), and Christ's prayers for his own (John 17:9, 11, 15; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25) guarantee true believers' perseverance. The final outcome of the saints rests not on their own resources, but in God himself.²

Perseverance is something in which every believer takes part, but it is a work of God from start to finish. Salvation finds its beginning in God's election of the saints in eternity past. Frame asserts that God's election "is an even more ultimate reason why we will persevere. . . . Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ cannot fail to be glorified."³ A God-enabled perseverance drives the believer to persevere in faith as they draw from God's boundless power.⁴

How then can a minister of Christ finish the race God has laid out for him? The Bible clearly proclaims that persevering to the end does not rest solely on the believer. Schreiner notes, "The writers of the New Testament teach us that everyone who believes in Christ Jesus and perseveres in faithfulness to him does so by God's grace alone. . . . Salvation from election to glorification, is all grounded in and secured by God's grace."⁵ Christ Himself has secured the believer's salvation by His own blood and no one is capable of taking the believer out of God's grasp (John 10:27-29). Grudem further declares "God keeps those who are born again safe for eternity in the 'seal' that God places upon us.

² Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 439.

³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 1000.

⁴ Demarest further develops his connection between preservation and perseverance in stating, "God's preservation and the believer's perseverance represent two sides of the same coin. For the purpose of analysis, they may be considered separately, but in truth and in life they are one. God faithfully and powerfully preserves genuine believers; but the latter must persevere with the strength that God provides." Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 450.

⁵ Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity, 2001), 13.

This ‘seal’ is the Holy Spirit within us, who also acts as God’s ‘guarantee’ that we will receive the inheritance promised to us.”⁶

The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit resides within the believer. Thus, the pastor who is weighed down by the cares of ministry must draw on God’s grace by finishing the course by the power of the Holy Spirit within him. Schreiner gives keen insight, asserting, “We need the power of God to finish the marathon that we run, and we have the promise of God that he will supply the necessary power. Thus, we can be certain that every believer will most certainly finish the race and obtain the prize.”⁷ The power of God in the gospel that saves the sinner is the same power of God that sustains the believer as he continues in obedience to the Word.⁸ Robert Culver notes that it is “God who preserves us so that we may persevere. Our success depends on Him as we ‘work out your [our] salvation but only ‘with fear and trembling’ knowing that God ‘works in you [us] both to will and to work for his good pleasure.’”⁹ As one rests in God’s work and diligently perseveres by God’s grace, he would do well to take heart in the truth that God will never abandon him (Heb 13:6), even in the midst of suffering. As Demarest concludes, “In the final analysis, the hope of true believers resides not in our feeble hold of God but in his powerful grasp of us. The stability and constancy of our spiritual lives rests not in our human powers but in God’s eternal purpose and infinite resources.”¹⁰ What hope and courage this provides in the face of ministerial trials that envelope the pastor on a regular basis! The way to keep going and the means to move forward are

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 790.

⁷ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 245.

⁸ Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 247.

⁹ Robert Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 767.

¹⁰ Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 462.

found in God’s manifold grace. Murray aptly advises the pastor, “Without motivating grace, we just rest in Christ. Without moderating grace, we just run and run—until we run out. . . . Where grace is not fueling a person from the inside out, he burns from the inside out.”¹¹

Perseverance Displayed in All Circumstances of Life and Ministry (2 Cor 4:1-18)

Perseverance in life and ministry rests upon God’s preservation and enabling grace. However, some circumstances can sound alarms of doubt and despair. During these moments one can see God’s promises as bleak and far away. In 2 Corinthians 4, the apostle Paul provides a God-breathed perspective on ministry. During the most excruciatingly painful moments of ministry, he desires to encourage the Corinthian church to continue with confidence. While Paul’s letter begins with the lofty prose of God’s faithfulness and comfort, it leads into the lowly depths of personal affliction and desolation. He does this in an emotional manner, pointing the reader to the hope found in the gospel.

The Apostle’s Perspective on Faithful Ministry (2 Cor 4:1-6)

In the opening six verses, Paul discloses his own personal story and the reason for his continued perseverance in ministry. In verse 1, Paul declares, “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.”¹² Paul is referring to the specific ministry of the new covenant that exposes the light of the gospel and the way it triumphs over darkness, specifically to those in unbelief. This ministry of the gospel captivated the apostle on the road to Damascus where he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In the backdrop of God’s mercy, Paul confesses that he will not give up, regardless of the circumstances. Murray Harris accurately offers the meaning of the phrase, “to lose heart”:

¹¹ David Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 18-19.

¹² All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Found only in Koine Greek, the verb ἐγκακέω basically means “behave badly,” especially in a cowardly (κακός) fashion or in reference to a culpable omission. It is a small step to the two NT meanings: “become weary” (Luke 18:1; Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:13), “lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:1, 16; Eph. 3:13). That is, weariness and despair that lead to slackening of effort or neglect of duty are ways of “conducting oneself remissly.” Paul was determined that no opposition, no failure, would cause him to relax his efforts to fulfill his God-given calling. Firing that determination was his constant awareness of the inestimable glory of the Christian ministry.¹³

Not only does the verb ἐγκακέω carry the connotation of giving up, it also means to give in to evil. Seifrid points out, “Although nearly all translations (including NRSV, NIV, ESV) translate *enkakoumen* as ‘lose heart,’ it is more likely in this context that this (negated) verb should be rendered ‘not failing’ (including moral failure, i.e., ‘not acting wrongly’).”¹⁴ Paul’s concern was not just in giving up or quitting the ministry. His greater concern was to remain faithful, keep the eternal perspective, and not be disqualified through disobedience.¹⁵ In this personal moment, Paul is letting the Corinthians see how a “new covenant minister” of the gospel fulfills his calling. Barnett describes how this unfolds in relation to 2 Corinthians 3 and 4: “Indeed, since the glory of the new covenant ministry ‘remains’ (3:11), as opposed to the old that is ‘abolished’ (3:11), it is appropriate that the new covenant minister ‘remains,’ that is ‘perseveres,’ ‘does not give up.’”¹⁶

Paul had been entrusted with this ministry of endurance from God, which mirrors the ministry of Jesus Christ who willingly suffered and faithfully persevered all the way to the end.¹⁷ He echoes this perspective in the first letter to the Corinthians: “Be

¹³ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 323.

¹⁴ Mark Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015), 190.

¹⁵ First Corinthians 9:27 bears out Paul’s concern: “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

¹⁶ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 212.

¹⁷ Barnett draws a connection to Paul’s claim as a genuine apostle: Quite possibly he is obliquely answering criticism that, since his ministry is characterized by such difficulty and reversal, his legitimacy as a minister is, to say the least, problematic. Paul will argue that, on the contrary his endurance in the sufferings of ministry (hinted at here but made explicit

imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Therefore, as Paul seeks to follow Christ’s example, he repudiates any kind of ministry practices or personal lifestyle that would detract from displaying the gospel in its undistorted and unadjusted form. For Paul, no such ministry would rely on mere human wisdom or veiled tampering with the Scriptures. Instead, the minister of God must seek to live transparently with a clear conscience before God and others. Guthrie argues for this kind of ministerial openness:

No walls of deception, of hidden motives or shifty actions, no walls that stand between the minister and his own conscience, or between the minister and the people inside or outside the reach of ministry. . . . Such a minister, who lives with integrity in the proclamation of the gospel, should be commended and embraced by the people of God.¹⁸

In the verses that follow, Paul turns his attention to those who hear the gospel in verses 3 and 4. Some may criticize the message as obscure or as non-revelatory. However, it is only obscure to those who are “perishing.” Guthrie continues, “The apostle answers that the hiddenness of the gospel cannot be attributed to his lack of rhetorical skill nor to the weakness of his gospel. Rather, its obscuring has to do with the spiritual condition of unbelievers and the “god of this world” (4:4), who blinds the minds of unbelievers.”¹⁹ Indeed, it is not the message or the messenger, but the heart of those receiving the message that is the problem. The blindness results in an inability to see the glorious gospel shining like the sun. However, spiritual blindness does not have the final word, nor does it place an impossible obstacle in front of the apostle Paul or to the minister today. In the verses that follow, Paul describes the gospel simply and profoundly as preaching Jesus as Lord (v. 5). In verse 6, Paul goes on to use the illustration of

elsewhere in the letter) mark the apostle out as a genuine servant of Christ, whose own sufferings are now reproduced in the ministry of the one who represents him. (Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 212)

¹⁸ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 238.

¹⁹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 239.

creation to show what the gospel does to dead and darkened hearts. It is the “let there be light” moment where the gospel penetrates the darkness of sin and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God creates a new heart.²⁰ The darkness-dispelling light of the gospel should give the minister great hope and encourage him to take heart in the power of God!

The Gospel’s Surpassing Power in Faithful Ministry (1 Cor 4:7-12)

While the power of God is at work through the gospel, Paul is quick to point out that this surpassing power is not sourced in the one preaching the gospel. It is an other-worldly, divine treasure displayed in pots of clay. As Paul devoted his life to preaching the name of Christ to the nations, he knew on the outset that it would involve suffering for the name of Christ (Acts 9:15-16). This suffering would come in multifaceted physical and spiritual forms. Paul depicts his suffering as corporate and common to all ministers in verses 8 and 9: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Each pair that Paul presents is a comparison of lesser to greater intensity of the suffering. Murray Harris writes, “The first element in each antithesis illustrates human weakness, the second illustrates divine power. . . . The negated second element does not indicate a mere mitigation of the hardship; rather, it points to an actual divine deliverance (cf. 1:8–9); not simply a change of outlook on Paul’s part, but God’s intervention.”²¹

The first comparison in verse 8 is between *θλιβόμενοι* and *στενοχωρούμενοι*. The former refers to any kind of trials and affliction that press into a person’s life, causing himself to feel surrounded in distress. The latter refers to being constricted and crushed.

²⁰ The apostle Paul may have his own Damascus Road conversion in mind as he describes the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ shining into blind and dead hearts. It was the light from the glorified Christ that invaded his heart and transformed him from a persecutor of Christ to a minister of Christ.

²¹ Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 342.

The second comparison is between ἀπορούμενοι and ἐξαπορούμενοι. This comparison is more of a wordplay where Paul and his fellow coworkers are as Guthrie describes, “baffled but not to the point of despair.”²² Barnett concludes that it could also be literally interpreted as “at a loss but not absolutely at a loss.”²³ The third pair, διωκόμενοι and ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι, describes the opposition the apostle faced on a regular basis in the ministry.²⁴ While the first participle refers to persecution, the second denotes the impossibility of being forsaken or abandoned by God.²⁵ Barnett portrays this word and its vivid display in God never forsaking His people: “Here the word implies an eschatological intent; God will not abandon his chosen ones who he has redeemed.”²⁶ The final grouping of καταβαλλόμενοι and ἀπολλύμενοι exhibits the full spectrum of ministry trials. The former is in the passive form and it means to be knocked down or laid low. Barnett contends that “suffering apostle will not be forsaken by God, nor lost from him.”²⁷

As the preacher of the gospel seeks to proclaim the gospel, there will be dangers and temptations. Each danger is an opportunity for the preacher to lose heart, and Paul outlines the potential dangers in verses 8 and 9. Paul is not seeking to minimize suffering

²² Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 256.

²³ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 233.

²⁴ Guthrie writes,

The apostle must mean that he has not been drawn into an *ongoing* state of despair, or that he was not touched by such a state at present, for, using the same word, he has already noted at 1:8 that the extraordinary persecution he faced in Asia had brought him and his ministry team to a point where “we experienced deep despair, to the point that we thought we were going to die.” The key is that God delivered him in that situation, and consequently delivered him from the momentary despair. (Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 257)

²⁵ Harris states, “In secular Greek διώκω regularly means ‘chase,’ denoting the pursuit of an animal in a hunt or of the enemy in battle. Its meaning was naturally extended to refer to persecution, a sense it often bears in Paul’s letters.” Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 344.

²⁶ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 234.

²⁷ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 234.

but to explain how God sustained him during each hardship. Seifrid notes, “His juxtaposition of deliverance with distress recalls similar contexts in Scripture, especially the thanksgiving Psalms. The psalmists are in distress, pursued by enemies, given over to death, and yet are delivered.”²⁸ Paul’s list of afflictions is found in the pages of 1 Corinthians 6:4-10, where he details his beatings, imprisonment, destitution, sorrow, unreasonable treatment, and poverty while still enduring with rejoicing.

This catalogue of Paul’s suffering can only be viewed in light of God’s sufficient grace, not in the toughness of Paul’s character to bravely persevere. Seifrid writes, “His life is full of afflictions, yet his afflictions are, or rather shall be, overcome by the comfort and deliverance granted him in Christ.”²⁹ The apostle sees ministry as a matter of life and death, which is a contrast that can be traced throughout redemptive history. It is also viewed as an instrument of blessing in his life. Barnett explains, “The motif of the death and life of Jesus is prominent within this passage . . . in two closely connected respects. Within himself in the course of his ministry Paul experiences the death but also the life, or deliverance of Jesus. . . . At the same time the death that is at work in Paul brings life to the Corinthians (v. 12).”³⁰ While death is at work in the apostle, he is mindful that something inside him is very much alive. The radiant, life-giving gospel is what he proclaims and what sustains him, regardless of the circumstances.

As the pastor seeks to carry out the gospel ministry entrusted to him, he must trust in God’s power alone. R. Kent Hughes writes, “God fills us with his power so that his power is manifested through us. We do not become powerful. We remain weak. We do not grow in power. We grow in weakness. We go from weakness to weakness, which

²⁸ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 206.

²⁹ Seifrid, *2 Corinthians*, 206.

³⁰ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 227.

is to remain vessels of his power—ever weak and ever strong.”³¹ One might interject that this kind of ministry life is exceptional and should be avoided. However, Paul is describing the normal life of those who engage in God’s service. Weakness is not a separate experience that a pastor encounters when his strength has expired. Weakness is the platform from which all pastors minister. Paul declares, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). This not only applies to prayer but also life in general, as one is disoriented and buffeted as they suffer. The Holy Spirit is aware of and understands the frailties of the pastor’s personhood and complexity of the pastor’s experiences. Therefore, when one finds himself in similar situations of being constricted, perplexed, facing persecution, or struck down, he can take heart knowing that the Spirit is at work. In the midst of those experiences, Paul outlines the good purpose of affliction in verses 11 and 12. It is designed to put the life of Jesus on display within these weak pots of clay, giving life to others. Guthrie concludes,

In the first statement (4:10), Paul proclaims that he and those alongside whom he ministers are “always carrying around the dying of Jesus in our body” (πάντοτε τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι περιφέροντες, *pantote tēn nekōsin tou Iēsou en tō sōmati peripherontes*). The adverb translated “always” (πάντοτε, always, at all times) refers to the state of constant threat under which the apostle ministers.³²

The Unsurpassed Reward of Faithful Ministry (2 Cor 4:13-18)

When a pastor is suffering under the weight of ministry, it can be bewildering to the soul and blinding to the eyes. Inevitably, the focus on the eternal weight of glory that Paul promises is shielded from view as the weighed down pastor’s gaze is on the ground, struggling to place one foot in front of another. Paul’s exhortation in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 strengthens pastoral perseverance and is closely connected with 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. Even though Paul has been “handed over to death,” he displays how the life of Jesus is at work in the life of His church. Guthrie rightly answers the begging question,

³¹ R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 90.

³² Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 259.

“Why would someone embrace a life and ministry characterized by such affliction? The apostle has already stated twice in the previous verses, ‘in order that also the life of Jesus might be made known’ (4:10–11) and, further, that the Corinthians themselves might experience life (4:12).”³³

Paul rests on the Scriptures as his foundation for his ongoing public proclamation of the gospel in verse 13: “Since we have the same spirit according to what has been written, ‘I believed and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we speak.” Paul also boldly declares the theology and efficacy of Christ’s resurrection for the church in verse 14: “Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence.” Christ’s resurrection ensures the believer’s resurrection. Guthrie contends, “Yet with Jesus’s resurrection, a new form of being raised to life was initiated, one in which the perishable becomes imperishable, the dishonor of death becomes glorious, the weak becomes powerful, the natural is transformed to a spiritual body, never to die again.”³⁴ Not only does being raised to life refer to the believer’s resurrection through Christ, it also underscores the believer’s presentation to the Father by Christ. Christ provides the rock-solid foundation and hope for the pastor as he seeks to remain faithful in preaching the Word. Paul revels in the vibrant increase of the gospel that will ultimately magnify God in verse 15: “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.” The “all” refers to the entirety of Paul’s ministry that pointed to the goal of glorifying God in every soul receiving God’s grace through the proclamation of the gospel. As Barnett summarizes, As Barnett summarizes, “This is the *doxological* motive, which must be added to the *eschatological* motive, for Paul ‘speaking [the word of God]’ (v.13) as well

³³ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 262.

³⁴ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 263-64.

as the *sacrificial*—‘dying’ that they might ‘live’ (v. 12).”³⁵ These vignettes of suffering that Paul describes are real situations on a cosmic scale. They are of this present time and culture, and yet do not move the scales of eternity and the glory that will be revealed. They are also akin to the exhortation Paul gave in Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

In verses 16 through 18, Paul comes full circle in his exhortation to the Corinthian church to “not lose heart” with three stark contrasts. The first contrast is found in considering the two ages in which the believer lives. Barnett notes, “The outer person (*exo anthropos*), who belongs to the present age is wasting away, while the inner person (*eso anthropos*), who belongs to the coming age, is being renewed.”³⁶ While Paul points out the obvious outer weakening of the physical body that is taking place, there is the reality of ongoing inward spiritual renewal.³⁷ Not only is there the contrast between the outer and inner person in verse 16, there is also the contrast between the “slight momentary affliction” and the “eternal weight of glory” in verse 17. Paul literally calls his ministry afflictions light, insignificant, and temporary. Paul’s description of ministry does not diminish the weightiness of his hardships. However, when they are laid on the scales next to the eternal importance and significance of God’s glory, there is no comparison. Paul has experienced extreme suffering, but he looks to an extraordinary God in the midst of those times. Guthrie explains, “Paul has in mind with this word picture seems to be that the glory gained, by the comparatively insignificant amount of

³⁵ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 244.

³⁶ Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 246.

³⁷ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 269. Guthrie explains this further: “In other words, the persecution against Paul and his mission might be consistent, but the spiritual renewal taking place amid that persecution is incessant” (271).

suffering that produces it, staggers the imagination.”³⁸ Paul’s third contrast in verse 18 pulls the temporal sight (what is seen) into alignment with the eternal perspective (what is unseen). Paul is pushing a paradigm shift to seeing with eyes of faith into the unseen eternity instead of focusing merely on the seen circumstances of this life. He is also pointing the reader to make a deliberate and conscious choice to look forward to the glory that is coming rather than to the hardships that are looming and unfolding. However, Paul’s footsteps through suffering were already outlined by Christ in His death and resurrection; for it is Christ’s pattern that every pastor who seeks to persevere in ministry must follow.

Perseverance Displayed in Faith and Practice (1 Tim 1:18-20)

The Minister’s Charge to Fight Well (1 Tim 1:18)

The apostle Paul was fully vested in entrusting the truth of God’s Word to “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). His first letter to Timothy, his son in faith, provided him with tools for public ministry as well as established the expectations for his personal life as a minister of the gospel. Paul seeks to establish that perseverance in public ministry cannot happen apart from a commitment to fight the good fight of faith in the inner man. These exhortations are not just for Timothy but are tailor-made for pastors today.

In 1 Timothy 1:18-20, Paul unfolds a sacred charge to Timothy based on the beginning of chapter 1. Yarbrough contends, “Previous verses serve now to underscore a major intent for Paul’s writing: to fortify Timothy as he executes a game plan that will

³⁸ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 272. Guthrie denotes, “The term βάρος (*baros*), which we have translated ‘tonnage’ could be used by writers of the ancient world to mean ‘a burden’ that is oppressive, or ‘a claim to importance,’ but here it speaks positively and almost lyrically of the ‘fullness’ or ‘weight’ of an accumulated ‘mass’ of glory” (272).

require all the resources he can muster.”³⁹ These “resources” will enable the perseverance that Timothy needs to be faithful in ministry. The first of these resources is found in the apostle’s life message and the undergirding support it brings to Timothy. As Paul shares his testimony with Timothy, it underscores how imitation can serve to be a means of pastoral perseverance. In the earlier verses of 1 Timothy 1, Paul gives his testimony of Christ’s power in taking him from a blasphemer, persecutor, and opponent of the gospel to being drafted into Christ’s service as a proclaimer of the gospel. This before and after picture is stunning to behold. However, none of this would be possible if not for this truth statement in 1 Timothy 1:15: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” This message of redemption has now been entrusted to Timothy, who has been called by God for this task. Knight suggests, “The word ‘παράτιθεμαι’ in this context has the meaning ‘entrust something to someone,’ which often has the double-sided nuance of both safekeeping and transmission to others.”⁴⁰ Paul charges Timothy directly, continuing his charge from 1 Timothy 1:3. Towner contends, “The personal stakes are increased as he is reminded of the divine acknowledgement of his calling. Timothy’s commission in Ephesus is to be seen as the corollary of his authentic faith. The continued pattern of contrast allows us to see what becomes of leaders who let go of that faith.”⁴¹

The second resource Paul entrusts to Timothy for his perseverance in ministry is what Yarbrough describes as “the prophecies once made (*proagousas*) about you.”⁴²

³⁹ R. W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 131. Yarbrough also points out that “only here and in 6:20 does Paul address Timothy by name, using the vocative case (*Timothee*). This usage lends a poignant touch, enhanced by ‘my son’” (131).

⁴⁰ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 107-8.

⁴¹ Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 155.

⁴² Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 131.

This prepositional phrase finds its roots in Timothy's commission to ministry by the Holy Spirit. Towner illuminates this ministry:

The role of prophecy in defining Timothy's calling and authority is confirmed by 4:14, but neither the procedure envisioned, nor the time is entirely clear. As for procedure, the best analogy is probably Acts 13:2, where, in the Spirit, words of confirmation and calling were uttered by the group of prophets and teachers praying for Barnabus and Paul. As for time, the translation above suggests that the reflection here is on an earlier episode in which multiple prophecies, mutually confirmed, were declared "upon" Timothy.⁴³

Paul desires for his young apprentice and pastor to fight well and finish well in the life of ministry that lay before him. Timothy needed the encouragement of Paul's life and the reassurance of his calling in order to "wage the good warfare" (1 Tim 1:18).

The Minister's Resources to Fight Well (1 Tim 1:19a)

In verse 19, Paul unfolds the resources that will enable the minister to fight well in the arena of service to the Lord. The first of these resources is found in "holding faith." Towner describes faith as "that posture of trust in God that animates the individual's personal relationship with God."⁴⁴ Paul is not referring to Timothy grasping hold of a confession of faith or creed. He is underscoring how an ongoing trust in God is essential for perseverance in life and ministry.

The second resource is a "good conscience," which is equally essential for the minister's life. Towner explains, "The 'good conscience' is the organ of decision, by which the Christian may move from knowledge of the faith (considered from the standpoint of objective content) and sound teaching to appropriate conduct."⁴⁵ The

⁴³ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 156. Towner states, It is not possible to locate this event with certainty. 4:14 might seem to indicate that Timothy's authority was confirmed in the local Ephesian setting, or there and here the reference may be back to some earlier occasion(s) either at the outset of Timothy's career (Acts 16:2), or as marking the commencement of this present assignment. Either way, Timothy is thus bound to his commission (1:5, 18a) by the divine decision communicated to him in the presence of others. (156)

⁴⁴ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 156.

⁴⁵ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 157-58.

minister must possess a living faith in God and a life in sync with the teaching he proclaims from the pulpit. In other words, one cannot separate belief and the decisions that flow out of those beliefs.

The Minister's Warning to Finish Well (1 Tim 1:19b-20)

In the final verses of 1 Timothy 1, Paul paints a vivid picture of so-called ministers who reject an authentic godly devotion to God in both faith and practice. They have let go of the solid moorings of sound doctrine and have given themselves over to a belief system that focuses on the outward instead of the inward. Towner contends, “Essentially, their rejection of the Pauline conception of faith, with its insistence on internalizing of the norm of godliness, for an external law structure without the Spirit, rendered their conscience incapable of discerning from inauthentic doctrine and conduct (4:2).”⁴⁶ Paul describes the disastrous end of those who continue in this rebellion as having “made shipwreck of their faith.” Tragically, they must have exhibited a veneer of faith, professing to know God but denying the truth, and therefore proving they were never truly children of God. Paul warns the church of false teachers in the each of the pastoral epistles (cf. 1 Tim 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:14-3:9; Titus 1:10-16, 3:9-11) and their destructive effect on the unfounded and easily deceived. However, in 1 Timothy 1:19, the other side of false teaching is in view. Not only does their false doctrine destroy others, it also sets in motion a destruction that will shatter their lives. Knight contends,

The definite article with πίστιν is most likely used here as the equivalent of a possessive pronoun (“their faith”). ναυαγέω, “to suffer shipwreck” (from ναῦς, ship, ἄγγυμι, to break: “to break a ship to pieces”; literal in 2 Cor. 11:25; figurative here), indicates in graphic terms the destruction wrought and provides a graphic negative lesson for Timothy and the listening church.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 158.

⁴⁷ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 110.

The false teacher's attempts to destroy the truth only ends with a disastrous backfire effect. Paul not only calls out this kind of rebellion, but he exposes two of them by name: "Hymenaeus and Alexander." It is likely that these men were not only known to Timothy, the Ephesian community, and the church at large, but could also have been prominent leaders. While Alexander is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, Hymenaeus is addressed in a later situation in 2 Timothy 2:16-18: "But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some." Paul desires to protect the church from such men whose blasphemy and doctrine were wreaking havoc on the church. His solution in verse 20 is that they be "handed over to the Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Paul is exercising his apostolic authority in the situation through this act of discipline. However, Paul does not clearly outline what handing someone over to Satan entails. Towner indicates, "The nature of the disciplinary process is less clear. Several texts (see also Matt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 2:5-11; 1 Thess 3:14-15), would seem to indicate that 'handing over to Satan' involved a last stage in which the unrepentant sinner was turned out of the church to be treated as an unbeliever."⁴⁸ The purpose for handing these men over to Satan was for their own good. In the end, Paul hoped they would learn not to blaspheme the Word in both faith and practice and be restored to the church. Paul's warning not only served to warn Hymenaeus and Alexander, but also to urge Timothy and the church to persevere to the end with their faith and conscience intact.

Perseverance Displayed through Faithful Preaching (2 Tim 4:1-4)

The apostle Paul continues his exhortation to Timothy in his second letter by

⁴⁸ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 158.

calling him to faithful preaching in the midst of a hostile environment. What is faithful preaching? This question is not easily answered in a day where it has taken on so many different forms. Within the church, it is described as a message, a sermon, or even a politically-motivated talk. However, the Bible should be the starting point when seeking to describe this office of preaching. In Scripture, preaching is portrayed as proclaiming God's Word. It is saying what God has already said. Because God has spoken, the preacher has something to say. Expository preaching is foundationally setting forth the meaning of Scripture. It is giving a message from God that is sourced in the Word of God. Since the text of Scripture is supreme, the expositor must clearly communicate the meaning of the text accurately. To do this effectively and responsibly, the expositor must begin with authorial intent, which is the meaning that the author delineated when he penned the words in his context. Few texts of Scripture would communicate the components for expository preaching more than 2 Timothy 4:1-4:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Considering the accountability of the omnipresence of God, the preacher is compelled by five imperative phrases as he prepares to preach. The first imperative, "preach the word" (κήρυξον τὸν λόγον), plays a dominant role. The preacher's marching orders are found in the context of the phrase, "preach the Word." The ultimate mandate for the expositor is to proclaim God's truth, which builds upon the previous commands in 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2:15. The second imperative, "be ready" (ἐπίστηθι), outlines how the preaching the Word is to be accomplished. It is to be done always, when it is well received and when it is rejected or mocked. It also carries the idea of staying on mission regardless of the circumstances. The expository preacher is called to declare publicly what God has said regardless of the cultural atmosphere and appetites of the people to whom he proclaims the Word. The third imperative, "reprove" (ἐλεγξον), means to

correct or reprove someone who is continuing in their sin against God. This expository message component may be easily overlooked because of its apparent negative connotation within society at large. However, a message that rebukes is an essential component for each expository message that cannot be dismissed. The writer of Hebrews puts this reproofing sermon element on full display in Hebrews 4:12-13: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” God’s chosen medium to declare who He is and what He demands from His people until He consummates His kingdom is found in His Word. The Word of God is the living and powerful revelation of God that exposes the heart in both the thoughts and intentions. When the Word of God is preached, there should be a heart disruption that should take place within the congregation. This exposure is for the good of those who hear and obey, for it leads one away from their sin and points them to Christ. The expositor must be willing to faithfully confront people with the truth of God’s Word through compassionate reproof of their sin patterns. Once people are admonished by the Word of God, the expositor must also seek to help people apply their lives to the Word of God. The fourth imperative, “to rebuke” (ἐπιτίμησον), is akin the previous command, but carries a different connotation. This expository preaching element is concerned with seeing the sinful patterns put to death. Paul’s compelling emphasis on correction proves that a sermon without compassionate call to change is incomplete at best. Considering sin’s destructive nature, the expositor must point his people to a continual renewal of the mind on God’s truth with the purpose of heart transformation.

In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul urges Timothy to persevere in preaching the Word through times of difficulty. Timothy’s context in Ephesus included people who refused to hear the truth as well as people who were susceptible to departing from the truth. Paul sought to equip him to deal with those who were intolerant of sound doctrine as well as

those who had an appetite for tolerant, inclusive doctrine. Timothy's setting is not too far removed from the challenges of the current age of skepticism and denial of God's truth. The pastor who perseveres must be vigilant in preaching the Word faithfully, regardless of the circumstances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pastor must seek to faithfully preach the Word and persevere in ministry—he must be present with his flock, constantly assessing their needs and spiritual growth. He must protect them by warning them concerning to false teachers and false teaching. He must comfort them during times of grief, confusion, and anxiety. He must be willing to exercise church discipline in love, as well as be willing to restore the repentant. He must pray dependently for God's divine grace and gratefully trust the Lord's sovereign work to produce fruitfulness, expose false teachers, and reveal apostasy. As the pastor preaches the Word, he must also yield to the Truth he is proclaiming through pursuing a clear conscience. He must in all things set his focus on Jesus Christ, his great shepherd and example.

CHAPTER 3
PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE IMITATED
IN JONATHAN EDWARDS

Introduction

This chapter argues for the imitation of pastoral perseverance amid suffering through an examination of the life of Jonathan Edwards. This purpose will be accomplished through a close examination of Edwards' life, pastoral ministry challenges, and theological convictions as it applies to pastoral perseverance.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was a man whom God used to change the course of history. Edwards became the pastor of one of the most prestigious pulpits in New England at Northampton at the age of twenty-six, but he was voted out of this church after twenty-two years of faithful ministry. He dearly loved the people at Northampton and sought to shepherd them faithfully. Edwards later served as a missionary to Native Americans and concluded his life as president of the College of New Jersey.

Edwards was born into a strong Christian family. His early education, according to Stephen Nichols, consisted of "learning Scripture, the catechism, and the rich heritage of the Puritan and Reformed faith from both his father and mother."¹ In conjunction with his education, he was trained by his father in pastoral ministry, and saw times of spiritual revival. For college, Edwards attended the Collegiate School of Connecticut in 1716, which later became known as Yale University. Edwards studied grammar, rhetoric, logic, ancient history, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, metaphysics,

¹ Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 30.

ethics, and natural science. In addition, he studied Greek and Hebrew to help him study the Bible more efficiently.

By 1734, Edwards experienced God’s work of conversion. Edwards records this experience in his work, entitled “Personal Narrative.” Within “Personal Narrative” Edwards records “70 Resolutions,”² which were seventy commitments that he made to God each week, which helped to serve as guideposts for his life. Each resolution represented the genuineness of Edwards’ faith and the seedbed from which his perseverance in ministry would spring forth. Stephen Lawson contends, “Edwards desired to bring *all* areas of his life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ through rigorous self-mastery.”³

Perseverance Displayed in Life and Ministry

Perseverance Displayed in Faithful Proclamation of the Word

Jonathan Edwards was arguably one of the greatest preachers in American history. John Piper notes, “One of the reasons that the world and the church need Jonathan Edwards 300 years after his birth is that his God-entranced vision of all things is so rare and yet so necessary.”⁴ He served alongside the longtime pastor of Northampton, Solomon Stoddard, who ministered faithfully for almost sixty years. Stoddard passed away just two years after Edwards’ arrival, at which time Edwards ascended to the role of senior pastor. Prior to pastoring at Northampton, Edwards had the blessing of observing his father, Timothy, in pastoral ministry. Peter Beck describes Edwards’ father, who

² Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 16:754-59.

³ Stephen Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2008), 31.

⁴ John Piper, “A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: Why We Need Jonathan Edwards 300 Years Later,” in *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 21.

“faithfully pastored his smallish congregation in East Windsor, Connecticut, for decades, modeling for his son the diligence necessary to complete the task before him.”⁵ Having a visual example of pastoral perseverance in front of him served Edwards well in his own pursuit of faithfulness in ministry. Patricia Tracy describes Edwards’ first Sunday at Northampton on February 16, 1729, when Edwards stepped into the giant shadow of his predecessor:

Twenty-five-year-old Jonathan Edwards mounted the steps of the pulpit in the Northampton meetinghouse and faced the congregation who were now his flock. He was not unprepared for this responsibility, for he had received excellent academic training and had over six years of preaching experience, two of them in this very community. . . . Now he was alone, and now he had committed his whole life to saving the souls of this particular group of Connecticut Valley farmers who sat on the benches before him. The bond between them was as intimate as each man’s concern for his own salvation.⁶

Edwards poured out his heart and soul for the people God gave him to shepherd. He performed this task with delight in God and with an urgency to see his congregation thrive spiritually in Christ. Packer observes, “His sermons were marked by riveting expository skill . . . wide thematic range, a wealth of evangelical thought, a pervasive awareness of eternal issues, and a compelling logical flow to make them arresting, searching, devastating, and Christ-centeredly doxological to the last degree.”⁷

Edwards’ first published sermon, “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption,” was given as a lecture in Boston where many skeptical Harvard graduates attended.⁸ Edwards’ sermon set the stage for Puritan doctrine of absolute divine sovereignty and

⁵ Peter Beck, “Jonathan Edwards: Faithful to the End,” in *12 Faithful Men: Portraits of Courageous Endurance in Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Colin Hansen and Jeff Robinson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 62.

⁶ Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 13.

⁷ J. I. Packer, “The Glory of God and the Reviving of Religion: A Study in the Mind of Jonathan Edwards,” in Piper and Taylor, *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things*, 84.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 17:200-216.

man's inability and dependence upon God in redemption. In his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,"⁹ Edwards spoke directly to awaken his church to the reality and horrors of hell. Nichols aptly called it "the most read sermon of all time."¹⁰ Marsden asserts,

The subject of the sermon is that at this very moment God is holding sinners in his hands, delaying the awful destruction that their rebellion deserves. Despite this unfathomable mercy, God is a just judge who must condemn sinners because they are in rebellion against God and hence hate what is truly good. Yet—and this is the point that is often missed—being in the hands of God means for the moment you are being kept from the burning in hell as you deserve. God in his amazing long-suffering is still giving you a chance; his hand is keeping you from falling.¹¹

Perseverance Displayed in a God-Dependent Sanctification

Throughout his ministry, he faithfully preached a God-dependent sanctification that would undergird his ministry. Lawson states, "He was keenly aware that God alone is the agent of sanctification. While he knew he was responsible to obey God's Word and pursue holiness, he understood that he could not do so by sheer will power."¹² Edwards lived his life and preached according to this theological reality of reliance upon God, which underscores the manner in which he persevered in life and ministry. Nichols writes, "Far from an advocate for self-help, Edwards realizes that anything he might do that pleases God or anything that amounts to something of significance is only the result of God working through him."¹³ Edwards' preaching focused squarely on dependence upon God for strength:

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 22:405-18.

¹⁰ Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards*, 19.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 221-22.

¹² Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 47.

¹³ Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions and Advice to Young Converts*

Take heed that you don't depend on your own strength. When praying and reading, or whatever duty you engage in, let it be with a sense of your own impotency. Don't go forth in your own strength. Go to God with all your difficulties. When you meet with temptation that you can't well get rid of, go to God to help you. When you find cause to complain of a hard heart and a blind mind, go to the fountain of life and light. When you are under temptation to discouragement or despair, go to God for help, in a sense of your own helplessness. Here I would offer some things to your consideration: first, to influence you not to depend on your own strength; and, secondly, to move you to look to God and depend on him.¹⁴

Even Edwards “resolutions” that he committed himself to would be null and void if he simply relied on his own strength to accomplish them. This God-dependent perspective also drove him to confess sin and walk in true repentance before God as he did battle against the sin in his own heart. Dane Ortlund asserts, “Edwards’ legacy . . . was that sanctification is inside-out and we lose it if we make it outside-in. Transformation occurs as the heart is changed within, not as we seek to crowbar our behavior into alignment with an external moral code or set of rules or even our conscience.”¹⁵

Along with Edwards’ keen wakefulness of his need for God, was accessing God’s divine enablement through faith. He believed it was his responsibility to act upon this need by daily entreating the Lord for His power to follow Him in obedience. William Morris shares Edwards’ perspective in carefully avoided the dangerous path toward self-reliance: “The search for personal holiness through self-discipline must not be allowed to blind one to the truth that only God’s sovereign grace acting in and on the soul to strengthen and nourish it could enable the soul to possess that creature holiness for which it so much yearned.”¹⁶ Edwards displayed a humble submission to God that proved his belief in a God-dependent sanctification. He viewed his life through the lens of Romans

(Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 10.

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 19:384.

¹⁵ Dane Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 193.

¹⁶ William S. Morris, *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 44.

12:1 and sought to offer himself as a “living sacrifice” to God.

Above all, Jonathan Edwards continually pointed his church to the transforming nature of the Word as he preached. Edwards asserted,

Ministers are set to be lights to the souls of men in this respect, as they are to be the means of imparting divine truth to them, and bringing into their view the most glorious and excellent objects, and of leading them to, and assisting them in the contemplation of those things that angels desire to look into; the means of their obtaining that knowledge is infinitely more important and more excellent and useful, than that of the greatest statesmen or philosophers, even that which is spiritual and divine. They are set to be the means of bringing men out of darkness into God’s marvelous light, and of bringing them to the infinite fountain of light, that in his light they may see light. They are set to instruct men, and impart to them that knowledge by which they may know God and Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal.¹⁷

Perseverance Displayed through Ministry Challenges

While Edwards led Northampton through times of awakening and revival, he also suffered through times of trial and controversy. In October 1747, death began to play a devastating role in Edwards’ family with the passing of David Brainerd, who was engaged to his teenage daughter, Jerusha. Later in February 1748, Jerusha died from tuberculosis, the same disease which took her fiancée in the previous year. The loss of his daughter and potential son-in-law were excruciatingly difficult for Edwards and his family. It was during this time of loss that Edwards simultaneously underwent the greatest ministry trial of his life.

In previous years, Edwards had dealt with church discipline situations where he had taken a stand against immorality between members of the congregation. However, the crucible of suffering that lay before him required him to stand alone. In 1749, Edwards opposed the church’s constitution that allowed for unbelievers to take communion. Edwards’ position was extremely difficult for the congregation to accept, since it was in direct opposition to Edwards’ highly respected and deeply loved predecessor, Solomon Stoddard. Edwards published a compelling treatise entitled, *An Humble Inquiry into the*

¹⁷ Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, 22:90.

Rules of the Word of God, Concerning Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church.

He hoped that the townspeople would be persuaded to reconsider Solomon Stoddard's position and come to see that true church members must display outwardly in sanctification what God has done inwardly through regeneration. However, as Marsden concludes, "Few people had read Edwards' book and few intended to. Further, they would not allow Edwards to hold a public debate on the subject nor to preach on it."¹⁸

In the months that followed, the relationship between Edwards and his congregation went from bad to worse. Edwards own cousin, Joseph Hawley joined the dissenters against Edwards' position on communion. Marsden includes this window into Edwards' suffering:

Young Hawley's defection was a blow. A few years earlier, Edwards spoken highly of his cousin Hawley as a 'worthy pious' man when the young man had been serving as chaplain to the army at Louisbourg. Edwards probably acted as something of a guardian and mentor to the boy, who been only eleven at the time of his father's death.¹⁹

The turmoil over the issue of communion was ever increasing, and Edwards could not convince the congregation to give him an audience to discuss the issue. However, Edwards was undeterred and refused to be swayed by the intense criticism from the people he had served for over twenty years. Tracy depicts the scene of confrontation:

In February 1749, Jonathan Edwards officially announced to the church what had been rumored for some time—that he had decided that his long continuance of Stoddard's open communion was wrong. He could not in good conscience admit any more members to the church who would not make a profession of the essentials of the Christian faith, essentials which included evidence of an experiential work of grace as well as sound doctrinal knowledge. Sixteen months later the Northampton congregation would formally and completely reject Jonathan Edwards—his doctrine, his discipline, and his twenty-three years of struggle to make them see the light.²⁰

Regardless of a pastor's acumen, moments like these are some of the most gut-wrenching

¹⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 357.

¹⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 358. Hawley's father committed suicide in 1735, and Edwards sought to minister to Hawley throughout that time. Hawley would eventually sever their friendship over his immoral behavior and his Arminian theological views.

²⁰ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor*, 168-70.

for anyone to endure. Most assuredly, Edwards had counted the cost of making the decision to oppose his predecessor and wrestled with the text of Scripture. At the end of this struggle, Edwards stood on the firm footing of God's Word. By opposing the church's constitution that permitted unbelievers to participate in communion, Edwards was asked to resign from the pastorate in July 1750. As Mark Dever points out, "Only 10 percent of the church members voted to keep Edwards as their pastor."²¹

Edwards gave his "Farewell Sermon" on July 1, 1750 from 2 Corinthians 1:14.²² It was arguably one of the best sermons he had ever preached and should be noted for its tenderness and compassion. Murray describes Edwards' unwavering devotion to the people of his church:

In his last official duty to his flock it is *their* needs rather than his own which are uppermost in his mind as he longs that they and he, "now parting one from another as to this world . . . may not be parted after our meeting at the last day." No congregation was ever spoken to more tenderly than the people of Northampton on July 1, 1750.²³

Once Edwards was dismissed, he continued to live in the parsonage and graciously accepted the church's weekly invitation to preach to them while they searched for his replacement until October 1751. Even in the midst of incredible pressure, Edwards stood upon the Word and preached it faithfully and selflessly. His chief concern was that his church would follow their Chief Shepherd by being the visible demonstration of his obedient bride. In a personal letter to Reverend William McCulloch, Edwards shared his heart: "I have now nothing visible to depend upon for my future usefulness, or the subsistence of my numerous family. But I hope we have an all-sufficient, faithful, covenant God to depend upon. I desire that I may ever submit to him, walk humbly before him, and

²¹ Mark Dever, "How Jonathan Edwards Got Fired and Why It's Important for Us Today," in Piper and Taylor, *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things*, 129.

²² Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 25:462-94

²³ Ian Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 329.

put my trust wholly in him.”²⁴

Edwards’ future proved to be bright and useful beyond anything his imagination could conceive. He left the farming community of Northampton for the wilderness of a Native American missionary station in Stockbridge. However, Edwards’ ministry to the church at large would continue. Beck notes,

Free of the hassles of an unappreciative congregation, Edwards produced many of the greatest and most important works during his five-year sojourn in Stockbridge. He wrote *Freedom of the Will*, *Original Sin*, and his two treatises, *the Nature of True Virtue* and *The End for Which God Created the World*. These works continue to affect Christians and have secured Edwards’ legacy for generations to come.²⁵

Edwards’ example of faithfulness to persevere through ministry challenges is noteworthy. However, in his intense contending for the truth, Edwards has been criticized for being prideful and unnecessarily rigid regarding the issue that ended his pastorate at Northampton. Marsden states,

His [Edwards] accompanying seriousness made him not an easy person to spend time with as a casual acquaintance, although he would be fascinating to talk to about matters that concerned him. His prowess as a logician made him exceedingly sure of his opinions, sometimes given to pride, overconfidence, tactlessness, and an inability to credit opposing views. At the same time, he was often aware of his pride and was constantly trying—and apparently often succeeding—to subdue his arrogant spirit and to culture such Christian virtues as meekness, gentleness, and charity. As was common for eighteenth-century leaders, he was authoritarian, yet he was also extremely caring. He was much loved by those closest to him. His opponents found him aloof, opinionated, and intolerant. For a time he won the hearts of almost everyone in his Northampton parish; then he lost them again in a bitter dispute, a quarrel of former lovers.²⁶

While Edwards is to be admired for his perseverance, one must consider the importance of seeing Edwards and other “heroes of the faith” as men who were in the process of being sanctified as they sought to persevere in ministry. These men of faith were not perfect, and thus should not be placed on a pedestal to be admired and worshipped. Instead, the lives of such men should cause the pastor to imitate them in their authenticity

²⁴ Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 16:358.

²⁵ Beck, “Jonathan Edwards,” 71.

²⁶ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 5-6.

to be like Christ. Edwards finished his life as president of the College of New Jersey before passing into eternity on April 7, 1758.

Perseverance Displayed in Glorifying God

For Edwards, the glory of God was his relentless pursuit and intentional endeavor of every day. Within this gaze, he dwelled on the “excellencies” or beauty of God. Ortlund contends, “For Edwards, beauty is what makes God *God*. . . . No sovereignty, not wrath, not grace, not omniscience, not eternity, but beauty is what defines God’s very divinity. Edwards clearly believed in these other truths about God and saw all of them as upholding and displaying and connected to God’s beauty.”²⁷

According to Edwards, beauty does not minimize God’s attributes, but becomes the lens by which one sees God and His attributes. Piper speaks of this lens as stunning and captivating: “To read him [Edwards], after you catch your breath, is to breathe the uncommon air of the Himalayas of revelation. And the refreshment that you get from this high, clear, God-entranced air does not take out the valleys of suffering in this world, but fits you to spend your life there for the sake of love with invincible and worshipful joy.”²⁸

Edwards was determined to see beauty in God’s holy and righteous character, as well as see the beauty in God condescending to earth in Jesus Christ to be the sufficient Savior of mankind. He also sought to appreciate the beauty in God’s creation as a tribute to the Creator Himself. The beauty displayed in nature displays the beautiful character of God. Furthermore, Ortlund accentuates that Edwards desired “to raise our eyes from the loveliness of creation to the loveliness of God.”²⁹ Since “all things were made through Him and for Him” (Col 1:16), the gaze of the one created must look upward.

²⁷ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 24.

²⁸ Piper, “A God-Entranced Vision of All Things,” 18.

²⁹ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 29.

For Edwards, “every thought, passion, and desire must lead to the glory and honor of Christ. He knew he was not his own, but belonged to Christ. Therefore, he must decrease and Christ must increase, so he reveled in the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.”³⁰ God’s glory and coming kingdom dominated Edwards’ thoughts and became the overriding goal of his life. This key theological conviction is rooted deeply in Edwards’ personal study of the Word at a young age. As Piper contends, “This is the essence of Edwards’s God-entranced vision of all things! God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things. Nothing exists without his creating it. Nothing stays in being without his sustaining word. Everything has its reason for existing from him. Therefore, nothing can be understood apart from him.”³¹ This fixed determination drove Edwards to give himself to an unwavering commitment to live for God’s glory alone.³² Even though Edwards’ resolve would be tested in some excruciatingly difficult ways, he saw each circumstance as an opportunity to give God glory for the spiritual growth it would produce in him.

Learning from the Weaknesses of Edwards

Failure to Relate the Gospel to Christians

Ortlund states, “Jonathan Edwards’ greatest weakness may have been a failure to adequately apply the gospel to the hearts of Christians. . . . His focus is on subjective much more than the objective aspect of Christian living: Christ in us more than Christ for us.”³³

³⁰ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 58.

³¹ Piper, “A God-Entranced Vision of All Things,” 24.

³² Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 65.

³³ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 178-79. Ortlund continues by clarifying, “Jonathan Edwards is way out ahead of me, and probably you, both in living and in theologizing on the Christian life. . . . Lest I overstate this criticism, let me put it this way: the Christian church has much to learn from Edwards about the gospel, but Edwards has a little to learn from us” (178).

In one sense, Edwards did preach the objective truth of the gospel. However, he did not consistently relate the gospel to his congregation's life once they believed the gospel. Ortlund gives an example of Edwards' weakness in being gospel-centered in application in his sermon, "A Glorious Foundation for Peace."³⁴ Edwards concludes rightly that Christ came to bring peace into the world. However, as Ortlund concludes, "For all that he [Edwards] said about the beauty of Christ, he could have been clearer on what precisely it is that makes Christ so beautiful – namely, his grace toward sinners, including regenerate sinners."³⁵

Misapplying the Text of Scripture

To be sure, Edwards treasured the Scriptures and sought to preach them faithfully. However, his sermonic pattern was lacking in moving through each text in an expository fashion. Ortlund notes, "his [Edwards'] sermonic strategy was to take a text, usually a single verse, and use it as launching point for a sermon."³⁶ This pattern encourages the preacher to put something in the text that was not intended. For instance, Edwards once connected Christ's sending his disciples as lambs into the midst of wolves (Luke 10:3) to David's rescuing a lamb out of the lion's mouth in the Old Testament.³⁷ This weakness is also seen in Edwards' preaching of prophecy passages and making forced connections to the events of the day. While he believed in Christ's soon return, he also contended that America could play a key part in eschatology.³⁸ One more way Edwards misapplied the text of Scripture was a tendency to use allegory in his preaching of the Old

³⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "A Glorious Foundation for Peace," in *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Michael D. McMullen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 182-84.

³⁵ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 180.

³⁶ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 189.

³⁷ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 189.

³⁸ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 189.

Testament. One example of this is his interpretation of Song of Solomon. For Edwards, the romantic love portrayed throughout the book refers to Christ and His bride, the church. Even in the midst of this weakness, it was not philosophy that won the day for Edwards. The bulk of Edwards' work displays a man who loved the Word and submitted himself to the Word.

Detrimental Self-Examination

As with other Puritans, Edwards encouraged intense self-introspection in his own life and in the lives of the people of his church. In reference to pursuing revival, Edwards wrote, "There are things that must be done directly to advance it. And here it concerns everyone, in the first place, to look into his own heart and see to it that he be a partaker of the benefits of the work himself, and that it be promoted in his own soul."³⁹ Edwards could have gone further to be clear about the balance between looking at the believer's inward sin and looking to Christ's righteousness that is imputed to the believer.

Ortlund states, "Healthy, occasional self-examination is one thing. But Edwards went beyond this into an unhealthy preoccupation with his own spiritual state, encouraging the same preoccupation among his people."⁴⁰ This fixation on assessing the state of the soul was most likely due to the preaching during the Great Awakening. Edwards stated in his *Religious Affections*, "'Tis not God's design that men should obtain assurance in any other way, than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercises of it."⁴¹ It appears that Edwards was appealing to the Christian's performance in killing sin in their lives as a primary means of assurance. He later wrote about seeking

³⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009),4:502.

⁴⁰ Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, 4:181.

⁴¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 2:195.

God and serving God to find assurance in one's standing before God. However, it would be clearer to say that the gospel is the means to biblical assurance.

Appreciating this World While Longing for Heaven

Ortlund writes,

Edwards did a poor job of fully appreciating the doctrine of creation and the everyday delights that are mediated through our five senses. Edwards emphasized the sense of heart . . . to the neglect of the five senses. He pursued enjoyment of the Giver but at times neglected enjoyment of the gifts. . . . Edwards' teaching could easily promote a false asceticism that needlessly denigrates the good things in life.⁴²

Edwards rightly pointed his church to the eternal hope of glory in heaven but overlooked how to properly delight in what God has given the believer on earth to enjoy.

Ministry Applications

Though not a perfect example, Jonathan Edwards' life provides the pastor a means of strengthening pastoral perseverance as he seeks to imitate the manner in which he followed Christ and ministered for Christ.

Undaunted Devotion to the Word

Considering the life of Jonathan Edwards, today's pastor can find encouragement to embrace a fervor for the text of Scripture. Exposure to Edward's passion to preach the whole counsel of God accurately and completely will challenge the pastor to take this charge seriously. In the midst of opposition and outside pressures to conform to modern interpretations of Scripture, Edwards never denied the truth. Edwards' diligence in study and exposition should help to inspire the pastor to serve the people God has placed under his shepherding in the same manner.

⁴² Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 185-86.

God-Centered Living

Edwards knew his life was not his own. He lived for the glory of God in a way that permeated every aspect of his life. He had a God-centered devotion that dominated every competing desire or ambition. He also saw beauty of God's character in creation and the gospel, and Edwards' perspective is both liberating and convicting. This God-centered focus should motivate the pastor to give himself wholly to a Godward focus in both life and ministry.

Taking Sin Seriously

Edwards did not see sin as something to tolerate in his life or in the life of the church. Church discipline and calls to repentance were regular occurrences throughout his ministry. Lawson explains, "Edwards was not content merely to root out sin and live a mediocre Christian life. He wanted to excel in his walk with Christ."⁴³ For Edwards, an inspected and exposed life gave way to a pursuit of holy living.

Conclusion

While the pastor today can access a great deal of resources at his fingertips, it is still possible to be devoid of the necessary encouragement to persevere. The horizons of the past can provide comfort to the struggling pastor who is losing heart as he presses on to the horizon in front of him. Studying men of the Word like Jonathan Edwards can inject strength into the pastoral bloodstream. Ortlund aptly states, "The supreme value of reading Edwards is that we are ushered into a universe brimming with beauty. Edwards walks us through the wardrobe of Narnia. We are given glasses—not sunglasses, which dim everything, but their opposite: lenses that brighten everything."⁴⁴ Edwards helps the pastor to sever the root of sin-killing joy in life and ministry by pointing him to the greater weight of glory of God and the beauty of His majestic plan. It cannot be overstated that

⁴³ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 146.

⁴⁴ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 15.

Edwards pursued God’s glory in all things. This chief aim of his life drove his family life and ministry direction. Through his God-centered devotion, Edwards sought to train himself for godliness and prepare for eternity. For Edwards, eternity was not just a destination but a mindset. Marsden notes, “Edwards spent his whole life preparing to die.”⁴⁵ This heavenward focus is seen in his stewardship of the moment and his desire to make every moment count for eternity. It was not that Edwards was preoccupied with death; he was preoccupied with pursuing God’s glory in all things.

The ever-broadening scope of Edwards’ ministry cannot be denied. Nichols asserts, “He mentored half of New England as young candidates for the ministry vied to apprentice under him. . . They all learned the pastoral charge from his example, and they went on to become college presidents and pastors, thus extending his influence throughout the colonies and the young Republic for generations.”⁴⁶ In addition to those he mentored, his descendants include 120 college professors, 110 lawyers, 14 presidents of universities, 8 holders of major public office, 3 mayors, 3 governors, 3 US senators, 1 chaplain of the US Senate, 1 comptroller of the US Treasury, and 1 vice president of the United States. Lawson estimates, “It is hard to imagine that anyone else has contributed more vitally to the soul of this nation [America] than this New England divine. There is no doubt that Edwards was a giant of the Christian faith, one whose influence is still keenly felt today.”⁴⁷ May every pastor who is losing heart study the life of Jonathan Edwards. He provides a life worth imitating as a means to strengthen pastoral perseverance.

⁴⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 490.

⁴⁶ Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards*, 19.

⁴⁷ Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*, 3.

CHAPTER 4
PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE IMITATED
IN CHARLES SPURGEON

Introduction

This chapter examines the life and pastoral perseverance of Charles H. Spurgeon as an example of pastoral perseverance. This purpose will be accomplished through a close examination of Spurgeon’s life, pastoral ministry challenges, and theological convictions within the realm of pastoral perseverance.

The highest compliment one could ever give a preacher would be to say that he preaches like Charles Spurgeon, who has been rightfully regarded as the “prince of preachers.” In his biography of Spurgeon, Lawson contends, “If John Calvin was the greatest theologian of the church, Jonathan Edwards the greatest philosopher, and George Whitefield the greatest evangelist, Spurgeon surely ranks as the greatest preacher.”¹

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex, England, in 1834. He was born into an extremely poor minister’s family and had to live with his grandfather, who was also a full-time minister, until he was seven years of age. As Spurgeon learned to read, he devoured the works of John Bunyan (including *The Pilgrim’s Progress*) and other Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Reeves states, “After the Bible, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was almost certainly the book that sunk deepest into Spurgeon’s being. He read it over a hundred times in his life and quoted it frequently in his sermons.”² Throughout his lifetime he would collect more than 7,000 Puritan works to add to his impressive 12,000-volume library.

¹ Steven Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2012), 1.

² Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 155.

Despite his Christian upbringing, Spurgeon remained unconverted throughout his childhood. However, Spurgeon's mother prayed for her son faithfully and preached the gospel regularly to him. God was faithful to answer his mother's prayers. On January 6, 1850, Spurgeon was walking to his place of worship when a snowstorm arose, deterring him from reaching his original destination. He instead wandered into the Primitive Methodist Chapel. Spurgeon found the preacher behind the pulpit to be neither eloquent with his speech, nor gifted with a commanding presence. He simply preached Isaiah 45:22 and challenged Spurgeon to look upon Christ and live. Spurgeon shares his testimony of salvation:

“Look!” what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, “Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.”³

Spurgeon received Christ as his Lord and Savior on that cold, snowy January day. It is interesting to point out that in 1897, a tablet was made in honor of Spurgeon and was placed in the window of the church of his birthplace. It was put under a figure of Jesus on the Cross with the inscription, “Look unto me, and be ye saved.” Soon after his conversion at age 17, Spurgeon surrendered his life to preaching God's Word. In 1853, he preached for the first time in the New Park Street Chapel in London. Three months later, the church called him as their pastor. He remained at this church, which would later be changed to the Metropolitan Tabernacle, until his death.⁴ Iain Murray contends,

³ Charles Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1834-1854* (Chicago: Curtis and Jennings, 1898), 1:106-8.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1856-1878* (Chicago: Curtis and Jennings, 1899), 3:4-5. The Metropolitan Tabernacle opened on March 18, 1861 as recorded by Spurgeon's wife and private secretary:

It was most appropriate that the noble building, which had been erected for a house of prayer, should be opened with a meeting for prayer. Accordingly, at seven o'clock in the morning of Monday, March 18, 1861, more than a thousand persons assembled in the Tabernacle. The Pastor presided, and among those who took part in the proceedings were representatives of the deacons and elders of

“When a general census of church attendance was taken on an ordinary Sunday in London in 1886 the total congregations at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, morning and evening, exceeded 10,000 people!”⁵ Most of his sermons were printed and made available to the public in England and around the world. Lawson asserts, “At the end of his life, more than 50 million copies of his sermons had been distributed.”⁶

During Spurgeon’s tenure, the church built the 6,000 seat Metropolitan Tabernacle. It was Spurgeon’s prayer above all that people would come to know Christ as they crowded the Metropolitan Tabernacle pews. However, Spurgeon’s ministry and outreach ranged far from Metropolitan Tabernacle as he founded an orphanage, an evening school that was offered for free to the public, and a college to train men for pastoral ministry. Despite all the outward ministerial success and prominence, Spurgeon encountered times of physical illness, sustained bouts of depression, and had ministry challenges. Through it all, Spurgeon sought live his life to the fullest. Reeves asserts,

Spurgeon was a man who went at all of life full-on. He was not simply a large presence in the pulpit. In life, he laughed and cried much; he read avidly and felt deeply; he was zealously industrious worker and a sociable lover of play and beauty. He was, in other words, a man who embodied the truth that to be in Christ mean to be made ever more roundly human, more fully *alive*.⁷

Perseverance Displayed through Manifold Sorrow

Spurgeon was no stranger to sorrow in his life. He experienced both spiritual depression of the soul, physical sickness of the body, and circumstantial disappointments that marked his ministry.

the Church and students of the College. Fervency and intense earnestness marked every petition. (Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography*, 3:4-5)

⁵ Ian Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 15.

⁶ Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*, 17.

⁷ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 25-26.

Perseverance Demonstrated through Spiritual Depression

There were times that Spurgeon would torment himself after preaching, wondering if he had fallen short of being a worthy servant of the Word of God. Zack Eswine recounts a scene where his wife, Susannah, found him “weeping deep in his soul over the ‘smitings of a very tender conscience toward God.’ She would cry with him, out of tender love for him. She felt that he was harder on himself than was warranted, so often having no legitimate cause for the way he upbraided his soul.”⁸ In this particular scene of discouragement and depression, Spurgeon was struggling with losing sight of the sufficiency of Christ and his Word on his behalf. However, he would fight the good fight of believing and depending upon God’s grace. Spurgeon preached about the propensity of the downcast heart and where hope can be found:

Perhaps you are not well, or you have had an illness that has tolled much upon your nervous system, and you are depressed; and therefore it is that you think that grace is leaving you, but it will not. Your spiritual life does not depend upon nature, else it might expire; it depends upon grace, and grace will never cease to shine till it lights you into glory.⁹

Spurgeon described his journey through trials with Isaiah 48:10: “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.” Spurgeon wrote in his later years,

This has long been the motto fixed before our eye upon the wall of our bed-chamber, and in many ways it has also been written on our heart. It is no mean thing to be chosen of God. God’s choice makes chosen men choice men. . . . We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice. So has it been in our case. . . . Therefore, if to-day the furnace he heated seven times hotter, we will not dread it, for the glorious Son of God will walk with us amid the glowing coals.¹⁰

⁸ Zack Eswine, “C. H. Spurgeon: Faithful in Sorrow,” in *12 Faithful Men: Portraits of Courageous Endurance in Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Colin Hansen and Jeff Robinson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 128.

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, “Smoking Flax,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1855-1917), 31:224.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography*, 4:353.

Spurgeon described his times of depression as the “minister’s fainting fits.” He sought to view each bout of depression as a blessing in disguise that would give way to supplying God’s strength out of his weakness. In one of Spurgeon’s many lectures to his pastor’s college students, he explained this phenomenon:

Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord’s richer benison. So have far better men found it. The scouring of the vessel has fitted it for the Master’s use. Immersion in suffering has preceded the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Fasting gives an appetite for the banquet. The Lord is revealed in the backside of the desert, while his servant keepeth the sheep and waits in solitary awe. The wilderness is the way to Canaan. The low valley leads to the towering mountain. Defeat prepares for victory. The raven is sent forth before the dove. The darkest hour of the night precedes the day-dawn. The mariners go down to the depths, but the next wave makes them mount to the heaven; their soul is melted because of trouble before he bringeth them to their desired haven.¹¹

Spurgeon wanted his aspiring pastors in training to have an unvarnished view of the ministry that lay before them. He challenged them to count the cost as well as confirm their calling. In Spurgeon’s view, pastors were not just called to preach sermons and stay disconnected from the people. Instead, Spurgeon sought to enter the lives of the people God gave him to shepherd. He was called to preach to the sheep but also smell like the sheep. In his lectures to students, Spurgeon describes the pressures upon the Christian minister to lose heart as they are called to do “heart work”:

Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin—are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth? The kingdom comes not as we would, the reverend name is not hallowed as we desire, and for this we must weep. How can we be otherwise than sorrowful, while men believe not our report, and the divine arm is not revealed? All mental work tends to weary and to depress, for much study is a weariness of the flesh; but ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul. How often, on Lord’s-day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break. Probably, if we were more like Paul, and watched for souls at a nobler rate, we should know more of what it is to be eaten up by the zeal of the Lord’s house. It is our duty

¹¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875), 1:174.

and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living *sacrifices*, whose lot is to be consumed; we are to spend and to be spent, not to lay ourselves up in lavender, and nurse our flesh. Such soul-travail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail.¹²

Even under the worst of circumstances, Spurgeon's focus was on Christ and the suffering that He endured on his behalf for Spurgeon's sin. Spurgeon's perspective on suffering gives hope to the pastor on the verge of losing heart. Even though Spurgeon seems to be a "larger than life" character of church history, he self-identifies with every pastor who has found himself in the throes of despair. Spurgeon reminds each minister of the gospel that Jesus is the suffering Savior in the same measure that he is the risen Savior. Eswine brings a helpful word to fellow sufferers on the benefits of preaching the Christ of the Gethsemane from Spurgeon's viewpoint:

At such times, Spurgeon reminds us that preaching the bountiful aid of the cross or the empty tomb or Jesus' ascension will provide no relief or respite. Only the Garden of Gethsemane can free us in our anguish. For there we do not have a general who stands in the back in safety demanding the we weary ones charge first into battle. On the contrary, the garden of betrayal shows us our fellow friend who steps forward to take the lead. He runs toward the fight before all of us. He faces the enemy first so that we who follow are neither alone or without hope.¹³

Spurgeon's confidence in suffering draws from life-giving truth in Hebrews 4:15-16 since Jesus is the personal high priest for the believer: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus experienced temptation, but faithfully obeyed the Father in every case. Therefore, the believer can draw near to the Father in prayer and access God's mercy and grace instead of judgment and condemnation. When preaching Hebrews 4, Spurgeon spoke with a personal touch to his flock:

This morning, being myself more than usually compassed with infirmities, I desire to speak, as a weak and suffering preacher, of that High Priest who is full of

¹² Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:170.

¹³ Eswine, "C. H. Spurgeon," 129.

compassion: and my longing is that any who are low in spirit, faint, despondent, and even out of the way, may take heart to approach the Lord Jesus. . . . Jesus is touched, not with the feeling of your strength, not with a feeling of your strength, but of your infirmity. Down here, poor, feeble nothings affect the heart of their great High Priest on high, who is crowned with glory and honour. As the mother feels with the weakness of her babe, so does Jesus feel with the poorest, saddest, and weakest of his chosen.¹⁴

As the believer draws near to the Lord, the Lord draws ever nearer to the believer. In such times of trial, the believer is molded into the image of Christ through leaning more fully on Christ for strength. Spurgeon's belief was well founded in 1 Corinthians 10:13, where Christ not only promises his presence, but also to be faithful in carrying the believer through the trial: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Reeves articulates the fruit of sorrow for the pastor: "Sorrows not only enable us to appreciate blessings from the Lord; they throw us onto him. Fear and tribulation make us cling to him as times of comfort never would . . . being a pastor, he [Spurgeon] was sensitively aware of *how* to give such theology to people who are in the throes of pain."¹⁵

Perseverance Demonstrated through Physical Pain

Spurgeon knew the adversity of physical pain, both personally and within his family. Though his wife gave birth to twin boys in 1856, she was unable to have any more children. Piper explains, "When she [Susannah] was thirty-three years old, she became a virtual invalid and seldom heard her husband preach for the next 27 years until his death."¹⁶

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, 36:315, 320.

¹⁵ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 167.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2015), 8.

Physical pain became a persistent condition of Spurgeon and proved to be relentless from the time he reached the age of thirty-three. Reeves describes Spurgeon’s painful path: “He suffered from a burning kidney inflammation called Bright’s Disease, as well as gout, rheumatism, and neuritis. The pain was such that it soon kept him from preaching one third of the time. Added to that, overwork, stress, and guilt about the stress began to take their toll.”¹⁷

Later in life, Spurgeon and Susannah would bury their grandson. However, Spurgeon found comfort in God’s purposes. Reeves contends, “Spurgeon saw that our heavenly Father ordains suffering for believers. Though our trials may come from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, they are overruled and ordained by God, who treats them as an important part of our new life in Christ.”¹⁸ Instead of viewing painful experiences as random or negative, Spurgeon believed that each experience was an opportunity to become more conformed to Christ and treasure Him above all things. Reeves captures Spurgeon’s perspective: “God will not therefore simply reward believers with ease in this life, for that would make ease, rather than Christ, the greatest prize. Suffering is therefore a ‘covenant mark,’ a proof that God is our Father and therefore cares enough about us to do everything necessary to mold and clip us into the likeness of his happily holy Son.”¹⁹ For the pastor, this perspective on suffering might not sound appealing. Truly, it is possible for believers to see suffering as a punitive mark against them from God as opposed to a “covenant mark” of God’s favor. In times of personal pain, the pastor must cling to the promise that God has not abandoned His own. Rather, He has chosen His own to go through suffering for His glory and others’ good. The pastor’s suffering deepens the well of a pastor’s capacity to serve the flock of God. Reeves shares Spurgeon’s perspective:

¹⁷ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 163.

¹⁸ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 165.

¹⁹ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 165.

When pastors preach from a broken heart, they can often relate far better to the despairing and thus offer a deeper consolation. When a pastor patiently endures difficulty and affliction, and keeps rejoicing in God, it powerfully commends the gospel as glad tidings of joy. The pastor—or, indeed, any Christian who ministers to another—can prove the comfort that is found in God at such times. God therefore often leads his under-shepherds through trials, “not so much for their own benefit as for the sake of those to whom they may afterwards minister.”²⁰

To cope with his physical pain, Spurgeon would often leave the cold dreary winter weather of London for the pleasant warmth of Mentone, which was located on the beautiful French Riviera. Spurgeon could see the need for rest and refreshment in his own life and sought to pass his wisdom to those he was training in his pastor’s college. In his own words, he speaks to past and present generations of pastors:

In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labour, the same affliction may be looked for. The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body. Our Sabbaths are our days of toil, and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down. Even the earth must lie fallow and have her Sabbaths, and so must we. Hence the wisdom and compassion of our Lord, when he said to his disciples, “Let us go into the desert and rest awhile.” What! when the people are fainting? When the multitudes are like sheep upon the mountains without a shepherd? Does Jesus talk of rest? When Scribes and Pharisees, like grievous wolves, are rending the flock, does he take his followers on an excursion into a quiet resting place? Does some red-hot zealot denounce such atrocious forgetfulness of present and pressing demands? Let him rave in his folly. The Master knows better than to exhaust his servants and quench the light of Israel. Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength.²¹

Spurgeon had taken note of his body’s ailments and learned that he had to pace himself. Without regular times of rest and refreshment, Spurgeon would not be able to give himself wholeheartedly to the task of pastoral ministry. Today’s pastor would do well to heed Spurgeon’s advice and invest each moment wisely for the kingdom with a balanced rhythm of rest and work.

Perseverance Demonstrated through Circumstantial Disappointment

In addition to spiritual and physical sorrow, Spurgeon experienced

²⁰ Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 168.

²¹ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:174.

disappointments that wounded him deeply. Early in his ministry, he had one incident that would mark him for the rest of his ministry. Eswine recounts the story: “One October 19, 1856, as he [Spurgeon] stood in the pulpit preaching to thousands, a prankster yelled, ‘Fire!’ The resulting panic left seven dead and twenty-eight seriously injured.”²² To make matters more complex, Spurgeon had only been married for less than a year and would become the father of twins the next day on October 20, 1856. Stress of this magnitude would cause any pastor to reconsider his ministerial calling. It would seem that Spurgeon’s future ministry stood on the edge of a knife. At this point, he did not have the luxury of seeing the far-reaching impact of his preaching, writing, and mentoring. Eswine asserts, “Susannah says that her husband tottered on the verge of insanity. Those close to him provided what we would call suicide watch to make sure he didn’t harm himself in his despair.”²³ This horrific encounter was something from which Spurgeon would never fully recover. Afterward, it was difficult for Spurgeon to bring himself to preach. Spurgeon confessed his struggle to preach publicly to his congregation as he stepped into the pulpit the next time:

I almost regret this morning that I have ventured to occupy this pulpit, because I feel utterly unable to preach to you for your profit. I had thought that the quiet and repose of the last fortnight had removed the effects of that terrible catastrophe; but on coming back to the same spot again, and more especially, standing here to address you, I feel somewhat of those same painful emotions which well-nigh prostrated me before. I have been utterly unable to study, but I thought that even a few words might be acceptable to you this morning, and I trust to your loving hearts to excuse them. Oh, Spirit of God, magnify thy strength in thy servant's weakness, and enable him to honour his Lord, even when his soul is cast down within him. . . . The most I ask is,

²² Eswine, “C. H. Spurgeon,” 130.

²³ Eswine, “C. H. Spurgeon,” 131. Eswine reveals how this affected Spurgeon in years to come: “Twenty-five years later, Spurgeon was about to address a large audience during a session of the Baptist Union. He was older now, middle-aged, a seasoned pastor and widely known. With all seats accounted for, hundreds pressed in. . . . He experienced what we call a flashback or a post-trauma response. . . . He preached that night but barely” (131).

that Thou wouldst live in me, that the life I live in the flesh may not be my life, but thy life in me, that I may say with emphasis, as Paul did, “For me to live is Christ.”²⁴

Like many pastors today, Spurgeon experienced desertion, bereavement, disappointment, defeat, and guilt. His response to depression was not always neat and tidy. He did not recover quickly and shrug off every bout as if he was impervious to affliction. However, Spurgeon remained faithful, crying out to God to supply him with spiritual strength and an eternal perspective. As Eswine contends, the way to overcome this kind of depression is “one imperfect, frazzled, vulnerable step at a time . . . our greatest hope at this moment isn’t the absence of our weakness but the presence of God’s strength.”²⁵ In moments like these, Spurgeon connected God’s nearness to the believer through suffering with God’s goodness. Drawing from one of his favorite books, Spurgeon related this experience in one of his sermons:

In the old *Pilgrim’s Progress* I used to read in my grandfather’s house, I remember the picture of Hopeful in the river holding Christian up; and the engraver has done it very well. Hopeful has his arm round Christian, and lifts his hands, and says, “Fear not brother, I feel the bottom.” That is just what Jesus does in our trials; he puts his arm round us, points us up, and says, “Fear not! The water may be deep, but the bottom is good.”²⁶

Persevered Displayed in Gospel-Centered Preaching

Throughout his life, Spurgeon never wavered in contending specifically for the doctrines of grace to be proclaimed consistently in his church. He was gospel-centered before it was popular to take the label among confessing evangelicals. He cherished the doctrines of grace (total depravity, unconditional election, definite atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints) and regularly preached them with vigor and passion. Lawson asserts, “Without question, the doctrines of sovereign grace were the

²⁴ Charles Spurgeon, “The Exaltation of Christ,” *New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 2, sermon no. 101, The Spurgeon Center, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-exaltation-of-christ#flipbook/>.

²⁵ Eswine, “C. H. Spurgeon,” 132.

²⁶ Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, 44:202.

foundation stones of Spurgeon’s gospel ministry, and the high-octane fuel that powered his fiery preaching of the gospel. The marvelous truths of God’s supreme authority in man’s salvation kindled the fires of his heart and stoked the flames of his pulpit.”²⁷

On the occasion of his inaugural sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he preached the doctrines of grace to the people for the purpose of establishing this new place of worship on the solid foundation of the gospel. Spurgeon’s legacy continues to be his unfaltering, courageous fight for the truth and his strict adherence to that truth which was all motivated by his undying love for his Lord. Spurgeon truly did leave behind a legacy that will not allow itself to be forgotten. He embodied so many of the traits that the New Testament qualifies for a shepherd of the Lord’s flock. His preaching always brought depth but also a freshness to the pulpit. His life was characterized by living those principles that he so diligently preached. He stood for the truth even when it seemed like no one else would. Spurgeon stood for the truth because he believed it should be tenaciously guarded. In his lecture on “The Necessity of Ministerial Progress,” he challenged his students to improve their God-given abilities to read, study, think, and expand their breadth of knowledge:

Let us be thoroughly well acquainted with the great doctrines of the Word of God, and let us be mighty in expounding Scripture. . . . I cannot too earnestly assure you that if your ministries are to be lastingly useful you must be expositors. For this you must understand the Word yourselves, and be able so to comment upon it that the people may be built up by the Word. Be master of your Bibles, brethren: whatever other works you have not searched, be at home with the writings of the prophets and apostles. “Let the word of God dwell in you richly.”²⁸

Spurgeon’s passion for doctrine was only rivaled by his fervor for evangelism. He was so committed to sharing the gospel with others that he would routinely and intentionally plea for people to come to Christ in every sermon. Spurgeon was undaunted in his faithfulness in preaching the gospel to anyone who would listen. Arnold Dallimore

²⁷ Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*, 58.

²⁸ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1889), 2:48-49.

recounts Spurgeon's passion for unbelievers:

Almost every sermon contained, especially toward its close, an entreaty of this nature—warning, begging, pleading, urging the sinner to come to Christ. He did not ask people to walk to the front of the auditorium, raise a hand, sign a card, or perform any outward action. But throughout each sermon and especially as he drew it to its close, he pleaded with unsaved hearers to believe on Christ, and he expected them to do so then and there.²⁹

Spurgeon also maintained that every pastor who was not preaching all the truths of Scripture was not preaching the gospel. He made bold proclamations of the gospel each week in his church with great compassion. In his own words, Spurgeon concluded that God's sovereign role in salvation became the motivation of his heart:

If there are so many fish to be taken in the net, I will go and catch some of them. Because many are ordained to be caught, I spread my nets with eager expectation. I never could see why that should repress our zealous efforts. It seems to me to be the very thing that should awaken us to energy—that God has a people, and that these people shall be brought in.³⁰

Spurgeon displayed perseverance in preaching the gospel faithfully. Due to the pressures of caring for the church, it is not convenient for the pastor to care so deeply for those outside of Christ. In fact, it is not uncommon for pastors to go throughout their ministry lives with a coldness toward the unsaved. Spurgeon was absolutely clear that he wanted to have preaching that says, "'Look unto him and be ye saved all the ends of the earth'—Calvary preaching, Calvary theology, Calvary books, Calvary sermons . . . and in proportion as we have Calvary exalted and Christ magnified, the gospel is preached in our midst."³¹ During a sermon in December 1860, Spurgeon recounted a story of many Welsh miners who perished in the mines after a horrific explosion sent them to their deaths and the aftermath of mourning that took place within the community. Spurgeon implored his people to place themselves into the story as he preached to them about the brevity of life

²⁹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 80.

³⁰ Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*, 84.

³¹ Charles Spurgeon, "The Exaltation of Christ," *New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 1, sermon no. 34, The Spurgeon Center, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/preach-the-gospel#flipbook/>.

and urgency to compassionately proclaim the gospel:

Can you picture to yourselves the scene? Do you see the women as they come clustering round the pit, shrieking for their sons, and their husbands, and their fathers? . . . The misery in that valley is past description; those who have witnessed it, fail to be able to picture it. . . . We have not a single relative who may not become to us within the next moment a fountain of grief. . . . Oh my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies; and if they perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly destroy themselves. If hell be filled, at least let it be filled with the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.³²

Spurgeon wanted a culture of evangelism to permeate his church and he modeled this passion for souls in his every day dealings with his fellow man.

Perseverance Displayed in Fighting for Denominational Purity

Throughout his life, Spurgeon fought valiantly for the Truth. From 1887 to 1888, he initiated what is called the Down Grade Controversy.³³ As Spurgeon saw it, a subtle theological drift had to be confronted. Some have discovered this drift as far back as 1873, when the Baptist Union switched its base of doctrine to one of function. The controversy broke out when Spurgeon published a series of articles in his paper to the public, *The Sword and the Trowel*. His first article was entitled, “The Down Grade,” describing where he thought the Baptist denomination was headed. McBeth writes of this downfall of dogma in the denomination: “It painted a dismal picture and doctrinal decay in the denomination, with prayerless churches, indifferent laity, and unbelieving pastors who spent their time in worldly pursuits . . . rather than in Bible study and fervent preaching.”³⁴

Spurgeon had detected two main weaknesses in the denomination. First, there

³² Charles Spurgeon, “The Wailing of Risca,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 7, sermon no. 349, The Spurgeon Center, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-wailing-of-risca#flipbook/>.

³³ Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 139-206. Murray provides an in-depth perspective on the theological nuances of the Down Grade Controversy along with its impact on Spurgeon’s life and ministry.

³⁴ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 302.

was a steady decline in use of prayer meetings and more of an emphasis on worldly entertainment within the church. In Spurgeon's opinion, this change of focus from prayer to entertainment would only lead to doctrinal decay. He could see that modern culture and entertainment-driven preaching would not lead people to the truth, but away from it. Over time, this issue of doctrinal decay was pressed to the forefront. Secondly, he warned the Baptist Union that some sermons were leaving out the atonement all together. Spurgeon contended that without the work of Christ on the cross there would be no Christian gospel to preach. He aggressively resisted the trends of belief that were making their way into Baptist territory. Notwithstanding, Spurgeon did not expect that his article would strike such a sensitive vein of contention among many Baptists of the day. The friction became so severe between some within the Baptist Union that Spurgeon decided to withdraw from the Baptist Union all together. In the end, this controversy would greatly affect Baptists as a whole.³⁵ The hasty winds of change took many Baptists by surprise, with their theology as well as their practice shifting from truth to error. Spurgeon could not reconcile how those who professed the gospel would fraternize with those who have turned aside to another gospel.

Spurgeon continued preaching the centrality of the gospel with a deep commitment for orthodoxy and theological precision. He felt that the Baptists were being unfaithful to the fundamentals of the faith and those who aligned themselves with these men were in grave danger of being in theological error themselves. Spurgeon fought for the inspiration of Scripture, the authenticity of Scripture, and against the current trends of liberalism in his day. He made any sacrifice necessary to defend the doctrinal truths of the grace of God. In 1887, Spurgeon continued to sound the warning call to his critics. Murray details Spurgeon's admonition:

³⁵ McBeth writes, "Changing views of life and moral values, often lumped together under the generic name of secularism, grew rapidly during the late Victorian era and made many Baptists uncertain about religious practices and teachings." McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 290

A chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and the men who are prepared for an advance upon Scripture. . . . The house is being robbed, its very walls are being digged down, but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth, and too much afraid of getting broken heads, to go downstairs and meet the burglars. . . . Inspiration and speculation cannot long abide in peace. Compromise there can be none. We cannot hold the doctrine of the fall and yet talk of the evolution of spiritual life from nature; we cannot recognize the punishment of the impenitent and yet indulge the “larger hope.” One way or the other we must go. Decision is the virtue of the hour.³⁶

Even though Spurgeon’s protest did not reap a great deal of followers at the time, it ensured a broader spectrum of hearers in generations to come. Many thought his stances were too strong and conservative. Spurgeon never accommodated his critics, nor did he ever give in to compromising his beliefs.

Learning from Spurgeon’s Weaknesses

Spurgeon’s Tireless Work Ethic

Spurgeon had a diligent work ethic in preparing to preach. In addition to raising twin sons, Spurgeon often preached up to ten times a week, wrote nearly 500 letters, digested six meaty books, and was constantly managing the roles of pastor, president, editor, author, and itinerate evangelist. William Albert addresses how this work ethic was in Spurgeon’s upbringing, but also became an antecedent for depression:

Spurgeon was raised with the belief that hard work was integral to Christianity. All Christians should be industrious, for religion never was destined to make one idle. Jesus was a great worker, and his disciples must not be afraid of hard work. Spurgeon had little use for ministers who did not labor intensely. . . . Work was a remedy and, on many occasions, the enemy of Spurgeon in his effort to curb depression.³⁷

Piper quotes a conversation between Spurgeon and missionary David Livingstone, who once asked him, “How do you manage to do two men’s work in a single day?” Spurgeon replied, “You have forgotten there are two of us.”³⁸ This is most

³⁶ Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 143.

³⁷ William Albert, “When the Wind Blows Cold: The Spirituality of Suffering and Depression in the Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 45-46.

³⁸ Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 8.

certainly referring to the presence of Christ’s energizing power as read in Colossians 1:29 when Paul says, “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” It is worth noting that Spurgeon’s work ethic should not be the aim of today’s pastor. While he worked untiringly, he did not always work well for the good of his health. Eswine provides helpful wisdom that Spurgeon realized later in his ministry: “We need to adjust our work rhythms and expectations. Spurgeon resisted this change at first, but gradually began to take regular breaks for months at a time in Mentone, France. For the sake of his health and ministry, such breaks were wise. . . . We need to build into our lives regular rhythms with God’s creation.”³⁹ Spurgeon’s tireless work ethic is not the standard by which all pastors will be judged. The apostle Paul unfolds the standard of faithfulness in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they found trustworthy.” In other words, success is faithfulness.

Spurgeon’s Method of Preaching

Spurgeon did not make it a normal practice to preach verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible. Instead, he moved from text to text on any given Sunday. In doing so, Spurgeon may have neglected to help people see the overarching themes of Scripture. While he was certainly orthodox and gospel-centered, Spurgeon was not expository in his delivery. In his *Lectures to My Students*, Spurgeon emphasized voice inflection, pitch, gestures, and pulpit presence.⁴⁰ To be sure, these exhortations may have been helpful during his day, but how much more to establish a commitment to expository preaching in the students. As with any preacher, today’s pastor should use discretion in tailoring his preaching methods to Spurgeon. Instead, one can seek to imitate his faithfulness to proclaim the truth.

³⁹ Eswine, “C. H. Spurgeon,” 133.

⁴⁰ See Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 2:150-213.

Ministry Applications

Ministry through Adversity

Upon considering the life of Charles Spurgeon, today's pastor should embrace ministry through adversity as a normality, not as the exception. To know Spurgeon through his writings is to know his passion to preach the Word faithfully. Spurgeon preached the Word amid great conflict within and without, including his bouts of depression. Piper explains, "Spurgeon saw his depression as the design of God for the good of his ministry and the glory of Christ. . . . What comes through again and again is Spurgeon's unwavering belief in the sovereignty of God in all his afflictions. More than anything else, it seems, this kept him from caving in to the adversities of his life."⁴¹

Spurgeon viewed his suffering as a means to greater growth in and knowledge of Christ. Like the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." As he persevered in his labor for Christ through depression, he came to understand how Christ was at work within him. Piper asserts,

He saw three specific purposes of God in his struggle with depression. The first is that it functioned like the apostle Paul's thorn to keep him humble lest he exalt himself. . . . The second purpose of God in his despondency was the unexpected power it gave to his ministry. . . . The third design of his depression was what he called a "prophetic signal for the future."⁴²

Each one these purposes served to equip him into a pastor who would endure to the end of his ministry.

Prizing the Value of Rest in Ministry

While Spurgeon toiled in his labor for Christ, he also saw the value of rest and reflection. In his lectures, Spurgeon contends,

It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on for ever, without recreation, may suit spirits

⁴¹ Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 17.

⁴² Piper, *Charles Spurgeon*, 19-20.

emancipated from this “heavy clay,” but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt, and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for awhile, but learn from the experience of others the necessity and duty of taking timely rest.⁴³

Spurgeon did not always value rest in his ministry, especially in his earlier years of pastoral work. However, he came to understand that rest could be enjoyed without guilt or regret of not being faithful to the Lord and the flock of God. Christopher Ash gives today’s pastor a helpful warning:

For every desperate trauma there are perhaps fifty or more pastoral needs which can perfectly well wait for a later visit or meeting. Indeed it is often good to wait, so that our brothers and sisters learn to depend upon God rather than on a particular Christian. A wise measure of self-preservation and the drawing of boundaries around our time is not the denial of love, but the outworking of wisdom. God needs no day off. But I am not God, and I do.⁴⁴

In the midst of ministry demands, the pastor would do well to remember that there is only one Messiah, and his name is Jesus Christ. The pastor who desires to persevere in ministry must consider the “long run” if he is to endure; and this perspective includes taking regular times away to recharge and refresh the soul through communion with Christ and meditation on his Word.

Ministering with a Gospel-Centered Focus

Lawson contends that “Christ—crucified, raised, and exalted—was the focus of Spurgeon’s gospel ministry.”⁴⁵ While seeking to duplicate Spurgeon’s evangelistic zeal would be a challenging task, today’s pastor should strive to model his compassion for the unsaved. Spurgeon treasured doctrines of grace and these truths motivated his passion to preach the gospel. It was not mere emotion that drove Spurgeon to be an ambassador for Christ; it was gospel-centered devotion. Spurgeon had an ever-present

⁴³ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:175.

⁴⁴ Christopher Ash, *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice* (Surrey, England: Good Book, 2016), 61.

⁴⁵ Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*, 101.

concern for those outside of the kingdom and longed to see them reconciled to God. He was known as a man who made tender appeals to those who were perishing in their unbelief. Tom Nettles elaborates on Spurgeon’s commitment to preaching the gospel: “This is the main glory of ministry, to preach Christ—his substitution, that he became a curse for us, dying the just for the unjust in the stead of his people. Christ must be preached in a lively, earnest, spiritual manner in order for him to be set forth plainly as crucified, even as Paul did before the Galatians.”⁴⁶

Training Faithful Men for Ministry

Spurgeon had a passion to train men for the ministry, which is clearly seen in his establishing the pastor’s college and the many pastors that he personally mentored. The theological training that each man received is recorded in his work, *Lectures to My Students*. These lectures are still widely used today in seminaries as a helpful resource for aspiring pastors. Spurgeon was committed to the mandate of 2 Timothy 2:2, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” He spent himself to both identify and train faithful men in his pastors’ college to be shepherds of the church who were lived in community with the church. To this end, he was intentional to connect the pastors’ college directly to the church. To Spurgeon, the students’ close proximity to fellow church members would prove essential to their training:

At the Pastors’ College, our brethren can not only meet, as they do every day, for prayer by themselves, but they can unite daily in the prayer-meetings of the church, and can assist in earnest efforts of all sorts. Through living in the midst of a church which, despite its faults, is a truly living, intensely zealous, working organization, they gain enlarged ideas, and form practical habits. Even to see church-management and church-work upon an extensive scale, and to share in the prayers and sympathies of a large community of Christian people, must be a stimulus to right-minded men.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 137.

⁴⁷ Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography*, 3:125.

In his lectures to the students of the pastors' college, Spurgeon was undaunted in training men to be faithful servants who are prepared to labor in study and face adversity:

Diligently labour to fit yourselves for your high calling. You will have trials enough, and woe to you if you do not go forth armed from head to foot with armour of proof. You will have to run with horsemen, let not the footmen weary you while in your preliminary studies. The devil is abroad, and with him are many. Prove your own selves, and may the Lord prepare you for the crucible and the furnace which assuredly await you.⁴⁸

Spurgeon was not interested in training men to be successful in the world or heroes on a pedestal. His passion was to train men to be preachers of the gospel. May today's pastors be intentional to practice this training mandate in their churches for the glory of God.

Conclusion

Spurgeon passed into eternity on Sunday, January 31, 1892. The next week, his body would lie in state in the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Murray recounts that on the coffin was "a simple inscription, the relevance of which those who had stood with him in the Down-Grade could understand. . . . 'I Have Fought a Good Fight, I Have Finished My Course, I Have Kept the Faith.'"⁴⁹ Spurgeon's life teaches the pastor in crisis that he can trust 1 Peter 1:13 to never fail him: "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Christ is both a pastor's portion and strength for every bout of depression, every twinge of physical pain, and every devastating circumstantial sorrow. Eswine reminds the struggling pastor to look to Christ like Spurgeon did on that snowy January day in 1850, for his salvation:

We look to Jesus with our consciences, our circumstances, and our chemistries. The sorrowing have a Savior. Our sturdy hope isn't that we get ourselves together but

⁴⁸ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:39.

⁴⁹ Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 165.

that he holds us and all things together, whether we find assurance or not. Our healing isn't what saves us. His grace saves us. Our speedy recovery isn't what gives us hope. His unselfish willingness to find us and carry us home anchors the hope on which we lean.⁵⁰

May every pastor who is losing heart study the life of Spurgeon. For when one looks to the life of Spurgeon, he will be forced to look to Christ and approach his throne to find grace to help in time of need. Truly, Spurgeon provides a life worth imitating as a means to strengthen pastoral perseverance.

⁵⁰ Eswine, "C. H. Spurgeon," 135.

CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER CHURCH

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the implications of imitation as a means of pastoral perseverance over the duration of a lifetime of ministry to Christ in contemporary pastors. This purpose will be accomplished through an examination of the biblical call to imitation, the biblical model to suffer with joy in ministry, and the biblical mandate to keep a close watch over one's life and doctrine.

The Biblical Call to Imitation

The Bible makes a strong case for imitation within the believer's life. George Zemek speaks of the deep roots of imitation (modeling) in the Scriptures:

Modeling had its origin in the creation of man in God's image, but through the fall and new creation of man in God's image, but through the fall and new creation of man in Christ, it has assumed a renewed importance. New Testament usage of the τύπος (*typos*, "type") and μιμητής (*mimetes*, "imitator") word-groups provides a good idea of the responsibility of church leaders to live as good moral examples before those whom they lead. Only when they do so can pastoral ministry fulfill the biblical standards of that office.¹

Ephesians 5:1

The apostle Paul stirs the believer to imitate God in Ephesians 5:1: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children." The believer's focus is directed to God to point where each thought, action, and motive are fixed to God's character. God is the ultimate model for his church. Zemek asserts, "On a larger scale, this command to imitate God

¹ George J. Zemek, "Modeling," in *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 214.

and Christ is part of a larger section about holy living (Eph. 4:25-6:20). . . . On yet a grander scale of inclusion is the comprehensive scriptural challenge to be holy because God is holy.”²

First Corinthians 11:1

Paul calls the believer to consider imitation of himself in 1 Corinthians 11:1: “Be followers of me as I am of Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is not declaring himself to be the prototype nor is he placing himself on an apostolic pedestal. He is ultimately pointing everyone’s focus to Christ as the exemplar to follow. Therefore, being an imitator of Paul or any faithful pastor is not to gaze upon the instrument, but to look through instrument to the ultimate pattern—Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:17

Paul emphasizes this concept of imitation in Philippians 3:17: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Clearly, Paul is not promoting himself in Philippians 3, for it is the same context where Paul proclaims his own limitations and moral imperfections. Paul was still in the process of being sanctified as he calls others to follow his example of godliness. It is worth noting that Paul is widening the circle beyond the apostles to include contemporary pastors whose faithful example should be emulated.

Philippians 4:8-9

Paul continues to accentuate the concept of imitation in Philippians 4:8-9:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

² Zemek, “Modeling,” 221.

Paul outlines the grid system of truth that should permeate the believer's thoughts and deeds. However, the list of virtues in Philippians 4:8 is not intended to remain in the abstract. Paul has sought to put them into practice and model each virtue before the people. Zemek states, "From the beginnings of this section, the theme of unity through humility, including the preferring of others over self, dominates. But the supremely important example of Christ (2:5-8) undergirds all subsequent moral responsibilities. The Lord is the primary pattern for attitude and actions."³ The pastor must keep in mind that he cannot reproduce what he does not possess in himself. In other words, the virtues that he seeks to model cannot be fabricated. This pattern of imitation worked for Paul because the virtues of Philippians 4:8 could be seen and traced in his life. First Thessalonians 1:4-7 also asserts the pattern of imitation. Paul teaches that the Word of God was received in Thessalonica, and the people were then transformed through the gospel into fellow-imitators of Christ.

First Timothy 4:12

Paul exhorted Timothy to be a pattern for the believers to follow: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." Zemek underscores that the bar is raised for both the character and conduct of Christ's servant: "The man of God is always accountable in areas of personal and professional responsibility. He cannot just be faithful in teaching the truth; he must live the truth...His obligation is one of exemplifying before members of the flock."⁴ The five areas in which Paul urged Timothy to exemplify included communication, lifestyle,

³ Zemek, "Modeling," 222. Zemek continues, "Paul challenged the Philippians to progress in their sanctification (2:12), reminding them that the resources for such a holy calling reside with God (v.13). Zemek, "Modeling," 222.

⁴ Zemek, "Modeling," 223-24. Zemek also discusses Titus 2 as declaring a similar message: "Among the instructions to young men, probably Titus' age group, Paul reminded Titus of his obligation to be a moral model. Preaching alone was not enough (2:6); he also had to live before them (v.7)." Zemek, "Modeling," 225.

self-sacrificial love, faithfulness, and moral purity. These five marks in 1 Timothy 4:12 give today's pastor his marching orders for how imitation is carried out on a weekly basis before the flock of God. The clear specificity of Paul's exhortations accentuate how the Bible never commands believers to imitate indefinable traits. In the same vein of 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul reminds Timothy at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 3:14 to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from who learned it." By the time Paul was called to heaven, Timothy had a full-orbed view of ministry. According to 2 Timothy 3:10-11a, Timothy had observed Paul's teaching, conduct, aim, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, persecutions, and suffering. Paul sought to leave footprints of sound doctrine and godly living for Timothy and others to follow.

Imitation Accomplished within the Church

The Bible teaches that imitation must be a hallmark of the believer's life. It should be a normal practice for the pastor's fellow church members to analyze his life and follow his pattern in following Christ. However, when a pastor approaches the imitation language in Scripture it can seem daunting, feel repulsive, or come across as arrogant. Matt Rogers supplies a helpful answer to this dilemma of seeing imitation accomplished within the body of Christ: "The church, by and large, is filled with passive consumers who are unwilling to take spiritual responsibility for the lives of others. We need to be reminded that the command to 'follow me as I follow Christ' is not a statement of arrogance, but the natural outworking of the Spirit of God in the life of all of his church."⁵

It is crucial to understand that the apostle Paul's call to imitation is not shrouded in a life that is flawless. In fact, he is calling others to imitation while he calls himself the "chief of sinners." Rogers asserts, "Perfection was not the basis for his [Paul] call to

⁵ Matt Rogers, "Is It Arrogant to Ask Christians to Imitate Your Example?" accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/is-it-arrogant-to-tell-other-christians-to-imitate-your-example/>.

imitation. A frail instrument being transformed by the grace of God is perfectly positioned to be a model for others to follow. This person's strengths and weaknesses, gifts and faults, successes and sins should set a model for a life transformed by the gospel."⁶ The invitation to imitation presupposes that Paul is united with Christ. There would be little value for today's pastor to imitate Paul's example or any other church leader were it not for their relationship with Christ.

Imitation Applied through the Life of Jonathan Edwards

The life of Jonathan Edwards provides the contemporary pastor a commendable model of pastoral ministry. He persevered through overwhelming ministry challenges at his church, and yet he sought to faithfully proclaim the Word to the people who would ask him to resign. Edwards was not a perfect model of perseverance, since Christ is the believer's ultimate and complete example. It has been argued that Edwards had a propensity to unhealthy introspection in much of his works and sermons. As Dane Ortlund observes, "Edwards could have made clearer that reviving comes to those who fix their eyes on Christ, not those who fix their eyes on Christ."⁷ In addition, Edwards often failed to consistently apply the gospel directly to believers. Therefore, Edwards stopped short of sharing how the gospel is at work after salvation into the hearts of his church. Ortlund observes, "He [Edwards] missed opportunities to startle his hearers and readers into wonder and worship through the wonder of free grace to God's own children amid their daily faults and failures."⁸ Edwards also misapplied Scripture through allegorizing and self-imposing themes upon the text of Scripture. Furthermore, he had preoccupation of appreciating this world while seeking to focus on eternity. In the midst

⁶ Rogers, "Is It Arrogant to Ask Christians to Imitate Your Example?"

⁷ Dane Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 181.

⁸ Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life*, 179.

of these weaknesses, Edwards' life provides numerous points of strength that should be exemplified in the contemporary pastor. He gave himself to a tireless devotion to the Word and proclaiming it with every breath God gave him with theological precision. He also pointed his people to prepare for eternity through pursuing holiness in all areas of life. Iain Murray shares Edwards' heart for his people's sanctification: "In Edwards' own manuscript notes on 'Directions for Judging of Persons' Experiences,' he writes, 'See to it that they long after holiness and that all their experiences increase their longing. . . . See to it, whether their experience makes them long after perfect freedom from sin, and after those things wherein holiness consists'."⁹ In addition, Edwards provided a God-centered lens for his people to view the world and their lives.

Today's pastor can learn from Edwards' weaknesses through recognizing and owning his own weaknesses before the Lord. Truly, it is comforting to pastors today that even Jonathan Edwards needed to grow in his understanding and application the Word. The contemporary pastor should embrace Edwards' passion for God's glory, incorporate his pursuit of personal holiness, and undaunted commitment to the Scriptures.

Imitation Applied through the Life of Charles Spurgeon

The life of Charles Spurgeon gives the contemporary pastor a praiseworthy example to follow. His strengths embody what pastoral perseverance is in several encouraging ways. He persevered through unthinkable physical pain, circumstantial sorrow, and spiritual depression. Michael Reeves speaks to how today's pastor can emulate Spurgeon's pattern pointing others to Christ's suffering in their times of difficulty:

When ministering to the downcast, pastors commonly point people to the resurrection and the victory of Christ. And the thought of death defeated, rears wiped away, and exchanging the helmets and swords of our struggle for palm

⁹ Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 260.

branches and crowns was all essential comfort for Spurgeon. However, when pastoring the suffering and depressed, he seemed most often to have focused people on Christ crucified as the Man of Sorrows. . . . Where Jesus in his heavenly glory might seem too exalted for the emotionally battered to approach, Jesus in his pain-racked humility can be just the balm they need.¹⁰

Spurgeon also persevered through controversy within his denomination, which would lead to his resignation from the Baptist Union. Far from perfect, Spurgeon struggled with weaknesses that hindered him. While his tenacious work ethic drove him to deliver excellent sermons, write voluminously, train men for ministry, it also pressed him at times to despair from unrealized expectations. In addition, Spurgeon's method of preaching does not translate well to the contemporary pastor. While he was faithful to preach the Word, he did not consistently give his church a steady balanced diet of expository preaching.

Today's pastor should strive to emulate Spurgeon's Christ-centered focus through the certain clouds of adversity. Spurgeon is a great companion for learning how to suffer well and not lose heart in Christ's power and sufficiency. Zack Eswine captures Spurgeon's heart in fighting against despair by looking to Christ: "We plead not ourselves, but the promises of Jesus; not our strengths but His; our weaknesses yes, but His mercies. Our way of fighting is to hide behind Jesus who fights for us. Our hope is not the absence of our regret, or misery or doubt or lament, but the presence of Jesus."¹¹ In addition, the contemporary pastor should incorporate Spurgeon's twin passions of passionately spreading the gospel and training faithful men to preach the gospel with accuracy and clarity. Reeves concluded that amid his theological rigor, Spurgeon was a "pastorally minded theologian. He wanted to be both faithful to God and understood by people."¹²

¹⁰ Michael Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 173.

¹¹ Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014), 51.

¹² Reeves, *Spurgeon on the Christian Life*, 21.

Imitation Applied to the Contemporary Pastor

For the contemporary pastor, imitation is applied through a close proximity to others. This juxtaposition implies a “life on life” model of discipleship with others where there is mutual striving for godliness that results in heart transformation. Imitation goes beyond being a mere role model but seeking to an accessible pattern for other believers to follow. Therefore, imbedded within the call to imitation are honest, soul-building relationships with other pastors. Christopher Ash calls today’s pastor to an intentional pursuit of accountability in order to avoid burnout in ministry: “Let us take care to nurture and sustain such friendships, and all the more so when we serve in contexts where there is much mobility and endless change of people. We are dust. We are not created to be autonomous, go-it-alone, god-like pastors.”¹³ No pastor can flourish in isolation of needful accountability. Isolation is the realm that a pastor will be tempted to lose heart and not persevere in ministry. The apostle Paul describes the normal body life that is guided by the gospel of Christ in Philippians 1:27: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” Striving together in ministry side by side with trustworthy brother-pastors who love and know one another will help to cultivate the good fruit of perseverance. Without these gospel friendships, the pastor is on track for disaster. This call to imitation not only includes looking to fellow pastors, but also looking back to pastors who remained faithful to the end for the Lord. Zemek asserts,

Whether historically noted or ethically urged, the New Testament data present God’s model to His people, show the moral example of the apostolic circle to all the churches, emphasize the particular area of responsibility in reference to church leaders and advocate that all Christians be maturing moral models for the spiritual well-being of the whole body.¹⁴

¹³ Christopher Ash, *Zeal without Burnout: Seven Keys to Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice* (Surrey: England, Good Book, 2016), 67-68.

¹⁴ Zemek, “Modeling,” 220.

The Biblical Model to Suffer with Joy in Ministry

The Bible calls pastors to suffer and yet to do so with joy. The apostle Paul proclaims this pattern of perseverance in Colossians 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” According to Paul, ministry is coupled with both suffering and joy, with a view to modeling Christ’s affliction to the world. As John Piper articulates, “Christ’s afflictions lack nothing in atoning worth. What they lack is a personal presentation in suffering human form to those for whom He died. This is what pastors and missionaries ‘complete.’”¹⁵ Paul was willing to persevere in suffering for the gospel’s sake in order to see people enter the kingdom through Christ. Ray Ortlund clearly states Paul’s perspective on pastoral perseverance:

Into his [Paul’s] pastoral ministry flowed two divine powers: suffering and rejoicing. It is not enough that we pastors today suffer as Paul did. We must suffer without self-pity, resentment, or murmuring but with rejoicing. Then we advance the gospel. How could it be otherwise? We represent the One “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2).¹⁶

For the contemporary pastor, the ministry blend of suffering and joy may seem contradictory. Of course, every pastor would desire the rejoicing part of ministry, but would seek to avoid the suffering that is woven into pastoral service. Ortlund challenges this popular assumption:

The Lord did not recruit pastors on false pretenses. He told us what to expect. We will suffer, for his sake. But for that very reason, because it is for him, our sufferings are a grace, a privilege, an honor he is giving us. We are following him down a path already stained with his priceless blood. . . . The privilege of pastoral ministry is *Jesus*—serving Jesus, standing for Jesus, representing Jesus, laying down our lives for Jesus, and through it all knowing Jesus more deeply.¹⁷

The pastor’s call to ministry implies a call to suffer for his sake and for others’ sake. If the pastor is continually surprised by suffering, then he is in danger of losing heart.

¹⁵ John Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 166.

¹⁶ Ray Ortlund, foreword to *12 Faithful Men: Portraits of Courageous Endurance in Pastoral Ministry*, ed. Colin Hansen and Jeff Robinson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 11.

¹⁷ Ortlund, foreword to Hansen and Robinson, *12 Faithful Men*, 12.

As one faithful pastor once said, “Ministry burnout is largely due to unfulfilled expectations.” Therefore, the pastor must view his suffering from a biblical lens. Piper states, “Our suffering is not in vain; God never wastes the gift of pain (Phil. 1:29). It is given to His ministers as He knows best, and its design is the consolation and salvation of our people. No pastoral suffering is senseless. No pastoral suffering is absurd or meaningless.”¹⁸ As the pastor suffers, he is never alone. Zack Eswine points the careworn pastor to look to a Savior who is well-acquainted with suffering:

Our sorrows belong to Jesus. He is their master no matter what fiendish thought or unexplainable cause gave them birth. Jesus shows us His wound, the slanders, the manipulations, the injustices, the body blows, the mistreatments piled on Him. From there, He loves, still. He invites us into fellowship with His empathy. We receive it from Him in the deeps.¹⁹

Jonathan Edwards gives these words of hope to those who feel crushed in their suffering: “Christ will surely give himself as much to his saints as he has given himself for them. He whose arms were expanded to suffer, to be nailed to the cross, will doubtless be opened as wide to embrace those from whom he suffered.”²⁰ Embracing ministry with Christ at the center must be the pastor’s aim. Viewing ministry as an undeserved gift of grace from God instead of a crushing burden that a pastor must regrettably carry injects joy into his soul. Derek Brown seeks to awaken the pastor to this viewpoint:

As we see ministry as a gift from God to enable us to persevere in the faith, many of us may find greater confidence with which to carry out our work. We may find our teaching attended with greater power, our discipline sought with greater rigor, and our spiritual lives characterized by greater joy. Instead of worrying about unavoidable failure, we will grab hold of our pastoral responsibilities as our God-given means of

¹⁸ Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, 166. Piper continues, “When Paul endures ‘weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities,’ and accepts them as God’s gracious therapy, the power of Christ is perfected in his life (2 Cor. 12:7-10).” Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, 167.

¹⁹ Eswine, *Spurgeon’s Sorrows*, 142.

²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies 501-832*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 18:370.

persevering to the end. And, as Paul notes, our progress will not only benefit us, it will serve as a means of perseverance for those we lead.²¹

The Biblical Mandate to Keep a Close Watch Over One's Life and Doctrine

In 1 Timothy 4:16, the apostle Paul charged Timothy and all pastors to obey the following mandate in order for them and their churches to persevere: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” In their commentary on the pastoral epistles, Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin state,

Timothy was to scrutinize both his behavior and his theology. Moral and doctrinal rectitude are the inseparable twins of the Christian life. Paul's final statement in v. 16 has important application for the doctrine of eternal security. First, Paul indicated that believers must endure to obtain the benefits of salvation. If Timothy persevered, his salvation would be evident to him as well as others. Both holy living and sound teaching are the inevitable fruits of saving faith.²²

Piper sounds forth a timely warning from 1 Timothy 4:16 to all pastors today: “Our salvation and the salvation of those who hear us week after week depend in large measure on our faithful attention to personal holiness and sound teaching. More is at stake in our work than greater or lesser progress in sanctification. The salvation of our believing hearers is on the line.”²³ Without question, the pastor's mandate is not to tailor his sermons to help his congregation merely get through the next week; rather, the pastor's charge is to prepare his congregation for eternity, equipping them through the Word.

Robert Yarbrough comments rightly in projecting Paul's aim in exhorting Timothy:

²¹ Derek Brown, “Ministry as a Means of Perseverance—Shepherd and Servant,” accessed January 12, 2017, <https://fromthestudy.com/2015/06/08/ministry-as-a-means-of-perseverance/>.

²² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 141.

²³ Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, 126. Piper contends, “It is the job of a pastor to labor so that none of his brothers and sisters is destroyed” (127).

Paul wants Timothy to be ministerially self-aware . . . he should examine and guard his heart and soul, the inner person who must be right with God for one’s observable life to be of use to God in pastoral labor. It is notoriously the case that the outward life of a minister (like the life of any professing Christian) can look one way and the inner reality be substantially different.²⁴

The contemporary pastor must be careful to preach the truth accurately and live out the truth genuinely. If a pastor’s example contradicts his doctrine, then his doctrinal beliefs are thus held in question. He should vigilantly avoid an example of hypocrisy that unravels what he says from the pulpit in doctrine. The pastor must yield to the truths he is proclaiming from the pulpit and trust the Word to accomplish God’s purpose. In a timely sermon to seminary students, Donald Whitney draws attention to the unavoidable destruction of a pastor who disregards the truth of 1 Timothy 4:

There is an almost inevitable ruin of every minister, and it will happen to you unless you avoid ruin by making progress. How do we make progress in ministry instead of making shipwreck...In the immediate context it is the discipline Paul commends to every minister in 4:6–16. And these are summarized in v.16: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”²⁵

Piper accurately cuts to the goal of the pastor’s ministry: “We preach so that saints might persevere in faith to glory. We preach not only for their growth but because if they don’t grow, they perish.”²⁶ The contemporary pastor must keep a careful guard over the doctrine of the Word that has been deposited into him; equally, he must also earnestly watch over his own soul. Eternity is at stake, so this charge to be watchful must not be taken lightly.

Conclusion

For every pastor and believer who desires to persevere faithfully to the end of

²⁴ R. W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 254.

²⁵ Donald Whitney, “Editorial: The Almost Inevitable Ruin of Every Minister . . . and How to Avoid It,” ed. Richard Mayhue, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 16, no. 1 (2005): 3. Whitney emphasizes where fruitfulness comes from: “Fruitfulness, whether in terms of evangelistic fruitfulness or the growth of souls into Christlikeness, comes as the result of paying close attention to your life and doctrine.” Whitney, “Editorial,” 4.

²⁶ Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, 130.

their life, there will be daunting challenges, seasons of suffering, pressures from within and without. The pastor must fix his eyes on Jesus who called him into service and will keep him by the strength of his sovereign might. Instead of being tempted to lose heart, the pastor can take heart in the promise of 2 Corinthians 4:16-17: “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” In conjunction with a line of faithful men, the lives of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon serve as a stirring testament to God’s sustaining grace and resolute faithfulness. As the pastor perseveres in ministry with an eternal focus, he will discover imitation of these faithful men of the past and faithful men of the present to strengthen him in perseverance. In the end, it will be Christ who energizes each pastor to be faithful.

May the words of this anonymous puritan prayer be the battle cry of every pastor who seeks to finish his course of ministry with indomitable perseverance and indestructible joy: “Give me a draught of the eternal fountain that lieth in thy immutable, everlasting love and decree. Then shall my hand never weaken, my feet never stumble, my sword never rest, my shield never rust, my helmet never shatter, my breastplate never fall, as my strength rests in the power of thy might.”²⁷

²⁷ Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 329.

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ABSTRACT

IMITATION AS A MEANS FOR STRENGTHENING PASTORAL PERSEVERANCE

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This thesis argues for combining a biblical perspective on pastoral perseverance with the historical examples of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon will encourage pastors to persevere in ministry. Chapter 1 frames the thesis in addressing the problem of pastors failing to persevere by focusing on the value of imitation as a means for strengthening pastoral perseverance. Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon are highlighted as examples of pastoral perseverance to contemporary pastors.

Chapter 2 emphasizes three main scripture passages in addressing apostle Paul's perspective on pastoral perseverance: 2 Corinthians 4, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy 4. Paul exhorts believers to press on by fixing their hope fully on God's grace as they shepherd the flock of God.

Chapter 3 focuses on Jonathan Edwards as an example of pastoral perseverance. He maintained a God-centered focus throughout his ministry, which provided the necessary anchor point during times of trial.

Chapter 4 presents Charles Spurgeon as an example of pastoral perseverance. He was a pastor that consistently battled depression, sickness, and denominational decline. Spurgeon pressed on in the power of the Spirit with a strong sense of vocational calling.

Chapter 5 summarizes the arguments made in the thesis and reveals the implications of imitation as a means for pastoral perseverance over the duration of a

lifetime of ministry to contemporary pastors and the broader church. This chapter argues for the biblical call to imitation through five pertinent New Testament passages that trace the theme of imitation.

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