



5 REASONS

Pastors Should Pursue An Online Degree

A Complimentary eBook For Christian Learners

Five Reasons Pastors Should Pursue An Online Degree

*“A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.”
(Ecclesiastes 4:13)*

As a pastor you appreciate humility, especially in other church leaders who not only “know how to receive instruction,” but who value it. A humble learner is a rare gem, like a new convert absorbing every morsel they can.

As we get older in ministry, we tend to know a lot. It comes with the territory of being an “elder” believer as we read, study, and hear the Word of God, have exceptional experiences in ministering to others, and grow up as a Christian.

The danger, however, is in thinking we know enough...and stop learning. Spiritual growth is different than physical growth...it is a choice. We choose to learn, to obey Him.

Picture a mountain climber who stops halfway up his climb. His position on the slope, neither going up nor down, is the very definition of mediocre. He’s stuck in the middle without a challenge, failing to advance.

Spiritual growth is different than physical growth.

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In short, he's quit...and in danger if he stays on that ledge.

Many pastors, if content with how much they know, end up there, stuck on the side of Mount Mediocre. In Christianese, we call this stage a rut.

Everyone needs to keep growing spiritually, especially pastors who need to stay ahead of their flock, leading and teaching them in the way of righteousness. We are disciples and in the original Greek that word means "a learner, a pupil."

As the Psalmist said, *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God."* (Psalm 42:1)

A recent survey of over 1000 pastors found that 75% felt they were unqualified and/or poorly trained by their seminaries to lead and manage the church or to counsel others.

As genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, we all need to advance in our knowledge of Him and His Word, lest we become "an old and foolish king" whose heart is hard and finds himself stuck in that dangerous rut – the middle.

Do you feel that way now? Like you need to be the student and not the teacher? To be challenged to move on up the mountainside to the top? To be fed, and become the proverbial baby bird, mouth yawning for food, or the panting deer?

If so, here are five reasons to consider the value of an online degree and remain a "wise lad...who knows how to receive instruction." Here's to your spiritual growth!

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① The Value To Your Church

Your Example

Consider what your example may mean to your congregation, especially for those who are weighing a return to school, or maybe finishing a degree they postponed. If our pastor has the humility to learn, to further himself, why can't I?

You could be the impetus to them bettering their situation, but they may not otherwise pursue it without a pioneer like you. Employers these days consider a bachelor's degree to be essential for higher paying jobs, and sometimes it's necessary to just land an interview.

You'll be demonstrating to them that you are a genuine disciple, a learner, and not just the guy on Sunday who knows everything.

"Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:12)

Teaching Fodder

Learning from others who have studied more and become a "pastor of pastors" will only enhance your understanding of God's Word, church history, hermeneutics, and theology.

To be able to learn from someone who knows more than you (we call that an expert) is a real find and can not only be refreshing to see things from a new perspective, but also re-ignite your sermons with new insights. Essentially, you're now in the pew, the learner for what God wants to teach you!

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A paradigm shift in your thinking may be a real benefit when you see what works in a lecture (sermon) and what is really boring or non-essential.

New Skills

Are you a gifted speaker, but weak on counseling? Perhaps a course on counseling or psychology may help you serve others in new and better ways. Think how your pre-marriage counseling may get a jolt and save you hours of time down the road with marriage counseling.

Has evangelism been a difficult area for you? Discipling young men? Never mastered Greek or Hebrew? Sermon preparation? Administration? Growing your church? Teaching classes? Marketing your church to the neighborhoods and towns nearby with winsome outreaches?

There are countless courses available to help you learn new skills to shepherd more effectively in areas you need to shore up on. Investigate.

Never Say Good-bye

The best part about online learning is you don't have to stop doing ministry. You can continue serving as before, without missing a beat, except that now you have "class time" as part of your schedule. Your relationships and roles remain unchanged, ministering to your congregation as usual.

One of the best things you can do for your congregation is to be growing spiritually, moving up the mountainside, and that starts with knowledge of Him and His Word. You can share what you're learning as you learn it.

"For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors." (Ecclesiastes 7:12)

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2 The Value To You

Input

The Schaeffer Institute reports that only 270 of the 1,050 pastors they surveyed (26%) said they regularly had personal devotions and felt they were adequately fed spiritually.*

Let's face it, we all need input, and pastors need to get fed as much as anyone else...maybe more when you consider their responsibility to the church and the Chief Shepherd.

Receiving a rich spiritual diet from those who have gone before us, those who have "been there," and who can offer a structured lesson of learning new and interesting things about the church or theology or whatever your need may be, is essential to keep your heart crackling with the supernatural.

As the Apostle Paul said, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17)." We all need to increase our faith, to trust Him in one of the most difficult jobs on earth, and that comes from hearing His Word...and hearing it from new and interesting angles from a fellow teacher who possesses more knowledge than us.

Your church's health and well-being depend on it.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hosea 4:6).

Mentor

According to Focus on the Family, 70% of pastors say that they have no close friends. To whom do you turn when you have a problem or a question?

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That stat is troubling for someone whose life is supposed to be overflowing with people, but then have no one to turn to when the time comes for their needs. It also speaks for the need to have a mentor in your life, someone to turn to for help and genuine friendship. A professor can be that friend and guide. An online class or degree should generate countless new friendships and relationships that endure well beyond your studies.

Challenges

Maybe you feel like you've spoken all your sermons, that you've shared everything God has taught you, and there's nothing left in your tank to give back to your church.

Really? If that's the case, take heart, my friend. There are bigger mountains to climb; a vast and magnificent Mount Everest of knowledge awaits you.

The challenge of earning a bachelor's degree in ministry leadership may be just the ticket to move you forward in your spiritual climb.

The Bible is an intricate tapestry of gilded threads that intersect and form a masterpiece that taken as a whole, display the wonders of our God. And, that picture is only what He chooses to reveal to our finite minds. There is so much more to learn about Him!

Before actually being with Him one day, face to face, we're lucky to understand just a few of these treasured threads in His Word. There are bottomless treasure chests to explore when you are studying an Infinite Being like the God of Abraham. Why not dig down a little deeper?

Personal growth

As you gain knowledge you'll also grow in your understanding and appreciation of God and His Word. New doors may

open for you in a hermeneutics course that helps you understand difficult verses that may have troubled you before. New ways to explain theological topics like Predestination, the Trinity, or Eschatology that you never considered will broaden your perspective.

Or perhaps the things you learn will aid your Men's Group or Adult Sunday School lessons. The guys you're discipling will eat up what you're learning, appreciating all the more your humility to "go back to school," and learning what you're learning. You may find you're more of a Covenant guy than a Kingdom guy, or Pre-Trib instead of Post-Trib. Who knows?

The point is you will be learning new things to confirm your convictions or expand those that are not so firm, for both you and your church, simply by interacting with learned men of God.

③ The Value To Your Ministry

Sphere of Influence

Every pastor worth his salt knows what Jesus meant when He referred to believers as the "salt of the earth." We are to be influencers, just as salt affects whatever it contacts. How much more a pastor's power to sway, and what greater magnification of that influence than through publishing something for the benefit of the body of Christ?

Is there a book in you from your sermons or blog? Some magazine articles, Bible studies, or an eBook God has uniquely gifted you to write from your ministerial experiences? If not now, perhaps one day you will want to write one, and when that day comes will your manuscript even be read?

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It's a known fact in publishing circles, both secular and religious, that an unpublished author needs a platform (a mega-church, a name, or multiple degrees/titles) to be considered as a credible publishing risk.

If you have nuggets of truth to impart to Christendom, publishers crave authors with credentials, and the more letters behind your name, the greater respect you receive from their editors. Flip through your bookshelf or local magazine rack and you'll see titles and degrees do matter.

"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men." (Proverbs 22:29)

Credibility

This is similar to the last point, but not the same. Consider new families checking out your church. A professor, banker, or lawyer immediately earns your initial respect if you are a learned man. That may be superficial at first, but it grants you an audience to prove your spiritual mettle with newcomers.

Or perhaps you're invited to speak at a conference or retreat, and your bio lists your achievements to go along with your bachelor's degree. Does that add instant credibility to you as an expert in your chosen topic? Of course it does!

Titles and degrees carry weight. Hopefully, the person has the necessary character to match their position. After all, *"a good name is to be more desired than great wealth..."* (Proverbs 22:1)

Career Advancement

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics found the average salary for clergy in 2010 was \$43,000. That is only an average and we all know the cost of living is never stagnant.

Although no one enters the ministry to get wealthy, it is nice to be able to supply the basics for your family: a home, help with your children's education, an occasional vacation or teen mission trip, and having some sort of a retirement fund...not to mention the option to advance to a larger church to do more for the Kingdom, earn more, and give more to the gospel.

If you were on a hiring committee for your congregation, wouldn't a pastor with a degree in ministry warrant more consideration (and salary) than one without a degree? Knowledge is power (and a godly man uses that power for good).

Earning more money may not matter now, but as you age other issues become more obvious that cost more (health needs, helping your aging parents, trips to the Holy Land, mission opportunities, etc.). Wouldn't it be wise to be in a position of strength when a need arises?

"A wise man is strong, and a man of knowledge increases power." (Proverbs 24:5)

Ministry Change

Although you may be content with leading your church now, the Lord could move in your heart to go overseas once your children are grown, maybe to an inner city mission, urban churchplant, or prison chaplaincy. Wouldn't it be nice to have already taken courses to assist that sort of move now, instead of having to do it at the very moment and delaying your career change by another year or two?

Think of the opportunities that are open to you with a degree in ministry when overseas, trying to influence a third world government official to act on some social or health issue. Or the weight a bachelor's degree or upper

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level degree in criminal justice carries when meeting with the warden in your prison ministry in a parole case and he wants your advice.

If you have even the slightest inkling that God may move you along someday, now is the time to plan for it.

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage....” (Proverbs 21:5)

Marketability

What if there is a sudden change in your situation that requires a move? Your spouse needs to move closer to home to help with her aging parents’ care, your child is in need at school with a health issue, or you’re forced to change careers and have to work from home in a wheelchair...will you be marketable in your new locale or situation?

An online degree can also be in areas other than the spiritual realm (marketing, accounting, criminal justice, business, public relations, healthcare, counseling, education, music, nursing, human resources, you name it), and yet still be offered by a Christian educator. (This can be critically important with liberal or humanistic professors at a secular college, especially in psychology or counseling degrees, omitting the Creator from the diagnosis and cure.)

My mother used to say, “I know not what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future.” Our job skills, like the maidens waiting for the bridegroom with their lamps trimmed, need to be prepared for any eventuality. It just makes sense to be ready, to be diverse.

“Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.” (Ecclesiastes 11:2)

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④ The Value To Your Family

Schedule Flexibility

You set your own schedule for learning and conform it to your family’s needs, meetings, and children’s sporting or school events. This needs no serious discussion, except to say that your ministry is second only to the priority of your marriage and family. Forget that, and you will fail at any ministerial endeavor. Your family is first and that makes learning online, at your own pace, ideal.

Continuity

In learning online, there is no upsetting of the apple cart with your family schedule. Everything continues as it was, except that you may miss some television, sleep, or a hobby for a short while earning your degree. The news, your favorite show, or championship game will go right on without you for a few months. The trade off is immeasurable.

No Travel

Again, this is self-explanatory, but it is a big plus when you think about the expense going to campus every day... crowds, parking hassles, and student drivers. Take a drive to your local campus some morning and see how 40,000 students and employees vie for parking!

Studying online, at home, warm and cozy (in your pajamas if you like) means weather is not an issue; neither are gas prices or commuting time. Parking expense is irrelevant. In short, it is easy and comfortable. Enough said.

No Uprooting

It goes without saying that you do not need to sell your home, switch schools for your kids, find a new church, or secure a new place to live while you get your degree. All remains as it was for your loved ones and you. The only

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change may be asking your kids for help with your homework or your wife to proofread a paper!

⑤ The Value of Value

Affordability

An online degree from an accredited Christian college or university is significantly less expensive than attending some brick and mortar schools, some as much as up to one-third less as the bottom 10% of all schools by cost (as a private, no-profit accredited college or university), not to mention the added expense of housing and meals for being on campus.

There's no question the expense of being on campus far outweighs an online degree, and typically they tack on hidden charges (lab fees, TA fees, and equipment use fees, to name a few). With an online degree, typically there are fewer expenses than on ground learning.

And in many cases, your degree lists the college or university on your diploma, not "an online degree." Even that apparent disparagement is unfounded in our high-tech web world nowadays, but no one will know that you earned your bachelor's degree in your pajamas. You should, however, ask your prospective institution how they address their diplomas.

Existing Credits

Many times, you can transfer existing credit from previous educational experiences toward your new degree. Check the transfer policy for your specific college and your savings.

Prior Learning

Some schools will give you existing credit for ministerial or other professional experiences gained while on-the-job.

Many times, you can transfer existing credit from previous educational experiences toward your new degree.

This may only be for bachelor degrees, but be sure to explore every option when it comes to the benefit of your life experiences counting toward credits. No point re-inventing the wheel, right?

Military Discount

If you or your spouse is a veteran, there are usually multiple discounts available for your service to our country, from books to tuition, even technology waiver fees.

Most accredited universities make a concerted effort to honor your service with vouchers, discounts, and other cost-saving perks. Be sure to consult their webpage for military personnel. It can be a real eye opener just how much you are valued!

And don't forget the Montgomery GI Bill and other military benefits (Survivors' and Dependents' Education Assistance, Post 9/11 GI Bill, VA Vocational Rehabilitation, and REAP).

Financial Aid

Be sure to fill out a FAFSA form to see what you are eligible for from the government with subsidized and unsubsidized loans. File it as soon as you can and then adjust when you have your tax information for the year. The FAFSA website will walk you through the process, which appears daunting, but it's really just filling out a form. And best of all, it's free...and a necessary step for applying to school when you need financial aid: <http://www.fafsa.gov>.

Church Funding

Depending on the size of your church, many times a donation or scholarship can be easily had by simply asking your board for it as a consideration. Even a \$500 training or appreciation gift can make a big difference in your tuition. Most businesses have a training budget for their employees, and God's church should be no different.

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Just like the climber on the mountain, it also will take hard work to improve yourself with an online degree.

It could even become a fundraiser for a Men's Prayer Breakfast or your Adult Sunday School Class. It's an excellent opportunity for your congregation to show their appreciation for your service. You do not have because you do not ask. Let folks know you're prayerfully considering another degree and see where the Lord takes it.

Just like the climber on the mountain, it also will take hard work to improve yourself with an online degree, but hopefully you can see now that the time and effort are well worth it. If it were easy, everyone would do it.

You and your church will both benefit from the knowledge and experience you'll gain, whether it takes a summer, a year, or two years. Just remember Solomon's words, "*The dream comes through much effort...*" (Ecclesiastes 5:3) You should at least prayerfully consider this dream and see what the Lord will do.

Finally, remember the Apostle Peter's admonition:

"...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

Here's to your continued growth in serving Him with grace and knowledge, onward and upward!



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