



For the **Life of the World**
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Pastoral Fitness under the Cross

Rev. Dr Albert B. Collver

Fit for Ministry

Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil

Devotional Diligence

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There is no greater temptation than to doubt the promises of Jesus; likewise, there is no way to survive the cross than to cling to the promises of Jesus. In fact, the pastor in crisis chases after Jesus and captures Him in the promises He gave him as a Christian in Holy Baptism and as a pastor in Holy Ordination. Jesus loves to be captured in His promises.

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by Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil

Martin Luther's paradigm for making theologians isn't a bad model for spiritual fitness among pastors (and other Christians too): Prayer, Meditation, and Affliction (spiritual struggle). Besides vital spiritual self-care, pastors need shepherding too. Just as barbers need barbers or physicians need physicians, pastors need pastors.

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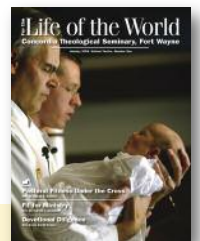
by Rev. Kerry David Reese

Ranking at or near the top of a list of occupational hazards for ministers of the Gospel is succumbing to the tendency to treat Scriptures as an academic tool while neglecting its devotional use for the pastor's spiritual strength and well-being. Being "in the Word" includes more than our hands-on approach for preparing cogent sermons and Bible classes.

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by Rev. John T. Pless

Pastoral fitness begins with pastoral passivity. We hear much about pastors "burning out" under increased demands often coupled with confusion over what it is that pastors are to do. Are pastors mainly counselors, managers, public relations experts, or community organizers?



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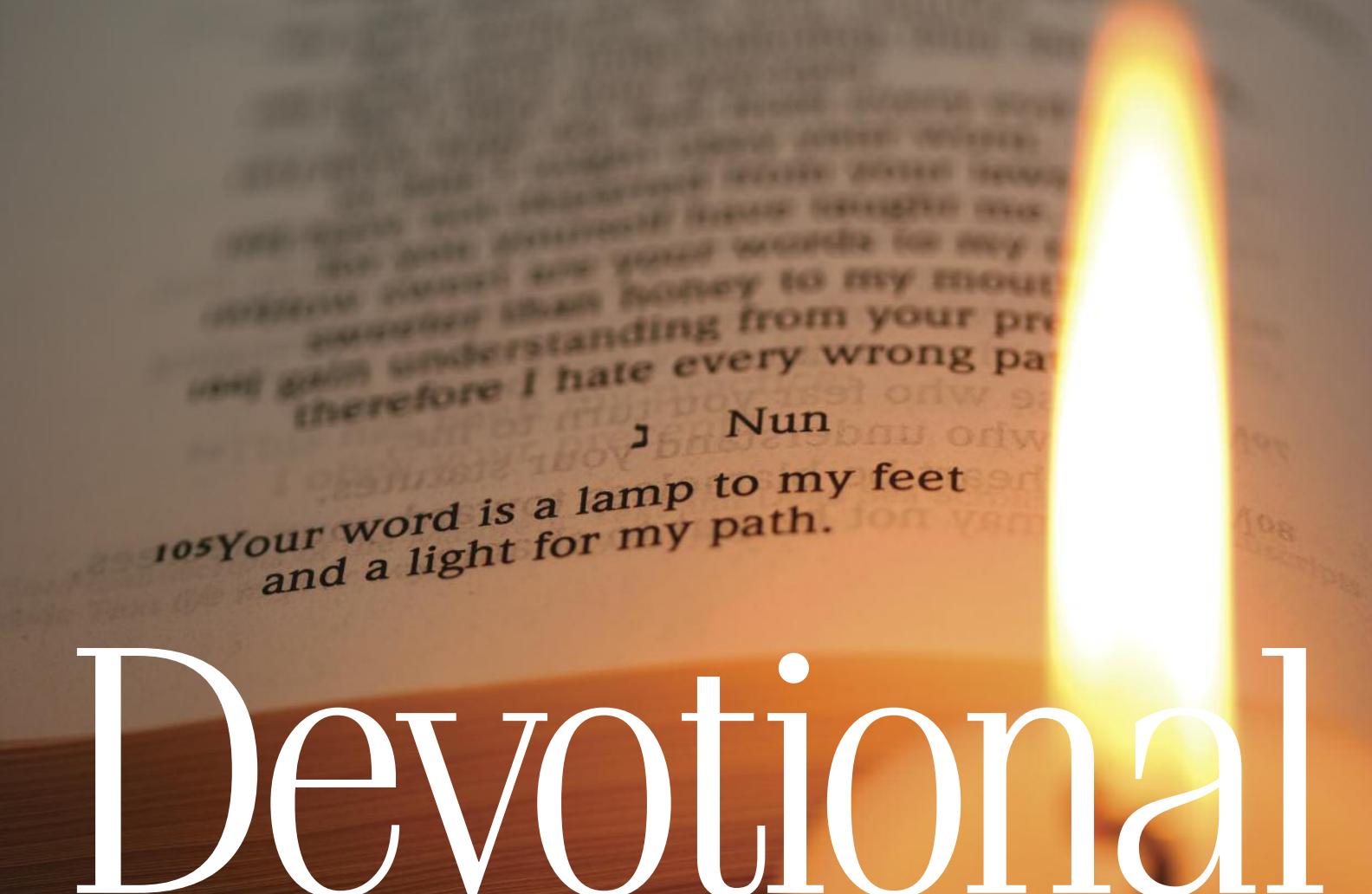
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Devotional

Conversations can be formative for directing one toward paths leading to genuine pastoral growth and renewal. I was fortunate enough to have had one of the more helpful of those chats while serving on vicarage in upstate New York. During evening banter in the living room of a delightful couple who had invited my wife and me to dinner, ‘Jim’ steered the course of our musings to the topic of hermeneutics—or so I thought. I was a bit too naïve at the time to realize the man had a deeper point in mind (he had seen some twenty vicars come and go before me) when he inquired, “How do you go about preparing for a sermon?”

Relentless rigors of parish duties make for a perfect storm that can send (pastors) adrift on mounting waves of stress and confusion.

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Diligence

By The Rev. Kerry David Reese

'Jim' listened patiently for some twenty minutes as I dug the hole for my personal burial deeper and deeper with every shovel full of verbiage I threw into the air about the dozen or so steps of exegesis-leading-to-oratorion I had diligently learned at seminary. I must have sounded as meticulous in the workings of sermon-craft as a chemist might go about his laboratory labors. Fortunately [no 'sic'-ness here] for me, 'Jim' had a keen flare for the dramatic, knowing his point was being made more memorable the longer he waited to hit me with the punch line.

The blow finally landed after the pregnant pause that followed my oral dissertation, but for that moment of awkward silence and catching a glance at 'Jim's' stoic demeanor I shockingly realized I must have left some vital element out of the equation for sermon production, but *what*? After commending me for my thorough academic grasp of the subject of biblical preaching, my host erupted with the penetrating reason for his questioning. "What about prayer?" he quizzed. "When does prayer enter into

the process of your sermon preparation? I would have thought it to be one of the first things you would do as you set upon your task."

'Jim' will forgive me for approximating his exact words in that last line of quotation, but he will be pleased to know that I have never forgotten his pungent point. He continued to give me some of the finest spiritual advice I have ever had the privilege to receive and employ in the course of doing the faithful work of a pastor in Christ's Church. I am happy to pass along what I received in what remains of this article.

Ranking at or near the top of a list of occupational hazards for ministers of the Gospel is succumbing to the tendency to treat Scriptures as an academic tool while neglecting its devotional use for the pastor's spiritual strength and well-being. Being "in the Word" includes more than our hands-on approach for preparing cogent sermons and Bible classes. Certainly those important tasks require due diligence in studying and coming to understand God's Word if

Pastors who do not take time out of each day for reading the Scriptures for their own sake without pretext or agenda risk becoming mired in despair as they lose their sense of joy in serving the Lord despite bringing the Gospel to others.



one is to proclaim and teach hearers properly and faithfully. Nevertheless, when the pastor neglects his need for having God touch him personally through his own reading and reflecting on Scriptures in daily devotions, his heart may grow cold toward his work even though he mouths the correct formulations of faith and doctrine.

Pastors who do not take time out of each day for reading the Scriptures for their own sake without pretext or agenda risk becoming mired in despair as they lose their sense of joy in serving the Lord despite bringing the Gospel to others. Relentless rigors of parish duties make for a perfect storm that can send them adrift on mounting waves of stress and confusion. We know this to be true—intellectually, at least. As our Lord Jesus took many occasions to separate Himself from the crowds for prayer, so we who carry on our pastoral work in His stead and by His command do well to go and do likewise. More than that, working as means of grace, God’s Word acts as the food which nourishes us from within, so that we have more to give the people we serve in Christ’s name.

I wish I could say that I immediately took ‘Jim’s’ words to heart and applied them without fail throughout the course of ministry. Alas, I was not so smart as that. Like many other servants, for a time I allowed my devotional reading to lapse while buying into the myth that all of my other handling of Scriptures in the ways already related were enough to maintain the joy and spiritual perspective we otherwise require. Wrong. Sometimes conversations are insufficient means to drive a point home; when words fail or fade, experiences of stress can teach the lesson again how urgently we need to hear the still small voice of the Lord in Scriptures. Learn well. Pastoral wellness is served by devotional diligence. We can thank all the ‘Jims’ we may meet for pointing this out. [▲](#)



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