

Philosophy of Ministry

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My philosophy of ministry is important to me because it helps me to identify what is most important to me, evaluate difficult decisions, and remain accountable to pursuing what God has asked me to do.

The call to pastoral ministry comes from God and should not be taken lightly. Fulfilling my call cannot simply be done by pursuing the requests of other people, sometimes even people in leadership positions of the church. There are times when I need to say no to the requests of others. Faithful stewardship of my call cannot bow to every whim of the church member. It cannot be dictated by money, agenda, special requests, assumptions, expectations, or even a written list of job responsibilities. Certainly these things influence my decisions. But they do not ultimately dictate my response to my call to pastoral ministry. It must be evaluated by God's Spirit. My call must help me to pursue the requests of God by using careful discernment. It must advance based upon God's timeframe.

Dr. Terry Wardle teaches: *Life comes at you fast; if you don't have a way to evaluate it, then what comes at you will control you.* My philosophy of ministry will help me evaluate my call to pastoral ministry. It will greatly influence how I make decisions, how I prioritize time, where I place value, how I invest my resources, and more. The specific goals described in my philosophy of ministry, including steps toward achieving each goal, will make decisions easier.

Four Desires

There are four desires in my heart that I pursue in order to respond to my call to pastoral ministry. I desire...

- to live in intimacy with my God by constantly pursuing him
- to be continually transformed by the Holy Spirit
- to steadily grow within the context of spiritual community
- to act in allegiance to the mission of God

Intimacy with God

God is the creator of all life. Apart from him there is no life. In John 15 Jesus described himself as the true vine and us as the branches. Apart from the vine, the branches can do nothing. They cannot grow, produce fruit, or even live. When we are separated from the

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vine—such separation is called sin—the result is always the same: our death. When we abide in the vine, we live, grow, and produce much fruit.

Notice that when Jesus described himself as the vine, he further described the vine as *true*. This implies that there are other vines, false vines, vines that claim to be the source of life and nourishment for the branches, but are in fact not true. Such false vines include (but are not limited to)

- Work
- Family
- Marriage
- Ambition
- Prestige
- Position
- Accumulation
- Wealth
- Greed
- Hobbies
- Skills

None of these vines are true. They are not all necessarily evil in themselves (some are). Yet they cannot provide the life that is only found in the true vine, Jesus Christ.

Continual Transformation by the Holy Spirit

Constantly pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus means listening to him, speaking to him, spending time with him, taking his values as my own, and including him in everything I do. It means that if I have any connection with the other vines listed above it must only be in ways that are pleasing to him and in-line with his purpose. It means the rejection of the substitute, the short-cut, and the second best. Seeking him will be my greatest desire.¹

His Spirit sanctifies us by his word by living within us, saturating our lives, cleansing us of sin, giving us new desires, empowering us to resist evil, and shaping us into Christlikeness. These activities of the Spirit happen best when we position ourselves to be sanctified by God.

Grow in the context of spiritual community

God designed us for community. He speaks to us and shapes us through community. He rebukes and admonishes us through community. He encourages, trains, and sends us through community. The spiritual community is vital.

Spiritual community takes several forms. Large group settings (such as the congregation) have the power of momentum and shared resources. Small group settings have more intimacy and personal influence. One-on-one relationships are fewer, yet have the ability to penetrate deeply into one's heart. Each form of spiritual community is important for the disciple of Jesus.

¹ Deuteronomy 4:29, Psalm 37:4

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Allegiance to mission

When a friend asks you to do something for them, it's often easy to say yes. But what if the thing they are asking you to do is inconvenient, difficult, costly, or even painful? Your response to their request will depend greatly on who they are and how you relate with them. Is this a request from a stranger, from an acquaintance, from a marginal friend, from a close friend, or from an authority over you?

The call to ministry is such a request. But it is not a passing, one-time occurrence. It is not something you can check off from a to-do list as having been completed. Accepting this request is a commitment to a life of service, an allegiance to a mission beyond one's self, an acceptance to be held to a higher standard, and an on-going willingness to prioritize the mission of God.

Every person called to pastoral ministry can attest that such a request from God includes commitment despite times of inconvenience, difficulty, cost, and pain. If one's relationship with God cannot be described as total allegiance, then their response to the call will be short-lived. Some will happily serve when convenient, readily responding to the call when it is easy to do so. But when service feels inconvenient, when difficulty arises, those without total allegiance will soon change or end their commitment; excuses will replace dedication. Such a lackluster response to the call of ministry will weigh the cost of service against the paycheck or prestige. And pain or danger will lead such a person to abandon their decision to answer the call. Were they ever truly committed?

Jesus described two kinds of shepherds in John 10. One has a personal relationship with the sheep, knowing their individual names, opening the gate for them to enter. The sheep recognize and listen to his voice. He leads them to safety, to food, and to joy. When a thief and a wolf come to steal, kill, and destroy the sheep, the good shepherd lays down his life to protect the sheep even when such danger arises. Whatever is required, no matter the cost, this shepherd takes responsibility to care for the sheep.

The second kind of shepherd is called a hired hand. He appears to be much like the shepherd at first. Many of his actions match those of the shepherd. His location, his appearance, and his language all seem to line up with the shepherd. But the sheep are not his. When the hired hand sees the dangerous wolf, he runs away. He abandons the sheep. He shows that he doesn't actually care about the sheep. He cares about himself and his paycheck.

In this illustration, the sheep are people. The shepherd can be compared to one who answers the call to ministry. The gate is the way by which people come near to God, that is, Jesus Christ. The thief and wolf represent anything that threatens the life or well-being of the sheep. When answering the call to ministry, one must decide which kind of shepherd you will commit to be. It's easy to agree to opening the gate and being the voice for others to listen to. Even knowing the sheep by name can give one a sense of prestige (because in

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knowing them, one is also known by many others, perhaps even famous). Being a leader feels great when others follow you to safety, food, and joy.

But the thief and wolf will come. This is the test that reveals which kind of shepherd you are. When danger and difficulty arise, the hired hand is revealed. He will run from the difficulty and from the call to ministry. He will weigh the cost of that difficulty against the value of his paycheck. Yet prestige, position, and paycheck are poor motivation for accepting a call to ministry. Accepting the call to ministry means accepting the cost of inconvenience, difficulty, and pain. It means enduring rejection, slander, and false accusation. It means laying down your life to be stolen, wounded, and destroyed by the wolves that come, all for the sake and well-being of the sheep.

Why would a person ever agree to do this? Allegiance. If your allegiance to Jesus is unshakable, then you are willing to accept his request, the call to ministry, no matter the cost. You remember the cost he paid. You believe that his resurrection gives you the hope of new and eternal life. And you trust that he can redeem your pain for his good. When you have such allegiance to Jesus, you can commit to accepting the call to ministry.

In another parable, one about sheep and goats, Jesus described a number of ways that his followers may serve others in Matthew 25. While these activities are in no way limited to those called to pastoral ministry (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11), they can certainly describe some of the activities of the minister. These include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, inviting in the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison.

If anyone had the right to be served by others, it was Jesus, the King of all kings. He was an amazing teacher, a miracle worker, and a famous leader. He is God. He had every right to accept the service of others. It would not be arrogant for him to accept, request, or demand that others serve him. He deserves it. Yet he regularly revealed that he desired to serve others instead being served by them.

When Jesus' disciples argued about which of them was the greatest, he quickly explained that *the greatest person is the one who serves others* (Matthew 23:11). Jesus said that he did not come to be served by other people; but rather, *Jesus came to serve others* and even give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45).

In the first century, it was the servant's job to wash the feet of others. When Jesus performed this humble task, he explained that he was setting an example for his disciples to follow (John 13:15). Jesus wants his followers to be servants like him. Following him means doing the things he does, serving the way he does.

Paul explained that we should do nothing out of self ambition, but rather, should think of others as being above ourselves. Jesus set this example for us when he did not cling to his divine rights, but humbled himself as a servant (Philippians 2:3-8). We are created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Similarly, Peter explained that we should each use the

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giftedness and grace that God has entrusted to us to serve others in the way that a faithful steward is responsible. When we serve other people, we serve God's purpose by following Jesus' example. His design includes our service, not because he needs us, but because he chooses to include us in what he is doing.

If we have the ability to help others, then we should (Proverbs 3:27). Yet we are also responsible to ensure that we have such ability (as much as we are able). When making plans and goals, the needs of others must be a factor. A schedule without wiggle room does not often allow one to serve others. A focus on one's self does not recognize the opportunities to serve others. A desire for prestige or self-promotion is not humble enough to serve others. These obstacles must be avoided and overcome in order to serve in the way Jesus served.

One may think about accepting the call to ministry as being somewhat similar to signing a blank check. You will owe whatever amount God will later write on the check. That amount is unknown at the time of your agreement to pay it. By signing the check, you are making a commitment to do whatever it takes to ensure that full payment to God will be made at the time when he cashes the check. When the Lord calls a person into pastoral ministry, there are almost never details of what such ministry will entail. This is the amount that will later be written on the check, the amount we commit to pay. The Lord asks the one called to sign the blank check, to agree to the call, without knowing what it will eventually cost. One can (and should) make efforts to weigh the cost (Luke 14:28-30) before making such an agreement with God and the Church. Yet the full knowledge of what will be demanded to fulfill the call to ministry is known only to God, the recipient who cashes the check, not to you, the one who agrees to pay it.

The call to ministry is often misunderstood by many people, even Christians. All followers of Jesus are given supernatural giftedness to enable them to fill a vital role in God's mission. No person is any better than another. The pastor is not any better than the lay church member. Each has a role to play, necessary for the health and effectiveness of the Church as a whole. Clergy are not higher class Christians, but rather those who have been asked by God to fill a role of leadership.²

Like all other followers of Christ who are entrusted with the influence of leadership, I have the responsibility *to rebuke, to teach, and to equip others* along their spiritual journey. Scripture says those who teach others will be judged more strictly than those who are taught (James 3) because they have such a powerful influence on others. Like the watchman described in Ezekiel 3.16-21, when God tells me to warn someone about his or her sin, I am responsible for the sin unless I warn them. No one likes being rebuked. But out of love for those people, and in response to this God-given responsibility, I will warn them to turn from their sin.

² 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

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I am called by God to be a leader, ordained for ministry (whether paid or not). By definition, *leadership requires change*. Rather than managing the status quo, I will seek what is new (as apostle), discern and proclaim what is (as prophet), prioritize the salvation of the lost (as evangelist), care for the congregation (as shepherd), and communicate and apply truth (as teacher). This five-fold role of ministry is described in Ephesians 4.

It is not my paycheck, office, or title that prompts me to serve God's Kingdom and Church. Even without being on staff as the pastor of a church, I am committed to continue answering the call God has placed upon my life to serve him and his mission. I will do this with or without a paycheck, office, or title. As I build genuine, intentional relationships with the people God places around me, and as God grants me the opportunity to influence others, I will do all I can to point and draw them closer to Jesus Christ. This will come as a result of the trust built in genuine relationship, not from title, position, or entitlement.

Core Values

Core values are important commitments because people constantly request and challenge the use of my time, energy, and attention. If I do not hold on tightly to my core values, then I'll end up going somewhere that I do not want to be. These values are essential to my ministry and life. They are non-negotiable. I'll never be the man God wants me to be if I don't maintain the following:

- 1) Life-long learning
- 2) Healthy family
- 3) Spiritual formation
- 4) Passionate body-part ministry
- 5) The *Missio Dei*

CORE VALUE: Life-Long Learning

Having the value of life-long learning means *loving my LORD with my entire mind* (Matthew 22:37). As I seek to represent God to other people, I must pursue being one of his most highly educated students. I desire to be an expert who "correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). I must be able to accurately understand and interpret God's Word. When I better understand God and his Word, then I can better draw others toward him. Nehemiah 8 describes a day when a priest named Ezra read and explained God's Word. In response, the people worshipped the LORD. How can I be this kind of spiritual leader, one who rightly explains God's Word and leads others to worship him? Before Ezra taught God's Word, he first devoted himself to study and obey it. Without excellence in this area, I risk not only my own soul but the souls of those I lead.

Steps:

- ~~I will complete the PhD in missiology from Concordia Theological Seminary. This is a step towards excellence in loving God with my mind.~~

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- I will read weekly on a great variety of topics, both related and unrelated to my field.
- When possible, I will attend a leadership conference designed for my growth.

Obstacles:

- This core value will require our money. I must be financially prepared to invest in education rather than an expensive home, vehicle, or other material items or leisure activities.
- This goal can easily be neglected as other responsibilities are more readily visible. Others may not necessarily know whether I am continuing to read or study.
- My calendar and agenda will make setting aside time for a leadership conference difficult. I will need to plan far in advance to ensure my other responsibilities are met and that other people can cover for me while I am away.
- Since I have two children, my time, attention, energy, and money are rightly invested in them. I will prioritize their needs and care as a responsibility that is greater than my personal education.

CORE VALUE: Healthy Family

I am committed to loving my wife the way that Jesus loves the Church (Ephesians 5). This means living in a sacrificial way for her benefit, prioritizing my relationship with her above others. Similarly, I am committed to loving my children, prioritizing their care and discipleship (1 Timothy 3).

Steps

- Dating my wife - monthly (preferably more often), apart from the children, with quality time enjoying each other.
- Protecting my wife's right to choose how she will volunteer (or withhold) her service.
- Reading one or more books annually about the topic of marriage.
- Annual Pastor's Wife Review - I developed this evaluation to ask her to list things I have done well and things I have done poorly. Then it asks her to identify the areas of my ministry, how she is connected or involved in each area, and how she would like those connections or involvements to change.
- The study of self-defense - I will train in-class and implement in my home and life strategies that promote the safety and defense of my family.

Obstacles

- Meetings, evening work, and emergencies can interrupt dating. Such dates will be rescheduled, not cancelled.
- People have expectations of a pastor's wife. I will support her despite failing to meet some of those expectations, knowing that she is a godly woman who sets an example for others to follow.

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- In an attempt to be patient and forgiving, my wife sometimes conceals her feelings of being hurt. This can lead to the build up of frustrations. I must provide the environment and opportunity for her to be forthright with me.
- Criticism can be painful, even when true. I will need to trust in my wife's love as I choose to welcome her feedback.
- Some people feel strongly about pacifism and may push back against my study and practice of self-defense. I will need to diplomatically educate those who are open to consider why I do this.

CORE VALUE: Spiritual Formation

Most Christians would easily agree that spiritual growth is important. They believe it is the result of reading and studying Scripture, believing religious truths, and attempting to behave based upon its rules. For years, I approached spiritual formation in those ways. But I am convinced that there is a plethora of additional ways to encounter God and so be changed by the experience, shaped by his Spirit, and transformed into the likeness of his Son. These practices of positioning myself will help me to focus less on solving the problems in my life and more on finding God amidst them.³

Steps:

- Just as David waited patiently for our LORD (Psalm 40:1), I will make my soul still before him (Psalm 62:5). The focus here will be two-fold: to *listen* and to allow God to *evaluate* me so that every part of me will surrender to the Holy Spirit.⁴ During these times, I will use a variety of disciplines such as communion, prayer, reading, and silence, etc.
- I will go on a spiritual retreat at least every other year whenever possible. Previous locations for these retreats have included The Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, KY and Manresa Jesuit Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills, MI. These retreats include silence, solitude, and worship. Quieting myself on these retreats has enabled me to hear clearly from God in a way like no other discipline.
- I will reflect daily on Scripture by meditation, journaling (for myself) and writing (for others) with additional texts such as commentaries, devotions, and other books. This feasting on spiritual food will ensure that I am not inviting others to a spiritual meal when my own pantry is empty.⁵
- Whenever possible, I will worship with a congregation outside my church denomination (Saturday nights, mid-week, during vacation, etc). This means when I have a week of vacation, I will still attend worship with another congregation.

³ Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 17.

⁴ Wardle, Terry. *Draw Close to the Fire*. Page 51.

⁵ Crabb, Larry. *Safest Place on Earth*. Page 65.

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Obstacles:

- Silence is quickly overcome by any number of noisy distractions surrounding me, including the computer, phone, music, television, people, and the unexpected. I will need to develop and maintain the discipline of silent waiting.
- Retreats are scheduled months in advance. Being away from the church and my family will add difficulty to planning these arrangements.
- *Doing* for my LORD comes much easier than *being* with him.
- When using spiritual disciplines for lengthy periods of time, they can become tiresome or hallow. I will need to stretch myself to use each discipline longer while balancing variety at the same time.
- In the past, I recognized a tendency of always writing for others, seldom journaling for my own benefit. This is less often true now. Still, some of my journaling must be kept private if I am to be completely honest about my feelings and thoughts.
- My responsibilities of ministry to a church may make it difficult to worship with congregations outside my church denomination. People will expect me to be present at all ministry events.

CORE VALUE: Passionate Body-part Ministry

Different people have their unique ministries because God has given them different gifts and passions (1 Corinthians 7). The same is true with congregations. The small congregation that ministers to rural families is no better or worse than the large congregation that ministers to post-modern business-people. When each works together, God's kingdom grows.

In the same way, God has designed me with specific gifts, loves, and passions that should not be stifled by a need or expectation. Some have called this a *gift-based ministry*. There will be times when I am required or asked to do things that don't interest or excite me. As a humble servant, I will act. But repeated involvement and energy in these ways is draining. To prevent discouragement, low morale, and burn-out, I will focus at least 80% of my time and energy on the areas of my greatest passions. As much as my passions contribute to my effective ministry, so my weaknesses and limitations contribute to my ineffective ministry.

Steps:

- I will seek to work with ministry staff, board members, and ministry leaders who share my value for passionate body-part ministry.
- I will trust God to present to me the opportunities to minister in the areas of my greatest passions, and remain willing to follow him in the areas of my weakness or disinterest.
- I will build a team of coworkers (staff, board members, ministry leaders, volunteers) that fill in the gaps where I fall short. I cannot (and should not) try to accomplish the tasks of every part of the body of Christ. The hand cannot be the ear. The foot cannot be the eye. God has arranged the parts just as he wants them

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- to be.⁶ This team will work together, not micro-managed under my supervision, but in the freedom that comes from passionate body-part ministry.
- The abuse of power is both dangerous and harmful. I will use my influence to create, not destroy. This kind of leadership will bring the best out of people.
- I will encourage, equip, and expect the involvement of all members of the congregation, empowering them to minister, decentralizing my power as a pastor.

Obstacles:

- It's natural to dislike or resist certain aspects of any job. There will be times when I will need to put forth extra effort to serve in ways that aren't my greatest passions. I understand that these things still need to be done.
- Most people in the church (and outside of it too) will have expectations of me and my responsibilities. They will need to come to an understanding that I am not simply a hired-hand, slave, or a do-it-all expert.
- Many people do not want to participate in ministry. They like others to take care of them. They like to have a pastor to whom they can attribute far too much credit and blame.⁷ I will strive to show them that finding their area of ministry will be an opportunity for great joy and fulfillment in their lives. As a means of serving the congregation, I will help them be good stewards of their spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4).
- When it is not the pastor's role to perform a certain task, and then the appropriate person is, for whatever reason, not doing it, this will mean that, at times, certain things will remain undone.
- The idea of decentralized power is not a difficult concept to imagine, but is often easier said than done. I will need to resist turning to the people who always say *yes*, rather than helping each person find their place.

CORE VALUE: The *Missio Dei*

Missio Dei is a Latin phrase that means the *mission of God*. Before understanding the purpose of one's individual life, one must understand the purpose of the Church and of Jesus Christ.

Salvation history shows us God's work for our redemption throughout history. When sin entered human experience in the Fall, we were separated from God and became spiritually dead. Out of merciful love, God not only sought Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8-9), but also made a sacrificial covering for their sin (Genesis 3:21) and announced his plan for the salvation of humankind (Genesis 3:15).

This set in motion a series of divine activities.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 12

⁷ Greg Bondurant

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When humankind's inclination to sin became all encompassing, God cleansed the world with the Great Flood and rescued Noah and his family (Genesis 7). Soon thereafter, God made a covenant with Abraham, maintaining his intent to bless all then nations (Genesis 12). When God's people became enslaved in Egypt, he rescued them and brought them to the Promised Land (Exodus-Joshua). When they continuously fell into the cycles of sin, God repeatedly sent leaders to confront, rescue, and guide them (Judges). When God's people rejected his authority over them, despite his warning, he allowed them to have a human king and promised that a Savior would come from the second king's descendants (2 Samuel 7:12-13). When the kings abandoned God's ways and the kingdom was divided, God sent prophets to announce moral boundaries, speak truth, and predict the coming of the Savior. Throughout the Old Testament, we can observe Salvation History and the *missio Dei*.

The New Testament reveals the same salvation history. Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection fulfilled prophecy, atoned for sin, provided for justification by faith, and made the means for our regeneration and adoption into God's family. He proclaimed good news. He came to seek and save the lost, to bring healing and life, to give his life as a ransom for many. He sent his disciples to continue his mission (John 20:21). Upon his return to heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to cleanse, fill, and empower us to live new lives as ambassadors, continuing the mission given to the Church (Acts 1:8). The New Testament provides accounts of how the Early Church went about this mission. To this day, the Church exists for the same purpose of this mission of God, the *missio Dei*.

Yet not all church leaders prioritize this mission. The role of the chaplain is important, nurturing the saints with teaching and preaching, encouraging fellowship with social gatherings and meals, comforting those who have lost a loved one, etc. Unfortunately, many people in the church forget that our mission is to those *outside* the church: to preach good news, heal the sick, and set captives free. The outward focus of my ministry is so important that I must distinguish it from the passionate body-part ministry listed above.

God's grace touched my life; I will never be the same. I desire to see people experience grace much like Peter did when he experienced Jesus' loving forgiveness despite his denial. My God "loves sinners, redeems failures, delights in second chances and fresh starts, and never tires of pursuing lost sheep, waiting for prodigal children, or rescuing those damaged by life or left on the sides of its paths."⁸ My ministry must follow his gracious character.

Steps:

- I will balance my ministry between discipling those who are already a part of the church and reaching out to those who are not yet a part of it. I will preach and teach in ways that encourage others to do the same.

⁸ Benner, David. *Surrender to Love*. Page 45.

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- I will attend community meetings, pastoral association meetings among churches, and political meetings to stay informed and connected to the contemporary events of my community.
- I will pray for my community and my church family.
- I will “take work home with me” by ministering to my neighbors, those I meet at the store and the bank, etc.
- I will prayerfully and intentionally do everything I can to disciple one or more persons to a new relationship with Jesus Christ each year.

Obstacles:

- People in the church may feel frustrated or neglected when I serve the community outside the church.
- It is easier to tend to the church member who speaks up rather than to the community that feels shut out of the church’s member-only congregation.
- It will require careful attention and spiritual discernment to identify who I will disciple.

Accountability

God asks for our bests, not our left-overs. In order for me to maintain integrity and feel good about myself, I must put forth the highest quality effort in everything I do. I may not always succeed in achieving the highest quality; but my effort will strive toward it.

I will need to do several things to ensure that I live by this Philosophy of Ministry. I will re-write this document once every three years. Upon rewriting it, I will have at least two people read it to prayerfully help me evaluate my progress and my failure. One of these people will be my wife. I will ask both persons to provide critical feedback to me. I will reflect on their feedback prayerfully.

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