# PERSPECTIVE

## OCTOBER 2016

# MARKS OF AN ENDURING LEADER



### 9 Marks of An Enduring Leader

Karl Vaters, writing for *Christianity Today*, recently described an epidemic of pastoral burnout. Though he was responding to the resignation of a high-profile megachurch pastor, Vaters noted it's not just the pastors of big churches who struggle: "This year, thousands will leave the ministry burned out and hurting. From big and small churches, growing and stagnant ones." <sup>1</sup>

"Thousands" is a lot. I'm thinking of faithful men who just a few years ago devoted their lives to pastoral ministry. They've shepherded a flock, preached the Word, and made disciples; but somewhere along the way things changed. Perhaps they felt unappreciated, or lost their vision for the future. Whatever the circumstances, the bright glow of ministry fell behind a gloomy cloud of despair.

In a fallen world all work is thorny. No matter the job in the home, the office, or the church—your plow is going to turn up a lot of rocks. Work is demanding and frustrating. Work in pastoral ministry presents unique challenges. A farmer *knows* if his labor was in vain—his sweat either produces a crop or it doesn't. Pastors typically run on the promise that their labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58), but rarely do they get to see the fruit of their work.

Pastors are important, but a healthy congregation consists of numerous men and women, whose labor makes ministry possible. Elders may be the main leaders in the congregation, but every church is full of people who roll up their sleeves organizing, recruiting, greeting, serving and leading in various capacities.

#### IT'S NOT JUST PASTORS WHO BURNOUT

At Mount Vernon, before someone joins the church they sit through something we call a membership interview. This is not a meeting to determine if someone is good enough to join the church. None of us worthy—that's why we need the gospel. Membership interviews allow time simply to get to know each other. These interviews are also an opportunity to hear their story, more fully understand how God is at work in their life, and see if they have repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. In every membership interview I ask how someone would like to serve the church. I'm eager to know people's interests and to find out what they've done in the past. If someone is coming to us from another church, it's not uncommon for me to hear, "I want to serve, but I'm tired...I'd kind of like a short break."

A number of years ago, we welcomed a couple into the church. They were theologically sound, servant-minded, and eager to help. And we needed help badly! I thought this was a match made in heaven. I failed to recognize they needed some time to adjust to a new church, to get to know new people, and to be invested in by a new family of faith. Instead they were thrown into the thick of ministry. Everything went well, for a season, but eventually the challenges of ministry overwhelmed them. They did too much too soon and couldn't sustain the ministry. They didn't endure.

I've seen burnout. I've been in rooms as people shed tears over the weight of responsibility they carried—especially when that responsibility included leading others. On a more personal note, I know what it's like to grow tired myself; to wonder if what I'm doing is really making a difference, and to be thoroughly convinced someone else could do my job better. Burnout threatens all of us.

There is no easy answer to the problem of ministry burnout. There's no silver bullet. Some things can be handled organizationally. I took a sabbatical last summer; not a vacation from church, but a break from preaching and the regular, daily duties of pastoral ministry. I read, and I wrote, and I recharged. Many of the servantleadership positions in our church come with built-in sabbaticals. In addition to that, it's amazing what a good night's sleep, a healthy diet, and regular accountability can do.

Sabbaticals and self-care aside, what does it take to be in ministry for the long haul? Whether you are a pastor, a deacon, a Sunday school teacher, or a greeter—whatever role you play in the church, what can you do to be a leader that lasts?

There are certain attributes that mark someone who is able, willing, and excited to serve the church. I pray that as you work through these marks, you'll be encouraged by the leadership role God has given you. If you aren't currently serving the church, maybe this will encourage you to throw your hat in the ring.

#### Contents

#### FIRST, CONFIDENCE IN THE BIBLE

The doctrine of inspiration is under attack today. In an attempt to defend Christianity, some religious leaders are pointing people away from the Bible. They tell us to focus on the heart of Christianity—the message of the resurrection. They warn us not to get lost in the weeds by defending the reliability of the Old and New Testaments.

The biblical authors, however, make much of inspiration, and so should we. Consider Paul's words to Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Where the Word of God speaks, God speaks.

Therefore, it's not enough to say Bible is true—so is the newspaper report of last night's football game. It's not enough to say the Bible is authoritative—so is a sheriff's search warrant. Christians believe the Bible is inspired by God and, for this reason, it's worth dying for.

Mount Vernon is committed to teaching everything Jesus commanded (Matt 28:20). This means proclaiming the Bible. Whatever your role in the church (teaching kids, opening doors, recruiting nursery workers, etc.) you are contributing toward this grand mission of spreading the Good News.

If you don't have confidence the Word we proclaim is inspired, why persevere in any church ministry? Enduring leaders have confidence in the Bible.

## SECOND, A COMMITMENT TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Industrialization has blessed us. It's meant cheaper goods for all; but there's a downside to industrialization. People can feel like cogs in a complex machine they don't fully understand. It's why some people describe corporate life as "dehumanizing." They wonder if a robot could do their jobs. It's why others describe work as a "rat race"; it can seem work is more about getting ahead than making a difference.

Serving the church can be like that—from organizing volunteers, serving on a worship team, or putting out snacks for a membership class. Whatever you do can feel tedious if you lose sight of the bigger picture: the health of the church as a whole.

The author of Hebrews reminds us of the big picture: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25). When we gather as a church, the mission is obvious—we are to press and prod and encourage each other "to love and good works." This is the big picture of church involvement. As we spend time together, the love of Christ abounds.

**Fighter Verse** 

It's important we *not* adopt a niche-ministry mindset. In other words, our church involvement should not be limited to a single activity. For me, this means I'm called to do more than preach. I'm called, like everyone else, to gather together, to invest in people personally, and to know the body that is my church family.

We all have a stake in the life of our church. We are, as Peter put it, a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9). None of us has the right to stand on the sidelines, nor do we have the right to limit our involvement to one particular sector of service.

This is why, at Mount Vernon, we talk a lot about the "ministry of presence." It's the idea that one of the most important things you can do to lead this congregation is be faithfully present when we meet as a congregation. This is how the church will know you. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. But make no mistake, those who spend time with the body of Christ will be known by the body of Christ. Those who lead the best are those who are known the most.

Leaders who endure are committed to the local church even more than their own, particular ministry.

#### THIRD, A ZEAL TO GLORIFY CHRIST

Years ago when I worked in Washington, DC, I represented a United States Senator. My job, in a nutshell, was to promote his agenda. Of course, I had my opinions about policy and strategy, and I advised him the best I could, but ultimately, my responsibility was to communicate and support *his* opinions and policy. He was the one elected, not me. Therefore, his agenda became my agenda.

In the church, our agenda is the glory of our Savior. "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:13-14). The Ephesians' lives were all for the glory of Christ. When we have a zeal for Christ's glory we will labor for the evangelization of the nations because we want more people to praise him. Not only that, we will labor for the building and maturing of the church so that those who already praise him come to praise him more deeply.

If you are convinced, as a leader, that you are serving Jesus Christ, you will endure in ministry as long as your body holds out.

#### FOURTH, A SOBER VIEW OF MINISTRY

According to Webster's Dictionary, sober means "indicating or expressing a thoughtful or grave character or intent." Our attitude in ministry ought to be one of *gravitas*. The church is in the business of people's souls. We are preparing one another for death. We want, more than anything, to help each other get ready for the day we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ hoping to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21).

Leaders in the church should be sobered by this mission. We have a weighty responsibility. As the book of Hebrews puts it, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, *as those who will have to give an account*. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb 13:17). This verse is primarily about elders, but anyone who leads in the church should take it to heart. We will be held accountable for our service. God will judge leaders for the way they care for the souls of others.

What does a sober view of ministry look like? In one sense, it doesn't "look" like anything. It's simply a deep awareness of the importance of the task at hand. Soberminded leaders will be unusually patient and thoughtful, slow to speak and slow to act. By being careful and deliberate, there will be fewer fires to put out. A sober ministry is an enduring ministry.

#### FIFTH, JOY IN SERVICE

At times service can be disheartening. In the church leaders are always servants, and whether you are an elder, a deacon, or a volunteer there are moments when the valleys of ministry can drain and discourage you.

Years ago I was in one of those valleys. The trial was hardly earth-shattering, but it was enough to pull me down. An older brother saw the weariness in my eyes and he exhorted me to have fun. It was a simple and novel piece of counsel, but I knew what he meant. Somewhere along the way, I'd lost my joy. He reminded me I wasn't working in a morgue. God surrounded me with men and women who are spiritually alive and hungry to follow Jesus. Though the work at times can be hard, I should rejoice in the work God called me to, the people God called me to lead, and the Savior who first called me to himself.

Paul told the Corinthians about Christians whose joy led them to serve. The churches in Macedonia marveled at the gospel of Christ and the amazing work the Lord did in them. He became poor so they could be rich. These believers responded by giving away to those in need more than they could afford to lose. Paul wrote, "their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" (2 Cor. 8:2). True joy produces faithful service.

Without this kind of joy, your service and leadership in the church will be a burden. You will eventually grow tired of carrying it; but if your heart is filled with joy, you will always feel independently wealthy. You'll have an abundance of joy to spend on your brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### SIXTH, THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

I recently visited a Tesla showroom. I asked if every car has the new autopilot feature. They told me it was optional (and expensive!). Christians who appreciate God's lavish grace can be tempted to think of holiness as optional, too. It's not.

> 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. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:13-16).

Though all Christians must be holy, church leaders are called upon to exemplify holiness. Yes, elders and deacons are especially called to model integrity; but remember, whatever position of responsibility you have in the church puts you in the spotlight. Others are watching you. You are leading by example.

It's so much harder to lead when you are bogged down by sin. It's a lot like running through a tar pit—try as you might you know something is horribly wrong. That's why we must pursue the spiritual graces: Bible meditation, prayer, and fellowship. Turn to the Lord each day in Contents

repentance and faith. Those who lead in the church will harm the body of believers if they persist in sin. Not only does leading in sin displease God—which is most important by far, but it also consumes your energy, gnaws at your soul, and shortens your ministry. Enduring leaders pursue holiness.

# SEVENTH, A ROBUST UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION

Martin Luther said every Christian is simultaneously a saint and a sinner, *sancti et peccator*. Indwelling sin means we are not yet perfect. Justification means in the eyes of God we are as white as the pure driven snow. As Paul put it, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23-24). Because of the salvation won by Christ, my standing before God is changed—his grace has made me clean and holy in his sight.

New York pastor Tim Keller recounts standing before his congregation and thinking to himself, "You don't define me. My identity isn't in you, it's in Christ." It's important for pastors to remember this. It's important for all of us to remember this. It's easy to find your worth in your ministry. I can think if I failed in my sermon I've failed as a person. What's true of the preacher is true of all of us. We are tempted to rate our self-worth by the quality of our performance.

Enduring leaders find their identity in Christ alone.

I always know this with my head, but I don't always feel it in my heart. There are moments, though, when the Spirit drives this truth deep into my soul. It's usually after a particularly fruitful time of Bible study and prayer, the gospel seems unusually fresh and real to me. I sense freedom from trying to please everyone, from trying to have it all together, from trying to look good. In those moments, I have more passion for my ministry, and I recognize my work doesn't have to be perfect—it can't be. At times like this, Psalm 118:6 makes sense, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Enduring leaders won't work to earn God's pleasure or their pastor's or anyone else's. Enduring leaders lead because atonement means they *are* pleasing to God.

#### EIGHTH, HUMILITY

Humility is arguably the greatest need in the church today. This is not because it's the most important, but because it's the hardest to find. It wasn't for naught that Paul penned Philippians 2. He knew the temptation believers face to come out on top. Paul reminds us of the gospel. He writes of the omnipotent Son of God who laid aside all his glory for our good. Christ's attitude should be ours:

> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:4-8).

Humility is the flipside of a zeal for Christ's glory. One demands the other. Whatever your role of service or leadership, humility is a must.

What does this have to do with an enduring ministry? Those constantly looking to be recognized will always feel let down when recognition doesn't come.

Perhaps this is why the book of Proverbs warns us against seeking attention: "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence...for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' then to be put lower in the presence of a noble" (Prov 25:6-7). The principle is clear. Leadership for the sake of recognition is a recipe for disaster; you're asking to be humbled in front of everyone. It's better by far to serve with the interests of others in mind. Leave recognition in the hands of our loving and wise God.

#### NINTH, A LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Paul downright marveled at the diversity in the local church. He looked at every member and sat in awe of the fact that each one added value. Not fundamentally because of what they did, but because of who they were in Christ.

The apostle likened the church to a body where every member has a role to play. Every member. Not simply the extroverts. Not just those who can teach well. Not just the extra-friendly. Everybody. Paul knew God graciously gifted every single person in the church with a wonderful role. He described the church as one body with many members and unique functions: serving, teaching, and exhorting, for example (Rom 12:4-6); but he didn't intend the list to be exhaustive. There are as many gifts as there are members. Looking at all these believers, rejoicing at the gift they are to the church, Paul wrote something spectacular, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10). Paul loved the diversity of gifts in the local church because he loved the people of the local church. He saw every single person as not only made in the image of God but as an object of the love of God. Our love for each other is to be a reflection, however pale, of the Father's love for us.

Contents

Let's refuse to see others as tools needed to complete a ministry project. It's easy to treat volunteers like nails you hammer to construct whatever you've been asked to build. They're sheep to be tenderly cared for, not nails to pound. The world gathers to be seen, but we gather to love. "Stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb 10:24).

Not long ago a church in a racially-divided town held a new members class with an African-American in attendance. A young man from the community caught wind of this and decided to protest. He parked his truck in front of the church, unfurled a Confederate flag, and waved it for all to see. The pastor and the African-American attendee headed into the building at the same time. They saw this act of hate. The pastor, shocked and embarrassed, started walking to confront the racist. His African-American friend stopped him and said,"Let me go and talk to him." For the next several minutes he shared the gospel with this young man. He told him about a Savior who was hated by men and yet who died to save them. He tried to get to know the young man and, when he was done, he even had a list of prayer requests! This is love.

If he could show such love for a racist neighbor, how much more should we love the people of God? Good leaders overflow with Christ-like love. It's the kind of love that motivates us to lead consistently and persistently, even when times are tough.

#### ARE YOU READY TO LEAD?

God has surely given you opportunities to lead others. You can be sure there will be bumps along the way; leadership is hard. If thousands of pastors are resigning every year due to burnout, tens of thousands of faithful church members are standing behind them, striving to make a difference. If that's you, I pray you'll take what you've read to heart. If you want to endure as a leader, whatever your role in the church, may God give you:

- 1. confidence in the Bible
- 2. a commitment to the local church
- 3. a zeal for Christ's glory
- 4. a sober view of ministry
- 5. joy in service
- 6. the pursuit of holiness
- 7. a robust understanding of justification
- 8. humility
- 9. a love for the people of God

These are marks of leaders that last.

~Aaron Menikoff

<sup>1</sup> Karl Vaters, "Epidemic: Another Pastor Burned Out and Quit Last Sunday," at *Christianity Today* (13 September 2016). Found at http:// www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2016/september/epidemic-anotherpastor-burned-out-and-quit-last-sunday.html. Accessed 28 September 2016.

#### Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life

Written by Barry Danylak Bookstall Price \$15



In today's modern culture, believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ–especially young people–are exposed to a confusing barrage of messages concerning relationships and sexuality, marriage and singleness. To help alleviate this confusion, *Redeeming Singleness* by Barry Danylak presents what God's Word says about these issues with a special emphasis on singleness.

The author biblically affirms the single life by exploring the role it has in helping to achieve God's ultimate purpose of redeeming a people for

himself for the sake of his glory. But this is not just a book for singles. It is also a book which validates God's purpose in the marriage relationship as outlined in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the apostle Paul.

To do this Danylak looks at the story line of the entire Bible to trace its teaching about both marriage and singleness. He begins in Genesis 1-2 by reminding the reader that God's mandate is that man is to "be fruitful and multiply" and he is to "leave, cleave, and become one flesh" with his wife. He then looks at God's covenant with the nation of Israel and explains why every Israelite man and woman married in order to reproduce the physical offspring necessary to insure God's promise of blessing given to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis 12. But with Jesus and the new covenant the author explains why God's emphasis becomes one of spiritual reproduction by all believers—both married and single—and not just physical reproduction by those who are married and descendants of Abraham. The author then highlights Paul's advocacy of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7 and reminds the reader of the unique and undistracted opportunity singles have to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and achieve a spiritual intimacy with fellow believers.

The aim of *Redeeming Singleness* is not to persuade anyone to either marry or remain single. But it is to give a degree of understanding and a positive view of the richness of living a life singly for God and his kingdom.

– Recommended by Jim Heiskell

# Excerpts from the Book

"Paul distinguishes the gift of singleness in three ways. First, it is characterized by one who, by the grace of God, lives a contented life apart from marriage and is above reproach in the sexual area. Second, it is distinguished as a life free from the distractions of a spouse and children, a life characterized by freedom and simplicity which testifies (to an unbelieving world) to the complete sufficiency of Christ. Third, it is a life enabled for constant and undistracted service to the King and His kingdom."

–Epilogue, p. 213



"Christian singleness is a testimony to the complete sufficiency of Christ...testifying that through Christ, life is fully blessed even without marriage and children."

-Epilogue, p. 214-215



"For the Christian single the freedom and flexibility of the single life will often open access to levels and opportunities of spiritual intimacy with other believers that those who are married do not have available in the same way and to the same degree."

-A Charisma in Corinth, p. 202-203

#### The Rare Jewel Of Christian Contentment

Written by Jeremiah Burroughs Bookstall Price \$10



Jeremiah Burroughs was a pastor in seventeenth century England who wrote his compact volume on contentment in order to quiet and comfort "the hearts of God's people under the troubles and changes they meet with in these heart-shaking times" (19). Burroughs' main point is that the duty, glory, and excellence of a Christian is to be well skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment. This loving pastor knew that a great deal of the suffering his flock experienced was due to the discontented way they viewed God and their circumstances. He labors

carefully to define, describe, and illustrate what biblical contentment is for their joy and fellowship with God.

The truths in this book will calm your soul and fix your sight more firmly on Christ and his sovereign power and goodness. Burroughs reasons from God's Word and from practical examples to help his readers see the beauty of contentment, how to obtain it, and the evils of a murmuring spirit. If you are fretful and anxious or if you want to worship God more fully by submitting yourself to his sovereign disposal in all things, pick up *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. God will nourish your soul in all circumstances as you learn to reason with yourself from God's Word and to see how all God's ways in your life spring from love and mercy to those that fear and love him (Ps. 25:10). Burroughs is an excellent spiritual heart doctor and will help you to diagnose where your heart can grow in this grace-filled discipline of contentment.

– Recommended by Andrea Lee



"Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."

-Christian Contentment Described, p. 19



"For you to murmur and be discontented is to resist the work of God. God is doing you good if you could see it, and if he is pleased to sanctify your affliction to break that hard heart of yours, and humble that proud spirit of yours, it would be the greatest mercy that you ever had in all your life."

-Aggravations of the Sin of Murmuring, p. 182

<u>3</u>

"When afflictions befall us we should not give way to having our thoughts continually upon them, but rather upon those things that may stir up our thankfulness to God for mercies."

-How to Attain Contentment, p. 223



<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

#### -Romans 12:20-21

These verses are a continuation of Paul's instruction from the previous verses. There we are told to live peaceably with others and not to avenge for any wrongdoing done to us. Rather, we are to trust that God, as the supreme Judge, will justly avenge.

The astounding thing about the Christian life is that we are to love in tangible ways those who commit evil against us. It may not be difficult to trust God to avenge. But if you are anything like me then you find it very difficult to go out of your way to love those who wrong you. Yet, Paul tells us that we are to give them food and drink. We are to help care for their most fundamental needs. That is so counterculture because our sin wants to avenge others at a deep and personal level.

This command presumes you have a close relationship with the person. It may even be family or a friend. Think of someone who has wronged you in a very hurtful way. Do you have in mind the person and evil they committed? Now ask yourself if you have the love and humility to care for them. That requires true Christlike character that we should pray for. Paul also says that "by so doing you will heap burning coals on [their] head." That's a rather strange image. But Paul's audience would have understood that throughout the Bible coal is representative of God's judgment. Paul's point is that in making peace and showing love to your enemy, you are heaping God's future judgment on them unless they repent. You are an agent of God's justice.

Lastly, Paul reminds us in verse 21 of the temptation in our hearts to be overcome by evil. Lest we become prideful and think the table could never turn with us being the offender, we should pray that we would "not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That happens as we make it a daily practice to do what is good and right. So how can you show goodness to others, those that you easily love and those that you struggle to love?

– Brad Thayer

# NEW MEMBERS

ŝ



Amanda Adams



Brent Adams



Todd Lawrimore

