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Preface to the New Edition

Nothing has happened in the last ten years to make me think this book is less needed. In fact, instead of going away, the pressure to “professionalize” the pastorate has morphed and strengthened. Among younger pastors the talk is less about therapeutic and managerial professionalization and more about communication or contextualization. The language of “professionalization” is seldom used in these regards, but the quiet pressure felt by many pastors is: Be as good as the professional media folks, especially the cool anti-heroes and the most subtle comedians.

This is not the overstated professionalism of the three-piece suit and the stuffy upper floors but the understated professionalism of torn blue jeans and the savvy inner ring. This professionalism is not learned in pursuing an MBA but in being in the know about the ever-changing entertainment and media world. This is the professionalization of ambience, and tone, and idiom, and timing, and banter. It is more intuitive and less taught. More style and less technique. More feel and less force.

If this can be called professionalism, what does it have in common with the older version? Everything that matters. The way I tried to get at the problem in the first edition was to ask some questions. Let me expand that list. Only this time think old *and* new professionalism.

Is there professional praying? Professional trusting in God’s promises? Professional weeping over souls? Professional musing on the depths of revelation? Professional rejoicing in the truth? Professional praising God’s name? Professional treasuring the riches of Christ? Professional walking by the Spirit? Professional exercise of spiritual gifts? Professional dealing with demons? Professional pleading with backsliders? Professional perseverance in a hard marriage? Professional

playing with children? Professional courage in the face of persecution? Professional patience with everyone?

That's for starters.

These are not marginal activities in the pastoral life. They are central. They are the essence. Why do we choke on the word *professional* in those connections? Because professionalization carries the connotation of an education, a set of skills, and a set of guild-defined standards which are possible without faith in Jesus. Professionalism is not supernatural. The heart of ministry is.

Ministry is professional in those areas of competency where the life of faith and the life of unbelief overlap. Which means two things. First, that overlapping area can never be central. Therefore, professionalism should always be marginal, not central; optional, not crucial. And second, the pursuit of professionalism will push the supernatural center more and more into the corner while ministry becomes a set of secular competencies with a religious veneer.

As I write this, I have ten months left as pastor for preaching and vision of Bethlehem Baptist Church. If I live to see this transition complete, I will have served the church for almost thirty-three years. I feel the conviction of this book as strongly today as when I wrote it ten years ago and as when my ministry began on this basis three decades ago. When I look back, my regret is not that I wasn't more professional but that I wasn't more prayerful, more passionate for souls, more consistent in personal witness, more emotionally engaged with my children, more tender with my wife, more spontaneously affirming of the good in others. These are my regrets.

In the first year of my ministry at the church thirty-two years ago, I read E. M. Bounds' *Power through Prayer*. His book struck the match that ignited the fire of this book. I quote it in chapter 1: "God deliver us from the professionalizers! 'Deliver us from the low, managing, contriving, maneuvering temper of mind among us.'" Now, at the end of my pastoral ministry, I return to this same place and say, *Thank You, Lord. Thank You, for showing me this. Thank You for burning this on my*

soul. Thank You for protecting me for all these years from the deadening effects of professionalization.

And I conclude this new preface with the same prayer I began with: “Banish professionalism from our midst, O God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord. In Jesus’ great and powerful name. Amen.”



Besides this preface there are six new chapters in the book: chapters 4, 6, 13, 18, 22, and 27. I added these because in the last ten years they pressed themselves on me. One for personal reasons like health (chap. 27). One for family reasons relating to my own sanctification (chap. 22). Two for theological reasons where I felt I needed greater clarity or correction (chaps. 4 and 6). And two in pursuit of being a better preacher (chaps. 13 and 18).

A very special thank you for David Mathis, for six years my executive pastoral assistant, now executive editor at *Desiring God*. I could not have done this under the constraints of pastoral ministry without his help.

And here at the end of my pastoral ministry, thank you to the church where I did my best to live according to the things written in this book. You have been kind to me. It has been a taste of heaven to worship and serve among you.

The preacher . . . is not a professional man;
his ministry is not a profession;
it is a divine institution,
a divine devotion.

E. M. BOUNDS



We are fools for Christ's sake.
But professionals are wise.
We are weak.
But professionals are strong.
Professionals are held in honor.
We are in disrepute.

We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle,
but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless.

1

Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matt. 18:3); there is no professional tenderheartedness (Eph. 4:32); there is no professional panting after God (Ps. 42:1).

But our first business is to pant after God in prayer. Our business is to weep over our sins (James 4:9). Is there professional weeping?

Our business is to strain forward to the holiness of Christ and the prize of the upward call of God (Phil. 3:14); to pummel our bodies and subdue them lest we be cast away (1 Cor. 9:27); to deny ourselves and take up the blood-spattered cross daily (Luke 9:23). How do you carry a cross professionally? We have been crucified with Christ, yet now we live by faith in the one who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). What is professional faith?

We are to be filled not with wine but with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). We are God-besotted lovers of Christ. How can you be drunk with Jesus professionally? Then, wonder of wonders, we were given the gospel treasure to carry in clay pots to show that the transcendent power belongs to God (2 Cor. 4:7). Is there a way to be a professional clay pot?

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus (professionally?) so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested (professionally?) in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:9–11).

I think God has exhibited us preachers as last of all in the world. We are fools for Christ's sake, but professionals are wise. We are weak, but professionals are strong. Professionals are held in honor, we are in disrepute. We do not try to secure a professional lifestyle, but we are ready to hunger and thirst and be ill-clad and homeless. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:9–13). Or have we?

Brothers, we are *not* professionals! We are outcasts. We are aliens and exiles in the world (1 Pet. 2:11). Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait with eager expectation for the Lord (Phil. 3:20). You cannot professionalize the love for His appearing without killing it. And it *is* being killed.

The aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying.

The life-giving preacher is a man of God, whose heart is ever athirst for God, whose soul is ever following hard after God, whose eye is single to God, and in whom by the power of God's Spirit the flesh and the world have been crucified and his ministry is like the generous flood of a life-giving river.¹

We are most emphatically not part of a social team sharing goals with other professionals. Our goals are an offense; they are foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). The professionalization of the ministry is a constant threat to the offense of the gospel. It is a threat to the profoundly spiritual nature of our work. I have seen it often: the love of professionalism (parity among the world's professionals) kills a man's belief that he is sent by God to save people from hell and to make them Christ-exalting, spiritual aliens in the world.

The world sets the agenda of the professional man; God sets the agenda of the spiritual man. The strong wine of Jesus Christ explodes the wineskins of professionalism. There is an infinite difference between the pastor whose heart is set on being a professional and the pastor whose heart is set on being the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of death to some and eternal life to others (2 Cor. 2:15–16).

God, deliver us from the professionalizers! Deliver us from the "low, managing, contriving, maneuvering temper of mind among us."² God, give us tears for our sins. Forgive us for being so shallow in prayer, so thin in our grasp of holy verities, so content amid perishing neighbors, so empty of passion and earnestness in all our conversation. Restore to us the childlike joy of our salvation. Frighten us with the awesome holiness and power of Him who can cast both soul and body into hell (Matt. 10:28). Cause us to hold to the cross with fear and trembling as our hope-filled and offensive tree of life. Grant us nothing, absolutely nothing, the way the world views it. May Christ be all in all (Col. 3:11).

Banish professionalism from our midst, Oh God, and in its place put passionate prayer, poverty of spirit, hunger for God, rigorous study of holy things, white-hot devotion to Jesus Christ, utter indifference to all material gain, and unremitting labor to rescue the perishing, perfect the saints, and glorify our sovereign Lord.

Humble us, O God, under Your mighty hand, and let us rise, not as professionals, but as witnesses and partakers of the sufferings of Christ. In His awesome name. Amen.

Notes

1. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 16.
2. Richard Cecil quoted in E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 59.