

Teach me, O Lord, the Perfect Way*Psalm 119:33–37, Scottish Psalter*

Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way
of Thy precepts divine,
and to observe it to the end
I shall my heart incline.

Give understanding unto me,
that I Thy law obey;
with my whole heart shall I observe
Thy statutes night and day.

In Thy law's path make me to go;
delight therein I find.
Unto Thy truth, and not to greed,
let my heart be inclined.

Turn Thou away my sight and eyes
from viewing vanity;
and in Thy good and holy way
be pleased to quicken me.

Confirm to me Thy gracious Word,
which I did gladly hear,
to me Thy servant, LORD, who am
devoted to Thy fear.

Turn Thou away my feared reproach;
for good Thy judgments be.
Lo, for Thy precepts I have longed;
in Thy truth quicken me.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***On Living the Liberal Life***Kevin T. Bauder*

Contemporary education emphasizes specialization. The more education you get, the more specialized it becomes. This trend produces scholars whose grasp of a tiny sliver of knowledge is exhaustive, but whose capacity to integrate that knowledge into the overall system of reality (i.e., the *universe*) is marginal. Their ability to integrate factual and theoretical knowledge with practical wisdom is often even worse.

The alternative to this kind of specialization has always been liberal education. Liberal education is liberal, not in the sense that it favors liberalism or progressivism, but in the sense that it is grounded in the liberal arts, and particularly the Trivium. The disciplines of the Trivium—grammar, rhetoric, and logic—are not “subjects” in the traditional sense of the term, but intellectual skills that constitute the tools of thought. These tools are applicable to all of life because a person who thinks well is one who knows how to think through unfamiliar challenges.

One of the faults of the older Bible schools and of some Bible colleges is that they took the specialist approach to preparation for ministry. They aimed to teach a core of biblical knowledge (often by rote) and ministry techniques that would equip the ordinary individual to function as a Christian worker. This preparation produced an entire generation of devout workers but yielded few leaders who knew how to think well about the unfamiliar challenges with which their changing situation confronted them.

To some degree this deficiency has righted itself: the Bible schools became colleges, then they produced seminaries, and finally the quest for accreditation forced them to confront key deficiencies. The better colleges have typically increased their emphasis upon broad learning, though they still do not fully equip their graduates to address the perennial questions. The better seminaries are preparing their students to think skillfully about the text of Scripture rather than to repeat rote answers. Their graduates can employ the biblical languages and exhibit a fair degree of hermeneutical and exegetical sophistication.

The best of the seminaries have realized that they cannot fully prepare future ministers on their own. Ministry involves people and congregations;



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consequently, certain skills are learned only in relationship and churches. The best seminaries have either joined themselves to churches or found ways to partner with them so that one side of seminary education takes place under the supervision of pastors in New Testament congregations.

All of this is good, but something is still missing. Besides all of the above, pastors (and professors) should have the same life skills that people in every walk ought to acquire. A pastor ought to know how to balance a checkbook (or the online equivalent), prepare a budget, and live by it. He ought to know how to change the oil, the spark plugs, or a tire on his car. He ought to know how to frame a wall, run a circuit, plumb a sink, and hang a sheet of drywall. He ought to know how to cook a meal, pitch a tent, build a fire, carry a gun safely, shoot it accurately, bait a hook, and harvest and clean his own fish and game. He ought to know how to iron his own shirt, shine his own shoes, do his own dishes, and sew on his own button. He ought to know how to do these things, not because he is a pastor but because he is a man.

A pastor (or a professor) does not always need to do all these jobs himself. Some responsibilities are shared between spouses. He may sometimes hire some of them done, because often money is cheaper than time. Still, these are all basic tasks that are part of a man's life. He should be able to perform them when needed, and not only for himself.

It is not beneath a pastor's dignity to cook the men's prayer breakfast and to wash up afterward. It does not degrade his office to swing a hammer or paint a wall at a church work day. People will not think less of him if he changes the oil in a widow's car or helps her install a new hot water heater in her basement. A pastor's life does not consist in these activities, but it must include them.

A pastor's primary responsibility is the teaching and preaching of the Word of God, but that responsibility is coupled with the care of souls. He cannot preach competently without hours spent in study; he cannot minister competently without hours spent among his people. While it is true that the material care of the congregation and the physical maintenance of the property belong to the deacons, a pastor must take an interest in those matters. Sharing the labors and burdens of his people is one way in which he enters their lives. Taking responsibility for his own life tasks is part of how he sets an example.

God calls some men to be pastors. Before He does that, however, He calls them to be men. One part of a man's calling is preparedness to live a fully liberal life—that is, a life of broad practical skill and wise application. A pastor (or professor) who simply shuts himself up in a study is only living half a life and he will only enjoy half a ministry.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
