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THE CALL AND THE CALLING

Defining Our Terms

The ministry of undershepherds and teachers is not simply a job. Rather it is a vocation, the answering of a specific call from God. It is the highest calling in Christian service. As a young man, F. B. Meyer shared his call to the ministry in a letter to a friend:

For friendship's sake I do not like to conceal from you, or in fact from any one else, the decision to which I have come. So to be frank, I have decided my future course, and am going, with help from above, to be a minister of the Gospel. Now I can imagine your astonishment, but it is a fact. I need only add that it appears to me to be the noblest aim in life to live entirely devoted to the one object of bringing others to know Him who has accomplished so much for us. When weighed against the hereafter, earth and its careers sink into insignificance.¹

Six months after his conversion, John Stott, still only seventeen, “was sure of his future calling to the ordained ministry of the Church of England.” When he was completing his university course, his parents were unhappy at his pursuing his call. In a letter to his father, he gave the reasons for his decision, the first of which was, “*Obedience to my call*. Whatever you may think of it, I have had

a definite and irresistible call from God to serve Him in the Church. During the last three years I have become increasingly conscious of this call, and my life now could be summed up in the words ‘separated unto the gospel of God.’ There is no higher service; I ask no other.”² To make such claims about God’s call, we must define our terms. By *call* we mean the unmistakable conviction an individual possesses that God wants him to do a specific task.

The task in view is that defined by the New Testament as being a pastor and teacher. God calls men to shepherd God’s flock and to care for its well-being, to show God’s people by example and instruction how they should live lives worthy of God their Savior. Sometimes pastors and teachers may be described as elders, bishops, or overseers, but whatever their description and title, an essential qualification is that they should be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).

They are all called to take their share in the direction of the affairs of the local church, but not all are called to give the whole of their time to the work of shepherding and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). We have both in view, but our particular focus is upon those set apart to give the whole of their time to this calling. However we view a pastor, or minister, or leader among leaders, within a Christian fellowship, we should think of him in terms of the New Testament elder, and as an elder among elders. We are thinking not so much of an office that may be held but of the exercise of a spiritual gift. The church has often tended to be office-oriented instead of gift-oriented, and the right balance needs to be struck.

THE IRRESISTIBLE NATURE OF THE CALL

Advice frequently given is, “If you can avoid entering the ministry, do so! If you can do something else, do it!” This is sound counsel. If it is right for a man to give himself completely to the ministry of the gospel, he will feel that it is the only thing he can do. John Ryle, a nineteenth-century bishop of Liverpool, had no early sense of call, and when he shared his decision to enter the ministry it came

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as a complete surprise to everyone. His explanation was, “I felt shut up to do it and saw no other course of life open to me.” And thus it has ever been.

Such advice makes good sense about any employment. Where possible we should enjoy what we do in life and engage in it with enthusiasm. Few make any impact for good upon others if they work halfheartedly. The ministry demands much of a man and his family. Before entering upon it, therefore, he needs to count the cost. Our Lord’s words about the importance of a man not looking back once he has put his hand to the plow have particular relevance to pastors and teachers. Many have begun and then, sadly, stopped.

More important still, behind this advice there is the basic truth that God always gives a clear call to those whom He has chosen for the ministry, so that when that call comes they can do nothing other than respond to it. They will not be able to say no to it. It follows that if someone thinks he may be called to the ministry but is not absolutely certain, then he should wait until he is sure. God does not give uncertain calls. As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed it, “It was God’s hand that laid hold of me, and drew me out, and separated me to this work.”³

In focusing upon the call of pastors and teachers, we are not suggesting that God’s call does not come equally to others for different tasks. Nevertheless, the call to shepherd God’s people and to teach them His Word is a special calling because of its strategic and unique importance for the spiritual well-being of Christ’s flock.

THE CALL IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD’S CALLING OF ALL CHRISTIANS

The words *call* and *calling* are used in a number of ways in the New Testament, and the call to the ministry is not the first call from God an individual receives. First Corinthians 1:1–9 provides a typical example. The primary call is to fellowship with God’s Son Jesus Christ (verse 9)—a call to union with Christ and all its glorious

benefits. The second call is to holiness (verse 2). Calling and justification bring the inevitable consequence and privilege of sanctification. The third call is to service, and frequently to specific service. In Paul's case, his primary service was to be an apostle (verse 1). God's call to be a shepherd and teacher is a specific call.

Old Testament Examples

The prophets' experience exemplifies the manner in which God works in commissioning His servants. The Old Testament prophets found God's call irresistible, much as sometimes they shrank from its implications. The call came in a variety of ways and circumstances, but it was essentially the same. For Moses it came forty years after his failure to wait God's time as he foolishly took matters into his own hands by physically defending a fellow Hebrew. At the time of his call he was carrying out his daily occupation of caring for sheep in the desert (Exodus 3). He was immediately aware of God's holiness (verse 5), and he was so overwhelmed at the implications of God's call that he asked, "Who am I, that I should go . . . ?" (verse 11).

Isaiah's call came when he visited the temple during a period of national crisis (Isaiah 6:1). He, too, was acutely conscious of God's inexpressible holiness. But in hearing God ask, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" he could do no other than say, "Here am I. Send me!" (verse 8). Jeremiah was told that before he was formed in the womb, God both knew him and set him apart for the work of a prophet (Jeremiah 1:5). This staggering truth did not stop Jeremiah from responding, "Ah, Sovereign LORD . . . I do not know how to speak" (verse 6). But the call was irresistible.

Apostolic Example

The apostles are the principal examples of those called to be shepherds and teachers. Ministers are not apostles, but apostles were ministers—they were shepherds and teachers. The apostle Peter's manner of addressing the leaders of the churches in Asia Mi-

nor in his first letter is significant: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder . . .” (5:1). What the apostles did in the Acts of the Apostles, when they took steps to ensure that they gave priority to prayer and the ministry of the Word (6:2), ministers today ought to do, for their priorities are identical.

The gospel writers describe how the apostles each received a distinct personal call from our Lord Jesus Christ to the ministry for which He was to prepare them. The same was true for the apostle Paul, whose call came after the others’. From the moment of his conversion, Paul was aware of God’s call. When Ananias was somewhat hesitant to go to Paul at the announcement of Paul’s conversion, the Lord reassured him, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Referring later to his conversion, Paul elaborates upon this and relates that when he asked, “Who are you, Lord?” the Lord replied,

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. . . . Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:15–18)

It was with the conviction of this call that Paul worked and wrote, so that he begins the passage we have referred to in 1 Corinthians 1 with the words, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (verse 1)—a conviction consistently echoed in his other letters (cf. Romans 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SENSE OF CALL

The call to shepherding and teaching comes in a variety of ways—and history shows this has always been the case. The key factor is that it is God the Holy Spirit who issues the call. The call comes about through sensitivity to God's dealings with us as we pray, through reading the Scriptures, and through listening to the preaching of God's Word, and often it is reinforced as we discover how God's call has come to others both at the present time and in the past.

The call usually begins with a desire to care for the spiritual well-being of others and to preach God's Word. Circumstances may put us in the position where we feel that we must do something to help people. Alan Stibbs was an extremely able expositor and teacher. His testimony to the way in which he developed his gifts was that although the Scripture Union group at his school in England was well attended, there was no one who would undertake the leadership of the group. So for two years between the age of sixteen and eighteen, he carried this responsibility alone. And so it was that three times a week he had to stand before his school contemporaries and seek to show them that, from a Bible passage fixed by others, God had something to say to him and them. Let him give his own testimony from this point:

During the same period, when I was seventeen, I “discovered,” and was arrested by, 1 Corinthians xiv. Here I found an injunction to covet spiritual gifts, especially to prophesy (see verses 1, 12, 19). In the light of other statements in the chapter I understood prophesying to mean, not foretelling the future, nor receiving new revelations from heaven, but expounding revealed truth in a manner both intelligible and helpful to the hearer. Such an exposition should be related to men's condition, and should be expressed in words that they can understand. Its aim should be to bring to the hearers instruction, challenge and encouragement (verse 3).

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So I began as a schoolboy of seventeen to pray for this gift, and—on each occasion when I expounded God’s Word—to pray for the grace worthily to exercise the gift to the glory of God and the blessing of men. Such prayers I have continued often to pray since; and I can humbly testify that God has answered my prayers.⁴

Our circumstances may be entirely different, but the desire to assist others by means of the Scriptures will be present. It may not be put into words and shared initially with others, because we may feel that it is rather presumptuous to have such thoughts. Reserve is not out of place. But where there is a genuine call, the desire to serve in these specific ways will grow and become dominant. The early Church obviously expected individuals to be drawn to pastoral and teaching responsibilities, and to recognize God’s call, since one of the “trustworthy sayings” that they regularly quoted to one another was, “If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). Although it can be sheer presumption to have such a desire, it will equally be simple obedience on the part of those called by our Lord Jesus Christ.

If genuine, the desire to be a shepherd and teacher will be nurtured. There will be a desire for preparation and training, since one of the evidences of a call is the possession of the qualifications for it. An obvious example is the knowledge of the Scriptures, and anyone with a call from God will make the most of every opportunity to study them. Opportunities for sharing in the care of others and of teaching and preaching will be seized. These tasks will never be irksome, but sheer joy. As opportunities are taken, people will become aware of the gifts of pastoral care and preaching and will comment on them. Such encouragements will fire the desire to pursue God’s call all the more.

Most important of all, the spiritual leaders of the church to which a Christian belongs may take the initiative in raising the issue of the call to the ministry, particularly if, as they ought, they

regularly ask God for sensitivity to the gifts Christ gives to His body.

We may not always be aware at first as to whether God's call is to give all or part of our time to shepherding and teaching—for there is a place for both. That ought not to be a major preoccupation, in that such uncertainty simply indicates that the time is not yet right for action. At the appropriate stage, God will make it plain.

Sometimes the call may come to its climax through the invitation of a church to become its pastor. As an occasional or regular ministry is exercised within a church, God the Holy Spirit may give the leadership and membership an unmistakable conviction as to God's call, which they then publicly recognize and obey by their invitation.

The confirmation of the call to the ministry is of vital importance. It is not enough to feel that we may possibly have a call to the ministry. Such uncertainty leads to tragic mistakes. It has been traditional to speak of the double call to the ministry: There is first the inward call an individual becomes personally aware of; there is, second, the outward call of God's people as they recognize the calling and gifts an individual has for the ministry. Acts 13 provides a powerful example of the latter in the call of Paul and Barnabas to Gentile missionary work. As the church met together for the worship of God and for prayer, the Holy Spirit instructed the church to set them apart for the work to which He had called them (Acts 13:2). In one verse Luke writes of the church sending them off, and in the next of the Holy Spirit (verses 3–4).

If formal training is part of the preparation for the ministry, then the call should also be put to the test by those responsible for the training. This is a good double check of the outward call of God's people, but it ought never to replace the confirmation of the individual's call by the company of God's people to which he belongs. No church is better able to confirm a call to the ministry than a man's home church—it is the natural and appropriate proving ground. He should submit himself, therefore, to the spiritual leadership of his church fellowship, asking them to test his call. Situations exist

where someone may not have the advantage of belonging to a church fellowship where his call can be properly tested. In such circumstances, besides the tests any training establishment may apply, it is important that he should willingly submit himself to the judgment of Christians who know him well and who may be relied upon to be completely honest in stating their convictions.

Sometimes a man's call may be immediately obvious to his own church fellowship and leadership. The outward call then straight-away matches the individual's inner call. On other occasions time may be required to allow the gifts of shepherding and teaching to emerge more clearly. It may be appropriate for the spiritual leadership to consider how they may deliberately provide scope for the exercise and development of the gifts appropriate for a call to the ministry. Ideally the church leadership should be able to share with the membership the possible call a member has, and to say that they will provide him with opportunities of ministry within the church fellowship with the specific aim of testing his call. Members will then not be surprised to see him asked to preach or to help in pastoral work or in the conduct of worship.

When inner and outward call match and come together, then is the time to proceed further. According to an individual's circumstances, formal training may be the next step. For others it will be a matter of waiting for a call to a church. But the testing of the call we have suggested is imperative and must not be bypassed. Mistakes made at this stage will be disastrous for the person concerned and—more important still—for the well-being of God's flock.

Writing in his diary on February 15, 1835, Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote, "To-morrow I undergo my trials before the Presbytery. May God give me courage in the hour of need. What should I fear? If God see meet to put me into the ministry, who shall keep me back? If I be not meet, why should I thrust forward? To Thy service I desire to dedicate myself over and over again."

What could be worse for a church fellowship than to have someone attempting to be a shepherd and teacher without God's call? It

is important, too, because throughout a man's ministry the enemy of souls will contest his call, especially when the going is tough. Tremendous strength comes from reviewing the manner in which God confirmed our call through the unanimous understanding He gave others of His will concerning us. That was clearly the point of Paul's reminders to Timothy of the way in which God's call to Timothy to be a shepherd and teacher had been confirmed (1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14).



DP My own conviction concerning the call to the ministry was present soon after my conversion in my teens. It surfaced when it was my turn to give the talk at the young people's meeting of the church through whose witness I had been brought to Christ. The pastor was present, and afterward he turned to me and asked, "Derek, have you ever thought of the ministry?" At the age of sixteen I had thought that to have such a desire so early was rather presumptuous, and yet it was wonderful to me that it was not I who raised the subject but my pastor. His question strengthened my desire to take things further. Throughout my national service and my time at university, the conviction did not leave me. Rather it grew as opportunities for ministry arose both in the forces and in the Christian Union.

In my last year at university I wrote to the elders of my home church and asked for their honest conviction as to my call. Their considered response was that they were sure about it, but they were not clear as to the timing, and they thought that my work initially might be with young people.

Coming from a non-Christian background, my parents opposed my going into the ministry, even though they consented to my switching to theology in my third

year at university. And so I taught first history and then religious knowledge for three and a half years in a boys' grammar school. During this time opportunities for preaching multiplied, and I became an elder of the church where I had been converted. To my surprise, during a pastoral vacancy, one of the elders intimated to me after a church prayer meeting that he and the other elders had come to the conclusion that it was God's will that I should become pastor of the church, and that they would share that conviction with the church if I felt an answering conviction.

There have been many occasions when being a pastor has proved difficult, and the enemy of souls has whispered, "Are you sure you did the right thing? Should you be in the ministry at all?" I have gained immeasurable strength from remembering that my decision to obey God's call was confirmed initially by the elders as I submitted myself to their direction, and then underlined by the clear call of God's people in a situation in which I had no hand. I would wish that kind of confirmation to be the experience of every shepherd and teacher, because it provides undoubted sustaining power.



AB When I think of being called to pastoral ministry I begin with Sunday afternoons in our home in Glasgow. My parents routinely welcomed pastors and missionaries to our home for lunch and tea. I have vivid recollections of these "ancient men," who were probably in their forties, saying to me: "Maybe one day, son, you'll grow up to be a minister." It was only years later that I recalled these statements. I think it would be true to say that they returned to haunt me.

As a teenager I had begun to speak at Christian coffee

bars, which were a feature of the sixties. I was also a Bible class leader for a group of ten-year-old boys. Each opportunity proved difficult and yet delightful, and the feedback I received was encouraging. However, it did not create within me a desire for pastoral ministry. In fact it never occurred to me. I was committed to the idea of becoming a lawyer. Too much Perry Mason had fueled my aspirations for courtroom drama. But it was not to be.

God used failure and disappointment to redirect my life. Even when I was a student at the London Bible College I was thinking about student work or some area of evangelism but not the role of pastor-teacher. I can still recall the occasion when the hammer dropped. I was eating lunch with a number of friends and one member of the faculty. The previous weekend I had been speaking at a youth retreat on the south coast of England. When I mentioned that I was increasingly disenchanted by the experience of making friends on Friday evening only to say good-bye on Sunday with no prospect of seeing them again or of following their progress, the faculty member looked at me from across the table and said, "Alistair, I can tell you why you feel that way. God has given you a pastor's heart." One of my friends laughed, and I wasn't sure how to respond.

I was twenty-three years old, about to graduate and be married, and I could see no prospect of a church being brave enough to take on a project like me. The opportunity to become the "assistant to the pastor" at Charlotte Chapel was then a crucial step in my call. It was in that context that the elders and congregation evaluated me and offered an objective affirmation of the growing sense of being "shut up to the ministry" that was in my heart. The occasion of my ordination to the gospel ministry in October 1976 was the final piece in the jigsaw puzzle of

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my call. For the past twenty-seven years I have enjoyed the immense privilege of pastoral ministry without ever seriously questioning whether I should, or even could, have done anything else with my life.



Paul and Barnabas found themselves in acutely difficult circumstances as they evangelized in the Gentile world. We can imagine Paul or Barnabas asking themselves, “Did we commission ourselves? If so, we deserve problems! But no! God called us, and He confirmed it by the corporate wisdom, judgment, and convictions of others” (see Acts 13:1–3).

If in doubt of a call, do not proceed—that counsel must always be given. It may be that the call is uncertain because it is not really present, or because the time is not yet right. We must proceed only when we can do so with certainty. Too much is at stake—for ourselves and for others—to do otherwise.

THE BEST KIND OF TRAINING

Anyone who is sure of God’s call will be concerned to achieve the best kind of preparation. Experience shows that God does not deal with everyone in the same way in the matter of training. What is also clear is that the best training a person can receive—sometimes almost unconsciously—is that within his own home church where he serves and proves himself.

Straightforward university training in theology is God’s way for some. Such training can sometimes be spiritually arid, and the Christian fellowship and spiritual stimulus of other students is then especially important. While not the right preparation for many, it is plainly God’s purpose for some. For others the preferable course will be the training provided by theological seminaries or Bible colleges. Where there is a commitment to a particular denomination, there will be a training institution where the individual is expected to train.

But these are not the only options. It is possible to study by means of correspondence or distance learning courses, linked sometimes with brief periods of full-time study throughout the year. There is much to be said for this arrangement when a person is older and has family responsibilities, especially if through earlier training he has already acquired habits of disciplined study. A further possibility is to serve as an assistant or intern—during which time a call can be well tested—and mornings can be made free to study for a seminary or college course, a plan of directed reading, or a university diploma or degree.

Dogmatism is out of place about the best means of preparation for the ministry. Differing personal circumstances demand flexible approaches to the subject. What is crucial is that no one should make the decision on his own about training, but in consultation with those who are over him in the Lord and who are in a position to provide guidance.

THE MINISTER'S CALLING

It is appropriate to move from a minister's call to a minister's calling. The word *minister* is an appropriate place to begin: He is above all one who ministers—in other words he is a servant. One of the paradoxes of Christian leadership is that the leader is not a boss but a servant—someone who follows in the footsteps of Him who washed His disciples' feet. This is a good reason for placing the emphasis upon the gifts of ministry rather than the office of a minister.

The Corinthian Christians fell into the snare of making too much of the servants God gave them—men like Paul, Apollos, and Cephas—and giving their allegiance to them rather than to Christ Himself. Paul counters that harmful tendency by asking a pertinent question, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?" with an equally pointed answer, "Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task" (1 Corinthians 3:5). Contemporary use has given the word *minister* a rather

respectable sound, so that it implies station and office. But not so in the New Testament, for it properly implies lowly service—in fact, like that of a table waiter! James Haldane, who, together with his brother Robert, had great spiritual influence in Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was described by an Edinburgh pastor in terms that are an example to all Christ's under-shepherds: "James Haldane is . . . willing to become the servant of all, provided he be but useful." Service, not dominion, is a minister's calling.

The preeminent picture of the Lord Jesus in the Scriptures is that of the Servant of the Lord, and it is in His footsteps that we who minister are to follow, since it is in His footsteps we are to teach God's people to walk also (1 Peter 2:21).

A succinct description of a minister's calling is given in Ephesians 4:11. Paul explains that the ascended Lord Jesus "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers," a passage paralleled in 1 Corinthians 12:28. The gift of pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4 is directly linked with the Church's growth. "Pastor" can equally well be translated "shepherd." The gift of pastors and teachers is described in the context of God's ultimate purpose of personal maturity in Christ for redeemed mankind: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (4:12–13). Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Chief Shepherd and Chief Teacher, but He commissions individuals to fulfill these functions on His behalf (cf. John 21:15–17). Pastors and teachers carry on Christ's ministry to the Church.

The term "pastor and teacher" denotes one office in Ephesians 4:11, and shepherding and teaching are twin tasks. Some have tried to separate them in that they feel that their call is just to teach and not to shepherd. But the shepherding aspect of the ministry keeps us in touch with reality—with genuine issues and problems—as

we teach the Word of God. To teach the Scriptures effectively we must apply them, and, with the Spirit's help, we can do this only as we are in touch with things as they really are in the lives of men and women. We have to determine sometimes the order of their priority in our work, in that some may be called more to pastoral work, and others more to teaching. But both are priorities, and they need to be kept together.

A minister—the servant of Christ and of His people—is first of all a shepherd. This description demands that we should know our flock well, so that we appreciate where they are in their understanding (whether, in terms of John 21, they are lambs or mature sheep). We are to get alongside the members of the flock so that we may encourage, comfort, urge, or warn them, as may be appropriate at any given moment (Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). Each function proves necessary at different times, and our object in exercising them is to help people to live lives worthy of God who has called them into His kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

A minister—the servant of Christ and of His people—is, second, a teacher. Keeping in view the picture of a shepherd, sheep require good pasture—the pasture of God's Word—presented in such a balanced, spiritual, and heartwarming way that the sheep are nourished and encouraged in their commitment to Christ and their growth to maturity. Good shepherding provides the best pasture by means of sound instruction.

The New Testament employs a number of other descriptions and pictures that amplify these two basic descriptions in Ephesians 4. A minister is to be like a father in the encouragement he gives to his children to aim at the best and the highest (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12). He is to be like a mother with her young children in terms of his gentleness with God's people (verse 7). He is to love them so much that he will be willing not only to share the gospel with them in all its fullness, but also his life as well (verse 8). He will be ready for them to be a burden to him, but he will never want to be a burden to them (verse 9). He will also see himself as something of a

watchman or a guardian (Acts 20:28; Jude 3). There are always “savage wolves” wanting to come in among the flock who will not spare it if they can do harm (Acts 20:29).

THE CONTINUING PROOFS OF A CALL

There are obvious signs of the genuineness of our call. First, we will recognize that all our gifts belong not to ourselves but to Christ and His people, and we will want to use them faithfully to administer God’s grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10–11). We will appreciate that our gifts are God-given and therefore a trust.

Second, when we speak, we will do so as those uttering the very words of God (1 Peter 4:11), as those approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:4). We will not want to impress our opinions upon people but to release God’s Word in their lives. We will not be mindful of our own authority; our God-given sense of call will authenticate our ministry.

Third, we will not try to please men but God (1 Thessalonians 2:4), which means we will not look for human praise. We will not despise either the praise or the appreciation of God’s people, but they will never be what we seek or the criterion of what we should do. It is a great blessing if God gives us this understanding from the commencement of our ministry. Dr. W. E. Sangster’s first charge was the pastoral care of two churches in North Wales, one called St. John’s, old-established and predominantly Welsh, and the other called Rhos, new and predominantly English. In the welcome meeting at Rhos, the members were anxious to tell their new and young minister what was what, and each department leader proceeded to tell him what was expected of him, and “stressed the importance of his own department, and made it clear that the kingdom of heaven was at hand only if the minister devoted his chief energy to that department. The long series of speeches and the carping atmosphere made an adequate reply impossible.” Paul Sangster relates how his father, dignified even at his young age, stood up and said simply,

“Thank you for your advice. I will try to please you all, but I shall try most of all to please God.” With that he sat down and the meeting was over!⁵

Fourth, we shall serve God with the strength He provides, with the determination that in all things He may be praised through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:11). And above all, we will be examples of holiness, righteousness, and blamelessness (1 Thessalonians 2:10), and “example[s] for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12), so that whatever they have learned or received or seen in us they may put into practice with the confidence that the Lord of peace will be with them (Philippians 4:9). That brings us logically to our next subject—the life and character of a minister.