Many pastors in America are abandoning their responsibilities.

Don't misunderstand me. They still have their job with their churches. Their congregations still pay them. They still stand and preach on Sundays.

But they are chasing other gods.

When started my work, I thought other pastors will work with me. But in a short time, I was working alone. My friends, the other pastors, were too busy. They were not interested. They are more concerned about their names, their programs, their numbers. Not God. Not the Bible. And not the souls of people.

Many pastors run the church like a business.
Advertise. Satisfy customers. Earn a profit.

But the church is not a business.
The church is a group of sinners.
And the lead sinner is called the pastor.
And his responsibility is help the people focus on God.

And that responsibility, many pastors, maybe most pastors, are abandoning. And that makes me angry.

This book focuses on three most important responsibilities for a pastor:
1. Prayer.
2. Reading Scripture.
3. Giving people spiritual leading.

These three responsibilities we do privately.
If we do them, no one notices.
If we ignore them, no one notices.

All three topics, mean attention.
1. Prayer = attention before God.
2. Reading Scripture = Attention to His word and His action during 2000 years in Israel and Christ.
3. Giving people spiritual leading = Attention to His activity in the person in front of me.

All three topics, attention is where?
God.
But the areas for our attention are different.

1. Prayer. The area is myself.
2. Reading Scripture. The area is the faith community through history.
3. Spiritual leading. The area is the person in front of me.

If we are attending to God, can people see that? No.
If we attend to them, they notice that.

So we can function with the name, Pastor, and never really attend to God in prayer, Bible study, and spiritual leading.

People do notice our programs, our meetings and appointments. And if we have no time left for God. No problem.

To help us understand those three topics more clearly, I want to borrow a picture from your math class: A triangle. \( \Delta \)

Remember that a triangle has three lines.
Those three lines connect in three corner angles.

For our lesson, those three lines mean that part of our pastoral work that people see.
1. Preaching.
2. Teaching.

The three angles are those three areas of our work that people don't see.
1. Prayer.
2. Bible study.
3. Spiritual leading.

You know that three lines alone don't make a triangle. Those lines must be connected with the three angles. With the angles, the lines make a shape.
In the same way, preaching, teaching, and administration, don't make true pastoral service. Only when we give our personal attention God, through prayer, Bible study, and spiritual leading, then the showing activities have the shape of real pastoral service.

Pastors, we can fake our work so easily. We train our face to show a holy expression. We use big words that show our seminary training. We memorize favorite Bible verses to our hospital visits. We invent touching prayers for our meetings. And Pah! We fool them.

If I wanted to become rich, I could open a business school for training pastors. College? Not necessary. Seminary? Forget it.

In my vocational training school, I can teach a high school graduate all the skills he needs to become a successful pastor. I need only four courses.

Course number 1. PLAGIARISM. Meaning, copying. In that class I will give you many inspiring lectures and fascinating stories. Then I will teach you how you can change them a little, so they look like your ideas, making you look clever and wise.

Course number 2. I will teach you how to control your facial expression and how to talk during prayer and counseling. That will help you appear more holy.

Course number 3. Office management. If we answer our phone calls and our mail quickly, people will really be impressed.

Course number 4. IMAGE. I will teach you how you can look busy. how you can look popular. how you can look successful. how you can look creative. People will want your advice, because you are the expert.

In the past I joked about that idea. But now I see advertisements for workshops for pastors all over. Their workshop topics are the same as my four courses. That's no joke. They are training pastors to win religious customers.

We pastors meet people having various expectations about us. We become skilled, shaping ourselves to satisfy their expectations.
You know we see two different kinds of workers.
1. crafts.
2. professions.

Craftsmen work with things that we see.
Professions work with things that we can't see.

Craftsmen work with physical things.
Profession works with ideas.

Both work their jobs carefully.

Craftsmen pay attention to their materials and their tools.
Profession pay attention to their purpose.

Doctors' purpose is health, not only to make people feel good.
Lawyers' purpose is justice, not for helping people defeat other people.
Teachers' purpose is to help people learn, not pouring in information for passing a test.
Pastors purpose is God.

not reducing anxiety.
not giving comfort.
not running a religious business.

We start our work knowing that.
But people poke us, and they demand our attention.
And they want us to do things that have no relationship with God.

If you don't give them what they want, they will go to another pastor who will.

How do we guard ourselves from that trap?

Remember that triangle -- those three angles?
We work those angles.

In old times, pastoral training involved discipline in those three topics.
1. Prayer.
2. Bible study.
3. Spiritual leading.

We call that discipline, ascetical.

It was a positive word.
But in recent times, the devil succeeded in making that word negative.

Now that word means a sour face. ☹ No fun. Holier than thou.
With that picture, people will avoid us.

But *ascetical* is a sports word.
People who win in sports focus on their training. Practice, practice, practice.
Stay focus. No distractions.
And they become successful, and popular.

But now sports training is becoming soft.
Discipline? That's the old way. Drop it.

And the same happens in religious training.
(The devil is smart!)

Ask pastors three questions.

1. What do you think about God?
2. In your work as a pastor, what do you want accomplish, do succeed?
3. How will you do that?

I expect that their answers for 1 and 2 will be good.
But their answers for the third question will vary -- some wild and some silly.
But will they say anything about God?

Do they pray?
Do they study scripture?
Do they say, "I tried that but it didn't work"?
No
They say, "I tried, but it is too hard."
They say, "I don't have time."
They say, "That doesn't fit my personality."

They like to look busy, so they find things to do to stay busy.

In sports, practice and exercise are hard work. But they are necessary.
And sports players practice and exercise, because they have a goal.
They accept the encouragement, challenge, and pressure from their coaches.

Pastor have coaches -- spiritual ascetic, theologians.
They teach us about prayer, reading scripture, and spiritual leading.

That's the goal for this book.
CHAPTER 2

When we pray, we are connected in communication almighty God. You know, that can become dangerous.

So, I wonder. Why are our prayers are weak, shallow, and boring? Answer: Because we disconnect prayer from God's Word.

Prayer is like a plant that grows in the soil. The soil is God's word.

We cut the flower, put it in a vase, and set it out for all to see. Pretty... and dead... and thrown out.

We open meetings with prayer -- keep it short, so we can proceed with the real business.

In every situation, we have a favorite prayer that begins things. A baby's birth, we pray for his beginning life. In the hospital, we pray for the doctor before he begins surgery. For people near death, we pray to begin their transfer into heaven.


God must have the first word. He first informs us of His thoughts. Then we respond to Him, not the reverse.

"Pastor, will open our meeting with a short prayer?" No. Prayer is not short.

Prayer means standing in front of a holy God. Prayer means standing in the lion's den.

So, what should we do?

We should let God speak first. Then prayer becomes our answer.

Notice Genesis chapter one. "In the beginning... God said... God said... God said..." Nine times in six days. "And God said..."
God speaks first, and then His Word makes the world. 
His Word gives the world his commandments. 
His Word blesses.

In the New Testament, God's work for salvation, works the same way.

John 1:1

_In the beginning was the Word._
_and the Word became human._

God's word is always first. 
Our word is never first.

And when God speaks first, then we can learn the deep language proper for prayer, proper for talking to God.

You know how children learn their first language. 
Hearing children listen to their parents talking. 
Deaf children watch.

While children listen and watch adults around them, chatting with them, 
Little bit, by little bit, they learn to communicate back to the people around them.

Our first language was all answer. We did not start talking first, and then other people answer us. No. They started talking first, and then we learned how to answer.

Prayer is the same way. 
God speaks first. 
We answer in prayer.

Human language is complex, filled with words and emotions. 

God's language, and prayer language, also are complex.

Where can His language for prayer? The Psalms. 
If you study the Psalms to help you pray, you notice how those 150 chapters are grouped into five books.

Psalm 1 to 41 is the first book. 
The last verse in that book says.

_Praise the Lord, the God over Israel._
_From eternity past to eternity future._
_Amen and Amen._
Next, Psalm 42 to 72 make the second book. The last verse for that book says.

- \textit{Praise the Lord, the God over Israel.}
- \textit{He alone does wonderful things.}
- \textit{Praise His glorious name forever.}
- \textit{Let His glory fill all the world.}
- \textit{Amen and Amen.}

Notice the first line is the same as the last verse in book one. The last line is the same. And the middle line is expanded.

Next, Psalm 73 to 89 make the third book. The last verse for that book is summarized to two lines.

- \textit{Praise the Lord forever.}
- \textit{Amen and Amen.}

Next, Psalm 90 to 106 make the fourth book. The last verse for that book says.

Praise the Lord, the God over Israel, from eternity past to eternity future. and let all the people say, Amen. Praise the Lord.

That one is identical, with the last Amen line expanded.

Finally, Psalm 107 to 150 make the fifth book. The last five Psalms in the book each begin and end with begins and ends with, \textit{Hallelujah!} -- One for each of the five books of psalms.

The last Psalm, 150, each sentence says,

- \textit{Praise Him, Praise the Lord, Praise God.}

13 times.

Clearly, the people who gathered all the various psalms for the Bible planned that. Why? Maybe the five books of psalms fit the five books of Moses, the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

And responding to God's teaching in the first five books of Israel's history, the people in worship respond with the five books of Psalms.
First God speaks.
Then the people answer.

That matching, the five books of the Torah, and the five books of Psalms, is only a general match. If you look at the history books, chapter by chapter. They don't match the Psalms chapter by chapter. But through the psalms, you can find gut responses to every situation in the history.

It is important to use God's Word to teach us how to pray. If we try to teach ourselves, or if we let other people's expectations guide our prayer, our prayer will be shallow and weak. But if we let our prayer mingle with the Psalms expressions for faith, love, and obedience, we mature in our own faith, love, and obedience.

All through past history, Jews and Christians used Psalms as the teaching book for learning how to pray. Only in our time has the church forgotten and neglected that treasure.

Christians, and specifically pastors, must go back to the psalms for their prayer lessons.

We don't let doctors invent their own medicines and their own therapies. Why do we allow Pastors do that with prayer?

One Bible teacher, name doctor Donald. Miller offered a picture for the first five books of the Bible that I really like. It is a picture of birth and growth for the people of Israel.

(1) Genesis.
   The book of beginning.
   The word "beginning."
   And Israel's picture, life beginning in pregnancy.

(2) Exodus.
   The story of the birth of the nation of Israel,
   born through the waters of the Red Sea.
   A baby receiving God's blessing and first instruction on the Mountain.

(3) Leviticus.
   Israel is a child, learning basic lessons about God's relationship to them.
   ABC lessons that God taught through Israel's holy days and sacrifices.

(4) Numbers.
   Israel is now a teenager, learning through their own mistakes what faith relationship with God means and learning through their rebellion what obedience means.
(5) Deuteronomy.
    Israel is now adult. They enter their home, fully trained, now responsible for all
    God has prepared for them.

That picture for the first five books of the Bible gives me also a picture for the prayer
expression in the five books of the Psalms.

God not only give us faith, but He grows faith in us.
And we pastors are responsible for growing in faith filled prayer,
    responding to God's Word and God's work.

CHAPTER 4
Translator's note:
This chapter is difficult to translate to ASL because it uses "deaf" as a negative analogy
for a spiritual condition. Peterson also talks a lot about "listening" to the "voice" of
God, not meaning hearing with our ears, but listening to God with our heart. And our
ASL for "learn" [information to our head] does not match Peterson's meaning for the
word.

In our work as pastors, we read the Bible a lot. That's our job.
But, while we read and study and preach the Bible, we forget something very important.
We stop listening to the Bible.
We stop listening to God.
While we work, we forget our responsibility.

Reading and listening are not the same.
Reading connects us with words and sentences on paper.
Listening connects us with people.
    connection in live conversation.
or    connection with an author.
It doesn't matter that author lived long ago in a far away place. We still connect.

If I chat with another person. that person knows if I pay attention, or not.
If I read a book, that book doesn't care if I pay attention.

God wants to connect with us through His Word.
How does it happen, that we forget how to listen and connect, while we read?

Three reasons.

First, invention for printing.
Before Gutenburg invented printing, people must hand-write copies of the Bible.
And people did not read the Bible silently for themselves only.
While they read, they voiced for other people.  
No matter if they read alone, still they voiced.

But now, people read silently. The voice is gone.  
And now printing makes so many Bibles, the Bibles have less value.  
Buy one, and throw away, like yesterday's newspaper.

God's Word has changed.  
God's Word has become limited to a stack of paper, binding, and two covers -- a book.  
Where is the life?  
Where is the connection?

Second reason -- Education. School.

In the past, students learned, not from books. They learned from people.  
One who had skills, he trained his assistant.  
And the teacher learned with his student.

But now school changes that.


Training? Gone -- Poof!  
Relationship? Disconnected.

We forget the purpose for language, including written language -- connecting people.  
People write books, not for sticking their facts in our heads.  
No. They want to relate with us.  
They share their stories, so we can become part of that story.  
They share their ideas, so we can mentally discuss with them.

The Bible has that same purpose.

Third -- Describe the pastor's job.

Our culture focuses on customers.  
That culture influences the church

We pastors become theology peddlers (sellers).  
And church members become our customers.  
We become fund raisers.  
Office managers.  
Member recruiters.
Our Relationships with people?
And their relationships with God?
And our relationship with God?
That is not in our job description.

How can we learn to listen to God in our Bible reading?
Remember that reading is only one part in four events.

First, speaking. God speaking.
Second, writing.
Third, reading,
fourth. listening.

Through that, God speaks to you and touches your life.

One verse in Psalm 40 says that God opens my ears.
Deaf people can properly say, that God opens my eyes. He opens my heart.

If I want to listen to God, I must read the Bible.
But if only read the Bible, and not listen, it goes right past me.
Listening is not easy.
But we see examples of listeners in the Bible.
   Mother Mary in Cana.
   Nicodemus.
   A Blind man wanting healing.
   Two sisters in Bethany.

All through John's Gospel, we see Jesus speaking, touching with His words.
We see people listening, and life changing.

You are blessed if you read and listen.

**CHAPTER 8 -- Getting a spiritual director**

You know that doctors care for sick people.

If a doctor becomes sick, what does he do?
Take care of himself?
Any doctor who does that is very foolish.

The human body is complex.
Doctors need wisdom and experience from other doctors.
They are too emotionally involved in their physical problems.
They must have another doctor, who can emotionally disconnect, and can observe, and counsel.

Doctors need a doctor.

The same is true for pastors.
Pastors give spiritual leading and counsel.
Who gives the pastor his spiritual leading and counsel?
Pastors need a pastor.
Shepherds need a shepherd.
The spiritual director need someone who can give him spiritual leading and counsel.
The one who cares for other people's souls, needs someone who can care for his soul.

All through history, the church recognized that.
But now we have forgotten that. Spiritual directors for pastors are very rare.

Today, pastors don't have pastors for themselves.

We feel that we don't need a spiritual director.
Our church members flatter us. They tell us,
"Pastor, That was a wonderful sermon."
"Pastor, your prayer really touched me."
"Pastor, thank you for staying with me through my trouble."

And we believe them.
Our head size increases.
We become experts.
We are teachers. We don't need anyone to teach us.
We are preachers. We don't need anyone to preach to us.
We have authority. We don't need anyone in authority over us.
We are leaders. We don't need anyone to lead us.

But we are still Christians.
And living as a Christian means, faith, service, and obedience.
Obedience to whom?

You notice that people who climb mountains, they don't climb alone.
They have a team.
They tie a rope together.
The experienced climber leads.

Oh, for sure, some people try to climb alone, and some succeed.

But around the mountain below, you see many who became frustrated and gave up... or worse.
I saw the same happen in my pastoral work.
I was climbing alone,
I never thought that I should have a leader.
But after a while I saw around me, many pastors who became frustrated and gave up.

A saw the danger. I began to recognize my need for a spiritual leader.

[Here we are skipping a story about a musical instrument -- a banjo.]

My awakening happened while I tried to grow in my prayer life.
My inspiration for prayer when up and down.
When my interest went down,
I sought inspiration in books, meetings, workshops.
But I knew I needed something more personal, one-on-one.

I did not want a counselor.
I did not need a therapist.
A friend makes a lousy guide.

Really, this was hard. All my religious training taught me that if I were spiritually mature,
I would connect with Jesus. And He is enough.

I began praying, Lord lead me to someone who can become my spiritual director.

I thought maybe one of the people I know?
No.
Any of my friends.
No.
None of them seem right for my spiritual director.
At that time, I thought that none of them can understand what I need.
Now I look back, and know that I was wrong.

But, anyway. I continued watching and waiting.
I did not feel hurry.

Eventually, I met a man, that I began to feel he could become my spiritual director.
While I learned to know him more, I felt more sure that he could understand me and guide me.

So, what did I do?
Nothing.
Yes, I surprised myself.

We met often, so I had plenty of opportunity for asking him.
But I procrastinated.
Why?
I did not want to give up my self control.
I wanted to stay boss for myself.

Those feelings surprised me.
And I invented theological reasons:
"I can connect directly to God through Jesus Christ, alone."
"I don't need to go through people."

That was true.
But my real reason was pride.

I struggled one year.
Then finally I asked John to become my spiritual director.
That year of procrastination was not wasted.
Through that year I learned an important lesson about myself.
That evil sin of pride hides.
And prides makes us isolated.

In our first meeting, John asked me, "What do you expect in our relationship?"
Answer? I don't know. I never did this before.
But I knew that I did not want to continue learning about faith and prayer through my
clumsy mistakes. I wanted someone who knew, to guide me.

The two of us met every month.
Now, looking back, three things impress me.

First.
I became free to try new activities for my spiritual experience.
I stopped worrying about trying new things.
I knew someone was watching over me.
Before, I always carefully evaluated every activity, every attitude.
While I supervised myself, I became strict. disciplined. limiting.

Now, I became bold - brave.
I knew my spiritual director will caution me if I wandered the wrong way.
I became more creative.
My prayer time and my meditation time blended with the rest of my life.
My fear melted.
I stopped worrying about success for my spiritual growth.

Second.
I noticed that I told my spiritual director things that I never told other people.
I don't mean embarrassing things or shameful things. -- not deep, dark secrets.
No, I mean that I told him boring things about myself. Normal, everyday things. Those things don't interest anyone, but they are important for my life. And the two of us could discuss those things.

Third.
I began seeing wisdom coming from, not written words in books, but wisdom from conversation. Connecting person to person.

I experienced wisdom and insight passed on through generations from person to person.

Those experiences were not special.
I could have the same experiences without a spiritual direction.
But with a spiritual director, those experiences become more deep.

Through the generations, the church understood spiritual direction is important.
If today we ignore that tradition, we make a big mistake.