

Preface: Caring for Feet

One of the most delightful experiences after a day of backpacking is taking off my boots and socks, and soaking my sore feet in a cool mountain lake. At the end of a day of walking or standing, our feet cry out for care. They are tired and need some attention. Learning to care for our feet is an essential part of our daily life. In the same manner, learning to care for the feet of others is an essential part of mentoring.

Why begin with feet? The ancient world understood the close connection between feet and the soul. Jesus took time to care for feet. “Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.”¹ The occasion of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet provided him with a teachable moment: “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”² More than physical washing of feet, Jesus called his followers to love others through acts of service, to come alongside others and mentor people by caring for them in practical ways. People have been doing this kind of “foot-washing” work for centuries, living out the ancient art of soul mentoring by caring for orphans and widows, picking up the dying off the streets of Calcutta, building hospitals and schools worldwide, and looking after people in their times of distress.

This book invites you into an ancient approach to caring for others based upon a book by Gregory the Great (AD 540–604), *Pastoral Care*, written as he began his service as pope in AD 590. The title Gregory chose to describe his vocation was *servus servorum Dei*, or “servant of the servants of God.” Gregory sought to serve those who were serving others. During his fourteen years in leadership, Gregory cared for mentors and took time to train them in the ancient art of soul mentoring. Much like the current

1. John 13:5. All Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

2. John 13:15.

Pope Francis, Gregory was a foot-washer, one who loved to stoop down to serve others, helping them in their journey of faith. His guidebook for learning the ancient art of soul mentoring invites readers to gently come alongside people and find practical ways to “wash their feet,” thus caring for the tired, hurting, and neglected places deep within people’s lives.

The design for this book follows Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* chapter by chapter. For quotations from *Pastoral Care*, I’ve relied upon the latest translation by George E. Demacopoulos, published in 2007. I also reference three other English translations of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* and one Latin text of Gregory’s classic work.³ Throughout this work, I will refer to Gregory’s book as *Pastoral Care*, though the footnotes will refer to Gregory’s work as *Pastoral Rule*. I prefer the title translation *Pastoral Care*, as it dodges connotations of “rule” as law or regulation. I’ve sought to bring out Gregory’s main metaphors, themes, and insights chapter by chapter, offering my own reflections upon Gregory’s wisdom for mentoring in our world today. Gregory’s writing is rich with metaphors, allegory, and symbolism, often drawn from the Bible. For example, in Part One, Gregory compares soul mentoring to an art studio, shepherding, a school, a cliff edge, lighting a candle, sailing in a storm, and an oasis in the desert.

At the same time, Gregory’s writing can be difficult for the general reader today. Not only is his language from the late sixth century, but he also wrote specifically for clergy, those involved directly in pastoral care in their professional lives. Though Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* was a classic text used widely across Europe for over a thousand years, today it is largely overlooked or unknown. I hope in this book to reintroduce Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* to a new generation of people seeking wisdom in caring for others. Very little of what we do in life has lasting results. By coming alongside people in a Gregorian way, we may discover the joy of being in touch with what is truly beautiful, artistic, and lasting: the soul of another person on life’s journey.

3. All quotations from *Pastoral Care* by Gregory the Great are from the 2007 translation by George Demacopoulos, titled *The Book of Pastoral Rule*. I also referred to Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* in three other English translations and one Latin edition, including: Davis, *Pastoral Care*; Barmby, *Post-Nicene Fathers*; and Bramley, *Regulae Pastoralis Liber*, with Latin and English translation presented side by side.