**Reading Nuggets The Care of Souls:** *Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart*

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***1. A Reminder: we unveil Mysteries***

* The Pastor’s role is to unveil mysteries… mysteries are things beyond human reach, sensory perception, and intellect, but now made known through Christ.
* Jesus' work is often hidden, imperceptible (like a seed or leaven.) Thus, our work is "simple-and yet quite profound" (11) – beyond our grasp, and yet utterly accessible as we lead people from epiphany to epiphany.
* Our temptation is to abandon our post. To seek less mysterious methods. We yearn for cultural respect and acceptance and must remember that we dabble in things unseen and unavailable to others.
* Pastors must find our role and identity in what Jesus gave us to do... not in a culturally conditioned definition. The world around us cannot make sense of what we do because we delve in mysteries.
* We are not magicians with incantations. Nor traffic cops corralling scoundrels. Not called to haul out “god talk” to make people feel better. Not commissioned to put smiley faces on tragedy. Not charged to throw around mantra-like formulas to cheer people up. “Most certainly not – no magic for us. Nothing less than mystery will do.” (13-14)

**2. Our Identity: *Pastor*** (those who engage in Soul Care)

* Classic vs Contemporary… *Esse* & *Bene Esse* (essential & beneficial)

“As a pastor you’re above all else a true servant of Christ and steward of God’s mysteries.” (26)

“Action flows from being; identity defines activity!” (16)

“We don’t stand over the text to judge it using our own subjective criteria, we rather stand beneath the text and it acts upon us.” (46)

“Thus the Bible is not a collection of ancient culture-specific documents that need to be adjusted to fit our cultural context; instead, every consecutive, shifting cultural context must be brought into the perspective of these established biblical texts. Evolving cultural trends must not position the Bible; rather, the Bible positions each changing culture in turn.” (47)

* Our task is the Care of Souls: *Care* (the ongoing treatment of our chronic conditions - often via public worship and gatherings), and *Cure* (what is done for acute needs - often in private care).

**3. A Lifestyle: *habitus***

* The Cure of Souls has always been thought of as a *habitus*… a temperament or character worked within us by the Holy Spirit. Every vocation has a set of external skills to master – as well as an inner aptitude or attitude. This is the *habitus*… a “practical disposition” that is acquired through a lifelong process of giving to others that which we receive from God. We are thus a continual work in process. Ministry “habituates” us… forms us, shapes us. We develop a “nose” for the practical work of ministry. We become craftsmen, our work a true craft. (17)

**4. Key Tools: With what do we work?**

* Word, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper…
* Jesus is as available to us today as he was back then… in his Word and Sacraments. The words of Jesus "enact reality." (226) His words carry the same impact as on day first spoken. The tools throb with vitality! (29) They are not empty human rituals or hollow gestures. (145) God's word has power - it is “performative speech!” (48)
* *NOTE:* I am particularly drawn to the way Senkbeil encourages us to bring the sacraments to bear in the discharge of Soul Care. Baptism and the Lord’s Table provide true means through which God’s Word reaches us. Our heritage of celebrating the Lord’s Table each Sunday (if not even more often), and our high view of baptism, provide ample opportunity to point distressed souls toward the promises of God associated with the sacraments. This allows room to likewise use other sacramental moments, places, and events – “thin spaces” where heaven meets earth… to point souls back to God’s Word. One might say we can engage the Word of God in “audible, liquid, and edible” form. (see 14-15) Note the relationship between the audible word and its enactment…

“For just as the Word enters through the ear in order to strike the heart, so also the rite enters through the eye in order to move the heart. The word and the rite have the same effect. Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a ‘visible word,’ because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.” Philipp Melanchthon. (92)

* List of our Tools: Baptismal Therapy: (100, 148) We wrap broken people in their baptismal identity. We drown the old Adam daily and he proves to be an excellent swimmer. (145) The key t0 transformation is baptismal therapy. (191) *This is my favorite insight… the practice of returning souls to their baptism.*

“In baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings – victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.” Luther (171)

Absolution: I expect our heritage has left most of us unfamiliar with this tool (102). Table Therapy: "a great antidote to the toxic individualism of our age” (103). Prayer: (105). Blessing: (108). Pastoral Letters: (112).

**5. A Process: The *Attentive / Intentional* Model:**

* Attentive Diagnosis & Intentional Treatment.
* We attentively diagnose (chapter 3) and apply Intentional Treatment (chapter 4) We listen for:

Faith: does this soul believe on the name of the Lord Jesus? (80)

Providence: how well does this soul handle the reversals of life? (82)

Holiness: does this soul see God as holy, feel called to holiness, and know the holiness that comes by faith? (86)

Repentance: does this soul acknowledge sin and accountability toward God? (88)

**6. A Secret Sauce: *Proximity***

* We “place” people in proximity with Jesus. More accurately, we help them “realize” his already “with us” proximity.
* Jesus comes to us *by means of* word and sacraments. He comes *directly* to his people. He teaches and comforts us *himself*. Jesus is present, even though unseen... (15)

“As we grow in our awareness that the word of God is living and active, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, we will increasingly use it to discern the thoughts and intentions of hearts struggling under the burden of guilt and shame (Heb 4:12). As we become more conscious that baptism is not just water, but joined with God’s powerful word it is a gracious water of rebirth and renewing in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), we will grow in our ability to apply baptismal therapy, helping hurting souls to daily die to sin and rise to newness of life in Christ. As we come to a fuller understanding that the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses from all sin, our reverence for the sacrament of the altar and our conscious application of the sanctifying power of his flesh and blood will develop in our pastoral practice.” (193)

**7. An Arena: *Sanctification***

* Justification is at the heart of the gospel – and sanctification is the focus of pastoral work.
* Sanctification a gift from God. We receive it and work to maintain it. We might say that our challenge is not the Imitation of Christ - but the Exhibition of Christ! Just as the Sabbath was made holy and we are to keep it holy, so we are made holy and tasked with keeping ourselves holy. We cannot sanctify – we acknowledge that we have been sanctified. We put to death the old self, and maintain the holiness already given us by daily contrition and repentance. (159)

**8. Duality of Focus: *the False Dichotomy*** *– (…of which I now repent!)*

* We are assigned the task of both evangelism AND shepherding. This is not an either-or choice!

“It’s time to call a halt to the false dichotomy between pastors and missionaries, between shepherding and evangelizing. The gospel and the sacraments of Jesus are given to his church to reach the lost, then gather them into his flock and tend them as his sheep and lambs. Wherever these mysteries are proclaimed and administered, Jesus is personally at work. By means of these mysteries Jesus is himself both evangelist and shepherd, both missionary and pastor. Most importantly, by these sacred means Jesus himself remains present with his church until the end of time to rescue, tend, and bless all his own.” (15)

“Pastors are increasingly pressured to make a choice. They can either be an evangelist or a shepherd, a missionary or a pastor. Likely you’ve faced some pressure on this yourself either overtly or subtly, asked to choose between two options that are actually false alternatives.… Refuse to play that game.” (221)

**9. Spiritual *Warfare* Self Care**

* We fight the wrong enemy with the wrong tactics and the wrong weapons (195).
* Two main areas for self-care: Sex (206) and *acedia*… the absence of care – or spiritual boredom (209).

**10. Result: the *JOY* of Pastoring**

* The role of a being a shepherd/pastor gives us a front-row seat for seeing what God is doing...

“The Lord of the church gives his ministry to pastors for their enjoyment; he gives them a front row seat in the drama of salvation. Pastors get to experience the joy of seeing Jesus at work through what they say and do in his name (John 15:11). (6)

“Have you come to realize that by your own reason or strength you can accomplish absolutely nothing in the ministry? Or are you still operating under the delusion that some of it is your own doing? Are you by any chance thinking that by your personal ingenuity, intelligence, adrenalin, and exertion you can anticipate every contingency, outsmart the opposition, and accomplish great things for God and his Kingdom? It gets ugly very quickly when we try to do things our way rather than God’s way.” (29)

* To be able to bring God’s words and sacraments to the point of need – what a privilege! We bring something solid. We have a front row seat. We bring the word of God… We listen to them… We treat their wounds… We pray by means of the word… We bless by means of the word… (56)