

“I have made *The Praying Pastor* part of my morning devotional time, and I am grateful for this easy-to-read book on prayer. Busic highlights prayer as a vital part of one’s life and ministry; prayer as a fountain of renewal and encouragement; prayer as the place of learning and growth; prayer as the point of inspiration and vision; prayer as our most influential moment of the day; and prayer as the place of intimacy with our heavenly Father.”

J. K. Warrick  
General Superintendent Emeritus, Church of the Nazarene  
Lead Pastor, Parkview Church of the Nazarene  
Dayton, Ohio

“Do you know what it’s like to sit down with a close friend and talk about something that’s important to you? That’s what it felt like as I read *The Praying Pastor*. This book is an honest and transparent conversation about prayer. Every pastor understands the temptation to neglect prayer in order to meet the expectations and demands of leadership. When we give in, we suffer great loss. As you read *The Praying Pastor*, you will be gently drawn into the open arms of God, who invites us to know him more.”

Rick Harvey  
Lead Pastor  
Bethany First Church of the Nazarene  
Bethany, Oklahoma

“To say that a pastor is an expert in prayer would seem as natural as saying a neurosurgeon knows a thing or two about the human brain! Yet the reality is not as straightforward as it should be. Every pastor *knows* the necessity of a healthy, regular, intimate prayer life, but not every pastor, including myself, always *practices* this. Busyness, multiple tasks and responsibilities, the business of ministry, and even the pastor’s own personal and family situation can all creep in and grab time that pushes our needed time with the Lord out. We all know we must prioritize this devotional rhythm, but we don’t always manage it. *The Praying Pastor* is just the timely help we need! It is a joy to read. It is profound, personal, practical, and perceptive. I encourage every pastor to read it, for not only is it the work of a seasoned theologian and church leader, but it is also the work of a passionate pastor. A beautiful and honest reflection of Busic’s own life as a praying pastor and a man after God’s heart.”

Jim Ritchie  
Eurasia Regional Director  
Church of the Nazarene  
Büdingen, Germany

“*The Praying Pastor* is a must-read for every pastor who desires to lead with purpose, power, passion, and the perspective of God. Busic’s writing is practical and comes from one who lives a life that displays the in-filling power, leadership, and

love of Jesus. You will smile as you read about not living like people with our 'hair on fire,' only to then be challenged by the possibilities that emerge for effectiveness, impact, and intercession. Every pastor who wants to lead like Jesus will want to read this book and pass it on to others."

Tim Bunn  
Lead Pastor  
Eagle Nazarene Church  
Eagle, Idaho

"This book is what I was hoping a book about a praying pastor would be. Personal. Pastoral. Practical but not pragmatic. Thoughtful but grounded. It models what it means for prayer to be at the very center of life and ministry. This may be the most important thing Busic has said to the church thus far."

Jeren Rowell  
President  
Nazarene Theological Seminary  
Kansas City, Missouri

"As a pastor, I pray daily for people and situations, at ceremonies and events, over meals and meetings, but am I truly a praying pastor, or just pastor who prays? This deep, necessary, soul-searching question left me needing to know more. I was both challenged and encouraged by Busic's personal and prescriptive words in *The Praying Pastor*. His transparency through his own journey is thought-provoking, reassuring, and transformative as he shares with us practical steps to truly intercede for our families, church leaders, congregants, and others. This book urges all pastors to truly examine our own prayer lives and leaves us better equipped to lead from our knees."

Selena Freeman  
Lead Pastor  
The Well Church  
Springfield, Missouri

"Pastors need help. They are human. Called by God to lead, teach, preach, serve, and love, they often find the challenges of life and ministry overwhelming. *The Praying Pastor* reminds pastors where their help comes from in a manner that moves beyond spiritual clichés. This book is powerfully practical and will be used to help pastors go deeper with God so they can daily live and lead with the guidance and help of the Almighty."

Jeffrey Johnson  
South Texas District Superintendent  
Church of the Nazarene  
Houston, Texas

THE  
PRAYING  
PASTOR

LEARNING TO LEAD FROM YOUR KNEES

DAVID A. BUSIC



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PUBLISHING®

Copyright © 2022 by David A. Basic  
The Foundry Publishing®  
PO Box 419527  
Kansas City, MO 64141  
thefoundrypublishing.com

978-0-8341-4122-3

Printed in the  
United States of America

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Cover designer: Rob Monacelli  
Interior designer: Sharon Page

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Basic, David A., 1964- author.

Title: The praying pastor : learning to lead from your knees / David A. Basic.

Description: Kansas City, MO : The Foundry Publishing, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references.

| Summary: "In the Praying Pastor, David Basic reasons that there's a difference between a pastor who prays and a praying pastor. He examines the vital role of an active and intimate prayer life for every Christian who is called to shepherd Jesus's flock, and urges pastors to move from prayer that feels like an obligation, to that of a desired and necessary activity"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021053034 (print) | LCCN 2021053035 (ebook) | ISBN 9780834141223 | ISBN 9780834141230 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Clergy—Religious life. | Prayer—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4011.6 .B87 2022 (print) | LCC BV4011.6 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/92—dc23/eng/20211130

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021053034>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021053035>

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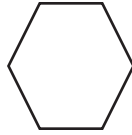
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# BECOMING A PRAYING PASTOR

There is a difference between “a pastor who prays” and “a praying pastor.” Ponder that statement carefully. At first glance, it may appear to be a minor difference of semantics or a witty wordplay. But I am convinced that the two phrases are dissimilar at best and divergent at worst. They are not the same. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the distinction in both the phrase and the practice.

Every pastor prays. We pray in worship services, at hospital bedsides, and before committee meetings. We pray at weddings, funerals, and sporting events. We pray over JELL-O salads at church potlucks and over newborn babies in maternity wards. We pray in person, over the phone, and through texts and emails. One could say we are professional pray-ers many times over. It’s in our job description. As pastors, we pray.

But being a pastor who prays and being a praying pastor are not the same.<sup>1</sup> A praying pastor engages in more than the ceremonial and the expected. A praying pastor immerses the vocation of pas-

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1. This is also true for churches. All churches pray, but some are praying churches.

toring—indeed, their entire existence—in the life of prayer. The praying pastor recognizes that prayer is not a duty to perform, a precursor for an action plan, or an add-on blessing to the already decided but that prayer is as essential an act for ministry as oxygen is for breathing. Imagine my surprise, then, when Eugene Peterson, the quintessential teacher of pastors, made the alarming acknowledgment that, “Most pastoral work actually erodes prayer.”<sup>2</sup> What could he possibly mean? Certainly, he wasn’t referring to the high calling of pastoral ministry and the accompanying time-tested acts of service necessary for shepherding a flock. He is fully aware that the vocational holiness of pastoring requires prayer. Instead, Peterson was describing the expectations—from others and self-imposed—of what it means to be a busy pastor of a growing church.

Few pastors make the conscious decision to be busy at the expense of excluding prayer and eliminating flexibility. It just happens. Calendars fill up without much effort on our part, and if the truth be told, with the exception of Sundays, much of our weekly work can begin to feel strangely secularized. I don’t think it is necessary for me to tell pastors how it happens or even why. But we all feel the void when prayer is pushed to the margins. Peterson goes on to say that, when pastors lose their practice of prayer, they soon enter into the habit of being messiah—doing the work of God *for* God, resolving problems, fixing people, and oiling the machinery of church-as-we-have-come-to-expect-it. It is work we are generally good at, indeed, that we have been well trained to do. But this messianic version of pastoring quickly leads to frustrated and exhausted laity and worn down, burned-out pastors. In the words of renowned pastor Earl Lee, “Burnout is the stress and fatigue of the incorrectly committed.”

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2. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 43.

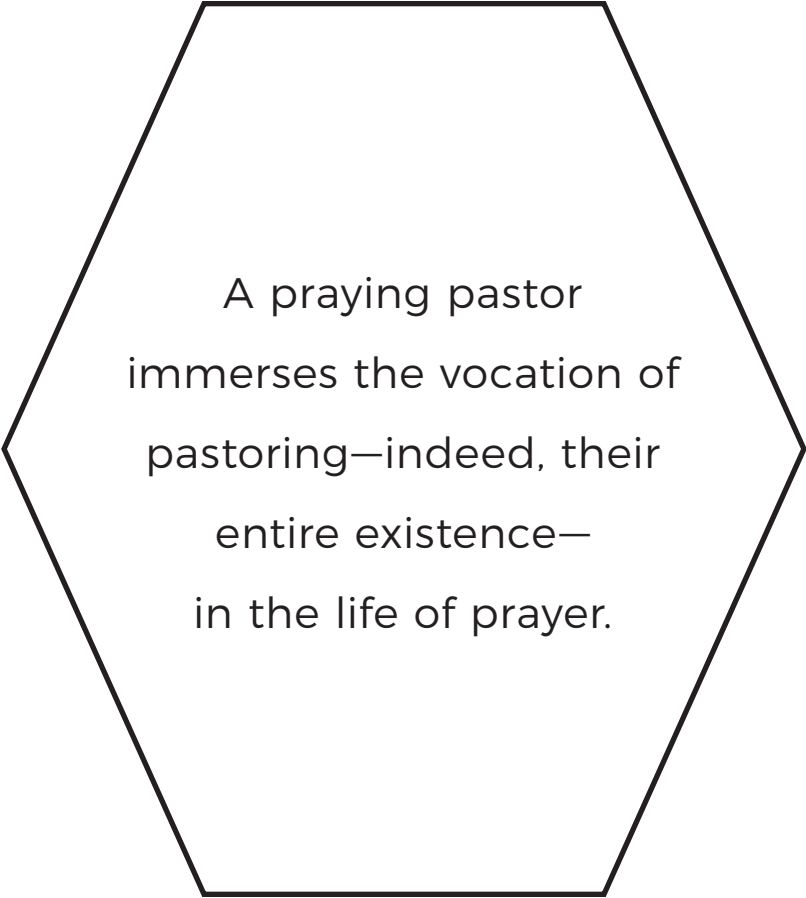
I was a lead pastor for three churches over a span of eighteen years. All three churches were healthy and growing. Many people in all three churches were saved, baptized, disciplined, sanctified, called into ministry, and engaged in their local communities. They were faithful and fruitful congregations, to the glory of God. And I think I was a good pastor, conscientious and careful, purposeful and disciplined. But if there is one thing I would change if I were to pastor again: I would be a praying pastor.

I certainly went through seasons of being a praying pastor, usually driven by particularly heavy burdens, stressful weeks, or crises too big for me to handle alone. But the rest of the time (which turned out to be most of the time), I prayed generally for God to help me and bless my efforts. I then proceeded to depend on my own giftedness, aptitude, people skills, and intuition to get the job done. I wasn't trying to be disobedient, and I even went through periods when I felt guilty enough about my lack of prayer that I adjusted accordingly (typically starting January 1 or Ash Wednesday). But most of it was temporary and didn't seem to last far beyond the current conflict or refreshed commitment to do better.

I'm not trying to be overly hard on myself. I was growing in my understanding and in my life of prayer. In hindsight, I realize that much of my prayer life as a pastor was dependent on what I could and could not control. The truth is, as a lead pastor, in most circumstances I could alter the trajectory of a congregation in a few months. I could preach sermons, cast vision, raise funds, call meetings, and have any number of meetings and conversations with influencers. I had access to key leaders and relational capital to spend. The subtle irony is that, when I had greater control, I prayed less.

Now I am a general superintendent in my denomination, and there are more than two million members who don't know me. I am an ecclesial authority at best, a figurehead at worst. I have far less control over outcomes than I ever did as the pastor of a local church. But it's not a bad thing. With less control, I am becoming a praying





A praying pastor  
immerses the vocation of  
pastoring—indeed, their  
entire existence—  
in the life of prayer.

general superintendent. I no longer merely pray for God to bless my decisions, and then move ahead as I see fit. With less control, I feel a greater need to bathe every decision in prayer, to keep company with God, to linger in the Lord's presence without the need to fill up the air with my words, to soak in the world of Scripture, to process knowledge with discernment, and to grow deeper in my understanding and practice of intercession. In short, I am learning to lead from my knees. The upshot is not more control but greater surrender. Not more power but greater peace. Not greater determination but greater dependence with a more restful heart—and potentially, by God's grace, more lasting fruit.

One of the tricks of life is that we don't know what we could have had; we only know what we actually have. What *would* have and *could* have been different if I had been more committed to intercessory prayer as a lead pastor? Would there have been different outcomes? More enduring fruit? A more impactful harvest? I don't have many regrets from my pastoral ministry. God gave great grace, and I believe I was a good pastor. But I wish I had put more emphasis on the life of prayer and less dependence on my natural instincts, abilities, and strengths.

In rereading the classic Bible verse on slowing down, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), I discovered that the Latin imperative for "be still" is *vacate*. In a play on words, Simon Tugwell offers a fresh paraphrase of this verse from Psalm 46: "God invites us to take a holiday, to stop being God for a while, and let him be God."<sup>3</sup> Take a vacation from being God! Take a break from trying to make things happen in your own strength, and rely on God's strength instead. Those commands (and they *are* commands) are jet fuel for the praying pastor. *There is a God, and it is not me.*

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3. Simon Tugwell, *Prayer: Living with God* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1975), 35.

I am still growing in my understanding and practice of prayer. The explicit goal of a book like this is not to create guilt over a failure to pray, or to plant an impetus to continue in the same generalized petitions we may have been praying up to this point. This book is not a how-to manual, although I hope you will find help from my own journey with prayer. My promise to you is that I will endeavor to make this book a guilt-free zone. Some laity hear an announcement about next week's sermon on prayer and mentally buckle their seatbelts for the collision they know is coming. If there is a collision coming for you, let it be from the Holy Spirit and not from me. I hope to encourage you toward a growing desire to pray; toward an increased, intentional practice of prayer; to take a vacation from being God and renew the conviction that "a life of prayer is the connective tissue between holy day proclamation and weekday discipleship."<sup>4</sup>

One last thing before we dive into the deep end. We call prayer a "practice," and rightly so. As a spiritual discipline, it is. But as you read this book, I hope it will also become clear to you that prayer is not just a practice—it is the game.

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4. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 59.