

Letters to a Young Pastor: Timothy Conversations between Father and Son

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Eleven years of correspondence between a father and his son are collected in *Letters to a Young Pastor*—honest and thoughtful letters about what it takes to be a minister.

While any response to Peterson's letters is missing—save that of the book's introduction by the letters' recipient, Eric—his letters are full of meaning and powerful messages about what happens in the pastor's study when no one else is around. The first comes from Christmas Day, 1999, and concerns "our common pastoral calling." The entries that follow cover a pivotal period for American churches.

Events like the rise of the internet and of evangelical megachurches are reflected in Peterson's changing advice. He encourages his son to cling to the "local, the personal, the relational, the scriptural, the spiritual" side of pastoral ministry. A 2004 letter captures a conversation with friends about how they plan to find a new, large church to enjoy, but cautions against such thinking, which leads to "gospel-in-general, one-size-fits-all-sermons" and churches where congregants "pick their friends" and—ouch—avoid everyone else.

Elsewhere, Peterson complains about the great "drumbeat of emphasis—throughout church and society—on leadership," meant to be a cure-all for the church though "so much of it has little to do with what it means to be a pastor." He goes beyond buzzwords concerning "vision statements" and "attainable goals," suggesting that pastors who identify as leaders first risk forgetting to follow Jesus. Such letters exhibit integrity and welcome hope for the future. This diminishes some later, replaced by acceptance: the church is what it is.

Letters to a Young Pastor is a wise text full of wisdom about a particular calling.

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