

CLERGY LEADERSHIP & RESILIENCE

A CLERGY RESILIENCE PRACTICE

When Everything Feels Urgent

Recovering Attention, Intention,
and Discernment in Ministry

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CLERGY LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE SERIES

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About the Clergy Resilience Series

Ministry can be deeply life-giving. It can also wear you down.

The work asks us to enter people's grief, conflict, fear, hope, illness, joy, disappointment, and change. We preach and teach, lead organizations, respond to crises, manage conflict, accompany people through suffering, celebrate with them, make decisions, and carry responsibilities few people in our congregations ever fully see.

Sometimes we do all of that while trying to make sense of what is happening in our own lives.

Over time, ministry leaves its mark.

You may notice that you are more tired than you used to be. Criticism stays with you longer. You carry other people's problems home. Saying no produces guilt. Conflict occupies your mind long after the meeting ends. Prayer has become something you do professionally rather than something that nourishes you. Perhaps you feel lonely, spiritually dry, cynical, constantly hurried, or simply beaten up.

These experiences do not necessarily mean you are failing at ministry.

They may mean that something deserves your attention.

Resilience Is More Than Endurance

Clergy resilience is sometimes understood as the ability to withstand the pressures of ministry—to become tougher, develop thicker skin, recover more quickly, and keep going.

But resilience is not simply endurance.

Nor is it another name for self-care.

Resilience is the developing capacity to remain personally healthy, relationally connected, spiritually grounded, and vocationally faithful through the ordinary and extraordinary stresses of ministry.

That capacity develops over time.

Emotional awareness helps us recognize what is happening within us. Differentiation helps us distinguish what belongs to us from what belongs to someone else. Boundaries protect what matters. Relationships keep us from practicing ministry alone. Prayer reconnects us with the source of our vocation. Rest and recreation restore capacities that ministry consumes. Attention to sleep, nutrition, movement, and physical health reminds us that our bodies are not separate from our spiritual and emotional lives. Systems awareness helps us remain grounded when congregations become anxious. Reflection and discernment help us recognize when something needs to change.

These are not techniques for making us invulnerable.

They are practices that help us remain available to God, to others, and to ourselves.

Self-Giving, Not Self-Erasure

Christian ministry involves sacrifice.

There will be nights when someone is dying and sleep will have to wait. There will be seasons when the needs of a congregation require more from us than usual. Love costs something. Vocation costs something. Following Christ has never promised a life protected from sacrifice.

The question is not whether ministry will ask something of us.

It will.

The more important question is what kind of sacrifice faithfulness requires.

Jesus' life was profoundly self-giving, but it was not indiscriminately available. He withdrew to pray. He rested. He received food and hospitality. He lived in relationship with companions. He left places where people were still looking for him. He sometimes moved toward one need while passing by another. The existence of a genuine need did not, by itself, determine what he was called to do.

That matters for pastors.

People may genuinely need us and yet their need may not always be ours to meet. Someone may be disappointed by a boundary we establish without that boundary being unfaithful. Rest may sometimes be more faithful than another meeting. Prayer may take us away from people who want our attention precisely because we need to remember whose ministry this is.

Christian ministry calls us to self-giving, not self-erasure.

Resilience helps us give ourselves faithfully without losing the self God has given us to offer.

The distinction matters because suffering itself is not evidence of faithfulness. Exhaustion is not proof of devotion. Being indispensable is not the same as being called. Allowing ourselves to be consumed by every legitimate need around us does not necessarily make us more Christlike.

Faithful sacrifice is ordered toward life.

Sometimes it asks a great deal of us. Sometimes it stretches capacities we did not know we possessed. But resilience helps us recover, learn, mature, and return. It preserves and develops our capacity to love, serve, discern, and give again.

So one question runs quietly beneath every resource in this series:

Is this helping me become more capable of faithful self-giving, or am I simply being consumed?

Start Where You Are

This series is not a training program to complete.

There is no prescribed sequence. There is no expectation that you work through every resource. You may never need some of them.

Begin instead with what is wearing on you now.

Perhaps you need stronger boundaries. Perhaps you need to understand why a particular situation makes you so angry. Maybe you need relationships in which no one needs you to be their pastor. Perhaps you need a way to recover after demanding weeks, or help sorting out what belongs to you and what you have been carrying for someone else.

Perhaps ministry has hurt you and you need to tend the wound.

Perhaps you have stopped doing things that give you joy.

Perhaps your body is telling you something you have been too busy to hear.

Perhaps you are beginning to wonder whether something about your vocation needs to change.

Start there.

Each resource in this series focuses on one dimension of clergy resilience. It is designed to be read in about an hour and practiced for approximately a month.

The reading introduces the practice.

The month is where the learning happens.

You will be invited to notice what happens in ordinary ministry, experiment with a few practices, reflect on what you discover, and gradually decide what is useful enough to carry forward.

There is nothing to complete here.

You are practicing, not performing.

If you miss several days, begin again. If a practice doesn't fit, adapt it. If you discover that the issue you started with isn't really the issue, follow what you are learning.

The purpose is not to become proficient at another program. It is to become more attentive to yourself, your relationships, your vocation, and the presence of God within all of them.

You Were Never Meant to Do This Alone

Personal practices matter, but clergy resilience is not solely an individual responsibility.

Sometimes pastors become depleted because we have developed unhealthy patterns. Sometimes we are depleted because we are serving within unhealthy systems. Often both are true.

No amount of emotional intelligence can make an abusive situation healthy. Better boundaries cannot eliminate every unreasonable expectation. Prayer cannot substitute for sleep. A vacation cannot repair chronic organizational dysfunction. And resilience should never become an excuse for asking clergy to endure circumstances that need to change.

Healthy resilience includes knowing when we need someone else.

A trusted colleague, friend, clergy cohort, coach, spiritual director, therapist, physician, mentor, or denominational leader may sometimes be part of what faithful resilience requires.

Seeking support is not evidence that resilience has failed.

Relationship is one of the ways resilience develops.

One Practice at a Time

You do not need to become perfectly resilient before you can practice healthy ministry.

Resilience develops as we live.

Notice one thing.

Practice one thing.

Pay attention to what changes.

At the end of the month, you may decide to continue the practice. You may choose another resource because something else now needs attention. Or you may simply return to your life and ministry carrying one new capacity with you.

That is enough.

Read for an hour. Practice for a month. Then ask what you need next.

Beginning Here

Ministry rarely arrives one responsibility at a time.

A sermon waits while a family needs pastoral care. A staff member has a question. The roof is leaking. Someone is unhappy with a decision. A hospital calls. An email marked urgent appears beside three messages that imply the same thing without saying it. Meanwhile, work that matters deeply—prayer, preparation, long-range leadership, relationships, physical care—remains quiet enough to postpone.

Some matters truly cannot wait. A death, a threat to safety, an acute crisis, a serious misconduct concern, or a rapidly closing opportunity may require immediate attention. Pastoral ministry includes holy interruptions and moments when love changes the plan.

But when everything feels urgent, urgency ceases to be information and becomes the atmosphere in which ministry is lived. The pastor responds continually yet gradually loses the freedom to decide what deserves attention. The day is organized by whoever is most anxious, whatever is newest, or whichever demand is loudest.

This resource is not about becoming less caring, less available, or more rigid. It is not a treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder or another condition affecting attention. Neurodivergence is not a moral or spiritual failure, and those who need clinical assessment, accommodations, coaching, or other support should receive it without shame.

This booklet addresses a different question:

How can I remain responsive to genuine need without allowing urgency to direct my attention, determine my priorities, and consume my vocation?

For one month, you will practice noticing what captures attention, discerning what matters, choosing where to place your presence, and building a rhythm that supports faithful intention.

Attention Is a Form of Stewardship

Attention is one of the ways we give our lives.

Whatever receives sustained attention receives time, thought, emotion, and energy. Attention shapes what we perceive, what we neglect, what we remember, and what becomes possible. It is not the whole of love, but love requires it. To attend to a person is to offer presence. To attend to Scripture is to become receptive. To attend to a congregation is to hear more than its loudest voices.

Because attention is finite, it must be stewarded. No pastor can be fully present to every person, answer every question, absorb every concern, monitor every conversation, and complete every worthy task. Every yes of attention allows something else to wait.

This is not a defect in human design. It is creatureliness.

Reformed theology begins with God, not with the pastor. God alone sees the whole, sustains the church, and remains present to every need. Pastors are called to faithful service within limits. They are not called to imitate divine omnipresence.

Christian attention is the practice of discerning what deserves our presence, energy, and response in light of God's call—not merely reacting to whatever is loudest, newest, or most anxious.

Jesus Was Interruptible but Not Directionless

The Gospels show Jesus responding to people he did not schedule. He stops for Bartimaeus while traveling toward Jerusalem (Mark 10:46–52). He receives children when the disciples would send them away (Mark 10:13–16). A woman touches his garment while he is responding to another urgent request, and he attends to her (Mark 5:21–43).

Yet Jesus does not treat every demand as a command. When people search for him after a day of healing, he leaves for neighboring towns because that is where he understands his mission to be leading (Mark 1:35–39). He withdraws to pray even when crowds gather (Luke 5:15–16). He disappoints those who want him to act according to their timetable (John 11:1–7).

Jesus is available without being governed by availability. He is interruptible without becoming directionless. Compassion opens him to the person before him; communion with God holds each encounter within a larger vocation.

The story of Martha and Mary also reveals how anxiety can fracture attention. Martha is distracted by many tasks, and Jesus names her condition with tenderness: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things” (Luke 10:41). The work itself is not condemned. The problem is that many necessary things, gathered under anxiety, have taken possession of her attention.

Pastors often know this condition. Many things matter. Several may be necessary. Yet anxiety turns plurality into tyranny: everything must be noticed, carried, and completed now.

How Urgency Captures a Ministry

Urgency has bodily and relational force. It quickens the pulse, narrows perception, and presses for immediate relief. Answering the message, solving the problem, or accepting the task may lower anxiety for a moment. That brief relief can train both the pastor and the congregation to repeat the pattern.

Over time:

- Immediate requests displace important but quieter work.
- Other people's anxiety becomes the pastor's schedule.
- Responsiveness is confused with faithfulness.
- Rapid replies create expectations of constant availability.
- Long-term problems remain unaddressed because short-term symptoms keep demanding attention.
- Prayer and reflection occur only after everything else is finished—which means they rarely occur.
- The pastor feels busy all day but cannot name the vocation the day served.

Congregational systems participate in this pattern. A church may call everything urgent because it has not clarified authority, emergency procedures, communication channels, or shared responsibility. Staff may interrupt one another because no regular time exists for coordination. Members may contact the pastor repeatedly because they do not know who else can help. Leaders may protect visible events while treating preparation, discernment, and recovery as optional.

Willpower alone cannot solve this. Pastors need personal practices, but congregations also need structures that make wise attention possible.

Urgency Is Not All the Same

The word “urgent” can name several different realities:

- **Genuine urgency** arises when delay may cause serious harm or close an important opportunity.
- **Preventable urgency** develops when planning, communication, or follow-through has been delayed.
- **Transmitted urgency** occurs when another person's anxiety creates pressure for an immediate response, even though the situation itself can wait.
- **Structural urgency** becomes chronic when staffing, authority, workload, or congregational processes are inadequate for the responsibilities being carried.
- **Internal urgency** grows from fear, perfectionism, guilt, conflict avoidance, or the need to feel useful.

These forms can overlap. A preventable problem may eventually become genuinely urgent. Another person's anxiety may point toward a concern that has been neglected. A pastor's internal urgency may be reinforced by a congregation accustomed to immediate access.

Naming the kind of urgency matters because different conditions call for different responses. A crisis needs action. A preventable pattern needs planning. Transmitted anxiety needs calm presence and discernment. Structural urgency needs shared leadership and systemic change. Internal urgency may require prayer, reflection, supervision, therapy, or another form of care.

Urgent, Important, Mine, and Timely

Not every interruption is a distraction. Not every urgent matter is unimportant. Not every important matter belongs to the pastor. Discernment asks more of us than sorting tasks into a productivity grid.

Four questions can create enough space to choose:

1. **Is it urgent?** Will delay create serious harm, violate a duty of care, or close an important opportunity?
2. **Is it important?** Does it serve love of God and neighbor, the congregation's mission, a significant relationship, human safety, or a responsibility of the call?
3. **Is it mine?** Am I the appropriate person to respond, or am I taking responsibility that belongs to another person, leader, professional, or system?
4. **Is it timely?** Does it need attention now, or does someone—including me—want immediate relief from uncertainty or anxiety?

These questions do not produce a mechanical answer. Power, vulnerability, history, access, and pastoral responsibility matter. A request that seems small may deserve prompt attention because the person making it has repeatedly been ignored. A task that appears important may need to be shared because pastoral control is preventing other leaders from developing.

Nor is importance measured by volume. People with influence often know how to obtain attention. Those with less institutional power, confidence, education, mobility, money, or familiarity with church systems may wait quietly—or disappear before their need becomes visible. Faithful attention notices who is heard easily, who must become urgent to be heard at all, and who is absent from the conversation.

Discernment asks not only, “What can I finish?” but also:

- What is faithful?
- What serves the health of the whole body?
- What belongs to my particular call?

- What responsibility has God entrusted to someone else?
- What can remain unfinished without becoming unfaithful?

A Month of Faithful Attention

The next four weeks develop four cumulative capacities:

Notice the Pull → Discern What Matters → Choose Your Attention → Build an Intentional Rhythm

During Week One, you will observe what captures attention and how different forms of urgency operate in your body, habits, and ministry system.

During Week Two, you will practice distinguishing urgency from importance, responsibility, timeliness, and anxiety while noticing whose concerns are easily overlooked.

During Week Three, you will deliberately place attention on work and relationships that deserve presence but seldom demand it.

During Week Four, you will build personal and shared structures that protect both faithful focus and genuine availability.

The practices are cumulative. During Week Two, continue a shortened daily attention log. During Week Three, keep using the four questions as you practice deliberately placing attention. During Week Four, carry noticing, discernment, and chosen attention into a supported rhythm. Each week adds one capacity without abandoning the previous one.

The aim is not to master attention in a month. It is to recover enough freedom to respond instead of merely reacting.

Week One — Notice the Pull

Before changing your schedule, notice what already directs it.

This week is diagnostic rather than corrective. You may see patterns you want to change immediately. Unless safety or serious harm is involved, resist redesigning the ministry before you understand what is happening within it.

Practice: Keep an Attention Log

For five working days, pause three times each day and record:

- What you intended to be doing
- What currently has your attention
- What caused the shift
- Whether the shift was chosen or automatic
- What you feel in your body
- What you fear might happen if you do not respond now

Do not grade yourself. The purpose is to see the pattern.

Name the Sources of Urgency

At the end of each day, identify the strongest sources of urgency. They may include:

- A genuine crisis or time-sensitive responsibility
- Another person's anxiety
- Fear of disappointing someone
- The desire to be seen as responsive or indispensable
- An unclear role or decision-making process
- Notifications, email, text messages, or social media
- A task avoided until its deadline became urgent
- An unresolved conflict
- Perfectionism or fear of making the wrong choice
- The discomfort of sustained, difficult work

Then name the kind of urgency involved: genuine, preventable, transmitted, structural, or internal. More than one may be present.

Digital tools intensify urgency, but they do not create every form of it. Turning off notifications will not resolve a congregation's unclear expectations or a pastor's fear of disapproval. Notice both the channel and the deeper pull.

Learn the Body's Urgency Signal

Urgency often appears in the body before it becomes a conscious decision. Notice:

- Tightness in the chest, jaw, shoulders, or stomach
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- A sudden need to move, check, answer, or fix
- Irritation at interruption—or irritation at the task requiring focus
- Difficulty reading or listening slowly
- A rush of energy followed by depletion

When you notice the signal, pause for one breath and say:

Something feels urgent. I do not yet know what it requires.

The sentence does not deny the need. It separates sensation from decision.

Notice What Is Repeatedly Displaced

At the end of the week, list what received little or no sustained attention. Include more than unfinished tasks. Consider prayer, preparation, people who do not press for access, staff development, family, friendships, exercise, learning, strategic leadership, and the congregation's long-term health.

What remains quiet is not necessarily unimportant.

Review the Week

- What captured my attention most often?
- Which interruptions were genuinely necessary?
- Whose anxiety most readily became my urgency?
- What bodily signal tells me I am becoming reactive?
- What important responsibility was repeatedly displaced?

Week Two — Discern What Matters

This week, place a small space between demand and response. Continue the attention log once each day so you can see whether discernment changes the pattern.

Practice the Four Questions

Choose one demand each day that feels urgent but allows a brief pause. Ask:

1. Is it urgent?
2. Is it important?
3. Is it mine?
4. Is it timely?

Then name the appropriate response:

- **Attend now.** Genuine urgency and appropriate responsibility meet.
- **Schedule it.** The matter is important but does not require immediate attention.
- **Share or redirect it.** The need is real, but responsibility belongs to someone else or should be carried together.
- **Clarify it.** More information is needed before deciding.
- **Release it.** The demand does not warrant further attention.

Define an Emergency

Write a working definition of a pastoral emergency. It may include imminent danger, death or acute crisis, threats to safety, time-sensitive safeguarding or misconduct concerns, and other circumstances in which delay could cause significant harm.

Then ask church leaders whether they share that definition. Who is contacted? By what channel? Who responds when the pastor is unavailable? What belongs to emergency services, medical professionals, civil authorities, denominational leaders, or other trained people?

Clear emergency procedures do not make a church less pastoral. They help the right care arrive at the right time.

Notice Who Is Not Demanding Attention

Review the people and communities who received pastoral attention during the past month. Do not assess only how many contacts occurred. Ask:

- Who knows how to reach me and expects a response?

- Whose concerns arrive through influential leaders?
- Who may be reluctant to ask for attention?
- Whose language, disability, work schedule, housing, age, culture, or previous experience creates a barrier?
- Who has learned that becoming visibly distressed is the only way to be heard?
- Who is missing entirely from my field of attention?

The answer is not equal time for every person. It is a more truthful awareness of the ways power and access shape what appears urgent.

Test the Meaning of “Mine”

“Not mine” does not mean “I do not care.” It may mean:

- Another leader has authority to act.
- A member is capable of making the decision.
- A professional is needed.
- The governing body must assume its responsibility.
- The pastor can accompany someone without taking over.
- A shared problem requires a shared response.

Notice whether you keep responsibility because delegating requires explanation, trust, or tolerance for another person's different approach.

Protect One Important, Nonurgent Matter

Choose one responsibility that matters but rarely announces itself: sermon preparation, prayer, a difficult conversation, mentoring a leader, reviewing ministry direction, or attending to a relationship. Put a specific time for it on the calendar.

When another demand arises, do not assume the protected work is expendable. Apply the four questions to both responsibilities.

Review the Week

- What did I identify as genuinely urgent?
- What important work needs protection rather than rescue?
- Which responsibilities are mine, shared, or someone else's?
- When was anxiety asking for relief rather than action?
- Whose concern might remain invisible because it is not being pressed?
- What became clearer when I allowed something to wait?

Week Three — Choose Your Attention

Attention is not protected by the desire to focus. It needs a place, a purpose, and a boundary. Continue using the four questions whenever a demand threatens to displace what you have chosen.

Create a Protected Attention Period

Choose one period on three days this week. Begin with an amount of time your ministry can realistically support. Before it begins:

- Name the one purpose of the period.
- Gather what the work requires.
- Silence or remove predictable interruptions.
- Tell relevant people when you will be available again.
- Decide what would justify interrupting the period.

At the end, ask whether the time served its purpose. Do not measure it only by quantity completed. Prayer, thinking, listening, and preparation may produce no visible artifact while remaining central to faithful ministry.

Practice Full Presence

Once each day, offer undivided attention to one person or activity. Put down the device. Stop composing the next response. Notice the person, text, room, or task before you.

Full presence does not require endless time. A bounded conversation can still be attentive. Say what time is available rather than offering hurried half-presence without a limit.

Choose at least one person who is not usually able to command your attention. Faithful presence should not be reserved for those who interrupt most effectively.

Delay One Nonurgent Response

Choose one message or request that does not need an immediate answer. Decide when you will respond, and allow it to wait.

Notice the discomfort. Does delay feel rude, unsafe, irresponsible, or unpastoral? What expectation—your own or someone else's—gives it that meaning?

The purpose is not strategic unresponsiveness. It is to relearn that a request can be real without becoming immediate, and important without becoming first.

Create Openings for Holy Interruption

Intentional attention is not a sealed calendar. Leave some unassigned space in the week. Walk through the building without an agenda. Be available after worship. Visit a community setting. Allow room for a conversation that cannot be predicted.

The difference between holy interruption and chronic reactivity is not that one was scheduled and the other was not. It is that the interruption is received through discernment rather than compulsion.

Practice Returning

Attention will wander. A crisis will alter the day. A protected period may fail. The practice is not perfect concentration; it is returning.

Ask:

What deserves my attention now?

Return without shame to the person, prayer, or responsibility you have chosen.

Review the Week

- When was I most fully present?
- What helped sustained attention become possible?
- What did I learn by delaying a response?
- Which interruption deserved to change the plan?
- Where did I return after attention wandered?

Week Four — Build an Intentional Rhythm

A personal practice will not survive indefinitely inside a system organized around constant interruption. No private calendar can change public expectations. This week, continue noticing, discerning, and choosing while building structures that make faithful attention more likely.

Design an Ordinary Week

Begin with the responsibilities that express the call, not only those already crowding the calendar. Make room for:

- Worship and sermon preparation
- Prayer and theological reflection
- Pastoral presence and care
- Leadership, supervision, and administration
- Community engagement
- Relationships and bodily care
- Unassigned capacity for genuine need
- A weekly review of what deserves attention next

Do not schedule every minute. A pastoral calendar needs margins. The goal is not control, but a visible pattern of intention with room for grace to interrupt it.

Create Three Versions

Design a rhythm for:

- **An ordinary week:** the pattern that normally supports faithful ministry.
- **A high-demand season:** what is simplified, shared, or postponed during periods such as Advent, Lent, stewardship, or major transition.
- **A crisis period:** what remains essential, who helps carry responsibility, and what will be restored when the crisis passes.

Crisis cannot become the permanent operating model. If the crisis version describes most weeks, the problem is no longer individual attention. Workload, staffing, role, expectations, or congregational functioning requires examination.

Establish Communication Agreements

With staff and appropriate lay leaders, clarify:

- What constitutes an emergency

- Which channel is used for emergencies
- When routine messages are normally answered
- Who is contacted when the pastor is unavailable
- Which questions can be brought to staff or other leaders
- When focused work should not be interrupted
- How concerns are gathered instead of arriving through multiple channels

Communication agreements are not walls against relationship. They reduce guessing and help people know how to receive a response.

They should also be tested for accessibility. A system that depends entirely on email, office hours, online forms, or familiarity with church leadership may work well for some people while excluding others. Clear pathways should make care more equitable, not merely more convenient for staff.

Hold One Shared-Responsibility Conversation

Choose one recurring source of unnecessary urgency. Bring it to the people who share responsibility for the system.

The conversation might address meetings that generate last-minute work, decisions that lack an owner, members who bypass established processes, an expectation of immediate replies, poor coverage during leave, or important work that is repeatedly sacrificed to avoidable emergencies.

Name the pattern without blaming one person. Ask what structure, agreement, training, or redistribution of responsibility would change it.

Ask the leaders to name what they will carry. If the only outcome is a new discipline for the pastor, the congregation has not yet addressed its part in the system.

Conduct a Weekly Attention Review

At the end of one week or the beginning of the next, ask:

- What is most important in the coming week?
- What is genuinely time-sensitive?
- What belongs particularly to my call?
- What should be shared, delegated, or released?
- Where is unassigned capacity needed?
- What will receive attention if no one protects it?

Choose no more than three primary intentions for the week. They do not replace other responsibilities. They keep the most important work visible among them.

Review the Week

- What rhythm supports both focus and availability?
- What expectation needs to be clarified?
- Where does the congregation need shared responsibility rather than pastoral speed?
- What changes during high-demand and crisis periods?
- When will I review and revise this rhythm?

When the Problem Is Larger Than Attention

Sometimes no practice can make the existing workload sustainable. The role may contain more responsibility than one person can faithfully carry. The congregation may be relying on the pastor to compensate for inadequate staffing, unresolved conflict, poor governance, or chronic anxiety. The pastor's gifts and capacities may not fit the requirements of the call.

In those circumstances, better attention may reveal the problem rather than solve it.

That discovery is not failure. It may lead to a workload conversation, clearer priorities, additional support, a change in role, or vocational discernment. The resources **Healthy Boundaries**, **Responsibility Without Rescue**, **Rest and Recovery**, and **Vocational Discernment** explore related work more fully.

Attention also cannot substitute for medical or psychological care. Significant changes in concentration, memory, sleep, mood, energy, or functioning deserve appropriate assessment. ADHD, anxiety, depression, trauma, sleep disorders, medication effects, and other conditions can shape attention. Spiritual practice and organizational change may help, but they should not be used to shame someone out of receiving qualified care.

Beyond the Month

There will always be interruptions. People will become ill. Buildings will fail. Conflicts will surface. Plans will change. Faithful ministry is not a protected life in which nothing unexpected enters.

The question is whether urgency remains a temporary condition or becomes the permanent authority over ministry.

Continue returning to four movements:

- Notice what is pulling your attention.
- Discern what is urgent, important, yours, and timely.
- Choose where to offer presence and energy.
- Build rhythms and relationships that help faithful attention continue.

Over time, the practice may change the congregation as well as the pastor. People learn that care does not require instant access. Clear pathways make pastoral attention more accessible to those who are easily overlooked. Leaders assume meaningful responsibility. Important work becomes visible. Genuine emergencies receive clearer responses. Anxiety has less power to define the common life.

A Pastoral Word

You will not finish everything worthy of care.

Some messages will wait. Some people will wish you had responded sooner. Some work will remain incomplete. There will be days when urgency takes over and weeks when the rhythm collapses.

Faithfulness is not measured by whether everyone received immediate access to you. Nor is it measured by a pristine calendar protected from human need.

Your attention is a gift, but it is not infinite. Offer it with love. Direct it with wisdom. Withdraw it when prayer, rest, preparation, or another responsibility requires your presence. Share responsibility with the body. Let God remain God.

You are not called to answer every demand. You are called to attend faithfully to the life and vocation God has actually entrusted to you.

A Closing Practice

Sit quietly with the coming day or week before you.

Name what feels urgent. Name what is important. Name what is yours to carry. Name what may wait.

Then pray:

God of every time and season,

gather my scattered attention.

Free me from the fear that everything depends on me.

Give me wisdom to recognize genuine need,

courage to protect what matters,

humility to share what belongs to others,

and grace to remain present to the person before me.

Teach me to receive interruption without becoming ruled by urgency,

and to offer my finite attention in the service of your love. Amen.