



# Giants of the Reformation

Readings, Meditations, and Prayers  
based on works by Martin Luther  
and John Calvin

T. M. Moore

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*Martin Luther and John Calvin*

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## Foreword

The Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries has much to teach us about following the Lord Jesus Christ. Among the great leaders who emerged during this period were Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Luther in Wittenberg and Calvin in Geneva had different views on what we might call *non-essentials* of the faith; but they agreed on the main points of Biblical teaching. Each left a legacy of work and words to guide Christian thinking and living back to the Scriptures, via the great teachers of Church history.

Our selections from Luther's works focus on the key questions of the Reformation: What does it mean to be saved? How does one receive this precious gift? What should be the effects of salvation in our lives?

Thus, the focus of our readings from Luther is on the individual believer's relationship with the Lord.

From Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, we will take excerpts from Book IV, to gain a better understanding of what it means to be the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Luther brought a reformation for individual faith and life, Calvin pointed the way to restoring local churches as true manifestations of the Body of Christ.

We trust you will find these readings helpful, encouraging, and, as with all our *Morning and Evening* readings, a fruitful way of connecting with great pastors and fathers from previous generations.

T. M. Moore  
Principal



*Day 1: Morning*  
A Spring of Water

“...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” John 4.14

***The Freedom of a Christian***<sup>1</sup>

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Many people have considered Christian faith as an easy thing, and not a few have given it a place among the virtues. They do this because they have not experienced it and have never tasted the great strength there is in faith. It is impossible to write well about it or to understand what has been written about it unless one has at one time or another experienced the courage which faith gives a man when trials oppress him. But he who has had even a faint taste of it can never write, speak, meditate, or hear enough concerning it. It is a living ‘spring of water welling up to eternal life,’ as Christ calls it in John 4.”

In 1520, Martin Luther published three powerful tracts which became the tipping point for reformation. *The Freedom of the Christian* insisted that *faith*, not *works*, was the ground of salvation, and of our justification in the sight of God. Christian faith is not merely something to be *believed*. Faith must be *experienced*, in all the freedom from fear and sin it brings, before we can be said truly to possess it. Pastors must not be content for the people in their care to know anything less than faith as a perpetual spring of living water, bringing spiritual refreshment and revival in and through them as a way of life. Only then will the freedom they have in Christ enable them to blossom as true vines in His Kingdom. Luther staked his life on this belief. We can do no other.

*Why do you suppose so many people who claim to be Christians are content with a faith that is “an easy thing” for them?*

*Lord, I do not want an easy faith; rather, I want...*

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).

*Day 1: Evening*  
Servant of All

*And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Mark 9.35*

***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

"I shall set down the following two propositions concerning the freedom and bondage of the spirit: A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. These two theses seem to contradict each other. If, however, they should be found to fit together they would serve our purpose beautifully."

The happiness of the person who is free in Jesus Christ does not depend on circumstances or people. It's not a matter of participating in programs or submitting to long-standing traditions, as was often the case in Luther's day. God needs nothing external to Himself to be full and complete in joy, and the Christian needs only to enter the divine presence, and to partake of God (2 Pet. 1.4), to be complete. Then, from that presence, filled with God and free of the burden of finding joy and significance elsewhere, the Christian goes forth to serve others with the strength and presence only God can give. Thus we are free from circumstances, relationships, and changeable conditions so that, in Christ, we may be free and filled with joy in serving others. We are free *in* Christ, *for* Christ, and *with* Christ, so that others may know His grace and truth. This is the true freedom of the Christian.

*Is this what you see in the lives of those you are serving? How do your preaching and teaching encourage your congregation to find their fullest joy and purpose in Jesus Christ alone?*

*Lord, thank You for this day. Thank for the joy of knowing You. Tomorrow, let me...*

*Day 2: Morning*

## One Thing Only

*“And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’” Luke 10.41, 42*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ, as Christ says, John 11, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believe in me, though he die, yet shall he live’...Let us then consider it certain and firmly established that the soul can do without anything except the Word of God and that where the Word of God is missing there is not help at all for the soul.”

What greater gift could a pastor bestow on His Church than to teach them to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and to feast to that end on the Word of Christ? Yet this was precisely what was missing in those early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. Our discipleship of the Lord’s people begins here, by helping them develop a true hunger for the Lord’s Word, and to put in place the daily disciplines essential for feeding on that Word with joy. It is a great sin to represent the Word of God as anything other than indispensable to Christian life and freedom. If, in our lives or ministries, we fail to show the highest regard, greatest esteem, and most zealous love for the Word of God, we cannot expect our people to consider it as anything more than an accouterment of faith, rather than the very source of it. God’s people can do without a lot, and still know joy and fulfillment. They cannot do without God’s Word.

*What do you and your church’s leaders do to help ground your people in the daily discipline of feeding on God’s Word?*

*Lord, today, let me encourage someone to spend more time in Your Word. I think especially of...*

*Day 2: Evening*

## A Famine of Hearing?

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord GOD,  
“That I will send a famine on the land,  
Not a famine of bread,  
Nor a thirst for water,  
But of hearing the words of the LORD.” Amos 8:11*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“On the other hand, there is no more terrible disaster with which the wrath of God can afflict men than a famine of the hearing of his Word, as he says in Amos. Likewise there is no greater mercy than when he sends forth his Word, as we read in Psalm 107: ‘He sent forth his word, and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.’ Nor was Christ sent into the world for any other ministry except that of the Word. Moreover, the entire spiritual estate – all the apostles, bishops, and priests – has been called and instituted only for the ministry of the Word.”

According to the Apostles, the ministry of the Word and prayer is the work pastors are called to pursue (Acts 6.4). In Luther’s day, a widespread effort was underway, even before 1520, to try to reform the Church, so that more of the Word could find its way into the lives of God’s people. But the effort wasn’t proceeding fast enough for Luther. He called for more emphasis on preaching the Word, and on helping God’s people to feed in it. God’s people, like baby birds, need continuous feeding if they are ever to fledge and leave the nest of infancy to soar in the winds of the Spirit and maturity in the Lord. The pastor’s job is to feed, feed, feed His people with the milk and meat of the Word of God. We bring a famine of hearing into the lives of our people if we fail to sow and cultivate the Word of God in all our ministries and activities.

*What would a “famine of hearing” look like if it began to settle on your congregation? Are doing all you can to preclude such a disaster?*

*Keep me always feeding on Your Word, Lord, and help me to...*

*Day 3: Morning*

## Intoxicated by the Promises

*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1.3, 4*

### **The Freedom of a Christian**

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Since these promises of God are holy, true, righteous, free, and peaceful words, full of goodness, the soul which clings to them with a firm faith will be so closely united with them and so closely absorbed by them that it not only will share in all their power but will be saturated and intoxicated by them. If a touch of Christ healed, how much more will this more tender spiritual touch, this absorbing of the Word, communicate to the soul all things that belong to the Word.”

Luther saw the Word of God fairly bristling with promises of blessing and abundance. But most Christians in his day were ignorant of this, and instead were living out of what Luther regarded as dead traditions and meaningless acts of piety. Luther called them to seek the promises of God. I rather suspect that the idea of becoming “partakers of the divine nature” is not one on which most Christians spend much time musing. The very thought of it can be daunting; we might even think it heretical to suppose that, by any means, we might “partake” of the Deity. But Peter insists that this is what God Himself intends for us. This is why He has given us life, granted us power, and extends to us His precious and very great promises. If our people do not long to become “partakers of the divine nature,” why not?

*How would you explain to a new believer, or perhaps a new member joining your church, what it means to become “partakers of the divine nature”? How would you counsel such a one to pursue that objective?*

*Let me know Your presence with me today, O Lord, that I might partake of You and...*

*Day 3: Evening*

## Most Obedient

*But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“So when the soul firmly trusts God’s promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. The very highest worship of God is this, that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallows his name and allows itself to be treated according to God’s good pleasure for, clinging to God’s promises, it does not doubt that he who is true, just, and wise will do, dispose, and provide all things well. Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by his faith?”

Luther might have winced a bit at my citing James (which he referred to as “a right strawy epistle”) to support his point, but the two are saying the same thing. If we rejoice to possess the promises of God, we will rejoice to submit to His will and carry out the very obedience that allows us to lay hold on those promises and experience the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. We are free in Christ as we partake of Him through the promises, and free from mere self-love to serve others with the freedom we find in Jesus and His Word. We must not teach the promises, or the joys of Christian freedom, apart from a clear, true, and compelling picture of the Lord Who offers the one and provides the other. Only in Him are we truly free, and only by knowing Him will we embrace the freedom He offers in Christ.

*In what ways do your preaching and teaching include regular exposition of the excellence and greatness of God?*

*Thinking back on this day, Lord, I give You thanks and praise for Your excellence and greatness, which I can see in...*

*Day 4: Morning*

## Concerning Our Power in Christ

*But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 1 Corinthians 4.19, 20*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“The power of which we speak is spiritual. It rules in the midst of enemies and is powerful in the midst of oppression...This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain, a truly omnipotent power, a spiritual dominion in which there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, if only I believe. Yes, since faith alone suffices for salvation, I need nothing except faith exercising the power and dominion of its own liberty. Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.”

I sometimes get the impression that Christians think “spiritual power” is reserved only for certain contexts or situations. You should know something like “spiritual power” when you are together with other believers in worship. You should be able to access “spiritual power” when the wheels are coming off in life and you need comfort or strength to persevere. But what about power to love my neighbor as myself? Or to speak with a lost friend about the Good News of the Kingdom? Or to persist in prayer for the revival of true faith in churches all over the world? Clearly, if we do not seek spiritual power unto such ends, we will never attain them. Luther understood that, being free in Christ, he had power at his disposal to allow him to challenge all that he considered to be wrong in the Church of his day, everything that was robbing Christians of their freedom in Christ. That power, which turned Europe upside-down in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, is available to us for making Christ known today.

*Paul said he would “know” the power of those false teachers in Corinth. How do you and your church leaders assess whether the power of God is at work in your congregation?*

*Grant me Your power for today, Lord, so that...*

*Day 4: Evening*

## Ministers All

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light... 1 Peter. 2.9*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“You will ask, ‘If all who are in the church are priests, how do these whom we now call priests differ from laymen?’ I answer...Holy Scripture makes no distinction between them, although it gives the name ‘ministers,’ ‘servants,’ ‘stewards’ to those who are now proudly called popes, bishops, and lords and who should according to the ministry of the Word serve others and teach them the faith of Christ and the freedom of believers. Although we are called equally priests, we cannot all publicly minister and teach.”

Jesus was sent to the world as a servant to seek the lost, to bring them the grace and truth of God, so that they might live (Phil. 2.5-11; Lk. 19.10; Jn. 10.10). As He was sent, He has sent us (Jn. 20.21). All disciples are servants and ministers, and all must therefore prepare themselves for this high, holy, and joyous calling. The work of the pastor is to replicate in those he serves the life and ministry of Christ (Eph. 4.11, 12; Col. 1.28). The pastor’s ministry of the Word is no different – only more public – than that of the people he serves. The freedom of a Christian is discovered in the life of serving others as ministers of God’s grace and truth. Luther’s articulation of the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers” is one of the great achievements of the Reformation era. We must take care, lest we squander that achievement by not taking seriously our call, as servants of Christ and shepherds of His flock, to equip the saints for daily works of ministry in their own Personal Mission Fields.

*How would you help a new believer understand what it means that he is now called to be a minister of God to others?*

*Thank You, Lord for the opportunities to minister Your Word today with...*

*Day 5: Morning*

## The Hope of Glory

*To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1.27*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in each of us. Such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him.”

The Christian stands in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5.1, 2). That is, as believers, it is our unique privilege to engage God in His glory, through our risen Christ and His Word, and to know the transforming power of glory to mold us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Thus transformed by the glory of God, we go forth to live for His glory in all our words and deeds, until the *knowledge* of the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (1 Cor. 10.31; Hab. 2.14). This hope belongs uniquely to believers, because only Christians have Christ in them, where His resurrection power can work revival in our soul day by day. What a great privilege and high calling it is to preach and equip God’s people for such glory!

*What does it mean to “engage God in His glory”? How, in your preaching and teaching, do you equip your congregation to realize this hope?*

*Today, Lord, let Your glory be seen in me by...*

*Day 5: Evening*

## Works and Faith

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2.10*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“In doing these works, however, we must not think that a man is justified before God by them, for faith, which alone is righteousness before God, cannot endure that erroneous opinion. We must, however, realize that these works reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts, and our whole purpose is to be directed only toward the driving out of lusts...Nevertheless, the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would most scrupulously obey in all things.”

Christians have been redeemed for good works. The Bible has been given to fit us for them (2 Tim. 3.15-17), and we are to be zealous in seeking them, and not to grow weary as we do (Tit. 2.14; Gal. 6.9, 10). Thus, where the Bible is faithfully preached, and the saints of God are duly and diligently equipped, good works should abound, for the Word of God is living and powerful, and by it the Spirit makes us willing and able to do what is pleasing to God (Phil. 2.13). The current tendency to downplay good works and to encourage “faith” based on “grace alone” is an aberration of Reformation teaching. James reminds us that faith without works is dead (Jms. 2.26). The pastor should be chief among his flock in stimulating believers to love and good works (Heb. 10.24). But what are the works “prepared beforehand” that God is looking to us to perform? Are they not the works outlined in His holy and righteous and good Law, which, as we do them, enable us to love God and our neighbors as we should (Matt. 22.34-40)?

*How does the Law of God feature in your preaching? What concerns do you have about giving the Law a more prominent place in your preaching?*

*Your Word is true, O Lord, as I saw today when...*

*Day 6: Morning*

## Good Men, Good Works

*“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7.17-20*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“The following statements are therefore true: ‘Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works.’ Consequently it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person, as Christ also says...”

The emphasis in Luther’s *Freedom of a Christian* is on the true nature and proper place of works in the life of faith. Good works are only those which God prescribes in His Word, not what men may devise or commend, even though their motives may be noble. Good works don’t “just happen” the longer we are believers. They must be nurtured in us through hearing and reading the Word of God, and listening to the Spirit’s prompting and guidance. We must be equipped for good works and encouraged in them regularly (Tit. 3.8, 14). We must persevere in faith and obedience until we become zealous for good works as the natural outworking of the goodness Christ has wrought in us (Titus 2.14). A pastor can know that the freedom of Christ has begun to have its powerful effects when he sees good works of love abounding within and from the members of his congregation, in Personal Mission Fields scattered across the community and the world.

*Do you think that every sermon or teaching situation should focus on some particular good work which is the logical outworking of the message? How would that work out in your ministry?*

*Make me alert to opportunities to do good today, Lord, especially as I...*

*Day 6: Evening*

## Living for All Men

*For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* Romans 14.7, 8

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“A man does not live for himself alone in this mortal body to work for it alone, but he lives also for all men on earth; rather he lives only for others and not for himself. To this end he brings his body into subjection that he may the more sincerely and freely serve others, as Paul says...He cannot ever in this life be idle and without works toward his neighbors, for he will necessarily speak, deal with, and exchange views with men, as Christ also, being made in the likeness of men, was found in form as a man and conversed with men...”

All God's people are called to be witnesses for Christ, to take up their cross daily and follow Him, and to do good works of love to the people they encounter each day in their Personal Mission Field. How do we nurture this ministry mindset in the people God has entrusted to our care? Not without sound teaching, consistent urging, and faithful support. Surely this is the greatest challenge facing any pastor – not merely to preach the Word, but to massage the Word deeply into the souls of his people, until that Word begins to bear irresistible fruit in the form of good works. Pastors must always preach through to the ground, keeping in mind as they preach, the daily lives and ministry opportunities of those they serve. Thus they may expect to help the members of their church meet Christ in His glory and live daily for His glory before others.

*What does it mean for you to “preach through to the ground”?*

*Lord, show me if today I missed any opportunities to...*

*Day 7: Morning*

## Faith Working through Love

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. Galatians 5.6*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love, that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith.”

We are not saved by works, but we are not truly saved without them. Where the salvation of Christ has taken root, good works of love will appear and abound (cf. Heb. 6.1-9; Matt. 7.17-20). We must be equipped with a mindset for ministry and learn to pray and plan for good works in every situation to which the Lord sends us each day (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). Pastors are wise shepherds when they illustrate the specific forms good works can take by preaching in ways that enable people to see themselves doing such good works. Think of Jesus saying, “Go and do likewise” after His vivid parable of the Good Samaritan. In all our preaching and equipping, we will be of most help to God’s people when we chart a course of good works on which they can see themselves travelling day by day in the Lord, following in the footsteps of Jesus, according to the Law and Word of God (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

*What would be some examples of general good works all Christians should do?*

*Lord, give me opportunities for doing good today, and let me encourage...*

*Day 7: Evening*

## Free Indeed

*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5.13*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, take upon himself the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, be found in human form, and to serve, help, and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt and still deals with him. This he should do freely, having regard for nothing but divine approval.”

Jesus Christ was the freest Person who ever lived. In the freedom of His Deity and love, He served. How hard is that to understand? If this is what Jesus did, it's what we must expect of ourselves, and it's what pastors must strive to realize through their ministries. When churches are abounding in good works – the fruit of faithful preaching and teaching – they will attract the world to the Lord (cf. Mic. 4.1-8). We are not Christians just because we say or think we are; we are Christians because all men can see the love of Christ at work within and through us (Jn. 13.35). Free from mere self-interest and self-love, we will stand out in this narcissistic age as people who embody the love of Jesus by their self-denying works for others. Then are we truly free, and in our freedom, we can show the way to others from the chains of self and the world.

*What's the difference between being free “from” works to being free “for” them? How can you encourage your people to greater flourishing in good works?*

*Lord, I want to be a person in whom good works about. As I think about tomorrow, therefore...*

*Day 8: Morning*

“You follow Me!”

*Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” John 21.22*

***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Each one should do the works of his profession and station, not that by them he strive after righteousness, but that through them he may keep his body under control, be an example to others who also need to keep their bodies under control, and finally that by such works he may submit his will to that of others in the freedom of love.”

Luther repeatedly emphasized that good works do not produce righteousness. They are the fruit of faith, which itself is our righteousness, and enable us to live in the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. Each Christian will have works to do appropriate to his or her place and calling in life. Each of us has been sent into the world as Jesus was sent, to embody, proclaim, and bring near the Kingdom of God to the people in our Personal Mission Field (Jn. 20.21). This will require different works for each of us, depending on our calling and the people we encounter there. We must learn what these are and, through faith and obedience, practice them faithfully, for the sake of others and the glory of God. The challenge to shepherds is to understand the callings of those in their flock, and to equip each one to follow Jesus and fulfill His calling.

*Is it possible to equip God's people to live the requirements of love in their own callings and places? What does that require of you?*

*Write Your Law on my heart, Lord, so that today I...*

*Day 8: Evening*

## Flowing from Us

*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive... John 7.37-39*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“See, according to this rule the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should ‘put on’ his neighbor and so conduct himself toward him as if he were in the other’s place. From Christ the good things have flowed and are flowing into us. He has so ‘put on’ us and acted for us as if he had been what we are. From us they flow on to those who have need of them...”

When the righteousness which comes by faith increases who we are – that is, as we are increasingly transformed into the image of Jesus Christ – what we *do* will come more naturally and readily to us. We’ll still have to pray and plan for loving our neighbors as we love ourselves (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17); however, as the Spirit works within to make us willing and able to do what pleases the Father, our responses of love will become more consistent, and flow more readily from us to those in need around us. Thus filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21), we fill our Personal Mission Fields with the presence of Jesus, risen from the dead and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Let each believer make this a goal and calling of his walk with the Lord, and let pastors and leaders lead, teach, and equip the saints for overflowing lives.

*Pastors must teach, pray, and set an example for their congregations in the life of “flowing” good works. How’s it going with you in this regard?*

*Lord, show me any obstacles to good works in my life, that I may...*

*Day 9: Morning*

## Living in Faith and Love

*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Corinthians 6.19, 20*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love...”

Luther had a way of making difficult matters simple. This little formula can serve as a guide for living the Christian life. Our lives have been hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3.3), Thus, believers must always “put on” Jesus, so that they are “found” in Him and “clothed” with Him and His righteousness, living in His presence and drawing on His power (Eph. 4.17-24). At the same time, they must always “put on” their neighbors so that they see with their eyes, feel their needs, and know how to respond as love requires. We are called to bear one another’s burdens, and to follow the example of the good Samaritan in loving our neighbors as ourselves. As we are filled with Jesus, and growing in His love, overflowing in love to others will come more naturally and consistently. Imagine how living this way might transform our churches and our world.

*How can you become more effective at helping the people in your charge to “put on” Jesus and their neighbors?*

*Heavenly Father, let me put on Jesus today, so that everywhere I go...*

*Day 9: Evening*

## Indispensable Faith

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. Galatians 5.6, 6.15*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Faith redeems, corrects, and preserves our consciences so that we know that righteousness does not consist in works, although works neither can nor ought to be wanting; just as we cannot be without food or drink and the works of this mortal body, yet our righteousness is not in them, but in faith; and yet those works of the body are not to be despised or neglected on that account.”

Only the person who is truly born again can fulfill the works of love for which we have been created. Unbelievers certainly do many good works, but only by the common grace of God, and only incompletely, as such works are not done for the glory of God (though His glory may be discerned in them, Ps. 68.18; cf. Eph. 4.8). We are redeemed *unto* good works (Eph. 2.10); we cannot expect God-honoring good works from those who are still dead in their trespasses and sins. However, we certainly should expect such works from those who know Him. Thus, if abundant good works of neighbor-love are missing in our churches, what does this suggest about the true spiritual state of the people? Do they really know the Lord? Have they truly come to the faith that redeems? Are we equipping them as faithfully and effectively as we should?

*What would you say to a young pastor to encourage him always to keep the Gospel before his congregation in his preaching and teaching?*

*As I review my day, Lord, I thank You, for I can see where You were at work in me to...*

*Day 10: Morning*

## Dealing with Weaker Brethren

*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Romans 15.1*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“The other class of men whom a Christian will meet are the simple-minded, ignorant men, weak in the faith, as the Apostle calls them... [The Christian] must yield to their weakness until they are more fully instructed. Since they do and think as they do, not because they are stubbornly wicked, but only because their faith is weak, the fasts and other things which they consider necessary must be observed to avoid giving them offense. This is the command of love which would harm no one but would serve all men. It is not by their fault that they are weak, but by that of their pastors...”

Are we ministering to “weak” Christians or to strong? And if to “weak,” how much of their weakness is our problem, our fault? Paul was unyielding with “weak” believers, calling them to “grow up” and press on toward maturity. People of weak faith are not much given to works of witness and love. They’re comfortable in their inherited or established routines and just want to be left alone. They like their church, like their worship, like their Christian friends; but they don’t have enough love for the lost to seek them for the Savior. They consider their Christian life as good as it gets. But they don’t know what they’re missing, and our job is so to excite them about the challenges of living boldly and maturely in Christ that they will want to press on toward the upward prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

*Members of your church may be content to be “weak” in the faith. Are you content for them to remain that way?*

*Lord, where I am weak in my faith? How can I encourage a weaker brother today? Let me see You, Lord...*

*Day 10: Evening*

## Walking the Tightrope

*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled... Hebrews 12.15*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“[The minister of Christ] ought so to govern and teach Christians all these matters that their conscience and faith will not be offended and that there will not spring up in them a suspicion and a root of bitterness and many will thereby be defiled...that is, that they may not lose faith and become defiled by the false estimate of the value of works and think that they must be justified by works.”

Pastors must be careful in emphasizing the importance of works done freely in Christ for the sake of loving our neighbors. On the one hand, we don't want to be thought of as always “haranguing” our folks and suggesting that they just aren't “good enough,” thus creating the impression that the only way they're ever really going to be saved is by wearing themselves out doing good works. But we don't want them to be complacent about good works, as if mere faith were sufficient for our Kingdom-and-glory calling (1 Thess. 2.12). It's a delicate tightrope, but one that pastors must walk. We want good works, deriving from a good walk with the Lord, for good motives, so that the goodness of God comes to light in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13). The call to good works can be a Scylla and Charybdis for some believers; we must do our best to navigate a straight course in equipping the saints to do them.

*Suggest a prayer that you might use before entering the pulpit to help keep you mindful of this important matter.*

*Lord, give me clarity about the place of good works, so that I can...*

*Day 11: Morning*

## Taught by the Lord

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2.12*

### ***The Freedom of a Christian***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Therefore there is need of the prayer that the Lord may give us and make us *theodidacti*, that is, those taught by God, and himself, as he has promised, write his law in our hearts; otherwise there is no hope for us. If he himself does not teach our hearts this wisdom hidden in mystery, nature can only condemn it and judge it to be heretical because nature is offended by it and regards it as foolishness.”

Luther leaves his best word for last: Only God, by His Spirit, can teach and transform us for good works of love; thus, the pastor’s best work is to pray faithfully that his people may all be taught of Christ, and to teach and equip them according to the Spirit’s plan for building the church (Eph. 4.11-16). If we do not connect our people with Jesus in a daily, deepening walk with Him, we aren’t really doing them any good; and any “good” they might do apart from such a relationship, will always fall short of glorifying God. Only Jesus can truly teach and change the self-centered hearts of inveterate sinners. Unless God’s people are taught of Christ, and freed from the bonds of sin and self, they will never truly learn, and never truly become disciples or followers of Christ, loving God and neighbor as the Law intends.

*Would you say that your prayer for the members of your church – all the members – is as full and consistent as it ought to be?*

*This morning, Lord, I pray for...*

*Day 11: Evening*

## Going Beyond

*Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.* 1 Corinthians 4.6

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church*<sup>2</sup>**

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Why do they appeal at this point to the free church and the power of the pope? Yet no such appeal abolishes either the Word of God or the testimony of the truth.”

In 1520, besides *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther published a broadside entitled *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*. It has also come to be called, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In this brief work, he railed against practices in the Church of his day for which he could discover no solid Biblical foundation. Things were being done in the churches because they'd always been done that way, or they worked to keep the churches and their coffers full, or because respected authorities insisted, without any Biblical basis, that this was the way to do church. In the forms of worship, the way Christian life was defined, the practice of ministers, and the whole organization of church life, the Church of Luther's day was operating on definitions, opinions, and practices which did not derive from Scripture. Church leaders had gone beyond the Word of God, and were leading their churches according to the spirit of the age. Roman Church authorities had begun trying to deal with some of the abuses, but they were moving neither fast enough nor boldly enough for Luther. Have we gone beyond the Word of God and the methods of the Spirit in how we organize and lead our churches?

*How confident are you that everything in your church is being done according to the Word of God?*

*What of my own life, Lord? Am I...*

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations from Martin Luther, *The Pagan Servitude of the Church*, in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).

*Day 12: Morning*

## God's Word or Men's Opinions?

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 2 Timothy 2.15, 16*

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“I saw that the opinions of the Thomists, even though approved by pope and council, remained opinions still, and would not become articles of faith even if decreed by an angel from heaven. For what is ascribed without a basis of Scripture or a proven revelation, may be held as an opinion, but is not to be believed of necessity.”

It's instructive to ponder what Luther might say about the way we do church today. Would he say that the opinions of marketers, entertainers, management mavens, and secular educators, though approved and embraced by church leaders everywhere, could not become articles of faith, and should not provide the standards and guidelines for church life? Why not? Because instead of arriving at such practices by rightly dividing the Word of truth, we have become enamored of the profane babblings of those who tout expedience and secular success as the measure of a healthy church, and we think we are free to run our churches in whatever seems to us the best way. But if God has shown in His Word how to make disciples, build His Church, and advance His Kingdom, shouldn't we look *there* to determine how to organize and conduct the work He has given us to do?

*Does God's Word teach us how to organize for building His Church? Where would you look in God's Word for such guidance?*

*Show me, Lord, if there is anything in my life today that...*

*Day 12: Evening*

## Hold Fast to Christ

*Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Hebrews 3.5, 6*

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“What is our response when Aristotle, and the doctrines of men, are made the arbiters of these very sublime and divine things? Why not hiss these ingenious inquiries off the stage, and hold to the words of Christ in simple faith...?”

The “sublime and divine things” Luther had in mind related to such Christian practices as worship, service to Christ, the work of pastors and church leaders, and the life of faith. Secular thinking and practice were ordering the churches and their work in Luther’s day – Aristotle, wrapped in the garb of scholastic theology and imposed on the churches as the latest and best thing. It’s not that there was *no* benefit to be gained from looking to the wisdom of God as revealed in the best of pagan thought and work. It’s simply that these must not be allowed to *replace* whatever God’s Word revealed about Christian faith and practice. Luther urged his contemporaries to “hiss these ingenious inquiries off the stage” and turn to the Bible to define and guide our work in the Lord’s Name. The Word of Christ is sufficient to equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17), even the good work of building Christ’s Church. Do we believe this? Or do we show by how we do church that we believe secular fashion is a more reliable way to pursue the Lord’s agenda? Time for a little hissing in the Lord’s household?

*What does it mean to hold fast to Christ in your church’s worship? In its efforts at disciple-making? In its mission to the local community?*

*Lord, I want to hold fast to You in all things! As I look ahead to tomorrow, therefore...*

*Day 13: Morning*

## Place to the Devil

*Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another. “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Ephesians 4.25-27*

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Satan has taken advantage of this lamentable condition of ours to remove every trace of the real mass from the church. At the same time, he has taken care that every corner of the world is full of spurious masses, i.e., abuses and travesties of God’s testament. He burdens the world more and more with sacrilege, that gravest of sins, and so increases his guilt; for what more sinful sacrilege could there be than to replace God’s promises by perverse opinions, or to neglect them, or to extinguish all faith in them?”

Luther was convinced that, by failing to teach the faith and build Christ’s Church according to God’s Word, Church leaders of his day had opened the door for the devil to wreak havoc in the household of faith. The devil kept the nomenclature of faith and church, but corrupted the substance of both, thus robbing people of their freedom in Christ, and making them servants to the whims and fancies of men. Truth was suffused with lies and half-truths, and sin abounded. God’s promises were given lip-service, as men imbued with the spirit of the age rather than the Spirit of God led Christians into “sacrilege” – corruption of life and faith. Doubtless many of these church leaders meant well, but, like Colonel Nicholson in *Bridge over the River Kwai*, they had given their best work to creating highways for the devil to prosecute his agenda all over Europe. They needed a “come to Jesus” moment, and Luther was determined to give it to them.

*Are you doing God’s work God’s way, or are principles and practices alien to the Word of God guiding your efforts at making disciples?*

*Help me to walk Your path today, Lord, and show me quickly if ever I...*

*Day 13: Evening*

## God's Way, Only and Always

*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Romans 15.1*

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“As we have said, God never has dealt, and never does deal, with mankind at any time otherwise than by the word of promise. Neither can we, on our part, ever have to do with God otherwise than through faith in His word and promise. He does not hold works in high esteem, nor does He need them.”

The evangelical ecclesiastical landscape today is populated in the main by two kinds of churches: megachurches, and churches that want to be like megachurches. Nearly 3,000 churches in America alone qualify as megachurches. Small churches in cities, towns, and rural communities adopt as much as they can of the way megachurches worship, and the programs they run (hence, the many books by megachurch pastors on the shelves of local pastors everywhere). Somewhere around 100 million Americans describe themselves as born-again believers. But if we are dealing with God according to His Word of promise, should we not expect that He would deal with us in the same way, and that those exceedingly great and precious promises of Scripture would be more abundantly in evidence in our world? We are working ourselves to the bone, trying to build our churches according to the best secular principles of management, marketing, communications, entertainment, and education. But God doesn't need such principles. And apparently – given spiritual, moral, and cultural conditions worldwide – He doesn't intend to “deal” with us when we prefer such means to the plain teaching of His Word.

*How do your church leaders “deal” with God? What evidence would indicate that He was “dealing” with your church's leader?*

*Today, Lord, have I dealt with You in any way other than by Your Word? Show me any place I...*

*Day 14: Morning*

## Passed Over?

*“According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.” Exodus 25.9*

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“But, you will say: What is this? Surely your contentions will overthrow the practices and purposes of all the churches and monasteries, and destroy those by which they have waxed rich for many centuries... You will deprive them of their largest incomes. My answer is: That is the very thing which led me to write that the church has been taken prisoner. For this sacred testament of God has been forced into the service of impious greed for gain by the opinions and traditions of irreligious men. They have passed over God’s word; they have laid before us the thoughts of their own hearts, and led the world astray.”

Luther was prepared for the fact that his contentions might overthrow what he regarded as the sinful and unBiblical manner in which church leaders were doing church in his day. The churches and monasteries had become rich by these practices. Pastors were well off and highly esteemed. Everybody went to church. And Luther wanted to undo all that? Was he *mad*? Angry, yes, but not mad, and not sinning in calling church leaders to realize that their worldly ways of doing church had imprisoned the Body of Christ in pagan practices, and robbed trusting Christians of their freedom to grow in the Lord and serve others in love. Church leaders in Luther’s day had “passed over God’s word” in trying to do God’s work, led by “the thoughts of their own hearts.” God had showed them the pattern, as surely as He showed Moses; but they had determined to do their own thing instead. Overthrow such a system? Well, if it would not agree to be reformed, why not?

*How might you undertake to assess everything in the life of your church, to make sure that what you’re doing has solid Biblical underpinnings? Where would you start?*

*Lord, overthrow in my heart any...*

*Day 14: Evening*

## Let God Be True

*For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.*  
Romans 3.3, 4a

### ***The Pagan Servitude of the Church***

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

“Do not be disturbed if the whole world is of the contrary opinion and practice. Thou hast the utmost certainty in the gospel. Trust in it, and thou canst well afford to despise man-made beliefs and opinions.”

The simple fact is that many church leaders today do not believe that the Scriptures are sufficient to do the good work of making disciples, building the church, and advancing the Kingdom of God. This is evident from the fact that so much of what we do in churches today cannot be supported by direct appeal to Scripture. Consider: The early churches of the Christian movement met in homes, depended on one another when needs arose, bore witness to their neighbors by word and deed, yet had no budgets, committees, ministry teams, or expensive training resources. They trained their own pastors, and these were ordained to serve by local colleagues already involved in ministry. They managed a simple service of worship which followed an order derived from the Scriptures. They started new churches as often as they could, but maintained fellowship and communion locally and regionally under the leadership of faithful shepherds. They were opposed by religious zealots from other faiths, and suspicious magistrates who didn't want any trouble on their watch. Yet they turned their world upside-down for Jesus, by trusting in God and His ways, and not the ways of the world. The world turned out to be the lie; God, Who is always true in everything He says, showed the power of truth by honoring the simple faith of those early believers. Luther wanted to get back to something more like that. Shouldn't we?

*What to you is the most important lesson from Luther's argument in 'The Pagan Servitude of the Church'?*

*Thank You, Lord, for Martin Luther's work, and for...*

*Day 15: Morning*

## For the Goal of Faith

*“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” John 15.16*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith.”

The goal of faith is eternal life – knowing God and Jesus Christ, and increasing in the knowledge of Christ for a life of fruitfulness here and glory beyond (Jn. 17.3; 2 Pet. 3.18; Phil. 3.14). In Calvin’s day, it seemed to many that the goal of the faith had come to be the Church, being loyal to the Church and supporting its clergy and projects. The goal of Christian faith was to contribute to the continuing prosperity and authority of the Church. But Calvin and other reformers, following Luther, understood that Christian faith is more than this, and that the Church is God’s means for helping believers to full and abundant life in Christ. It’s a lesson we do well to review. The goal of faith is not the local church, and the measure of a church is not the number of people in the pews, the size of the sanctuary, or the number of programs or staff. The goal of faith is fruit. The measure of a church is the extent to which it contributes to the progress in faith and fruitfulness of those entrusted to her care. Jesus calls us to bear fruit, and He brings us into the church to equip and encourage us for this work.

*In your church, how do the leaders keep track of the growth and ministries of the members?*

*Lord, let me bear fruit today. Let my faith issue in results. Let me see You at work in me, doing...*

*Day 15: Evening*

## One Body

*“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”*  
John 17.20, 21

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“But all the elect are so united in Christ that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knitted together as are the limbs of a body. They are made truly one since they live together in one faith, hope, and love, and in the same Spirit of God.”

Oneness is a sure way of identifying a healthy church, as Paul explained in Ephesians 4.11-16. When members confess the same faith, embrace a common vision, share their lives with one another, and press on and encourage one another to increase in the knowledge of God and fruitfulness in Christ, then they are realizing true unity as a church. This doesn't just happen, however. The local church is the forge where the raw iron of faith is smelted and hammered into the steel of a mature walk with the Lord. Maturity in Christ – as individuals and congregations – grows out of unity. But true unity doesn't come easily. We must work hard to achieve and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3). Can our petty disagreements about this, that, and the other really be more important than working hard to maintain our unity in Christ? And if not, where the local church is concerned, what about with the various congregations of Christ in a local community? How shall we achieve and demonstrate our oneness, that our neighbors might believe that God has sent Jesus to them?

*Would you say that your church reflects this kind of unity? How is growth in such unity encouraged in your church?*

*I pray for oneness in our church, Lord, and among all the churches in our community, that...*

*Day 16: Morning*  
Shared Benefits

*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... 1*  
Corinthians 12.7

***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“But a community is affirmed, such as Luke describes, in which the heart and soul of the multitude of believers are one; and such as Paul has in mind when he urges the Ephesians to be ‘one body and one Spirit, just as’ they ‘were called in one hope.’ If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brother love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.”

Our witness to the world begins in our relationships with our fellow church members. Life together in a local church affords many opportunities for identifying, nurturing, and employing spiritual gifts in service to one another. We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ as we practice self-denial and cross-bearing, esteeming others better than ourselves, and using our gifts and opportunities to serve one another, encourage others in the faith, join to praise and thank the Lord, and share together in His Body and Blood. The more we do this – the more we *actualize* the unity we have in Christ – the greater is the likelihood that gifts for loving service will flow through our everyday lives as well. The church is the incubator of a witnessing way of life, through the shared benefits and ministries of its members. Where this is present, the Body of Christ will be visibly dispersed throughout the community, and not just when it assembles for worship.

*What opportunities does your church provide for identifying and developing spiritual gifts, and then for putting them to use in serving your fellow church members? Are you making the most of these opportunities?*

*Lord, fill me with Your Spirit for this day, for I shall need His many gifts to...*

*Day 16: Evening*

## The Work of Pastoral Ministry

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... Ephesians 4.11, 12*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“On the one hand, he approves our obedience by a very good test when we hear his ministers speaking just as if he himself spoke. On the other, he also provides for our weakness in that he prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself, rather than thunder at us and drive us away.”

It is a high and holy calling to be entrusted with the ministry of the Word of God. Through the Word, and the ministry of those called to it, Christ gathers His elect and brings His saints to greater knowledge of Himself, and more abundant fruitfulness. The work of pastoral ministry – the work of shepherding – is to equip church members, helping them identify, nurture, and employ spiritual gifts, so that they become flash points for ministry within the Body of Christ and throughout the larger community. By this means, Jesus builds His Church in unity and maturity. As individual believers are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, they do those works of ministry which are the fruit of Christ at work within them. Thus, the congregation as a whole increases in unity and maturity in the Lord. It is a grave sin not to seek the *Lord's* ends for this calling. The goal of faith is fruit. The measure of a church is the growth of its members. And the measure of pastoral ministry is equipped saints, serving the Lord in their daily lives.

*Have you thanked God lately for all the faithful teachers in your congregation? Have you thanked them?*

*I do thank You, Lord, for...*

*Day 17: Morning*

## Visible and Invisible

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... Hebrews 12.1*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name ‘church’ designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ.”

Does it ever trouble you that there is so little visible unity among the churches in your community? So little sharing in life, worship, ministry, and outreach together? Or that, in many churches today, there is but little regard for the saints who have gone before us, who have made it possible, by their faithfulness, for the Gospel to come down to us? Shall we so easily forget our beloved forebears in the flesh? Or fail to seek unity with our brothers and sisters, living in the same town? Jesus said that unity was the key to credibility where the Gospel is concerned (Jn. 17.20, 21), and Paul reminds us that we must work hard to achieve and maintain such unity of the Spirit with our Christian brethren (Eph. 4.3). If we’re not working at unity at all, we are disobedient to the apostle; and if our witness to our local community seems ineffectual, it may be because of this. The more we make the Body of Christ visible in our communities, the more His invisible presence and power will bring Kingdom fruit through our efforts.

*In what ways does your church promote unity with other churches and an appreciation of the contribution of previous generations of believers?*

*How can I be an agent of unity for Your church today, Lord? What can I do to strengthen the bonds between Christian brethren? Show me how to...*

*Day 17: Evening*

## Who Belongs Here?

*“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”* John 7.24

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“Accordingly, the Lord by certain marks and tokens has pointed out to us what we should know about the church...And, since assurance of faith was not necessary, he substituted for it a certain charitable judgment where we recognize as members of the church those who, by confession of faith, by example of life, and partaking of the sacraments, profess the same God and Christ with us.”

The church is not a society for everyone; we have to make some judgments about who does and does not belong. Not that we turn people away who are not members of our congregation. However, we do expect that those who seek to unite with our local body, and thus to enjoy the shared benefits of our communal life, will confess the same faith we confess, increase in knowledge and fruitfulness, and participate in the worship of Christ and the sacraments He has established. The first and last of these are easy. The middle one – increase in knowledge and fruitfulness – requires continuous oversight and instruction (Heb. 13.17). This is the work of shepherds. Church membership is a commitment not merely to a local congregation, but to the Lord, for increased faith and fruitfulness, under the guiding hand of faithful shepherds, and with the aid of fellow church members. We do not belong to a church simply because we have completed some membership process. We show that we belong by fulfilling the Lord’s expectations for all the members of His Body.

*How are the members of your church encouraged to mark the progress of their faith and thus prove – not earn, prove – their salvation?*

*Thank You, Lord, that today You have proved my salvation by...*

*Day 18: Morning*

## Not without Fruit

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”* John 13.16, 17

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“From this the face of the church comes forth and becomes visible to our eyes. Wherever we see the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists...If it has the ministry of the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church. For it is certain that such things are not without fruit.”

Note the emphasis on hearing and doing: Calvin is never far from the importance of Christians and churches bearing fruit in the world. We often hear that one mark of a true church is the preaching of the Word. That’s only half the truth. Calvin says pure preaching and *pure* hearing, and *honoring* the Word – these are the true mark. It’s not enough to proclaim the Word purely. This is indeed the task of the preacher, and a true measure of faithfulness in ministry. But for the *church*, merely *attending* to such preaching is not enough. The Word must be *purely* heard and *honored* with worship, obedience, and fruitfulness. The ministry of the Word – by preaching and shepherding, sacraments, and the practice of church discipline – is the means God has provided to bring His Body to fruitfulness in every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). How can we bear fruit, and how can we regard ourselves as members of Christ’s Body, if we fail to honor these expectations and strive for these objectives?

*What do you think Calvin means by “bearing” and “honoring” the Word? How can we know if we’re doing that?*

*Today, Lord, I would bear and honor Your Word by...*

*Day 18: Evening*

## To Bring Forth Fruit

*“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7.18-20*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“We have laid down as distinguishing marks of the church the preaching of the Word and the observance of the sacraments. These can never exist without bringing forth fruit and prospering by God’s blessing. I do not say that wherever the Word is preached there will be immediate fruit; but wherever it is received and has a fixed abode, it shows its effectiveness.”

The true marks of the Church, as Calvin noted – following Jesus – are to be found in the fruitful lives of its members. Mere preaching and merely offering the sacraments from time to time may be a mark of a faithful *ministry*, but they are *not* marks of a healthy, growing *church*. Only where the Word is *received* and has a *fixed abode* have the deep roots of Word and Spirit taken hold, so that they bring forth the fruit of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, which is the Kingdom of God. We must preach and shepherd for fruit. Jesus and the apostles insisted on it, and we must do no less. We must always strive to cultivate fruit in the lives of those we serve, not merely to hurl the Word at them, with no regard for the outcomes of such an effort. We labor in vain, Paul would say, if our labors do not bring forth fruit in those we serve.

*How do you determine the fruitfulness of the people in your church? What regular measures do you employ to this end?*

*As I look back on this day, Lord, I thank and praise You for the fruit You have borne in me, especially...*

*Day 19: Morning*

## Resisting Disunity

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit... Ephesians 4.1-4*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

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“For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; salvation rests in God’s mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of the faith.”

Well, maybe not in Calvin’s day, but certainly in ours. Doctrines such as how you worship, which version of the Bible you use, what you think about the Spirit, how you perform the sacraments, and more are cherished and brandished these days to distinguish churches from one another, asserting the superiority of one and the inferiority of all the others. The fragmented state of the Church today is a great sin. It is one of the tragic offspring of the Protestant Reformation. Our studied disunity betrays our claim to be the Body of Christ, which is one Body, and compromises our witness to the watching world (Jn. 17.21). The worst part of this situation is that church leaders do almost nothing to establish, express, and maintain the unity they have in Christ with other churches. Yes, this is hard work (v. 3, *spoudazontes* – *working hard*), but we must not let secondary doctrinal or ecclesiastical differences get in the way of our demonstrating the oneness we have in Christ.

*What other churches in your community share the doctrines of saving grace with yours? What might you do to show your unity to the rest of the community?*

*Again today, Lord, there must be something I can do to encourage unity among Christian brethren. Lead me to...*

*Day 19: Evening*

## Every Member a Builder

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... Ephesians 4.11, 12*

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“From [Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 14.30 ff.] it is clear that every member of the church is charged with the responsibility of public edification according to the measure of his grace, provided he perform it decently and in order.”

The goal of pastoral ministry is to build the church in unity and maturity, and thus to realize Christ’s agenda (Matt. 16.18) as fully as possible within one’s own calling and context. But building the church is not the responsibility of the pastor alone, although some congregations act as if that were the case. Building the church depends on saints doing the work of ministry within their own callings, as Paul makes clear in these verses. When pastors and teachers are equipping the saints, and equipping them with vision, understanding, heart, will, and the skills for ministry in their everyday lives, the people in our Personal Mission Fields see and hear the reality of Jesus, alive from the dead, and they will stream up to the church to get more of Him and His Word (Mic. 4.1-8). If the people aren’t ministering, the church won’t grow; but they won’t minister without being equipped, and this is the work of the pastor.

*Would you say that every member of your church is continuously involved in being equipped for ministry and ministering to others? Should they be?*

*Looking back on this day, Lord, I can see that I might have been more effectively equipped for ministry if...*

*Day 20: Morning*

## Public and Private

*“...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 20.20, 21*

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“Therefore, in the communion of the saints, our sins are continually forgiven us by the ministry of the church itself when the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthen godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness. This they do both publicly and privately as need requires.”

To pastors and elders (“bishops”) is entrusted the ministry of the Word of God. Whatever shepherds do, whatever our work of ministry requires of us, the Word of God must be central. And the aim of our ministry of the Word is the transformation of the souls of those we serve – to fit their minds with the truth of God, their hearts with the love of Christ, and their consciences with the priorities of the Kingdom. We minister God’s Word publicly and in private, until those we serve think with the mind of Christ, love with the heart of God, will what God wills, and follow the Spirit in doing what God would have them do. All that a shepherd does in his ministry week by week must line up behind this calling to preach and teach the Word, aiming at the souls of those we serve.

*What do you do to make sure that the Word of God has primacy of place in all your ministry activities? How do you aim the Word at the souls of those you serve?*

*Whom will I see today, Lord? How can I equip them for serving You? As I think about the day ahead...*

*Day 20: Evening*

## Head of the Church

*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1.22, 23*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“[The Lord] alone should rule and reign in the church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it, and this authority should be exercised and administered by his Word alone. Nevertheless, because he does not dwell among us in visible presence, we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work.”

Pastors and elders (church leaders, shepherds) have an awesome responsibility. They will be held to greater account who take up this calling (Jms. 3.1). Those who minister the Word are called to represent Christ and His will to His Body. He is the Head of His Body, and He exercises that Headship through the ministry of His Word, which has been entrusted to those in pastoral leadership. Church members have a duty to read, study, and search the Scriptures by themselves and in groups together, to be sure. But shepherds must, by their faithful and wide-ranging ministry, provide the safe and nurturing parameters within which growth in the Lord can occur. How vitally important it is that pastors and church leaders have a deep and growing relationship with Christ and His Word! Otherwise, how can they possibly represent Him and His will to His Body?

*How do the leaders of your church encourage and hold one another accountable for growing in their relationships with Christ and His Word?*

*Lord, I want to become better equipped to serve You and our church by...*

*Day 21: Morning*

## This Human Ministry

*“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20.28*

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“Paul shows...that this human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body...through the ministers to whom he has entrusted this office and has conferred the grace to carry it out, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church; and he shows himself present by manifesting the power of his Spirit in this institution, that it be not vain or idle.”

I wonder how many church members would point to their pastors and church leaders as the primary evidence of the Spirit’s lively presence in their church? How confident are those we serve that we are building the Lord’s church as the Spirit would have us build it? That our vision is Christ’s vision? Our church is making a true Kingdom impact in our community? Calvin obviously had a very high view of the role of pastoral ministry, a view he derived from the letters of Paul and Peter, and the example of Jesus. The power of the Spirit – for fruit, gifts, and witness – will be manifested in church leaders first, before it becomes the common possession of the members of the congregation. No disciple is above his teacher, and no teacher is worthy of the name who does not show the evidence of the Spirit’s power at work in his life. This human ministry is God’s way of making disciples, building His Church, and advancing His Kingdom. Where any of this fruit is lacking, we need to take a fresh look at how we are doing the ministry entrusted to us.

*What do you think? Would the members of your church point to you and your leaders as the primary evidence of the Spirit’s presence in your church? Why or why not?*

*Fill me with Your Spirit for this day’s work, Lord, and let me know Him working in me so that...*

*Day 21: Evening*

## Extraordinary Offices

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists...  
Ephesians 4.11*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“...these three functions were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before, or where they were to be carried over from Moses to Christ. Still, I do not deny that the Lord has sometimes at a later period raised up apostles, or at least evangelists in their place, as has happened in our own day...I call this office ‘extraordinary,’ because in duly constituted churches it has no place.”

Calvin’s point is that pastor/teacher – shepherd – is the *office* God has established for building the local church. Apostles, prophets, and evangelists serve the larger Body of Christ, or bring the Gospel to desolate or unevangelized areas, thus serving the *larger* Church, while pastors and teachers concentrate on building-up the *local* church. We do not expect every church to have apostles, prophets, and evangelists, although every believer has been *sent* (Greek: *apostello*) like Jesus was sent (Jn. 20.21) – called to proclaim the Word of God (Joel 2.28), and to bear witness to the Lord (Acts 1.8). Each church may have people who manifest the traits or skills of these “extraordinary offices,” and may even fulfill such a role for a time – as on a short-term mission project, or in an evangelistic outreach. But in almost every age of the Church, some people have been called by the Lord to these *extraordinary offices* as their primary calling, to address a specific need or opportunity. Meanwhile, the *ordinary* office of pastor/teacher is essential for every church, for equipping the saints and growing the church in unity and maturity.

*Who would be some examples of people serving in these “extraordinary” offices in our day? How do they benefit your church?*

*Thank You, Lord, for those who fill these extraordinary offices for the Church, such as...*

*Day 22: Morning*

## The Office of Pastor

*“...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*  
Acts 6.4

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

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“...in the office of the pastors also there are these two particular functions: to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments. The manner of teaching not only consists in public discourses, but also has to do with private admonitions...That is, they have been set over the church not to have a sinecure but, by the doctrine of Christ to instruct the people to true godliness, to administer the sacred mysteries and to keep and exercise upright discipline.”

Calvin cannot talk about the *office* of pastoral ministry without also describing the *effects* for which that office has been established. Pastors do not simply carry out functions or execute tasks. They are charged with *making disciples* and *equipping the saints for ministry*. Where disciples are being made, godliness and uprightness will be much in evidence. Where saints are ministering, the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit will appear. The goal of pastoral ministry, in other words, is not ministry, but disciples. One who holds the office of pastor will plan, pray, and prosecute his ministry with a view to seeing the people entrusted to his care transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, and the congregation increasing in unity and maturity, as a true expression of the Body of Christ. Our labors are not in vain in the office of pastor when such outcomes are in evidence.

*How does this way of thinking about your ministry affect the way you plan and assess your work?*

*What opportunities for making disciples are before me today, Lord? Help me to focus on...*

*Day 22: Evening*

## Elders

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you... Titus 1.5*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“Governors [elders] were, I believe, elders chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops [pastors]...Each church, therefore, had from its beginning a senate, chosen from the godly, grave, and holy men, which had jurisdiction over the correcting of faults.”

Paul’s language to Titus implies that churches without elders are churches not quite in order. Whether we call them elders or something else, somebody needs to take responsibility for the oversight of the spiritual wellbeing of all church members (Heb. 13.17). The “censure” of morals means the careful nurturing of godliness in those who profess faith; and the “exercise of discipline” does not refer only to those practices we employ to correct and reclaim those who have fallen into sin, but all the disciplines that pertain to godliness and prepare us for ministry. Saints grow in the gift of eternal life as they increase in Christlikeness and order their lives for wisdom (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Eph. 5.15-17). The role of elders is to nurture that life in those entrusted to their care. Elders are also called “overseers” (1 Tim. 3) because this is the very nature of their work. No elder can fulfill his calling merely by sitting on a board, managing a department, or running a program. To elders is entrusted the care and nurture of souls.

*Do the elders – or leaders – of your church take direct oversight of the souls of your church members? How do they do this?*

*Lord, I need someone watching over my soul with me, especially to help me...*

*Day 23: Morning*

## Deacons

*But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.* 1 Timothy 3.10

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“The care of the poor was entrusted to the deacons...Unless my judgment deceive me, in the first clause [of Rom. 12.8] he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who had devoted themselves to the care of the sick...If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves...Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor.”

By “poor” here Calvin means people with various sorts of material needs, not only or necessarily those who are chronically poor. One of the primary ministries of the church, as Calvin understood it, was to care for the material needs of members in its community. For this, deacons were appointed to collect, manage, and distribute alms, as needs arose or ongoing care was required. All the reformers were urgent about the duty of caring for the poor, and, typically, the pastors were counted among the *first* of the poor to be cared for by the church’s alms (see the reading of Calvin’s will in *The Record of the Company of Pastors in Geneva in the Time of Calvin*). Thus, the ministry of deacons complemented that of the elders, by seeing to it that no want of material necessities became a hindrance to anyone growing in Christ and serving others. Theirs was as truly a *spiritual* ministry as that of the pastors and elders. Together, these three offices are the shepherds appointed for the care of God’s flock.

*What do the deacons do in your church? How does their work complement that of the pastor(s) and elders?*

*I pray for our deacons today, Lord, that You...*

*Day 23: Evening*

## A Company of Pastors

*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons... Philippians 1.1*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“Each city, then, had a college of presbyters, who were pastors and teachers. For all exercised among the people the office of teaching, exhorting, and correcting, which Paul enjoins on bishops; and to leave successors after them, they labored hard to teach the younger men who enlisted in the sacred army.”

I've omitted most of Calvin's references to Scripture, but he is doing nothing more than giving us his understanding of what he read in the New Testament about the organization of the church. Geneva in Calvin's day had several churches, and several more existed in the outlying areas. The pastors of those churches met regularly as a “company” to study, discuss their ministries, deal with cases of discipline, assess one another's preaching, hear reports of pastoral visitation, hold one another accountable in matters of doctrine and life, and other matters. The unity of the church in Geneva had a profound effect on the expansion of the Reformation in places like Eastern Europe, Scotland, and the American colonies, in no small part because the pastors made a point of seeking and training younger men to serve the Lord's churches. In our day, we know nothing of such leadership by pastors in local communities.

*Meditate on John 17.21. Are we compromising our witness by not joining with other churches in the community for worship, outreach, and ministry?*

*Lord, I would like to encourage other pastors in my community. How can I pray for them? And how can I...*

*Day 24: Morning*

## Money and Priorities

*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. Acts 4.32*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“At first they spent very little on the embellishment of sacred things; afterward, although the church became gradually richer, they still kept moderation in this respect. Whatever money was given to it still remained intact for the poor, should any great need arise.”

Next to staff, keeping up church property is typically the largest chunk of the budget of a local church. Churches need a place to worship and make disciples, but we have capitulated to the materialist spirit of the day when we feel we need expansive campuses with all kinds of multi-purpose facilities and all the latest technological gadgets. The first Christians met in homes, and each house church was a *true* church, though all the churches remained one church in their community. Only after the turn of the third century did large church buildings begin to appear – a legacy we have never quite managed to shake off. Once we build these facilities, we tend to do most of what we do as congregations in them, which discourages making disciples in the community, where people live. Our congregations become *centripetal*, as all our activities are designed to draw people to the building, rather than *centrifugal*, flinging us out to the larger world with the Good News of Christ. We excuse our lack of personal outreach by saying our church is “seeker-friendly.” But aren’t *we* supposed to be doing the seeking, like Jesus did (Lk. 19.10)?

*How much of the outreach and disciple-making of your church is conducted beyond the confines of your local facility?*

*Lord, You have called me to make disciples “as you are going.” Today, I’m going to...*

*Day 24: Evening*

## Pastoral Training (1)

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2.2*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“But the institution itself [“the clergy” of a city] was particularly holy and profitable, for by it those who wished to consecrate themselves and their service to the church were brought up under the bishop’s care. It also ensured that only well-prepared persons might minister to the church, for from early youth under sacred instruction and strict training they took on an exemplary life of gravity and holiness; and, separated from worldly cares, they became accustomed to spiritual cares and studies.”

In Calvin’s understanding, following the example of the early Church, the company of pastors in any city was responsible to train and prepare the next generation of pastoral leadership for the churches. The idea of sending a man off to a seminary to study with professional academics was precisely the kind of approach to pastoral training that Luther, Calvin, and others were trying to replace. They wanted pastors who were skilled and holy, and not just repositories of doctrine and the latest methods for “growing” the church. It makes sense that pastors should train pastors, over many years of teaching and disciple-making, and that such a role not be entrusted to academics only. Scholars and Christian scholarship are important, and the Church needs them. But pastors-to-be need pastors for their preparation. Calvin understood this. Perhaps some day we will, too.

*What is your church’s role in helping to prepare the next generation of pastoral leaders for your community or for the larger Church?*

*Lord Jesus, I pray for the pastors in our community, that...*

*Day 25: Morning*

## Pastoral Training (2)

*For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God... Titus 1.7*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“First, then, they were entrusted with the opening and closing of the church...Afterward they were called ‘acolytes,’ to assist the bishop in household tasks and continually to accompany him first for honor’s sake, then that no suspicion might arise. Moreover, that they might gradually become known to the people and acquire commendation for themselves, and at the same time learn to be seen by all and to speak before all; that, when made presbyters, they might not be covered with shame when they came forward to teach – they were given opportunity to read from the pulpit. In this way, to prove their diligence in individual exercises, they were promoted by degrees...”

Becoming a pastor in Calvin’s Geneva involved a lengthy process of study, spiritual development, acquiring ministry skills, on-the-job training, and gaining the confidence of the people. This approach to pastoral preparation proved highly effective, and could be of great benefit to churches in our day, although a typical seminary setting makes such training rather difficult. Internships for seminary graduates provide some help, but they are typically short and poorly structured. Existing denominational structures do not encourage a “home-grown” approach to pastoral training either. The requirement that pastors should only be selected from among those who have earned an accredited degree has yet to prove the best or only way to prepare men for ministry. Poor training for ministers creates poor pastoral leaders, and poor pastoral leaders lead shallow and marginalized churches.

*Suppose your church might want to begin encouraging some young men to seek the ministry as a calling. What might your church do to begin their training now, even if, at some point, they must go off to seminary?*

*Lord Jesus, I pray that You will use our church to make disciples and to train...*

*Day 25: Evening*

## No Other Word

*Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 1 Corinthians 4.6*

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“Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word.”

Evangelicals insist on the primacy of the Word of God as source and touchstone for all teaching in the Church. This was a founding premise of the evangelical movement, and it has been reviewed, restated, and reinforced in many ways over the past many generations. But it's one thing to say that we hold to *sola Scriptura* as our defining framework, and quite another to practice it consistently. In many churches today, preachers insist they are teaching the one, true Word, when, in fact, they are straying far from the path men such as Luther, Calvin, and others recovered. A hermeneutic of convenience obtains with many contemporary preachers and theologians, which accommodates the spirit of the age as much as the Spirit of God when it comes to how we understand the Bible. And, like Gresham's Law, inevitably the bad drives out the good, and the true teaching of the one true Word is substituted for by other words, strange winds of doctrine, which have blown many churches off course in their pursuit of the Kingdom. The reformation bequeathed us *sola Scriptura* for the health of our faith and our churches. The question remains whether we can keep that bequest.

*How would you summarize your approach to making sure that, in all your ministry, you do not go beyond what is written in God's Word?*

*Help me to love and trust Your Word more consistently, Lord, especially with respect to...*

*Day 26: Morning*

## Furnished with Sure Commands?

*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.* 1 Peter 4.10, 11

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“Accordingly, Peter, who was well instructed by the master as to how much he should do, reserves nothing else for himself or others except to impart doctrine as it has been handed down by God...he says, ‘speak only the words of God’; that is, not hesitatingly and tremblingly as evil consciences are accustomed to speak, but with the high confidence which befits a servant of God furnished with his sure commands.”

Pastors must be students of God’s Word, continually reviewing and digging deeper into the Scriptures to discern what is right and true and essential for the equipping of the saints. The pastor’s study of the Word must be, first, for his own edification and enrichment. From there, he must consider the application of Scripture to the needs of his congregation and the temper of the times. Pastors need unhurried, uninterrupted time to read, study, and meditate in the Word of God. They must feed their congregations milk and solid food, always working to nurture the young or weak in faith, and to challenge the more mature. The more we are furnished with the sure Word of God, the more we will grow to be like Jesus, and be equipped to help others in this same calling. It falls to the shepherds of God’s flocks to lead His people in becoming furnished with the sure commands of the Word.

*Are there any areas in which you would like to improve your approach to the reading and study of God’s Word? Do you have a prayer partner or accountability partner with whom you share your studies?*

*Am I studying the Word as fully as I ought to, Lord? Do I spend as much time as I should, focus as deeply as I might, or otherwise...*

*Day 26: Evening*

## All Things by God's Word

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

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“Here, then, is the sovereign power with which the pastors of the church, by whatever name they are called, ought to be endowed. That is that they may dare boldly to do all things by God's Word; may compel all worldly power, glory, wisdom, and exaltation to yield to and obey his majesty; supported by his power, may command all from the highest even to the last; may build up Christ's household and cast down Satan's; may feed the sheep and drive away the wolves; may instruct and exhort the teachable; may accuse, rebuke, and subdue the rebellious and stubborn; may bind and loose; finally, if need be, may launch thunderbolts and lightnings; but do all things in God's Word.”

Churches today sponsor a wide range of programs, activities, and events, and feature many boards, committees, teams, and so forth. Are we careful to make sure that each of these has the sanction of God's Word, and that all the work of each of these is done in a manner consistent with and according to the plain teaching of Scripture? The Spirit has determined how best to build Christ's Church, and He will do so, working with us, only as we follow His lead from the Scriptures. We must not *substitute* the world's ways of getting things done for what the Scriptures teach; rather, to the extent that we borrow on worldly wisdom – and there is a place for this – it must be only in such a way as to *aid* in fulfilling what the Scriptures require, and *subordinate* to any clear teaching of God's Word concerning how we must build His Church.

*How confident are you that all the work of your church is being done according to the teaching of God's Word?*

*What about my own life, Lord? Are there any areas of my life where...*

*Day 27: Morning*

## Gathered in His Name

*“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Matthew 18.20*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“Christ promises nothing except to those who are gathered in his name. Let us therefore define what that means. I deny that they are gathered in his name who, casting aside God’s commandment that forbids anything to be added to or taken away from his Word, ordain anything according to their own decision; who, not content with the oracles of Scripture, that is, the sole rule of perfect wisdom, concoct some novelty out of their own heads.”

Calvin’s advice applies to all kinds of gatherings – meetings, worship, Bible study groups, church courts, even family gatherings for a meal. We can only expect to know the presence of Christ in our gatherings when we set them up according to His agenda, and not our own. Jesus will not come to our gatherings to discover how we might like Him to do our business for us. He comes to our gatherings when we, submissive to His Word and one another, enter together for the sake of the Kingdom, and for the building-up of His Body. Worship and all Christian activities are first for knowing the Lord, and glorifying Him. The enjoyment we gain from the life of faith flows from those encounters with Him, and overflows from us *by* Him like rivers of living water.

*How can we know when our various gatherings are beginning to swerve from what God has clearly revealed to us in His Word?*

*Lord, thank You for our church, and for the opportunities we have of gathering together with You. At all such times, Lord, help me to...*

*Day 27: Evening*

## In Line with the Word

*“Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree...” Acts 15.14, 15*

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“...whenever a decree of any council is brought forward, I should like men first of all diligently to ponder at what time it was held, on what issue, and with what intention, what sort of men were present; then to examine by the standard of Scripture that it dealt with – and to do this in such a way that the definition of the council may have its weight and be like a provisional judgment, yet not hinder the examination which I have mentioned.”

Calvin believed everything should be evaluated by the Word of God, even the decisions made by church bodies or ministry teams within churches. Unless our doctrines, definitions, decisions, and determinations can be shown to be in line with Scripture, and for the furthering of Christ’s Kingdom, we have no grounds to suppose that the Lord’s blessing will abide with or bless what we intend. This comes down to our daily actions and all the work of ministry we do as well, our walk with and work for the Lord. To have a good conscience before the Lord, we must review and assess all we do, to determine whether we have departed from the will of God in any way (Ps. 139.23, 24). And then we must make haste to bring everything in our lives back into line with the plain teaching of God’s Word (Ps. 119.59, 60).

*Do you have a system for reviewing the use of your time and your activities in ministry that fulfills this requirement?*

*As I think back over this day, Lord, I thank You that...*

*Day 28: Morning*

## Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction

*“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” Matthew 18.17*

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“...this is the aim of ecclesiastical jurisdiction: that offenses be resisted, and any scandal that has arisen be wiped out. In its use two things ought to be taken into account: that this spiritual power be completely separated from the right of the sword; secondly, that it be administered not by the decision of one man but by a lawful assembly. Both of these were observed when the church was purer.”

Churches today can be reluctant to wield the power and authority granted to them by the Lord Himself. We prefer to turn a blind eye to sin – whether of omission or commission – than to confront a brother. Church trials, in which elders convene to help a straying sinner and protect the flock of God from wickedness or error, are rare these days. We have substituted a false idea of *tolerance* and *forbearance* as the way to love the sinners in our midst. But we’re neither loving those who sin, nor those with whom they associate, if we take no steps to lead them back to the path of righteousness (Heb. 12.3-11). And, while we should always practice patience and compassion, our practice must not be such that sin is ignored, allowed, or worse, endorsed. Church discipline is a loving tool for improving the lives of believers and congregations alike. We must learn to use it as Christ intends, according to, and for the purposes of, His Word.

*Does your church practice church discipline? Do your members understand the Biblical teaching about the nature and practice of church discipline?*

*Lord, I know I need more discipline. My Christian brothers could help me in this. Lead me to some soul friend Lord, who can...*

*Day 28: Evening*

## Much More Necessary

*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:*

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,  
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives.” Hebrews 12.5, 6

### ***Institutes of the Christian Religion***

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

“But because some persons, in their hatred of discipline, recoil from its very name, let them understand this: if no society, indeed, no house which has even a small family, can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church, whose condition should be as ordered as possible. Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.”

Imagine an athletic team without discipline. Or a school. Or even a family. Discipline does not imply, in the first instance, punishment. Discipline is behavior undertaken to correct false or errant practices, or to improve lagging ones. Some disciplines we are called to embrace in an active manner, according to our needs: reading Scripture, prayer, worship, and so forth. Church discipline falls into this category. Other disciplines may be as the Lord chooses, and which He imposes as we require, to arrest us on a wayward path and bring us back to the way of righteousness. Discipline is much more necessary than we suppose. Every believer must take up those disciplines that help us grow spiritually and fulfill our callings in life. And every church must practice the disciplines essential for growing the body of believers into a healthy, flourishing congregation. Discipline provides the sinews that hold the members of Christ’s Body together in Him.

*How would you describe the state of such discipline in your church today? What might you do to improve the use of discipline in your church?*

*Lord, tonight I thank You in particular for the discipline of...*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.