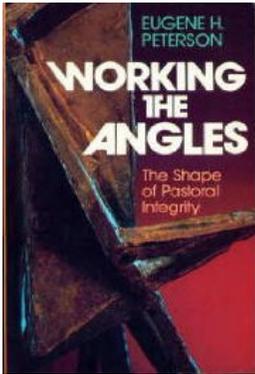


# PASTORAL COACHES

GCI pastoral intern discussion starter

by Greg Williams



Recommended reading:

*Working the Angles*  
by Eugene Peterson,  
pages 1-18.

## Ministry Interview

The year was 1986 and the setting was the office of Mr. Joseph Tkach, Sr. (pictured below). My wife Susan and I were being interviewed to enter into full-time ministry as a ministerial trainee in the Glendora, California congregation of the Worldwide Church of God.



Were we nervous? You bet! Susan figured that we'd be quizzed with Bible questions. I was not sure what to expect, but I knew that Mr. Tkach was a straight shooter and this would be clear and to the point. What actually transpired was a curveball to me; a young, emerging minister who was eager to achieve and make a good impression (and a little bit full of himself).

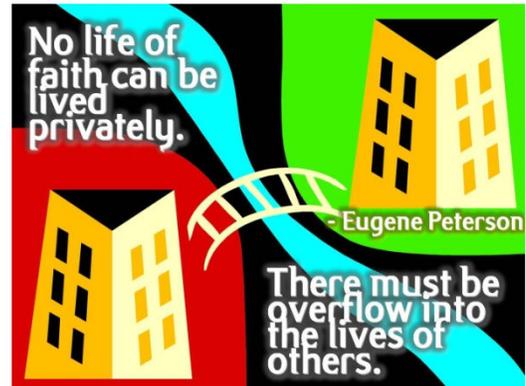
Mr. Tkach offered a warm, enthusiastic greeting and seated us in front of his desk. He briefly stated some particulars about the job and then turned his attention to Susan, peppering her with questions, like, "Do you know that you will share Greg with the entire church?" Do you know he will be gone from home many evenings each week? Do you know that ministry responsibilities happen at any time on any day and usually when it is not convenient?" Susan was attentive to the questions and her responses met Mr. Tkach's satisfaction. He then congratulated us and sent us on our way.

I thought to myself what a strange interview. Why didn't he address me more, wasn't I the one being hired? In fact, I felt a bit slighted by the interview. Susan left the office smiling contentedly. Being a naive 26 year old husband and burgeoning minister I mistook her smile being related to the absence of Bible questions.

## *Working the Angles*

It's popular to write a series of books as a trilogy (e.g. The Hunger Games). The book recommended for this discussion is Eugene Peterson's *Working the Angles*. It's the middle work of a series written to pastors. Work number one is *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* and number three is *Under the Unpredictable Plant; an Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. I highly recommend this series for the growing pastor.

The introduction in *Working the Angles* provides a simple illustration from trigonometry to help the pastor stay true to his called profession. Peterson related the three visible aspects of ministry (preaching, teaching and administration) to the three visible lines that when connected constitute a triangle. The lesser noticed interior angles of this triangle are the private aspects of ministry that Peterson identifies as prayer, scripture and spiritual direction.



The primary purpose of a pastor is to point people to God, and to stay attentive to his activity in our lives and world. This purpose can only be accomplished if the pastor himself or herself is living a life of abiding in Christ. This is where Peterson got the notion of "working the angles." The basics acts of praying, reading scripture and giving spiritual direction determine the shape of everything else.

Working the angles happens in the quietness of the day to day life of the pastor. It is similar to the world class athlete who continually trains and performs repetitive motions and techniques until they become memorized by the brain and muscles – then in that instance on the public stage they stick the landing, they are the first to break the tape, or they make that acrobatic catch that no one else could.

Athletes and pastors alike need coaches. The athlete needs a motivator who can get him moving when he is tired and complacent; an analyst who can help dissect the slight body movements that can achieve enhanced performance; and a psychologist who can say the right words to encourage the extra burst of mental drive.

Pastor's coaches are spiritual practitioners and theologians who span a vast spectrum of cultural conditions and represent a variety of temperaments. These coaches speak out of their personal journeys with the Lord. They resist categorization, are impatient with labels and refute formulas. Peterson says that they continually catch us off guard and challenge us with surprise.

My interview with Mr. Tkach was one of those surprising situations. Twenty-six years later I have come to fully appreciate this unorthodox interview. Mr. Tkach knew that I must have a calling and competencies for pastoral ministry based on the recommendations of my Pastor-Trainer. His concern was for my dear wife. Did she know what she was entering? Did she anticipate the personal and family sacrifices? His loving concern still touches my heart deeply.

Joseph Tkach, Sr. was a pastoral coach to me in ways that he would not have known. The list of such coaches in my life is long and diverse. I have been extremely blessed to have had a choir of Godly voices in my life.

Several such voices are being made available to you through this series of discussion starters:

- **John Halford** is an author and pastoral leader whose British wit adds flavor to the honest (catch you off guard) information and insights he brings.
- **Ted Johnston** is a pastoral leader and seminary instructor who works the angles—offering focused Christian education through his writing, training, teaching and consulting ministry.
- **Charles and Michelle Fleming** are a dynamic father-daughter team that bring to ministry a joy and caring reflective of their island heritage. Charles, who is from Grenada, works with great passion to develop GCI pastors in the Caribbean. Michelle, who is a pastoral intern (and thus writes with that voice), is passionate about ministry and about her “tent-making” job of teaching math to middle school aged children.

This team of coaches is pulling and praying for you. The sole intent of their series of discussion starters is to enrich your development as a pastoral intern.

### Discussion Starter Questions

This essay has described the need that pastoral interns have to both abide in Christ and to have an ongoing relationship with a pastoral coach. The following questions are intended for personal reflection and then interactive discussion between Pastoral-Intern and their Life-Mentor.

1. What do you think of Peterson's point that the primary purpose of a pastor is to point people to God and to stay attentive to his activity in our lives and world? What factors do you think distract pastors from this primary purpose?
2. How has your private life (especially of “working the angles”) prepared you for your public life?
3. If you are married or engaged, does your spouse (or spouse to be) have a clear, informed understanding of what you are embarking on as you enter pastoral ministry? If you are not currently married or engaged, how does your calling to ministry mesh together with dating?
4. As you know, in the pastoral intern program, we are inviting you to develop a lifelong practice of having coaches and mentors in your life. Knowing yourself, what are some of the qualities you would look for in a coach or a mentor?