

Conditions of Success in the Pastorate.

Address to the Students of the Bethel Theological
Seminary, Stockholm.

I HAVE lately seen a number of the former students of this Seminary who are now at work in the pastorate in various parts of Sweden. To come into close touch with those who trained them for the work, and to have the opportunity of speaking to those who will shortly follow them in the service of the churches up and down this beautiful land, are privileges that I value very highly. The fame of this Seminary is spread abroad, not only through all Sweden, from Malmö to Haparanda, but through all the Baptist world. Every one knows that, under God, the striking success of the Baptist work in this land has been chiefly due to the efficiency of this Seminary as a training ground for preachers of the gospel and shepherds of the flock of God.

If I am to say anything useful to you in the time at my disposal to-day, it must be something based on my own experience and observation. You can all read books on homiletics and pastoral theology for yourselves. You are plentifully instructed in the theory of those subjects by learned preceptors whose business it is to teach you. It will be more fitting for me, as a plain working pastor, and moreover a pastor from another land, to confine myself to things which come when Seminary days are over and the work of life has to be faced.

In twenty-five years in the pastorate one sees many things happen. I have seen some men leave college and settle in quiet, out-of-the-way places in the country. They have grown in power, in usefulness, and in honour. They have occupied one sphere after another with increasing success. They have risen step by step as on a ladder. To-day they are filling the most responsible positions in our denomination, both in the colleges and in the pastorate. There must be some reason for that success.

Again, I have seen something very different. Men of undeniable brilliancy of talent have settled in important churches

with every prospect of usefulness. They have not fulfilled their promise. They have lost grip, moved to smaller spheres, declined in power, and disappointed the hopes of those who foretold great things for the Kingdom through their means. Some have even given up the ministry altogether, and gone back on their ordination vows, if they have not gone back on Christ. There must be some reason for such failure.

A third class stands out in my mind—the largest class of all, thank God. They are men who, although not possessing brilliant gifts, by persistent study, sound preaching of the kind that keeps close to the Bible, faithful care of souls in the pastorate, and the force of high Christian character, succeed. They win souls, build up churches, and receive the affectionate respect of all who know them, and the trust of their people in unstinted measure. We call them the average men, and they are the backbone of our denomination in England.

One cannot help asking why some men fail and why others succeed. Yet no one can answer either question fully. A pastor's failure contains a secret element hidden from the most observant eye, and known only to the Searcher of hearts. It may be emotional, it may be spiritual, it may be moral, it may be intellectual. That is to say, a man may have been mistaken about his call, mistaking a gust of feeling for a divine summons; or he may have lost faith in the truth and importance of the message he was ordained to declare: or he may have fallen under the power of the adversary through neglecting to watch and pray: or he may have found the strain of the work too great for his unbraced and undisciplined mind. We can only guess at the cause of failure where the reason is not notorious.

On the other hand, a man who has met with success could hardly tell you the reason of it. No man can see himself as he really is. Most men who meet with favour are too modest to note their own virtues, too humble to think of their own qualities. They do not think of themselves in any self-conscious sort of way. They think of their people, and of their work, and lose themselves in the privilege of service. The pastor does not live who could answer the question, "Why I was successful in the pastorate."

Only in general terms can the conditions of success in the pastorate be named. Given the reality of a man's call, the possession of the requisite natural gifts, and a suitable training—all of which may be assumed in the case of men who have got into the seminary, got through, and got out with honour—the conditions of success I would emphasise are five.

The first condition of success in the pastorate is **CHARACTER**.

By this I do not mean merely good moral character, as commonly understood. I take it for granted that Christ's man will be scrupulously honest in all his dealings, perfectly truthful in his every utterance, and absolutely pure in his speech and behaviour. That is to say, there is no place in the ministry of Christ for any one who is not what we call in England a gentleman. But Christian character goes beyond that.

When a young brother goes to his first church, what has he to do there? What does Christ require of him in that sphere? To preach? To organise the workers so as to get the best out of each? To shepherd the flock, especially the sick and the sinsick? Yes, all of those things in their place, and more. But there is something Christ requires of him before preaching, organising, or visiting. He is to *be* something before he does anything. An old minister gave to a young one this word concerning his pastorate in Ephesus: "Set the believers an example of speech, behaviour, love, faith, and purity." The young pastor has first of all to strive to become the best Christian in his congregation, in his village, in his town. He is to be a sample Christian: not merely the best talker on the Word, but the best doer of the Word. He is to be an example of the type which the ministry and the church exist to create and perpetuate. The young pastor is to be the best model of his own teaching.

I need not remind you, who are students of theology, that even our divine Lord's word is only guaranteed by His character. He has authority because of what He showed Himself to be. We attach final authority to His words because the sinlessness of His life declares Him to be more than man. And His word is also best illustrated by His character. He was everything He wished others to be. He was everything He preached. So must it be with the Lord's servant, in measure. In the present day no man will be heeded because of his office, or on the ground of any external authority whatsoever. The young pastor's word must be guaranteed by his own character. If he is not prepared to strive with all his might to become a first-class Christian, let him even now seek some other path of life. It may be possible to be a successful author, editor, organiser, or peripatetic vendor of occasional pulpit fireworks without being a good Christian—I do not know. But I am sure that no one can survive the rigorous scrutiny involved in pastoral relationships unless he is humbly striving to walk with God, and to show forth His praise not only with his lips but in his life. Pray, brethren, not first that your sermons may be a success, or that your churches may be a success, but that you, yourselves may be a success. And let this aim be cherished not as a condition of success in other things, but because it is right.

To indulge a prudential motive at this point is to vitiate all. Look after the health of your soul, and God will look after the welfare of your churches.

The second condition of success in the pastorate which I will mention is DILIGENT STUDY. If you think that severe intellectual labour is a thing that can be laid aside when once you leave the seminary, you have not understood what the seminary is for. A seminary course is intended to put you in the way of becoming a student for life—not to make further study unnecessary. The seminary is the place where you make the tools with which you can work as a student when you go hence. All that you can do here is to lay a foundation. A foundation is not much in itself; it is invisible, and apart from the superstructure, useless. Unless you keep up the studies to which you are introduced in this place, you will be worked out in three years, and your people will be tired of the sound of your voice, and fret for your departure from among them. You will join the ranks of those who occupy many different spheres in a few short years, and become a burden to the denomination from middle life to the end.

As soon as you are settled in your first church you should substitute for that compulsion under which you labour here a voluntary yoke of your own devising. There is both an intellectual and moral necessity for doing so. It is necessary for your growth in knowledge. That goes without saying. And it is necessary for your stability of character. Few men can spend money wisely if they keep no accounts. You have something more precious than money to spend. You have the spending of time, and time which does not belong to you but to Christ and the church which has called you and sustains you. You cannot spend that time as a wise steward unless you plan for it, and adhere to your plan. The plan should fence off hours for study, and allot the hours their tasks. The plan should be reasonable enough to convict you of sin if you should fall short of its requirements. Do not make the plan impossibly hard, or you will be excusing yourself on the ground of its severity.

Details every man must work out for himself, but until you have something better from experience, let me offer general advice.

Work steadily through the great books in the several departments of theological study. Never mind the little books, go for the big ones. Always have on hand one of the standard books of exposition, or systematic theology, or church history, or a treatise on one of the great doctrines, and work away at it as you have learned to do with a text book in the seminary. Be your own professor, and continue on the lines followed here.

But add to this kind of reading, and alongside of it, two other sorts of books. First a book which you cannot read easily, a really hard book—it may be of philosophy, or science perhaps, at any rate, a book which compels your utmost attention and puts your mind on the stretch. The mind may be compared to an elastic band. It will enclose a certain area without any strain whatever. Only under pressure will its capacity be enlarged. The object in reading a hard book is to put pressure on the mind in order to enlarge its capacity. Some men are diligent readers, yet their minds do not increase their range of action. The reason is not that they are mentally indolent, but that they never travel outside the range of topics which can be studied without strain. That is to say, there is rarely in their intellectual exercises anything which has the effect of stretching the compass of the mind. Of course, strain on the mind is a comparative matter. What is a strain to one is easy to another. All I mean is that we should all do something which to us is hard mental work.

Second, a lighter book, as a foil to the heavy one. This may be of poetry, travel, biography, or (sparingly and judiciously), fiction. The purpose of this kind of reading is to gain information, of course, but to do so in a pleasurable way that relieves the mind of strain and monotony of mental food. In speaking to students elsewhere, I have called these three kinds of books, "Stock books," "Stiff books," and "Light books." It should always be possible for a young pastor to say, when asked, what book in each of these classes he is occupied with.

I know that, to the giants, this plan of reading will appear pitifully meagre; but the giants are not in my view, nor would they need any advice from me; I speak only to those who have not better ideas of their own.

The results of your reading on each of these lines should be preserved in three manuscript books. First, a large, well-bound book, in which you enter extracts from authors, not for the purpose of quoting them in sermons, but as intellectual wealth to be stored up, and as a record of your reading through the years. The right of entry into this book is the sheer weight and importance of the matter the extract carries. Second, a slighter book in which to enter texts and topics for sermons or other discourses. Into this goes everything of pulpit value, except illustrations. This sermon seed-book is so often spoken of, that I need not say much about it. Leave a page for a subject, add what occurs to you as the probable line of treatment, and leave it to grow. Third, a rough book, in which you enter everything of an illustrative nature. All your reading will contribute to this book. Make the daily newspaper pay for the time you spend on it by demanding, even from it, an item per

day for your illustration book. The roughest note will do, so that you can recall the point. When an entry has been incorporated in a discourse, draw a line down through it. Keep this book at hand when you are sermonising, and rarely will it fail to yield something to lighten a heavy sermon or brighten a dull one. Biography, travel, fiction—all sorts of reading will throw up something for this rough book.

The third condition of success in the pastorate is SYMPATHY. In the pastorate we deal with persons, not with things. That is what makes our calling the most difficult calling on earth. We do not deal merely with ideas, as does the poet or the philosopher. Nor do we deal with commodities, as does the manufacturer or merchant. We deal with persons, good, bad, and indifferent. A pastor, therefore, needs much of that quality which goes to the making of a wise father or a sweet and influential mother. He must have sympathy. Without that he may be many things, but not a pastor. The men who only deal with ideas may be striking preachers; perhaps that is why they are apt to be found in those spheres which demand but a minimum of pastoral labour. But those men are no sort of models for the average man to copy. Their spheres are unusual in character and few in number.

Pray, therefore, for a pastoral heart, warm, tender, self-forgetting. I have never known a diligent and sympathetic pastor to be a failure. On the contrary, I have known men who achieved surprising success though possessed of moderate preaching power, because they had the heart at leisure from itself. If no one could succeed as a pastor without extraordinary talents we might well despair. But it is not so. If a man has a sympathetic nature he has the talisman of success in the pastorate.

Miss no opportunity of showing sympathy. If there is trouble or sorrow, be the first to show that the affliction is a matter of concern to you. If you hear of a case of sickness, let no one be before you in calling on the sick person. Use to the full the opportunity that sickness gives you of seeking the spiritual welfare of the patient. When you are summoned to a case by an interested friend, go at once. If you delay you may have the mortification of being too late. You may arrive, as I once did, only to see the blinds down.

It is not less important to show sympathy with the joys of your people. If a young lad has passed a stiff examination, or a girl has got happily engaged, or any kind of joy has come to a person or family, let your letter be the first they receive. And do not do things like this as a matter of policy or duty, but from the loving interest you feel in the welfare of those over

whom you have been set. Cultivate an interest in your people, and little acts of this kind will become second nature to you. By such slender cords will people be bound to you. They will pardon your occasional failures in the pulpit if they know that you love them and are always concerned for their good. And, moreover, if you should have occasion to rebuke them for any fault, you will find that they will receive it from you all the better if they feel that your love makes the duty a sorrowful one.

Without sympathy you will not be in a position to deal wisely with individual cases. The sinner who has done wrong and stayed away, the inquirer who has his difficulties, doubts, and fears, the little children who must be remembered by name—all these and many more must be carried on your heart, as the high priest of old carried the names of the tribes on the breastplate of remembrance when he ministered before the Lord. Get into the way of thinking much about people. It was for people that Christ died, not ideas. You are ordained to serve and save persons.

The fourth condition of success in the pastorate is HUMILITY. Time allows me only a few words on this important matter. When you settle into the pastorate you will, as a very young man, be called upon to preside over deacons' meetings and church meetings, wherein you will find many people older, wiser, and holier than yourself. Treat them with the respect which is due. They were in the church before you came. They will probably be still in it when your talents have secured you a place more worthy of you. Meanwhile, go softly. Remember that the wise monitor who said to the pastor of Ephesus, "Let no one slight you because you are a youth," also said, in the same breath, "Never censure an older man harshly; appeal to him as a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters—with perfect propriety."

Remember that pastors are for churches, not churches for pastors. The church does not exist simply to afford you a platform upon which to display your shining talents to an admiring world, and maintenance while the performance lasts. That is essentially a showman's idea. I trust you will never descend to it. Pastors are for churches—to live for them, serve them, suffer for them if need be.

The fifth condition of success in the pastorate is PATIENCE. Want of patience brings premature discouragement. Be patient, therefore, with yourself. Do not be discouraged if your preaching hangs fire at first. Persistent endeavour will bring its reward before long. Never commit decisive acts under the immediate stress of strong feeling. If you are tempted to resign and fly from difficulties, write the letter by all means—it may be

a useful relief to your feelings, as well as an exercise in elegant composition—but tear it up the next day. Never post the letter of passion, however many times it may be written. And do not contend about trifles. Let small things go. If the time ever comes when you have to make a stand (it probably will never come if you have sense), let it be on good ground and about something of importance. You may be beaten, but you will not look ridiculous, and the sympathy accorded to the vanquished in gallant fight will be yours.

And have patience with your people. They may try your patience, but think how you try theirs! Change things slowly. Set out to win their confidence first. After they have had two or three years experience of your practical wisdom they will believe in your methods as firmly as they believe in your gospel. Give them good reasons. They will appreciate good reasons as well as other people. It once took me three years to get consent to something I believed in. Haste might have split the church. In the end it was done by a unanimous vote. Waiting was trying, but it was worth while.

My last word is this: brethren, continue to be students when you leave these halls of learning. There are adjustments to the thought of this age that you have yet to make. It is no disrespect to seminaries to say that they cannot teach you everything. If you learn how to learn it is enough. But you must go on learning. Michael Angelo studied new forms of art when he was past eighty years of age. When surprise was expressed that he, the acknowledged master of the world with chisel and brush, should, at his age, learn new things, he answered, "I hope to die learning." I hope that spirit will animate every man here. Then by God's grace there will be a good time before the churches of Sweden.

GILBERT LAWS.

BLUNHAM. There were fifty people here in 1669, led by John Wright, a collar-maker, who was licensed in 1672. In 1715 they were led by one Perry. Nine years later they organized and opened a meeting-house; Usley from Birmingham ministered 1725-1737, then returned. Thomas Craner ministered 1739-1756, then went to London; a new building arose towards the end of his pastorate. Abraham Clarke followed, 1758 till his death in 1767. Thomas Thomason came at once, but was ordained only in 1771. Such were the facts gleaned by Josiah Thompson about 1779.