

# WEB-EXCLUSIVE: Do you really need a Master of Divinity to pastor?

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By admin

By **Greg Trull, D.Min.**



Statistics from groups such as the Association of Theological Schools reveal that the Master of Divinity degree, or M.Div., faces tough times these days. For decades, the M.Div. stood as the standard for pastoral training; but, more and more ministers now enter the pastorate with the shorter Master of Arts degree, or with no graduate training at all.

So, is the extra time and expense to obtain an M.Div. worth it? Does a pastor really need one to minister effectively?

Answering this key question requires addressing several others first.

**Do you have a grasp of theology and issues sufficient to lead a church congregation?** The theological world grows increasingly complex these days. A pastor needs to be able to address a wide variety of theological and worldview issues. Who else is expected to offer wise perspective on gay marriage, creation and evolution, persecution in other countries, beliefs of other denominations and of cults, and whether or not dogs go to heaven?

A strong foundation in systematic theology, history of doctrine and theological issues enables a pastor to better answer the wide variety of questions asked.

Add to that foundation training in theological method, the proper process for studying a specific issue. Gaining these in a M.Div. program setting allows professors and students to deeply discuss these difficult topics.

**Are you prepared to lead a ministry organization?** Serving as a pastor today is much more than studying, preaching and visiting the sick; a pastor of a growing church also leads an organization. These organizations require strategic planning, budgeting, meetings and much more. (Plus, if you have music in your worship services, you'll need conflict management skills!)

All these elements revolve around an absolutely crucial skill today: leadership. Any preparation for pastoring must include a range of leadership training.

**Are you ready to confront the deep emotional and spiritual needs of today?** When I first began to counsel as a pastor, I feared I would do no more than ruin people's lives. I had trouble figuring out where to even start.

At those times, I said a prayer of thanks for the counseling skills course in seminary. I learned techniques that helped me listen — *really* listen. As I listened, my training in counseling issues began to he

lp me make sense of what I heard.

For many believers, their counseling needs are pretty basic. Many issues revolve around relationships and fears. Counseling training helped me understand people better so I could better help them with the Word.

Good training also helped me recognize when to hand off. Seeing that an issue is too deep or too complicated for basic counseling requires knowledge and humility. Knowing enough to refer a counselee to a specialist blesses the counselee and relieves the pastor.

**Do you have effective communication skills for preaching and teaching?** With the Internet and iTunes making the most popular expositors available to worshippers, expectations are rising. For some, you speak just after they hear Mark Driscoll or John Piper. Now, not every pastor needs to be the modern day Jonathan Edwards; but, you can't ignore crucial communication skills.

Pastors need to have the ability to analyze an audience according to gender, social roles, generations and other factors. Then, you can use your skills to word craft key points, connect with all learning styles, and develop creative teaching strategies.

Some have natural communication gifts that make the process easier — but, no one effectively communicates the Word without help.

**Do you have a sufficient knowledge of Scripture to preach, weekly, for two decades?** Assuming you want to put roots down and stay long enough to make an impact on generations, you'll need to preach often, and for a long time. The stereotype today has the pastor preaching his best sermons early in his tenure, fading after a few years, and then moving on when the tank is empty. You don't want to be that pastor. After Ephesians, Romans and your favorite psalms, then what?

Long-term, effective preaching ministries build on a grasp of Scripture that features breadth across testaments and literary genres, plus a depth that enables fresh exploration. No commentary set or software program takes the place of a thirst to search the Word for yourself and for your people.