

Two kinds of ministers

By [Ruth Everhart](#)

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I submit that there are two kinds of ministers: ministers who've been hurt by the church, and ministers who haven't been hurt by the church, yet.

I suppose you could apply this bifurcation to any group of persons. There are two kinds of spouses: those who have disappointed their mate, and those who haven't, yet. There are two kinds of people: those who've died, and those who haven't, yet.

Does this sound cynical? There is wisdom to be gained from meditating on failure and mortality, although we tend to avoid it.

I've always been intrigued by the [Vanitas](#) paintings created by Dutch painters in the 16th and 17th centuries. These are a subcategory of still life paintings in which reminders of mortality are placed among the images of flowers and food. These reminders can be subtle or extreme, which is what makes finding them fun. Watches and hourglasses hint at the passing of time. Empty oyster shells and broken crusts are neutral reminders of a meal now past. Rotting fruit and dead game can be almost ghastly. And there are always lemons.

Contemplating still lifes makes a good hobby for a minister. Maybe it's the modern equivalent of keeping a skull on your desk. (Thanks, Jerome.) Because Ecclesiastes was right. All things pass. Sometimes churches think that well-designed strategies can protect them or uphold them, or generate success. But there is more wisdom in knowing that we will fail. Inevitably. We will get it wrong until we get it right. Even then, all things will come to an end, often untimely so.

Maybe it's best to learn to appreciate a bit of lemon. Maybe it's good seasoning for a minister.

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