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On Being a Pastor – Book Summary

“On Being a Pastor,” by Derek Prime and Alistair Begg can be considered and classified as a handbook, or a guidebook rather, for those who are leaders in the church; and most of all, pastors. It was directly crafted to provide practical wisdom and advice for those who seek out assistance and guidance in the realm of pastoral ministry. The book does a phenomenal job at covering a wide range of topics, such as biblical qualifications for ministering pastorally, the importance of teaching via preaching, pastoral care and counseling, leadership and the administration of a church. The authors make an excellent collaboration to emphasize the centrality of the gospel message and the need and importance for pastors to faithfully (and effectively) communicate it to their congregations. They also stress the importance of maintaining a personal holiness, humility, and the dependability of God in the ministry. The book itself is also a great tool to encourage pastors to prioritize their own spiritual growth and well-being.

I truly enjoyed this book - and one of the reasons is because it clearly addresses practical concerns for those pursuing pastoral ministry. For example, it gives over time management, pastoral ethics, and even the challenges that come with leading and taking care of a diverse congregation. The authors take ideas and examples from their own experiences in pastoring, and this is a great method to offer practical advice and examples throughout the book. Overall, this book proved to be a valuable resource for pastors and leaders in the church that are seeking

growth in their own individual understanding and practice of pastoral ministry. It's also a great resource for pastors to keep in account when serving their congregations, because it can make them more effective and therefore more faithful.

As a Pastoral Ministry major, I've read a handful of books relating to bettering oneself as a pastor and as a leader of a church. Through these books and articles, I've learned that the church is an organization like others in many ways, although not many pastors recognize that and they fail to apply practical methods to its operations. I've learned that a pastor is really a leader, chosen by God, to (although quite obvious) lead His people. That being said, I believe there are a lot of leadership resources available for such leaders, and they can also be applied in pastoral methods. Reading *On Being a Pastor* also makes me realize that, secular leadership aside, there are a wealth of other resources that are devoted to Christian philosophy, theology and even the psychology of Pastor Ministry. This book demonstrated itself to be a biblically sound and field-tested guide for leading God's people. Prime and Begg are clearly intentioned with giving the reader practical tips, and they also highlight that these frameworks are just that, a frame of work, a guide; not a perfect model. In short, the authors strive to make this work as practical as possible, without it being vague or general. There's a thin line between those three factors, and Prime and Begg walk it firmly.

On Being a Pastor is written from the perspective of two pastors that align in their ideals when it comes to theology and philosophy. Although the pastors have a similar, if not identical, outlook on their theology and philosophy, they do differ the most in their personalities. Prime is the senior pastor, who excelled when being methodical, systematical, structured and well-ordered. This is classic for Type-A personalities. This really shows that God does equip the called, but sometimes he calls the ones that are already equipped. It's no easy task being a leader,

let alone a pastor, but there are people who have the qualities of leaders and it makes the path not as difficult, smoother even. Throughout the first three chapters of the book, they define and explore the word “calling.” They do this to differentiate from “work,” and they also speak on how damaging it can be to live with a “volunteering” mentality when work is very much being done. I have also found myself in this loophole. There are many times in which I’ve burnt myself out because I put too much on my plate in the name of calling, in the name of serving God. I will overload myself with classes, school work, activities at church, extra shifts at work - and I put taking care of myself last. My volunteering mentality has abused me, because I often put myself last and end up pouring from an empty cup.

Prime and Begg also define calling as “the unmistakable conviction an individual possesses that God wants him to do a specific task,” (Prime and Begg, Page 18) I find this to be quite refreshing, because they explained calling as a commitment towards a Godly life, and this includes being aligned in character and establishing biblical goals. They authors also do a magnificent job at explaining the necessary qualities of being a pastor/leader/teacher. They base their ideologies off of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but they also use 1 Timothy 4:12, which truly characterizes a Christian as keeping track of important aspects of life, such as speech, life, love, faith and purity. I truly enjoyed this approach, because many different authors stick to the initial text and make their entire argument off of it. Which, to be fair, is totally admissible and not a crazy idea per se, but it does get quite repetitive so it was nice to see a change of verses.

They also talk about the practicality of ministry, and how being practical (without being overly pragmatic) can be extremely helpful if properly established. They also highlight the importance of detail orientation, and how as we’re detailed in other areas of our lives, we should be in ministry. This book was of great help in reshaping my way of thinking about ministry.

There is so much encouragement found in the pages, but there's also realistic warnings. It kind of tells the reader to be weary, as ministry is often not as glamorous as it's presented to be via the media.

Throughout the book, they talk about the five key points of effective and successful pastoring. These are: the centrality of preaching, the priority of personal godliness, the significance of prayer, the importance of pastoral care, and the value of perseverance. These five points will be discussed shortly in regards to my own personal development in my personal theology of pastoral ministry, and they are as follows:

In the centrality of preaching, Prime and Begg argue that preaching should very much be at the center of pastoral ministry, meaning it is the life-giving force of faithful proclamation of God's word. It's important to note, over and over, that what saves us is grace and not works. Therefore, God's word should be a seed to be fed in every service to remind us of its power and stimulate growth in our faith. Personally, this is the concept I've struggled the most with in my Christian walk. God's never-ending love and grace towards His children are the most difficult concept for me to come to terms with. The more that I think about it, the less emotional sense it makes to me but the more eager it makes me to receive the gift itself. I've spent my entire life trying to win people's approval, whether it's from my parents, to girlfriends I've had, to friends I've made in school, to leaders in the church. I've lived 26 years desperately trying to show the world that I'm worthy of God's love and their approval. Yet, God's love feels both liberating and captivating. Liberating because I never question my identity in him; I know that no matter what I do, I am His Son and that is the most interesting and most important fact about my being. Captivating, because it makes me hold myself (and others both in the Christian world as much as the secular world) to a higher standard.

The son of a King should not behave a certain way, should not speak a certain way, should not treat others a certain way, etcetera. Thus, what I've learned from this unfathomable gift is that I am human. In the middle of my humanness, what's saved me the most from my brokenness is a pastor preaching about Jesus' work. A worship song, in the middle of my sin, reminding me about holiness and heart purity. I am so thankful that my pastor has never given up on preaching the word, on proclaiming his faithfulness and on encouraging us to grow in our faith. Because of these experiences, I consider my prayer life and my devotional life a must in survival skills. This also makes me appreciate my own growth in my faith, and it's even refreshing and even life-giving to realize that my present convictions are even more than what my past convictions were. Past me would feel so comfortable doing things I now feel convicted for.

Secondly, the book talks about the importance of prioritizing personal godliness. The authors highlight the importance of pastors cultivating a personal relationship with Jesus, and dually seeking to grow in their holiness and spiritual maturity. The authors insist that this will have a significant impact on their effectiveness towards the ministry. I personally feel that this may be one of the most important ones to follow. Whenever a pastor is not in touch with their relationship with God, it's noticeable. It's noticeable in messy ways. There's a level of disorganization that I can't quite describe, but attending a church led by a cold pastor feels like a consistent nudge of anxiety in the service. This reflects in many ways; not being prepared for the sermon, constantly making jokes to fill up the time of the sermon, talking past a certain point, making inappropriate jokes on the podium, etc. The list could go on and on.

However, one thing I've learned about this, is that humans are only humans. I believe those pastors who are not cultivating their personal relationships with God are not missing it on

purpose. They're not actively rejecting God and rejecting effectiveness. I've learned that the leaders that undergo this type of life experience are only missing it because they don't have the privilege to prioritize a relationship with God. I know that relationships are voluntary and one chooses where to prioritize, but I've found that there's often secular reasons as to why the pastors are not as effective. This could be focusing on a secular job to provide for their family, or simply being financially limited. I've learned that although money cannot buy happiness and growth, it buys a lot of comfortability and possibilities. This is also why it's so important to always be under a mentorship, no matter what age one may get to. Mentorships and even human relationships are so important for accountability. When there is no one checking the pastor and even checking on him or her, it's quite easy for the pastor themselves to feel isolated and out of strength.

Thirdly - the book goes in depth on the significance of prayer. The authors emphasize the need for the pastors and leaders to be committed to prayer, individually and as a whole. According to Prime and Begg, prayer can be a means to seek God's guidance and blessing on their ministry. I think this is true, but it can also go so much deeper in different ways. For myself, communal prayer is a way to interact with our brothers and sisters in Christ, to see where they are hurting and where they need extra grace to be extended on. I believe that for a church to be prayer effective, the preacher must emphasize the necessity of prayer. This also ties in with the first point, and a preacher should always have foundational points to fall back on that are almost, if not actually, bulletproof. In business school (in a previous life, before Christ found me), I learned that organizations should always have a mission statement. Mission statements are ways to let the public, the market in this instance, know what the organization believes in and what it

stands for. I believe all churches should also have one, and all of them should absolutely include prayer.

When we pray for one another, or corporately as the book referred to it as, we really get to know each other's deepest desires, and oftentimes, our sources of stress and hurt. This humanizes us in different ways. A few years ago, I knew of a girl that was notorious for dating different guys from the congregation. There were so many of them that she was often called the "Taylor Swift," of the church. I never personally gossiped about her, but we all know that just because we don't do something in the flesh doesn't mean we didn't do it in our spirit, or heart. I definitely was also part of rooms in which people would gossip about her. It wasn't until one time, a brave woman stepped out of it, and told us that instead of talking poorly about her, we should be praying for her and for Jesus to give her wisdom in her romantic life. It was a changing moment for me, truly, because as we prayed for her, we all saw that she desperately wanted to feel loved. Which, to be fair, is everyone's deepest desire - but this is an essay for another day.

Fourthly, Prime and Begg talk about the importance of pastoral care. What this means is that the pastors must absolutely be compassionate and attentive to the growing needs of their congregation. This rule urges the pastors to not only provide spiritual and emotional support to those who are struggling, but to also provide practical help. Many times, pastors do provide emotional and spiritual support but they do not provide practical help. I actually have a current situation with my pastor. Our church offers biblical classes every Sunday before church, and there's really three levels of it. However, I've asked my pastor if he'd be interested in offering different classes. The biblical classes are great, because they deepen our knowledge and understanding of the Bible, but I do feel there's a huge area of opportunity for the people of the church to be pruned better. For example, some of us are really good with our finances and

budgeting, and I asked the pastor if he'd want us to host classes teaching us the basics of finances, or even cooking classes. My pastor heard me and he expressed that he found those skills to be valuable, but that he just did not believe that the House of God should be used to teach anything outside of the Word of God. I personally found this concept to be outdated and quite lawfully religious, but I did not argue further. He is the pastor, after all.

Despite this, I do think there are so many practical ways to help the church. Sometimes I want to ask him to sit down and analyze what the needs of his sheep are. For example, is he doing a lot of marital counseling? Is there a financial need for the members? (there always seems to be), are we praying for the healing from a lot of diseases that are caused by obesity or even being overweight? If so - what about biblical marital classes, finance classes, fitness classes? Are the practical needs of the body of Christ not faith-based enough? I do think there are extremely critical areas for Christians because outside of being Christians, we're human beings. But as I mentioned earlier, I digressed.

Lastly, the fifth and final point was the value of perseverance. The authors encourage reading pastors and leaders to persevere through challenges and difficulties that the pastoral ministry world would encompass. The authors stress trusting in God's faithfulness and continuing to faithfully serve their congregation - even in the midst of adversity. I hate to sound like I'm just repeating myself over and over, but I found this one to be so important for our walk of faith. I personally hate adversity - I hate how it feels and how much it paralyzes me. I face adversity at work, at school, at church - in pretty much every area of my life. I hate how it makes me feel like a victim, like sometimes the world is out to get me. I hate that it makes me feel weak and like I'm just not good enough. I hate that it feels scary, and like I'm just too small.

That being said, I absolutely love the growth it brings me. I love the feeling of figuring something out at work that took me ages. I love feeling more confident with the way I speak after sacrificing myself and my time on bettering myself. I love feeling like I'm actually struggling and overcoming life. Nothing in life can make me feel strong the way I do after I persevere through a situation. That can only mean one thing - adversity is growth, and the only way out is through. Facing adversity means doing hard things, and not quitting because of it. It means to keep on going, no matter how much your flesh tells you that you want to give up. I've learned that nothing makes you grow quite like adversity, and it's the only thing that we can bet on that has a positive result on the other side. The positive may not be the situation itself being resolved, but it can be the lesson learned. One of my favorite Bible verses is 2 Timothy 4:7. In here, Paul says his famous line - "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." This is so impactful to me. It is so simple yet so complex at the same time. When Paul speaks about fighting the good fight, he truly means it. He truly means fighting his flesh and his mind to comply with Christ, to become one with the Spirit. This is yet another example of the book being biblically sound. Even if the correlation is not there explicitly, these are based on Biblical concepts.

One of my favorite pastors, Erwin McManis, has a podcast with his son where he talks about how some people are good people, even when they're not Christians. They have morals and they follow the law and they try, very hard, to not do evil most of the time. There's two things here - God writes the law in our hearts, which explains the "gut-feeling" we have when we know something is wrong or something is right. Secondly, non-believers that are generally good people follow biblical principles, even if they don't realize it. And the reason they're seen as good people is because Biblical principles work outside of the Bible. I myself find this to be

quite confusing, because what he's saying makes total sense but I'm not sure I believe it. I am one of the people that take bible verses very literal, and sometimes it can cause more of a headache. I believe that when Jesus said that only the father was Good, it was true. So to me, even if a person appears to be good, they're really not, if they don't have Christ.

A person without Christ is a slave to their flesh, no matter how disciplined they may be.

Works Cited

Prime, Derek, et al. *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work*. Moody Publishers, 2013.