

## EXCERPT

IVP Academic

### ***A Pastoral Rule for Today*** *Reviving an Ancient Practice*

May 14, 2019 | \$20, 208 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5234-5

How can pastors thrive amid the demands of being a preacher, therapist, administrator, and CEO? We need a contemporary pastoral rule: a pattern for ministry that encourages and enables pastors to focus on what is most important in their pastoral task. Written by three veteran pastors, this book gives examples of pastoral rules in communities throughout the church's history, providing concrete advice on how pastors can develop and keep a pastoral rule today.

## How Can Pastors Thrive Amid All the Demands?

In our many years of working with and serving as pastors, we have observed that the pastoral office today is increasingly held hostage to a multitude of competing demands. The pastor is supposed to be, among many other things, preacher, teacher, therapist, administrator, personnel director, organizational manager, business entrepreneur, and CEO—all at the same time. Each of these functions is critically important; moreover, they belong to the reality of pastoral ministry today. We cannot pretend that pastors are immune from the multiple pressures that increasingly define every kind of work in a digitalized, globalized world driven by values of efficiency and productivity. There is no going back to an era in which the pastor could imagine “himself” (as was the case in those days) to be nothing more than the congregation’s resident theological scholar who would be honored for his educated sermons and wise pastoral counsel, while others took care of the church’s “business.”

But pastors also have a responsibility to shape our reality. We are not simply passive servants of the marketplace; we are called to live in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We can make choices about what is more or less important. We can strive for a measure of order that honors God even as we remain flexible in responding to the needs of the day as they come at us. We can seek to exercise our service with integrity, in the sense of wholeness, by reframing all that we do in light of what God has done and continues to do for the world in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will benefit by having a “rule,” a disciplined way of life that keeps us grounded in the principal calling of a pastor: to be faithful to God and God’s will for us and the people we serve.

What exactly is a pastoral rule? In English, the word *rule* implies something or someone with power and control over another. Sovereigns rule over their subjects. Parents make rules for their children. Employees are supposed to abide by the rules of their company. From an early age, we are taught that there are punishments for breaking the rules. *Rule* and *ruling* take us into the world of law and regulation. That kind of pastoral rule would hardly seem to correspond to the freedom of the gospel.

But there is a second sense to the word *rule*, as when a ruler refers to a measuring stick. A rule of life gives us a set of criteria for measuring our faithfulness to the gospel. A pastoral rule delineates basic rhythms and practices that define the life of a pastor. These kinds of rules are more than legal or bureaucratic obligations; they stimulate and encourage us to live out our calling in Jesus Christ more fully. They guide us, just as ruled paper (once upon a time) kept children’s handwriting in a straight line and within the margins, or just as a rule of thumb gives us a general sense of what to do in a certain situation (how much tip to leave after a meal, or how much lemon juice to substitute for a squeezed lemon in a recipe).

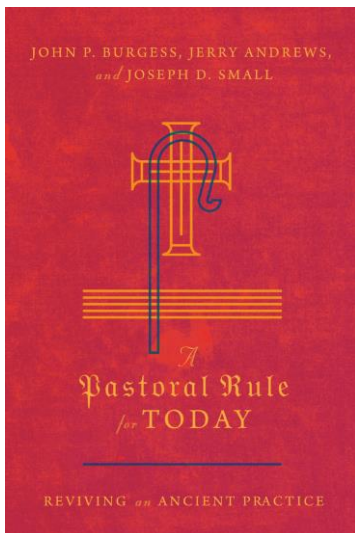


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*"Pastors in North America today face enormous challenges that imperil faithful, joyful ministry. In this engaging and accessible work, John Burgess, Jerry Andrews, and Joseph Small open the wisdom of the Christian past, showing how pastors and the congregations they serve can flourish by disciplined attention to prayer, Scripture, theological reflection, and service with friends in ministry."*

**Bradley J. Longfield**, professor of church history, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary

Consider the following example of a rule: A pastor makes a commitment to begin each day at the office with twenty minutes of prayer. He reads aloud to himself the assigned daily Bible passages of the Revised Common Lectionary and prays the morning prayer of the day from his denomination's prayer book. He further commits to participating in a pastors' group whose members read a serious book of theology and meet once a month over lunch to discuss it. He takes his turn in leading the discussion. This pastor also adopts a pattern of visiting one homebound member of the congregation every Sunday afternoon, and before leaving the church in the afternoon he reads online the local news section of his city's newspaper to be aware of developments in his context of ministry. None of his rules is ironclad, and sometimes he has to make adjustments. But they come to define the rhythm of his ministry for the ten years that he serves in that congregation. They give him an anchor for remaining spiritually steady and upright as he attends to everything else that he has to do.

Another pastor's rule consists of beginning each workday with a half-hour walk in a nearby park. She uses the time not only to stay in shape physically but also to consciously meditate on the beauty of God's creation and the miracle of her own life. Once a week she gathers at noon with the church staff and any interested church members to pray aloud and spontaneously for the congregation as a whole and for any people who are in particular need. Over the course of a month, the group lifts up in prayer by name every person listed in the church directory. Further, this pastor commits to closing her office door and turning off her cell phone every afternoon at 3 p.m. and reading a great novel for an hour. One Saturday morning a month she gets together with another female colleague to process issues in ministry and to discern what she needs to be preaching about. And once a year she takes a weeklong retreat to a Catholic monastery on the other side of the state, where she meets each day with a spiritual director. Like the first pastor, she remains flexible in practicing her rule, and sometimes she finds it hard to keep it going. But eventually she comes to look forward to these basic rhythms of her day, week, month, and year. They give her a sense of rootedness in faith and service, no matter how hectic church business gets. And this rootedness feeds her preaching and pastoral care.

Rules of life have an ancient legacy in Christianity. Christians have identified certain spiritual practices and disciplines that guide their sanctification personally and with other Christians. To be sure, there is nothing mechanical or automatic about a rule of life; just because one follows the "rules," one does not necessarily become a better Christian. But Christians have been confident that the Holy Spirit, while free to blow where it will, blesses us with certain ordered activities that help us die more and more to our selfish, sinful selves in order to live more and more fully for Christ and by the guiding power of his Spirit. As an important book about practicing faith put it twenty years ago, "Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in light of God's active presence for the life of the world. . . . All of them, woven together, suggest the pattern of a faithful Christian way of life." It is such a pattern of practices and disciplines in the exercise of the pastoral office that we in this book are calling a pastoral rule.

—From the introduction



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