

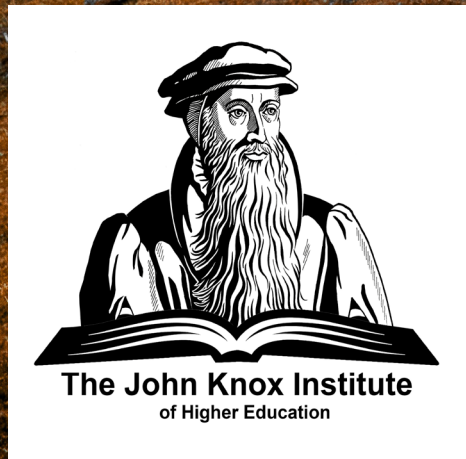
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

by Rev. Harry Woods

LECTURE #5

Minister's Self Watch, part 2



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev Harry Woods recently retired as minister of Kilmorack & Strathglass Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in Beaully, Scotland, after having served as a minister of the Gospel since 1982. He was the editor of the monthly denominational youth magazine, *The Explorer*; for eleven years and taught Apologetics and Pastoral Theology at the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary in Inverness for eighteen years. He is married to Mairi, and has three adult children and three grandchildren.

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PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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Lecture #5

Minister's Self Watch, part 2

We continue our lecture on *Self Watch*. You'll remember that we looked at 1 Timothy chapter 4, and verse 16, where Paul says, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." We noted that our checks and balances with respect to taking heed to our doctrine, as we preach our sermons publically, assessed, analyzed both by our elders and our congregation. And so, our focus has been on *Self Watch*, because in that, our only checks and balances come from within ourselves, as it were. We looked at some of the spiritual concerns that are applicable to those who are in the ministry. And what I want to do is move on and consider *Self Watch—Watching the Whole Man*.

1. The Whole Man

Now, a minister, a preacher of the gospel, is not in the business of simply churning out sermons week by week, but he's a whole man, and this exhortation to *Self Watch* is applicable to all those aspects of the man. We remember that the Scriptures tell us that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that we bear a responsibility for our whole person. And for that reason, in our *Self Watch*, we have to give attention to the physical, and emotional, and mental, and intellectual needs of the minister, because all of these things are interrelated.

If you think, for example, of Elijah and his confrontation with the prophets of Baal, and his fleeing from Jezebel, and after her threat, we see that his physical, and mental, and spiritual states were involved in this flight from Jezebel. And we see how God dealt with him. He gives him food, he gives him sleep, he gently rebukes him, and he gives him encouragement. With these things in mind, I want us to consider our *Self Watch* from the perspective a man's *physical health*, and his *mental health*, and his *emotional health*.

1. Physical Health

When we think of his *Physical Health*, we think of the necessity for being physically fit. A lack of physical fitness easily affects our concentration. It affects how we are able to study, and so on. We need, as preachers of the Word, a healthy level of cardiovascular efficiency. We need it because breathing and speaking plays a vital role in preaching. And so, by way of encouragement, we ought to do something to exercise, applicable to our age and our circumstances. It might be going for a walk, it might be doing some press-ups,¹ or whatever may come to your mind and you're able to

¹ Press-up (British) or push-up (American) is an exercise for strengthening arm and shoulder muscles.

accomplish. So there needs to be physical fitness.

Of course, there needs to be care of the voice. Our voice is also sensitive to maltreatment. If we spent the whole of a Saturday at a football match yelling and shouting for the team that we support, it's unlikely we will be able, with a clear voice, to preach the gospel on Sunday. And so, we should take care to avoid unnecessary stress upon our voices. Charles Haddon Spurgeon,² for example, gives the recommendation to those preparing for the ministry that they shouldn't use a scarf to wrap up their throat, but rather, get it used to the changes and the things that will affect it in the ordinary daily life. Again, you think of the fact that many churches have audio amplifiers, and these can be of help especially if we have a sore throat.

Another aspect of our *Physical Health* that we need to give attention to is that of our weight. Apart from the associated health risks, obesity will also affect our perceived authority. It's very difficult for a congregation to listen to an obese minister who is telling them that they need moderation in all things. And so, we should take care to keep our weight at a reasonable level. And if we are overweight, we should try and reduce it. This will also have the effect of sharpening our mind. Anyone who has managed to reduced their weight will tell you that it makes a big difference to their concentration and their energy levels.

Appearance is also something that we should be concerned with, with respect to our *Physical Health*. The physical appearance of the preacher is important, especially in the pulpit. And so, we should make sure that our hands, and our hair, and our fingernails are well tended to. We don't want to come into the pulpit with our hair all over the place, or with fingernails that look as though we've been working on a motor car, changing the engine or whatever. And so, too, with our shoes and our clothes, we have to try and be reasonably dressed for a public speaking event. Again, and a sensitive subject, we must beware that we are not giving off body odor, and that we should keep ourselves clean. This appearance is important, because, whether we like it or not, it involves an issue of trust. If you go to a doctor, and he comes in wearing sandals, and shorts, and a T-shirt, you might not have the same confidence in his ability than if he came in wearing a white coat with a stethoscope wrapped around his neck.

So you see that these things are important. *Physical Health* also means that we look at our diet, that we have regular eating habits, not gorging or starving ourselves. Of course, one of the problems that we face in the ministry is that when we go visiting, very often, we are encouraged to have a cup of tea, or eat with the people. And that is something that we must be careful about. We don't want to go out visiting five houses, and come home in the evening full of cakes and biscuits. We have to be ruthless about this, and be willing to say, "Thank you very much, but no thanks."

Again, with our *Physical Health*, we need to give attention to our sleep, and we should form regular sleep patterns. Some people turn night into day in the ministry, and they're up till four in the morning, perhaps even a Sunday morning, and they're struggling to prepare their sermon. They will go into the pulpit jaded if they have been doing this, especially if it's regular. There will be times in the experience of the preacher when his normal sleep pattern will be disrupted, but we've got to be careful that we do not let this become the norm of our pattern.

2. Mental Health

Again, you think of *Mental Health*. It has a close connection with our physical state. The ministry is mostly mental work. We are thinking, we are reading, we are seeking to discern the

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was an English Particular Baptist preacher, who remains highly influential among Christians of various denominations. He is known as "Prince of Preachers."

truth, we are studying. We often have to concentrate, and at times most intensely, and so it's important that we keep a healthy mind. And the best way to keep a healthy mind is to maintain our spiritual health, that as we are walking with God, we have no bad conscience, that we are able to concentrate on matters that are spiritual without the nagging sense of our own sin plaguing us and keeping us from study. You might wonder if this is really something that affects us, but when you look at the Psalms you see this coming out. You think of Psalm 32, the Psalm that speaks about "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (verse 1). But if you read through that Psalm, you see that the state of that man, the psalmist, before he was forgiven, before his sin was pardoned was one of roaring, of his bones waxing old, of sleepless nights. And so, the best way to deal with that is to keep short accounts with God. Failure to maintain our *Mental Health* will lead to discouragement, and guilt, and frustration. And the best way to remedy that, as I say, is to obey the exhortation of Paul to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

But also remember *Mental Health's* connection with your *physical state*. The mind and body are closely connected. You think again of the experience of Elijah. He had confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he had run extraordinarily before the chariots of Ahab to Samaria, and as he did so, no doubt it took a toll on his physical strength. And so, when we find him fatigued, when we find him easy prey to temptation, we see that these things had an effect upon him. And for that reason, when God comes upon him, the first thing he does is feed him, and then he puts him to sleep. And so we are reminded of the close connection between physical fatigue, or overweight, or even illness, and its effect upon the spiritual state.

You will find in the ministry that there are days when you simply can't concentrate, and you may sit at the desk and study, and study, and study, and seem to be getting nowhere. Sometimes the best thing to do is go out for a walk, or take your mind completely off matters. Go out and cut the grass, or go out and visit somebody perhaps. But we have to be careful that we don't use those things as an excuse for not studying. But on those days when concentration is hard to find, then sometimes what we need to do is rest.

So we've looked at *Physical Health* and *Mental Health*.

3. Emotional Health

I want to conclude by looking at *Emotional Health*. It is rarely the amount of work or the difficulties that we face in the ministry that cause emotional breakdown. There are some reasons why we might have an unhealthy emotional life.

One of them has to do with *identity*. It's one of those things that men find when they come into the ministry and begin to reflect upon, "What am I supposed to be doing? What *is* the work of the ministry? What do I need to do to fulfill this call that God has given me?" Identity can be difficult for men at the beginning of their ministry. Well, remember, you are God's ambassador. You are not a man-pleaser. You are not there to please the congregation. You are there to open up the Word of God, to preach the gospel, to be the mouthpiece of God in that particular place where God has called you to. You are to be a pastor/teacher. You are to be teaching, yes, but you are also to pastor, and we'll cover that in a later lecture. You're not a social worker. You're not a counselor. These may be things that you obliquely have to deal with as you meet with your people, but the fact is, that is not your calling. You are called to be a pastor/teacher. And remember that you are a servant of the flock. You are not to lord it over them—and again, we'll see more of this later. But at the same time, you are called to be its leader. So, *identity* is one of those problems that can give rise to a breakdown of *Emotional Health*.

Another is *discouragement* and that comes in various forms. There is in the ministry often a lack of visible progress. If you examine your own heart, you might be grieved and discouraged at the lack of growth and development as a believer that you see within yourself. You maybe see in your people a similar discouraging outcome. When we think of the *discouragements*, it's good for us to remember that sometimes these *discouragements* are caused because of a lack of time management, and again, we will look at that in a later lecture. But we also have to remember that there are some things that we can never do. You can never do all the work that needs to be done. You can never do everything that is required, because there is always someone who needs to hear the gospel. There is always some saint who needs to be encouraged. And so, as we mentioned in the beginning exhortation, whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might as to the Lord, and leave it in the hands of the Lord. The work is the Lord, and he knows our frame. In Psalm 103, we are told he knows that we are dust (verse 14). He knows our weakness; he knows our frailty, and we should commit our ways to the Lord when we find ourselves *discouraged*.

Now, what about *criticism*?—another thing that impacts upon our *Emotional Health*. We'll deal with this in more detail later on. But you have to face the fact that as a minister, you will be criticized in just about everything you do, whether it's preaching, whether it's visiting, whether it's your motives, whether it's your dealing with people. And *criticisms* often come when you're most vulnerable. You will find, after having preached a sermon, that the evil one will often tell you that that was a terrible sermon. The other thing sometimes he does to trip us up and cause us to be prideful is to tell us it was a good sermon, so we need to be aware of that. But we also need to be aware that we may have these *criticisms* coming from those in the congregation: "I didn't understand a word you said;" "That teaching was too deep for me." These kind of *criticisms* can be wounding. How are we to deal with them? Well, resist self-defense or anger. It's very easy for us to want to vindicate ourselves. Leave the vindication up to God. But consider if the *criticisms* are warranted or unwarranted. If you have a wife, then ask her what she thinks, "Do you think that these are valid *criticisms*, or do you think that this is something unwarranted?" If they are warranted *criticisms*, then repent of them, and seek the Spirit's grace to change. If necessary, apologize and ask for forgiveness from those who have made the criticism.

If they are unwarranted, however, there are various possible responses. The first is, don't take everything you hear with the same degree of seriousness. In Proverbs, the master is warned not to listen to the *criticisms* of their servant, because they're bound to hear something that is critical of the master. We must remember that criticisms of ourselves are not always an attack upon our ministerial office, and so we have to be prepared at times to deal with them in the way I'm going to suggest. Often the best way is to ignore what you hear and commit the matter to the Lord. He knows whether the *criticisms* are fair or unfair, and so do the discerning saints in the congregation. One of the dangers we must avoid when we face *criticism*—that we will indeed face—is cynicism. We have to be careful not to become cynical and hard in the face of these things.

Again, we've seen *identity*, *discouragement*, and *criticisms*, but another aspects that affects our *Emotional Health*, strangely enough, is *loneliness*. Now you might think that being a pastor over a congregation would mean that you're anything but lonely. But the ministry is one of the loneliest callings. You may have to stand alone. You can think of the historical Athanasius,³ who was the only man maintaining orthodox doctrine in the ancient world, in his generation. Here,

³ Athanasius I of Alexandria, aka Athanasius the Great (AD c. 296/298–383), a Christian theologian and the 20th patriarch of Alexandria over 45 years, including 5 exiles under 4 different Roman emperors. As a church Father, he was the chief proponent of the Trinity, arguing against Arianism proposed by Arius.

we have to recognize that often we face trials, temptations, difficulties that only another minister can understand. We may not be able to share things that we have heard, not even with our wives. We may be dealing with someone who has spoken to us in confidence, and we have to bear that burden before the Lord and not before men. We can't always take every opportunity afforded to us for fellowship. We may want and we may desire to go out to this meeting or that meeting, but if we have our deadlines, if we have preparation for the coming Lord's Day, we simply may not be able to join with other believers. Again, sometimes when we do manage to have fellowship with our ministerial brethren, we perhaps feel that they can see right inside us. We reel exposed, we feel guilty, we feel that we have fallen short even of our own standards. Remember, dear friends, that they can't see inside you. The Lord can, but they cannot. And remember that they may well have the same feelings of inadequacy and failure that you may have. One thing I would suggest to combat that loneliness is to seek a close friend who is a minister. Try and have one close ministerial friend, because you will be able to speak with them, offload things unto them, share with them burdens that none others can understand.

And I conclude this *Watching the Whole Man* with another *Emotional Health* check, and that is *dryness*. Dryness in the ministry is one of those things that will come again and again. You preach a sermon, and it's as though you are just saying words and making no impact. You may have many reasons for that dryness—we've touched on them in previous lectures. It may be that you are actively rebellious against God. It may be that you are tired. It may be that you're discouraged and cast down. Whatever it is, you will face that *dryness*. But when you can look at this from a positive perspective, if we are going through a period of *dryness*, it may well be that the Lord is calling us closer to himself. It may well be that he is calling us to a greater dependence upon the Spirit of God. It may be that he is removing the props that we have been leaning on, in order that we lean more heavily upon him. He is the one who can give us the unction of the Spirit. He is the one who can remove the *dryness*. And so, *dryness* should drive us to a closer walk with our Lord, a greater intercession in our prayers, that the Lord would bless the Word we preach. And we will continue in this *Self Watch* in our next lecture. Thank you.