

*The* NEW  
PASTOR'S  
HANDBOOK

HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT  
FOR THE FIRST YEARS OF MINISTRY

JASON HELOPOULOS

*Foreword by* Ligon Duncan



**BakerBooks**

a division of Baker Publishing Group  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2015 by Jason Helopoulos

Published by Baker Books  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Helopoulos, Jason.

The new pastor's handbook : help and encouragement for the first years  
of ministry / Jason Helopoulos.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1835-0 (pbk.)

1. Pastoral theology. I. Title.

BV4011.3.H45 2015

253—dc23

2015015861

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007

Scripture quotations labeled NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

15 16 17 18 19 20 21      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



Jason Helopoulos, *The New Pastor's Handbook*  
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

To Paul Settle, Ligon Duncan, Thomas Watson,  
John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards—  
faithful pastors who have shaped and informed  
my own pastoring in significant ways.

# Contents

Foreword by Ligon Duncan	11
Acknowledgments	17
Opening Words: A Holy Calling	19

## **Part 1 The Beginning**

1. What Is a Call? 25
2. How Do You Know Whether You Are Called? 28
3. Candidating 32

## **Part 2 Starting Out Strong**

4. As a Senior or Solo Pastor 39
5. As an Assistant Pastor 42
6. As a Youth Pastor 46
7. As a Church Planter 50

### **Part 3 Encouragements**

8. The Secret and Simplicity of Ministry 57
9. Your Early Ministry Focus 60
10. Strain Your Eyes: Read Often and Widely 64
11. Shepherd Your First Flock: Caring for Your Family 68
12. Know Your History: Learn about the Church You Are Serving 73
13. Personal Holiness Matters 76
14. No One Is Looking over Your Shoulder: Use Your Time Well 80
15. They Want to Follow: Leadership 84
16. Lose Control: Equip the Saints 87
17. Find a Friend 90
18. Trust His Means: Rely on the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer 93
19. Reading Scripture and Prayer 97
20. Slow to Speak, Quick to Listen: Listening to Your People 100
21. Ministry before Our Eyes 104
22. You Can't Do Everything: Busyness and the Pastorate 107
23. If You Pastor, They Will Come: Listening to Complaints 110
24. Silent Suffering 114
25. Thankfulness for the Congregation 118
26. Dual Purposes 121
27. Administration to the Glory of God 123

## Contents

- 28. Leave Your Door Open 126
- 29. Weddings and Funerals 129
- 30. Hospital Visitations 132
- 31. Leading Meetings 136

### **Part 4 Pitfalls of Young Pastors**

- 32. Beginning Too Fast 143
- 33. Idealistic Zeal 146
- 34. Discouragement 149
- 35. Taking Yourself Too Seriously: Substituting Self for Christ 152
- 36. Not Taking Yourself Seriously Enough 155
- 37. Here We Go Again: Theological Hobbyhorses 158
- 38. Giraffe Syndrome: Lack of Contentment 161
- 39. One Size Fits All 165
- 40. Devastated by People 169
- 41. Lecture Sermons 172
- 42. Illustrations and Applications Gone Awry 176
- 43. Iron Grip: Holding People Too Tightly 180
- 44. Pastor Envy 183

### **Part 5 Joys of Ministry**

- 45. An Eternal Work 189
- 46. Confidant: A Trusted Position 192
- 47. We Get Paid for This? The Privilege of Ministering 195

## Contents

48. Self-Knowledge: Getting to Know Your Sin and Yourself 198

Closing Words: Perseverance in the Ministry 201

Suggested Reading 204

Notes 208

## Foreword

**T**he apostle Paul once wrote to a young pastor and said, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In fact, Paul’s letters are filled with those kinds of exhortations, specifically intended for those starting out in ministry.

Train yourself for godliness. (1 Tim. 4:7)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim. 4:12)

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant

must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:22–26)

The list could go on. The point is, Paul is deliberate and specific in providing exhortation and encouragement to a new pastor (who, in this case, is his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy) at the outset of his ministry, and Paul's words, being by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also guide our investment in and preparation of young pastors, in every age. Paul gave that help and encouragement because Timothy needed that help and encouragement. And so do new pastors in every age.

That is why Jason Helopoulos wrote *The New Pastor's Handbook: Help and Encouragement for the First Years of Ministry*. In it he engages the reader in a conversation that is not only useful in the early years of ministry but also sets the stage for long-term faithfulness and fruitfulness. The considerations here—the issues, circumstances, challenges, and, importantly, delights of ministry—are all important to think through at the outset of ministry. Those currently training for the ministry, or just starting out as an assistant pastor, or in the first years of a church plant, or in their first church as a solo minister, or beginning a pastorate in a new place (to mention no more) will all find the discussion here helpful. Additionally, Jason provides seasoned pastors with a good outline of issues to think through as they

mentor and encourage seminarians and young ministers. I am personally thankful for that particular application of the book.

Jason Helopoulos is one of a new generation of pastors who deeply encourages me. I have known him since he was a young ministerial candidate in Dallas, Texas, and I have followed his service of the Lord and his church with gratitude ever since those days. You will quickly discover that, though he is not as young as he used to be, he is still wise beyond his years. You will also find that the topics that he addresses here are very pertinent to and timely for those who are just starting out in ministry (I should also say that veteran pastors will be edified, as I was, in reading this book). The chapters are brief and the topics wide ranging. In the midst of much practical wisdom, forthright consideration of problems, and counsel on dangers and priorities, I love the note of hope and joy that Jason strikes. He calls us to perseverance, to endurance in the pastoral ministry, because he knows its value and its end. He is fully aware of its challenges, and he understands there are pitfalls, but he also knows the blessing, glory, and gladness of serving God and his people. The biblical and prudential wisdom here serves a number of functions: to set our expectations so that when disappointments come, we are neither surprised nor unduly discouraged; to prime us so that when decisions have to be made, we have thought about them ahead of time; to prepare and equip us for the long haul in ministry; and to call us to a deliberate self-awareness.

In Acts 20:28, in his final earthly meeting with the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul exhorted them to “be on guard

for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (NASB). That urgent challenge—to shepherd the flock of God, the church of God, the very people of God, bought at an unfathomable cost—has rung in the heart of every faithful Christian pastor ever since, bringing both inspiration and conviction. Paul is setting before us the pastoral task, building in us an aspiration to it, and specifically urging us to undertake it faithfully. We all need that.

Paul says three things: as pastors-elders-shepherds-leaders, (1) watch over yourselves; (2) guide, direct, protect, feed, and help the flock of God; and (3) remember what they cost God and how valuable they are to him.

Don’t miss Paul’s astounding third point: pastors-elders-shepherds-leaders have been entrusted with God’s own inheritance, purchased with the blood of his Son. That is, Paul reminds us of the exceeding preciousness of the people whom he has called us to pastor. Listen again to how he says it: they are “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” This reminds us that in being called to shepherd God’s flock we are being called to care for something of staggering value to God.

God himself has redeemed, purchased, and paid for his people, his church, his vineyard, his Son’s body, his children. This has been done through the infinite cost of the death and dereliction of his own Son. Surely it is a grave thing to be entrusted with such a gift. God has entrusted to you his own children, the blood-bought brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ,

and said, “Tell them what I’m like. Give them my good news. Proclaim my grace. Keep the wolves away from them. Teach them to trust in my Son Jesus, to love my Word. Show them how to glorify me in all of life. And prepare them to be with me forever.”

Young pastors and those preparing for the ministry, you must realize the exceeding preciousness to God of what he has given or is giving into your arms and prepare accordingly. Jason’s wise counsel is here to help you to that end.

Ligon Duncan

Chancellor and CEO of Reformed Theological Seminary  
John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology

## Acknowledgments

There are many who made this book possible. I am thankful for Baker Books and especially Brian Vos for the opportunity to publish this work.

Kevin DeYoung's early encouragement was key in this book seeing the light of day. He is a pastor from whom I have learned a great deal, and I am thankful to count him as my dear friend.

Much of the content of this volume is the result of watching older and wiser pastors who set good examples before me. While they are too many to list, their impact has been significant.

I am thankful for Rob Allen, Ron Williams, Roger Wiles, Robby Rucker, and Paul Settle, all seasoned men in ministry, who intentionally spent time mentoring a twenty-something, zealous, overconfident young man. They sowed many of the seeds of wisdom and practical advice that are present in this book.

## Acknowledgments

As always, thank you to my dear wife, Leah, who has been a true helpmate in the midst of this ministerial journey. She is a faithful friend, wiser than I shall ever be. I am a better pastor with her by my side. Thank you also to my two children, Gracen and Ethan, who fill me with delight and encouraged me throughout this writing project, routinely asking, “Daddy, how many chapters do you have left to write now?”

Most importantly, I want to thank the congregations that have afforded me the privilege to serve as their pastor: Meadowview Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christ Church, Providence Presbyterian, and University Reformed Church. Much of the content of this book was learned by way of experience—and not always by taking the easiest road. I am grateful for your patience and long-suffering, and for the encouragement you extended to a pastor who needed his fair share of each. It has been my honor to serve alongside you.

# Opening Words

## *A Holy Calling*

**T**he diploma reads “Master of Divinity” or “Master of Theology.” That first week in the church involves incredible excitement about this new season of life, the call you received, the task placed before you, and the realization of all those years of study. Somewhere in the second or third week you begin to experience a little panic. You come to the jarring conclusion that you are not quite the “Master of Divinity” your diploma says you are. You can exegete from the original languages, critique the best sermons, and wade through the deep waters of the hypostatic union, but you suddenly realize you lack knowledge about a lot of practical things—things you have never done and aren’t even sure you know how to do. Seminary didn’t teach you everything.

If you are a pastor and find yourself in such a situation, you are in good company. Every pastor before you has traveled this road. My hope is that this book will help you avoid some of

the potholes on the journey. It will not make ministry easy or painless. However, it may spare you a little unnecessary trouble, and, maybe more importantly, spare your congregation a little unnecessary trouble too.

A friend asked me why I was writing this book. He wasn't as concerned about the book's subject as he was about me being the author! He said, "You are neither a famous pastor nor a pastor nearing retirement with a lifetime of ministry to look back on, so why you?" No doubt many other pastors could write a better book on this subject. I do not pretend to be an authority on pastoring. Rather, I am an ordinary pastor continuing to grow in the pastorate who loves the church, loves my fellow brothers in the ministry, and passionately desires to help men at the beginning of this glorious calling. I am thankful for the older pastors who came alongside me over the years, equipping me for the challenges of ministry.

In turn, I ask you to consider this book as an outstretched helping hand from a pastor a little further along in the journey than you—a pastor who experienced his first years of ministry just a decade ago. Those memories and challenges are still fresh in my mind. I hope this freshness, along with some seasoning through experience as the years have passed, will provide ready wisdom and aid to those just beginning this journey. Much of this book draws on advice mentors have given me over the years, but some of it is what I wish I had known and unfortunately only learned by experience.

I think of those first months of pastoral ministry and of a wise pastor telling me to move slowly. I was zealous and filled

with ideas. Implementing a host of new initiatives in the children's and youth ministries of the church were the first items on my list. However, the parents of these children didn't know me, and I didn't know them, which was a recipe for disaster. Thankfully, this wise pastor's encouragement slowed me down and provided the opportunity to foster trust before making sweeping changes. I think of another seasoned minister who charged me to devote my first couple of years in ministry to learning as much from the Scriptures as I could. He said, "Don't get entangled in controversies early in ministry. Devote your first years to learning the Scriptures above all else." This wonderfully practical advice has provided a strong foundation for all my years as a pastor (this will be discussed in more detail in chap. 9).

I also think of the difficult lessons I learned by experience. Nothing prepared me for the sting of betrayal in the church. I don't remember anyone warning me about this hazard in seminary or during those first couple of years of pastoral ministry, but I've discovered my situation was not unique. I recently spoke at a conference for pastors on this very subject. A young pastor came up to me afterward with tears streaming down his cheeks and said, "I almost left the ministry over this very thing. Betrayal wasn't on my radar." He and his wife were devastated, and we spent twenty minutes talking and praying through his situation. I hope betrayal never happens to you, but it is helpful to be prepared in case it does (this will be discussed in more detail in chap. 40). This book is aimed at such issues—practical advice to aid you as you set out on a lifetime of ministry.

## Opening Words

My brothers, we have a high calling. A holy task has been set before us. It isn't always fun. It isn't always easy. It isn't always pleasurable. But I know the vast majority of us can testify that nothing is more rewarding or joy stirring than serving Christ and his dear bride! The Great Shepherd of the sheep has called and equipped us to serve as his undershepherds, those charged with the care of his precious flock. We enjoy one of the great honors and privileges of this life. May the Lord help us to serve his people well, unto his glory. I hope in writing this book to help you live as a more faithful and effective minister of the gospel, even as I join you in this lifelong calling to grow as a pastor. I sit with you at the feet of Christ, pleading, "Teach me, humble me, convict me, and equip me, so I may be a better servant in your church for its good and your glory." Let's march onward.

---

PART 1

---

*The*  
**BEGINNING**



# 1

## What Is a Call?

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors [ESVmg.] and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11–12

**W**hat do we mean when we say someone is “called” to the ministry? *Call* can include many different definitions. A *call* can be a loud voice, a brief visit with a friend, or even a moment in a card game. None of these refers to the *call* of God to vocational ministry.

In the Scriptures we see that Zacchaeus responded to the call of Christ (Luke 19:5–6). In fact, Christ calls every Christian to service in his name (Eph. 4:4). Without that call on our lives we would not be Christians. As Paul says to Timothy, “But share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:8b–9). To be a Christian is to be called. He summons each of us to holiness and labor for the sake of the kingdom (1 Cor. 10:31).

Yet, it is also true that Christ extends a distinct and particular call to those who serve as pastors of his people. He summons some to a specific office, responsibility, and function in the church. Paul clearly articulates that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), and in the centuries to follow, the church has continued its upbuilding through the ministry of evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11–14).

Pastors possess a distinct calling from others in the body of Christ. However, this does not diminish the need for every other Christian in the body to contribute his or her necessary service. On the contrary, “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If we were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:17–20). The church needs each and every one of us. As pastors, we serve

as members of the body distinctly called to proclaim, explain, and apply the living Word of God (2 Tim. 4:2). We “equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

We have a particular call marked by requisite gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Tim. 4:14). This great service demands sacrificial love (Rom. 9:3), holiness (1 Tim. 3:2–7; 4:12–13), and the pouring out of our lives for the sake of others and the gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:17). A pastor functions as a counselor, a friend, a guide, and a leader. He will fulfill many roles. He operates as a shepherd and physician of the soul. Above all, he is a man under obligation to proclaim the Word of God with authority, accuracy, and faithfulness (2 Tim. 2:15) for the benefit of the body and the glory of God (2 Tim. 4:2). Did God call you as a pastor? Then this is your high calling. As undershepherds of his great flock, we care for his sheep by feeding them the Word; it is the very core and heartbeat of the calling on our lives.