

Dangerous Calling | Paul David Tripp

Reviewed by Pastor Warren A. Coe

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You have heard ‘You can’t tell a book by its cover’? I picked up Paul Tripp’s book thinking it would exalt and affirm the high calling of the pastorate. Instead, I read exhortations, warnings and correctives designed to protect pastors from fatal mistakes. *Dangerous Calling* also helps congregations provide a grace-filled environment that results in healthy pastors and healthy churches.

Paul Trip is president of Paul Tripp Ministries. It is his mission to connect “the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life.” Paul serves as executive director of the Center for Pastoral Life and Care in Fort Worth. He has written over a dozen books on Christian living.

Tripp loves pastors and their families. The inside cover-jacket declares Mr. Tripp’s “is not only concerned about the spiritual life of the pastor, but also with the very community of people that trains him, calls him, relates to him and restores him if necessary.”

Why this book? Why at this time? Pastors are stressed out. Some have made costly mistakes hurting themselves, their family and the church. According the Francis Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership thirty five to forty percent of pastors leave the ministry within the first five years. I have served the local church for over thirty-four years, never has the ministry been more demanding. The days of the quiet shepherd-like ministry seems like ancient history. Pastors are asked to wear over two dozen hats like preaching, teaching, visitation, counseling, administration, marketing, visionary, disciple, evangelist, staff motivator and program director to name a few responsibilities and expectations. What happens when the pastor finds out he’s not good enough at all those tasks? What happens when the congregation finds out?

“Dangerous Calling reveals the truth that the culture surrounding our pastors is spiritually unhealthy—an environment that actively undermines the well-being and efficacy of our church leaders and thus the entire church body.”

At the heart of the matter is a dis-connect between the public life of the pastor and his private life. What pastors appear to be on Sunday morning might be another matter at home with their wife and children. Tripp believes there are three reasons for this. (1) The ministry has defined the identity of the pastor (page 21). (2) Biblical literacy and theological knowledge defines a pastor’s maturity. Knowledge about God begins to replace relationship with God (page 25). (3) There is confusion about ministry success with God’s endorsement of the pastor’s lifestyle. Here a deep sense of privilege or what I might call entitlement seeps into the mind and heart of the pastor. Now he thinks the congregation is lucky to have him serving their church.

Paul Tripp shares a chilling story. A pastor arrived late for staff meeting; something he never did. He looked exhausted. He looked old. The staff wondered? “He mumbled an apology about being late and without any further hesitation said: ‘I’m done, I can’t do this anymore. I can’t deal with the pressure of ministry. I can’t face preaching another sermon. I can’t deal with another meeting. If I am honest, I would have to say that all I want to do is leave. I want to leave the ministry, I want to leave this area, and I want to leave my wife. No, there’s been no affair. I’m just tired of pretending that I’m someone that I’m not. I’m tired of acting like I’m okay when I’m not. I’m tired of playing as if my marriage is good when it is the polar opposite of

good. I can't preach this coming Sunday, and I have to get away alone or I'm going to explode. I'm sorry to lay this on you this way, but I'm done—I can't go on.' And with that, he got up and walked out." (Page 31)

Tripp had a shocking take-away. "For me the attention-getting thing about this sad scenario, which I've heard way too many times, was not its stunning suddenness but the shocking reality that the pastor lived in this day-by-day ministry community fundamentally unknown and uncared for." (Page 31)

The book drives the hopeless to the Word of God. Paul Tripp brings us to Isaiah 55 and explicates this passage. Then he writes these words. "When the Word of God, faithfully taught by the people of God and empowered by the Spirit of God, falls down, people become different. Lusting people become pure, fearful people become courageous, thieves become givers, demanding people become servants, angry people become peacemakers, complainers become thankful, and idolaters come to joyfully worship the one true God. The ultimate purpose of the Word of God is not theological information but heart and life transformation. That last paragraph was worth the purchase price of the book. (Page 51) This is what we believe at Village Schools of the Bible.

What are the warning signs that a pastor is walking too close to a precipice? There are seven signs: Spiritual blindness, theological self-righteousness, dysfunctional personal relationship to the Word, and a lack of personal gospel neediness, impatience with others, wrong perspective on ministry and no living communion with Christ. If you are a pastor you are nodding your head. We've all been there. But how do we get in a safe place so we can faithfully love our families and serve the body of Christ?

Here is Paul Tripp's antidote. "The pastor must be enthralled by, in awe of—can I say it: in love with—his redeemer so that everything he thinks, desires, chooses, decides, says, and does is propelled by love for Christ and the security of rest in the love of Christ. He must be regularly exposed, humbled, assured and given rest by the grace of his redeemer. His heart needs to be tenderized day after day by his communion with Christ so that he becomes a tender, loving, patient, forgiving, encouraging and giving servant leader." (Page 63)

After reviewing Joseph's life, Moses, Elijah and David, the author says the heart of the matter is the heart! Real ministry in the church begins with a heart enthralled with Jesus Christ. For those who serve on church boards, Sunday school classes or other responsibilities in the church, I encourage you to read this book. Paul Trip peels back the curtains of the pastor's heart and life. You will become more sensitive to his interior life.

As a cautionary note: I would not recommend that you recommend this book to your pastor. He might think you are making a statement. Rather, pray for your pastor. Live in Christian community with your pastor, not only as your pastor but a fellow heir in Christ. Finally, if you can, become a friend to your pastor and his family. When they come to visit or you visit them, ask them about their life, children, hobbies and their walk with Christ. Your love may be just the thing that builds a healthy environment for them and your church to flourish.