

# THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

READINGS IN SCRIPTURE AND CHARLES BRIDGES

**T. M. MOORE**

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*A PASTOR TO PASTOR RESOURCE*



**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Christian Ministry*

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*Readings and Reflections from Scripture and Charles Bridges*  
T. M. Moore  
A Pastor to Pastor Resource

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## Introduction

Welcome to *The Christian Ministry*, 28 days of meditations taken from the work of Charles Bridges, a leader in the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church in 19<sup>th</sup> century England.

In these excerpts from *The Christian Ministry* Bridges provides an overview and summary of the calling, character, and work of the pastor. His insights can serve as an excellent review for our work and lead us to reflect on the Word of God for improving our callings.

No matter what your work in ministry – whether as a pastor, shepherd, lay leader, or teacher – Bridges can help you gain a better sense of what the Lord has called us to do in caring for His sheep and building His Church.

Incorporate these brief meditations into your daily devotions. Share them with your church leaders or other pastor friends. Let this great leader from our Christian past speak into your present, and listen as the Spirit of God leads you to fan into flame His calling on your life.

The entries in this, as in every *Pastor to Pastor* study, are arranged for a month of readings, one reading per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We're happy to provide these readings at no charge for you to use, personally and with your staff or church leaders. Please feel free to make copies for your leadership team or to forward the link or PDF to as many people as you like. If you find these meditations beneficial, we hope you'll consider making a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe to help support this and our many other outreaches to the Church.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord's work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

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Week 1, Day 1

## Three Grand Repositories

*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...* Ephesians 4.11, 12

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter I<sup>1</sup>**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The Great Head of the Church has ordained three grand repositories of his truth. *In the Scriptures* he has preserved it by his Providence against all hostile attacks. *In the hearts of Christians* he has maintained it by the Almighty energy of His Spirit – even under every outward token of general apostacy. *And in the Christian Ministry* he has deposited ‘the treasure in earthen vessels’ for the edification and enriching of the Church in successive ages.”

Charles Bridges was a priest in the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. His insights into the work of pastoral ministry – and what can hinder its effectiveness – are as valuable today as they were when first penned nearly 200 years ago. God has, indeed, deposited His Truth in earthen vessels; and this is precisely the way that thanks, praise, glory, and honor go up only to Him, as faithful ministers make strong disciples and build healthy, growing churches. You have been entrusted with the Word of truth. How should this affect your prayers? Your daily duties? Your relationships with the Lord’s sheep?

*Next steps: How do you evaluate the state of God’s Truth in your church? In your own life? Talk with some of your church leaders about these questions.*

Week 1, Day 2

## Entrusted with Blessing

*...pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man...* Ephesians 4.11-13

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter I**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“This sacred office is administered by agents, Divinely-called through the medium of lawful authority, and entrusted with the most responsible and enriching blessing; rendering the highest possible serve to their fellow men, because *that* most nearly connected with the glory of the Saviour...The privileges communicated to the Church by its instrumentality, are union with her glorious Head, and the communion of the several members with others in their diversified relations, and mutual dependencies. Thus the body ‘cometh in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man.’ Each member contributes to the establishment of the system.”

For Bridges, a healthy church was one growing in unity and maturity, as each member, equipped for ministry, took up his or her appointed task of service in the Body of Christ. The calling of pastors and teachers is to

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<sup>1</sup> All the excerpts for this series are from Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry, with An Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1830, 1991).

lead people to greater communion with Christ and with one another. Church health and growth, as Bridges pursued it, was first *qualitative* and only secondly *quantitative*.

*Next steps: How do you measure the qualitative health of your congregation? What should “unity” and “maturity” look like in your particular church? Download the free assessment tool, [“Twelve Questions that Could Change Your Church.”](#)*

Week 1, Day 3

## A Vision of Influence

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days  
That the mountain of the LORD's house  
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,  
And shall be exalted above the hills;  
And peoples shall flow to it... Micah 4.1*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter I**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“What an extensive medium of pouring forth the light and life of the Gospel upon a benighted world! What a vast and valuable body of moral influence would it spread throughout its widely expanded sphere! How would its wise and kindly control of ‘the madness of the people’ impose a check even upon the political convulsions of the earth! And what an unlimited flow of national, social, and individual blessing would be communicated to our own, and to every land through this divinely-appointed channel!”

In a course on pastoral ministry once my students were complaining about the pastors they had known and observed in churches – they didn’t seem very energetic or fruitful. “Is this the best we can do?” asked one. Then another asked, “Do you think pastors are working up to the level of their ability?” I answered, “No, I don’t. Most pastors are very gifted and eager to serve. They do not lack ability or desire. But they are working, many of them, up to the level, not of their *ability*, but of their *vision*.” We need more pastors with vision like Charles Bridges and Micah.

*Next steps: Can you summarize your vision for your church in a brief sentence? Put succinctly, what do you expect to be the impact of your church in its community and the world? How would you church leaders answer these questions?*

Week 1, Day 4

## Who, Indeed?

*For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 2 Corinthians 2.15, 16*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter I**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“Who is sufficient for these things? Who, whether man or angel, ‘is sufficient’ to open ‘the wisdom of God in a mystery’ – to speak what in its full extent is ‘unspeakable’ – to make known that which ‘passeth knowledge’ – to bear the fearful weight of the care of souls? Who hath skill and strength proportionate? Who

has a mind and temper to direct and sustain so vast a work? If our Great Master had not himself answered these appalling questions by his promise – ‘My grace is sufficient for thee;’ and if the experience of faith did not demonstrably prove, that ‘our sufficiency is of God;’ who, with an enlightened apprehension, could ever enter upon such an awful service; or, if entered, continue in it?”

The minister’s sufficiency is only and always from God and Christ. He only is our All in all. When we start relying on our own cleverness, gifts, wiles, or charm, or the “proven methods” and “successful programs” we’ve learned and run in the past, we will soon find the sufficiency of the Lord – and His presence – being withdrawn. God has tasked ministers with an awesome responsibility and charge, and He intends for them to draw all their wisdom and strength from Him in the prosecution of His calling.

*Next steps: What does it mean for you to draw your “sufficiency” from the Lord? How is this obvious to others? Ask a few of them.*

*Week 1, Day 5*

## Seeking the Right Results

*“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16.18*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter II**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The dignity however of the sacred office belongs to a kingdom ‘not of this world.’ It is distinguished therefore, not by the passing glitter of this world’s vanity, but by eternal results, productive, even in their present influence, of the most solid and enduring happiness.”

The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Since the church, the community of God’s Kingdom citizens and ambassadors, is the agent of the Kingdom, these are what we should be seeking in and through our churches. It’s harder, to be sure, to labor for these spiritual and heavenly results – so much easier just to count heads! But this is what God expects of those who are called to the office of pastoral ministry: seek the Kingdom and His righteousness; everything else will fall into place.

*Next steps: Is it possible to “measure” such Kingdom outcomes? Or to evaluate the state of your church by such criteria? How might you try to do so? What would your leaders say?*

*Week 1, Day 6*

## Dignity of Character

*“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.” John 13.16*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter II**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“A sense of the dignity of our office – accurately formed, carefully maintained, and habitually exercised – is therefore of the highest importance. It elevates the standard of Christian consistency even in the prospective consideration and choice of the work. For what is unsuitable to the Ministerial character is obviously

unsuitable to the probationer for the Ministry. In the actual discharge of duty, the mind will thus be excited to a more solid and devoted consecration; and the whole man will be gradually formed in this heavenly mould – exalted, not elated. Dignity of character will thus correspond with dignity of station.”

We hear a good deal about the failure of character on the part of ministers these days; why don't we hear more about the dignity of their character? Why don't more young men aspire to become ministers, like their pastor, when they grow up? Our personal example is one of three tools the Lord has provided us – along with the Word and prayer – for doing this important work (1 Pet. 5.1-3). The pastor must remember that he, like the people he serves, is called first of all to *be* something (Acts 1.8), and only in *being* such a person, to assay anything at all for the Kingdom of God.

*Next steps: What temptations particularly assail a pastor's or a shepherd's character during any given week? How can we prepare to meet and overcome these (Rom. 12.21)? Talk with your fellow shepherds about these questions.*

*Week 1, Day 7*

## The Ministry of the Word

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2.15*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The ministry of the word was ordained for the planting and watering of the church... Thus has this great ordinance of the Gospel regard to the continual progress of the church, both in its collective body, and in the several states of its individual members. It was given ‘for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’ There was not only a foundation to be laid, but a building to be raised.”

When I fire my Kentucky long rifle, if I want to hit anything, I have to line up two sights – one next to my eye, and one at the end of the barrel. If we want our ministries to fulfill their God-given purpose, we have to aim both at equipping the saints, individually, and building up the congregation in unity and maturity. No matter the activity we're involved in, get these two sights lined up and in harmony, then squeeze the trigger oh so gently.

*Next steps: What process do you follow for setting goals for your ministry? For preaching and teaching? How do you evaluate the results? Discuss these questions with your church leaders.*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Bridges seems to have had a very high view of the calling to be a shepherd of the Lord's flocks. Do you think people today generally have such a high view of church leaders? Why or why not?
2. What is the role of vision in leading a church? Where does vision come from? At what does it aim? How is vision developed, disseminated, and used in building your church?

*The Christian Ministry*

3. Pastors and shepherds have three tools for doing their work: The Word, prayer, and their personal example. Briefly reflect on the various ways you use these tools each week in making disciples and building the local church:
4. How do you define discipleship? In your mind, what constitutes a healthy, growing church? Do your church leaders agree on these?
5. What are your goals for these meditations? What do you hope to learn? How do you hope to grow or improve in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

*Week 2, Day 1*

## Channel of Communication

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

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The primary use of this holy function [pastoral ministry] is, as we have already observed, the channel of communication from the Head to the several members of the body. Its more specific uses may be readily collected from the various scriptural illustrations of the office – each bearing a relation to the nature of the ministration, and the necessities of the charge.”

The fact is, this is the way many lay people look at their pastors – all the time. They regard their pastor as *the* authority on all things related to the Christian life. The pastor is the most constant source of understanding about the Lord Jesus, His Kingdom, His will for the Church, the meaning of discipleship, and the way to follow Jesus. And pastors and shepherds are always communicating, not just when they’re preaching or teaching. We must always be mindful and make certain of the messages we are sending to the people in our care. Are they the ones Jesus wants them to receive?

*Next steps: How does this calling to communicate from Christ to your congregation affect your approach to ministry each day? Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17 with this in mind.*

*Week 2, Day 2*

## The Pastor as Shepherd

*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5.2, 3*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“If the church be called a flock, the minister is the pastor to ‘seek that which is lost – to strengthen the diseased – to heal the sick – to bring again that which was driven away;’ in a word, to shepherd the flock in all the exercises of tenderness, consideration, and care, that belong to this endearing character.”

In John 10 Jesus identified six key functions of the Good Shepherd: know the sheep, lead the sheep, lay down your life for the sheep, defend the sheep, give eternal life to the sheep, and bring other sheep into the fold. These days there’s not much of such shepherding to be found in our churches. We prefer to run programs, organize committees, and let the sheep feed where (and if) they will. Can we possibly hope to build the Lord’s church if we choose not to shepherd His flock in the way He has described? Do you think it would be possible to organize one’s entire ministry around these shepherding ideas, found in John 10?

*Next steps: Meditate on Ezekiel 34.1-10. How did the shepherds of Israel fail the people of God? Talk with some of your fellow shepherds about this text.*

Week 2, Day 3

## Manager of the Household

*[The shepherd] rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)... 1 Timothy 3.4, 5*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“If the family of Christ be an household, the Minister is ‘the faithful and wise steward,’ who dispenses the provision of the house according to the necessities of its several members.”

It would seem to be fairly important that, like the Good Shepherd, pastors take the time to get to know the people in their care, and the overall state of their congregations with respect to the criteria of a healthy, growing church. How can we dispense God’s provision to their several needs if we don’t know those needs? Here we can understand why Jesus, in John 10, began His explanation of the work of shepherding by saying that the Good Shepherd knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him. Can we say as much?

*Next steps: How much of your pastoral work is devoted to getting to know the people in your care? And do they feel like they know you, as Jesus said they should?*

Week 2, Day 4

## Watchman, Worker

*I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;  
They shall never hold their peace day or night.  
Your who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent,  
And give Him no rest till He establishes  
And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isaiah 62.6, 7*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“If the Church of God be a city, he [the pastor] is the watchman to wake and warn slumberers of their peril. If it be a husbandry, he is the ‘labourer,’ to plant and water the soil – to cleanse the earth – to watch the growth of the plan – and instrumentally to bring forward the harvest.”

Jesus said the Good Shepherd defends the sheep and also leads them out to where they can feed and grow strong. What do the people of God need to be defended against in our day? False teaching? Temptation? Their own sinful inclinations? And are we making sure that all the people are being fed, and producing fruit in their lives? We must be prepared to give an accounting for our stewardship. Let us look to our Good Shepherd and His example in all things. And let us plead continually with the Lord to make true disciples of those we are called to serve.

*Next steps: Isaiah’s watchmen prayed continuously for the city, so that it would become a praise in the earth. How would you describe your prayers for the people in your care?*

*Week 2, Day 5*

## Master Builder

*According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 1 Corinthians 3.10*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“If it [the Church] be a building, he [the pastor] is the ‘Master-builder,’ to build upon the ‘sure foundation’ lively stones – a spiritual house – ‘growing into an holy temple of the Lord, builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.’”

Jesus literally gave eternal life to His disciples – as to us. But the shepherds of God’s flock today do the same, to the extent that we guide and encourage the people of God to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Phil. 2.12, 13; 2 Pet. 3.18). Each church member is a living stone in the temple the Lord is building. The pastor and shepherds prepare each stone for its place and oversee the building of the entire congregation in unity and maturity in the Lord (Eph. 4.11-16).

*Next steps: What goals do you pursue for “making disciples”? How do you measure the overall state of health of your congregation? Talk with some of your fellow shepherds about these questions.*

*Week 2, Day 6*

## Ambassador

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us... 2 Corinthians 5.20*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“If there be a treaty of peace to be negotiated between the Majesty of heaven and a world of rebels, he [the pastor] is the ambassador, entrusted with ‘the Ministry of reconciliation;’ and praying them in Christ’s stead – ‘Be ye reconciled unto God.’”

Ambassadors spend most of their time on the turf of foreign peoples, serving their President and country. Pastors are to be ambassadors for Christ. We can’t do this without being out among the lost, speaking on behalf of our King and His Kingdom. Moreover, we cannot expect the people of God take seriously the work of bringing other sheep into the fold – bringing others to peace with God – unless we are leading the way by our example and our prayers.

*Next steps: What is your present approach to fulfilling your ministry by doing the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4.5)?*

Week 2, Day 7

## A Sacred Institution

*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*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter III**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“We do not limit the infinite extent and power of Divine grace, when we speak of the necessity of the Christian Ministry. These uses of the sacred institution are not and cannot be necessary to God, as if he were unable to work without them. But they are such as he has appointed and made necessary in the constituted order of means, for the accomplishment of his own purposes of mercy to the world.”

Pastor, God doesn't need you. But it pleases Him to *use* you, and to give you the joy of serving His flock and exercising oversight of His people. He laid down His life for those sheep, and, as Jesus pointed out, so must we. If a Christian is “not his own” because he is bought with a price, pastors are even more so not their own. Shepherding the saints and overseeing the flock are indeed a sacred calling and institution.

*Next steps: Pastor, who encourages you in your work? Do you have another pastor friend with whom you pray? Would you like one? Contact me at [tmmore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmore@ailbe.org), and let's talk.*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. This week Charles Bridges shows us several ways of thinking about the work of pastors and shepherds. In one or two words, summarize each of the following:
  - Communicator:
  - Shepherd:
  - Manager:
  - Master Builder:
  - Ambassador:
2. Go back to each of these. Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how would you assess the state of your ministry at this time? Why did you choose the numbers you did?
3. Is it possible to shepherd the flock of God without knowing something about the spiritual condition and life situation of each of the sheep? How can pastors and shepherds obtain such knowledge?
4. Charles Bridges refers to the work of shepherding as a “sacred institution.” Why? Do you agree?
5. Is your thinking about the work of pastoral ministry changing in any ways? Explain:

*Prayer:*

Week 3, Day 1

## Our Own Worst Enemy

*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you..*  
1 Timothy 4.16

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter IV**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“But, after all, the greatest difficulties [in ministry] *derive their origin and power from ourselves*...It is not easy to overcome our natural love of ease, our indisposition to self-denying devotedness, and our false tenderness in flinching from the declaration of unpalatable truths. Were we angels by nature as well as by office, the difficulty would be of little account. But, while we bear the marks of our apostasy, we cannot advance, without a constant and sometimes painful, effort.”

Paul called on Timothy to maintain a constant self-watch, for he knew, as did Bridges, that the greatest hindrances to our ministry come from ourselves. We must check every inclination to sin, every unloving attitude, every fleshly lust at the very moment of its appearing; and we must give equal diligence in search the Scriptures and waiting on the Lord for the content and power our ministries require.

*Next steps: How do you exercise this calling to the self-watch? Is anyone watching over your soul with you? For a brochure to guide you in this, write me at [tmmore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmore@ailbe.org).*

Week 3, Day 2

## The Pastor's Sufficiency

*And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* 2 Corinthians 12.9

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter V**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“*How ample also are our sources of encouragement within the compass of our work!* Did we depend upon the failing support of human agency, or upon the energy of moral suasion – we should cry out, prostrate in heartless despondency – ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ But the instant recollection – that ‘our sufficiency is of God’ – ‘lifts up our hearts in the ways’ and work of the Lord... We have the fullest assurance, that ‘the life-giving Spirit’ employs our Ministry as the vehicle of conveying his heavenly influence ‘to open blind eyes,’ and to quicken the spiritually dead.”

Paul warned us against comparing ourselves with others in the work of ministry (2 Cor. 10.12). If we try to derive our sense of sufficiency in ministry from the numbers of people we attract or their glowing responses to our teaching, or if we think our ministry will only matter when we're more like the megachurch on the other side of town, then we are not wise. Our sufficiency in ministry – to guide, empower, and prosper our ministry, and to assure that we are being faithful – must come only from the Lord.

*Next steps: How do you receive encouragement from the Lord in your ministry? How do you encourage other ministers in theirs? Talk with your fellow shepherds about these questions.*

*Week 3, Day 3*

## A Combination of Opposites

*For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, and with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you. 2 Corinthians 2.4*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VI**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“In ‘considering the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ,’ we witness a most harmonious combination of seeming opposite characteristics. The Ministry of our Lord was distinguished by the dignity of God, and the sympathy of a man and a brother – by the authority of the commissioned delegate of the Father, and yet by the humility of a servant, who ‘came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.’ If ‘he taught as one having authority,’ yet they were ‘gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,’ tempered with ‘the meekness of wisdom’ and the ‘gentleness’ of love.”

There is an art to pastoral ministry which requires the skilled application of seemingly opposing tools and resources to achieve the desired outcome. Just as the physician of the body must sometimes inflict pain in order to restore health, or to require exertion in order to restore rest, so the pastor must be able to speak hard words in love, require great exertions in order to acquire rest and peace, and promise joy by troubling complacent souls. He can only do so if such speaking comes from one whom all know to love and care for them abundantly.

*Next steps: Pastors need to continue improving these diverse skills. What is your approach to the ongoing development of your pastoral art?*

*Week 3, Day 4*

## Holy Joy

*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5.2, 3*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VI**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The Scripture justly insists – that Ministers should be ‘holy’ – in a peculiar sense men of God – men taught of God – men consecrated to God by a daily surrender of their time and talents to his service – men of singleness of purpose – living their work – living altogether but for one end; and for the promotion of this end, ‘moved by none of the afflictions that await them; neither counting their life dear to them, so that they might finish their course with joy, and the Ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.’ Such was the Apostle Paul, the living exemplar of his own instructions...”

What are the obstacles that keep us from pursuing holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1)? Are we so busy in ministry that we cannot take the time for periodic retreats throughout the day into the presence of the Holy One of Israel? Are we so in the thrall of silly diversions and mindless distractions that we are unable to discipline our minds to be fixed on the things that are above? We will not succeed as shepherds unless we follow our Good Shepherd and present an example of holiness before the people we serve (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

*Next steps: Holiness is best pursued with the company and assistance of others. Do you have a soul friend? Are you a soul friend to others? How might pastors be of more help to one another in this important matter?*

*Week 3, Day 5*

## Wide Learning

*...of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do... 1 Chronicles 12.32*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The Apostle’s own practice explains his rule to embrace the wide field of *General Study*. His introduction of heathen aphorism in the illustration or application of sacred truth proves, that he apprehended no necessary debasement of its purity from an intermixture of human learning. Stephen mentions it to the honour, not to the discredit, of the Jewish Lawgiver, that he was ‘learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians’...But it is also true that God is pleased to make himself known by the use of means. And when the means are used in subordination to his grace, he will honour the means. Let us then honour human learning. Every branch of knowledge, which a good man possesses, he may apply to some useful purpose.”

Pastors must minister the Word of God in a wide variety of contexts to a wide range of people, whose daily lives take them into various fields of information and activity. The more a pastor knows of his people, and the more he understands about their fields of endeavor and interest, and the times in which we live, the more effective he will be at speaking the truth to the things that are closest to their hearts. To this end, general reading and study must be part of our ongoing preparation for ministry.

*Next steps: What are you presently doing to fulfill this challenge? How does general reading and study fit into your ongoing preparation?*

*Week 3, Day 6*

## Make the Most of Your Time

*So teach us to number our days,  
That we may gain a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90.12*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“Seneca has long since taught us, that time is the only thing, of which ‘it is a virtue to be covetous.’ But here we should be, like the master with his money – saving it with care and spending it with caution. It is well to have a book for every spare hour, to improve what Boyle calls the ‘parentheses or interludes of time: which, coming between more important engagements, are wont to be lost by most men for want of a value for them: and even by good men, for want of skill to preserve them...’”

Frequently, when I have taught time management classes, I ask people to keep track of their time, in thirty minute increments, for a week, writing down everything they do in all their conscious moments. Unfailingly, people are shocked to discover how much time they waste on unproductive and frivolous things – not minutes, but hours. Edwards wrote that time is our most precious gift from God. We must handle it as such.

*Next steps: What is your approach to planning your time and to evaluating the use you make of it each day (Eph. 5.15-17)? Write me at [tmmoore@aillbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@aillbe.org), and I’ll send you a brochure to help you in this effort.*

*Week 3, Day 7*

## Stay in the Word!

*Your words were found, and I ate them,  
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart,  
For I am called by your name,  
O LORD, God of hosts. Jeremiah 15.16*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“Habits of General study, however well regulated and perseveringly maintained, will reflect no light or spiritual apprehension of the Gospel, independent of the special study of the sacred volume. Nor is it sufficient merely to combine these courses of study. Their connexion is not that of *equality*, but of the direct *subserviency* of General study to this specific purpose – a more enlightened and fruitful study of the word of God.”

Over the years, I’ve had occasion to talk with many pastors, and I’m always surprised at how little the private study of God’s Word is a part of their daily disciplines. Pastors tend to elide their spiritual lives into their work lives. Most of their reading and study of Scripture is for preaching or teaching; very little is for the sheer necessity and inestimable delight of feeding on the Bread of God. Men and brethren, these things ought not be.

*Next steps: In your own walk with the Lord, do you find your time in the Word sufficient to keep drawing you closer and closer to Him?*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. In this week’s readings Bridges reflects on some of the traits that must characterize a pastor or shepherd. Summarize each of these:
  - Circumspect:
  - Dependent:
  - Holy:
  - Learned:
  - Diligent:
  - Spiritual:
2. Again, rate yourself, 1 to 10, in each of these traits. See if you can identify one or two steps to take in order to improve in each of these areas.
3. Do you agree with Bridges on the necessity of pastors being students of a “General Learning”? Why or why not?
4. How can a pastor or shepherd continue to grow in general learning and keep his or her learning within the boundaries of Scripture?
5. How can you make better use of your time each week for personal prayer, reading, and waiting on the Lord.

*Prayer:*

*Week 4, Day 1*

## The Importance of Scripture (1)

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...* Colossians 3.16

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“In the hidden book of Scripture, and no where else, are opened the secrets of the more sacred wisdom. Whatever is not drawn from them – whatever is not built upon them – whatever does not most exactly accord with them – however it may recommend itself by the appearance of the most sublime wisdom, or rest upon ancient tradition, consent of learned men, or the weight of plausible argument – is vain, futile, and in short, a very lie. ‘To the law and to the testimony. If any one speak not according to this word, it is because there is not light in them.’”

These days, many influences bear upon a pastor with respect to how he ought to order the work of ministry. If he is to sort these out as God intends, the minister must be, in the first place, a man of God’s Word; and he must strive to conduct all his ministry according to the Word of God. Ideas, examples, programs, and schemes fly at the minister every day, recommending themselves as “the next big thing.” But if it is not according to the Word of God, it is, “in short, a very lie.”

*Next steps: What is your practice in letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly? How do you bring the guidance of God’s Word to your ministry? How do you encourage your fellow shepherds in this discipline?*

*Week 4, Day 2*

## The Importance of Scripture (2)

*Your word is a lamp to my feet  
And a light to my path.* Psalm 119.105

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The attentive study of the Scriptures has a sort of constraining power. It fills the mind with the most splendid form of heavenly truth, which it teaches with purity, solidity, certainty, and without the least mixture of error. It soothes the mind with an inexpressible sweetness; it satisfies the sacred hunger and thirst for knowledge with flowing rivers of honey and butter; it penetrates into the innermost heart with irresistible influence; it imprints its own testimony so firmly upon the mind, that the believing soul rests upon it with the same security, as if it had been carried up into the third heaven, and heard it from God’s own mouth; it touches all the affections, and breathes the sweetest fragrance of holiness upon the pious reader, even though he may not perhaps comprehend the full extent of his reading.”

What could be sweeter, or more beneficial to ourselves and our ministries, than for us to spend regular, devoted time in Scripture, seeking the face of God, to see the glory of Jesus there (2 Cor. 4.6)? Bridges explains that our time in the Word should reach us heart, mind, conscience, and life. If this is not happening in us, how can we expect to happen in the people we serve?

*Next steps: How do you respond to your time in God’s Word in your mind? Your heart? Your conscience? Your everyday life?*

*Week 4, Day 3*

## The Importance of Scripture (3)

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2.15*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part III, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“But time must be found for the spiritual feeding upon Scriptural truths, as well as for a critical investigation of their meaning, or for a Ministerial application of their message. For if we should study the Bible more as Ministers than as Christians – more to find matter for the instruction of our people, than food for the nourishment of our own souls; we neglect to place ourselves at the feet of our Divine Teacher; our communion with him is cut off; and we become mere formalists in our sacred profession.”

Ministry that does not flow from a life of clinging to Jesus will soon enough become pragmatic, tedious, and merely formal. We only “rightly handle” the Word of truth when we handle it for the daily revival and feeding of our souls first of all. Having someone in our lives to encourage and hold us accountable in this matter can be a great help in keeping it as a priority in our lives.

*Next steps: Do you think journaling would help you to slow down your reading of God’s Word and let it sink more deeply into your soul?*

*Week 4, Day 4*

## A Work of Prayer (1)

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

### **The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter VII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“The Christian Ministry is a work of faith; and, that it may be a work of faith, it must be a work of prayer. Prayer obtains faith, while faith in its reaction quickens to increasing earnestness of prayer. Thus spiritual, enlightened, and encouraging views of the Ministry flow from the habit of diligently waiting on God.”

Along with Scripture, prayer is foundational for the minister. In my experience with ministers, this is an area sorely lacking in their daily discipline. “Too busy, I guess,” is the typical explanation for why ministers don’t pray any more than they do. Paul’s exhortation to pray without ceasing is not mere rhetoric; but we will never get to that until prayer becomes the priority it should be in our walk with the Lord.

*Next steps: What have you found to be helpful in improving your prayer life? With whom can you share this in the week to come?*

*Week 4, Day 5*

## A Work of Prayer (2)

*[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention you in my prayers... Ephesians 1.16*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part II, chapter V**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“Prayer is the ornament of the priesthood, the leading feature of our character. Without prayer, a Minister is of no use to the church, nor of any advantage to mankind. He sows; and God gives no increase. He preaches; and his words are only like ‘sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.’ He recites the praises of God; while ‘his heart is far from Him.’ It is prayer alone, then, that gives the whole strength and efficacy to our different administrations: and that man ceases, if I may use the expression, to be a public Minister from the time he ceases to pray.”

We get the impression that Paul spent a good deal of time in prayer. It would be interesting to go to school with him on this subject some time; I, for one, know that I would be found wanting. It is presumptuous to take up any aspect of the work of ministry without prayer; it is foolish to engage any aspect of everyday life without it. Let us encourage one another in this highest privilege and calling of the Christian life.

*Next steps: How would you like to see your prayer life improve? What would be the first step? Talk with a soul friend about these questions.*

*Week 4, Day 6*

## The Public Man (1)

*“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5.16*

### **The Christian Ministry: Part III, chapter II**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“Our Divine Master never intended, that we should confine our religion to the services of the sanctuary. As men of God, we should have it at heart and in hand, spreading a spiritual savour over the common walks of society, and stamping us with the mark of confessors of Christ in the midst of a world, who hold him still in the same contempt, as when eighteen centuries since they nailed him to the cross. There must be some defect if we do not bring an atmosphere with us, which is more or less instantaneously felt.”

“...bring an atmosphere with us...” Don’t you love that image? We may not always be engaged in works of ministry, but we are at all times followers of Jesus Christ. That should certainly affect every aspect of our lives – every word and deed, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. The more consistent the minister is in living his faith in every situation, the greater is the likelihood those for whom he cares will do so as well.

*Next steps: What does it mean for you to have your faith “at heart and in hand” in the non-ministerial areas of your life?*

*Week 4, Day 7*

## The Public Man (2)

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?”* Matthew 5.13

### **The Christian Ministry: Part III, chapter VIII**

*Charles Bridges (1794-1869)*

“We should each of us consider ourselves as the appointed luminary in our respective spheres – placed as the centre of the system – the source of light and warmth to all within our circle. We should thus be ‘burning’ as well as ‘shining lights.’ We need not always blaze; but we must always burn. There must be love as well as light – the light of holy love.”

What a powerful image: “the appointed luminary in our respective spheres”! As the sun brings light, warmth, and life to the world, so we are called to light the world we inhabit, wherever we are, whatever we’re doing. This is what we refer to as our [Personal Mission Field](#). The Christian life is full-time work, not just for the minister, but for those we are called to equip as followers of Jesus Christ. Let them see in us what we strive to help them become.

*Next steps: Would the people you encounter each day consider you as a “luminary” to warm and enlighten them? Why or why not?*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Building on last week’s readings, this week Bridges fleshed out the three tools available to pastors in their walk with and work for the Lord. Summarize the role of each:
  - The Word of God:
  - Prayer:
  - The minister’s personal life:
2. Again, assess yourself, 1 to 10, in each of these areas. Where would you like to begin seeing some immediate improvement? What steps will you take?
3. Have you mapped out your [Personal Mission Field](#)? Do you think this could be an effective tool for disciple-making? Why or why not?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from these readings and meditations in Charles Bridges?
5. How are you planning to put that to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

## 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.

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Thank you.