



**The Little Book
of Things You Should
Know About Ministry**



By Reid Ferguson

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Foreword

John H. Armstrong

The late A. W. Tozer once said: “The ministry is one of the most perilous professions.” I doubt that members of your church can relate to such a statement.

Misunderstandings about the role and responsibilities of ministers abound in our age. Formal education taught most of us in the gospel ministry many valuable lessons. We learned how to interpret the Scriptures wisely before we entered upon this work. We also learned the essential core of orthodoxy so we could teach and protect the faith in public and in private. Gaining the necessary tools for our ministry was essential. Though some think otherwise, decrying intellectual pursuit as a waste of time, it is essential that a minister be “trained in the words of the faith and of good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:6). We must have *this* training, regardless of how we get it. It may come in formal or informal ways but make no mistake about it, training is necessary for *good* ministry.





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There are voices today that insist anyone can do pastoral ministry, so long as they “feel called.” I would not decry a true “call” to the ministry for one moment. Without it you will not survive in this demanding work. But you must have more. A calling merely points you in the right direction. “Training in godliness” necessarily takes time.

The proverb is correctly applied here that it is the “little foxes that spoil the vine.” Fruitful ministry comes over the long haul because ministers keep a wise and careful “self watch.” Those who do this will continually seek help for their holy work. *The Little Book of Things You Should Know About Ministry* is a book I welcome precisely because it will help the modern pastor better understand and cope with the “little foxes” of the Christian ministry.

The biblical pastor is first and foremost a spiritual mentor and then a shepherd of souls. I submit to you that modern pastors, at least in the West, often become very good managers. The better they manage the church the larger their circle of influence becomes. We then make our managers into messiahs. The daily work of ministry, in our modern context, is usually about tasks, plans, and job descriptions. But we are not called to be managers. We are called to shepherd sheep. We do this best by feeding and leading, which is the true work of spiritual direction.





Eugene Peterson, warning against the two common models of ministry that we adopt, calls them the managerial and the messianic. He suggests that we easily adopt the messianic role when we major on serving and helping people in trouble. Understanding and mercy are common to most of us in ministry. As we care for people they sense a greater need for us to be their ministers. Somewhere along the way we cross a line when, as Peterson suggests, “my messianic work takes center stage and Messiah is pushed to the sidelines.” The sheep need us and we begin to feel our importance. In our eagerness to fulfill this role we can actually hinder their growth, both spiritually and emotionally.



We slip into the managerial role when we sense that our people need us to guide and lead them if they are to grow. Says Peterson, “I am responsible for the successful operation of a religious organization—if I am going to do this well, I am going to have to get the best help available, and deploy the forces strategically.” This leads ministers to seek for the “best” leaders in the flock, those who are gifted and who can create a good impression. The minister is in a good place to see the gifts of the flock and thus to challenge the people. Peterson adds, “As I get people working with me, my image is enhanced. And in the course





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of doing this I cross a line: what started out as managing people gift's for the work of the kingdom of God becomes the manipulation of people's lives for the building up of my pastoral ego."

Peterson wisely adds that the "tough part" (at least in this culture) is to develop the skill of slipping quite effortlessly in and out of the messianic and managerial roles. For sure, we must do both these works but we should understand that they are the high profile works of ministry. What about the small things? What about the day-to-day realities that make us good spiritual mentors, spiritual directors who can quietly move people toward the Savior through our labors? Peterson concludes: "Spiritual direction is practiced by pastors in the very context that constantly interferes with the practice. This is why it is so infrequently practiced: the setting is not congenial."

Now here is the real challenge. Peterson concludes that "spiritual direction [is] what I am doing when I do not think I am doing anything important." I like that. It is what I have come to understand first-hand after thirty-plus years in the ministry. How can I pay attention to the spiritual graces of a faithful ministry while not putting too much emphasis upon my personal skills to help, i.e., to become a messiah to my people? How can I lead my





church, in the power of the Spirit, without the real issue becoming my personal management style and giftedness?

Reid Ferguson grew up in the home of a wise and faithful pastor. He has a keen practical and penetrating insight into the nature of pastoral work. He has learned some simple lessons in his own ministry that will profoundly serve his fellow ministers. He writes lucidly. He understands the great traditions of spiritual ministry but he is practically rooted in present realities.

Here you will find help to deal with real church issues like “special interest groups.” Here you will also be challenged to drop a number of mistaken notions that you have picked up along the way. And you will certainly learn some practical things about avoiding needless controversies, which all too often destroy long term pastoral ministry. Since ministry is two parts godliness and one part humor you will also be urged to laugh.

A. W. Tozer once noted that, “Whatever is getting the attention from our spiritual leaders is what we finally come to accept as orthodoxy in any given period of history.” If this is true I submit that the modern ministry desperately needs a new reformation, one that reshapes and retools the way we see our work and the way we follow our Chief Shepherd in it. Reid





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Ferguson understands this need for reformation in ministry. In short, Ferguson understands that it is the “little foxes” that often destroy our work. In this excellent book he provides some basic things that all ministers need to think about more clearly and act upon more faithfully. This is a wise little book.

John H. Armstrong,
Reformation & Revival Ministries





Preface

Moses Hadas once wrote a review of a book which read: “This book fills a much needed gap on my bookshelf.” He had a way with words. It is my sincere hope that this little book will do just the opposite of the one Hadas cited; that it will fill a sore gap on your bookshelf.



There are, in my estimation, three books which speak directly to pastoral work which no man who endeavors to preach should ever be without: C.H. Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students*; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ *Preachers and Preaching*; and Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*. Spurgeon’s work I recommend to be read once a year. Spurgeon himself had his dear wife read him Baxter’s book regularly after he retired from preaching on the Lord’s Day. And Jones’ book equips the preacher, so that he may better pastor – since our first contribution toward the spiritual





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health of our people is to feed them upon God's own Word.

Each of these works speak so eloquently and powerfully to the preacher's needs, that little can be said to improve upon them. And yet, it is this writer's experience that there are some select things which no one ever says to the pastor about his work and himself which would be of great usefulness if brought to the fore. Perhaps I might even be able to spare you some of the pain, heartache and foolish mistakes that I have already made. That is my desire – to add just a little more to the equipping you've already had.



I want to make it clear that much of what you will read here is not simply the fruit of dispassionate observation, but lessons learned in the aftermath of my own grave errors. A precious trust has been committed into our hands by our being allowed the privilege of building into peoples' lives upon the foundation of Christ that has already been laid. If you are anything like me, it can be a very easy thing to be a raging bull in the china shop of men's souls. We minister to peers, not underlings. We too are sheep. Sheep under-shepherding other sheep to be sure, but sheep nonetheless. It is my sincere hope that the chapters below will help you avoid some of those errors to which I





have been prone, both for you own sake as well as for those you faithfully tend.

In many cases, it will be abundantly apparent that the topics addressed could use much more “in depth” treatment. That will have to wait for another day, and perhaps, other contributors. The object here is not to treat each of these exhaustively (this author is certainly not qualified to do so anyway), but more to call them to the mind’s attention – and to give each reader room to think them through more carefully in their own context. Thus there is much contained herein which is broad and general rather than precise and specific. That is by design. Keeping the chapters short and thought provoking, while calling certain central ideas to the fore will (I hope) both keep the reader’s attention, and prevent them from being bogged down in applicational detail which might hinder the practical use intended. One might look at some of them as slightly expanded proverbs.

If the subjects seem to jump erratically, it is because I am filling holes, not creating a smooth pavement. Bear with me. If you think I left something out, it is probably in one of the three books mentioned above. Even at that, there is some overlap with them. But I have tried to avoid that, and just leave you with





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some critical material. May God be pleased to bless it and use it for His glory.

One last thought: as I began to commit these thoughts to paper, it occurred to me that just tossing some of these things into your collective laps may be somewhat sterile in and of itself. I would recommend that if you have picked up this copy of the book, it might be wise to find another brother at least – if not a few others - with whom you can discuss the various concepts tendered, in an atmosphere where you can work through specific applications prayerfully and peer to peer. If you cannot do that – please feel free to contact me personally if I can be of any assistance. We are all co-laborers here. If we can help one another in the task committed to us, I believe we will be better Shepherds. To that end, letters may be sent to me care of the Evangelical Church of Fairport, 38 E. Church St., Fairport NY 14450. Or I can be e-mailed at reid@reformed.org. No Shepherd should be without access to a least one other who is laboring in the same field.

