

# SOUL CARE

F O R P A S T O R S

WITH BRIAN CROFT

**PASTORU**<sup>™</sup>  
BY THE FOCUSED PASTOR





## **BRIAN CROFT**

is the former Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky and is the Founder and Executive Director of Practical Shepherding, Inc. He is also Senior Fellow for the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization and an Adjunct Professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the husband of Cara and father of four children, son, Samuel and daughters, Abby, Isabelle, and Claire. He has served in pastoral ministry for over twenty-five years, spending seventeen of those years as Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Session #1: Navigating the Pastor's Soul Care	5
Session #2: The Calling of a Pastor	7
Session #3: The Soul Work of a Pastor	8
Session #4: The Spiritual Care of a Pastor	9
Session #5: The Physical Care of a Pastor	10
Session #6: The Physical Rest of a Pastor	11
Session #7: Pastoral Friendships	12
Session #8: Silence, Stillness, and Solitude	13
Session #9: Depression, Anxiety, and Suicide	14
Session #10: Growth in Self-awareness	15

Welcome to Soul Care for Pastors. Whether you are watching this video series for yourself or with your pastoral team, we hope that you find encouragement as you navigate how to care for your own soul.

Each episode is designed to help you think through key elements in taking care of yourself as a pastor and the unique challenges that you face. This PDF is meant to supplement each video episode and provide opportunities for personal reflection.

We're glad you're taking the care of your own soul seriously and we hope that we can be a part of your journey towards becoming a more healthy pastor.



The Focused Pastor Team



INTRODUCTION OF TOPIC

# Session #1: Navigating the Pastor's Soul

## 2 Reasons for pastoral burnout:

- 1) Ministry is uniquely hard
- 2) Pastors do ministry in a way unsustainable long term.

## 4 Common factors leading to pastoral discouragement:

- Spiritual attack
- Isolation
- Loneliness
- Depression

## Key Texts: 🔑

- Acts 20:25-32 (Focus v.28)
- Main idea: It is essential for survival and a long ministry for a pastor to pay careful attention to himself, not just his flock.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





## Session #2: The Calling of a Pastor

### Key Texts:

- 1 Timothy 4:16
- Main idea: It is essential for a pastor to watch his life and his doctrine if he desires to thrive in the ministry.

### Common reasons pastors fail to see the importance to watch life and doctrine.

- We forget to value God's word for our souls.
- We forget people are watching our life.
- We are fearful to stop and look in our souls because of what we might find.
- We don't feel worthy to be cared for by others.

### How does a pastor watch his life and doctrine?

- Be mindful to watch your life in a hard, and possibly hostile environment.
- Know what you believe, hold fast to it, and teach it with patience.
- Make sure God's word is a balm to your soul, not just for sermons.
- Realize you need others to walk with you and support you.

### Personal Reflection:

- What does it mean for you when you read, "Watch your life and doctrine?"

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Session #3: The Soul Work of a Pastor

## Key Texts:

- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
- Main idea: Self-awareness and embracing our humanity is essential for a pastor to not just survive, but to thrive.

## Common reasons pastors resist growing in self-awareness of our humanity.

- We fear our emotions and have been taught to suppress them.
- We want to be perceived as superman and we fight our limitations.
- We want to look like we have it all together.

## How does a pastor grow in self-awareness?

- Learn to embrace your weaknesses and limitations (Perfection, control).
- Believe embracing your humanity will enhance your ministry.
- Own how you feel, begin to express your emotions to God and others.

## Personal Reflection:

- What is one thing that keeps you from embracing your humanity (limitations)?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Session #4: The Spiritual Care of a Pastor

### Key Texts:

- 2 Timothy 1:1-7
- Main idea: Pastors must see their need and get creative on how to receive spiritual care from others in what is often an unhealthy church situation.

### Common reasons pastors fail to receive spiritual care for their own soul.

- We don't realize how badly we need it (exception to rule)
- We don't know where to find it and from whom to receive it.
- We forgot how important the public and private means of grace are for us too.

### How can a pastor seek spiritual care for himself?

- Live and die on the life-giving word of God to feed your soul.
- Seek out an older pastor to be a spiritual mentor.
- Invest in friendships with other pastors and encourage your wife to do the same.
- Embrace whatever aspects of the private and public means of grace you have.

### Personal Reflection:

- Whom do you need to come alongside you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session #5: The Physical Care of a Pastor

**Key Texts:** 

- Biblical texts to support: Mark 14: 32-42
- Main idea: Pastors must see their need in the unique stress of this work to physically care for themselves in these 3 main areas: Eat, Sleep, and Exercise

**Common reasons pastors fail to care for themselves physically.**

- We become consumed with ministry and don't prioritize time to do so.
- We miss how closely tied to the soul eat, sleep and exercise is.
- We miss the reality of having only one body to steward.
- We refuse to acknowledge our humanity and limitations.

**How can a pastor care better physically for himself?**

- Be aware of the ways we use food to cope with stress.
- Stop lying about how much sleep you actually need.
- Set small, realistic exercise goals for yourself and build from there.
- Make time in your schedule, just like anything else.

**Personal Reflection:** 

- Which of these 3 areas of eat, sleep, exercise am I most neglectful and why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Session #6: The Physical Rest of a Pastor

**Key Texts:** 

- Matthew 14: 22-27
- Main idea: Pastors must see their need in the unique stress of this work to rest by first letting go, then embracing rest in these 3 main ways: Day off, vacation, sabbatical

**Common reasons pastors fail to care for themselves through rest.**

- We don't make rest the priority we need it to be.
- We don't learn how to let go of ministry burdens.
- We fail to see we need it and deserve it.
- We are trained work-aholics who don't know how to stop.

**How can a pastor care for himself through rest?**

- Schedule a day off every week that you honor, with exceptions to emergencies.
- Unapologetically, use all of the vacation time the church gives you.
- Realize you need to learn the discipline of rest and letting go.
- Lead your church to grant every full-time staff member a sabbatical.

**Personal Reflection:** 

- When was the last time you truly let go of ministry burdens and let go?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Session #7: Pastoral Friendships

### Key Texts:

- 1 Samuel 23:1-15
- Main idea: Pastors must see their need in the unique stress of this work to have close, intimate, life-giving friendships, as well as for their wives.

### Common reasons pastors and wives fail to have close, intimate friendships:

- We don't make these kinds of relationships the priority we need it to be.
- We deceive ourselves that we are the exception and don't need them.
- We conclude that if our church is unsafe, so is everyone else.
- Unwillingness to be a good, safe friend to another pastor.

### How can a pastor and his wife engage friendships?

- Make the extra effort to find meaningful friendships in your life.
- Look for friendships inside and outside your church.
- Pursue friendships with other pastors, and other non-pastors (same for wife).
- Be a faithful, safe friend to someone else.

### Benefits for friendship:

- 1) Presence (v.15-16)
- 2) Strength (v.16)
- 3) Comfort (v.17)
- 4) Protection (v.17)
- 5) Providence (v.17)
- 6) Promise (v.18)

### Personal Reflection:

- Can you name one safe, close friendship in your life and if not, why?

---

---

---

---

---

# Session #8: Silence, Stillness, and Solitude

## Key Texts:

- Psalm 62:1-5
- Main idea: Pastors must see their need in the unique stress, pressures, and busyness of this work to have intentional moments of silence, stillness, and solitude.

## Common reasons pastors ignore the regular discipline of silence, stillness, and solitude:

- We think we have to be constantly busy and doing things.
- We hate silence, so we run from it instead of facing it.
- We miss how silence exposes the activity of our souls.
- We are comforted by the wrong things (noise vs. quiet)

## Why should a pastor make time for silence, stillness and solitude?

- To remove ourselves at times from the toxic noise that often exists in revitalization.
- To help us learn to listen well and learn about our church.
- To have regular time with God where our souls are laid bare before him.
- To regularly assess what this unique work is doing to us.

## Personal Reflection:

- What keeps you from prioritizing regular silence and solitude?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Session #9: Depression, Anxiety, and Suicide

### Key Texts:

- 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (Paul and Spurgeon)
- Main idea: Pastors must be honest with their level of struggle with depression and anxiety, realizing the thorns of our flesh are magnified in this work.

### Common reasons pastors ignore the reality of dark nights of the soul:

- We feel the pressure to have it all together, so we try to act like we are fine.
- We are not honest when the darkness comes and doesn't leave.
- We are ashamed when we struggle, so we don't ask for help.
- We think success and busyness in ministry is the cure.

### What can a pastor do when the darkness comes?

- Remember this hard, unique work can magnify an already troubled soul.
- Be honest with where you are, not where you think you should be.
- Ask for help from someone who is a safe person who honors confidentiality.
- Trust God has good plans for all of us with whatever thorn is appointed to us.

### Personal Reflection:

- When the darkness comes, what keeps you from asking for help?

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Session #10: Growth in Self-awareness

- Self-awareness is key.
- Have you grown in awareness?
- How do you plan to respond?

### Key Texts: 🔑

- Acts 20:28 again
- Pay careful attention to yourselves.
- Pay careful attention to all the flock.

### How have you grown in personal awareness, and will you respond?

- 1) Calling of life and doctrine.
- 2) Soul work in humanity and weakness.
- 3) Spiritual care for yourself by someone.
- 4) Physical care in regard to eat, sleep, and exercise.
- 5) Physical rest by letting go and embracing a day off, vacation and sabbatical.
- 6) Friendship for you and your wife.
- 7) Silence, stillness and solitude for your soul.
- 8) Battles with depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

**Call the pastoral care line (1-844-4-PASTOR) today if you need a place to start.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



©2024 Focus on the Family.

Focus on the Family and its logo and design is a federally registered trademark and The Focused Pastor is a trademark of Focus on the Family.

All Scripture quotations are taken from HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION unless otherwise noted. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.



**PASTORU**<sup>TM</sup>  
BY THE FOCUSED PASTOR

**1-844-4-PASTOR**

[pastors@fotf.org](mailto:pastors@fotf.org)

[thefocusedpastor.org](http://thefocusedpastor.org)