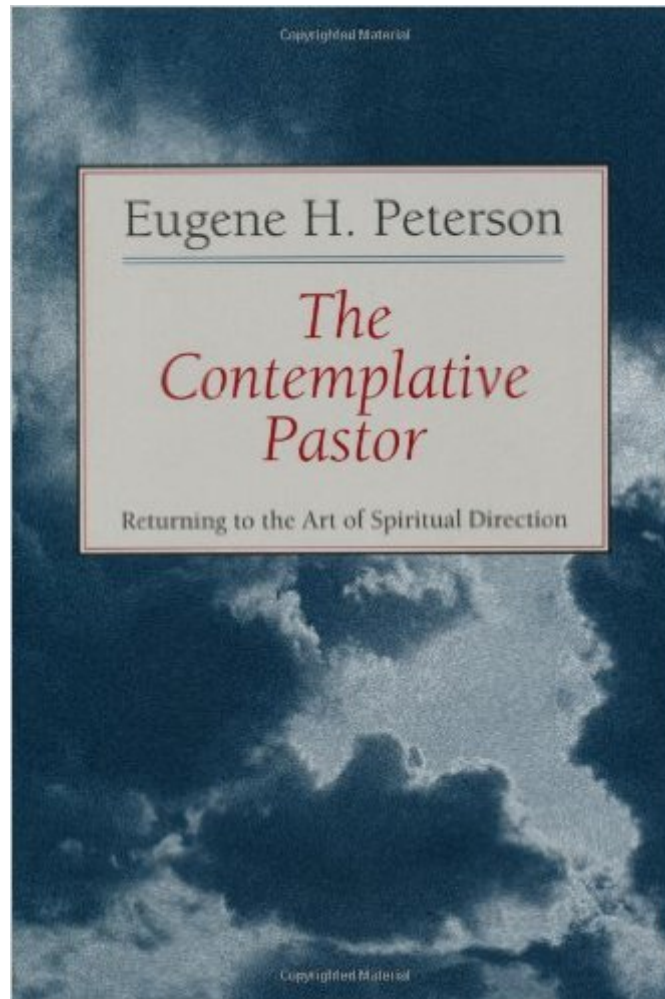


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# The Contemplative Pastor: Returning To The Art Of Spiritual Direction



## Synopsis

Any pastor who needs and wants to get back to basics will do well to absorb this book. Eugene Peterson, well known as "a pastor's pastor," here speaks words of wisdom and refreshment for pastors caught in the busyness of preaching, teaching, and "running the church." In *The Contemplative Pastor* Peterson highlights the often-overlooked essentials of ministry, first by redefining the meaning of pastor through three strengthening adjectives: *unbusy*, *subversive*, and *apocalyptic*. The main part of the book focuses on pastoral ministry and spiritual direction "between Sundays": these chapters begin with poetic reflections on the Beatitudes and then discuss such themes as curing souls, praying with eyes open, the language of prayer, the ministry of small talk, and sabbatical--all with engaging, illustrative anecdotes from Peterson's own experience. The book ends with several meaning-full poems that pivot on the incarnation, the doctrine closest to pastoral work. Entitled "The Word Made Fresh," this concluding section is a felicitous finale to Peterson's discerning, down-to-earth reflections on the art of pastoring.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Eugene Peterson's reflections on the struggle of Christian ministry touched cords in my heart. The pain, the joy, the doubts and fears are explored as if we were talking with a fellow worker in the vineyard. I wish I had read this book before entering ministry. Some of the dark times would not have felt so dark knowing that another had asked the same questions. Practical, interesting and a refreshing book to read.

The Contemplative Pastor - the first book I have read by Eugene Peterson - is a helpful study not in sermon preparation or church growth strategies or qualifications for eldership (the kind of stuff I usually read), but on the pastor's heart and the pastoral art. Peterson describes the term "pastor" with three unusual adjectives: un-busy, subversive, and apocalyptic (a chapter is devoted to each term), and then charts a course for shepherding people in the mundane. Peterson's poetry is sprinkled through the book, concluding with numerous poems at the end. Unfortunately, his poetry is not all that good. To me, it just seemed like the throwing together of pretty words without much rhyme or reason. But there are some jewels to be mined here - especially Peterson's job description for the un-busy pastor who devotes his time to prayer, bringing messages from God, and listening to his people, his meditation on "the middle voice" in relation to prayer, and his chapter "The Ministry of Small Talk."

When I first started reading this book, I thought perhaps it was a waste of money. There was no meaty theological discussion, just basic, almost simplistic spirituality. Then it occurred to me that as pastors we tend to get so busy and so preoccupied with the "meaty" theological matters and the more "advanced" spiritual issues that we lose touch with the fundamentals. Here Peterson offers pastors a slower, change-of-pace that is refreshing and renewing. I especially appreciated his chapter entitled "The Ministry of Small Talk." There is a place in our busy lives as ministers to discuss more trivial things with other people. Through spending time conversing about smaller issues, we can make larger strides in relationships. This book is the first one I have read by Peterson. I don't plan for it to be the last. If you are a busy, burdened pastor, it will do you good to read this insightful work.

If you are a pastor, thinking of going in to the ministry, seminary student etc. BUY THIS BOOK! Peterson's insights are just exactly what I needed someone to tell me 15 years ago when I entered the ministry. This is part of three or four books Peterson has written for pastors and if they have only half of the depth of this one they are all super. Peterson's books to pastors all have cumbersome titles but buy 'em, they're great. Worthy reading! The others are: 'Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work' 'Under the Unpredictable Plant' 'Working the Angles' Check this great pastor's pastor out. You will not be disappointed!

I like this book! Dr. Peterson has a special knack of putting the common into the light of the

extraordinary and the extraordinary into the light of the common. His musings on the "subversive" pastor are worth the price of the book. I read and continue to re-read this chapter. It inspires and motivates me to live out my calling as a leader fearlessly. Thank you, Dr. Peterson!

There are few writers I enjoy more than Eugene Peterson. His love for God, for people, and for language routinely meet on the pages of his books. His work should be tasted and savored, but I find it difficult not to binge on his writings. Not surprisingly, Peterson exploring "the Art of Spiritual Direction" in *The Contemplative Pastor* (1989) was a book that I had a hard time setting down. *The Contemplative Pastor* is broken into three sections. In the first, "Redefinitions," Peterson explored three descriptors for a pastor: unbusy, subversive, and apocalyptic. I was recently moved by his description of the "unbusy pastor" in his later memoir *The Pastor* and had some familiarity with the idea of the apocalyptic pastor. Briefly, in Peterson's thoughts, pastors should be characterized by settledness, margin, and patience, working without frenzy in the day to day life of the church and of the world. The second section--the longest--is called "Between Sundays". Peterson meaningfully argues that much, if not most, of the work of the pastor takes place from Monday to Saturday. The nine chapters here are built around the beatitudes with an eye toward soul care. Each chapter begins with a poem and then moves into the realities of spiritual direction, exploring themes such as creation, prayer, language, small talk, and suffering. The final, albeit too brief, final section contains a number of poems about the incarnation. Peterson asked, "is it not significant that the biblical prophets and psalmists were all poets?" To answer his rhetorical question, yes, I believe it is significant. Words matter. Words convey truth, but they also convey beauty. Like his previous works *The Contemplative Pastor* by Peterson is a joy to read, whether or not you are a pastor.

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