

# MINISTRY LESSONS

Wisdom for Pastors from Pastors

GREG BURDINE

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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my pastors. Most of them have already finished their life journey and have received their reward for faithful service. A few are in retirement. But every one of them has left a permanent mark on my life. I am eternally grateful for the lessons each of them has taught me.

Nolan Phillips — University Baptist Church in Middletown, OH

Joe Lewis & Marty Lewis — Trinity Baptist Temple in Middletown, OH

Larry Lilly & Lee Singley (youth pastors) — Trinity Baptist Temple in Middletown, OH

David Cavin — High Street Baptist Church in Springfield, MO

Bill Dowell — Baptist Temple in Springfield, MO

Bill Taylor & Ival Robinson — Bible Baptist Church in Ottumwa, IA

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# PREFACE

“They didn’t teach me that in Bible college!”

I loved my experience in Bible College. Some of my closest friends are those I met at Baptist Bible College. I also had great professors who instilled a love for God and a thorough understanding of doctrine and theology. Yet, it was only a few weeks after graduation and into my first position as a youth pastor that I realized there were more lessons to learn.

My first pastor boss, Bill Taylor, shared many practical lessons he had learned in his years of ministry. Most had to do with relationships with church members. Others had to do with personal issues. I remember one situation when he had to deal with divorce and remarriage within the church. He wasn’t sure what he should do, but encouraged me to watch and learn.

In ministry life, many lessons are learned from other pastors. When I thought about writing this book, I knew I needed some help. I have learned many practical lessons about ministry. But with the help of some of my pastor friends, I now have a whole book of practical lessons about ministry. I simply asked each of them to share the one lesson they would like to share with other pastors.

## MINISTRY LESSONS

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This book is designed to share valuable time-tested lessons from men who have pastored for many, many years. Most of these men have pastored the same church for over a quarter of a century. If you added them all up, there are over 200 years of ministry experience in this book. I want to thank each of the pastors who made a contribution to this book. Your friendship is a blessing to me and hope your chapter will be a blessing to other pastors.

My prayer is that these lessons will save a young pastor from making some of the same mistakes these experienced pastors have made. I am also hoping that these lessons will give some guidance and wise counsel to a discouraged pastor who does not know what to do in a church mess. If you are not a pastor, I hope you will begin to understand the complicated situations in which pastors often find themselves.

This is not an exhaustive list of ministry lessons. If you are a pastor and have learned other lessons besides those mentioned in this book, please let me know. I may need to have a second edition.

God Bless You,

Greg Burdine

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# SPEND TIME EVERY DAY WITH GOD

*Greg Burdine*

*“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day,  
he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and  
there prayed.” (Mark 1:35)*

MORNINGS HAVE ALWAYS been a challenge for me. I am not a morning person. At least, at the beginning of my ministry, I would get out of bed at the last minute to shower, no breakfast, and out the door to my first appointment. I didn’t “wake up” until about mid-morning and consume a candy bar and Pepsi for my late breakfast. No time to prepare myself for the day. No time to spend time with God. Barely enough time to get everything done that needed to be completed. I felt important because I felt busy.

But that all came crashing down when my son was shot in 2006 while serving in the Marines in Iraq. We received the call and it turned our world upside down. He nearly died from the blood loss. However, he recovered and had a month of rehabilitation at Bethesda Naval Hospital. I went out and spent the whole month

with him. It's a month that has defined who I am as a father and a Christian.

I am very familiar with hospitals. As a pastor, I spend quite a bit of time visiting people in the hospital. But I wasn't visiting for a few minutes nor was I a patient. For many, many days, I had all day looking for something to do. So I picked up a Bible and started reading it.

I've read the Bible through a couple of times in my life. But this time I read the whole Bible in less than a month. I even started reading it the second time before the time came to go home. I left that Bible behind, but when I got home I picked up where I left off with my preaching Bible. Even with my busy schedule, I discovered that I had to carve out time to read my Bible. I had created a thirst for God's Word that nothing else in my schedule could quench.

That is when I started getting up early to read my Bible. I also discovered that early morning is the best time of the day. It is quiet. The craziness of my schedule and the crazies that I sometimes interact with aren't filling my mind with more crazy. It is just me and God. It is beautiful. It is productive.

When I get up in the morning and make time for God, I am guaranteeing that my most important priority is getting done. Nothing else I do all day will compare in value with my time with God. So, even if I get nothing else accomplished, I got my Number One Priority completed.

## What is Quiet Time?

Christians down through the centuries have set aside a small portion of each day to shut out the world and focus on building their relationship with God. This time has been called many things: Quiet Time, Daily Devotions, The Morning Watch, Time Alone With God. I have always favored the term “Quiet Time.” Your Quiet Time is when you get alone with God for the purpose of fellowship and worship. Those who have made their Quiet Time a priority in their lives point to it as one of the main keys to depth in their walk with God.

*“The amount of time we spend with Jesus, meditating on His Word and His majesty, seeking His face, establishes our fruitfulness in the kingdom.”*

— Charles Stanley

*“Ten minutes spent in the presence of Christ every day, aye, two minutes, will make the whole day different.”*

— Henry Drummond

*“We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little; many services but few conversions; much machinery but few results.”*

— R. A. Torrey

*“Time spent alone with God is not wasted. It changes us; it changes our surroundings; and every Christian who would live the life that counts, and who would have power for service must take time to pray.”*

— M. E. Andross

*"If we don't maintain a quiet time each day, it's not really because we are too busy; it's because we do not feel it is important enough."*

— George Sweeting

*"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees."*

— Corrie ten Boom

Notice how Jesus had His quiet time. *"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."* (Mark 1:35)

Following a busy day and before another day began, He got up early to spend quiet time with His Heavenly Father. Late hours did not keep Jesus from His appointed meeting with His Father early in the morning. He knew that if He was to meet men he must first meet God.

As brief as it is, this picture of Jesus at quiet time is very instructive. He found a solitary place and prayed. Every person has some measure of power. We control our schedule and decide our priorities. No matter how busy you are, you make time for your priorities. The fundamental issue is not how we can cram more into our busy lives, but how we use what time we have. In this sense, we might even speak of our Quiet Time as a barometer of faith. If we do not have a Quiet Time, it is quite possible that we are operating on our own agenda and have refused our proper role as ministers.

All Christians need time alone with God. It is vital. But ministers, especially, need to spend time with God. We are examples



of what a Christian should do. We are leaders and if we don't get it right, we will lead a whole congregation down the wrong path. Personally, we need fellowship with God. We were created to have fellowship with God; Jesus died so that we could have fellowship. To miss our Quiet Time is to miss our most important appointment of the day.

*"If you want to find out what a man is really like, find out what he is like alone with God"*

## What Is Involved in Having a Quiet Time?

I am glad God doesn't make a list of expectations for our Quiet Time. It may vary from person to person. However, there are some simple principles that would help you have a regular, consistent Quiet Time.

### **1. Set aside a particular time to spend alone with God.**

It must be predetermined. If you don't set aside a time, you won't have the time. Jesus predetermined the time. Jesus did so before the day began. It must be planned. How much time will you spend? Notice that Jesus planned to spend a good amount of time. He went "a great while before day." It needs to be unhurried.

### **2. Set aside a particular place to get alone with God.**

It needs to be a place where you can be quiet and uninterrupted. Notice Jesus went to a "solitary place." This is important if you are to unclutter your mind

so you can meet with God. The psalmist quotes our Heavenly Father when He said: “*be still, and know that I am God*” (Ps 46:10).

**3. Take God’s Word with you to your time alone with God.**

God’s Word (the Bible) is the primary tool that God uses to speak to us. Lately, I am reading less, not more. It’s not a contest anymore to see how much I can read my Bible. I am reading one or two chapters, finding a verse that hits my heart, and making some observations and personal application. The goal is not just to read the Bible (though that is important), but to let the Bible read you. Slow down and listen.

**4. Spend time in prayer, talking heart to heart with God.**

Pray with purpose and direction. Just having a conversation with God is wonderful. However, it is also valuable to have some structure. Many Christians use acronyms to guide them: For example, A.C.T.S. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) or P.R.A.Y. (Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield). I have often simply used the Lord’s Prayer as my guide. Currently, I am using the example of twelve points of prayer from Dick Eastman’s book, *The Hour That Changes the World*.

Regardless of what method you use to aid you in your prayer, make sure there is a time when you sit quietly and listen to the voice of God. We must be still so we can hear his voice. He will

comfort you during this time. He will direct you to scripture during this time. He will direct your spirit during this time.

## What Are the Benefits of Having a Quiet Time?

**1 – Peace.** Through refocusing your attention on God, rather than your problems, you will discover the promised peace of God. Life has a way of making our problems look bigger and our God look smaller. Your Quiet Time will readjust your perspective. *“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).*

**2 – Joy.** Because the source of your strength becomes Christ rather than your circumstances, you will maintain joy in spite of your circumstances. The ministry always has moments that cause pain and hurt. Don’t let the ministry rob you of the joy of the presence of Jesus. *“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand [there are] pleasures for evermore.” (Psalm 16:11).*

**3 – Direction.** Spending time with God enables Him to give you direction when you need it. Even if you do not receive specific direction, God will bless the path you take as you acknowledge him in your decision. *“In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.” (Prov. 3:5-6).* Notice that God does not necessarily direct our steps, but He will direct whatever path we take.

**4 – Power/Strength.** The ministry can be exhausting. It is an impossible task for our simple human strength. We need

supernatural power and that only comes by waiting on God. *“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)*

**5 – Success.** Joshua received a great promise from God that can apply to our ministry. *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” (Joshua 1:8).* Joshua was a great success as a military leader. We can be a great success in our ministry by daily meditating on God’s Word. Success is not found in buildings and budgets, but in hearing *“Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).*

**6 – Others will notice the difference in our lives.** Your Quiet Time is the foundation of a good ministry. If it is done right, no one will know the quantity and quality of your time with God. It is easy to cut corners in our Quiet Time. No one will know. But God will know. In regards to our private worship, Jesus promised: *“thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6).* People may not know how or why, but they will know we have been with Jesus. *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)*

There are many problems that we face when we try to maintain a Quiet Time. It may be discipline (consistent daily), boredom (dry), concentration, and even discouragement. The main thing to remember is to always pray and ask the Lord to help you.



Then commit yourself to just doing it. If you miss then do it the next day. Don't be committed to the schedule but the purpose.

It is said that Andrew Bonar, a great man of prayer, had three rules:

1. Not to speak to any man before speaking to Jesus.
2. Not to do anything with his hands until he had been on his knees.
3. Not to read the papers until he had read his Bible.

A missionary in Africa mentions a phenomenon that occurred as Christianity began to spread among some natives. In the early part of the day, as the men went to work, they would wander through the tall grass and find a quiet place to spend time with God. Soon the worn down grass became a dirt path that marked each one's journey to have a Quiet Time. Soon, one's prayer life was made public. If someone began to neglect his or her devotional life, it would soon be noticed by others. Believers would then gently and lovingly remind those in neglect, *'The grass grows on your path.'*

If you are too busy to spend time with God, you are busier than He intended you to be.



# DISCOVER THE SWEET-SPOT OF FAITH AND WORKS

*Tim Adrian*

*"Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, For in these I delight,' says the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)*

I WAS EXCITED to attend Bible College in the Los Angeles area. Sunny weather, the beach, Disneyland, Hollywood, nearby mountains, and of course California girls had all piqued my interest. I had a couple of real close buddies coming to school with me and we anticipated a year filled with a lot of laughter, a lot of adventure, and oh yeah, a bit of study. My dorm consisted of about twenty-five guys and nearly all of us were young teenaged freshmen. It was quickly evident all of us would need part-time jobs and that became the number one request at our weekly dorm prayer meetings.

Within three or four weeks, almost all of us had secured employment except two guys down the hall. I think everybody in

the dorm took turns approaching these guys and passing along tips about potential jobs and the names of places accepting applications. Several more weeks passed and then we discovered the unique strategy of these two unemployed dorm-mates. It seems every afternoon, following a brief prayer that petitioned God to give them jobs, they retired to their bunks for a “season of rest.” Is it a surprise they remained unemployed? Perhaps we all learned God is inclined to answer the prayers of people who actually work alongside Him.

Your grandma was right when she said: “God helps those who help themselves” and even though it’s not Scripture verbatim, the principle is easy to find in the Bible. I like to think there is an intersection where our human effort meets our total reliance on God. It’s the sweet-spot that results in God’s best blessings. I used to hear Jerry Falwell say, “Work like everything depends on you and pray like everything depends on God.” I had an old Sunday School teacher put it this way, “Boys, put feet to your prayers.”

Just a few years after college, I’m married with three small kids, and God called us to plant a church in Arizona. We had enjoyed youth ministry in two wonderful churches and truly believed we were ready to step out this way. We were still in our twenties so we were probably long on energy and short on knowledge. Pam and I were genuinely excited about the venture, but we were basically clueless. This was before the formation and publication of church planting assessments, strategies, workbooks, and mentors so we did what we knew; pray hard and work hard. It now seems utterly ludicrous... we unloaded the U-Haul truck in the middle of a Phoenix summer and held our first services four weeks later with 23 in attendance. It seems unbelievable to

me now, but six families joined us that first Sunday and all six attended for at least the first five years of the church's history.

After our church plant launch, people joined with us and our growth was steady albeit somewhat slow. It was a thrill to see people saved and baptized and soon we were able to give to missionary causes. I'm quite certain we were very typical in that our financial growth lagged somewhat behind our numerical growth.

We had raised some financial support, but at the time many churches were accustomed to giving help for only about 12 months. When possible, I worked part-time but financial concerns were always present. It seemed God regularly surprised us with unexpected gifts and frankly we learned one faith lesson after another in ways I can hardly describe.

We were about two years into the church plant when our offerings hit a level that I had been praying for. Not only did our folks begin to give at a higher level, but new families came our way that had already understood the grace of giving. I was probably a bit too proud when I called the last of our supporters and announced we no longer needed their help. In short order, God had a way to scrape some of the arrogance right off me.

One Saturday, I fielded two separate phone calls within 15 minutes of each other. They were from the two largest donors in our baby church. Both were being transferred out of state and both would obviously take their offerings with them. I was devastated as I suddenly knew we were in real trouble. My dreams of buying property for the church were replaced by the nightmare of knowing I would probably have to take a major pay cut.



Late that Saturday afternoon, I found myself at the rented day-care center where we held our services. I typically spent an hour or so making sure everything was clean and ready for the next day. Burdened and probably fearful about our future, I remember running the vacuum with tears running down my cheeks. It was during those few minutes God and I had a conversation. I ended up asking myself some serious questions and then came to some equally serious conclusions.

Had I really taken the credit for God's blessings? Had I really minimized God's part in our success? Was I willing to admit that, as our offerings went up, my acknowledgement of God went down? I felt like I was guilty of working for God but became somewhat independent from Him.

God had me in a ministry crisis. Losing two prominent families showed me just how vulnerable our baby church was before God. More importantly, He was showing me just how vulnerable I was. Being reliant on Him was a place I needed to be in, and a place where I needed to stay.

The afternoon nappers back in my college dorm prayed regularly but didn't work. Now I was guilty of the more egregious opposite. I had slipped into a habit of working without much prayer. God always has a way of getting the attention of His students and then implementing His custom-designed curriculum. In the day-care, He began to teach me several valuable lessons.

## Ministry Crisis Clarifies Spiritual Issues

First of all, I realized my ministry crisis helped to bring clarity to certain spiritual issues. The drift towards “selfism” was gradual but certain. It is haunting to admit, but my attitude and behavior would have never changed if it were not for the crisis. It was the crisis that pinpointed my need and challenged my heart. It was the crisis that motivated my desire to listen to God behind the vacuum cleaner. It took a ministry crisis to bring about growth in my spiritual and personal life and, sadly, I just don’t think it would have happened any other way.

## Ministry Crisis Magnifies Spiritual Impotence

Secondly, the crisis magnified my own spiritual impotence. In the midst of all this, I was teaching and preaching and witnessing. God was honoring our faithfulness but it became evident I wasn’t hitting the sweet spot. It was as if God were saying, “I can add to your church, but remember I can take them away too.” God made it clear, He wanted me to enjoy a higher level of fruitfulness but revival needed to happen first. I didn’t want to just spin my wheels. I wanted to be used by God for great things and that just wasn’t going to happen if I didn’t realign my heart.

## Ministry Crisis Tests Commitment and Resolve

Additionally, I think God was testing my commitment and resolve. Pam and I had left a wonderful situation and church family in Kansas City before we relocated to start the church. Now that we were facing a bit of discouragement, would we be just as committed? Behind the vacuum, I sensed God wanted me to say “yes” to Him again. It is at these times we should remember the call of God and possibly even rehearse past blessings. So, much like David recalled killing the lion and the bear before facing Goliath, I acknowledged my willingness to start the deliberate walk back onto the battlefield. Looking back, I am so grateful I said “yes” to God again that day.

## Ministry Crisis Develops Faith Maturity

The ministry crisis also added another lesson in the development of my quest toward faith maturity. I had willingly put my eternal soul into God’s hand and time and again had been called to place my earthly future into His control as well. This test would revolve around financial uncertainty and it brought me to a place where I had to determine where I stood. Would I rest in His promises or would I react with worry, anxiety and possibly anger? And how would I respond to our small congregation of seventy people? Would I be a man of faith or not? God was challenging me.



## Ministry Crisis Magnifies God's Answer and Blessing

Finally, the ministry crisis would magnify God's eventual answer and blessing. God had driven me to my knees on Saturday, but the very next day He assured me and our entire church of a great future. For the first two years of our church, almost every single family that attended had received a personal invitation from our family. Some were cold calls and some were leads that we followed up but we could point to the path that brought everyone to our church. The Sunday after my vacuum cleaner revival saw four different families walk in through the door that we did not know or invite. Our church ministry stayed right on course, as eventually all four families became quite involved and generous givers to the ministry. God has rarely answered my crisis questions so completely and so quickly as He did that weekend. But it was obviously a tremendous lesson and something I've looked back to frequently.

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Years have passed since my time behind the vacuum. My ministry seems more complicated now. I've endured building programs, seen staff members come and go, and have had times of abundance and times that were very lean. At the end of each day, I still need to recognize the unique partnership I have with God. He has asked me to "present my body as a living sacrifice" and He has promised to "open the windows of heaven and pour out incredible blessings." It is my challenge to take care of my side of this arrangement and then patiently wait on God to bless as He sees fit and in the way He sees fit.

Baseball hitters talk about the sweet spot. Hitting a ball there typically results in line drives or even a home run. Just a tick off of that spot brings about weak pop-ups or slow grounders resulting in just another out. The sweet spot of ministry is that place where we are working hard and smart, yet remain reliant upon God for the outcomes. Isn't it exhilarating when we connect with God at the sweet spot?

My prayer continues: Lord keep me passionate; I need to work with enthusiasm and lots of energy. Lord keep me focused; I want to work the right way on the right things. Lord keep me humble; I don't ever want to deflect glory from You.

*Tim Adrian has been the Lead Pastor at Westside Baptist Church in Hutchinson, Kansas for over 22 years. Under his ministry, Westside has sent eleven families to the mission field. His past ministries include starting churches in Colorado and Arizona. He earned his BA degree from Liberty University, and graduate degrees from Louisiana Baptist University. Tim is the current President of Baptist Bible Fellowship International (2019)..*