

You'll find in your mailboxes this month's *Forward in Christ*. That's our national church body's monthly magazine. This month there are great stories about following Jesus. One great article speaks about the very same disciples the gospel speaks of, those men sent out by Jesus. You'll also find a bunch of pictures of the graduates from Martin Luther College. That's our church body's college of ministry. Some of these young people are receiving their first call into the public ministry as teachers or staff ministers. Others are continuing at the seminary to become pastors. Perhaps you might do as I did. Scan their names, look at their faces, feel their joy, feel their fear, and pray for them.

Not that these young people are ill prepared. Quite the opposite. These young people are equipped to enter full time gospel ministry. They're full of joy. They're looking to set the world on fire for Jesus. God bless them in that work. But why might they still have some lingering fears? Aren't they entering God's church as servants? Haven't they studied hard and earned their degrees? Haven't they been tested and approved by the leadership of these schools? Yes to everything. So why might fear still linger?

The words Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy recorded in the second lesson are the qualifications for full time ministry, especially for pastors. I'm sure Timothy had the same feelings as those graduating seniors from Martin Luther College. Joyful at being out in the ministry. Ready to set the world on fire for Jesus. Wanting so much to be a servant of God. But maybe after reading these words Timothy had a little fear too. Why he felt that way and what God has to say in return are what we're looking for from God's Word today...

God stands behind you and me
Making us worthy
Giving us our task

As God's church on earth expands, more workers are always needed. So Paul included qualifications at God's command in this letter. **"If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."** We can't match every Biblical term to a position in the church today. Bishops, elders, overseers, shepherds all meant something different than they do today. This overseer was someone called by a group of Christians to preach and teach God's Word in their name and for their benefit. That most closely matches our pastors today. Now why a whole sermon on words that seem to apply to me, not you?

God wants you to know the qualifications for pastors, otherwise how will you know if a pastor is qualified or not? Listen to them again. **Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money."** What's interesting is that there's mostly things on this list that apply to me and you, pastor and lay people. Aren't you also supposed to be a one woman kind of guy or a one man kind of woman? Temperate is nothing more than being restrained in going to extremes. You too should be under control and respectful to people. Not getting drunk or violent or quarrelsome are all good things for you. Besides being able to teach these sound like qualifications not just for pastors but for every Christian.

Think about the list again. Pastor or layperson, it doesn't matter. What God wants you to answer is who has lived up to these qualifications? Who has kept them perfectly? No one here can raise their hand, least of all me your pastor. I have sinned against God in these too. I can't say I've kept these qualifications perfectly and I'm the pastor that must meet them to do what I do. As a Christian you too recognize you haven't kept them perfectly either. God demands perfection in everything we do whether pastor, teacher, staff minister, or lay person. But we've had those moments where we lost self-control, we overreacted, we weren't temperate. We've been disrespectful of parents or authorities. We've sinned. I've sinned, haven't been perfect, and am not worthy before God. You've sinned, haven't been perfect, and are not worthy before God.

At the American Idol tryouts downtown on Friday the minimum age was fifteen. The maximum was twenty eight. More than 9,000 people showed up meeting those age qualifications. Anyone outside of those would've been disqualified. You and I haven't met God's qualifications perfectly as he required. We should be disqualified, especially me, your pastor. So why do I stand here preaching to you and teaching you? What makes me worthy? What makes you worthy? God stands behind you and me making us worthy.

Christ Jesus really would make the best pastor. He lived and breathed God's qualifications perfectly every day of his life. He was the only one too. He always had the right self-control. He was always respectful and cared for others. He always was gentle and never loved money more than God. He had it all. The Bible says he took that perfection earned through a life of never sinning and gave it as a payment. He went to the cross where he gave that perfection to God in your place. He paid with his perfect life for your imperfect one. Now you have his perfect life to call your own. Christ Jesus stands behind you and me and makes us worthy.

The price was paid. I am worthy to stand here preaching and teaching you the Word of God as your pastor because Christ stands behind me in the message I share. You are worthy to be God's people, live in freedom with no guilt because your sins are paid for, and listen to God's Word because Christ stands behind you with a perfect life and death given for you. We bring no worth of our own. You and I are worthy to receive all the blessings God intends to give to us because our worth comes from Christ.

If you've looked for a job recently are you concerned they aren't out there? Plenty are I'm told by HR people all the time. The problem is not everyone is qualified for every job. Disqualified people can't be hired unless the company is willing to train them. They must be brought up to qualification. Even if the person walks off the street qualified, that's only the first step. They still have to complete the tasks. God stands behind you and me and makes us worthy in Christ. But that's only the first part. God has qualified us, now God stands behind you and me giving us our task.

It shouldn't be a surprise to know that pastors face temptations. I'm not going to make this confession hour for me. But there's the danger that the pastor can get to thinking he's better than the rest. **"He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."** Pride goes before a fall and pastors can certainly become prideful and fall. The temptation is also there to forget that he is still pastor on the fields and courts and at the grocery store. **"He must have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace."** Pastors wrestle with taking too much credit or passing blame. Pastors wrestle with responsibility, what God entrusts and you entrust. They wrestle with abilities and with tasks needing to be accomplished.

Remember, God stands behind you and me giving us our tasks. That makes God responsible for all growth. New people who come to know Christ, families who send their children to our school, God gets all the credit. God gets all the glory. And God allows hardships and difficulties to strike too. These are used by God to make you and me stronger. People who walk away or don't come aren't rejecting you or me, they reject Christ. If people aren't supporting sacrificially with their offerings it's not you or me they hurt. It hurts God who cares about their soul. Ultimately that's what you and I want to care about, caring about souls. We want people to have a close relationship with Jesus. That's our God-given task.

I need God standing behind me as you need him standing behind you. And he does. Christ Jesus forgave all your sins and my sins. We are free. We're free from the burden of always thinking how we've failed. We're free to look with joy on each new day confident in our forgiveness because of Christ. That freedom in Christ allows you and me to do our tasks. God stands behind you and me as we do them. Christ Jesus empowers you every day to work, go to school, to live to his glory.

God stands behind you and me making us worthy and giving us our tasks. You're right where God wants you to be. God makes you worthy for the life he gives you in Christ. He gives you tasks that match where you are. Not everyone is meant to be a pastor. Not everyone should be a teacher. But those with gifts that could be used in those areas should think about serving in those ways. Those without those gifts can put their gifts to use in God's kingdom elsewhere. No matter what, no matter what tasks you do, you can do them serving the Lord Jesus wherever you are. God stands behind you and me all the way.