



Shepherd the Flock of God:

Eight Questions for Pastors of God's People

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to 1 Peter 5. While you're turning there, a quick explanation for this bandage on my head. One morning a couple weeks ago I blacked out all of a sudden, fell on a sharp edge and gashed my forehead. So a lot of stitches, a concussion and a few cardiologist appointments later, I'm good now by God's grace. But for your sake, I'll keep what's under this bandage covered up for now.

Each year I have attended or spoken at T4G I have felt completely undeserving to even be in the room. This year I stand alone in a room and I still don't feel like I deserve to be here, particularly speaking to you on this text and this topic. I was asked to preach from 1 Peter 5:1-4 with the title, "Shepherd the Flock of God." There are so many other pastors who should be preaching this sermon.

I think about my childhood pastor, Don Bolden, who went to be with the Lord this last year after decades of faithful pastoral ministry. I think about Jim Shaddix, my mentor and the man who faithfully pastored a flock of 150 Sunday after Sunday during my time in Seminary. I think about Corey Varden, a bi-vocational pastor who tirelessly works while shepherding God's people in a traditional Baptist church. I think about Matt Pearson, who moved with his wife to live in a trailer on the church property in a small town, to love and lead and marry and bury saints in ways no one but God would ever see.

I think about pastors overseas. We're starting a new initiative right now through Radical to partner with indigenous pastors and missionaries on the front lines of the most urgent spiritual and physical need in the world. We're focusing initially on work in 12 countries, including Somalia, Yemen, Bhutan, Afghanistan and North Korea. The pastors in these places know far more about this topic than I do.

On top of all this, if I could be completely honest, I'm in a season right now where I feel pretty insufficient as a pastor. I won't go into details, but I have been convicted over recent days about ways I have not cared well for the church I serve, so preparing this message has only deepened that conviction, further uncovering areas for growth and needs for grace in my own sinful heart.

So now that I've totally undercut my credibility to preach this message, I want to lean totally on God's Word and God's Spirit to do what I can't do—speak to you. I pray, in a way that I will serve you well as you shepherd the flock God has entrusted to you. In light of my own pastoral weakness, I'm going to draw on a pastoral hero of mine from history. His name is Charles Simeon and over this last year I read

Hugh Evan Hopkins biography entitled Charles Simeon of Cambridge. I was moved by God's grace in this man who pastored Trinity Church in Cambridge, England, for 54 years.

Here's what I want to do. I want to read our text, 1 Peter 5:1-4, then based on the text, I want to ask eight questions of every pastor who is listening right now. If you are not a pastor or elder—maybe you're a church leader in some other capacity or a church member—I hope you will be edified by anything here that applies to you. My aim in the next few minutes is to speak specifically to pastors because that's who God is speaking to in this text. I want to ask my fellow pastors eight questions that I believe this text beckons you and me to ask as we shepherd the flock of God entrusted to our care. Along the way, I want to intersperse insights from Charles Simeon's life and pastorate that I hope will be an encouragement to you. Before any of that, I want to lead us in prayer.

O God, this is such a unique scene in so many ways. Me and others speaking at T4G, joining people in homes and other places amidst a pandemic. We continually plead for Your mercy, for the spread of Your salvation, for the sick and dying, for all who are helping and working. God, I pray especially right now for pastors who are laboring during these days. Help us, we pray, to lead Your church well, to point the people in our charge and people across our communities and cities and countries to You, to Your Word and Your grace and Your coming Kingdom. Please make us faithful pastors during these days and in all of our days. I pray that You would help me now to preach and help us all to hear what You are saying through Your Word to us as those You have entrusted to lead Your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

All right, 1 Peter 5, beginning in verse 1:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

This is a really appropriate passage during a pandemic. In his commentary on 1 Peter, Tom Schreiner writes that this passage demonstrates “the type of shepherd leadership that is needed to assure the survival of the church in trying times.” Now, the context in 1 Peter, of course, is persecution, not pandemic. But I believe many of the principles are the same. What type of pastoral leadership is needed in the church amidst trying times?

If you look back up in your Bible, Peter has just warned the church that God's judgment is coming and that it begins in God's house. We see trials throughout 1 Peter that test the people of God. Peter is saying the first to take these tests are the elders or pastors in the church. The background here is Ezekiel 9:6, where God tests His people “*with the elders who were before the house.*”

So in view of trials on this earth and coming judgment for eternity, the church must be ready, starting with the elders or pastors who lead the church. That's the set-up at the end of 1 Peter 4 that then provides a pretty sober tone to 1 Peter 5 and continues throughout every verse we just read. Peter is saying to pastors, "The Chief Shepherd is coming back and there will be a reckoning among all His undershepherds. He will call every pastor and elder in the church to give an account, so each of you should be ready."

That's what God's Word is saying here and that's part of why I was drawn to Charles Simeon. He was 23 years old in his first year as pastor at Trinity Church when he spoke clearly to his congregation about his accountability before Jesus for them. One Sunday morning, he said to people standing in the aisles (which I'll explain that more in a moment):

Remember the nature of my office and the care incumbent upon me for the welfare of your immortal souls. Consider whatever may appear in my discourses harsh, earnest or alarming, not as the effects of enthusiasm, but as the rational dictate of a heart impressed with a sense both of the value of the soul and importance of eternity.

Simeon knew that it is a sober responsibility to shepherd people whom Jesus has purchased with His own blood. Simeon described the pastor like a keeper of a lighthouse. He painted a vivid picture one day of a ship wrecked on a rocky shore with dead bodies floating and widows and orphans wailing. When asked what happened, the keeper of the lighthouse responded, "I fell asleep." Simeon knew what every one of us as pastors needs to know: life and death, heaven and hell for souls hang in the balance of how you and I carry out our calling, which means we must not fall asleep.

This word from God in 1 Peter beckons pastors—lighthouse keepers—to honestly, soberly and humbly ask at least eight questions. I'm going to phrase these as if God is asking these questions through His Word to each of us individually.

1. Do you love your ministry more than you love Jesus?

Peter writes, "*So I exhort the elders among you...*" Then listen to how he describes himself, "*...as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.*" He describes himself as a pastor, as an eye-witness of Jesus and as a partaker in coming glory. By the way, he uses the word from which we get the word martyr.

Then he says one imperative in this passage—one command: "*Shepherd the flock of God...*" So why this one command to pastors? Well, remember Jesus' last recorded conversation with Peter in John 21:15-17:

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter

was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Don’t forget the call to lead the church flows from love for Christ. There is a direct relationship between loving the Son of God and shepherding the flock of God. Instructions for leadership in the church are given to those with affection for the Lord of the church. I wonder if we are prone to miss this. You don’t even have to get past the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospels to hear of people who are performing miracles and driving out demons in Jesus’ name, but then Jesus says, “I don’t even know you.” Is that possible? Is it possible to have fruitful ministry for Jesus totally apart from personal intimacy with Jesus? It’s absolutely possible. It’s dangerously possible.

As an illustration from my own sinful heart, I can remember a long season in my life as a pastor when the church I was pastoring was growing, a lot of people were coming and a lot of good ministry was happening. I had written a book and a lot of people were reading it. I started getting invited to preach in all kinds of places, so on the outside, it looked like the height of ministry. On the inside, my time alone with the Lord was inconsistent at best. The reality is most days it was non-existent. Sure, I would prepare to preach a sermon and I would pray in public, but I rarely prayed in private and I had never read the Bible simply so I might know and love God.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t lazy. I was working hard, staying up all night many nights. There were a lot of things happening—a lot of good things happening in ministry. But I was doing it all totally disconnected from intimacy with Jesus. It is frightening to me to realize how successful, so to speak, I could be in ministry while missing a heart for Jesus. I loved my ministry far more than I loved Him.

What about you? I’m guessing there are some of you listening right now who are right where I was. God, in His kindness, is calling you back to Himself right now even. Maybe the word you most need to hear from God right now is, “I love you and I long for intimacy with you.” Others of you might say, “I think I love Jesus more than I love my ministry.” I do hope that’s the case. I want that to be the case in my life more than anything else—literally, more than anything else.

But this is where Charles Simeon challenges me. Simeon was not a Christian when he went to Cambridge, but three days after he arrived there, the provost told him he would have to attend the Lord’s Supper. That frightened Simeon out of his mind. He knew enough about Christianity to know that you don’t take the Lord’s Supper if you don’t believe in Jesus, and you definitely don’t feign belief in Jesus. This fear drove Simeon to reflection during Passion Week and he wrote this in his journal:

As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord’s Supper, I met with an expression to this effect, that the Jews knew what they did when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering. A thought came into my mind. “What? May I transfer all my guilt to another?”

Has God provided an offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer.”

Accordingly, I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus and on the Wednesday began to have a hope of mercy. On Thursday, that hope increased. On the Friday and Saturday it became strong, and on the Sunday morning, Easter Day, April 4th, I awoke early with those words from heart and lips: “Jesus Christ is risen today. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” From that hour, peace flowed in rich abundance into my soul and at the Lord’s Table in our chapel, I had the sweetest access to God through my blessed Savior.

Fifty years later, Simeon would write, “The light of God’s countenance then first visited me and in His great mercy, He has never withdrawn it from me.” Simeon walked with God for the next 57 years. Here’s what I mean by “walked with God.” One man who lived in Simeon’s quarters for a time wrote:

He invariably rose every morning, though it was the winter season, at 4:00, and after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of Scriptures. Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials and prepared for every duty.

Simeon’s ministry for Jesus flowed from Simeon’s intimacy with Jesus. So what about you and me? We’re busy people. There are emails to send, calls to make, sermons to write, meetings to run, people to contact, things to do. Before long, if we’re not careful, no matter what we might say, it can easily start to look like we love our ministry more than we love our Master. God’s Word is pleading with us as pastors, “Don’t manufacture a heart for ministry and miss a heart for Jesus.”

Do you love your ministry more than you love Jesus?

2. Are you content to care for the congregation God has entrusted to you?

Question number two that springs from this text is are you content to care for the congregation God has entrusted to you? Peter writes, “*shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...*” The flock of God belongs to God. It’s not your congregation; it’s His congregation. It’s not your church; it’s His church that is among you, around you, entrusted to you. The language later in verse three references “*those in your charge.*”

So shepherd the flock of God that is among you, “*exercising oversight.*” That’s one word in the original language that essentially means to take care of the flock. The meaning here is crystal clear and actually quite simple. God has entrusted certain people to you and me to care for them as pastors. Yet, if we are not careful, as pastors we can easily look past them. Instead of being content to care for the congregation God has entrusted to us, we can start to compare them with congregations God has entrusted to others.

We look past our people to the larger church...or to the smaller church. We look out and see other churches that are younger...or older and more mature. We think, “I would like to pastor in the city...or in

the country.” We think, “I would love to pastor a church with more money...or fewer problems.” We start to look at other churches with a sense of comparison that cuts in subtly perilous ways.

I think of times as a pastor when my church was growing and all kinds of good things were happening, but I began to experience a sinful sense of elation as I thought about how I was the leader of that church. Or I think of times as a pastor when my church wasn’t growing and not much was happening, then I’d hear reports of all that another church was doing and how it was growing. Instead of immediately having joy over what was happening in that church, I could sense myself starting to justify why it wasn’t happening in our church. Or I could even start to criticize—even if just in my own mind—all the things that were wrong with that other church, coming up with a list of unbiblical reasons why they were experiencing growth. I can think this way without even realizing I’m doing it.

Just in case you’re thinking, “You’re a pastor of a large church, certainly you don’t struggle with comparison,” don’t be fooled. Prideful comparison is dangerously pervasive and the ecstasy of crowds only increases it.

Jonathan Edwards says this about spiritual pride:

This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advance of Christ. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit to darken the mind and mislead the judgment. It is the chief source of all the mischief that the devil introduces to clog and hinder the work of God.

I get caught up in comparison, even in the sick sense of competition, that robs me of the contentment I should have to care for the congregation God has entrusted to me. Maybe I’m alone, maybe I’m not—but to the extent to which you ever struggle with comparison or competition that threatens your care for your congregation, let’s learn from Simeon’s example.

Upon his ordination as a deacon, he preached during the summer months for Christopher Atkinson at St. Edwards Church. The parish for which he was responsible was pretty small, comprised primarily of all the local butchers. But he went door to door caring for each of those individual souls. Not long thereafter, to the amazement of most everyone—including Simeon himself—at 23 years of age, he was appointed pastor of Holy Trinity Church in the heart of Cambridge University. It was a dream job...until it wasn’t. Week one. The people in the church didn’t want Simeon. They wanted the former pastor’s assistant curator, John Hammond, and they made that clear. Simeon said he would step down, but the bishop in charge of the appointment said that even if Simeon stepped aside, Hammond would still not be appointed. So Simeon remained and the congregation revolted.

Every Sunday morning for the service, parishioners not only refused to attend, but they locked their pews so that no one could sit in them. Simeon set up seats in the aisles at his own expense, but the church wardens threw them outside. They did this, not for one week, or two, or three; not for a month, or

two, or three. They did this for ten years, such that every Sunday morning for ten years, Simeon could only preach to people standing in the aisles or sitting in obscure corners of the room. Ten years!

Then there was a Sunday afternoon service that was under the purview of the parishioners, but they wouldn't let Simeon preach. Instead, they paid John Hammond twice the salary that Simeon was receiving so that Hammond would preach the Sunday afternoon sermon. That went on for five years, at which time Hammond stepped down and the people asked somebody else to take Hammond's place for the next seven years. So for twelve years total, Simeon was kept completely out of the Sunday afternoon service. So Simeon tried to start a Sunday evening service and many people came week one—until the church wardens decided they were going to shut that down. They locked the doors and wouldn't let anyone in. They told Simeon he had “no right to go into the church whenever he thinks fit.” They told the pastor of the church he doesn't have a right to go into the church whenever he wants.

Get the picture. For the first ten years of his pastorate, Simeon preached to a room full of empty pews in the morning. For the first 12 years he was forbidden to preach in the afternoon, plus all this time he was locked out of the church on Sunday night. How do you shepherd that flock for 54 years? When Simeon was asked that question, he answered:

In this state of things, I saw no remedy but faith and patience. The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was 2 Timothy 2:24: “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil.”

O God, make us all content to care well for the congregation You have entrusted to us.

3. Is pastoring a job for you to perform or a passion for you to fulfill?

Peter writes, “*shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly...*” So according to our text, it is possible to shepherd God's people out of a sense of duty that lacks desire. It's possible to see pastoral ministry as a job to perform instead of a passion to fulfill. I'm guessing any pastor has faced this temptation at some point. I'm guessing many pastors are experiencing this emotion at this point, for so many different reasons. We can start to see different facets of pastoral ministry as activities we have to do instead of opportunities we want to take.

God is warning us here in His Word to be careful. Don't begrudge any of the work you have been called to do. The care of souls is critically important and, by God's Spirit, He supernaturally equips you and me for it and compels us in it, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

I think about Monday mornings, that moment when you or I wake up and realize it's time to start all over again, beginning with preparation for preaching. If we're not careful, even preaching can start to become a job to perform instead of a passion to fulfill. May it not be so, Peter says.

Hopkins, Simeon's biographer, writes:

The modern parson is sometimes heard complaining of the fatigue of preaching weekly to the same congregation. Before ten years have passed, he will start talking about being “preached out” and needing a move. Such an idea would have been anathema to Charles Simeon. His remarkable achievement, unparalleled by any other local incumbent before or since, was to hold the attention of undergraduates and townsfolk alike, preaching multiple times every week for over 50 years. It’s like Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16. Simeon couldn’t help but to preach God’s Word: “Woe to me if don’t!”

In 1807, after 25 years of pastoring, Simeon’s health started to fail. His voice was struggling to the point where some Sundays he could only speak in a whisper. Those physical struggles continued for the next 13 years, until he was 60 years old. But he still kept preaching in the middle of it all.

On one particular Sunday during that period, a visiting pastor was so struck by Simeon’s passion for his people he said, “Never shall I forget one remarkable instance which I myself witnessed of his affectionate concern for the souls entrusted to him. He was preaching upon those striking words in Romans 10, ‘All day long I have stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.’

“After having urged all his hearers to accept the proffered mercy, he reminded them that there were those present to whom he had preached Christ for more than 30 years, but they continued indifferent to a Savior’s love. And pursuing this train of expostulation for some time, he at length became quite overpowered by his feeling, and he sank down into the pulpit and burst into a flood of tears, and few who were present could refrain from weeping with him.”

Not long after that, about 40 years into pastoral ministry, he made a special note in his pocket Bible, right next to Jeremiah 20:9: “There is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

Pastors, do we weep over the people to whom we preach, even as we preach to them? As we look in their faces, do we long for their salvation with fervor? I have a picture of a pastor weeping in the pulpit for the people God has entrusted him to shepherd.

Is pastoring a job for you to perform or a passion for you to fulfill?

4. Are you pridefully concerned about what others think about you or humbly consumed by what God has called you to?

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...” As God would have you—not as the world would have you, not as others would have you, but as God would have you. Literally it says, “according to God.” Do you notice how much pride lies underneath every phrase in this passage? There is a propensity in all of us to desire the praise of others or even to please ourselves. It’s so subtle in pastoral ministry that we’ll miss it if we’re not vigilant, or at least I have to be.

Even as I was preparing this sermon, I kept thinking, “What will people think of me when I preach? Will they think the sermon was good? Will they think the sermon was bad? What will this person or that person think?” That was my thought process in a sermon where I’m pleading with people not to be concerned with what others think about you. How frustrating is that? And it’s not just preaching. It’s

praying. I can stand in front of a group of people and pray, and I can actually be concerned about what others are thinking about me as I'm praying. How sick is that? My heart swims in a sea that prioritizes myself, even in the most holy things I do.

When I was a teenager, a mentor of mine challenged me to pick a life verse, "A verse you want to mark your life." I chose John 3:30, what John the Baptist said about Jesus: "He must become greater; I must become less." But the reality is that verse does not mark my life. I think the first part does. I want Jesus to become greater. I really believe I want to exalt Jesus. But my impulse is to take that last phrase and say, "He must become greater and I wouldn't mind becoming greater too." I have to fight in prayer and thought all the time to say, "No. I want to become less. God, please make me less. You greater, me less." I so want that verse to be my life, but the struggle continues.

This is where Simeon's counsel is spot on. He said the three lessons which a minister has to learn are 1) humility, 2) humility and 3) humility. Hopkins describes how Simeon was constantly learning this, particularly in those early years at Holy Trinity:

This once very self-assertive man now found himself totally rejected by those he tried to lead. No one would even walk next to him on the Cambridge campus. People threw stones at him through the windows of the church. People threw dirt and rotten eggs on his face and clothing. Harder to take than even that, they smeared him with rumors and they questioned his character. So in those early years of the church, he was prone to self-pity.

Then when circumstances changed, he was prone to self-praise, and he came to know the danger of man's applause. He once said, "If anything laudatory be mentioned about me or my sermon, I entreat from my inmost soul that I may not have it repeated to me. Let me go to heaven as the vilest sinner in the universe. Satan himself could not be a greater curse to me than the person who would dare to breathe a word upon that subject commendatory of me or anything I have done."

That may seem like an overreaction, but he was zealous to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus as his judge. He said, "The ministers of Christ are generally even unduly exalted or undeservedly depreciated by those around them. But they should discharge their duties with fidelity, without any regard to the opinions of men and approve themselves to Him Who will judge them righteously in the last day."

It just doesn't matter what they say about you or me, here or there, on this or that social media channel. It doesn't matter. Our eyes are fixed on Jesus. Are you, am I, pridefully concerned about what others think about us, or are we humbly consumed by what God has called us to?

Let us shepherd the flock as God would have us.

5. Are you driven by what you get in ministry or by what you give in ministry?

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly." Not for shameful gain—that's certainly a warning against greed in the pastorate or the misuse of money, much as we see in the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

We know this does not mean that the church doesn't financially provide for various elders. We see a clear pattern in Scripture of support for leaders among God's people. But the context here certainly seems broader than just money when it's contrasted with "eagerly," which is a poignant word that portrays a zeal to serve others over and above one's self. It seems like the point is that a pastor is driven not to get, but to give. The posture of a pastor is to serve and not to be served.

Simeon beautifully illustrates this picture of selfless ministry. He lived a simple life, capping his salary at the same amount almost all his life and giving away everything above that for people in need, from Cambridge to India and other places in between. His brother left him a fortune, but he turned it all down. Simeon ended up selling volumes of his sermons, but all of his royalties were owned by various societies representing different ministry causes. He said, "If God be honored and my fellow creatures benefited, it is all I want." One friend remarked that Simeon had a 'noble indifference to money.'

But his eagerness went beyond money. He poured his life into raising up other ministers. He couldn't bear to see so many men going out to pastor churches who had no training in God's Word or how to communicate it, with no understanding of what it means to care for souls. So he made himself as accessible as he could to as many of them as possible. Hopkins' biography has an entire chapter devoted to telling all that those ministers did as a result of Simeon's influence in their lives. Hopkins writes:

In the saga of Simeon there is a long roll of honor, of really remarkable Christian men who owed their conversion and progress in the Christian faith to the life and witness of the old apostle of King's and Holy Trinity Church. W. Caris Wilson. Robert Houseman, the first undergraduate whom Simeon led to Christ at Cambridge and who later became pastor of St. Ann's Church for 42 years. George Hodson, who became Archdeacon of Stafford. Thomas Lloyd. Henry Venn. John Venn. Thomas Saurby. Matthew Preston. Charles Perry. Patrick Bronte. The list goes on and on, all the way to Simeon's last curate, William Caris, who took his place at Holy Trinity. And those were the men who stayed in England.

Then there were those whom Simeon mobilized to go overseas, namely to India. These were the days when the Church of England was resistant to global missions, trying to convince William Carey not to go to India. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland carried a resolution that affirmed, "To spread abroad among barbarians and heathen natives the knowledge of the gospel seems to be highly preposterous, insofar as it anticipates, nay, even reverses the order of nature." Warren Hastings made it a fundamental rule of policy "to discourage missionary efforts."

In the middle of that scene, Simeon was 29 years old, six years into pastoring, still locked out of his church on Sunday nights, forbidden to preach on Sunday afternoons and preaching to empty pews on Sunday mornings. He obviously had enough problems to focus on, but he knew the need for the gospel among the nations. He started raising up and sending out missionaries. David Broward. Daniel Corry. Claudius Buchanan. Henry Martyn, one of the most famous missionaries to India in history, who translated the New Testament into Urdu and Persian and oversaw its translation into Arabic. All of these missionaries started under Simeon's tutelage and many of them came to Christ under him.

It was said that for a period of about 40 years, most all the missionaries who went to India from England were recommended by Charles Simeon. His focus was broader than India though. Through persistent work and partnership with William Wilberforce, he started the Society for Missions to Africa in the East, which later became known as the Church

Missionary Society. People went out from Simeon's care to proclaim Christ in Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, the Middle East and across Africa.

To pastors who said there were enough problems in England to take care of, he wrote, "What would have been the state of the whole world if the same mind had been in Christ that is in us and maybe said, 'Why are we to waste our strength upon the heathen? Is there not scope for the labors of all at home?' I answer, it is well for us that the apostles did not argue thus."

Simeon urged his church to pray that they would be "the means of diffusing life and salvation to the remotest corners of the globe." Simeon spent restless effort buying up every opportunity that came his way for the spread of God's Kingdom overseas.

I ask you, pastors, are you spending "restless effort buying up every opportunity" that comes your way for the spread of God's Kingdom overseas? Is your church a "means of diffusing life and salvation to the remotest corners of the globe"? The opportunity is before us, pastors, in a way that Simeon could have only dreamed. Pastors, there are resources among us in the church to take the gospel to every people group on the planet.

The question is: will we be driven by what we can get in ministry or will we be driven by what we can give in ministry?

6. Is your leadership based on intimidation of others?

"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge..." As if you are in charge when you are not. Jesus' words to His disciples are surely in the backdrop here:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all (Mark 10:42-44).

Leaders of the church are the servants of the church, Jesus says. There's no place in pastoral ministry for a sense of entitlement, as if we have earned what we have only been given by God's grace. There's no place in pastoral ministry for an air of superiority, as if we are not the vilest of sinners were it not for God's mercy. There is no place in pastoral ministry for oppression or coercion. There's no place in pastoral ministry for personal pressure, sexual provocation or political plotting. There is no place in pastoral ministry for unrighteous anger or any kind of temper.

Obviously in telling the story of Charles Simeon it's easy to highlight his strengths and ignore his weaknesses, but he was obviously not perfect. He had a bad habit of getting angry about small things. One day at a Mr. Hankinson's house, Simeon got so irritated with how a man was stoking the fire that he swatted the man on the back to make him stop. Later that day the same man made another mistake and

Simeon lost his temper with him. Mr. Hankinson wrote a letter, as if it was from this other man, and he put it in Simeon's bag for him to find later. The letter said, "He could not see how a man who preached and prayed so well could be so angry and have a temper about such trivial matters." The letter was signed, "John Softly."

Simeon responded directly to the man with a note that said, "To John Softly, from Charles Proud and Irritable, I must cordially thank you, my dear friend, for your kind and seasonable reproof." Then Simeon wrote to Mr. Hankinson and said, "I hope, my dearest brother, that when you find your soul nigh to God, you will remember one who so greatly needs all the help he can get." Not domineering over those in your charge.

Is your leadership based on intimidation of others?

7. Is your life worthy of imitation by others?

"Shepherd the flock of God...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." We immediately think about Paul saying to the church in Corinth, *"Be imitators of me as I am of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 11:1), or to the Philippian Christians, *"Brothers, join in imitating me....What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 3:17, 4:9).

What a statement! Whatever you've learned or received or heard or seen in me—if you do that, it will go well for you. The people of God will not be what they cannot see, which means they need to see the life of Jesus in their pastors and elders. Isn't this why the majority of qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are character qualifications that are essentially expected of every follower of Jesus? Elders and pastors in the church are to lead in such a way that members of the church see the life of Christ in them. So let us each ask if the church I lead imitates my life, what will my church look like? Let us each examine our hearts, inquiring what in my life is not worthy of imitation and how can I change, by God's grace, for their good?

I've mentioned William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon's contemporary who worked to abolish the slave trade in Parliament. Wilberforce once recorded in his journal, "Simeon is with us, his heart glowing with the love of Christ. How full he is of love and of a desire to promote the spiritual benefit of others. Oh that I might copy him as he, Christ." That's high commendation and critical for a pastor.

John Thornton once wrote to Simeon, saying, "Watch continually over your own spirit and do all in love. We must grow downwards in humility to soar heavenward. I should recommend your having a watchful eye over yourself, for generally speaking, as is the ministry, so are the people." As is the minister, so are the people.

I look at the church in my country and it doesn't seem healthy in so many ways. As is the minister, so are the people. So might we conclude then that a lack of health in the church is a sure sign of a lack of health in pastors.

Is your life worthy of imitation?

8. Does the way you pastor make no sense on this earth and total sense in eternity?

I phrased this last question this way because of how our text ends:

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The thrust of this command to “*shepherd the flock of God*” and all that we’ve seen it entails, hinges on the coming of the Chief Shepherd with a crown of glory. This charge to pastoral ministry only makes sense in the light of eternity. In other words, if this world is all there is, then to use Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15, live it up. This is the way of worldly leadership. There’s no need to care for souls. Compete to be better than others. Do whatever you have to do to be better, in order to promote yourself, climb the ladder, achieve standing in others’ eyes, gain all you can along the way for you, be confident in yourself, be cavalier with others.

This is the way of worldly leadership, but here’s the danger. If we are not careful, we can take the same principles of worldly leadership and apply them, almost unknowingly in some ways, to our lives as pastor. We too can be competing to be better than each other, doing whatever works along the way in a church world where pragmatism reigns. We can promote ourselves, climb the ladder, achieve standing in others’ eyes. The difference is we’re using the name of Jesus to do it. We can gain all we can along the way for our maximum benefit as ministers in this world. God is saying to us right now, “Don’t do it!”

This world is not the end. This world is passing away—this world and all of its crowns, even its crowns cloaked in church language. This world and all of its crowns are fading, but the King is coming. The Chief Shepherd of the church is on His way; He will reckon and He will reward.

Which begs the question are you ready? Am I ready? As I think about these questions we’ve asked from this text, I wonder who of us is. What pastor among us is not prone to pride? What pastor among us is worthy of perfect imitation? What pastor among us doesn’t grow weary in this work or falter in shepherding the flock? None of us is a perfect shepherd—and that’s the point. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd—and He is the overseer of our souls too. He Who humbled Himself in a life worthy of perfect imitation, with patient love for sinners, gave His life for our salvation and for the salvation of those we lead. So let’s look to Him. Let’s all look to Him.

In these days of pandemic and every other day to come, let's look to Him exclusively. Let's trust in Him completely. Let's become more like Him continually. Let's love Him wholeheartedly. And let's long for the day when He will come back with a crown of unfading glory for every single person and every single pastor who is eagerly waiting for Him and laboring with Him, like lighthouse keepers caring for souls.

In September 1836, Charles Simeon preached on 2 Kings 10:16, "*Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord.*" It was a fitting last sermon from the man who had once said, "Two things matter most. One is to enjoy God in everything; the other is to enjoy everything in God." A month later as he lay on his bed dying, someone asked him, "What are you thinking about?" Simeon answered, "I don't think now. I just enjoy."

Finally, on November 13, 1836, on a Sunday when chapel bells were ringing across the Cambridge University campus, Charles Simeon exhaled his last breath in this world. And for every year since then, on November 13, people gather together in King's College Chapel and pray this prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, Who by Thy holy servant Charles Simeon, didst mold the lives of many that they might go forth and teach others also, mercifully grant that as, through evil reports and good reports, he ceased not to preach Thy saving Word, so may we never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end.

O God, I pray for every pastor listening right now, and for me, that You would help each of us shepherd Your flock among us, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as You alone would have us do. Not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Not domineering over those in our charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, may we receive His unfading crown of glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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