

“I was delighted that Christopher Ash’s new book unpacks the overlooked exhortation of Hebrews 13 v 17—namely, that it is the responsibility of the sheep to make the shepherd’s work a joy and not a burden. Christopher lays out seven ways to do so. I know of no other book like this—it is a ‘charge to the congregation’ that is more specific and practical than anything else you will find in print.”

**TIMOTHY KELLER**, Pastor Emeritus, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

“Too many pastors today are discouraged, isolated and weary, and it shows in the alarming rate of drop-out from pastoral ministry. Christopher Ash has pooled his extensive experience and wisdom to produce a book that could help make a real difference. If church members and leadership teams can read this book, we could help more pastors persevere and thrive in their ministry to us.”

**MICHAEL REEVES**, President and Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology

“In the short time it will take to read this book, a radical shift may well take place—a shift in orientation from asking ‘How is my pastor doing in meeting my needs?’ to ‘How am I doing in caring for my pastor?’”

**NANCY GUTHRIE**, Author and Bible Teacher

“The shepherd tends the flock—we get that—but whoever thought of the flock looking after the shepherd! Christopher Ash has and, with his usual clarity and kindness, shows us what that means and why it matters.”

**ALISTAIR BEGG**, Senior Pastor, Parkside Church, Cleveland, Ohio; Bible teacher, Truth for Life

“This book will help church members understand Scripture better so that they become better able to meet pastors in their need. After all, don’t you want their work to be a joy, not a burden (Hebrews 13 v 17)—a joy and not a burden both to them and to the sheep in their flock? I wonder how much the fruitful and happy functioning of a local church turns on believers who are grateful encouragers of their pastors—prayerful warriors who draw out from their under-shepherd the very best he can give them!”

**D.A. CARSON**, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; President, The Gospel Coalition

“We know that pastors care for the church, but who cares for pastors? The church does! Let Christopher Ash introduce you to a new category: caring for your pastor so your pastor can happily care for you.”

**C.J. MAHANEY**, Senior Pastor, Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville

“Christopher’s usual clear teaching is shared through countless stories and illustrations from ministers’ lives. He tackles a vital subject we often skirt around, and earths it with practical ideas, questions and prayers. Find someone not too embarrassed to promote it in your church!”

**HUGH & CLARE PALMER**, All Souls, Langham Place, London

“The best thing about this book is that it will make your church “do church” better. Christopher’s penetrating insights from Scripture into community life will raise the bar for all Christians. We can’t wait for our whole church to read this!”

**DENESH & DEBORAH DIVYANATHAN**, The Crossing Church, Singapore

“Christopher Ash has an extraordinary ability to identify books which need to be written and then write them! We all need biblical encouragement, and this will help people provide their ministers with much-needed support and encouragement. Praise God for this useful book!”

**PETER ADAM**, Vicar Emeritus, St Jude’s Carlton, Melbourne;  
former Principal, Ridley College Melbourne

“A wonderfully encouraging, challenging, wise and readable book. It is not only a book your pastor wishes you would read, but this pastor’s wife highly recommends it too.”

**CLARE HEATH-WHYTE**, Author, *Old Wives’ Tales* and *Everyone A Child Should Know*

“We greatly appreciate this important and timely book—full of biblical wisdom and practical counsel about how church members and pastors should relate to and encourage one another as together they grow in Christ. A book to be widely read and shared—for the good health of our churches.”

**JOHN & MOYA WOODHOUSE**, Sydney, Australia

“All of us will do well to heed the wise biblical counsel of this brief book. Our pastors will be better for it—and so will our churches.”

**JONATHAN GRIFFITHS**, Lead Pastor, Metropolitan Bible Church,  
Ottawa, Canada

“We were challenged and encouraged afresh to have soft hearts and to engage humbly and wholeheartedly in our local church family—and cannot think of anyone who wouldn’t be helped and challenged by reading this book.”

**GARY & FIONA MILLAR**, Queensland Theological College,  
Brisbane, Australia

“Christopher Ash has a special knack of putting his finger on the sensitive nerve-endings of churches and their pastors. This book is no exception. It contains the wise fruit of many years of church membership and a wide knowledge of ministers and their ministry. If we will ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest’ these pages, both our churches and our ministers will be healthier and happier.”

**SINCLAIR B FERGUSON**, Ligonier teaching fellow and Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“My observation over the years is that some churches support their leaders well but others do not. Some energise their leaders very successfully but others suck the life out of them! So how are we to encourage our church leaders and make their work a joy rather than a burden? With clarity and insight, Christopher shows us what we should be doing and why it’s in our best interests to do so!”

**CARRIE SANDOM**, Director of Women’s Ministry, The Proclamation Trust, London

“Where do you get people who know how to pastor their pastor and (in doing so) make him a better pastor? You could wait for them to miraculously appear (and I’ve had my share) or give out this book in great quantities. It will make pastors weep for joy that someone understands, and will make people wise for action of the most useful kind. We loved it.”

**SIMON & KATHY MANCHESTER**, St Thomas’ Anglican Church, North Sydney

“We found this book both practical and encouraging. Its relaxed conversational style makes it easy to read. There is no doubt that those who read this will be strengthened in their discipleship, and their pastor hugely encouraged.”

**NAT & HELEN SCHLUTER**, Johannesburg Bible College

Christopher Ash

**THE BOOK YOUR PASTOR  
WISHES  
YOU WOULD  
READ**

(but is too embarrassed to ask)

The logo for 'the goodbook COMPANY' features the text 'the goodbook' in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with 'COMPANY' in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font below it. A stylized, curved line above the text suggests an open book or a smile.

The book your pastor wishes you would read  
*(but is too embarrassed to ask)*

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# Introduction

**W**hy would your pastor be embarrassed to ask you to read this book? Because it tells you how to care for them.

Surely that's the wrong way around. When a friend asked me what I was writing, I explained that I was trying to write a book about how we care for our pastors. "But surely," she said, "they are supposed to care for us, aren't they?!"

You do need your pastor to look after you, and so do I. I need, and I deeply appreciate, those who care for me pastorally, who keep watch over my soul, who love me and pray for me, counsel me and preach to me. But what's all this about me caring for them?

## **From me to you**

I want to write to you, as one church member to another, and not to write to your pastor. There is a



place for speaking to the church leader, and plenty of books and talks at ministry conferences do that. But I want to speak to *you*, an ordinary church member like me. I want to speak to you about how to care for your pastor.

You may call your church leader a pastor, a minister, or something else. You may, if you belong to a larger church, have other staff on the church payroll—perhaps an assistant pastor, a women’s pastoral worker, a youth minister and so on. If so, include them in your thoughts.

I want you to read this book. I want that very much. I want it because it’s important. And precisely because your pastor will be embarrassed to ask you. But you should. You will be a better Christian in a better church if you do. What I write about is very important and widely neglected. You may not have thought about it; but I hope you will now.

Our pastors will be embarrassed to ask because I’m going to consider how we can care for them better. Even though what I will say is what the Bible teaches, it is not easy for your own pastor to give you a message that amounts to this: “Come on, guys, you need to raise your game!” If they are not embarrassed, they probably should be! So I’m going to do it for them.

I'm going to do this because I know what being a pastor is like and what being a church member is like—because I was a pastor, and I am now a church member. I was a pastor for over eleven years, first as an assistant in a large city-centre church and then as the pastor of a smaller village church-plant. I then served for eleven years as Director of the Proclamation Trust's Cornhill Training Course in London. Since 2015, I have been Writer-in-Residence at Tyndale House in Cambridge, UK.

As a pastor, I was very well looked after, so I have no sour grapes and no axe to grind. Then, in my role with the Proclamation Trust and associated networks, I was brought into contact with lots of pastors and pastors-in-training, and plenty of churches. So I've seen what happens when this goes wrong—but also how churches flourish when it goes wonderfully right. And I'm now a church member, who needs to think just as carefully about these things as I'm hoping you will.

You may think you don't need to read this book. But you do. We all need to look after our pastors and—paradoxically—it is in our own best interests to do so. If you and I do not care for our pastors, then they will not be able to care for us. I want to warn you about how it can go horribly wrong. But, above all,

I want to set before you a healthy two-way dynamic in which pastors care for people and people care for pastors; and both pastors and people grow in a glad Christ-likeness.

And that's the kind of church we'd all like to be part of.

## PASTORS ARE PEOPLE TOO

### A tour of the pastors' hall of faith

**B**efore we think together about caring for our pastors, I want to take a step back and help us think about something very obvious but easily neglected: our pastors are people. Well, you say, of course they are; I knew that. Yes, but it is easy to forget. It is natural to think about our pastors in terms of *what they do*—how they lead and pray and preach and teach and so on; but what about *who they are*? We tend to see our pastors at their most polished. I want us to see them, or at least imagine them, as they are.

So come with me to the pastors' hall of faith. I want to introduce you to ten pastors. They are not paintings or statues; each of them is alive and sitting at their desk on the same Monday morning. They have had the same Sunday. The same people came to church, listened

(or did not listen) to their ministry, mingled, chatted, prayed, grumbled, were thankful, sang, were morose or thoughtful, came to the pastor with the same intractable pastoral problems, shared an answer to prayer, brought some enquirers to church (or didn't), and so on. The same Sunday. And now it is Monday morning.

I am going to tell you something about each one. Not everything—very far from everything—but something that has shaped them to be the pastor they are. And something that will affect how they responded to that Sunday and how they are as they face this Monday. For their thoughts, their mood, their feelings, their energy or lack of energy, their enthusiasm or weariness, are all affected not only by what happened on Sunday but by who they are.

Does this seem an absurd experiment? Perhaps. And yet I think you will find, by the time you have walked around this hall of faith, that it may help you to think of your pastor as a human being, perhaps in a way you have never done before. Try it and see.

There is no particular agenda in these fictional cameos. Their only aim is to spur you to think about pastors as people.



**Andy's** father was a skilled craftsman. Practical work—the ability to make things well and make things work—was highly valued in their childhood home. Often, Andy's dad would show him, with justifiable pride, some finished artefact or completed project. Andy did an apprenticeship as a builder; he developed some skill and really enjoyed being able to finish a building project and look at the end product. “By God's grace, I made that, built that, finished that,” he would say to himself, with thanks in his heart towards God.

But then Andy left and went into the “wordy” world of pastoral ministry. It's a very different world. He can never look on a completed pastoral task the way his father could look at a finished piece of craftsmanship. He thinks over yesterday's conversations: the loose ends of men's and women's lives, the half-healed and yet half-dissolving marriages, the hopeful signs of faith spoiled by depressing symptoms of unbelief, the sheer unfinishedness of pastoral work. He longs to *finish* something, really finish it; but he knows that, for all his completed outward tasks—the sermon preached, the elders' meeting chaired, the pastoral visit made—the tasks that really fill his day are never finished.

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**Ben** came to Christ as a student in a large, young, vibrant city-centre church where he then served as an apprentice. The preaching and teaching of the pastors impacted him profoundly, as did the one-to-one Bible-reading times with a student worker on the church staff. These were his role models for fruitful ministry. When challenged to consider pastoral ministry, it was these lives and examples that inspired him, and he could think of nothing better than to be like them.

Yesterday seemed very different. The church he serves does not sparkle with life. Far from it. The people are quite, well, ordinary. There doesn't seem to be a huge amount going on. The music is a bit dull. Talent is in short supply. Oh, sure, he prays, he preaches, he meets people one to one, he pays pastoral visits and teaches the Bible to people. But it doesn't feel at all like that city-centre church where he began.

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**Colin** was from a Christian home. In fact, his father had left his secular job to train for pastoral ministry in midlife. His parents were thrilled when Colin followed in his father's footsteps, and have not stopped saying so. They can think of no higher calling for their son. Like many proud parents, they have high expectations

and exalted hopes for him—of wide, deep and lasting influence for Christ.

It is a wonderful legacy that Colin enjoys from his parents. And yet, as he sits at his desk putting the realities of yesterday side by side with these expectations, he cannot but be thoughtful. What does wide, deep and lasting influence for Christ mean in the week-by-week realities of pastoral life? Mostly—and yesterday was no exception—he feels he is having close to zero real influence for Christ. His vision is filled with frustrations—the man who will not repent, the comfortable couple full of grumbles, the young woman scarred by what has been said and done to her in the past, the teenager gripped by enslaving addiction.



**Deepak** came from a culture where an academically capable son was expected to qualify in some prestigious and well-paid profession, usually as a doctor or lawyer. He is clever and capable. His dad and mum hoped for just this from him as they supported him through his education; and they made their expectations very clear. He did qualify as a lawyer and practised law for a few years.



But then Deepak left to enter pastoral ministry. It's a very different world. He can't help comparing the two spheres. As he sits at his pastor's desk on Monday morning, he remembers the prestigious surroundings of his law firm, the sense of significance and the little markers of status that he used to know. The inadequate church building, the rather tatty décor, the absence of colleagues (let alone juniors to command), the loneliness—they begin to get to him and lower his spirits. Has he been wise to give up *that* for *this*?

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**Ethan** was brought up in a Christian home in a small rural church, where he saw unimpressive but faithful ministry bear fruit in slowly changed lives. For him, this is the ideal to which he aspires. He cannot think of anything more worthwhile than the quiet, steady work of getting alongside men and women in the stabilities of rural life, teaching them the gospel of Jesus, praying for and with them, year after year after year.

Somehow, it fits quite well with yesterday. Ethan sits at his desk quietly contented and settles to another day of prayer and preparing to teach the Bible.

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**Finn** has been a rootless millennial. His experience of Christian ministry has been overwhelmingly through the podcasts of famous preachers on the internet. His mind is filled with images of well-known speakers on screens teaching at large conferences. Finn doesn't have any authentic first-hand knowledge of local church ministry that has impressed him. So, as he mulls on yesterday, the humdrum life of his local church feels like a parallel universe compared with the big-name speakers on bright platforms speaking eloquently to large crowds. He just feels a bit lost in the little world of the local church he serves.

As he sits at his desk, he is not quite sure how to sort out in his mind the maelstrom of experiences from yesterday—all the different conversations with people of different ages and stages of life, with such a myriad of varied challenges in their lives. It's all very new to him, and he feels he needs the spiritual equivalent of a caffeine hit from some famous preacher.

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**Gerald** went to one of the top schools in his country. The family home was quite an impressive pile. Both mum and dad ran good cars. Money was never in short supply. Holidays were comfortable, sometimes quite

exotic affairs; his clothes were new and fashionable, with designer labels; gadgets and gizmos were up-to-the-minute and replaced with the newest model frequently.

Now he's on the staff team of a large inner-city church. It's a great work and he loves seeing local people being reached for Jesus. But Gerald can't help struggling to get used to the drab surroundings, the very low income and the constant struggle to make ends meet. He doesn't resent it; he knows it's a sacrifice worth making; but it is so different to his childhood and it just is hard.

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**Harry** is a voracious reader but he is shy; he prefers his own company when he wants to replenish his emotional batteries. He can manage the public role of a pastor and being among a large group, but the experience drains him a lot more than it does his extrovert friends. When the diary gets too crowded, he struggles with a kind of emotional and psychological claustrophobia and longs for some space—physical space, time space, personal space, aloneness space.

After a busy Sunday he feels very squeezed. Harry preached at the two morning services, with what felt like hundreds of snippets of conversations before, between, and afterwards. He and his wife hosted two

young families, a young couple, a widow and two singles for lunch. And then he led the evening service and interviewed some mission partners in a meeting for the 20s and 30s after church, before sitting at the back for the end of the youth-group meeting, to mix with the teenagers. He sits at his desk on this Monday morning just staring empty into space...

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**Ian's** wife, Imogen, was a high-earning banker in the central business district of their capital city. When she married Ian, he too was doing well in finance. Then they had children, and Imogen decided to work in the home as a full-time, hard-working but unpaid mother. That was fine, while Ian brought home good pay. And then Ian left to become a pastor. However keen a Christian she may be, Imogen would scarcely be human if she did not feel the financial draught.

As Ian sits at his desk, he knows he should be praying and preparing with his Bible open. But he can't help coming back in his mind to the painful conversation he and Imogen had last night about not being able to afford a summer holiday.

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**Jez** is a preacher's kid. Brought up simply, with enough but rarely more than enough. Holidays were simple affairs, camping not too far from home. The family car was bruised and battered, if much loved. Shoes and clothes were, more often than not, hand-me-downs. It wasn't easy, and there were anxieties about money; but there always seemed to be enough.

He's a pastor now and loving it. There's not much money, and he and his fiancée wonder quite how they will make ends meet when they marry in the autumn. But it's a great life, and he is overwhelmed with the privilege of bringing the good news of Jesus to the people in his care. He sits at his desk praying for one and another with a deep thankfulness in his heart.

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And now you come to your own pastor as they sit at their desk in the pastors' hall of faith. What might be going on in their mind and heart this Monday morning? For God has entrusted them with this work in the concrete reality of all their history, their personality, their interests and their circumstances—in all the strange mix that is their full humanity.

That's the pastor you need to care for.

## **A prayer**

*Father God, thank you that the Lord Jesus, your Son, the great Shepherd of the sheep, was and is fully a human being, with human thoughts and feelings. Thank you that he has appointed under-shepherds, pastors, and that they too are fully human beings. Grant that I may pray for those who pastor me, understanding a little more of their struggles, hopes and fears. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*