Twitter Thread by Steve Bezner

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After 20+ years of pastoring, a thread of some thoughts for you youngsters and seminarians:

First, theology is important, but probably not in the way that you think it is.

Bottom line: theology—when pastoring—must be relentlessly tied to helping your church live out the faith.

In seminary, theology can serve primarily as an intellectual exercise, as the ultimate mind games. So we ask Qs like:

Does God predestine souls to an eternal destination before birth?
How do we reconcile the existence of God/evil?
How to make sense of certain Scriptures?

Etc.

These are good and even helpful—if we are constructing a pastoral framework with them. It is helpful to remember that many questions/situations have a *theological* response and a separate *pastoral* response. While the pastoral response may be informed by theology, it is unique.

For example: When a church member tells me he has an inoperable brain tumor, my theological treatise on God and evil is tone deaf, and, frankly, likely pastoral malpractice.

The pastoral response in that situation? To sit. To grieve. To hug. To say, “I am so sorry.” To pray.

Later, at some point, that same church member *will* be ready for a theological discussion of “Why?” But, even then, I must remember this is not a classroom. I am not attempting to win an argument. I am helping a very real human make sense of reality. That is what theology does.

Theology is, in a very real sense, an interpretive discipline. It gives us the tools to enter into the story of God found in Scripture and to make sense of the world. (This is what any number of philosophies attempt to do, as well.) Theology is not simply a set of puzzles.

Similarly, any theological approach has holes that can't be fully appreciated until you find yourself in a local congregation. My theology has softened in some areas and grown more rigid in others, based on experience. So adopt an approach, but hold it loosely, willing to grow.

Second big idea: Counseling is far more important than you probably realize. Even though you likely know that you will serve as a sort of guide to innumerable people, you need some tools to help you engage with things like trauma, grief, etc.

As one small example: people with sexual abuse, addiction, death, disease, etc. in their backgrounds carry trauma *in their bodies* as a physiological reality. (Lots of writing/research on this front, i.e., The Body Keeps The Score by van der Kolk) I need theology AND skill here.

I cannot recommend highly enough the need to understand 12 Step programs, particularly the moral inventory of Step Four. Until people have confronted their "junk," they are not able to move towards emotional and spiritual health. Theology works with this reality, not opposition.

If God has created humanity, science, and reality, the realities that have been discovered along the way, work *with* our theological knowledge. "All truth is God's truth," as is sometimes said. Bring your theological approach to your pastoral approach, informed by counseling.

If you understand the way physiology operates in conjunction with emotions and the like, your theology will become more robust, and your pastoral approach will become much more developed.

You have two subjects: God and humans.

Don't neglect to seek to understand humans.

These are some things I wish I would have known when I began serving in my first church (at the tender age of 19…ah, how ignorant I was). I hope they serve to help those of you who are either younger, or simply looking to continually grow.

Have a great day.

Grace and peace.