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1: TAKE HEED TO YOUR SELF

It happened again this week. No doubt you heard the news about the pastor who left his church due to immorality or being burned out. Depending on your status, you may have received the news with a shrug of the shoulders or with grief or perhaps you have taken it as a providential shot across your bow. It could have been you. Maybe it should have been you. You may be taking up this book with a sense that you are barely hanging on. Perhaps for months there has been little genuine spiritual vitality in your personal life. You feel like you have been running on fumes as you preach a Christ whom you have not personally treasured for some time. Perhaps you have failed again in some area of moral or relational compromise. You've told yourself repeatedly that it has to stop, or it will mean the end of your ministry, and yet you've gone on feeling either defeated, condemned, or worse, hard hearted. It may be that you have decided to read this book with hope that it will help

you to hang on for a few more months before another assignment comes your way.

The fact of the matter is, you have grown weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9). The thought of another elders' meeting, or congregational meeting is causing you distress and depriving you of needed rest and Christian joy. It is feeling like every other day is Sunday and you know full well that that next passage will not exegete or preach itself. You are convinced that the pressures of ministry are unrelenting. It's quite possible I have not described you. You may be in the midst of new and flourishing ministry. It may be that the Lord has been dealing very graciously with your soul and things have never been better. I'm thankful. I wish I could tell you that you will never enter a dark valley again. If you live and minister long enough in this old cursed world the pressures of ministry will hit you at some time.

In his first lecture to his students, Pastor Charles Spurgeon addressed the theme of the 'Minister's Self-Watch.' The so-called Prince of Preachers knew not only great public success, but spoke often and passionately of the private life that was the well spring of such public power.

It will be in vain for me to stock my library, or organize societies, or project schemes, if I neglect the culture of myself; for books, and agencies, and systems, are only remotely the

instruments of my holy calling; my own spirit, soul, and body, are my nearest machinery for sacred service; my spiritual faculties, and my inner life, are my battle ax and weapons of war. M'Cheyne, writing to a ministerial friend, who was traveling with a view to perfecting himself in the German tongue, used language identical with our own:

I know you will apply hard to German, but do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, his instrument—I trust, a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.¹

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF

What does it mean to take heed to yourself and in what way is this fundamental pastoral duty an aid to your

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), 2.