The Man Behind the Anointing

The Man Behind the Anointing

Character, Integrity and the Secret Life of a Minister

SOLOMON KPOU

LIFE RECLAIMED
PUBLISHING
BOOKS THAT INSPIRE. TRUTH THAT TRANSFORMS. LIVES THAT ARE RECLAIMED.

Life Reclaimed Publishing

The Man Behind the Anointing: Character, Integrity and the Secret Life of a Minister

Copyright © 2026 Solomon Kpou

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews and articles.

Published by Life Reclaimed Publishing
Perth, Western Australia

ISBN 978-1-7639386-7-0 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-7639386-6-3 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-7639386-8-7 (ebook)

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

First published 2026

To every minister who wants not only to start strong but to finish well: may the life God sees in secret be the life He rewards openly.

And to my family, my first congregation: Mama K, Georgina, Christina, Giftens, Bruce, David and Eliana. You have seen the man behind the pulpit, and you have loved him anyway.

Contents

Preface ix
Introduction: When the Public Sees the Pulpit but God Sees the Heart 1
PART ONE: THE OIL AND THE VESSEL 13
Chapter 1: Called Before Crowned 15
Chapter 2: The Anointing Is Not an Endorsement 27
Chapter 3: The Hidden Man of the Heart 37
PART TWO: CHARACTER IN THE DARK 47
Chapter 4: Integrity When No One Is Home 49
Chapter 5: The Little Foxes: How Compromise Works 59
Chapter 6: Iron Sharpens Iron: Accountability 69
Chapter 7: The Towel and the Spotlight: Humility and Success 79
PART THREE: GUARDING THE SECRET PLACE 91
Chapter 8: The Private Altar 93
Chapter 9: The Unseen Battles: Temptation and Holiness in a Permissive Age 103
Chapter 10: When the Secret Life Leaks 117
PART FOUR: THE WEIGHT OF LEADERSHIP 129
Chapter 11: Shepherding Without Losing Yourself 131
Chapter 12: The First Congregation: Ministry at Home 141
Chapter 13: Money, Power and Motive 151
PART FIVE: FINISHING WELL 163
Chapter 14: The Fall, the Wounded and the Way Back 165
Chapter 15: Passing the Mantle, Finishing the Race 175
Conclusion: Before the One Who Sees in Secret 189
Appendix A: 40 Questions Every Minister Should Answer Honestly 199

Appendix B: A Personal Integrity Audit 203
Appendix C: Building an Accountability Structure 209
Appendix D: Scriptures on Character and Integrity 217
Appendix E: Recommended Reading for Ministers 222
Appendix F: A Six-Session Guide for Small Groups 225
Notes 231
Acknowledgements 235
About the Author 237
Books by Solomon Kpou 239

Preface

> So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.
>
> — Psalm 78:72

Psalm 78 walks through Israel's long history of blessing and rebellion, and then it closes with David. God took him from the sheepfolds to shepherd His people, and David led them with two things: the integrity of his heart and the skill of his hands.

Notice the order. Integrity comes first. Skill comes second. Both matter, but one holds the other up. This book is about that order.

Why I Wrote This Book

In my years of pastoral ministry I have come to believe that the greatest danger facing the church is not a lack of gifted leaders. It is gifted leaders whose inner life cannot carry the weight of what God has placed in their hands.

We have all seen it, sometimes from a distance and sometimes far too close. A preacher who could move a room is suddenly gone. A youth pastor loved by every teenager turns out to have been living a life nobody knew about. And the questions are always the same. How could someone so anointed fall so far? Was any of it real?

Those are honest questions, and they deserve honest, biblical answers. I believe the answers begin in a place most of us would rather not look: the secret life. This book asks what kind of inner life makes a minister safe to

follow, and what slow, private choices either build that life or quietly wear it away.

What This Book Is Not

It is not an exposé. I will not name any living minister, and where I refer to a recent event, I leave out names, places and identifying details. Where I draw on history, on published research or on public inquiries such as Australia's Royal Commission, the sources are given in the notes. Where an illustration is imagined or drawn from common patterns rather than one person's story, I say so.

It is not a book against the anointing. I believe the Holy Spirit still anoints men and women to preach the gospel, heal the brokenhearted and set captives free (see Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).

And it is not written from a pedestal. I have not written these chapters because I have mastered them. I have written them because I need them.

The Heart Behind the Title

The title came to me as a question. When the lights go down and the people go home, who is left? Who is the man behind the anointing?

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the nineteenth-century Scottish minister, counselled a fellow minister, "Take heed to thyself. Your own soul is your first and greatest care" (recorded in Andrew Bonar's *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne*). He understood that a congregation is fed not only by what a minister says, but by who that minister is.

Jesus said that our Father "who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:4). That is a warning, because no performance can fool the One who sees in secret. It is also a comfort, because no faithful act done in obscurity is ever wasted.

An Invitation to Honesty

Please read this book slowly and honestly. Some chapters will encourage you. Some may unsettle you. If one feels as though it was written about you, do not close the book and walk away. Conviction from the Holy Spirit is not condemnation. It is the kindness of God, drawing you back before a hidden crack becomes a public collapse.

If you have been hurt by a leader whose secret life did not match their public ministry, I am deeply sorry. Nothing in this book excuses that leader, and nothing in it asks you to stay silent.

My prayer for every reader is the prayer of Psalm 78:72: that God will give you skilful hands, and above all an undivided heart. The crowds may see the pulpit. God sees the heart. Let us live for the One who sees.

INTRODUCTION

When the Public Sees the Pulpit but God Sees the Heart

> For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.
>
> — 1 Samuel 16:7

The Oil and the Vessel

In the wilderness of Sinai, God gave Moses a recipe.

It is easy to read past it. Exodus 30 sits among chapters of measurements, curtains, rings and poles, the kind of detail most of us skim on our way back to the story. But slow down, and the passage begins to carry a fragrance. Liquid myrrh. Sweet-smelling cinnamon and cane. Cassia. Each spice weighed by the shekel of the sanctuary and blended into a hin of olive oil, "an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer" (Exodus 30:25).

This was the holy anointing oil. With it Moses was to anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony, the table and the lampstand, the altars, the laver and every utensil that belonged to them (Exodus 30:26–28). Then he was to anoint Aaron and his sons, "that they may minister to Me as priests" (Exodus 30:30).

And then God added a command that is easy to miss:

> "It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you." (Exodus 30:32)

In its setting, the meaning is plain. The oil was reserved. An ordinary Israelite could not use it as perfume or rub it into his skin after a long day. No one could copy the recipe for private use, and the next verse warns that anyone who did, or who put it on an outsider, would be cut off from his people (Exodus 30:33). The oil existed for one purpose: to set apart people and objects for the service of God. It was never meant to make anyone feel important.

I want to be careful at this point. Exodus 30 is not a passage about pastors, preachers or worship leaders, and I am not claiming it is. It is a law for Israel's worship in the tabernacle. But it reveals something about the way God works that runs through the whole of Scripture, and it is the conviction this book is built on.

The oil was holy because of whose it was, not because of whom it touched.

When Moses poured it on Aaron's head (Leviticus 8:12), it ran down, as the psalmist would later picture it, "running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments" (Psalm 133:2). That oil marked Aaron as God's priest. It gave him a task, a place and an authority he did not have the day before. What it did not do was make him a different kind of man. The same Aaron who received the oil had, not long before, shaped a golden calf for a restless crowd (Exodus 32:1–4). The anointing set him apart. It did not do away with the need for his heart to be right with God.

Fire on the Eighth Day

If there were any doubt about this, the book of Leviticus settles it with almost painful speed.

Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons. He took the anointing oil and the blood from the altar and sprinkled them on the priests and on their gar-

ments (Leviticus 8:30). For seven days they stayed at the door of the tabernacle of meeting while the ordination was completed (Leviticus 8:33). On the eighth day Aaron offered the sacrifices, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the offering on the altar. "When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Leviticus 9:24).

It was one of the great days in Israel's worship. The tabernacle was standing. The priests were anointed. Heaven had answered with fire.

Then the next chapter begins:

> "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them." (Leviticus 10:1)

Fire went out from the LORD a second time, and it devoured them (Leviticus 10:2).

The oil was still on their garments. They had stood in the same ordination as their father. They had seen the same glory. Yet they came near to God on their own terms, with fire He had not asked for.

Scripture does not tell us everything that was in their hearts that day. Some readers connect the command about wine that follows a few verses later (Leviticus 10:8–11) with what had happened, but the text does not say so directly, and we should not claim more than it says. What it does say is enough. Through Moses, the LORD explained what had taken place: "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3).

Notice the two audiences in that sentence. *Those who come near Me*: the private life of the priest before God. *All the people*: the public life of the priest before the congregation. God cared about both, and He would not let the second stand in for the first.

The Question Behind This Book

In many of our churches, *anointing* is one of the most treasured words we have. We say a preacher is anointed when a sermon breaks through. We say a worship leader is anointed when a room falls quiet before God. Often we are right. God still sets people apart and fills them with His Spirit for His work, as He anointed Jesus of Nazareth "with the Holy Spirit and with power" (Acts 10:38).

But we are slow to ask the question that Exodus and Leviticus press on us. What about the vessel the oil rests on?

The oil can be genuine while the vessel is cracked. The fire on the altar can be from heaven while the fire in a censer is profane. A minister can carry a real gift from God in public and still be drifting from God in private. One does not cancel the other, and one does not prove the other.

That is the question this book asks. Not whether the anointing is real. It is. The question is about the person it rests on: the man or woman behind the anointing, who is left when the service ends and the lights go down.

Two Platforms

Every minister has two platforms.

The first is the one everyone can see. It might be a pulpit, a stage with a worship band, a youth room on a Friday night, or a hospital bedside where a family is waiting for a word from God. On that platform we are watched, measured and often praised. People notice our gifts. They remember our sermons, our songs and our prayers, and they tell their friends about us.

The second platform is the one nobody sees. It is the study at midnight. It is the phone in our hand when we are alone. It is the drive home after a long Sunday, and the tone of voice we use with our family once the church door has closed. It is the inner room of thoughts, motives and desires that only God can enter.

We met these two platforms at the door of the tabernacle. "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy," God said, "and before all the people I must be glorified" (Leviticus 10:3). One phrase speaks of the

priest's nearness to God. The other speaks of his place before the congregation. Most of us pour our energy into the second. God looks first at the first.

What Samuel Nearly Missed

Few moments in Scripture show this more clearly than the day Samuel went to Bethlehem.

The prophet was grieving. Saul, the king he had anointed, had been rejected by God, and Samuel was mourning over him (1 Samuel 16:1). Now the LORD sent him to the house of Jesse with a horn of oil, to anoint one of Jesse's sons in Saul's place.

It is worth remembering what Saul had looked like. When Israel first met him, Scripture says there was not a more handsome person among the children of Israel, and "from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2). Israel had wanted a king who looked like a king, and in Saul they got one.

So when Jesse's eldest son, Eliab, walked in, Samuel felt sure. "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!" (1 Samuel 16:6). Eliab had the height, the presence and the bearing. He looked the part, just as Saul had.

God stopped the prophet before the oil was poured. "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him" (1 Samuel 16:7). Then came the words that stand at the head of this introduction: man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

The tragedy of Saul was about to repeat itself, and it took the voice of God to prevent it. Even a seasoned prophet, a man who had heard from God since childhood, could be impressed by the wrong things.

Seven sons passed before Samuel, and God chose none of them. Only then did anyone think to mention the youngest, who was out in the fields with the sheep. When David was brought in, the text tells us he was "ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking" (1 Samuel 16:12). That detail matters. God was not choosing David because he looked unimpressive. He was choosing him for something the others could not see. The oil was poured

on the son nobody had invited, and the Spirit of the LORD came upon him from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:13).

A chapter later, Eliab reveals what God had already seen. When David arrived at the battle lines with food for his brothers, Eliab burned with anger and accused him of "pride" and "the insolence of your heart" (1 Samuel 17:28). The man who looked most like a king was the one who could not bear to see his younger brother honoured. The outward appearance had concealed the heart, but it had not concealed it from God.

That day in Bethlehem sets the tone for this book. The public sees the pulpit. God sees the heart. And sooner or later, what God sees in secret becomes the true measure of every ministry.

The Problem of the Divided Life

There is a saying often repeated in leadership circles: your gift can take you where your character cannot keep you. Few sayings have proved truer in the life of the church.

Gifting opens doors. A gifted communicator will be invited to speak. A gifted musician will be asked to lead. A gifted organiser will be given responsibility. There is nothing wrong with that. God gives gifts so that they will be used (1 Peter 4:10).

But a door that gifting opens has to be kept open by something else. As the years pass, the platform grows heavier. Expectations multiply. Temptations become more subtle. A minister can grow in reach far faster than in character, and when that happens a gap opens between the public life and the private life. At first the gap is small, and often the minister is the last to notice it. Yet a divided life is an unstable life. In time, the weight of the public platform exposes whatever is missing underneath.

Consider a sketch drawn from a pattern many pastors will recognise. It describes no single person. A gifted young preacher serves in a growing church. He is warm, funny and sincere, and people come to faith under his ministry. Within a few years he is preaching most Sundays and travelling to speak elsewhere. He prays less than he used to, but tells himself it is only a

busy season. He stops meeting with the older friend who used to ask him hard questions, because there is simply no time. He begins to lean on his gift instead of on God. No single decision looks like a disaster. Yet slowly, the inner life that once held him steady is being hollowed out.

You may have met that young preacher. You may have been him.

This book is written to close that gap. It is for ministers who want their secret life and their public life to be one life, and for those who would rather deal with hidden cracks now, in private, than have them exposed later in public.

Gifts That Are Not Withdrawn

We need the power of God. Without Him, our best sermons are only speeches and our best services are only events. In the Bible, to be anointed is to be set apart and empowered by God for a task (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20, 27). Nothing in this book is meant to dampen anyone's hunger for more of the Holy Spirit.

But here is the hard truth this book has to face. The anointing is God's gracious empowering. It is not God's endorsement of a person's private life.

Paul writes that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). In context, Paul is speaking about God's faithfulness to Israel, and we must not stretch the verse into a general rule about spiritual gifts. Yet it does show us something of how God gives. He does not snatch His gifts back the moment we stumble. That is a mercy. It is also a danger, because it means a person can keep operating in a gift long after the heart has drifted away from God.

Jesus warned that on the last day many will say to Him, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And He will answer, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22–23). These people had real ministry activity to point to. Yet Jesus says He never knew them. We will return to this sobering passage, and to Samson, Saul and Balaam, in Chapter 2.

The answer to these warnings is not to want less of the Spirit. It is to want more of Him, and to let Him do His deepest work in us, not only through us. The goal of this book is a Spirit-filled minister with Christlike character: a person who moves in the power of the Spirit and also bears the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

Power without character is dangerous. Character without power is dry. God wants both, and He wants them in the right order.

A Word to Men and Women in Ministry

The title of this book speaks of "the man behind the anointing", but the book is not for men only.

God has called and anointed women as well as men to serve His people. Many who read these pages will be women who preach, lead worship, pastor young people and carry real spiritual responsibility. The temptations, pressures and safeguards in this book apply to you just as much. When you read the word "man" in the title, please read it as including you.

Throughout the book I mostly speak of "the minister", "the leader" or simply "you". My aim is not to settle every debate about roles in the church. My aim is to speak to the heart of every person God has trusted with influence over His people.

Who This Book Is For

I have written mainly for pastors, preachers, worship leaders, youth leaders and elders. I have also written for Bible college students and emerging leaders who are only beginning to feel the weight of the call. If you are just starting out, build your foundations before the platform grows. It is far easier to lay strong footings at the start than to repair them under a building already full of people.

This book is also for those who choose and oversee leaders. When Paul instructed Timothy and Titus about elders, he did not give them a list of gifts to look for. He gave them a list of qualities: blameless, faithful in marriage, self-controlled, hospitable, gentle, not greedy for money, managing

their own household well and having a good reputation even with outsiders (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). My hope is that church boards, denominational leaders and congregations will learn to look beyond the outward appearance, the way God does.

And this book is for anyone who has been hurt by a leader whose private life did not match the pulpit. What happened to you matters to God. Nothing in these pages is meant to excuse that leader, and nothing here asks you to stay silent.

The Journey Ahead

The book is laid out in five parts, and each one builds on the one before.

Part One, The Oil and the Vessel, asks what genuine ministry rests on. We begin with the truth that a person can be called long before they are crowned, and that God makes the minister in hidden seasons before He uses the ministry in public. We then see why the anointing is not an endorsement, and we look at the hidden person of the heart.

Part Two, Character in the Dark, looks at the qualities that hold a ministry up from the inside. We consider integrity when no one is home, the slow mechanics of compromise and the excuses that make it feel acceptable, the accountability that guards a leader from himself, and the humility that keeps success from becoming a snare.

Part Three, Guarding the Secret Place, takes us behind closed doors. We come to the private altar of prayer. We face the unseen battles every minister fights against temptation, lust and pride, and we ask how to live a holy life in a permissive age without hiding away in isolation. This part ends with a sober chapter on what happens when the secret life leaks out, and why those who have been harmed must always come first.

Part Four, The Weight of Leadership, turns to the pressures that come with responsibility. How do you shepherd others without losing yourself? Why is your family your first congregation? How can money, power and motive quietly corrupt a ministry?

Part Five, Finishing Well, looks to the end of the race. We hold together grace for the fallen, protection for the wounded and wisdom about restoration. We think about passing on a mantle of character to the next generation. And in the conclusion, we stand in imagination where every minister will one day stand in reality: before the One who sees in secret.

I encourage you to read the book straight through at least once, because the chapters build on one another. But if one part speaks urgently to the season you are in, go there first. Just do not stop there.

How to Use This Book

This is not a book to read in a hurry. It is meant to be prayed through, talked about and lived out.

Take the reflection seriously. Every chapter ends with a short section called *The Second Platform*, which names one practical safeguard to put in place, followed by Reflection questions and a prayer. Please do not skip them. That is where teaching turns into self-examination. Paul urged the Corinthians to "examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5), and the psalmist prayed:

> "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23–24)

Keep a journal and write your answers honestly. God already knows the truth, so there is nothing to gain by pretending.

Use the appendices. At the back of the book you will find forty questions every minister should answer honestly (Appendix A), a personal integrity audit (Appendix B), practical guidance for building an accountability structure (Appendix C), Scriptures on character and integrity for meditation and memorisation (Appendix D), recommended reading (Appendix E) and a six-session guide for small groups and ministry teams (Appendix F). An integrity audit done once is a good start. An integrity audit done every year can save a ministry.

Read it with an accountability partner. "Two are better than one," the Preacher says, "for if they fall, one will lift up his companion" (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10). Choose someone mature in faith who is not impressed by your gifts and does not depend on your approval. It might be a fellow minister, a trusted elder or a mentor outside your own church. Read a chapter at a time, then meet, in person if you can, to talk through the questions. Give each other permission to ask the uncomfortable follow-up question. James tells us to "confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Healing often begins the moment something hidden is spoken aloud to a safe and faithful friend.

Some of God's greatest gifts to me have come through people who loved me enough to tell me the truth, and my spiritual father, Rev. Roland Thomas, is one of them. Everyone in ministry needs at least one person who can look them in the eye and ask, "How is your soul, really?"

Read it with your team. The book can be used by a pastoral staff, a board of elders, a worship team, a youth leadership team or a class of ministry students. Reading it together can build a shared culture of integrity. When a whole team agrees that character matters more than performance, it becomes easier for everyone to be honest and to ask for help before a crisis comes.

If you use the book with a group, agree on confidentiality from the start, and remember that a group is not always the right place for deep personal confession. Some things are best shared with one trusted person or a counsellor. Never let the discussion become a way to target or shame anyone. And some matters must not stay within the group at all. If anything is disclosed that involves abuse or harm to another person, especially a child, it must be handled properly and reported to the appropriate authorities. A culture of grace is never a culture of secrecy.

Let it lead you to action. The goal of this book is not information but transformation. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to show you one or two specific steps. It might be restoring a daily time of prayer or putting a safe-

guard on a device. It might be telling your spouse the truth about something, or booking an appointment with a doctor or counsellor. Small, concrete steps of obedience, taken in secret, are how the hidden life is rebuilt.

Before We Begin

Paul's words to Timothy capture the heartbeat of everything that follows:

> "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:16)

Notice that Paul tells Timothy to watch himself first. A minister who neglects their own soul will one day have nothing left to give anyone else.

Perhaps you are opening this book with a strong and healthy walk with God, and you want to keep it that way. Keep building. Or perhaps you are opening it tired, discouraged, or quietly afraid that your inner life no longer matches your outer life. Please hear this: you are not beyond help, and you are not beyond hope. The same God who sees every hidden failure also sees every hidden tear, every secret prayer and every quiet act of faithfulness. He is not looking for a reason to throw you away. He is looking for a heart that will turn towards Him.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). For someone with something to hide, that is a frightening thought. For someone who longs to be made whole, it is the beginning of freedom. The One who sees everything is also the One who loves us completely and gave Himself for us.

So let us begin where God begins: not with the oil, but with the vessel; not with the pulpit, but with the heart.

PART ONE

The Oil and the Vessel

CHAPTER 1

Called Before Crowned

> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.
>
> — 1 Samuel 16:13

God's calling, public recognition and the making of a minister

There is a moment in every minister's life that nobody else sees. It might come in a quiet prayer meeting, in a bedroom late at night, on a long drive or in the middle of an ordinary Sunday service. Something stirs. A burden settles on your heart and will not lift. A sense rises, sometimes slowly and sometimes all at once, that God has laid His hand on your life for a purpose bigger than yourself.

That is the call. And very often, for a long time afterwards, nothing visible changes at all.

No one announces it. No one hands you a microphone or a title. You go back to your job, your studies, your family and your small corner of the church, carrying something holy that nobody else can see. There is a gap between the day God calls you and the day people recognise you, and between the promise God gives and the purpose He fulfils. Learning to live faithfully in that gap is one of the first and most important lessons of ministry, because the way you handle the season before recognition will shape the way you handle recognition when it comes.

The Difference Between Calling and Crowning

We need to separate two things our culture keeps blending together. A *calling* is God's choice of a person for a purpose. A *crowning* is the public moment when that purpose is recognised, released or rewarded by people. The first happens in heaven. The second happens on earth. The first depends entirely on God. The second often depends on timing, opportunity, other people's decisions and a hundred circumstances outside our control.

The danger is that we start to measure our calling by our crowning. If the invitations come, we assume God is pleased. If the platform grows, we assume our ministry is healthy. If nobody notices us, we wonder whether we heard God at all. But Scripture never tells us to measure a calling by its applause.

The psalmist puts it plainly:

> "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west Nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another." (Psalm 75:6–7)

Promotion in the kingdom is God's business. Faithfulness is ours. When we confuse the two, we start striving for what only God can give, and neglect what only we can give. A minister who is anxious for recognition will be tempted to manufacture it: to network instead of pray, to perform instead of serve, to push on doors God has not yet opened. A minister who is secure in the call can wait, because the One who called is also the One who crowns.

There is a second truth bound up with the first. God is not only interested in what you will do for Him. He is deeply interested in who you will be when you do it. Between the call and the crown there is almost always a process, and the process is where ministers are made. God prepares the vessel before He fills it for public service. He is never in a hurry to use someone He has not yet formed.

That matters for every person in ministry, whether you lead thousands or a home group of six. The call carries the same weight at every size, and

the making takes the same care.

David: Anointed in the Field, Crowned in Stages

We saw in the introduction how God passed over Eliab and chose the youngest son of Jesse. What is easy to forget is what happened next. Samuel poured the oil on David's head, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him from that day forward, and then David went back to the sheep.

What follows is one of the longest waiting seasons in Scripture. David served in Saul's court. He faced Goliath. He became a captain in Saul's army, and then a fugitive hiding in caves and strongholds. The Bible does not give an exact figure for the years between the oil in Bethlehem and the throne, and estimates vary. What we do know is how the story unfolds. After Saul's death, "the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah" (2 Samuel 2:4). About seven years later, all the elders of Israel came to Hebron and anointed David king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:3, 5). The text adds that "David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years" (2 Samuel 5:4).

David was anointed three times. The first was private, in his father's house, before a handful of witnesses. The second was before one tribe. The third was before the whole nation. The calling was settled at the first anointing, but the recognition came in stages, over many years.

And in the years in between, God was doing something in David that the throne would later need. Psalm 78 describes it:

> "He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands." (Psalm 78:70–72)

Integrity of heart and skill of hands. Both were formed in the field before they were ever displayed in the palace. David learned to protect sheep when no one was watching, and later he shepherded a nation. He learned to wor-

ship alone, and later he led Israel in worship. The private years were not wasted years. They were the foundation for everything that came after.

The Hidden Years of Jesus and John

If that pattern holds for David, it holds with even greater wonder for the Son of David.

We know almost nothing about the first thirty years of Jesus' life. Luke gives us one scene from His boyhood, when at twelve He stayed behind in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Then the curtain falls again. Luke tells us only that "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them," and that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51–52).

Then come nearly two decades of silence. When He later preached in His home town, the people asked, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary?" (Mark 6:3). The eternal Word, through whom all things were made, spent most of His earthly life working an ordinary trade in an unremarkable village. He was not idle, and He was not hidden by accident.

Luke tells us that "Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). Just before that public ministry began, at His baptism, the Father spoke from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus had not yet preached the Sermon on the Mount or healed a single leper. The Father's delight rested on Him before any public ministry at all.

Here is a truth every minister needs to hear. If you belong to Christ, God's pleasure in you does not begin when your ministry becomes visible. The Father's love was settled before you ever stood in front of anyone. Ministry flows from that love. It does not earn it.

John the Baptist shows the same pattern. Few people in history have had their calling declared so clearly and so early. An angel announced to his father that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and go before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:15–17). Yet Luke closes the account of his childhood with these words:

"So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Luke 1:80).

When the moment came, Luke marks it with care. He names the Roman emperor, the governor, the regional rulers and the high priests, all the great names of the day. Then he says that "the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2). The word of God passed by the palaces and the temple and came to a man in the desert. John's message had a fire and a clarity that could never have been formed in Herod's courts. When the crowds finally came out to hear him, they were hearing a man who had already met God alone.

Joseph: Tested by the Word

If David, Jesus and John show us the hidden season, Joseph shows us how painful it can be. The psalmist sums up his story:

> "He sent a man before them—Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him." (Psalm 105:17–19)

Notice two things. First, God "sent" Joseph. What looked like betrayal and disaster was, from heaven's point of view, a sending. Second, the very word God had given Joseph became the thing that tested him. The promise did not excuse Joseph from the process. Every year in chains asked him the same question: do you still believe what God said?

Joseph's road ran through three places.

The pit was the place of betrayal. His brothers stripped him of the coat that marked his father's favour and threw him into an empty cistern. "And the pit was empty; there was no water in it" (Genesis 37:24). Then they sat down to eat, deaf to his pleading, and sold him to traders bound for Egypt (Genesis 37:25–28; 42:21). Many ministers know a pit like this: the church that rejected them, the leader who used them and then discarded them, the friend who spoke against them behind their back. The pit stripped Joseph

of something he would never need again. In Egypt he would have to live by the favour of God alone.

The prison was the place of being overlooked. In Potiphar's house "the LORD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2), yet his faithfulness led, in the short term, not to promotion but to a cell. Even there "the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy" (Genesis 39:21). Joseph served, took responsibility and noticed the troubled faces of two of Pharaoh's officials. He interpreted their dreams and asked the butler to remember him. Then comes one of the most painful verses in the story: "Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Genesis 40:23). Two more full years went by (Genesis 41:1).

Many ministers spend more time in the prison than anywhere else: serving under another leader, building someone else's ministry, faithfully doing what nobody notices. It is easy to become bitter there. Yet the prison was where Joseph learned to manage, to serve and to interpret, the very skills he would need in the palace.

The palace revealed what the pit and the prison had produced. When Pharaoh asked him to interpret his dream, Joseph's first words were, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16). The young man who once shared his dreams without much thought for how they would land now stood before the most powerful ruler on earth and pointed away from himself. He had been seventeen when he was sold (Genesis 37:2) and was thirty when he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:46). Thirteen years lay between the dream and the day it began to be fulfilled.

And years later, when his brothers feared his revenge, Joseph said, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). The palace did not make Joseph. It revealed what God had made in him.

Moses and Paul: Taken Aside Before Being Sent

Moses' preparation looked very different, but it was just as thorough. Raised in Pharaoh's household, he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). At forty (Acts 7:23) he acted on a sense that God would use him to deliver his people. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, looked this way and that, and killed the man and hid him in the sand (Exodus 2:11–12). Stephen explains what Moses was thinking: "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand" (Acts 7:25).

Moses had a calling, but he tried to fulfil it in his own strength, by his own methods and on his own timetable. It ended in failure, and he fled. For the next forty years the prince of Egypt kept another man's sheep (Acts 7:29–30). Then one day "he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God" (Exodus 3:1). There, as far from Egypt's palaces as anyone could be, God spoke from a burning bush.

Scripture does not tell us what happened inside Moses in those years, but we can see the difference in the man. The Moses who killed the Egyptian was confident in his own ability. The Moses at the bush was so aware of his weakness that he begged God to send someone else (Exodus 3:11; 4:10–13). God did not need Moses to be impressive. He needed him to be dependent.

Moses later explained to Israel why God had led them through their own wilderness: "to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deuteronomy 8:2). The wilderness strips away what we lean on, exposes what is inside us, and teaches us that "man shall not live by bread alone" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

The apostle Paul received a similar season. After his conversion on the Damascus road he began almost at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues (Acts 9:20). Yet in Galatians he adds a detail Luke does not mention in Acts:

> "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." (Galatians 1:15–17)

Only "after three years" did he go up to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18). Scripture does not say what he did in Arabia. Some scholars suggest a time of prayer and rethinking the Scriptures in the light of the risen Christ. Others note that Arabia was a populated region and suggest he began preaching there. We do not need to settle it. What we can say is that this brilliant, zealous, newly commissioned man did not rush to claim a position among the apostles. And even after he reached Jerusalem, it took Barnabas to vouch for him before the disciples would trust him (Acts 9:26–27). Recognition came later, and it came through others.

For a minister today, a wilderness season can take many forms: a small and hidden ministry, sickness, grief, financial strain, a role that ends or a long dry stretch when prayer feels like speaking into an empty room. Not every hard season comes directly from God's design, and some situations call for change, wise counsel or protection rather than quiet acceptance. But where God is clearly forming us, these seasons are rarely wasted. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

When Recognition Comes Too Soon

If waiting is hard, being recognised too early can be harder. A young preacher can now become widely known almost overnight. A clip can travel the world before the person in it has learned how to handle criticism, temptation, money or influence.

Paul warned Timothy about this danger. An overseer should be "not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation

as the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6). Later he added, "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

That is not a rule against young leaders. Timothy himself was young, and Paul told him not to let anyone despise his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). It is a warning about speed. Recognition that arrives before character has been formed can crush the very person it was meant to honour. Pride grows quickly in shallow soil.

Picture a gifted young worship leader, a composite of many I could describe. Her voice is extraordinary, and her songs move people deeply. Within a year she is leading at conferences and fielding invitations from churches she has never visited. But nobody has asked how she is praying, who she is accountable to, or whether she has the inner strength to carry so much attention. The gift is real. The crown has simply come before the roots have gone down, and unless someone helps her, the pressure of the platform may begin to shape her more than the presence of God.

This is why churches must be careful. We are often in a hurry to promote gifted people because we need them. A wise church honours gifts but tests character over time. A wise leader is willing to say "Not yet", not to hold someone back but to protect them. And a wise young minister learns to receive a delay as a kindness, not an insult.

Church history offers a quieter example of the opposite path. Charles Simeon was appointed to Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, in 1782 and served there until his death in 1836. In his early years many in the congregation opposed him so strongly that pew-holders locked their pews to keep people from sitting in them, and those who came to hear him had to stand. Simeon stayed. He preached, prayed and visited for more than half a century, and over time his ministry shaped generations of students who went on to serve in England and overseas. Recognition came, but it came slowly, and it came to a man who had already learned to be faithful without it.

Over the years of pastoring, I have become convinced that one of the kindest things God does for a minister is to make them wait. Waiting ex-

poses our motives. It teaches us to love God for Himself, and not only for what He might do through us. Those who have learned to be faithful in obscurity are usually the ones who can be trusted with visibility.

Finding Your Identity in the Call, Not the Crown

So how do we live well in the space between calling and crowning, and cooperate with the God who is making us there?

Settle where your identity comes from. You are a child of God before you are a minister of God. Your title may change. Your platform may grow or shrink. Your role may be given to someone else. If your identity rests on your position, you will defend that position at any cost. If it rests on God's love, you can hold your position with open hands.

Be faithful in what is in front of you. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Joseph served in Potiphar's house and in the prison as though each place mattered, because it did. Serve the small group, the children's room, the hospital visit and the early prayer meeting as though Christ were the only one watching, because He is. "It is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). Not famous. Faithful.

Keep your heart free from bitterness. Joseph had every reason to resent his brothers, Potiphar's household and the butler who forgot him. Bitterness would have poisoned the gift God wanted to use. Bring your disappointments honestly to God, but do not let them settle into resentment.

Do not run ahead of God's timing. Moses' calling was right, but his method and timing were wrong. Do not only ask, "What has God called me to?" Ask, "Is this His way and His time?" Refuse to manufacture your own crowning. Let others speak for you, as Barnabas spoke for Paul. If a door has to be forced open, it may not be your door, or it may not be your time.

Find wise people to walk with you. One of the great gifts in my own life has been a spiritual father who helped me make sense of seasons I did not understand and reminded me that God was still at work when I could

not see it. Every minister needs someone further down the road who can say, "I have been there too, and God is not finished with you."

Remember that recognition is not the goal. There are faithful men and women of God who will never be widely known on earth, yet who will be greatly honoured in heaven. The final word on your ministry will not be spoken by a congregation, a committee or a crowd. It will be spoken by the One who called you, and "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

And if you are already crowned, go back to the field often. Keep the secret place alive. The same God who anointed you in obscurity is watching you in prominence, and He still looks at the heart.

David was anointed long before he was crowned. Jesus was approved by the Father before He was known by the crowds. John was strengthened in the desert before he was heard at the Jordan. Joseph was tested by the word before it came to pass. Moses and Paul were taken aside before they were sent out. In every case, God did His deepest work before the public ever saw the result.

He is doing the same with you. But oil on the head is no guarantee of what is in the heart, and that is where the next chapter must go.

The Second Platform

Write down, in a few sentences, the call of God as you first received it. Then name one "field" task, something small, hidden and unglamorous, that you will keep doing whatever happens to your platform. Tell one trusted person what it is.

Reflection

1. When did you first sense God's call on your life? How has your understanding of that call grown or changed since then?
2. In what ways have you been tempted to measure your calling by recognition, invitations or the size of your platform?

3. Joseph knew the pit of betrayal and the prison of being forgotten. Which of these seasons have you walked through, and how did it shape you?
4. Are you tempted right now, like Moses, to rush ahead of God's timing or to fulfil your calling in your own strength?
5. Whose gifting is growing quickly in your church? How could you help protect and strengthen their character, and not just promote their gift?

Father, thank You that You called me by Your grace long before anyone recognised me, and that Your love for me was settled in Christ before I ever stood before people. Forgive me for the times I have measured my worth by applause, grown bitter in the waiting or grasped for what only You can give. Teach me to be faithful in the field, to put down deep roots in the hidden season and to trust Your timing for every door. If You lift me up, keep me humble. If You keep me hidden, keep me joyful. Finish the good work You have begun in me, so that when You open the door I may walk through it saying, "It is not in me." In Jesus' name, Amen.