

## PASTORING AND PREACHING

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The call to the ministry is a very high calling, one which no man should dare to take upon himself. The work is more than what is humanly possible, but the Lord promises to provide for those whom he has called to that work. In this supply he also abundantly blesses the gospel labourer. It is a work which continually places a man upon his knees and makes him to know the need of wisdom, strength and power from the Lord.

### ***Preparation***

In pursuing a godly ministry, solid instruction in God's Word is absolutely necessary to meet the difficulties of the ministry. When the Lord calls a man into the ministry (Rom 10:15), he also prepares that man with a good understanding of all the truth God has declared (2 Tim 2:15; Titus 2:1) so that he may defend the faith (Titus 1:9). I am grateful for the good foundation I received in my years at Western Reformed Seminary. The emphasis there on the authority of God's Word and the absolute sovereignty of the Lord who does all things according to his own will has been valuable in meeting the demands and difficulties of the ministry.

### ***Providence***

I was called to the ministry and taken under care of the Northwest Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church; and, while waiting for the Lord's direction and for open doors to attend Western Reformed Seminary, I served in the Edmonton Bible Presbyterian Church for a couple of years. I taught Sunday school classes, attended session meetings, preached occasionally, and served wherever I could. The Lord gave my wife and me our first two sons and then allowed us to make our way west to Vancouver, B.C., and eventually to Tacoma, Washington. During this time the Lord provided for us in many remarkable ways, including food and clothing, vehicles and gas to make them go, as well as housing. It was a time of trial and of waiting upon the Lord, a time when the Lord showed us in many special ways that he was caring for us. We also made many special friends as new relationships were established at church and among students and faculty at the seminary. It has been an honour to be co-labourers with many of these men as we have served the same Lord, though often separated by great distances. These friendships have been the source of trusted comfort and counsel throughout the years of ministry.

### ***Pastoring***

The Lord's providence was no less evident as I entered into the work of the ministry after

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I was ordained. There were doctrinal controversies brewing when I first started in the work, many of which also involved personality conflicts. One of the first tasks assigned to me by the presbytery was to write a paper to address questions that had arisen regarding biblical worship and the regulative principle. Even though this specific controversy had not been addressed in my seminary classes, the exegetical and theological training I had just completed were valuable in being able to answer objections in a way which emphasized the gospel of God's grace in Christ.

There were also financial difficulties for the church and for our family, and the Lord showed Himself to be no less faithful than he had been during the years of my classroom training.

## **Planning**

What does a typical week in the ministry of the gospel look like? It is hard to think that I have ever had a typical week, but I do have plans for one! Preaching has pre-eminence in the work of the gospel, so most of my weekly activities center on preparation for the services of the Lord's Day and our Bible study on Wednesday night. I am expositional in my preaching, going through a particular book of the Bible in an ongoing series. More recently I have been preaching through the historic creeds of the church on Sunday evenings, beginning with the ecumenical creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian, etc.) and continuing through some of the Reformed creeds. I am presently going through the instruction of the Council of Dort. This has been a challenge, as it is more topical in nature and requires a different approach in preparation.

An ideal week begins with a reflection of the previous Lord's Day and preparation for the one to come. Unless some special occasion or circumstance intervenes, my text will follow in series from the previous week. On Tuesday I begin work on the bulletin, choosing hymns and Scripture texts that will develop the themes of the coming Lord's Day. I also begin preparation on the Bible study for Wednesday night, and finish that on Wednesday. On Thursday I work on the messages for the Lord's Day. Friday is the day that seems to work best for a day off in our family schedule. On Saturday I finish the bulletins and print them, making final preparations for the sermons and Sunday school lessons of the following day.

Interspersed with those activities are the phone calls, counseling, and visiting which give variety to every week. Many aspects of pastoral life are not as orderly and ordered as seminary classes. The firm deadlines of Wednesday night Bible studies and Sabbath day preaching continue, but the Lord also undertakes for the unexpected emergencies and questions that arise from time to time.

## **Preaching**

Most of this weekly work is preparation for the first day of the following week, in the preaching of the Word on the Lord's Day. It is a great privilege, as well as a solemn duty, to be able to minister to the Lord's people in this way and to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus through faith alone. This message of hope to sinners can only be proclaimed when

there is confidence in the Scriptures as the very word of God, a confidence which was emphasized in my classroom days at WRS. “Preach with authority directly to the hearer” was the feedback I received after delivering my first sermon in homiletics class. The opinions of men are irrelevant if we do not start and end with what God’s Word plainly says.

### ***Perseverance***

One of the practical lessons I have learned from the professors at WRS is that the Lord will see his servants through every test and trial. We are called to be faithful ambassadors of his message and he will grant daily strength and meet every need. In the early years of the seminary’s existence, I saw men who had a godly burden to see it prosper for the sake of the ministry. They would take second jobs in order to provide for their families when the income from the seminary was not adequate to pay them fully. And they always taught with a love of the truth, the joy of the Lord being their strength. They had an earnest desire for the progress and growth of the students, and did not do their work as a trial or a hardship, even when there may have been only a few students in the class.

May the Lord continue to use Western Reformed Seminary to faithfully train men for the ministry and to give growth to our Bible Presbyterian churches.