



*Ancient*  
**WISDOM**  
*for the*  
**CARE**  
*of*  
**SOULS**

*Learning the Art of  
Pastoral Ministry from  
the Church Fathers*

**Coleman M. Ford &  
Shawn J. Wilhite**

Foreword by Ray Ortlund



“When Christian authors of late antiquity are read or consulted today, it usually has to do with matters of doctrine, like their superb and absolutely fundamental reflections on the Trinity, for instance. But their thoughts on piety, pastoral leadership, and soul care are also of immense value for our day. To be sure, they lived in a world quite different from ours in all kinds of ways. However, such basic issues as human pride, abuse of power, and sexual lust were as common in their world as they are in ours. And their wisdom on how to deal with these matters as well as their pungent and powerful reflections on spiritual formation are of enormous value in our bent world. This is a book to be read slowly and treasured.”

**Michael A. G. Haykin**, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls* is a brilliantly conceived volume, weaving together faithful biblical interpretation, engaging historical theology, thoughtful spiritual formation, and practical pastoral care as seen through the window of the church fathers and classical Trinitarian thought. It draws from the rich tradition of the church’s early centuries and provides pastors, students, and church leaders examples of great wisdom for the rigorous and complex challenges of ministry in our contemporary context. This book offers insights regarding the virtue, spirituality, theological depth, and ministry skills needed in those charged with the responsibility of spiritual oversight and the care of souls. Three cheers for Coleman Ford and Shawn Wilhite for writing this wonderful book, which will serve as a treasured resource for many for years to come.”

**David S. Dockery**, President and Distinguished Professor of Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; President, International Alliance for Christian Education

“Pastoral ministry lies at the heart of the church. Its outward form is constantly changing, but its underlying principles remain the same. The distilled wisdom of the past is an encouragement in the present, as this guide to the teaching and practice of great leaders of the early church makes plain. It is a precious resource for us to ponder and to use in our service to the Lord today.”

**Gerald Bray**, Research Professor, Beeson Divinity School

“Sometimes it takes getting out of our own culture to see our misguided assumptions, including those about ministry. As pastors, we need to prioritize Scripture as our authority and glean wisdom from the local church, the global church, and the historic church. This helpful volume takes us back to the early church so we can learn from the church fathers about pastoral spirituality, theology, and ministry.”

**Christopher W. Morgan**, Dean, School of Christian Ministries, California Baptist University; Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Highland, California



*Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls*



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*Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry  
from the Church Fathers*

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 **CROSSWAY®**  
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*For the elders, deacons, and ministry staff of the Village Church Denton,  
who are a beautiful model of Christ's humility and abundant grace.*

*Coleman*

*For the elders, deacons, and ministry staff of Redeemer  
Baptist Church. It fills me with exceeding joy to labor  
alongside each of you for the joy of the bride.*

*Shawn*





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## Foreword

WHEN WE CHRISTIANS recite the Apostles' Creed in our worship services, we affirm not only “the holy catholic church” but also “the communion of saints.”<sup>1</sup> These two articles of faith are related, of course, but they are not identical. The holy catholic church is the whole body of people throughout time, anywhere and everywhere, who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. The communion of saints is the ongoing fellowship and solidarity among those believers in Christ. It's their shared life together. The first is an entity, the second an experience.

The communion of saints is one reason why this book matters. Our sympathies flow out toward the whole church. Yes, we are compelled by history and geography to gather together in local churches, which might appear more like separation than communion. But in our hearts, we cherish, we affirm, we revere the communion of saints as a grace from our Savior God (Eph. 4:4–6; Heb. 12:22–24).

1 Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 13.

So, then, we have an answer to the question, Why go back to the patristic era for pastoral wisdom today? The answer is, we today are located *within* the ancient, medieval, and modern communion of saints! We should instead ask, Why *not* go back?

Our pastoral resources are not limited to our time. We have helps for our generation from beyond our generation. Let's not leap mentally from the apostles of the first century to the Reformers of the sixteenth century, as if God's people in the intervening centuries had nothing to say. Thomas Cranmer, the English Reformer, believed that the church had lost its way only in the three or four centuries prior to his own time. He believed that, in going so wrong, the church had departed not only from the Scriptures but also from the fathers.<sup>2</sup> Let's take full advantage of the profound resources God has provided for us today in those saints then!

Coleman Ford and Shawn Wilhite's new book, *Ancient Wisdom for the Care of Souls: Learning the Art of Pastoral Ministry from the Church Fathers*, opens a door for our generation of pastors to be enriched by this ancient wisdom. It's as if a circle of elderly pastors from those centuries long ago is standing together, discussing pastoral ministry, each one contributing his own experience and insights. Ford and Wilhite are over here, standing with us, pointing to them over there and saying, "Those saints aren't all that far away. Just a few steps. And we could learn from them. Want to walk over and listen in for a while?" Who would refuse such an offer?

Thank you, Coleman and Shawn, for helping us get free of the narrow limits of our time. We're tired of hype and celebrity. We

2 J. I. Packer, "Introduction," in *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), xi–xiii.

FOREWORD

long for gospel ministry that's been time-tested, that's real and solid and lasting. Thank you for showing us a path into the communion of saints deeper and richer than we have known thus far—and all by God's grace alone, for his glory alone.

*Ray Ortland*

RENEWAL MINISTRIES



## Acknowledgments

WE HAVE BEEN FRIENDS for the better part of twelve years, and our friendship forged this book. The topics of our text threads and conversations range from music interests to patristics, pictures of books, praying for one another, and caring for our families. We have decided to write this book because of our mutual interest in ministry and patristics, but it also affords us even more ways to explore the depth of our friendship.

No book is ever written without the influences (living or dead) that surround an author. I (Coleman) wish to thank many mentors who have shaped my thinking and ministry throughout the years. Jerry Witham was the first true pastor I had, modeling the work of pastoral ministry and providing me with opportunities to grow and develop as a preacher and minister of the gospel. Michael Haykin showed me what it means to receive the voices of tradition with grace and charity. I am thankful to the many fellow ministers of the gospel, both past and present, with whom I have had the pleasure of serving alongside. You all demonstrate the heart of a pastor and have shaped and encouraged me in myriad ways. Alex, my wife and partner in ministry, has greatly encouraged me in my ministry calling and writing. The Fordlings



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(Colette, Matthieu, and Charlotte) bring so much joy to me along the way. Thank you all!

I (Shawn) wish to express gratitude and thanks for several mentors and spiritual directors: Greg Cochran and Jeff Mooney for modeling a patient and caring ministry to the church, Michael Haykin and Lewis Ayres for teaching me how to read the fathers slowly and patiently, and Jeff Biddle for showing me how to care for souls. I also wish to thank my students at California Baptist University (CBU) and Gateway Seminary as well as the ministry interns at Redeemer (especially Matt, who began as an intern, became one of my disciples, and now serves as my pastor). I am incredibly grateful to belong to Redeemer and CBU. My deans, Chris Morgan and Tony Chute, have greatly supported me and my research interests. My partner and co-heir in this life, Allyson, and my beloved kiddies (Mercy and Caden) have added value to my life in ways unimaginable. Thanks to each of you.

We cannot accept full credit for the final outcome of this book. We are incredibly thankful to the wonderful team at Crossway, including Todd Augustine for shepherding this project with us and especially Jenny-Lyn de Klerk for her keen editorial insight. Her tireless work and dedication contributed immensely to what you hold in your hands. Her polishing is invisibly present all throughout and we would be negligent in not thanking her for her incredible work. Of course, any errors that remain fall squarely on our own shoulders.

Last we are deeply indebted to and grateful for the Christian sisters and brothers in our lives. The normal and ordinary relationships we experience week in and week out at the Village Church Denton and Redeemer Baptist Church continue to shape our

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spiritual lives and how we minister to others. It is to the pastors, deacons, and ministry servants of these churches that we dedicate this book. May you live a life of slowness, virtue, patience, and joy as you shepherd the church among you.

*Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite*

PASCHAL TRIDIUM 2023



## Introduction

# The Contemporary Pastor and the Classical Tradition

I (SHAWN) REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME that a local church's philosophy of ministry collided with my vision of theology. I was an associate pastor at the time and it was a surreal moment as I realized how many cultural assumptions in this local church did not match my evolving theological vision. During this season, I was unaware of the classical tradition of the church.<sup>1</sup> Unable to change the culture of this local setting, I became quite discouraged—jaded in many ways. I settled for a less-than-ideal church culture and resolved to live with my pastoral and theological idealism.

On another occasion, I remember walking down the hall of an emergency room to visit a church member. She had been recently admitted and was hooked up to a ventilator by the time I arrived. These machines essentially enabled her body to remain functioning

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001). In our book, “classical tradition” refers to the writings and visual culture of the church before the modern era that affirmed the ecumenical creeds.

for hours. We later discovered that she had a stroke earlier in the morning and presumably died at that moment but had been revived. Several friends and church members would come throughout the day to kiss her forehead, whisper in her ear, and mourn at her feet. Merely two weeks before her death, I visited her in the hospital, where she recounted how the gospel had transformed her life. As I sat near her while she lay dying in her hospital bed, I was reminded of two different realities: the beauty of Jesus's work of transforming lives and the burdens of pastoral ministry. That day, her pastors and friends from our church family sang hymns around her bedside (written hundreds of years before this very moment), prayed for her, and read Scripture with her as she slowly passed from this life into the presence of Jesus.

These stories highlight a certain tension within pastoral ministry: how does a theological vision shape pastoral ministry? The complexities of Christian theology ought to be reflected in the cultural life of the local church and the shepherding duties of its pastors. But a quick glance at local churches and denominational structures may reveal a host of problems—abuses of leadership, an inappropriate adoption of CEO models, minimizing theological depth in the name of reaching the lost, a diminishing value of church membership, confusion regarding the qualifications and role of a pastor, and much more. It takes a skilled and winsome pastor to observe and speak into these patterns and present a rich vision of Christian theology for the church.

Coleman and I are quite happy to watch a philosophical shift toward older traditions within the Protestant landscape as believers feel disillusioned with modern models of ministry. As several Christian thinkers focus on classical traditions, a *ressourcement*—that is, a mode of theology that listens to voices from different

eras in order to learn from, be shaped by, and resource them for modern expression—is occurring within the Protestant theological culture.<sup>2</sup> Henri de Lubac, a French Jesuit in the twentieth century, said, “Every time, in the West, that Christian renewal has flourished, in the order of thought and that of life . . . it has flourished under the sign of the Fathers.”<sup>3</sup> We hope the resurgence of classical traditions is not a fad but a true recovery of spiritual and theological vitality for the modern church. We hope patristic and medieval *ressourcement* is more than a growing trend and serves as the philosophical and theological medicine that will help cure shallow evangelical practice.

Though Christians pursue formal and informal theological training to serve local churches, we are aware that pastors are neck-deep in the throes of pastoral ministry. We also understand that burnout in pastoral ministry is a real and present danger. Often it comes about when we are operating at a spiritual deficit rather than surplus. Pete Scazzero observes that “spiritual deficits typically reveal themselves in too much activity. Unhealthy leaders engage in more activities than their combined spiritual, physical, and emotional reserves can sustain.”<sup>4</sup> As budgets need to be met and attendance numbers need to grow, pastors may be tempted to explore ministry gimmicks or shortcuts to meet these practical concerns. But what you use to win people, you will probably use to retain people. If

2 See Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015) and John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

3 Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1992), 317–18.

4 Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 26.

we primarily entertain churchgoers, we will need to continue entertaining in order to keep them around.

Coleman and I believe that ministers should instead use the depth of the Scriptures, a vision of the Trinitarian God, and wisdom from the classical traditions as the foundation of local and global ministry. Pastors should help people see the beauties of God as displayed in Scripture and active in the life of the historic church and show them how the triune God is the source of all things and how the ancient creeds of the church tether us to an orthodox vision of God. These three anchors—Scripture, Trinitarian theology, and church history—stabilize the church’s moorings in an ever-shifting world. We echo what Trevin Wax has observed:

The ancient Christians worked for decades on arriving at a place of clarity concerning the nature of Christ’s identity, not because they were obsessed with the smallest of details or had a propensity toward theological wrangling, but because they knew orthodoxy wasn’t some dry, abstract definition—it was a portrait of a real and living God.<sup>5</sup>

Pastors and their people must dwell in the life of God for the good of their souls and the good of the world.

As we watch the modern and late-modern experiments fail to satisfy our souls, we believe the recovery of classic Christian traditions should increase. According to L. O. Mills, “the history of pastoral care is largely unclaimed and unknown” today.<sup>6</sup> Additionally,

5 Trevin Wax, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2022), 43.

6 L. O. Mills, “Pastoral Care (History, Traditions, and Definitions),” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 836.

Andrew Purves suggests, “Contemporary pastoral care is, by and large, uninformed by historical practice.”<sup>7</sup> As a result, pastors are not taught what the church’s theological heritage says about pastoral ministry.<sup>8</sup> But this heritage has much to teach us.

### Discovering a Classical Vision of Pastoral Ministry

Early in ministry, Shawn and I often heard, “The pastor is supposed to do such and such” regarding various extrabiblical tasks. Several people had expectations that were not rooted in a biblical vision of the pastoral office. It certainly took time for us to learn (and continue to learn) how to remain teachable to some and lead others toward a biblical vision of the pastoral office. But, in general, too many items have been added to the pastor’s job description. According to Scripture, the pastor first and foremost prays (Acts 6), shepherds his people (1 Pet. 5), lives a virtuous life in the Spirit, and upholds sound teaching in local settings.

While writing this chapter, I (Coleman) overheard two women describing their church experiences over the last few years. One heard a feel-good message and was then herded out of the sanctuary; she did not feel known or seen. The other said she wanted to be in a church that was more rooted in the community. Both were expressing the desire to attend church in the town where they live, be integrated with others in the community, and be known by their church family and its leaders. This casual conversation in a suburban

<sup>7</sup> Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: Harper Collins, 1983); Thomas C. Oden, *Care of the Souls in the Classical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1984); Alastair V. Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1986); Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992); Michael A. G. Haykin, Brian Croft, and Ian H. Clary, *Being a Pastor: A Conversation with Andrew Fuller* (Durham: Evangelical, 2019).



coffee shop in north Texas over iced lattes perfectly represents why we wrote this book. While we don't want to idolize a specific vision of church life, we do want to bring the ancient voices of the church fathers to bear on this topic. We offer a simple vision of a pastor who prays, tends to people's souls, and preaches the life-giving word of God. This kind of pastor pursues virtue, contemplation, and slowness. He equips the church and shepherds people's souls. He cultivates communal and individual liturgies. He leads a local church that, though unknown to the rest of the world, is vital to the surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, the classical pastor is the quiet pastor who displays a peaceful temperament and ministers to souls in his local setting.<sup>9</sup>

In order to do this, the classical pastor contemplates and proclaims the beauties of the triune God, the gospel, and the Scriptures, using this to walk with people through their current life into the next. He takes these beauties and shows people how to find joy and happiness in God during this life. In a single day, he may walk with someone who shared the gospel for the first time, someone who criticizes his last sermon, someone whose marriage he officiated but who is now on the verge of divorce, and someone expressing an interest in missions work. Such pastors administer the riches of

9 This is not to say that humble pastors will not be noticed or lauded by others but that they do not seek acclaim in their pastoral ministry. A recent example of such a pastor is Timothy Keller. While well-known and widely published, all accounts show him as a humble and well-tempered man who cared about the souls to whom he ministered. For more on the life and pastoral ministry of Tim Keller see Collin Hansen, *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023). Another example is Eugene Peterson, well-known author of *The Message* and numerous books on Christian living, who produced his works with his local congregation in mind. Notoriety was not his goal but was a by-product of his faithfulness to ministry. For more on his pastoral ministry see Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2012) and Will Collier, *A Burning in My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2022).

God to address the complexities of various situations in his congregants' lives, model godly living, and equip others for ministry. Navigating this pastoral life is, as the fathers said, the “art of arts.”<sup>10</sup>

More precisely, a classical vision for ministry is characterized by the following marks:

1. Classical theology: classical pastoral ministry confesses a theology that rests on the historic confessions of the church—including the three Western creeds (the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles' creeds) and the Chalcedonian Definition—and is informed by the church fathers.
2. Virtue: classical pastoral ministry holds in high regard the health of the church—especially for the purpose of theological clarity and spiritual care—and this is seen in the flourishing of Christian virtues. Further, the primary qualifications for a pastor are these virtues.
3. Integrated spirituality and theology: classical pastoral ministry places no unneeded dichotomy between theological study and spiritual feeling. In other words, classical pastors think deeply about the divine mysteries and personally experience them.
4. Local community: classical pastoral ministry offers pastoral theology and care within the locus of the local church, and

<sup>10</sup> This phrase is taken from Gregory the Great: “No one presumes to teach an art that he has not first mastered through study. How foolish it is therefore for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority when the care of souls is the art of arts.” St. Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. George E. Demacopoulos, Popular Patristics Series 34 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), pt. 1, sec. 1. Similarly, Gregory of Nazianzus called soul care the “art of arts and science of sciences.” Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 2*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:208.

this then spills outward to the wider church for its benefit (not vice versa).

5. Care of souls: classical pastoral ministry is a ministry of soul care—for both ministers and the congregation. Care, or curing, of souls is using biblical wisdom to bring true, sustained, and holistic health to the life of the church.

In addition to these marks, we can also identify a main guiding principle of classical vision for pastoral ministry, namely, what the fathers called the “double love,” or love of God and neighbor according to Matthew 22:37–40. Here, Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

In the pastoral office, to love God is to thoughtfully and prayerfully commune with God, to contemplate and spend time with him. This activity cannot be measured on a chart and is rarely seen by others. To love one’s neighbor is to thoughtfully and prayerfully connect with people in one’s congregation and community through preaching, soul care, discipleship, evangelism, and presence. These activities can be measured but not necessarily the results.

Thus, in this classical vision for pastoral ministry, depth of theology and care of souls go hand in hand. Defining theology as a purely intellectual enterprise betrays a misunderstanding of theology altogether. And pursuing soul care apart from a deep well of theology leads to dry human pursuits with parched human solutions. Instead, we must drink from the deepest well of contemplative theology to minister to all those who are thirsty. Early Christian pastors dug a deep well of theology to bring forth water for the care of souls,

and we can glean many insights from this tradition that will help us deepen our ministry, enrich our theological reflection, and vivify our spiritual communion with God. This book will help you dig that well afresh (or anew).

### **Corrections to Pastoral Ministry in Our Modern World**

Overall, recovering this classical vision of pastoral ministry can help us correct three misunderstandings regarding the nature of ministry today. First, the role of the pastor is not to serve as a CEO of a business but to walk the neighborhoods and visit the homes of Christians. We realize that a local gathering of believers must pay rent for a building and process weekly, monthly, and yearly expenditures—many items that require business skills. But we must resist the temptation to allow the church's business to override the pastoral functions. Pastors are not just the holy CEO charged with keeping the doors open and the church budget in the black—they must concern themselves with souls.

Second, the role of the pastor is not to meet a quota of souls who attend services but to provide care for souls. Faithful pastoral ministry may translate into more people in the pew, but it is not the decisive factor. We know many faithful churches that have hundreds and thousands of members shepherded by godly ministers. We also know faithful pastors who shepherd just a few dozen souls. And though an evangelistic culture in the church is a good thing, it's not good when pursued at the expense of deep formation and theological precision. So how can we recover the model of local pastors who are known deeply by their local community, whether in a small country parish or a larger suburban church? A single pastor can efficiently and faithfully shepherd, at most, fifty to eighty people. If a local church is home to five hundred

members, then that local body of Christians may need at least ten elders to shepherd each person well (a 1:50 ratio). Pragmatism often impedes such a vision, but pastoral ministry is about shepherding people—full stop. Church elders must have time and space to get to know people and care for their souls.

Finally, the role of the pastor is not to make decisions primarily on the basis of what is convenient but what is theologically true. I (Shawn) remember a pastor saying, “I have preached expositionally through Hebrews for a full year, and it didn’t work,”<sup>11</sup> and Coleman remembers planning a meeting where someone advocated for adding a Saturday evening service to accommodate families and young adults. Such comments reveal pragmatic commitments. We understand the need to serve our people and address the effectiveness of our preaching and teaching, but we believe local pastors must maintain a clear theological vision that upholds doctrine and pursues deep theology for the church’s health.<sup>12</sup> We do not do things primarily because they produce certain results; we do things because we are convinced they are based on good theology and because they are the best things to do for the souls in our congregation.

### Looking Backward to Move Forward

As previously stated, this book is one of *ressourcement*. Another word for this is retrieval. According to John Webster, “The major achievements of theology in the mode of retrieval have been to commend a more celebratory style of theological portrayal and to

<sup>11</sup> All quotations that do not list a source are taken from the authors’ personal experiences.

<sup>12</sup> We agree with the pastor-theologian model proposed (or perhaps recovered) in Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

rehabilitate classical sources of Christian teaching and draw attention to their potential in furthering the theological task.<sup>13</sup> Patristic studies have rightly influenced modern hermeneutical theory, Trinitarian doctrine, and selected studies of Christian spirituality.<sup>14</sup> We aim to continue this trajectory of patristic *ressourcement* with an eye toward pastoral ministry.

Todd Billings posits, “If the idea of reading very old commentaries on Scripture is new to you, it may seem counterintuitive. Aren’t we supposed to interpret the Bible as God’s word for *today*?”<sup>15</sup> This question frequently enters the pastor’s study as he prepares to say something meaningful about his people’s struggles.<sup>16</sup> Why would we consider reading something antiquarian to address modern concerns? For some, the ancient authors seem odd, and so do their interpretations of Scripture. For others, what these authors wrote about seems irrelevant to the modern issues pastors need to address today.

But it is precisely by retrieving these sources that pastors can most effectively minister to their people. Timothy George, a theologian

13 John Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Ian Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 596.

14 John J. O’Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005); Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2014); Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016); Shawn J. Wilhite “Spirituality in the Patristic Era,” in *Early Christian Doctrine*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Michael Strickland (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, forthcoming); Coleman M. Ford, *Formed in His Image: A Guide for Christian Formation* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2023).

15 J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 151.

16 The rest of this section has been adapted from Shawn J. Wilhite, “Integrating Patristic Voices in the Local Church,” The Center for Baptist Renewal, April 17, 2018, <https://www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com/>. Used by permission.

and church historian, has brilliantly referred to this kind of retrieval as “retrieval for the sake of renewal.”<sup>17</sup> He explains,

What is retrieval? It is not just refurbishment. It is not just going back and finding something or someone famous four or five hundred years ago and dusting them off and letting them shine again in all of their glory. There is nothing wrong with that, but more is involved in retrieval. *Retrieval is more of a rescue operation.* It recognizes that there is a great deal of our Christian past that has become obscure, that we just don't know about anymore. Retrieval looks at these figures as our fellow sojourners in the life of faith. We are one with them in Jesus Christ. They are guiding lights for the people of God throughout the ages. That sometimes means we have to ask new and different questions of them, different from what they were asking in their own day. We have the right, and even the responsibility, to do just that.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Allen explains this kind of retrieval using archeology as an illustration, saying that when we dig deep into the tradition of our heritage, we discover the well and repository of the satisfying riches in Christ and his bride.<sup>19</sup> Rowan Williams thus calls theological retrieval “creative archaeology.”<sup>20</sup>

This does not mean that theological retrieval is an uncritical acceptance of ancient readings of the Bible or theological affirmations,

17 Timothy George, “Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal,” *Reformed Faith & Practice* 2, no. 2 (2017).

18 George, “Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal,” 73.

19 Michael Allen, “Reformed Retrieval,” in *Theology of Retrieval: An Exploration and Appraisal*, ed. Darren Sarisky, T&T Clark Theology (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 67–68.

20 Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2005), 100.

a prioritizing of older voices over newer voices, or a rejection of modern methods of Bible interpretation.<sup>21</sup> It is good and right to analyze writings from the past, and, as people living in the twenty-first century, pastors cannot ignore modern scholarship on the Bible.

Rather, theological retrieval is excavating the past and allowing ancient sources to influence and contribute to modern ideas. It assumes that doing theology is studying God and all other things in relation to God, including the past. Our theological progress is incomplete but arriving at greater and greater clarity as the church continually engages with the Scriptures, the culture it lives in, and the tradition it has received. This process helps us to consider texts critically and diligently as we mine the Christian tradition, recover its valuable features, and use all the riches of the Spirit's work in the church, including those from history. Billings helps us bring all of these ideas together when he says,

In the end, we should read premodern exegetes in particular not because we always agree with their positions. Indeed, they often disagree with each other. We should not read them because they replace or make obsolete the insights that come from critical studies of the Bible. Premodern interpreters are fallible and limited, as are we. But they also reflect the work of the Spirit in the past, and they show great insight into how to interpret all of Scripture as God's own word in Christ.<sup>22</sup>

21 "‘Retrieval’, then, is a *mode* of theology, an attitude of mind and a way of approaching theological tasks which is present with greater or lesser prominence in a range of different thinkers, not all of them self-consciously ‘conservative’ or ‘orthodox.’" John Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Ian Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 584.

22 Billings, *Word of God for the People of God*, 188.



Thus, in the spirit of renewal or *ressourcement*, each chapter of this book will seek to learn from a particular church father regarding (1) the virtues and spiritual life of a pastor, (2) the theological vision of a pastor, or (3) the ministry of a pastor. As you read, we hope these facets will come together to provide a holistic picture of classical pastoral ministry. Only a few pastoral treatises exist in the patristic tradition—Gregory of Nazianzus’s *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*, John Chrysostom’s *On the Priesthood*, Ambrose of Milan’s *On the Duties of the Clergy*, and Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Rule*. We will interact with each of these in various chapters throughout the book.

In addition to this, we will also consider some important Scripture texts on pastoral ministry and reflect on our ministerial experience. As Protestants, we view Scripture, tradition, and experience as helpful aids to uncovering truth. Though the tradition examined in this book—the church fathers—is not on the same level as Scripture, we desire to listen attentively to their wisdom.<sup>23</sup> John Jewel (1522–1571) highlighted what we aim to follow:

But what say we of the fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyprian, etc.? What shall we think of them, or what account may we make of them? They be interpreters of the word of God. They were learned men, and learned fathers; the instruments of mercy of God, and vessels full of grace. We despise them not, we read them, we reverence them, and give thanks unto God for them. They were witnesses unto the truth, they were worthy

23 “The Fathers are not Scripture. They are senior conversation partners about Scripture and its meaning. We listen to them respectfully, but we are not afraid to disagree when they err.” Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 29.

## INTRODUCTION

pillars and ornaments in the church of God. Yet may they not be compared with the word of God. We may not build upon them: we may not make them the foundation and warrant of our conscience: we may not put our trust in them. Our trust is in the name of the Lord.<sup>24</sup>

In seeking to glean wisdom about the pastoral office from the great tradition for ministers today, we are not offering a full-fledged philosophy of ministry, a definitive view of the church fathers, or a systematic critique of modern ministry models. Rather, we seek to offer broad reflections on pastoral ministry while in conversation with patristic mentors. We write this book for pastors, churches, and students alike, with our own beloved communities in mind. We hope you are encouraged and challenged along the way. May we slow our lives, walk the parish of our local church, tend to the stillness of our soul with God, and learn from the traditions of old as we love God and neighbor. Join us as we travel ancient roads and bring back treasure to share with those we love and serve.

<sup>24</sup> Barrington R. White, "Why Bother with History?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 4 (July 1969): 85 and Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*, 29.



PART 1

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THE VIRTUES AND  
SPIRITUAL LIFE  
OF A PASTOR



## The Humble Pastor and Basil of Caesarea

*Nothing is left to inflate your arrogance, O man, since  
your boasting and hope now lies in mortifying yourself  
in all things and seeking the life to come in Christ.*

BASIL OF CAESAREA

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in  
humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

I (COLEMAN) REMEMBER HEARING all sorts of messages from gifted preachers and teachers in my seminary chapel. To be sure, I truly enjoyed chapel. The regular rhythm of worship, gathering with other ministers in training, and hearing God's word was a formative time for me. As a trumpet player, I loved that our chaplain brought his trumpet along and blasted his horn with the hymns. It took a couple of years, however, for me to notice

a pattern. Often, chapel preachers came from larger churches and visibly successful ministries. While there is nothing innately wrong with big churches, the subtext of these messages was “Unless you are like this kind of preacher or have this level of success in ministry, then something is wrong.” No one said it, but it was hard to avoid the conclusion. Ministry success equated to influence and growth. Never once do I remember hearing a clear message on how ministry success related to a pastor’s level of humility. It may have been briefly stated, but when accolades and church sizes were announced before every speaker’s message, it was hard to hear anything else being said. Ambition, not self-denial, appeared to be the key to successful ministry. Unfortunately, those who buy into this lie may find themselves in a state of burnout or ministry disqualification before long. Humility, not ambition, it turns out, is the key to ministry success.<sup>1</sup>

We want to begin with humility in our exploration of ancient pastoral habits because this virtue is increasingly threatened in our decadent culture of virtue-signaling and social media-fueled bravado. Our disordered hearts are seeking a lesser, not greater, glory. But when we seek what is greatest through a posture of humility, we attain something that no social media influencer can provide.

### Humility and Happiness

Gavin Ortlund observes that “pursuing our own glory is pathetic and boring. But seeking the glory of Jesus Christ is the most thrilling, enthralling adventure you could ever spend your life on.”<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The chapter is an adaption of Coleman M. Ford, “Striving for Glory with God: Humility as the Good Life in Basil of Caesarea’s Homily,” *Themelios* 44, no. 2 (2019): 278–90. Used by permission.
- 2 Gavin Ortlund, *Humility: The Joy of Self-Forgetfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 68.

Humility is all about rightly directed glory. Glorifying self will always lead to ruin; a humble life glorifying God always leads to happiness—true happiness.

Yet, though it brings supreme happiness, humility is not the default of our hearts. The fathers recognized this reality, noting that pride was indicative of our sinful condition and destructive to our souls. They agreed with Solomon that “one’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23). Honor, at least the type of honor that matters in the sight of God, is obtained through a lowly spirit and humble heart. The halls of God’s kingdom are decorated not with portraits of triumphant generals but of lowly servants. Each placard beneath the picture tells a tale not of a champion of human strength and ambition but of a victor crowned through humble faith and self-denial.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus thoughtfully carved out this image of a humble kingdom servant. His words expressed aspirations of happiness but in a manner completely unexpected by this world. New Testament scholar Jonathan Pennington rightly translates Jesus’s introductory words as “Flourishing are the ones.”<sup>3</sup> This translation clarifies the paradoxical nature of lowliness in the kingdom of God: those who flourish best in God’s kingdom arrive there by the road of humility.

In the church, pastors are the guides in the life of humility, pointing the way to Christ for all other humble pilgrims on the road to the Celestial City.<sup>4</sup> Augustine described the pastoral task like this:

3 Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

4 This is represented by Evangelist and other characters found in John Bunyan’s famous allegory of the Christian life, *Pilgrim’s Progress*.



“I feed you on what I am fed on myself. I am just a waiter, I am not the master of the house; I set food before you from the pantry which I too live on, from the Lord’s storerooms.”<sup>5</sup> Pastors thus lead others toward humility as they seek it for themselves. Knowing how much they lack, they exhort others (and themselves) to seek the gentle and lowly Savior whose heart is always for the broken and downtrodden. Dane Ortlund reminds us,

For the penitent, his heart of gentle embrace is never outmatched by our sins and foibles and insecurities and doubts and anxieties and failures. For lowly gentleness is not one way Jesus occasionally acts toward others. Gentleness is who he is. It is his heart. He can’t un-gentle himself toward his own any more than you or I can change our eye-color.<sup>6</sup>

At various seasons of our (Shawn’s and Coleman’s) own pastoral ministry, we have seen when the desire to serve others has really been a mask for extolling ourselves and our own agendas. We have been tempted to see the title “pastor” as a means toward honor and prestige in our community. We have focused too much on what others think of us and our preaching and not enough on how we are encouraging others to love and lean on Christ.

Thus, when we first read Basil’s homily on humility, it cut us to the heart. Like a microscope applied to cancerous cells, Basil perceived the disease of all our souls. We discovered that the therapy we need was not self-actualization but self-denial; the cure for

5 Augustine, *Sermons 306–340A on the Saints*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 9, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1994), 282.

6 Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020) 21.

this cancer was an infusion of life-saving grace, which led to life-transforming humility. As physicians of the soul, pastors offer the same medicine that they themselves depend on. Let's now explore Basil's wisdom, including the ways it collides with the wisdom of this world when it comes to theories of the good life.

### **Basil of Caesarea**

Basil of Caesarea (c. 330–379) was a significant theological force in the fourth century. On the heels of the Council of Nicaea (325), he sought to steer the church through tumultuous theological waters amid the ongoing Arian controversy and its numerous aberrant theological descendants. He was instrumental in defending the deity of the Holy Spirit and promoting a robust Trinitarianism in the spirit of Nicaea. Ordained bishop of Caesarea in 370, he remained in close relationship with various political figures and helped to establish various church leaders throughout the region of Cappadocia. These leaders—including his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and his close friend Gregory Nazianzus—were also sympathetic to the Nicene cause.

In addition to being a significant theological voice, Basil was also a monastic reformer and minister who addressed various pastoral matters. Overall, one of his main concerns was promoting humility as integral to a flourishing Christian life and ministry.

### *The Chief Virtue*

Basil viewed humility as the chief Christian virtue. He wrote on this topic throughout his career but his thoughts are most clearly seen in a sermon he preached around 375, now titled *On Humility*. Humility, according to Basil, was especially important for church leaders. Michael Haykin notes, “A key area in Basil's thinking about

monastic and episcopal leadership was the responsibility of the monastic leader and bishop to be a man marked by humility.<sup>7</sup> Only through the practice of humility may one truly develop character and cultivate happiness. More importantly, humility served as the divine entrance to restoring the glory that humans lost through pride. In fact, it was in this way that humility led to happiness (because it allowed one to comprehend and fully value the life of Christ) and produced excellence of character (by allowing one to properly apply other virtues without being clouded by corrupt human pretension). The world strives for glory by means of power and personal exaltation, but this delusive pathway to glory impairs the performance of even basic virtues.

*Humility in the World, Scripture, and the Christian Life*

Philosopher Peter Kreeft observes that the traditional virtues of justice, wisdom, courage, and moderation are the “hinge” virtues of life, that is the virtues “on which all other virtues turn.”<sup>8</sup> As such they are the natural virtues (described by Plato) from which the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love bloom.<sup>9</sup> These virtues make up “the necessary foundation and precondition for all the others.”<sup>10</sup> Kreeft affirms that while these virtues are more fully realized by the biblical witness, they are nonetheless part of natural revelation as well.<sup>11</sup> In other words, they are naturally revealed and thus able to be demonstrated by all people.

7 Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 111.

8 Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 68.

9 Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 59.

10 Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 59.

11 Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, 67.

While Basil recognized the existence of natural virtues, he also affirmed the human inability to naturally practice virtue to its fullest extent. For Basil, man had “lost the good which it was in his power to possess.”<sup>12</sup> This fall from glory came through pride, and humility was the necessary key to unlocking divine glory. In his words, “The surest salvation for him, the remedy of his ills, and the means of restoration to his original state is in practicing humility and not pretending that he may lay claim to any glory through his own efforts but seeking it from God.”<sup>13</sup> Human effort falls short of the glory of God. Striving for glory by means of self-righteousness, worldly wisdom, and attempts at courage and moderation all fall short of their full expression in a Christian life of virtue.

To support this point, Basil provided numerous biblical examples. In a book on monastic practices, Basil stated, “Humility is to consider all (human beings) better to oneself according to the definition of the Apostle.”<sup>14</sup> Here, Basil was referring to Paul’s words in Philippians 2:3, but he was also alluding to the full apostolic testimony regarding Christ. Thus, the fundamental basis of humility for the believer is the life of Christ through the teachings of the apostles. Basil explained, “Indeed, we find that everything the Lord did is a lesson in humility”<sup>15</sup> and “Come, let us imitate [the apostles], so that out of our humility there may arise for us everlasting glory, the perfect and true gift of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

12 St. Basil the Great, *Homily 20*, sec. 1 in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, ed. John Behr and Augustine Casiday, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Popular Patristics Series 47 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012).

13 Basil, *Homily 20.1*.

14 Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 380.

15 Basil, *Homily 20.6*.

16 Basil, *Homily 20.6*.

Imitating such humility informed all other actions in one's life, especially charity, and led to glory.<sup>17</sup> Christ shared his glory with those who glorified him through their actions of love. He also "allowed the temporal authorities to exercise the power given them. . . . Thus he experienced every stage of human existence from birth to death. And after such great humility, only then did he manifest his glory, giving a share of his glory to those who had glorified him."<sup>18</sup>

But how does one imitate Christ in this way? In his *Shorter Rules* Basil described just that. First, believers should call to mind the words and example of Christ. Next, they should claim the promise of Christ that he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:11). Last, they must remember that developing humility is akin to learning a craft, requiring practice and fraught with difficulty, though it is "accomplishing every virtue in accordance with the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup>

To provide a contrast to this, Basil also set forth the Israelites and the devil as examples of a lack of humility. Thus, the Christian grows in humility by modeling Christ and the apostles and shunning the path of Satan, which is, in essence, one of pride.

According to Mark DelCogliano, "though [Basil's] homily is entitled *On Humility*, it is as much, if not more, about pride."<sup>20</sup>

17 For more on Basil's understanding of social action and charity see Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 27–29. See also Timothy Patitas, "St. Basil's Philanthropic Program and Modern Microlending Strategies for Economic Self-Actualization," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman, Holy Cross Studies in Patristic Theology and History (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 267–86; St. Basil the Great, *On Social Justice*, trans. C. Paul Schroeder, Popular Patristics Series 38 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

18 Basil, *Homily* 20.6.

19 Silvas, *Asketikon of St. Basil*, 381.

20 Mark DelCogliano, "Introduction to Homily on Humility" in *On Christian Doctrine and Practice*, St. Basil the Great, Popular Patristics Series 47 (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), 104.

Basil began his homily by saying that man enjoyed glory with God, which provided true nobility, wisdom, and happiness, but forfeited this by becoming prideful or “looking for something better and striving for what he could not attain.”<sup>21</sup> This striving was giving into Satan’s temptation in Genesis 3, which promised equal status with God. Instead of enjoying the good they were given, humanity fell from glory. This shows us that pride “blinds without purpose” and “causes vain haughtiness.”<sup>22</sup> It is like an inflammation on a tumor that grows and pervades the body, becoming “a cause of death.”<sup>23</sup> In the end, the proud will be humbled, either by choice or by consequence.

Yet, just as humanity lost the glory of God by rejecting humility, so did God bring them back to glory by entering their humanity through humility. Thus, it is not human beings who ascend to God but God who descends to them—the road to ascension begins with a posture of condescension. This is the ironic nature of the distinctly Christian virtue of humility. Basil consistently lamented that humanity spent much time posturing and seeking success in the eyes of the world but that this was a search for validation in the eyes of people and would not lead to the glory it was seeking. It prevented human beings from the true practice of virtue and thus the glory that waited at the end. “What truly exalts a person,” said Basil, is “to know in truth what is great and to cling to it, and to seek the glory which comes from the Lord of Glory.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to calling out pride, Basil also recognized the reality of false humility. Self-exaltation can easily be disguised as humility.

21 Basil, *Homily* 20.1.

22 Basil, *Homily* 20.1.

23 Basil, *Homily* 20.1.

24 Basil, *Homily* 20.3

To support this point, Basil highlighted examples in the Bible of those who appeared to be submitting to God yet were ultimately subject to fear and arrogance. Peter, who declared his dedication to Christ, eventually denied him out of fear. This was because his avowal to stand by Christ was actually rooted in arrogance. Similarly, the Pharisee in Luke 18:11–14, though seemingly humble through total submission to God’s law, “lost the righteousness in which he could boast because of his sin of pride.”<sup>25</sup> Basil further warned that attempts at humility could easily lead to contentious behavior and “make us as bad as those fighting over the first seats,” that is, James and John (Mark 10:37).<sup>26</sup>

According to Basil, allowing oneself to be served by another is just as much an act of humility as one performing the action itself. He declared, “The subordinate therefore need have no fear of undermining his goal of humility if he ever is ministered to by a greater.”<sup>27</sup> Thus Basil maintained that humility can only properly flourish within a mutual relationship. Roberta Bondi helpfully explains Basil’s view when she says,

The basic attitude of humility recognizes that no person loves or does any good without the help of God, so that whatever acts of kindness or virtue a person performs, whatever strength or happiness one has, one’s ability to work well and to love well—all these are possible because God gives them to the creatures as God’s good gifts. No one is in a position to look down on another from a superior height because of her or his hard work or piety or mental superiority. We are all vulnerable, all limited

25 Basil, *Homily* 20.4.

26 Silvas, *Asketikon of St. Basil*, 219.

27 Silvas, *Asketikon of St. Basil*, 232.

and we each have a different struggle only God is in a position to judge.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, Basil affirmed that everyone needed to practice humility and receive acts wrought from a position of humility and that such mutual submission should be practiced in order to aid one another's growth in virtue by providing models for emulation and ongoing encouragement.

### *Lessons for Today*

As we have seen, Basil continually asserted the centrality of humility in the Christian life. The implications of practicing humility are myriad for Christians, but based on this short study, we'd like to highlight three applications for pastors.

First, humility is indispensable to the Christian life and pastoral office. Modern voices have recognized the loss of teachings on Christian virtues like this one, and perhaps it is this lack that has led to a misunderstanding of holy living.<sup>29</sup> Virtue is not a self-driven effort fueled by innate ability, as both ancient and modern philosophers would contend, but is cultivated when one submits to the will of God. Pursuing holiness is a vital facet of the Christian life, and according to Basil, it leads to happiness in the light of Christ and his work on our behalf. Thus, humility is the axis on which Christian virtue turns.

28 Roberta C. Bondi, *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 43.

29 For more on virtue and Christian morality in modernity see Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).



How often do pastors exhort their congregation to virtue? We contend along with Basil that pastors need to cultivate Christ-like virtue in their own lives and prompt others to follow. For example, we can humble ourselves by equipping the community of faith to practice their gifts, serve, and take ownership of ministries—even if we feel like we could do it better. Sometimes the most humble thing we can do in ministry is to let someone else do the work.

Second, humility is the proper response to receiving the gift of salvation. Commenting on Basil's theology, Haykin observes, "Foundational to humility . . . is the recognition by men and women that they are entirely destitute of all true righteousness and holiness."<sup>30</sup> For Basil, converting to Christ leads to humility and informs one's entire Christian life. The turn from gazing on self to gazing on God and his work of salvation on our behalf is what truly brings glory to one's life. Thus, the degree to which pastors reflect on their salvation is the degree to which they grow in humility. Calling the saints to consider the riches of Christ, not the supposed riches of a church ministry or personality, brings transformation and sustained spiritual growth. Our glory is only found in recognizing the glory of God intimately displayed in the humility of Christ. In our preaching, teaching, and discipleship, humility should be commended as the proper response to God's grace in salvation.

Third, the practice of humility serves as an apologetic to the unbeliever. Too often the world sees the story of moral failure play out in the pastorate. The desire to gain influence at the expense of humility leads to downfall. Every time. God's word predicts it

<sup>30</sup> Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*, 113.

(Prov. 16:18–19). On the other hand, a humble pastor may not draw a crowd, but he is certainly modeling Christlike behavior, and such humility has an irresistible gravitational force. It has the power to demonstrate another way of life that brings meaning and speaks hope to despair.

Happiness is the goal of every human, yet only in Christ is it achieved and properly understood. The idea of the good life, plastered on billboards and extolled in the latest pop song, is only found in a life of Christlike humility. A humble pastor whose focus is on the humble Christ will thus offer a distinct witness in a decadent culture of selfishness and pride.

### **Conclusion**

James tells us, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Paul exhorts the church to “do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). Conceit and selfish ambition are destroyers of godliness; they spread like wildfire through a church or ministry, burning and destroying souls in their path of savagery. Such pride hurts the church. But humility lifts it up to the glory of God.

In his homily, Basil taught that humility is essential for obtaining the good life. This good life is a return to the glory that humanity once had with God at the beginning of creation. Pride, the chief reason for humanity’s fall from glory, continues to impair their practice of virtue. Their wisdom and ability to perform virtue are illusory. Only humility can return them to the state of glory they once possessed. Thankfully, Christ has provided a way back to glory—by humbly trusting in his salvation and imitating his humble spirit.

Because of humility's prime place in the Christian life, other virtues can only rightly be practiced through confessing weakness. Humility thus produces excellence of character and true happiness by allowing one to properly apply other virtues, free from corrupt human pretension. This applies to all aspects of life, including ministry. Therefore, pastoral virtue is found in the spirit of the humble Christ. What the world wants to gain through prideful living can only be found in humble submission to God, and pastors can present this true glory with their humble words and their humble work.