

Old Testament studies in theological and Bible schools and churches. One could complain about the length of the book and Walton's tendency to repeat himself. Still, it takes not away from the quality and value of the book itself. His theology is sound argued and well researched, supplying insight into new trends in the field of Old Testament studies. Additionally, he provides diverse academic opinions and compares them to his own. Albeit, he is humble enough to admit that we do not have all the answers. The relevance of the book lies in the author's words: "Old Testament theology must be approached independently from the New Testament theology, through New Testament theology cannot be done in isolation from Old Testament theology" (20-21).

Monika Bajić

Christopher Ash

The Book Your Pastor Wishes You Would Read (But is Too Embarrassed to Ask)

The Good Book Company, Epsom, 2019., 128.

This book is not for me, but it would be great for you. Unless you are a pastor like me. Too often Christians hear a sermon or read a book about a certain issue and immediately think of a few persons who should hear or read that. But that is not what I mean. I am not simply seeing how others would benefit from the content of this book, while thinking that it has nothing to teach me. But, this book has been written by an ex-pastor for Christians who have pastors shepherding them. In the author's own words, he wants "to speak to *you*, an ordinary church member... about how to care for your pastor" (p. 10).

Writing from past personal experience of being a pastor for over a decade and later being a director of a training ministry, which allowed him to draw insights both subjective and objective in nature, Christopher Ash sets out to help church members help their pastor to do their ministry not only well but also with joy. He starts by stating that care for pastors is actually self-care that every church should be eager to do. "We all need to look after our pastors and—paradoxically—it is in our best interest to do so. If you and I do not care for our pastors, then they will not be able to care for us" (p. 11). In the *Introduction*, he gives a brief vision of how great it would be for everyone if this mutual care would be done in local churches and how that would cause growth in Christ-likeness because of which our churches would be more desirable to be part of.

Before giving his readers seven virtues which would cause joy in pastors if church members would learn and implement them, he starts by showing that pastors are people too, because people tend to see pastors "at their most polished"

(p. 13), instead of as they are. He does this by providing ten biographical sketches of different pastors on a Monday morning. These are fictional, but they seem very real, as they depict situations and settings which truly are part and parcel of a regular average pastoral ministry.

In these snippets, we are presented with a pastor who is struggling under the pressure of never-ending and never-finished pastoral work, as his main responsibilities are such that real progress often cannot be seen. There is no end to the grind of preaching, counselling, and leading. Another pastor serves in a church in which not much is going on. His ministry might be called ordinary and even dull. Also, there is a pastor who is haunted by the feeling that what he does week by week has little to no true impact for God's kingdom, and that frustrates him as his labor seems to make no real change in the lives of the people he is ministering to. One of the pastors feels deep loneliness, as he has no colleagues with whom he could share his workload and responsibility for the flock that has been entrusted to him. Still, not all is gloomy, as there is also a pastor who rather enjoys the quiet, steady, and uneventful ministry in a small rural environment. On the other hand, one pastor is portrayed as being overwhelmed by the variety and volume of challenges in the lives of those in his flock. He has no idea how to even begin to tackle all the issues which he faces every day. Not all challenges are emotional as there is also one pastor whose family struggles financially. His life, before he became a pastor, was not one of want but instead was very comfortable. Now, his income is lower than before, and life is harder than he is accustomed to. Another pastor faces similar problems after his wife quit her job in order to raise their children, and he left his job to pursue pastoral ministry. One of these pastors is something that might seem odd for a pastor to be — an introvert. He likes to read and spend time alone, reading in silence. For him, Sundays are almost more than he can handle because pastoral ministry involves spending a lot of time with people. He likes other people's company, but it drains him of his energy. The last is a pastor who grew up simply, and that has prepared him well for a lifetime of gratitude and contentment. He feels great privilege for being able to be used by God to preach the Gospel.

What these brief but realistically insightful descriptions show is, first, that pastoral ministry is not easy as some think. Pastors do not work only one hour on Sundays, nor do they even have working hours. Pastors who truly aim to have a life and a ministry which is God-honoring face many challenges. They may not show it on Sundays, when most church members see them, but faithful pastors are truly human. They serve with supernatural aid, but nevertheless, the stress they are exposed to is as natural as that of any other human being. Secondly, they show that pastors do need to be taken care of by the members of the church they lead. They really might be too embarrassed to seek that care (as the subtitle of this

book suggests), but that only means they need it even more.

Thirdly, the way these are presented shows that every pastor is different and his needs may not be as those of another. For the readers of this book, the author concludes this chapter by reminding them that they need to care for *their own* pastors, which implies they need to know him and his struggles.

After doing such a great job in this chapter, the author injects another rather important chapter — about why would you even want to care for your pastor — before continuing with the seven virtues. In it he answers several questions in order to further emphasize the fact that caring for your pastor is caring for yourself. Replying to the first question (“How do we hope our pastors will care for us?”), he describes five ways: 1) they preach to us, 2) they pray for us, 3) they protect us from wolves, 4) they prepare us for ministry, and 5) they provide guidance. The answer to the second question (“How can a pastor be motivated to do all this?”) shows that Hebrews 13:17 give the power of such motivation for joyful service to the flock. Pastors will persevere even in hard times, if they are being followed. Pastoral joy in ministry is actually a product of a two-way dynamic in which church members play “as critical a part as [their] pastors” (p. 32).

The “meat” of this book are the seven chapters which delineate and explain the virtues which will help churches to be flocks that are a pleasure to shepherd. They are the following:

Daily Repentance and Eager Faith: Such behavior gives pastors hope that their labor is not in vain. “Nothing so drains a pastor of vital energy as having to preach to, having to go on praying for, having to try to lead and care for men and women who are impervious to the good news of God’s grace. Hardness of heart is the great pastor-killer” (p. 40). Church members can show they are eager to walk in truth (2 John 4; 3 John 3–4) by “demonstrating eagerness to know [their] Bibles” (p. 40). Praying for your pastor’s sermon preparation, reading in advance the passage to be preached on Sunday, actually using a Bible during the sermon, thanking your pastor for a specific thing you learned from his preaching (maybe even in written, so he can re-read it during discouraging times), are just some examples of how daily repentance and eager faith are manifested given in this chapter.

Committed Belonging: Regular attendance and the resulting growth in maturity make pastors rejoice, as their ministry is “more deeply a ministry to build up the church that it is a ministry to build up individuals” (p. 49). When the people in the church are committed to being active members of that spiritual family, it is easier for pastors to do the job of “being a guardian to a virgin daughter” as the author shows from 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 (p. 50).

Open Honesty: The author here shows how a lack of openness and honesty with pastors is a serious infection in a church. “Some people only speak with their pastor when they have an issue with the church leadership or a crisis in their own

life” (p. 60). That needs to change, as honesty and openness are “prerequisites of a healthy church,” claims the author (p. 62).

Thoughtful Watchfulness: What is meant by this is that “it is much easier for a pastor to make progress when they serve a church that expects them to make progress” (p. 72). This can be accomplished by helping the pastor grow through reading (the church can provide a book budget and inquire with the pastor how is his reading going), conferences (the church can pay for their pastor [and maybe also his wife] to attend a conference or two every year), study leave (“when a church manages to shift from an inappropriate business model of the pastorate to a properly pastoral model, they learn the potential benefits. For there is a relentlessness to local church pastoral leadership that fights against prayer and quietness, and stifles serious thinking about the Bible, human nature, contemporary issues and so on,” pp. 75–76), days off (churches can help mitigate the stress of pastoral ministry by allowing their pastor to have a proper rest day), and vacations (churches need to be clear as to how much vacation time their pastor can and should take every year, because some pastors feel uncomfortable going on a vacation at all [p. 78]). Besides these ways just mentioned, a church also watches after its pastor by providing enough finances for him.

Loving Kindness: There are many every day opportunities to be kind to your pastor in a small and yet very significant way. These include babysitting their children (if they have them), helping with their garden (if they have one), random but meaningful gifts, etc.

High Expectations: This does not mean that church members “put [their] pastors on a pedestal and expect them to be superhuman” (p. 94), but it does mean that they do not entertain gossip about the pastor without checking it (p. 96) and yet keep them accountable as they are also able to sin. In other words, the church should “care about [their pastor’s] godliness” (p. 98).

Zealous Submission: Because pastors are leaders, the author’s exhortation to church members in this chapter is “let the pastor lead and be zealous in following the direction of that leadership (so long as it is in a gospel direction)!” (p. 102). Since all authority is delegated, “submission of church members to pastors... can never be absolute” (p. 103). Yet, churches need to recognize that pastors are “accountable to Christ... and not primarily to [them]” (p. 104).

Following these seven chapters, just before the conclusion, the author includes a chapter in which he points out that churches need to know their pastor—their past, their family background, their previous pastoral experiences and influences, their personality, etc.— as all of these aspects influence how they do ministry.

The conclusion of this book first considers some possible scenarios about how the reader is doing in this regard, and then offers some steps to take for each

of those scenarios. Firstly, if the church is already caring for their pastor, they should still check with the pastor if he feels the same. Secondly, if they are not caring for their pastor, and it is so bad that drastic measures need to be taken, perhaps some elders, secretaries, treasurers, etc. need to resign. Thirdly, if a part of the church does not care for the pastor and another part wants to care for him, the latter need to be loud with their support for him. Fourthly, in some extremely bad cases, pastors may need to move on to another ministry and in that case both him and the church he is leading should guard themselves against bitterness. Fifthly, there may arise a need for an outside figure to be invited “to help a church and a pastor work through difficulties” (p. 121). Whatever the case is, the author urges his readers to “do something” (p. 121). The book ends with a couple of practical suggestions: 1) get the church or at least its leadership to read this book over a few weeks and discuss its teaching and 2) meet with the pastor and ask him what would he like to see implemented from this book.

This is a small book (it's 123 page long, but its format is small: 128 x 178 x 11mm) and could probably be even read in a single day. However, it would be better to read it slower, perhaps even devotionally. That approach is made easier by the fact that every chapter ends with a short, but very deep, soul-searching prayer about what was written in the preceding chapter.

Even if this book is not for me as I am a pastor, I highly recommend it because its teaching is very timely and practical. It is easy to read even though its topic is very serious. I wholeheartedly agree with its final words (p. 122): “What we need is a shift of church mindset so that caring for our pastors becomes an integral and normal part of what we do. And please pray for your pastors... If you want a better pastor, you can get one by praying for the one you already have!”

Mario Kushner