

FINISHING WELL
OBLIGATION TO FINISH WELL
Faithful for God's Glory

John 4:34, Acts 20:24, II Timothy 4:7-8, I Corinthians 4:2

*Jesus: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."
Paul: ". . . that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received . . ."
". . . I have finished my course . . ."
"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*

Life is a gift from a gracious God. Life is a stewardship, all of it, from start to finish. But this life will soon come to a close, perhaps sooner than we think. Heaven will soon be our joy and our gain (Philippians 1:21-24, II Corinthians 5:1-9). And we will give a full accounting of our lives to the Lord (II Corinthians 5:10). Surely it is true: "Only one life, twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last." Are we going to waste some of our best years in carnal, sinful, worldly, self-centered living? How can we make the most of these good years for Christ?

Read Dr. Don Sisk, *Fourth Quarter* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2011)

I. We should be FAITHFUL because God is absolutely faithful.

Faithfulness is an attribute of God. He is faithful in the absolutely highest possible sense. He is faithful to keep His word (Deuteronomy 7:9). He is repeatedly declared to be faithful (Isa. 49:7; I Cor. 1:9; 10:13; I Thess. 5:24; II Thess. 3:3; I John 1:9; Heb. 10:23). Jeremiah exclaimed in the midst of Jerusalem's ruin "great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). We can be full of faith toward Him because He is entirely trustworthy. Romans 4:20 and 21 illustrate Abraham's faithfulness because of God's faithfulness. Abraham was "strong in faith" because he was "fully persuaded that, what he (God) had promised, he was able also to perform." Our faithfulness to Him is not by mere human determination. Rather it is due to our having such a trustworthy God. His faithfulness to us begets our faithfulness to Him. We must be faithful by His grace.

Dt. 7:9 — "Know therefore, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."

I Cor. 1:9 — "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship . . ."

He is faithful to save — Heb. 10:23 ". . . he is faithful that promised . . ."

He is faithful to complete — I Thess. 5:24 — "Faithful is he that calleth you . . ."

He is faithful to deliver from temptation — I Cor. 10:13 "But God is faithful . . ."

He is faithful to forgive — I John 1:9 ". . . he is faithful and just to forgive . . ."

He is faithful to sustain through judgment — Lam. 3:23 — "Great is thy faithfulness"

God is reliable, trustworthy, steadfast, loyal, unwavering, and immutable!

II. We must be FAITHFUL because God expects it of us as ministers.

A. Faithfulness is the standard by which men initially enter the ministry and the standard by which ministers will eventually be judged by Christ.

Paul declared that God "counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (I Tim. 1:12). **Paul urged Timothy to invest his life in the training of faithful men (II Tim. 2:2). Faithful ministers are sorely needed in Christian enterprise today. God wants men of integrity, ethics, and industry who will carry out the assigned task with energy, enthusiasm, and endurance. He desires that men invest all of their God-given resources to make gain for God. He wants His managers to turn a spiritual profit for the kingdom and glory of God. He wants men as managers who are reliable, dependable, trustworthy, and faithful.**

The pastor is clearly "the steward of God" (Titus 1:7). He is the household manager serving the Lord's interest in His church while He is away. When He returns He will call the pastor into an accounting (II Timothy 4:8; I Peter 5:4; Hebrews 13:17). What is the standard by which the pastor's management of the flock is to be judged? **"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2).**

B. Faithfulness is the standard by which God judges His stewards: Luke's Parables

Faithfulness is defined and illustrated by Luke's parables. Three parables in the book of Luke greatly expand our understanding of what it means for a steward to be faithful. The actions of three household managers demonstrate three different characteristics of faithfulness. These characteristics can legitimately be transferred to what a pastor must be or do to qualify as "faithful."

1. **Luke 12:42-48 teaches that one who is faithful must be active.** He must stay with the assigned task. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (12:43). The unfaithful steward in this passage became self-indulgent and abusive. Far too many pastors fail to stay with the assigned task given to them by God. Some pastors do not stay with a ministry long enough for their management of the flock to mature. In frustration they flee to greener pastures. Some flee the ministry altogether. Often what is really needed is the development of skills to work through difficulties and then to develop the opportunity to its fullest potential. He stays with the assigned task!
2. **Luke 16:1-12 teaches that faithfulness means being attentive.** The unjust steward in this parable discovers that he is about to receive a "pink slip." In his closing days in office he cunningly endears himself to his master's debtors by reducing their debts. Thus he indebts the debtors to himself so he will have a place of refuge when he is finally fired. Upon discovering what his deceitful steward has done, the master commends the shrewdness of the steward. The deeds were self-serving but nevertheless worthy of special note. God does not at all condone deceitful, self-serving managers. But He does want managers to give attention to detail, as the steward did. Faithfulness in small matters is the basis for greater opportunity in larger matters (Luke 16:10). The management of temporal money is the basis for receiving true spiritual riches (Luke 16:11). Faithfulness in others' matters is the basis for acquiring opportunity for managing personal assets (Luke 16:12). Pastors need to give attention to the details of the ministry, such as their personal and church finances, personal and church schedules, buildings and property, and the individual personal needs of the church people. "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds" (Prov. 27:23; cf. Acts 20:28, I Tim. 4:16).
3. **Luke 19:12-27 teaches that faithfulness means being productive.** The nobleman entrusted each of ten servants with a pound. The accomplishments of three of the ten are noted upon the nobleman's return. One servant's pound had gained ten pounds. Another had gained five pounds. Another had only the one original pound to show to the master. The first two were commended for their faithfulness because they were productive. They turned a profit with their entrusted pound. They were given corresponding broadened authority. Again, the spiritual application to Biblical ministry is transparent. God wants the resources He has entrusted managers with to be productively managed to create increase. The superior wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to use these resources productively are at the managers' disposal. The collective wisdom of mature, godly people in the church should be tapped energetically. Rather than being lazy like the slothful servant, we should work hard to be faithful like the productive servants. Results will differ from church to church as do opportunities themselves. But no manager can merely sit on his resources and be genuinely faithful to the task. **We have incredible resources today! What are we doing with our time, talent, and treasure?!**

Epitaph on Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.'s Gravestone

A fight well fought
A race well run
The faith well kept
A crown well won

OBSTACLES TO FINISHING WELL

Job 42:17 – “So Job died, being old and full of days.”

Genesis 35:29 – “And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

I Chronicles 29:28 – “And he (David) died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.”

II Chronicles 24:15 – “But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died.”

Life Expectancy in the USA— Many people are living a long time past normal full-time employment years.

I. Procrastination: Not Preparing to Finish Well

- A. Spiritually — Confident in the Lord, trusting Him, not living in fear but recognizing that life will change and end, and anticipating being with the Lord in heaven
- B. Physically and Emotionally — proper diet, exercise, rest, outlook, etc.
- C. Medically — Health care
- D. Financially — Housing, investing, insurance, professional advice
- E. Legally — All important documents in place and a good understanding with husband/wife and children; will/trust; General POA; Health Care POA
- F. Locationally — Where will you live as time goes by; where will you attend church?
- G. Vocationally — Will you or your wife be working full-time or part-time; how will you prepare your church? And possibly a successor for your transition from full-time ministry?

II. Pride: Living selfishly and independently from God

- A. Pride can lead to succumbing to worldliness and fleshliness.
(Romans 12:1-2; James 4:1-17; I John 2:15-17)
 - 1. Lust of the flesh — pleasure
 - 2. Lust of the eyes — possessions
 - 3. Pride of life — power

Illustration: Solomon — I Kings 11:4: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.”

Read the chapter on Solomon in Alexander Whyte’s *Bible Characters*.

Read Donald Whitney’s article online “The Almost Inevitable Ruin of Every Minister and How to Avoid It.” (money, sex, power, pride, cynicism, success; letting the ministry keep you from Jesus and keep you from learning)

B. Humility is the key to life-long usefulness to God.

1. James 4:6-10

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

2. I Peter 5:1-11

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

“A charge to keep I have A God to glorify,
Who gave His Son my soul to save And fit it for the sky.
To serve the present age, My calling to fulfill—
O may it all my pow'rs engage To do my Master's will!
Arm me with jealous care, As in Thy sight to live; And
O Thy servant, Lord, prepare A strict account to give!
Help me to watch and pray, And on Thyself rely;
And let me ne'er my trust betray, But press to realms on high”
Charles Wesley, from “A Charge to Keep I Have.”

OPPORTUNITIES IN FINISHING WELL

“that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”

I. Attitude: Am I fixed on God’s Will, Flexible in God’s Plan?

- A. Truly dedicated to Christ and willing to do His will? (Romans 12:1-2)
- B. Immersing my life in God’s Word and doing what I know to be His will? (Psalm 119:105)
- C. Prayerfully seeking God’s will? (Psalm 143:10)
- D. Keeping my motives free from worldly thinking? (1 John 2:15-17)
- E. Sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 16:6-10)
- F. Listening to wise, godly, mature counsel from people who know God, me, and life well? (Romans 15:14)
- G. Submissive to the authority God has placed over me? (Hebrews 13:17)
- H. Exercising good stewardship of my God-given spiritual gifts, talents, and opportunities? (1 Peter 4:10-11)
- I. Focusing upon today’s responsibilities rather than being sinfully anxious about tomorrow? (Matthew 6:31-34)
- J. Trusting God during the uncertain times and acknowledging Him in all my ways? (Proverbs 3:5-6)

II. Assessment 1: Why Am I Considering a Change of Ministry?

- A. Could my real need be to improve my ministry skills rather than change my location?
- B. Have I faithfully shepherded this church to a point of maturity and readiness for a change of pastoral leadership? Have I truly completed the task God gave me?
- C. Is the church able to sustain a change of pastoral leadership at this time?
- D. Have I noticed mood swings in myself or my wife that are negatively affecting my stability? If so, what is causing this?
- E. Am I allowing one or two primary people in the church to keep me off balance?
- F. Do I have the support of the lay leadership and a strong majority of the church membership?
- G. Is this a good time for my wife and children to change ministries?
- H. Am I financially prepared for a change of ministry?
- I. Am I changing ministries too often?

<https://gfamissions.org/church-staffing-resources/> 17 articles Several on transitions

III. Assessment 2: Has the time arrived for a transition out of full-time pastoral ministry?

- A. Health – Do I have the energy to meet the demands of full-time ministry? What about my wife’s health and energy?
- B. Family – Is it time to relocate near other family members? Do our parents need us now? Any special needs of children or grandchildren to consider? Desire to influence grandchildren?
- C. Financial – Are we financially prepared for retirement?
- D. Ministry – What type of ministry will I continue to have? What is realistic? What are some opportunities?
- E. Church – Should I remain in the church from which I am retiring or find another church home?
- F. Transition Plan – Does the church have a succession plan for an orderly transition to a new pastor, perhaps one who has been trained under the retiring pastor?

IV. Arenas of Later Life Ministry

- A. Continue part-time on pastoral staff helping with the seniors' ministry or another aspect of ministry.
- B. Serve in the community as a chaplain in a hospital, business/plant, detention center/prison, or nursing home, or as a hospice chaplain. These may be income-producing opportunities.
- C. Serve as an interim pastor, pulpit supply preacher, or conference speaker.
- D. Serve as a furlough replacement missionary couple for a mission agency or as a mission board representative in churches, colleges, and conferences.
- E. Train national pastors through ministry education on mission fields.
- F. Use your ministry specialties in another church voluntarily by evangelizing, discipling, mentoring, praying, administrating, counseling, teaching, preaching, writing, financial advising, special giving.

V. Activities for Later Life Enjoyment

- A. Encouraging missionaries through international travel or correspondence.
- B. Visiting places in the USA and around the world that you have always wanted to see. Pray for God's provision and direction.
- C. Enjoying the fellowship of your lifetime ministry friends.
- D. Writing your personal or family biography for the generations to come.
- E. Showing honor and gratitude toward those who have helped you in life and ministry.