

CHAPTER 2

The Nature of the Work

“What does Dick *do* all day? Show tourists round the church?”

Our minister at St Helen's, Bishopsgate, London, Dick Lucas, was recalling a question a friend of his mother had asked her in his early years as Rector. It reflects the bafflement many feel about how a pastor fills his time if they only encounter him on the odd Sunday, or at Christmas, a wedding or a funeral. Sunday (or sometimes Saturday) appears to be the only working day: six days invisible, one day incomprehensible!

As you can imagine, rather more is involved. This chapter is about what's in the job description – so that you can picture whether this could be you.

A pastor's exact role varies with church size, denominational arrangements and local expectations. There are likely to be many entries in a pastor's diary: Sunday services, baptisms, weddings and funerals; meetings with colleagues, elders or church council; evangelistic and pastoral visiting; teaching courses; attending ministers'

fraternals; one-on-one Bible reading, pastoral counselling, and more. All these are in addition to the time for study, preparation, prayer, writing projects and answering emails! Nevertheless, again with Bibles in our hands, we can identify *one great aim* and *three key activities* which are at the heart of the role, whatever the church.

Our aim: presenting everyone mature in Christ

The Apostle Paul describes his aim as to ‘present everyone fully mature in Christ’ (Col. 1:28). His teaching, his prayers and his strategy were all devoted to this great objective: that he might present (before Jesus) people who’d come to know Christ and had grown into Christian maturity.

He shows us what maturity looks like on the previous page of his letter: living lives ‘worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened to endure,’ and being filled with enthusiastic thankfulness for our deliverance in Christ (Col. 1:10-13). This is Paul’s great aim in all his work, and surely – for we serve the same Lord – it must be the purpose of every pastor.

It sounds obvious but let me say it: being a pastor is about *people*. It’s about helping them to know Christ and grow in maturity in Him. Our great aim is not maxing sermon downloads, but presenting real people mature in Christ. It is *people* who are the fruits of our ministry, or, as Paul put it elsewhere, our letters of recommendation (2 Cor. 3:1-2).

So then: do you long for people to come to know Christ and be saved for ever? For them to grow in godly assurance, joy, character and usefulness? Would you like to see your life invested in such a way that, on the last day, you may “present” people, with lives transformed, to the Lord Jesus?

Seeing people grow in Christ – what a privilege and joy! In ministry, we have the privilege of seeing the Lord work through our meagre efforts.

But how on earth is this to be achieved?

The ministry of the Word

Our equipment is the Bible. Paul reminds his younger colleague Timothy that ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It seems that Paul is thinking here particularly of the pastor-teacher or gospel worker: the phrase NIV translates *servant of God* is actually *man of God* in the Greek, echoing a term often used in the Old Testament for a prophet.

The place of the Bible in the minister’s life and work was a rediscovery of the Reformation. Before then, it was the custom at an English ordination service for the bishop to present the candidates with a chalice – a communion cup – as a symbol of their main work. Now – ever since the Reformation – the bishop presents a Bible instead. The minister is to be a minister of the Word.

In all his work, then, the pastor will be wanting to share, teach and preach the Bible. When he meets the sick or troubled person, he will want to share Scripture with them. Every baptism, wedding or funeral is an opportunity to preach Christ. A healthy minister will be seeking every opportunity his ordinary work affords him to bring the Bible to bear and to help people know God through it – and if there is no such opportunity, to question the usefulness of that activity. He will be wanting to train others to share in this work, so that the church may continue and grow

(2 Tim. 2:2). He will have in his mind that the church will only grow with this nourishment.

Central to this is the ministry of preaching. Certainly, this is how Paul sees it: he follows his comments about the minister's equipment with a charge of great solemnity, 'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: preach the word ...' (2 Tim. 4:1-2a). It must be front and centre in our work. As Paul also told Timothy, 'Devote yourself [strong word!] to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching' (1 Tim. 4:13). A regular ministry of faithful preaching can transform many lives.

I personally try to keep the mornings clear of appointments so that I can study God's Word and books that will help me grasp it, teach it, and to prepare for talks and other teaching opportunities. I do my best to listen to God's surprising Word and try – however imperfectly – to progress at explaining it to real people. This is an irreducible element of the pastor's job, whatever other expectations may be placed on him (and he may need to fight some of them off if he is to achieve it).

So then: do you love God's people and His Word in such a way that you will labour to study, and to prepare accurate, nourishing, easy-to-listen-to, applicable Bible teaching?

Prayer

All Christians have the privilege of prayer, and all are called to pray; but ministers of the gospel are particularly called to pray. Certainly this was the pattern of the Apostles, where they say that they will 'give [their] attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). Likewise, pastors are

normally set apart from other work so that they can devote themselves to these things. The Lord Jesus prayed for His disciples; Paul shows us in his letters how he prays for those he's writing to. How can a ministry which is all about presenting people mature in Christ – based as that is on God's work – not include a significant element of prayer?

In practice, the gospel minister will set aside some time – probably additional to his morning devotional quiet time – to pray for those in his care, and those he's seeking to reach for Christ. He will be with his lists.

Over the years, he should have the inestimable joy of seeing the Lord answer his prayers in the lives of individuals, even beyond his wildest prayers and dreams. Sadly, along the way, there will be disappointments – as the Lord taught us to expect in the parable of the sower. But he should also see real growth: seed watered by prayer, grown by the Lord (2 Cor. 3:7).

Do you know the struggle and joy of intercessory prayer? Will you be prepared to give yourself to this?

The direction of the church

'Presenting everyone mature in Christ' requires not just personal and public preaching, but directing the church so that its policies, people and practices promote this. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul gives Timothy instructions about church policies: on widows, on ministerial pay and on handling of allegations against those in leadership, and it's clear Paul expected his younger colleague to take a lead in implementing these.

When you think about it, it's noteworthy that the earthly leadership of churches – both in the New Testament and down the centuries since – is given to pastors, rather than

CEOs or administrators. I take it that this arrangement – assumed in Scripture and followed down in church history – reflects the fact that the Lord Jesus is the head of the church, and He leads by His Word. Therefore, earthly leaders need to be those who are best versed in the Bible, so that every policy seeks to implement scriptural principles, and, more than that, is a teaching opportunity. And, of course, the church is led from the pulpit. But the flip side is that pastors will be involved in leadership and policy decisions.

Paul also gives Timothy and Titus a great deal of instruction about appointments – instructions we'll return to in the next chapter. The space Paul gives to this suggests that for Paul this is a crucial part of the minister's role. A predecessor of mine here in Cambridge used to say that his only spiritual gift was appointing assistant ministers. I think he was being modest, but he hit the nail on the head in understanding this as a key part of his role. I am so thankful for colleagues I have been able to appoint, and what a difference they make to the life of our church!

We must be careful at this point. None of this is saying that the pastor is to be the sole governor of the church – it's clear in the pastoral epistles that leadership has a corporate dimension. Moreover, it is not the case that the pastor needs to, or should, lead on every detail of policy. It is unwise, unbiblical and impracticable for the pastor to attempt this (and this is why the supply of helpers with admin, finance, safeguarding etc is a key need to pray for). You absolutely don't need to be an expert on these things, nor should they be your job.

Rather, the pastor's role in policy must mainly be in his teaching, which creates a culture and a shared understanding of mission within which others will make

wise decisions. He must stick, as his priority, to the ministry of the Word of God. Paul talks about pastor-teachers being among those given by God “to equip his people for works of service” (Eph. 4:11-12). I take it that this implies that as the pastor does his main job of teaching, he will be shaping the attitudes and gospel understanding of the treasurer, the safeguarding officers, the administrators, the musicians and others so that they do their jobs with Bible attitudes and priorities. I have found that if I stick to my job, others will be better at doing theirs!

Nevertheless, because the pastor is a leader, he will inevitably be involved in the making of a lot of decisions, and at least some of the paraphernalia that goes with that: meetings, interviews, reading and writing emails, chewing his pencil as he thinks about policies. Sometimes, he will need to make tough decisions and will need courage. Occasionally, he will need to be involved – with others – in the painful but necessary matter of church discipline. He will find himself spreading all these matters before the Lord and pleading often for wisdom.

Inescapably, then, the pastor is a leader. Of course, this must be leadership exercised gently, after the pattern of Christ. He must never be a dictator. But he will still have much responsibility on his shoulders, and he will need to face it and exercise it.

So then, here are three key roles for the pastor. Clearly they are pretty significant. All this leads naturally to the question: who is qualified for this?