

THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

It is my privilege to congratulate you on having received a call from God to enter the ministry, and also a call from your churches to become their pastor. We shall follow your career with a personal and prayerful interest. We are anxious for you to be used by and blessed by the Lord throughout the years of your ministry. We wish for you all of the usefulness and success possible. We hope that you will have a long, happy, useful and fruitful ministry.

We want this service to be helpful to you. To this end, my feeble remarks will be based on my limited experience, observation, and study of the Word of God. I shall talk to you about practical things. How I wish I had received these practical suggestions from some friend at the beginning of my ministry!

1. Expound the Word of God.

"Preach the word." I Timothy 4:2. The apostles said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:4. You, too, are to be a herald of a divine message. It will be your duty to proclaim the word of God. God will bless His word. Major on expository preaching. Exposition is preaching that comes out of the scripture and is explanatory of it. It will compel us to handle big subjects. Some of us are tempted to evade certain great texts because of the transcendent glories and majesty. It is for better to have a great text and a poor sermon than not to have anything great.

A man who is an expository preacher and a diligent student of the word of God will never be "preached out." Expository preaching gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work. His power proceeds along the line of the Word of God like a telephone message proceeds along the electric wires. We sincerely hope that you will be a scriptural preacher. Study the Bible, learn it, believe it, practice it and preach it. If you will stand by the Book, the God of the Book will stand by you.

If you are going to expound the word of God in the most effective manner, by all means you should continue your education. You will discover that you need an education. You can do more and better work with it than you could possibly do without it. The Lord Jesus took thirty years to prepare for a three-year ministry. No body will ever improve on His example. He gave His apostles special training. If you fail to prepare, you will stand in your own light and in the light of those to whom you try to minister. By your failure to prepare you say that the biggest and holiest task is not worth getting ready for. A call to preach includes a call to prepare. When a preacher thinks that he knows all that he needs to know, he will never become a better preacher. Learn the truth from every possible source.

2. Avoid ruinous pitfalls.

(1) Prayerlessness.

A ministry cannot be spiritual without prayer. God's greatest preachers have been men of prayer. Dr. William Evans related an experience which he had in a hotel in London, England. The weather was cool and damp and his room was uncomfortable. Observing a gas grate in the room, he tried to get some heat, but failed in the attempt. Upon complaining to the clerk about his failure to obtain heat, he was informed that it was necessary to drop a shilling in a certain slot before the gas would become available for ignition. He remarked that he discovered it was either a shilling or no heat. Thus it is in the ministry; it is either prayer or no power.

(2) Studyness.

A preacher should feed his mind with the truth. A preacher actually should have some sense. You will preach what you know, you will know what you learn, and you

will learn by study. You must keep up with your age intellectually. You can't preach to it from behind. People will listen to a man who knows more than they do. A preacher must fight for time to read, to think, to study and to pray. A mind that is constantly giving out must be constantly receiving. There has never been a great preacher who wasn't a diligent student. It is far easier to move a little box of sermons than to dig down and fill up a new box of good sermons. That is the reason why some change pastors as often as they do.

(3) Laziness.

As a preacher you must not allow yourself to be drawn into petty performances of little or no value.

(4) Anger.

When you lose your temper in your pulpit, you will lose your influence over your congregation.

(5) Restlessness.

A Negor said, "A preacher is that kind of a man what all the time wants to be whar he ain't." The short pastorate is a curse to church life. Dr. Joshua Gravett has been pastor of the Galilee Baptist Church in Denver, Colorado for fifty-nine years.

(6) Second best.

Our Lord commands our best, His work deserves our best, the world needs our best, and we owe our best. In fact, our best is not good enough for Him.

3. Appreciate your glorious privileges.

- (1) Being a real Christian gentleman.
- (2) Being a highly respected citizen.
- (3) Being a good example to others.
- (4) Acquiring many friends.
- (5) Being Christ's representative.
Speak and teach for Him.
- (6) Being God's fellow-worker.
- (7) Holding forth the word of life.
- (8) Introducing the lost to Christ.
- (9) Helping Christians to live victorious lives.

4. Preach the gospel of Christ.

Paul exhorted Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. All of the gospel is truth, but all truth is not the gospel. One may preach philosophical, scientific, and even Biblical truth without preaching a word of the gospel. The gospel is good news--the news "That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." God loves all men. Christ died for all men, salvation is offered to all men.

Preach the old unchanging truths of evangelical faith. Preach the atoning death of Christ. Christ crucified is the only message we have, the only message men need, and the only message that will produce the desired results.

5. Magnify Christ.

Christ is the essence of the gospel message and the only hope of lost men. One aim of the divinely-called and spirit-filled preacher is to send his hearers away saying, "What a wonderful Saviour! What amazing grace!" He has certainly failed if they go away saying, "Isn't he a clever preacher?" It is impossible to magnify Christ too much. Make your message Christ-centered, preaching His virgin birth, His victorious life, His vicarious death, His victorious resurrection and His visible return.

6. Depend on the Holy Spirit.

He has resources which can never be exhausted. People need to hear the old gospel preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. If you ignore the Holy Spirit, your preaching will be powerless.

7. Comfort the broken-hearted.

There are many bewildered minds and sad hearts. They need the enlightenment of divine truth and the consolations of divine grace. It is exceedingly important that you come to know about the struggles, the temptations, the weaknesses, the disappointments and the needs of the people in order to minister to them the comfort and guidance which they need. Preach to broken hearts because there are always some in the audience.

8. Warn the unsaved.

Preach the love of God, and also the judgment of God. His love is holy and unmerited; His judgment is righteous and inescapable. Lost sinners need to be saved from hell. Warn them of their doom if they continue in their rejection of Christ.

9. Teach our distinctive Baptist doctrines.

Most people are ignorant of them. All need to know them. They cannot know them unless they are taught. Not everything is right with Baptist people, but there is nothing wrong with Baptist doctrines and principles.

10. Practice what you preach.

It is not enough to preach the truth, but you must also demonstrate it in your life. You cannot guide the feet of others in the path in which you do not go. You are not a guidepost but a guide. Give of your best to the Master.