

FROM SOLA TO SOLI: FOCUSING FAITHFULNESS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE  
PASTORAL MINISTRY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WI

MARCH 7, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

There is a question every pastor must ask himself every week: “Have I been faithful?” Faithfulness is God’s standard for his servants, but what exactly constitutes faithfulness may be another question. This thesis seeks to explore the concept of faithfulness in the ministry and pair it with the concept of excellence to help shape a healthy ministry. The thesis starts by rooting itself in grace, the core of our faith. Following that are definitions of faithfulness and excellence, along with preliminary suggestions for focusing faithfulness and pursuing excellence in parish ministry.

J. J.

## INTRODUCTION

At the completion of his work, on the bottom of a page heavy with ink, Johann Sebastian Bach would write three letters: S. D. G., short for *Soli Deo Gloria*. Whether he wrote an oratorio, cantata, or concerto, the same letters stretched wide across the page. His large abbreviations gave but a small indication of his fervor. As a devout Lutheran, Bach dedicated his massive masterpieces to one end: the glory of God. Growing up two centuries after the Lutheran Reformation, Bach knew his Lutheran roots. He knew *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fide*. The music he wrote *Soli Deo Gloria* was simply the fruit of that.

At the core, this thesis deals with that very thing: gospel-motivated fruits to the glory of God. This thesis addresses delicate questions concerning work done in the parish: how should we speak about quality, and what terms should we use in describing our work? Which ministerial standards are God-given and which are man-made? How do we as Lutherans use these terms in a balanced way to shape a healthy and faithful ministry? With a gospel-oriented approach, this thesis will address such questions by carefully defining the terms “excellence” and “faithfulness” and examining their relationship to one another. It will also provide practical insight gleaned from research in the areas of business management and church leadership.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, I propose that Lutheran pastors can properly and profitably use terms such as “excellence” as they pursue faithfulness in their ministries to the glory of God.

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1. The distinction between management and leadership in this thesis is in keeping with secular literature on the topic. Management generally speaks of efficiency, whereas leadership pertains to direction.

## PART I: THE LUTHERAN “WHY”

### **Disclaimers and Discouragement**

There was what should have been, and what actually was. The service ended in an hour or so, but then came the car ride back. It bubbled out, “Sorry, I thought it was a little weird as well.” That was the apology. Then came the damage control, “I’m sure they’re working hard on improvement,” or, “I’m sure pastor’s just busy this time of the year.” Finally comes the consolation, “At least God’s Word was present.”

The scenario may sound familiar. That nightmare has played out in my own head dozens of times. Did I craft the sermon well enough? Was I friendly enough, but not too friendly to the visitors? How often did I leave members making excuses to the friends they invited? Was I faithful this week or not?

I imagine many pastors (and seminarians) find within themselves an odd knot of frustration and aspiration, of grand inspiration and deep, personal disappointment. Different pastors carry the weight of the different crosses. They and their people live in constant sinner-saint tension; they carry the burdens of serving in a sinful world. They have their own unique pressures; all have their own unique wishes for ministry. Before them lie the various tasks of ministry, some mundane, others complex and deep. Assuming they are faithful, they desire to handle these tasks well and serve God’s people to the best of their abilities.

The reality of life in a sinful world, however, may quickly corrode enthusiasm. Crises come without warning, from both the church and the home. Various crosses push hard on pastors, so perhaps they discard some of their expectations. Tough ministry grinds away at a pastor until he finds himself in a rut. As Daniel Deutschlander writes, “He thinks that no one notices.

He thinks that it doesn't make any difference."<sup>2</sup> Professor Richard Gurgel describes the feeling this way: "That is the slow leak of zeal that finally leaves in its wake someone who spends years pastoring on autopilot. Zeal is replaced by a dull resignation to mediocrity in ministry. It is a dull discouragement that comes when a pastor has, for all practical purposes, lost confidence in the gospel to make any real difference in his congregation."<sup>3</sup>

The mention of "excellence" to such a man may seem cruel, elitist, or unrealistic. Yet the point of this thesis is not to condemn, put down, or rate ministries. To do so and expect change might be like beating Balaam's donkey and expecting it to move before addressing the obstacles first. Instead, this thesis aims to sink its readers into the thick riches of the gospel, the very power of God (Rom 1:16 NIV), to rethink faithfulness and excellence, and to offer practical suggestions to execute ministerial tasks with excellence.

### **Finding the Lutheran "Why"**

One might imagine a number of complex responses to the use of the term "excellence" in the pastoral ministry. Feelings of unease might arise for some; for others, optimism. Perhaps young pastors would be full of zeal and enthusiasm. Perhaps older pastors with some experience might hesitate. Any of them would appreciate quality work, but most of them would know it's not that simple. Quality, excellence, faithfulness—whatever term we use—each carries a high cost. Before we encourage Lutheran excellence, we must start with the Lutheran "why."

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2. Daniel Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2008), 209.

3. Richard Gurgel, "You Were Ordained for a Life of Growth: Pursuing Ministry Excellence by the Gospel and for the Gospel" (essay written for Grow in Grace, May 2011), 3.

Bestselling author and business consultant Simon Sinek makes a living off cutting to the heart of a matter. “Why?” He writes, “...What is your purpose, cause or belief? WHY does your company exist? WHY do you get out of bed every morning? And WHY should anyone care?”<sup>4</sup> So why strive for excellence in the ministry? For that matter, why think about the ministry at all? Failing to answer this question may leave us drifting; answering it affords clarity of purpose and motivation.

So how might we answer? A standard response to this question might be, “We exist to teach people about Jesus and help them grow in their Christian faith.” According to Sinek, this would classify as a “what,” not a “why.” Many Christian churches teach about Jesus. Many pastors preach and teach; many members follow them in praying prayers and singing songs. The “what” is mostly the same. The “how” may vary—some traditional, others contemporary, some emphasizing one facet of ministry, others another, and so on. The methods, the structure of the church, the philosophy of ministry—all of these might differ. But what about the “why”

Perhaps the question is too vague. Any confessional Lutheran pastor would (hopefully) give an excellent answer about the role of the gospel in ministry with a more precise question. But perhaps the question can help us take a step back and freshen our perspective and approach.

### **A Lutheran Focus on Grace**

The “why,” the root, the cause, and the case for Lutheranism is grace. The early Sunday school definition of grace was “undeserved love,” but even such a simple idea still defies total compre-

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4. Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 39.



hension. This grace is neither a carrot nor a stick—it never depended on human behavior. Neither a threat nor a manipulation, it is simply grace, that disposition of God that moves him to love the unlovable in unthinkable ways. As Deutschlander puts it,

Grace is a unique kind of love that God alone has. It is not a quantity to be measured; for nothing in God is capable of measure or limitation. It is rather an attitude, a disposition in God, by which he loves with no other reason for it than God himself. God loves because that is his nature, that is his essence. God loves, not because the object is lovable but because he is loving.... Thus the whole of our salvation rests on this attribute of God.<sup>5</sup>

Imagine that—a hope built on the infinite love of an almighty God. Of all the attributes of God, perhaps the Christian spends more time pondering the nature of this one more than any other. As another author put it, “Grace is unconditional acceptance given to an undeserving person by an unobligated giver. It is one-way love.”<sup>6</sup>

Not every Christian denomination understands grace the same way. The Catholic Catechism defines grace as “the undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children.”<sup>7</sup> Additionally, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center states that 52% of Evangelicals believe that salvation is through faith *and works*.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, one author describes much modern-day preaching as “preachers telling one-legged people to jump higher and run faster.”<sup>9</sup> Still elsewhere, Christianity has turned into what Christian Smith calls “moralistic, therapeutic

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5. Daniel Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2015), 111–112.

6. Tullian Tchividjian, *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World* (David C. Cook, 2013), ch. 1, “An Exhausted World.”

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 538.

8. “U.S. Protestants Are Not Defined by Reformation-Era Controversies 500 Years Later,” Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/31/u-s-protestants-are-not-defined-by-reformation-era-controversies-500-years-later/>.

9. Tchividjian, ch. 4, “I Fought the Law (and the Law Won).”

Deism,”<sup>10</sup> that is, a religion roughly based on doing good, feeling good, and getting good stuff from God.

However, God still preserves many faithful Christians in a right understanding of this “very heart of Christianity”<sup>11</sup> across denominations, especially among confessional Lutherans. Confessional Lutheranism keeps the law’s edge sharp and reserves the full comfort of the gospel. From Lutheranism’s earliest days, it has taken God’s message of law and gospel close to its heart. It celebrates tangible grace in the sacraments. It grounds its adherents and their lives to their “not guilty” verdict in Christ. The core of Lutheranism is grace. Each branch shooting from that core is also imbued with grace. This Lutheran “why” permeates everything we do.

### **A Lutheran Approach with the Means of Grace**

But you must come here, where there is neither yours nor any man’s, but God’s business and rule, namely, where his Word is. There you will meet Him and hear and see neither wrath nor displeasure, as you fear, but only grace and cordial love toward you . . . But it means a struggle for the heart to get there and take hold of this; first it must crash and experience that all our notions of seeking Christ are futile and in vain and that in the end there is no other choice than to turn away from oneself and all other human consolation and trust only in His Word.<sup>12</sup>

Luther knew firsthand the importance of the means of grace, how they truly conveyed to him forgiveness, life, and salvation when his soul troubled him. When his distressed thoughts would

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10. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162–171, 258, 262.

11. A. E. Wagner, “The Certainty of Salvation,” in *Abiding Word*, vol. 1, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 225.

12. Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Sammtliche Schriften*, St. Louis ed., vol. XI (St. Louis: Concordia, 1910), 452, quoted by Francis Pieper in *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Walter Albrecht, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950–1953), 3:139.

pursue him, he knew where God could be found in all his mercy. When his conscience turned on him, he could flee to these indestructible gateways of God's mercy.

For Luther and all Lutherans, they are "The means of certainty."<sup>13</sup> Here they can find relief in their God's grace. And here, God offers the richest blessings in tangible, unimpeachable proofs to drive far away any doubt or fear. As the *Smalcald Articles* state, "And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through and with the preceding outward Word."<sup>14</sup> Against all forms of do-it-yourself spirituality of the day, man has no relationship (at least no genuine one) with God apart from the means of grace.

### **The "Why" for Ministry**

God offers mankind his means, but man by nature is "hostile" (Rom 8:7). Someone must deliver the message (Rom 10:17). Someone must act as a steward of the mysteries, as steward of the means of grace. While all Christians have the Word and the Sacraments, nevertheless God has also instituted the public ministry.

These ministers are God's gifts to his church to build them up with the means of grace (Eph 4:11–12). They are harvesters to gather in the ripe harvest (Matt 9:37–38. For the harvest, there are harvesters. Whether their task is, like St. Paul's, to travel abroad and preach God's Word or to shepherd the flocks closer to home, ministers have a need to fill. They are to bring grace and forgiveness to a world in great need of it.

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13. Wagner, 227.

14. Smalcald Articles, III. VIII. 3 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 322.

### The “Why” for Excellence

We have taken a brief glance at the core, the “why” of Lutheranism—grace. We understand why the ministry must exist. But now we may ask what the reason is for excellence in the ministry. While much of this will be explained throughout the paper, we may briefly say that grace motivates diligent effort for quality work. Paul says about his ministry, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor 15:10).

We also speak of excellence for other reasons, such as stewardship of the means of grace or as a way of glorifying God. While there is much to be said about this, St. Peter briefly sums up the matter:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet 4:10–11).

### A Word to the Prophet

Elijah has long vacated his spot under the broom tree, but weary workers still slouch at their desks. Moses’ murmuring doubts don’t drift through desert air; they drift into the heads and hearts of ministers. Those same ministers share in Isaiah’s woe over his sinfulness.

To preface any discussion of faithfulness or excellence, we do well to recognize the hardships of ministry, to apply God’s promises to them, and to take spiritual care of our souls. As August Pieper wrote, “. . .the most important part of true faithfulness in the ministry is finally this that one cares even more for his own soul than for the souls of others!”<sup>15</sup> Throughout the Bible,

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15. August Pieper, “The True Reconstruction of the Church,” in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. I, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 309.

God makes a point of speaking to the heart of his prophets and leaders before commissioning them.

Perhaps, as Elijah did, pastors get burned out or weary. Like Elijah, they may think, “I have had enough, LORD” (1 Kgs 19:4). Perhaps pastors become frustrated with what they’ve been given. Their gifts, their contexts, the congregational culture they’ve inherited—it can all seem immovable or hopeless. Perhaps they find themselves in Moses’ sandals (or lack thereof). The LORD tenderly comforts his servants. He gave them their gifts, he put them in their settings, and he promises to rule all things for the good of this church. He assures his servants that the mission is his, and he will see it through. He will accomplish what he wills; now he gives his saints the privilege of ministry. When the refrain rings, “Who is equal to such a task?” (2 Cor 2:16), Paul’s words also follow shortly after, “Our competence comes from God” (2 Cor 3:5). The ultimate result is the LORD’s; the privilege is ours.

Finally, God speaks his absolution. Do pastors (or vicars or seminarians) have sin to confess? Can we present an immaculate record of faithfulness to our master, or have we failed to be resourceful, thorough, or focused? Have we been thoughtless, unmotivated, or lazy at times? The LORD removes the filthy clothes of His servants—he takes away their sin—and dresses them in fine, spotless garments (Zech 3:1–5). He picks them up, touches their lips, changes their clothes, casts aside the devil’s accusations, and speaks the final word on their sin.

Grace gives his ministers a radical perspective on ministry and life. In insufficiencies, God gives strength. In hardship, God gives encouragement. In sinfulness, he clothes his ministers with his righteousness.

## PART II: DEFINING FAITHFULNESS AND EXCELLENCE

### **From *Sola* to *Soli*: Introducing Excellence**

In view of all these mercies, we want to offer something back in thanksgiving. Renewed souls look for a way to serve. Naturally, we want this service to reflect what is in our hearts. Even if our offerings will always be imperfect and tainted, we want them to be excellent.

### **Godly Concerns over the Term “Excellence”**

With the term “excellent” a number of thoughts, objections, and concerns come to mind: “Should I bother using the term ‘excellent’ when I fumbled through the children’s sermon last week?” “Should I use a term that I wouldn’t describe myself with?” or “What might happen on a broad scale if we all started using this term?”

Confessional Lutherans may object to the implications of such a term. Business books tend to promise grand outcomes to readers, whether it be measurable growth in profit, better employees, or an ever-harmonious and satisfying workplace. Hearts (and ambitions) simply flutter at the thought. However, using the term “excellence” to imply that the church could escape the hardships promised her through stricter standards would be to ignore Christ’s words about His church and the evil world she lives in. Jesus promises his church a costly cross (Luke 14:25–33).

Confessional Lutherans may, in good conscience, use terms such as “excellence.” Such terms refer to a mindset, a way of doing things, not the final product of a pastor’s work. One might also use other terms to describe this way of doing things, such as “focused faithfulness,” “disciplined,” or “quality-conscious.” I do believe, however, that excellence, properly defined and presented, helps shape ministry as well as any of them. Still, without careful definition, these

thoughts of “excellence” may put us out of touch with reality. Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong, in their book *Resurrecting Excellence*, put it this way:

“Excellence” is too often interpreted as the capacity to come out ahead, to exercise strength at the expense of weakness—indeed, to leave encumbering weakness behind. Such interpretation has crept into the church without any adaptation or translation into Christian terms, leading even pastors we would characterize as excellent feeling frustrated.<sup>16</sup>

Careless use of the term can lead to frustration with our own efforts. As God’s sinner-saint servants, our efforts are less precise and mechanical and more often mixtures of our flaws and frailties.

Not only frustration, but also arrogance and self-reliance could come as a result of carelessly using this term. In striving after excellence, a pastor may lean away from mediocrity and a lax work ethic, but he may find himself falling into another trap. As Gurgel notes,

There is a counterfeit alternative that often appeals to those who are most zealous in their ministries. Instead of giving in to self-doubt and discouragement, the pastor is determined by his own hard work and effort to show himself such a good and faithful minister that the flock cannot do without him. This path often embraces what is openly a theology of glory. Longing to be needed and craving outward evidence to validate his ministry, the pastor relies on a flurry of manmade activity to achieve the bottom line results that we as pragmatic Americans have become convinced are the marks of excellence.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps hard-working Confessional Lutheran pastors might object to an unfair metric being imposed on their work as well. Faithfulness, not excellence, is the word most often used in prescribing and measuring ministerial efforts. Would talk of “excellence” lead us to exclude St. Paul from the ministerium for a (perceived) weakness in public speaking (2 Cor 10:10)? Was Elijah unable to “get the job done”? In a vocation with high expectations, high stress, and a long list of duties, concerns about expectations are understandable.

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16. L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 2.

17. Gurgel, 4.

These and other objections force us to think critically about word choice as we consider ministerial metrics and philosophies of ministry. When a word comes with so much baggage, we might be justified in asking why we use this term at all. Nevertheless, as Jones and Armstrong write, “We also do not think that we are called to lower expectations in order to resist cultural standards of excellence. The alternative to uncritical adoption of cultural standards is not to reject excellence altogether, nor is it to settle for “mediocrity masquerading as faithfulness.” Rather it is an appropriately Christian understanding of excellence.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Difficulty with Faithfulness**

While “excellence” may have its baggage, we may note that the current lexicon used for pastoral standards is vague. Most often, we speak in terms of “faithfulness” as the measure of our work. The trouble is, how does one know when he has been faithful at the end of a week? Informally, I asked that question to a number of seminarians and pastors. Between my question and its answer spanned a thoughtful silence. The answers included ideas of stewardship, i.e. of being faithful *with* what was given to them. They included the notion of doing one’s best, but what exactly that looked like was hard to say. They were good, albeit incomplete, answers. There were no boxes to be ticked, no lists for pencils to scratch through, but rather a nebulous, loosely-defined standard of faithfulness.

And perhaps God intended it to be this way. Perhaps he never intended called workers to have a black-and-white task list of numbers and quotas, but rather that they regularly examine their ministries to test whether they are faithful and trustworthy. To give ministers a single task list would be to give the sinful nature an excuse to laziness. Ministry often requires a little extra

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18. Jones and Armstrong, 2.



study, a little extra time with members, and another evangelism call or two. Many tasks of ministry, like the “seeding” and “watering” of which St. Paul speaks (1 Cor 3:6), are hard to quantify. True faithfulness morphs from one week to another. Some weeks, being faithful means going beyond the task list and investing leftover time elsewhere. Other weeks, faithfulness may still leave work unfinished.

Because faithfulness is so hard to define, a pastor may not be able to tell when he has been faithful or not. Relying on his own ideas of faithfulness may leave him feeling unsure and conscience-stricken at the end of a week. On the other hand, another minister may be unaware of his shortcomings. Jones and Armstrong note:

Some people are temperamentally prone to excessive self-preoccupation and self-criticism, whereas others seem oblivious to their own distortions or failings. We human beings tend to be a complicated mixture of self-assertion and self-abnegation, caught in webs of self-deception of which we are unaware. So also do we tend to fail to discern accurately our own gifts and calling. We often get the discernment partially right, but also partially wrong.<sup>19</sup>

In commenting on 1 Corinthians 4, Gurgel also notes that the least qualified person to judge a ministry is the minister himself: “Categorically, no one has more trouble being objective in evaluating ministry than the one who is the subject of the evaluation.”<sup>20</sup> Could we imagine the sinful nature using the efficacy of God’s Word to excuse sloppy work? On the other hand, could we overestimate what God expects of us in the ministry?

Failing to define and come to terms with faithfulness and ministerial expectations may exact its own price. The pastor knows the guilt he feels while he is at home—he relaxes (or tries to) while good ministry work sits on his desk. And when he’s at work he feels guilty for neglect-

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19. Jones and Armstrong, 100–101.

20. Gurgel, 16.

ing his vocations as a father and a husband. When asked, “How do you know you’ve been faithful at the end of a week?” one interviewee responded with a joke, saying that his wife would let him know when he had worked enough. We get the joke. We also get the barb underneath the joke. Vocations often ask for more than the pastor can give. It can be easy to let vocations fight each other for our time and attention.

Rather than letting vocations fight each other for time and energy in an already busy world, rather than agonizing over whether we have been faithful or not, I would suggest a healthier and more proactive route, where faithfulness is carefully defined and gently shaped by the concept of Scripturally-normed excellence to guide healthy ministry.

### **Defining Faithfulness**

As we have already seen, a comprehensive definition for faithfulness can easily elude us. St. Paul says that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). Therefore, we must earnestly grapple with these ideas. But what this ministry requirement, this πιστός, entails may be viewed from different angles. Jesus speaks about faithfulness and stewardship in a number of parables (Matt 25:14–30; Luke 12:35–48; 16:1–13; 19:11–27) . Paul describes his coworkers as “faithful” in a few places (1 Cor 4:17; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7–9) . The Bible often describes believers as faithful in that they have faith (Ps 32:6; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2; et al.). Is faithfulness a certain attitude, a devotion to one’s duties? Perhaps it is a quality of character, like integrity. Does faithfulness simply connote trying hard or does it imply resourcefulness and shrewdness? Modern definitions of faithfulness may be slightly watered down. Faithfulness in modern parlance may excuse blind effort or lionize loyalty in lieu of quality. I believe that we may have defined faithfulness too narrowly, detached it from quality work, and identified it too

simply with having good intention or effort. It would be wise to see four chief parts of faithfulness in the public ministry: a faithfulness *to* God, faithfulness *for* a purpose, faithfulness *as* (in different vocations), and a faithfulness *with* what has been given.

#### Faithful *to* ...

By its very nature, πιστός requires two parties: there must be one who has faith and one in whom faith is placed. One party trusts another party to carry out a specific task or obligation. One might think of this as a faithfulness *to* the one who calls, trusts, or entrusts. Husbands are called to be faithful to their wives. Stewards are accountable *to* their master. In this way, we strive to be faithful *to* God. We understand that Parables such as the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30) or the minas (Luke 19:11–26) come to mind. Paul’s discussion on faithfulness in the pastoral office (1 Cor 4:1–5) brings to mind a final accountability *to* the one who gives ministers and holds them accountable. Next, faithfulness can be seen in terms of a devotion *for* a purpose.

#### Faithful *for* ...

In discussions on ministerial performance, faithfulness is often used over against other terms and measurements for ministry. Perhaps this is done as a well-advised reaction to American ideas of success and visible results. Perhaps, however, we do well to note that faithfulness is not opposed to results or to a purpose, but that it generally denotes that the person called faithful has done his part well, as far as it depends on him.

When Paul calls his coworkers faithful (1 Cor 4:17; Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7–9) and sends them to accomplish a purpose, he is not only saying that these men are well-intentioned, loyal, or

good-hearted, but that they are reliable and trustworthy. Paul sent them to pass on an authoritative message and trusted them to do it. As far as we know, they were faithful *for* a purpose. As far as it depended on them, they did their job. Whether that brought about visible results, such as growth in faith, a godly response, etc. was beyond their ability. Nevertheless, God gave His church these men to equip God’s people (Eph 4:12). For clarification on this point, see Figure 1A in Appendix 1.

To put it another way, faithfulness is not an end in itself. The analogy of working out to faithfulness seems to fit nicely here. Normally, people do not work out for the sake of working out; they work out, for example, to change their appearance or to become healthier. If the gym-goer had no sorts of goals or ideas of what he wanted, one can hardly imagine much success (or for that matter, measure success). If a gym-goer sets standards and goals for his own work he may find something to spur him on to better efforts on his part at using what he has been born with, though he cannot control how much he grows in strength—perhaps he tears a muscle or perhaps the weight stays on. At the same time, gym-goers are often concerned *too much with visible results*. Both an unhealthy desire for results and a lack of purpose are unhealthy. Perhaps a better option is to understand your mission, to develop a set of standards to help curb unhealthy ambition, and to stave off a perfunctory routine.

#### Faithful *as* ...

Chief among those callings is a faithfulness to one’s vocation as a child of God. This involves, as August Pieper would say, “that one cares even more for his own soul than for the souls of others!”<sup>21</sup> While God desires that his ministers care for their souls, this is not to be understood as a

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21. Pieper, “The True Reconstruction of the Church,” 309.

chore. As Gurgel notes, “The natural *opinio legis* lodged deeply also in pastors wants to think of our devotional time as some kind of favor we do for God, when in fact it is quite the opposite.”<sup>22</sup> This is yet another opportunity to return to grace, the heart of our faith, and be filled with what we need.

Among other vocations are his roles as a father and a husband. While both vocations consume a significant amount of time, energy, etc., he understands that faithfulness in the ministry involves faithfulness as a father and a husband. Inability to control his children or take care of his family would, in fact, disqualify him from his office (1 Tim 3:4; 5:8). As he balances his work schedule with his family time, he (Lord willing) discovers again how his children are a heritage (Ps 127:3) and his wife is “worth far more than rubies” (Prov 31:10).

#### Faithfulness *as* ... a Pastor

Of course “faithful as” includes his duties as pastor as well. More specifically, he is called to publicly administer the means of grace on behalf of a congregation of believers. This generally includes preaching, teaching, evangelizing, visitation, admonishing, planning and leading worship, and a variety of other duties. Faithfulness as a pastor in all the above activities require more than perfunctory performance. It requires aptitude. Jon Hein explains:

Does “able to teach” simply mean that we share God’s Word accurately, without twisting or perverting it? Let’s carry that to the logical conclusion. If that were all that is required, then Gospel ministry could be reduced to reading of the Word. Do not write a sermon. Why risk that you don’t say things as well as the Spirit? Just read enough of God’s Word, so that both Law and Gospel are proclaimed. Do not learn God’s Great Exchange, which requires interaction with a lost soul. When you are sitting in someone’s living room,

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22. Gurgel, 9.

simply pull out your Bible and read Romans, chapter 3, or perhaps a portion of the Gospels.<sup>23</sup>

Because the pastor understands that faithfulness requires an amount of skill, he understands that he has an obligation to continue developing skills needed for the ministry. As August Pieper writes,

The daily need to care for souls will again and again drive him anew into the study of the individual parts of pastoral theology, so that he becomes clear on how he should act and why just so and not otherwise. In brief, the daily practical demands of the ministry necessitate of themselves basic theoretical study, if one does not want to change from a beginning dabbler into a superficial bungler.<sup>24</sup>

For such a task our seminary has resources to help pastors continue growing as they carry out their tasks, such as summer quarter or other programs provided by Grow in Grace, a seminary-based institute established to support pastoral growth. Beyond that, there is an endless selection of secular books that provide worlds of insight into leadership and management. Eschewing these resources because they approach the matter with a different perspective does not make anyone more orthodox (or more faithful). Rather, a wholesale ignorance of such resources may land closer to unfaithfulness. Still, in order to stay on the middle road, a caution is in order:

Here again, a middle ground presents itself. On the one side is a careless satisfaction with basic beginning competency that often simultaneously abuses the truth of the inherent power of the means of grace in order to excuse carelessness in preaching, aimlessness in teaching, and cluelessness in leadership. On the other side lurks a selfish and proud ambition that seeks to grow in ministry knowledge and skill because it brings praise and recognition.<sup>25</sup>

An attention to essential duties (as well as attention in developing them) will likely consume most of the pastor's schedule. Therefore, the call to ministry is also a call away from non-

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23. Jonathan Hein, "Treasures in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God's Plan of Salvation" (essay presented to the Institute of Worship and Outreach, 2011), 12.

24. August Pieper, "The Study of Scriptures as the Special Assignment of the Pastor," in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. I, ed. Curtis A Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 120.

25. Gurgel, 11.

essential duties. The apostles in first-century Jerusalem had come to this very conclusion. While distributing food to widows would certainly have been a good thing for the apostles to do, it was not the best thing they could have done with their time. In fact, they considered their call to ministry as a call to be loyal primarily to a specific set of tasks, and, if at all possible, to find other ways of completing the necessary work (Acts 6:1–7). One might call this philosophy of ministry “focused faithfulness.” This philosophy understands both the mission and the means to fulfill that mission. Therefore, it can trim away some of the beneficial non-essential activities for the essential ones.

#### Faithful *with* ...

To be faithful also means to be trustworthy *with* what has been entrusted, whether that is the means of grace, certain gifts, doctrine, etc. Consider the varied parables that portray stewards handling the things of their master: great things are given along with great responsibility. While different parables have different corresponding elements and emphases, they all take up the matter of stewardship and faithfulness. Something of value is given to the servants of God. Consequently, that which is entrusted is to be managed well.

Pastors are entrusted with the means of grace, powerful and valuable tools. God uses his minister and his means to create saving faith. Pastor Hein clarifies this connection:

We are very careful that we do not attribute to the minister what is the Word’s responsibility. The minister does not convert. The minister doesn’t strengthen faith. The minister doesn’t grant spiritual life. That is the working of the Word. And so, when discussing such responsibilities, the Word puts man in his proper place. We’re just jars of clay carrying treasure. However, it is equally important that we don’t attribute to the Word that which is the minister’s responsibility. The Word doesn’t carry itself to pagan lands. The Word doesn’t preach itself in our churches’ pulpits. That is work for the minister to do.

The Word works ... at doing its job. But it does not work at doing our job. Thus, the ministerial cause is vital to God's plan of salvation.<sup>26</sup>

With Hein, we note that both the man and the Word have roles to play.<sup>27</sup> Man cannot create results by his cleverness or craft, but he can use tools which God has given and empowered. To illustrate this with a Biblical example, a farmer cannot cause a seed to grow. He can, however, attempt to use his time and energy to cast and water the seed (1 Cor 3:6–7). In no uncertain terms, that man has a responsibility for spreading that seed.

A pastor is entrusted not only with the means of grace, but also with what we might term “gifts.” For the purpose of this paper, this encompasses the talents, skills, and even the context in which he is placed. The point of similarity is that the pastor has little control over these (in a sense), but is nevertheless expected to find ways of administering the means of grace. Because of this, faithful work on his part will appear different from faithful work from another pastor. The pastor cannot control what he has been given or what the final fruit of his work may be, yet this does not rationalize shoddy work, especially in essential pastoral duties. He may not be able to pick his gifts or dictate his results, but he can still control how he works and what he produces. See Figure 1A–1C in Appendix 1 for clarification on this point.

Finally, a pastor must prove faithful to the doctrine entrusted to him. Quality does not matter if the message is warped and heretical. Paul exhorts Titus to hold firmly to the truth (Titus 1:9) and repeatedly encourages Timothy to cling to the doctrine he was given (1 Tim 4:16, 6:2–

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26. Hein, 16.

27. Some Lutheran theologians have distinguished between the causes of salvation. The instrumental cause of salvation refers to the gospel message as that instrument or medium through which the Holy Spirit works faith. The ministerial cause of salvation refers to the messenger who brings that gospel message.



4; 2 Tim 1:13, et al.). Ministers are to use God's means in their missions rather than using unscriptural appeals to the gospel or paring off what they perceive to be the rough edges of Christian teaching.

### **The Middle Road between Objectivity and Subjectivity**

I believe that there is a middle road in determining faithfulness. While God is the only true, final, and perfect judge of faithfulness (1 Cor 4:4), a standard is given to us in Scripture to hold to. On the one side of the road is the ditch of total subjectivity where no external input is accepted, nor is there any outside accountability. Rather, the judgment is based solely on the pastor's idea of how his ministry is going. Dull preaching, superficial teaching, infrequent visitation, lifeless evangelism, uninspiring leadership, and sloppiness in general can all be excused if faithfulness is undefined or a pastor refuses to accept input.

In the other ditch, ministry may be confined to out-of-touch checklists and rigidly evaluated, leading to another lopsided form of ministry. More than likely, the pastor often finds himself there, buried by lists he never completed, expectations he did not meet, and standards he fell short of. Viewing faithfulness through this lens will likely marginalize pastors whose gifts lie in areas less visible to the congregation, such as counseling or visitation. This extreme may lead a pastor to pursue only those ends which can be quantifiable, checkable, and gradable, (if not falling into despair or into using unorthodox methods) while much of ministry is unquantifiable. A conversation with Mrs. Schmidt in the intensive care unit may not boost evangelism numbers. Nevertheless, it is imperative to visit her. Evangelism calls often go better when the pastor takes his time to build a relationship rather than hitting his quota and going home.

Faithfulness will look different from week to week, from person to person. A pastor may not complete all his duties in a week. He may very well have been faithful. What is faithful work from a pastor may not suit the preferences of his parishioners. To a certain extent, faithfulness defies being tied down to any set of standards. On the other hand, having set goals and standards and being held accountable to them can help shape faithful ministry.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Faithfulness**

Any standard that exists for all pastors must be flexible in assessment and will be somewhat subjective. On the other hand, any standard that has no teeth is really no standard at all. Faithfulness does have demands. Two servants were “good and faithful” (Matt 25:23), but another was a “wicked, lazy servant” (Matt 25:26). Before we conclude that a pastor in our circles could never be unfaithful, we might remember that Jonah struggled with carrying out his evangelism work (Jonah 1:3), St. Peter stumbled in leadership and outreach (Gal 2:12–13), John Mark let one of his coworkers down (Acts 15:38), and Elijah got in a rut (1 Kgs 19:9–10), not to mention other failures. For such failures, God offers forgiveness to release his servants and righteousness to clothe them.

Yet as we continue, we note that faithfulness is being loyal *to* a master, dedicated *for* a purpose, trustworthy *as* pastor, father, or another role, and trustworthy *with* something. Faithfulness in the pastoral office cannot be reduced to percentages, numbers, and grades. Indeed, as Pastor Jonathan Schroeder writes, “numbers can in no way be used to evaluate faithfulness in the ministry.”<sup>28</sup> While faithfulness is not measured on a line graph, thoughtful reflection on numbers

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Schroeder, “Worship and Outreach: A Lutheran Paradigm” (paper presented for the Symposium of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, September 20–21, 2010) 5–6.

can help in reassessing a church's plans. Furthermore, we dare not forget our role as the ministerial cause of salvation or reject offhand the sincere and constructive remarks a brother may have for us.

At the end of another day of service, pastors can look back. Indeed, God brings forth fruits from their efforts. The minister can find satisfaction in his duty done to God's glory. As sinner-saints, however, all pastors must confess an imperfect ministry, understand the tension between sinner and saint, and find forgiveness at the cross for his failures. In this way he may unburden himself and renew his zeal for ministry.

### **Defining and Defending Excellence**

"She has done a beautiful thing to me" (Mark 14:6). Such were the Savior's words when he was anointed before his burial. This extravagant offering—it would have been, perhaps, too much to ask for. A year's wages were spent on something so trivial (at least to the disciples). They could not understand why this woman would spend her money how she did. It made sense, however, to the woman. It also made sense to Jesus. Just like Bach, the woman wanted to offer the best she could to glorify God, not because she had to, but because she wanted to. There was no law or command prompting her. Rather grace moved her to do something excellent for him. Whether a "year's wages" or just a few mites, we too would give something, everything to our Savior. And if it could be excellent, we would have it that way.

Pinning down what "excellent" means, however, can be a challenge. Excellence is relative. Excellence in one context might be superficial and insufficient in another. An impromptu defense of the gospel from an apostle in the early church would be excellent, especially consider-

ing the setting. My impromptu children's sermon would not be. A small, warm gathering of believers in a house might be a beautiful expression of fellowship and warmth. Neglected church grounds without signage would not be.

Furthermore, defining excellence scripturally is difficult. "Excellence," in Greek ἀρετή, is rarely found in Scripture. On the occasions that ἀρετή is found in Scripture, it is not in the context of ministerial standards. Furthermore, ἀρετή more often describes moral character than the way something is done.<sup>29</sup> Scripture does speak of things that are beautiful, very good, or praiseworthy, but because Scripture does not use this word explicitly to talk about the way things are done in ministry, it is better to draw support implicitly from Scripture and form a definition from outside Scripture.

In discussing excellence, one's thoughts might tend to the glamorous and flashy, the impressive and complex. Does a commitment to excellence lead pastors to endlessly "keep up with the Joneses"? Does excellence imply groomed charisma or magnetic charm? Does excellence necessitate a certain rhetorical and personal flourish? While a commitment to excellence does not neglect natural gifts, neither does it pursue the unattainable or the superficial. Excellence doesn't need to be complicated. In fact, it rarely is.

Rather, excellence is achieved through focusing on the essentials to limit flaws. Committing to excellence means excelling in the essentials, for example: dividing law and gospel, understanding God's people and communicating truth to them in a winsome, relatable way, reaching out to the community with God's Word, etc. Excellence does not require pastors to create an ever-expanding list of duties nor to cater to the whims of the members. Rather, we define excel-

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29. Frederick W. Danker, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), electronic version.

lence as a quality product, a state of high-quality relative to its setting. The following pages detail a scriptural case for excellence as an end in itself, as stewardship of the means of grace, as useful for the sake of gaining a hearing for the gospel, and as glorification of God.

### Excellence as an End in Itself

In many contexts, excellence is simply a means to an end. Better products mean better sales, which means bigger bonuses. It seems easy enough to draw a line from a quality product to impressive results—the best, most successful organizations are often those with the most sought-after products. The idea behind setting a standard for quality seems to be oriented around results. Aside from the possible benefits of committing to excellence, this point stands: excellence is an end in itself.

Excellence will not always lead to good results. For example, a chef aims to make his customers happy. He makes the best *tacos al pastor* north of the border. He spices and slices the meat just right. The meat tumbles onto the tortilla, blanketed with queso and topped with a delicate slice of pineapple. His eight-year-old customer, however, thinks they are “icky” and would much prefer a cheese quesadilla. The chef prepared excellent cuisine. The tacos *were* excellent. For one reason or another, quality does not guarantee results. Nor does it have to.

Recall the expensive perfume poured over Jesus. The practical result from this action was that Jesus smelled good for a while. Deeper than that, this was an act of worship. Jesus endorsed what she did not because of the results it would guarantee, but because it was a grace-motivated act of worship.

Results and repercussions may be impossible to predict and hopeless to rely on. The Lord still wills that ministers (and even all Christians) work passionately and diligently. St. Paul writes

in Colossians, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:23–24). Paul encourages Christians to work hard, that is, to do high-quality work not based on earthly results, but because God promised them a heavenly reward out of his grace. The Christian does not only live for results. Instead, he recognizes the intrinsic value of dedication and quality work.

Secular business literature also corroborates this idea. Jim Collins, in his bestseller, *Good to Great*, writes, “Those who turn good into great are motivated by a deep creative urge and an inner compulsion for sheer unadulterated excellence for its own sake. Those who perpetuate mediocrity, in contrast, are motivated more by the fear of being left behind.”<sup>30</sup> First and foremost, a commitment to high-quality work is justified for its own sake.

#### Excellence as Stewardship of the Means of Grace

A dollar is a dollar. No one can make it more effective. Snap it in front of people, give the audience a pitch on this specific dollar, smooth talk the cashier—none of it makes a difference. A dollar is worth a dollar. The concern for the owner of said dollar is the stewardship of the dollar. He can store it away in an IRA, start a business, or bury it.

In the same way, excellence simply seeks to, with diligent effort, make the finest use of what we are entrusted with, namely the means of grace. Excellence apart from the means of grace converts no one (and for that matter, may not even be considered faithful). Excellence with

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30. Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 160.

the means of grace, however, consists in finding the best ways to make the most use of Word and sacrament. Schroeder writes:

We believe that the Word of God is efficacious. That means our job is to preach the gospel and leave the converting to the Holy Spirit... Yet at the same time, our Lord calls us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace and use them in the best way we can... There is a tension in our ministry between these two truths. Nowhere does he tell us that the efficacy of the Word excuses a lack of working or planting or going. Nowhere does Jesus tell us that our working and going and planting are what saves. Efficacy cannot be an excuse for laziness; effort or results cannot be an excuse for pride.<sup>31</sup>

Because the means of grace are such treasures of the church, it is fitting for ministers to treat them as such, to value them and handle them with care (2 Tim 2:15). In his book *The Defense Never Rests*, Craig Parton compares the gospel to a fine Bordeaux.<sup>32</sup> While a Bordeaux can be poured into a Styrofoam coffee cup, should the need arise, should it not be placed in fine crystal when available? In the same way, an unbeliever can be converted when the means of grace are handled in a sloppy way in worship. Imagine that the organist had not practiced and the pastor was too tired to memorize well. The Sovereign Lord may work in spite of it all. However, in no way does God's power negate his commands for his servants to work hard and diligently at what they do with what they have.

#### Excellence to Gain a Hearing for the Gospel

God does not judge by appearances, but worship visitors do. As Lutherans, we affirm that God uses the means of grace to powerfully change hearts. We believe that God chooses to reveal himself in what the world considers "foolishness" (1 Cor 1:18). We trust the promises God attaches

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31. Schroeder, 7.

32. Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 153.

to his Word, but we reject that the means of grace work magically, as if it were some sort of incantation.<sup>33</sup> God's Word works psychologically through the minds of men<sup>34</sup> and supernaturally through the power of God.<sup>35</sup>

This carries several implications as we consider the administration of the means of grace. We cannot expect an unbeliever to come for doctrine he doesn't know, a message he hasn't heard, or for means of grace he hasn't received. In the case of the dechurched, it would be a stretch to expect sanctified decisions from one who has abandoned the means of grace and let the sinful flesh control his decisions for years.<sup>36</sup>

The criteria for the unchurched may look different as well. Should an unchurched couple decide to investigate a church, then a good reputation in the community, or the appearances of the church grounds or website, may sway them. This is not to suggest that we pander, alter our foundations, or otherwise sell out. Rather, making a habit of excellence simply serves to earn a hearing for the means of grace.

This is what Hoenecke terms "the call in the improper sense," that is, a call to inquire about God apart from the means of grace. The unregenerate may be brought into contact with the means of grace after pondering the cosmos, marveling at nature, or even just admiring how pretty a church is.<sup>37</sup> We may go so far as to say that "through the report of a community in which

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33. Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels et al., 4 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1999–2009), 4:15.

34. Hoenecke, 4:13.

35. Hoenecke, 4:16.

36. For that matter, might there be church members among us who use our sloppiness as an excuse to neglect regular public worship and find other resources to enlighten them? They are, after all, still sinner-saints.

37. Hoenecke, 3:229.



the true God is known and worshiped, there can be a call to salvation (1 Kgs 10:1; 2 Kgs 5:2f.; 1 Thess 1:8).”<sup>38</sup> To be clear, a good report in the community is not the gospel. A nice lawn will not convert anyone. Clear signage in the church or a trustworthy nursery cannot work faith in the spiritually dead. Quality can, however, be used by God to provide an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel.

Scripture exhorts believers to be aware of their contact with unbelievers. Sometimes this has the ultimate aim of conversion (Matt 5:14; 1 Pet 2:12; 4:11). Good impressions do not save, but God can use them for a hearing of his Word. Contrary to the quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words,” Christians must use words (Rom 10:17). Living as a Christian and loving our neighbor may earn us the right to be heard.

Finally, no one can remove the offense of the cross without removing the cross itself. The cross defies all attempts to be gussied up or toned down. The lawn may be immaculate and the bathrooms nice, but the message of sin and grace is offensive. That does not mean anything else should be.

#### Excellence to God’s Glory

Finally, by use of the term “excellence,” we wish to emphasize that the glory of God, not of man, be the goal. Accordingly, we reject any use of excellence that reinforces a sense of superiority in the worker himself. As defined here, excellence is not a destination for the few and the proud. It is not a ledge to climb up in order to look down on others. Such an attitude may have its own consequences. As Pastor Nathan Pope writes, “If pride motivates a man to be the best he can be,

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38. Hoenecke, 3:229.

I can see the possibility of that individual growing bitter if his parishioners fail to respond to his plans or actions with the praise he was expecting.”<sup>39</sup>

Rather than exalting the servant, it focuses him on his own work and directs the glory to God. John the Baptist, an excellent steward of the means of grace, said, “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). We are, after all, “unworthy servants” (Luke 17:10).

The aim of this commitment to excellence is always to glorify God. As St. Peter writes,

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10–11)

### **Contrasting Faithfulness and Excellence**

Here it would be profitable to note some distinctions between faithfulness and excellence. Though we recommend thinking in terms of excellence in the parish, we also hold that faithfulness is *still* the standard God has set for his ministers. Between these two terms there are several distinctions, perhaps the most critical being this: different stages of the work process receive different focus (see Figure 1A–1C in Appendix 1). Do we focus on what we have or haven’t been given or do we focus on doing what it takes to produce quality material? Are we concerned with working for the sake of work or can we keep an eye on the quality of our materials? Faithfulness bends and morphs to accommodate for the unforeseen and unexpected circumstances in ministry; excellence seeks to prevent unforeseen lapses in quality from becoming the norm. I firmly believe that an orientation shift from gifts and process to process and product is healthy and profitable for pastors.

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39. Nathan Pope, *Motivation for Ministry: Perspectives for Every Pastor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993), 27.

We may discuss several other distinctions between excellence and faithfulness, including the following: excellence apart from the means of grace is not faithfulness, excellence does not imply adding more criteria to faithfulness, and that excellence without devotion to God's Word is not faithfulness. More contrasts could be added to these, but these are given to demonstrate that excellence ought not be used to subtly replace faithfulness, but rather to help shape it. For clarification on this point, see Figure 2A–2C in Appendix 1.

### **Comparing Faithfulness and Excellence**

At the same time, faithfulness and excellence often resemble one another. Focused faithfulness will resemble the discipline that creates excellence. Both can be used as law terms, showing us our failures or guiding us in grace-filled thanksgiving. Neither of them, however, should ever be used as a basis to justify ourselves before God. Both terms can fall too far into people-pleasing and detract from essential duties or from other vocations. Both are *eo ipso* good things. Both appear different in different settings. Finally, both are done as stewards of the means of grace for the greater glory of God.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Faithfulness and Excellence**

There may well be more points to discuss, so I encourage more discussion on faithfulness and excellence. As seen above, faithfulness and excellence can prove to be difficult to define. As we apply these terms to ministry, we ask God for wisdom. On one side, we may fall into an unhealthy obsession with perfection; on the other side, we may fall into laziness, disorganization, or any number of ruts, each with its own rationalization.

Above all, the gospel plays the central role in a minister's motivation. Whether it be faithfulness or excellence, every minister has fallen short of the standards set for him; everyone has offered "lame and diseased animals" (Mal 1:8) at one time or another. It would be disastrous, then, to try to find comfort and strength in our performance instead of God's promises. And, as stated earlier, God does indeed extend gracious promises to his ministers. He promises to support them, equip them, and, most of all, to release them from their sins and failures and give them eternal life.

### **Committing to Excellence**

In an attempt to shape faithful ministry, we may adopt a "commitment to excellence." Here we make a distinction between "excellence" and "committing to excellence." The distinction is slight, but significant. Describing one's own ministry as excellent without clarification may seem immodest or dismally deluded. Perhaps the pastor prefers to reach for words other than "excellence" to describe what he produces. To declare one's own ministry to be "excellent" without further commentary may be interpreted as elitist or snobbish. To state that a certain ministry is "committed to excellence," however, may be more palatable and more profitable.

This "commitment to excellence" is not a boast in past accomplishments, but a prayerful guide for the future. This sort of commitment does not imply that pastors will find everything they do to be excellent. They can, however, expect colleagues, congregations, and elders to hold them to such standards.

The emphasis on a "commitment to excellence" is not simply a move to soften words like "quality" or "excellence." Rather, this commitment emphasizes and defines the "process" of work for ministers (cf. Figure 1A–1C in Appendix 1). As we seek to stay faithful to Scripture,

we keep an eye on “product” quality, but also emphasize the role of diligent work in such quality, just as Scripture does.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. . . . Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (1 Tim 4:13–15). Broadly speaking, the goal of hard work is a quality product. Paul asks Timothy to work in such a way that people will see. In Romans, Paul commands those who have the gift of leadership to lead “diligently” (Rom 12:8). These and other verses prescribe the process and request a kind of quality to the work of pastors and church leaders.

In further defining this stance toward work, Jim Collins provides insight in his section on a “Culture of Discipline” in his book *Good to Great*.<sup>40</sup> He prefers using the word “discipline” to describe quality work for a quality product, though he lists several others, including: “rigorous, dogged, determined, diligent, precise, fastidious.”<sup>41</sup> He also relates an anecdote about an athlete who, to gain even the slightest edge, *insisted* on rinsing his cottage cheese. As Collins reflects,

Now, there is no evidence that he absolutely needed to rinse his cottage cheese to win the Ironman; that’s not the point of the story. The point is that rinsing his cottage cheese was simply one more small step that he believed would make him that much better, one more small step added to all the other small steps to create a consistent program of superdiscipline.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps this concept of a “commitment to excellence” sounds similar to faithfulness. Assuming faithfulness is defined as it is above, I believe that is appropriate. Faithfulness pursues

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40. Collins, 120.

41. Collins, 127.

42. Collins, 127.

excellence. However, because faithfulness may still be considered rather subjective, we pair it with a commitment to excellence to give attention to the quality of completed work.

Combining faithfulness with a commitment to excellence ties ministries to normative standards. These standards help tether a pastor to quality work. Setting goals for the week, month, and year can also help the pastor rediscover a sense of accomplishment. Instead of wondering what progress he has made recently (or if his work even matters), he might, Lord willing, find a sense of traction and reward in his labors.

Such normative standards not only control *how* something is done, but *what* is done. Standards composed by a pastor and an elder or colleague will likely restrict his activity to key areas of ministry. While this sounds like putting the pastor under a burdensome set of laws, the intent and effect are the opposite. Consider the use of a budget. While budgets place boundaries on spending, they can be used profitably, with the end result being freedom and confidence in spending money. Budgets justify expenditure of resources on the most important items, as well as justifying the elimination of other items from the shopping list. At the end of a month, a budget may give us an indication that we could be better stewards of our money. It may indicate that we can rethink our priorities or spend more in other areas.

Grades, deadlines, and other measures work in this same way. As mature Christians, we are free to use them or not, but perhaps it would be wise to recognize the benefit of such measures in curbing the sinful nature. Tools such as personal goals or planned feedback might restore a feeling of traction or a sense of accomplishment to pastors who are overwhelmed by their work. Perhaps such tools could be used to help shape a ministry to be not only faithful and excellent, but also sustainable. In the end, we are free to use such means as we strive for excellence.

### PART III: IMPLEMENTING EXCELLENCE

This final section of the thesis will address strategies and philosophies that (Lord willing) will help pastors fulfill their duties with faithfulness, excellence, and sustainability. As always, caution must be taken when integrating secular literature into ministerial philosophies. While readers may find insight into improving the “process” or “product” found in Appendix 1, they must guard against subtly forming expectations of “results” through man-made methods.

That said, these books, like other tools such as building plans, budgets, and detailed strategies, may serve to guide us as they are normed by Scripture. With every strategy and every plan, the pastor humbles himself before God, yet confidently asks for God’s blessing. As St. James writes, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’” (Jas 4:13–15). While man-made plans may fail, and secular literature’s appeal may fade, we nevertheless recognize the wisdom of planning and ask the Lord’s blessing on it. As Scripture points out, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov 15:22).

#### **Figuring Out What to Do**

“Good is the enemy of great.”<sup>43</sup> Perhaps this bit of wisdom accurately describes the scene in the early church. In Acts 6, the apostles had plenty of ministry activities: they fed the poor, preached the Word, prayed, and carried out other duties. To be sure, the food distribution to the widows in Acts 6 was a marvelous act of charity and love. But then came the complaining. The apostles

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43. Collins, 1.

could not keep up with all the ministerial tasks. They may have been very devoted to all their tasks, but the food distribution was not done well. The apostles had juggled a number of tasks, but now it came time to do many things poorly or a few things well. They prioritized the stewardship and administration of the means of grace.

This was not simply *their* personal philosophy of ministry. They, in fact, considered it “wrong” to neglect their chief duties of prayer and the Word. They might have been kind and loving to those widows, but they would not have been faithful as administrators of the means of grace. In other words, they understood that both faithfulness and excellence require focus.

Knowing what to do and what not to do is critical in the pastoral ministry. Dozens of tasks lie before the pastor every week: evangelism calls, a sermon, Bible study, Bible information class, catechism, worship planning, visitation, counseling, and outreach event planning, as well as many smaller, sometimes inconvenient tasks. The pastoral ministry will consume as many hours as can be thrown at it, but there’s only 148 hours in a week.

In the prior discussion on faithfulness, we said that faithfulness *to* the call is also a call *away from* non-essential duties of a given ministry. What is essential in a ministry varies from setting to setting. In general, professors do not visit sick members of a congregation, nor are parish pastors called to specialize in a topic as a professor might. Call documents can specify what particular duties a pastor has.

Beyond that, various voices from the business world offer insight. Collins especially helps. He advocates for what he calls the “three circles of the hedgehog concept.”<sup>44</sup> By the term “hedgehog,” Collins is simply referring to the simplicity of a hedgehog in its survival tactics.

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44. Collins, 90.



While the fox stalks, chases, or lies in wait, the hedgehog just curls up. It's simple, but effective. Collins suggests following the example of the hedgehog: do less and do it better.

Collins advises organizations to fill in their three intersecting circles with three things: what you are deeply passionate about, what you can be the best in the world at, and what drives your economic engine.<sup>45</sup> In order to make this model more church-friendly, Thom Rainer re-names the circles in his book *Breakout Churches*.<sup>46</sup> Rainer's three circles are: leadership passion, community needs, and passion and gifts of the congregation.<sup>47</sup> While the specifics of Rainer's approach may or may not be helpful, the simple concept of a disciplined agenda provides clarity for the pastor.

The pastor may feel pressure to please his congregation and do what other seemingly prosperous churches are doing, or perhaps he has a few of his own side programs he would like to start. To this point, Sinek offers a bit of advice, laying out what he calls the "celery test."<sup>48</sup> He compares organizational priorities to grocery store priorities. One friend advises a hypothetical shopper to buy junk food. Another advises him to buy organic food. So the man goes to the store and fills his arms with cookies, organic rice milk, candy bars, and a clump of celery. Apparently, he has no idea what he wants (or perhaps he just wants everything). He himself has no aim (but his friends do have an aim), so he does what people tell him to do. He will end up spending more resources with less efficiency. Suppose, however, he starts with his areas of emphasis, his

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45. Collins, 96.

46. This book is, by Rainer's own admission, heavily inspired and patterned as a church version of *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. I recommend Collins over Rainer.

47. Note that these models are man-made, not inspired. Perhaps a pastor would like to create four parallelograms of prime ministry time or five pentagons of focused faithfulness (though this starts to spread ministry hours thin).

48. Sinek, 165.

“hedgehog circles,” and his “Why.” If his plan entails healthy eating, he can buy the celery and rice milk, stick to his goals, and use his money and time more efficiently. If he aims to eat his sorrows away, he should buy the chocolates. Regardless, if he wishes to spend his resources wisely, he must consider what his end goal is.

### **Figuring Out What Not to Do**

If everything is important, nothing is. Some things have to be cut. Going back to concepts of a commitment to excellence and focused faithfulness, we might take Collins’ advice to start a “stop doing” list.

Most of us lead busy but undisciplined lives. We have ever-expanding “to do” lists, trying to build momentum by doing, doing, doing—and doing more. And it rarely works. Those who built the good-to-great companies, however, made as much use of “stop doing” lists as “to do” lists. They displayed a remarkable discipline to unplug all sorts of extraneous junk.<sup>49</sup>

While we would not label any ministry “junk,” his logic applies. Pastors may have to slowly and cautiously cull certain programs. They may have to ask whether a particular program fits into the larger plan or not.

### **Leading in Excellence**

Should a pastor choose to implement a commitment to excellence, he needs to understand that this process requires more than a line on a mission statement. The process starts at the top (or rather, the bottom). As Jesus says, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Beyond that, Jesus modeled what leadership and authority in the church should resemble when he washed the feet of his disciples. This requires more than a few

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49. Collins, 139.

heavy-handed exhortations to the congregation. It requires that the pastor model this behavior. While individuals may make sacrifices and strive for excellence in spite of a bad example from leadership, both Scripture and secular literature testify to the importance of leadership by example. From Old Testament history a leader can find dozens of examples of good or bad leadership and its corresponding consequences. The New Testament regularly addresses pastors and the expectations God has of them. From the business world, John Kotter offers a few words: “We often call such behavior ‘leadership by example.’ The concept is simple. Words are cheap, but action is not. The cynical among us, in particular, tend not to believe words but will be impressed by action. In a similar vein, telling people one thing and then behaving differently is a great way to undermine the communication of a change vision.”<sup>50</sup> In short, a special burden lies on the pastor. Regardless of how frequently he promotes a commitment to excellence, a failure to lead in this commitment may disillusion the congregation instead of inspiring it. This may be especially tough, as most of what he does (with the exception of Sunday morning) is not visible.

Nevertheless, the pastor’s commitment to hard work and desire for a quality product must be emphasized. It is not enough for the pastor to commit to a term like “excellence” or “discipline.” The term is not primary; it only serves to describe a mindset. Committing to a term without truly committing to the concepts behind it is destructive. Kotter writes, “Communication comes in both words and deeds. The latter is generally the most powerful form. Nothing undermines change more than behavior by important individuals that is inconsistent with verbal communication.”<sup>51</sup> A number of Bible accounts that confirm this phenomenon may come to mind.

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50. John Kotter, *Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business Review, 2012), 98–99.

51. Kotter, 10.

Jesus spoke to the crowds and his disciples and warned them to distinguish between what the religious leaders of the time taught and what they practiced (Matt 23:1–12). Another example would be Peter’s hypocrisy in the presence of Judaizers (Gal 2:11–13).

### **Personal Evaluation and Development in the Pastoral Ministry**

Assuming quality work is important in the pastoral ministry and assuming the pastor has not mastered all aspects of his ministry, he may search for help in evaluating and improving various skills in the ministry. To this end, there are various resources, including: summer quarter at the seminary, Grow in Grace, colleagues in the circuit, or even a congregation’s elders, just to name a few.

The concept of committing to excellence requires that such measures be used for a number of reasons. First, many pastors are constantly seeking to improve their craft. Even the most gifted and driven pastors have shortcomings, biases, and room for improvement. Secondly, by carefully encouraging input from select leaders in the congregation or from select coworkers, he takes the first step in crafting a culture of openness and improvement, rather than a culture of insecurity and stagnation. Thirdly, for the sake of the pastor’s own psyche, a stable source of validation and encouragement makes it healthy. Fourthly, having another party involved in assessing ministry can bring spiritual joy. As Gurgel writes,

The greatest gift another can give me is to help me measure how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for me. When approached from proper law and gospel distinctions, the use of others to help hold me accountable and to encourage me does not need to reflect a lack of trust in the power of the Word – in particular the gospel – to work. Rather, just as we do for others, those others serve us by applying law and gospel to us.<sup>52</sup>

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52. Gurgel, 18.

Whether a pastor chooses to ask a brother to evaluate a sermon or asks an elder to regularly analyze strengths and weaknesses, he may find rich blessings by incorporating the input of others.

### **Excellence Requires Help**

Perhaps the pastor has set his pattern of work, assembled his network of accountability and feedback, and, in doing so, provided the example for the flock. He may still find himself burning out without additional help. Moses was in just such a situation when his father-in-law Jethro said to him, “The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone” (Exod 18:18). He had visited Moses and watched as he was swallowed up by the needs of the people from morning until evening. Just one look at weary Moses, and Jethro could tell that the situation was “not good” (Exod 18:17). Jethro did not view Moses’s ministry model as a personal preference or a fine habit. Just like the apostles in Acts 6, Jethro understood that ministers need help. He recognized the need for a ministry to be sustainable and he saw the necessity of delegating responsibility to others.

A good piece of advice found broadly in the business world is to focus on doing what you do best. Pastors have received the training (not to mention the call) to preach and teach. It makes sense for them to do what only they are able to do. Other tasks (not necessarily the dirty ones, like taking out the trash or dealing with tough interpersonal issues) can be shared with the congregation. In this way a pastor can guard his time and energy more closely. When done properly, sharing ministerial tasks blesses, rather than burdens, the members. They may find joy in their work, as well as finding their pastor less distracted when they need him. As pastors commit to focusing their faithfulness on fewer ministerial tasks, they may find that their lean schedule allows for more gracious interaction with members who drop in, rather than a tense, hurried exchange.

### **Serving to Lead**

All of this, however, must be balanced with another concept, the idea of a pastor as a servant-leader. While a pastor may wisely delegate certain duties to an assistant or a volunteer, he understands that the minister is a servant, not a lord. Instead of seeing the ministry as a pyramid with him at the top, he sees it as an inverse pyramid, with his members spread wide at the top and with him at the bottom, servant of all.

Our Lord set the very example of how such leadership ought to look on Holy Thursday. He, perhaps the most anguished and worn out (yet certainly the most skilled and worthy of praise), saw fit to kneel down and do a servant's work. Pastoral leadership does not let the messy jobs tumble down the ladder. It leads the members in them.

Called workers know the drill: be the first to arrive and the last to leave. Set up and take down chairs, empty the trash, and mop up the spills. Yes, a pastor is called to tasks which only he is qualified to perform. He is also called to lead God's people; doing that with excellence includes being a servant and model for his members.

### **Managing Excellence**

Once a pastor has successfully communicated events, goals, plans, and needs to his congregation, his job continues. To borrow a cliché, the buck stops with him. A wonderful, godly member might have mown the lawn, but a few stray clumps of untrimmed grass remain. Another of God's saints might have watered down the coffee or presented something that cannot be termed "excellent."

So how does a pastor get his members to commit to excellence? Perhaps a stern talk or worse, passive-aggressiveness? In such situations, it is important to return to the “why” again. If excellence does not flow as a response to God’s grace, we do not want it.

To resolve such problems in a loving manner, a pastor might gently remind the Christian how things might be done best, ask how she feels about serving in her current role, or, if problems persist, ask if she might allow another to fill her role, at least for a time. Of course this is all easier said than done. Such conversations have great potential for hurt feelings and strained relationships. Worst of all, a pastor may give the impression that he is more concerned with standards than people.

While the prospect of mediocre work from members may scare pastors, Collins suggests more freedom, not less. He speaks of freedom within a framework.<sup>53</sup> He reasons that volunteers, employees, etc. function better when given a specific set of constraints up front, then given freedom in the way they carry out their responsibility. Kotter advocates for a similar approach, discouraging a “command-and-control”<sup>54</sup> style of management, where leaders second-guess or undermine the efforts of coworkers as they micromanage them.

### **Enduring Excellence as Parish Culture**

Lastly, there is a way to perpetuate a “commitment to excellence.” There is a way to turn excellence into a lasting norm instead of a one-man flash in the pan. Kotter describes this as “anchoring an approach in the culture.”<sup>55</sup> Collins illustrates this as “building a clock instead of telling the

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53. Collins, 124.

54. Kotter, 117.

55. Kotter, 153.

time.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, one can (with the Lord’s help) change the culture. With the Spirit’s power, he can lead the congregation to shift its values, attitudes, and behaviors. He can use the gospel to inspire a commitment to excellence in the congregation.

Every congregation already has a “way of doing things around here,” that is, a culture. In his book *I Will!*, Rainer exposes the widespread culture of consumerism in mainstream Christianity. He concludes that this atmosphere of consumerism has left many church members concerned more about what their church can do for them than what they can do for their church.<sup>57</sup> In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, he warns churches of cultures that face inward on member comforts instead of outward on the spiritual needs of the unchurched.<sup>58</sup> Every church has a culture. Many cultures are pernicious and detrimental to the spiritual formation of the flock. Cultures are also hard to grasp and difficult to change.<sup>59</sup> Like the wind, culture will either batter the boat or empower it, so paying attention to it is essential.

St. Paul himself emphasizes the same point. Constant communication in word and deed is necessary to teach the flock how to act. St. Paul writes, “And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8).

As Lutherans, we start our conversation on culture with the means of grace. Because the means of grace are God’s means to bring Christians his blessings, we do well to pay attention to how we emphasize the Word and sacraments. Worship especially influences church culture.

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56. Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2002), 22.

57. Thom Rainer, *I Will!: Nine Traits of the Outwardly Focused Christian* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 76.

58. Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 22.

59. Kotter, 156.



What does worship emphasize? Is worship primarily about information, an insightful, encouraging message bookended by catchy songs? Is worship primarily about feeling, thus teaching congregations to equate emotion with spirituality? Assuming that worship is the best time to work on the spiritual formation of a congregation, how will we emphasize the importance of Word and sacrament for a robust spirituality? A failure to ponder these questions may end up creating a monster of unspoken beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, or as stated earlier, a cultural monster.

Every pastor will have to confront this question sooner or later because every pastor (unless the Lord Jesus returns first) will leave behind a congregation that he has shaped, for better or for worse (or that has shaped him, for better or for worse). Every pastor will leave something behind, whether that comes when he is hit by a school bus, when he retires, or when he takes a call—each one leaves behind a group of people with a healthy or unhealthy culture.

The good news is: cultural change is possible, and not only from gifted, charismatic leaders. Collins's research suggests that in reality, charismatic leaders actually have a harder time building a culture because so much of the company rests on their personality.<sup>60</sup> Building a culture decentralizes the DNA of a congregation from the pastor to the congregation. Again, cultural change is notoriously difficult, but any pastor can take specific, concrete steps to work towards it.

Should the congregation not conform to meet the wishes and desires of the pastor, the pastor must still love his flock. As earnestly as a pastor may desire to implement change in the congregation he serves, he ought not love his vision more than the people themselves. Should he love his dream church more than he loves the sinner-saints he serves, he may do more harm than good. The best advice for the shepherd may be the simplest: love the flock.

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60. Collins, 31.

## Conclusion

A blank page lay before J. S. Bach. Jeremiah, Isaiah, St. Peter, St. Paul and a host of ministers stood stunned at the prospect of the ministry. The challenges, sorrows, frustrations, and hardships of ministry lie before seminarians and pastors, not to mention their flaws, weaknesses, and insecurities.

One wonders where to start, but then, perhaps, he goes back to the warm, comforting grace of his God. God's grace fills every need. It encourages, uplifts, and empowers ministers for their tasks. Healed and helped, they go out to serve God. As gospel-rooted ministers, they do not work out of fear or coercion, but rather see their ministry as a privilege and an honor.

Furthermore, they seek the wisdom to know how to evaluate and develop ministry in terms of faithfulness. Faithfulness, God's standard for ministry, is not simply a loyalty to ministry, but a term with several facets, including faithfulness for a purpose, faithfulness with what has been entrusted to ministers, faithfulness as a pastor, father, husband, etc., and faithfulness to God.

Excellence can also be used profitably and properly as a means to shape faithful ministry. Excellence can be used to emphasize the quality of work done in a parish. Such quality is Scriptural. Excellent work is an end in itself, but it also means practicing proper stewardship of the means of grace, cultivating a positive reputation in the community to give the means of grace an audience, and working in such a way that glorifies God.

A small number of suggestions for pursuing excellence were given. Chiefly, this involves trimming or redistributing non-essential duties for the pastor to focus his faithfulness. What may be considered essential in the pastor's agenda will vary across contexts, but the principle of focusing faithfulness for the sake of high-quality work remains. To aid the pastor in this, secular

literature offers a number of tips on leadership, management, and culture. Regardless of tactics, we ask that God give his servants the wisdom and zeal to keep glorifying God in their work.

To conclude this thesis, one more insight from Bach's life may prove beneficial. At the top of an empty music sheet, before spotting and lining it with ink, Bach would jot down two initials: J. J., that is, *Jesu Juva* (Jesus, help!).<sup>61</sup> As talented and as gifted a musician as he was, he still humbly asked the Lord's favor before he started his work. As we end this paper and resume our work as Bach did, we ask the Lord's help, knowing that no work in the Lord is ever in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

S. D. G.

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61. Patrick Kavanaugh, *The Spiritual Lives of Great Composers* (Nashville: Sparrow Press, 1992), 13.

APPENDIX 1

FIGURE 1A:

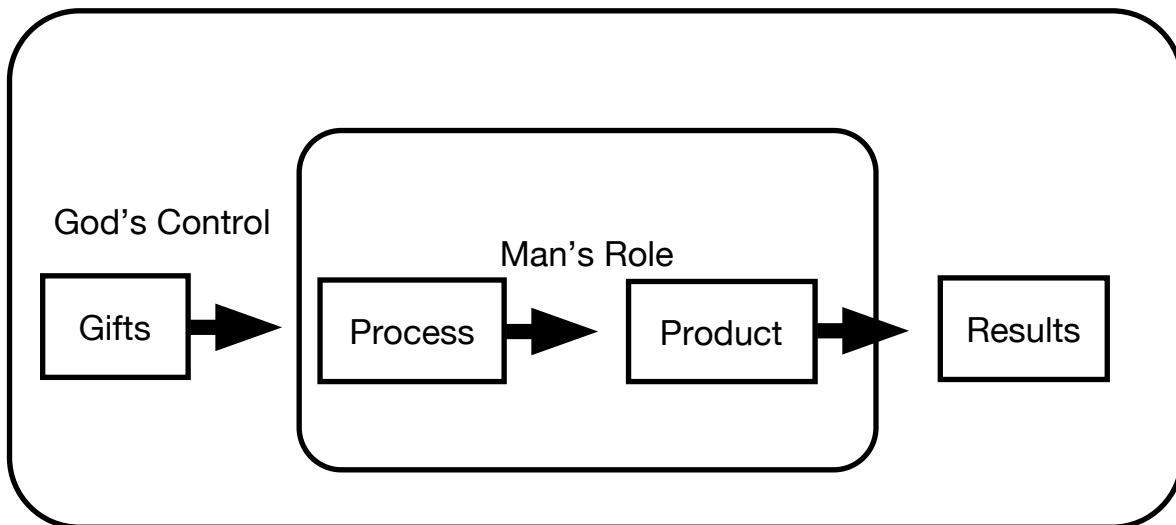


Figure 1A depicts the mindset that this thesis advocates. To clarify, “gifts” may stand for everything a pastor is entrusted with or given outside of his control (talents, setting, means of grace, etc.). “Process” represents how a pastor works, i.e. he may work diligently or not. “Product” represents that which a pastor produces (sermons, Bible studies, etc.). “Results” represents the final spiritual effect of whatever a pastor did (conversions, growth in faith, etc.). Everything in this figure falls under God’s control, but the process and the product also fall under man’s role.

FIGURE 1B:

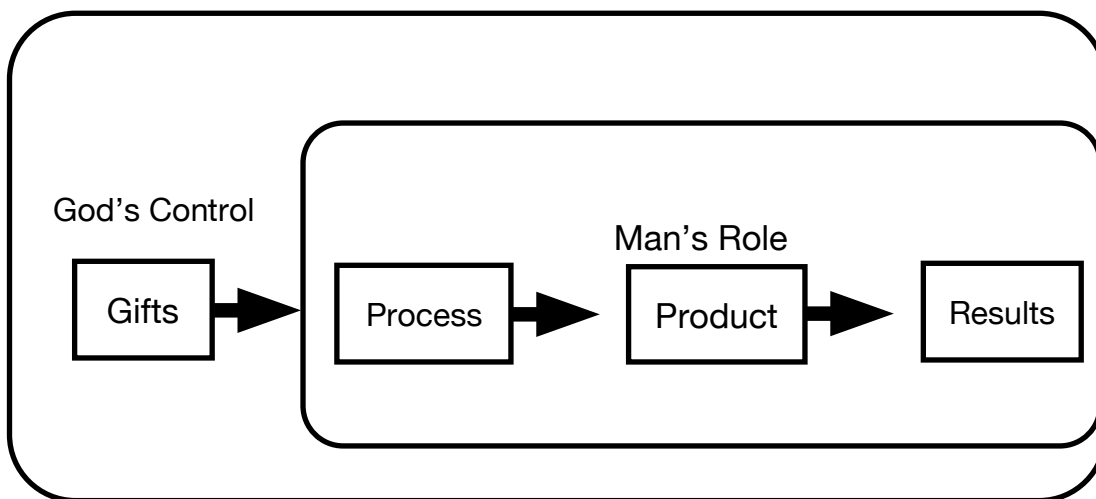


Figure 1B represents an unhealthy mindset towards ministry, where the pastor takes upon himself control over numbers and final results. He does not leave Holy Spirit to work where he may.

FIGURE 1C:

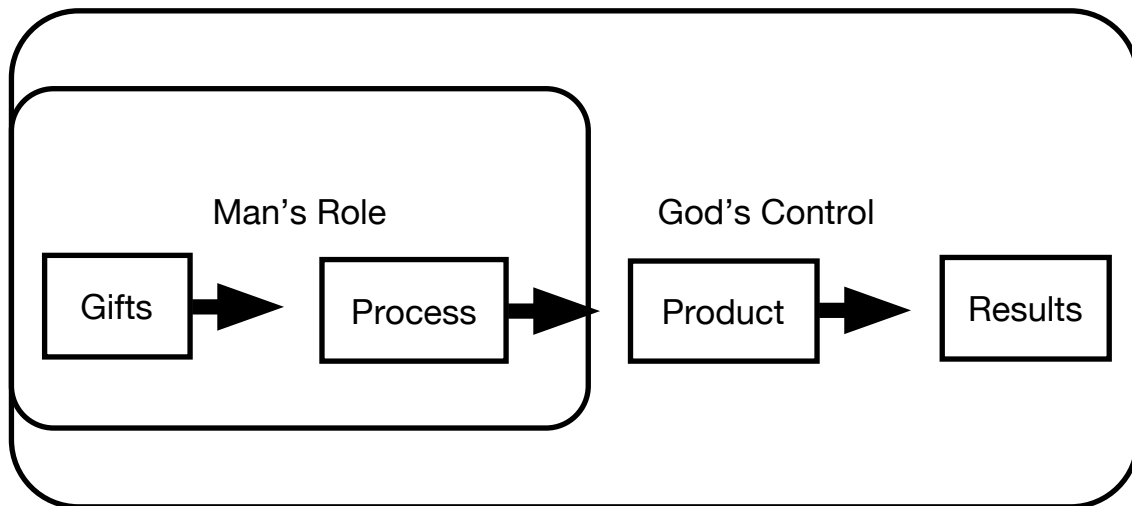


Figure 1C represents another unhealthy view of ministry, where the minister focuses on what he's been given (or hasn't been given) to the detriment of trying to produce quality work. While it is true that context and talents play some role in what a pastor may produce, this thesis seeks to prove that his focus should lie not on what he hasn't been given, but on how he can strive for excellence with what he has been given.

FIGURE 2A:

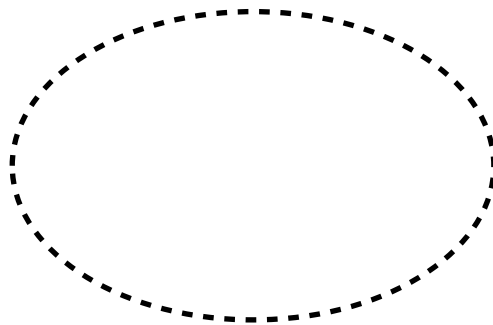


Figure 2A represents a loose definition of faithfulness. Here, the lines are dotted and the shape is round, signifying that, while faithfulness carries with it a sense of what must be done in a given week, it is unclear and flexible. While the shape allows for flexibility, it does not encourage focus.

FIGURE 2B:

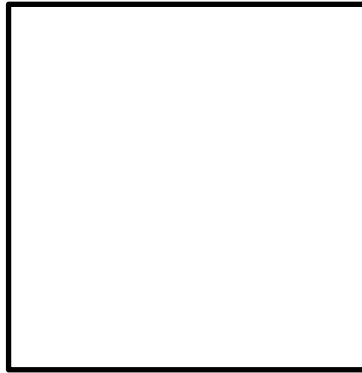


Figure 2B represents excellence as a rectangle with strictly defined edges. Over-relying on excellence could perhaps lead to a rigid view of ministry. Duties fit into the box or they do not. Our efforts perfectly conform to the same box every week or they do not.

FIGURE 2C:

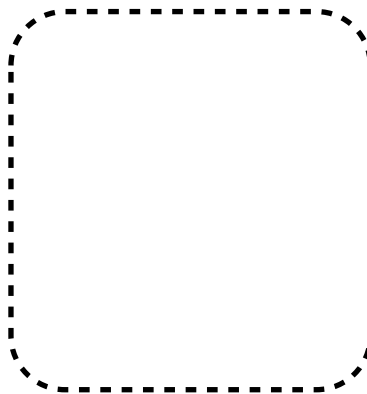


Figure 2C can represent a number of concepts, which, although distinct, have many similarities. This figure may represent focused faithfulness: while the line is dotted and allows for departure from a rigid ministry mindset, it also has a definite shape and is more conducive to focus.

FIGURE 2D:

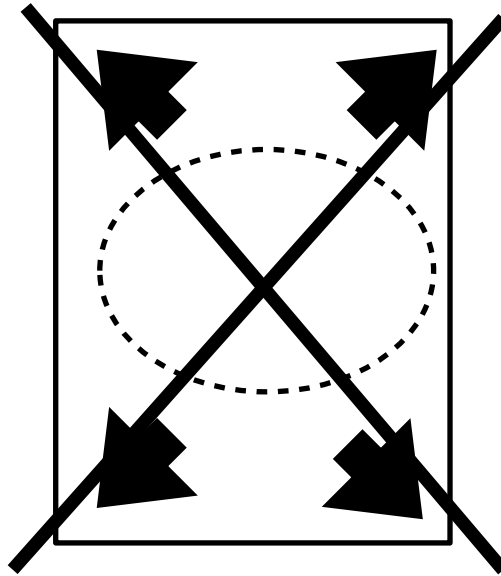


Figure 2D shows an unhealthy view of faithfulness normed by excellence. This comes as a result of believing that excellence means doing everything perfectly. Excellence is not an increase in ministerial activity with stricter standards. Humans have limits. Excellence is not an ever-increasing set of standards to stretch faithfulness beyond a minister's means.

FIGURE 2E

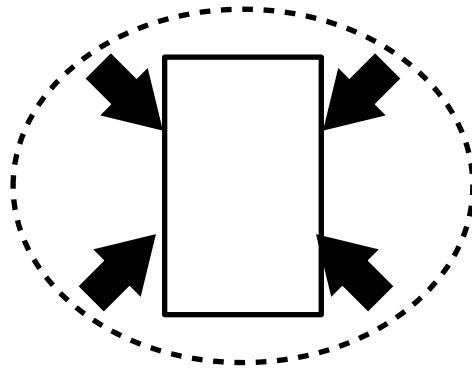


Figure 2E represents an unscriptural view of ministry, where the many and varied duties of ministry are compressed into a short list of ministry tasks to be checked off quickly. This comes as a result of emphasizing excellence at the expense of faithfulness.

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