

5 books for ministry

selected by [Brian D. McLaren](#) in the [May 4, 2010](#) issue

***Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, by Eugene H. Peterson** (*Eerdmans*). This book, along with Peterson's *The Contemplative Pastor*, reminded me again and again of my responsibility to guard my heart well, "for from it flow the springs of life," as the proverb says. I was surprised when I left higher education to become a pastor that it was actually harder in the pastorate to keep my devotional life alive than it had been in the secular world. Peterson's books were and are a lifeline, affirming that the primary duty of a spiritual leader is to be a spiritual person.

***Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, by Edwin H. Friedman** (*Guilford*). I was shocked, surprised and disillusioned when I began to realize that hard work, sincerity and prayer weren't enough to guarantee success in pastoral ministry. I kept getting myself into tangles that I didn't understand until I read this book by a storytelling rabbi with uncommon wisdom. Friedman helped me see that the best way to engage with the factors I can't control—like the opinions and behavior of others—was to focus on the factors that I can control: my own presence, identity and behavior in the social system of the local congregation.

***Life Together*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (*HarperOne*). I entered pastoral ministry with mountains of idealism, and by God's grace I never lost it. But I needed to discover how my idealism could become toxic, and Bonhoeffer's idea of "wish dreams" helped me as no other idea had. I would go back to *Life Together* often as a reminder that my church members were first and foremost my neighbors, my brothers and sisters, and that there was no bypassing them in all their gritty humanness to get to some grand ideal of the church or Christian community.

***Developing the Leader Within You*, by John C. Maxwell** (*Thomas Nelson*). I mostly encountered Maxwell's work through cassette tapes (remember those?), but thankfully he also made his insights available through books. Some might frown on Maxwell's work as insufficiently academic, but I often needed exactly the kind of

inspiring pep talks and practical advice that only a gifted motivational speaker and veteran pastor could offer. Maxwell, along with Bill Hybels, reminded me that leadership was both a gift and a calling, and that I needed to stir up that gift, develop it and exercise it with energy and diligence.

Strategies for Change, by Lyle E. Schaller (Abingdon). Many of Schaller's books helped me, but probably this one most of all, since so much of leadership is being an agent of change. Schaller became famous for asking a question and then answering it with 16 points or 21 steps. Some might find that excessively complex, but for me, Schaller's thoroughness kept pushing me to see my congregation more broadly and deeply, with more detail and nuance. When I opened one of his books, I felt a sage mentor's hand on my shoulder.