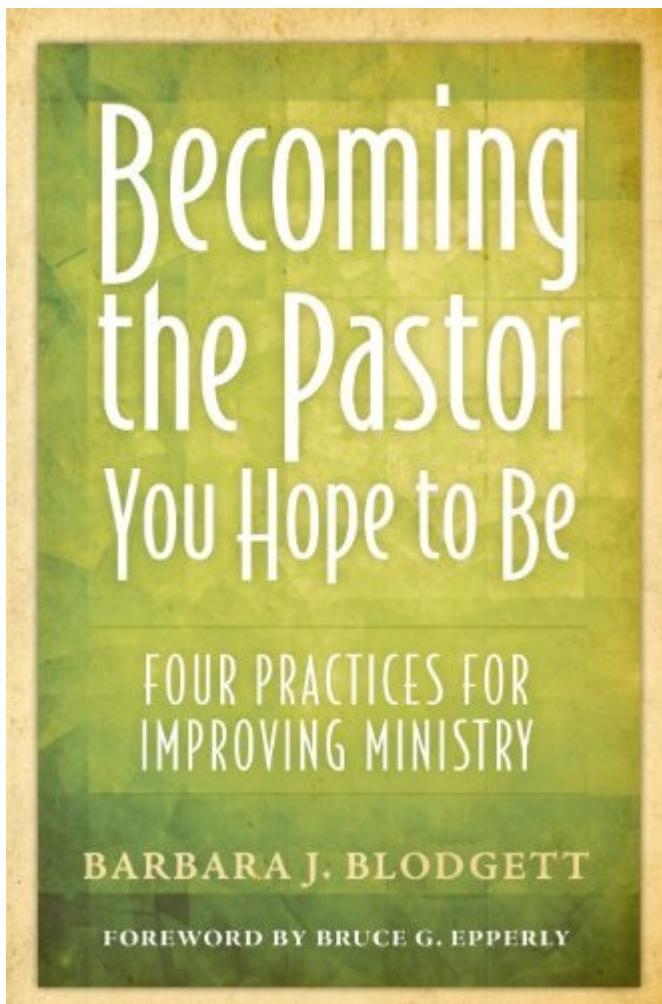


Praise God. For the rest of us, feedback.

By [Anthony B. Robinson](#)

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In Review



Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be

by Barbara J. Blodgett

Alban

Maybe it's part of our "have a nice day," smiley-face culture, but these days it seems that praise is tossed around as lavishly as dandelions in the spring grass. Words like "awesome," "super" and "perfect" pepper our interactions. "You're the best!" rolls off our tongues. "You're amazing!" Kids are lauded with "Great game!" whether it was one or not.

But social psychologist Carol Dweck's research with children has produced clear if counterintuitive findings: "Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance." In her new book *Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be*, Barbara Blodgett applies Dweck's insight to pastors, arguing that what pastors need is less praise and more solid feedback.

Dweck believes that success of many kinds--excelling in sports, succeeding in business, doing well in school--is ultimately aided not by boosting kids' sense of their abilities or attributes but by boosting their engagement and passion. Her research indicates that what's most helpful is providing feedback on how well or hard kids worked. Blodgett adds this:

Children love praise. And they especially love to be praised for their intelligence and talent. It really does give them a boost, a special glow--but only for a moment. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence goes out the window and their motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they're smart, failure means they're dumb.

Blodgett makes a parallel to ministry, encouraging us to work at thoughtful feedback. She also wants ministers to understand that excellence in ministry is not a mysterious quality that some are born with and some are not. Ministry--and excellence in the practice of it--can be taught and learned. "As pastors," writes Blodgett, "I believe we are made, not born. Therefore we need others around us who are committed to helping make us into the pastors we will become."

Feedback can be positive. What distinguishes it from praise is this: praise tends to be person-focused, while feedback is action-focused. Instead of saying, "you're just the world's greatest friend," feedback might mean saying, "I really appreciated the way you listened without giving me advice or trying to fix it for me."

And praise, as upbeat as it may sound, isn't always innocent or even positive. Sometimes generalized and lavish praise can be a way of covering up hard issues or

of manipulating people. Ever notice how easily blanket praise can flip over into blanket criticism?

Yet praise can be intoxicating. That's what makes it dangerous. God can handle praise, but for us mortals, thoughtful feedback is enough.